

Amelia Bonow:

Hello and happy spooky season to everyone. I don't know if it feels like spooky season. No, Abigail is saying no. Abigail's in Ghana. Is there a-

Abigail Peprah:

It does. It feels like spooky season. Not the normal spooky season, but I feel like there's so much going on in the world right now that in itself is spooky. So yeah, it's spooky season.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree. It's like we don't need real monsters or costumes to be surrounded by scary, terrible things. Well, hello and welcome to everybody. My name is Amelia Bonow and I use she/her pronouns. I'm the executive director of Shout Your Abortion, and SYA is a nationwide organization working to normalize abortion and elevate paths to access regardless of legality. We make resources, campaigns, and media intended to arm existing activists, create new ones, and foster collective participation in abortion access all over the country and the world. Abortion Academy is a monthly webinar series where we introduce you to some of our brilliant colleagues who takes a deeper dive into their area of expertise. These sessions are for anyone who's looking to deepen their knowledge, connect dots between issues happening at the regional, national, and international levels, and just get some fresh ideas to take back into your community. And the Study Abroad series is relatively new. Maybe this is like our fourth one or something, where we chat with some of our international partners about the work that they are doing all over the world.

So audience members will be off-camera and muted for security reasons, but you will be able to ask questions in the chat throughout the session, and I'll be talking to Abigail in Vianey for maybe 30 or 45 minutes, and you're welcome to jump into the chat and ask questions at any point, and we will start taking questions towards the end of our conversation. We also have live Spanish translation available, so if you would like to listen in Spanish, you can go down to the bottom of your Zoom bar and click on the globe that says interpretation and then select English or Spanish. So today we are very excited to talk to a couple of our international partners about, brace yourself, the good that can be done with social media.

It's not something that we think about or talk about every day. Sometimes for me, it feels difficult to find. Social media can, I think, feel... I mean, or it does feel incredibly overwhelming and stressful and traumatizing and a difficult place to go to find good, empowering, reliable information. And also we know that social media, whatever form you're talking about social media, whether you're talking about Discord, which is sort of borderline, but whether you're talking about TikTok or Twitter or Facebook or whatever, people are talking about abortion everywhere, they are sharing information everywhere, and these are platforms that we can use to distribute information safely. And that also comes with a lot of caveats about censorship, about digital security, about just how effective it is to try to use these methods or are we being shadowbanned? Are people even seeing what we are saying? Are these safe places to organize and sort of find each other?

There are a lot of questions, but there are people doing this work all over the world, and we're really excited to be joined by a couple of them today. Both of our guests are content creators and advocates who are working to share safe abortion information, de-stigmatize abortion, and make abortion more accessible all over the world in every community, in every corner of the globe. You may recognize these two and their respective organizations from our recent collaborations on International Safe Abortion Day. When SYA partnered with a Mexico city-based artist named Marimoto to create a set of posters that were then translated into, I don't remember how many different languages, but probably, I don't know, eight different languages maybe, and then adopted into a bunch of different versions to be used in different localities in partnership with different local groups on the ground who were out doing activations with these posters that they helped to create.

And both of these folks were recently a part of that project. We are sad that SYA's incredible communications director and international connections person, Erin Jorgensen, is under the weather and not joining us today because that very much was Erin's project that she carried and we love Erin. And I think that you both met Erin years ago now in a separate project, which we can touch on, but let me just introduce you both.

So Vianey Estrada is the communications officer for safe2choose, a digital eHealth platform that is focused on providing compassionate abortion care for people all over the world. She's based in Mexico City, has a bachelor's degree in social communications and a master's in gender studies, and is dedicated to working with sexual and reproductive health advocates around the world to ensure that there is a future where our bodily autonomy is prioritized and respected. Abigail Peprah is the communications officer for Find My Method and a passionate advocate for sexual reproductive health and rights. Based in Ghana, she works alongside a team of amazing advocates and creatives to ensure that women and people all over the world have access to accurate and non-stigmatizing information to make informed sexual health decisions. Thank you so much for being with us, Vienna and Abigail, and welcome.

Vianey Estrada:

Thank you to you for inviting us. We love Shout Your Abortion. Like you mentioned, we've been able to chat and partner with Erin before, but it's really great to expand and learn more about the team, see more about what your work is doing. And we just love, love, love the posters that have been. Oh, I was telling Erin that I got the bandana that was sent a while ago and I love it. So everyone who's watching, go to their page because this merch is incredible.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah, that bandana is a real cutie and it's been worn by a lot of pets in the last six weeks or so. There is a whole campaign. We were like, "We can't believe we've finally activated the cats," because cats and dogs all over the world were wearing that bandana, which we made with Marimoto in Mexico City. Do you know Mar, Vianey?

Vianey Estrada:

I'm familiar with her work, but I don't have the pleasure of knowing her as an individual, but I absolutely loved the whole work that-

Amelia Bonow:

I think Mexico City is kind of a big place, so that makes sense.

Vianey Estrada:

Extremely.

Amelia Bonow:

So I guess just to get started, I think it might be helpful for folks if you could just explain the organizations that you are a part of and sort of how they connect and overlap and what you do for the organizations.

Vianey Estrada:

Yes, I can go first. So basically we are Women First Digital and our goal is to make sure that sexual and reproductive health rights are accessible information and access to resources is accessible at all, especially since we live in a digital age. It's very important that everyone can access this through their computers, their cell phones, wherever they need to use it. And under this organization, we have three sort of sister organizations that are safe2choose, HowToUseAbortionPill and Find My Method, which has Myka. I will talk about safe2choose, which is where I work in. I am the communications officer for safe2choose. So I help out with a lot of the material, the content, video scripts, producing just a lot of content creation and kind of public relations and marketing and a bit of everything.

But safe2choose is an eHealth platform that focuses on information on safe abortions. So what we do at safe2choose is provide information on the abortion protocols, on abortion access around the world, because as we know, a lot of countries, and even within a country, different states have different access. So we want to make sure that everyone can have that information. We also have live counselors, which are available in six different languages, including English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Swahili, Hindi, and these counselors can give you advice and guide you through your abortion for free. They're available from Monday to Friday, and basically you go with them, you tell them, "Hey, I'm thinking or I want to have an abortion. How can I do this?" And they'll recommend what kind of steps you can take depending on what kind of abortion you want, what the legality is in your country, who maybe you could refer to locally if you want that support.

So our counselors are really great, and I know them all personally, so they're all lovely women who are extremely passionate about providing abortion care. And we also have a series of testimonial videos just to help normalize abortions that I think Shout Your Abortion does an incredible job at doing kind of just sharing these stories and showing that abortions are normal, they're common, they happen around the world with different types of people. So yeah, basically an information hub where we want to make sure that people can have access to all these things. And sometimes going to the internet is very overwhelming. You don't really know where

to find the information or if I'm being lied to if the information is accurate. So I want to make sure that all of that is encompassed into one place that helps people find the information and then choose what's right best for them.

Amelia Bonow:

I had no idea that you had counselors in that many languages working that often. That is incredible.

Vianey Estrada:

Yes, and they're all trained medically. Some of them are from a midwife background, some of them are just really passionate about SRHR and then trained further on. They also have certifications and everything. But I think the most important thing, and for me, what stands out about our counselors is that they're so compassionate. It's basically like talking to an older sister who's not going to judge you, who's going to understand you, who's going to be calm, and when you're in a moment of anxiety or maybe fear or maybe ecstasy, they'll be there for you. So I really do love our counselors. I think they're amazing.

Amelia Bonow:

I'm going to drop the link in the chat. This is just the safe2choose link will get you to these folks. And are there any geographical... I mean, is this just anybody in the world who has internet access can chat with these folks and expect that they will be able to receive medical support, that big sister support that you just described, and also potentially help finding local resources?

Vianey Estrada:

Yes, of course. As long as they speak the same language as one of our counselors, they have the information. So for example, one of our counselors is based in Mexico, but if you're in the United States or if you're in a Latin American country or Canada, she has the information for the whole region. So we have counselors based on regions, and that helps us have a bit more of a knowledge of the local context. So our counselors will understand what you're going through and make sure that it's adapted based on maybe what you need, maybe the stigma you have within you, because it really varies by location, local laws. So as long as you can communicate with them, it's free and it's available year-round.

Amelia Bonow:

Wow. This is amazing. Do you have any idea how many folks they're speaking to in a given month or...

Vianey Estrada:

I don't have the exact data right now, but it's quite a lot. I would say it's a really big number and it comes from all over the world. So we try to have... I can't think of a number off the top of my head, but it's probably in the thousands, I think, if we're talking about a monthly basis.

Amelia Bonow:

That's so beautiful. I'm so glad to know that this exists. And yeah, thank you for holding that down. Do you have other things to share about your role in either of these buckets or should we hear from Abigail?

Vianey Estrada:

I think Gail can go ahead. I've been here for almost five years, so I'm pretty familiar with all of them, but I think Gail is the closest right now to the other organization, so I think she'd be really great at introducing them.

Amelia Bonow:

Okay. Hi, Abigail.

Abigail Peprah:

Hi. Hi, everyone. So I was the comms officer for HowToUseAbortionPill until earlier this month where I moved to Find My Method. So I'm going to speak on HowToUseAbortionPill first because I worked on HowToUse for over a few years. I feel like I always say there's a bit of an overlap between safe2choose and HowToUse, because HowToUse also provided abortion information. However, HowToUse was focused solely on the abortion pills. Perhaps when you go to safe2choose, you can get information on surgical abortion or abortion after 13 weeks, HowToUse was just within 13 weeks and using abortion pills. And one of our selling points was Ally. Ally was our chatbot and Ally's available 24/7 in six different languages to answer any questions that users will come to Ally. Ally is available on WhatsApp, on Instagram DM, on our website. We have a landing page on there for Ally and on Facebook.

So yeah, people just reach out to Ally. You can ask Ally any questions at all because I understand sometimes it can be more difficult for people to navigate information on a website as opposed to just reaching out via DM or WhatsApp and going like, "I'm having an abortion with pills and then I'm bleeding too much. So I want to know how much bleeding is too much and when do I need to go to a hospital?" And Ally was also able to refer users to the safe2choose counselors. So if you ask Ally a question that Ally feels, "Oh, I do not have this knowledge, but I can also refer you to a place where you can get more support." So yeah, there was a little bit of an overlap between HowToUse and safe2choose.

So currently HowToUse is moving to a B2B brand. So it's just going to be focused for providers because we also had an e-learning course for providers where people get certifications and this was catered in partnership with IPPF and their certification was also approved by FIGO. So we had a lot of medical providers. I believe that was also available in six or eight languages. So we had providers from all around the world taking this medical abortion course and then getting certified for it. So yeah, that's HowToUse. And Find My Method, which I currently work on as the comms officer, and like Vianey said, I do content creation, there's a little bit of influencer marketing, there's digital marketing, there's PR.

So Find My Method is a contraceptive brand, and I like to say that it's a comprehensive sexual health brand, because even though contraception is our main selling point, you can get a lot of sex, sexuality, and pleasure content on our website, even when you go on our social media accounts, you're going to get all these messages. And Find My Method also has a mascot,

Myka. Myka is also a chatbot who you can reach out to if you want to explore your contraceptive options. So Myka will help you based on your lifestyle, based on if you have some underlying issues, it will present you with the best contraceptive options, then you can make a choice and take the decision from there.

Amelia Bonow:

Abigail, you mentioned that Ally is accessible in, I think, you said WhatsApp and other messaging platforms. So how do you... I feel like an old millennial who is bad at... There's a lot of platforms that I don't use. And I guess when I think of a chatbot, I think of going to a website and then a chatbot pops up and helps you. So how do you access Ally on something like WhatsApp?

Abigail Peprah:

Okay. So on WhatsApp, usually you have to access Ally through our social media platform. So our LinkedIn bio always has Ally's link, Ally's WhatsApp link, and we usually promote Ally on social media with Ally's WhatsApp number.

Amelia Bonow:

Oh, wow. Ally has their very own phone number. Oh my God. Okay.

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, Ally has a WhatsApp number. So you can just save Ally's number in chat, but we also acknowledge that for a lot of people, it might be difficult to save the number in chat, because I mean, people just want to get it over with. That's why we usually refer them to the link in our bios. So you just type on it and it takes you right to WhatsApp so that you can initiate a chat.

Amelia Bonow:

Okay. Gotcha. So I don't want to go straight to something negative, but I was thinking about obviously digital security as you were talking about people communicating in real time about their abortions to a chatbot or to the counselors for that matter, and I guess I would like to hear you both talk about how you think about that and how you encourage best practices and how you manage that also for yourselves because obviously in the United States, there's this huge emphasis on criminalizing people who are helping others have abortions, and as you know, Shout Your Abortion is committed to helping to engender a mass culture of defiance where people are saying, "We will help each other no matter what. We will do the right thing. We will be careful about protecting ourselves and protecting the people we help, but we will not obey unjust laws."

And obviously these laws are written in a way that is trying to scare us so much that we stop and we want to be very clear that we will not ever stop. And that said, we also want to be very clear that there is a risk associated like in many, many, many places all over the world with helping or to some degree with SMA. Although I think that there's lots of places where SMA is not explicitly illegal. So I guess I would like to hear how do you think about digital security and everything that I just said?

Abigail Peprah:

That's interesting because HowToUse a few months ago, we created another resource on digital security. So it's available on the howtouseabortionpill.org website and the digital security for [inaudible 00:20:32] users. And the great thing about Ally is the moment you send Ally a hi, Ally asks about your language and you send your language, Ally sends you a disclaimer. So now we are actually trying to get a lot of people not to chat with Ally on Meta and even maybe on WhatsApp that more people to chat. Yeah, so Ally sends a disclaimer that if you want a more private and confidential chat, you should click on the link to the website because the website is a more private and confidential option for anyone at all, but it also has now been embedded with the digital security.

So it gives pointers on things that you should do, like not saving Ally as abortion chatbot. You could save Ally in a very random way. Whoever it is you are talking with about abortion, you should make sure that you've not saved the person's name as abortion counselor or nurse for abortion, or... That's something you should do. Also, you always need to make sure that if you're sending videos, you're sending images, it's view once. It's not something that can be [inaudible 00:21:52] four hours. You set your messages to disappearing.

I know that even when you take all these precautions, your information can still be retrieved one way or the other because, I mean, of course, social media is the internet, but we try really hard to also make this information accessible to people so that in as much as they're getting this information from us, we are also making them aware that you need to take these steps to protect yourself. So Ally is embedded with that extra thing for people to know that, yeah, I need to delete my chat rights after this. And yeah, I think these are some of the ways we help people with digital security.

Amelia Bonow:

If one of you could put the link in the chat to the digital security brief that you were talking about putting together. Is WhatsApp encrypted?

Abigail Peprah:

WhatsApp is not. So that's also something we struggle with because WhatsApp is not. But again, I think the steps we have for WhatsApp, if you are someone looking for abortion resources is different. So in the PDF, it has a special section for WhatsApp, how to deal with looking for abortion information on WhatsApp. There's even a section on if you are assessing physical abortion service, what to do, turning your location off, maps to use instead of Google Maps so that your location cannot be accessed later, more private ways. So yeah, it's a very comprehensive guide. I'm looking for it right now so that I can share it. Yeah.

Amelia Bonow:

That's great. And I mean, I think it's important. Obviously there are many, many conversations about security in our movement, about digital security, and it's like a very fine line, I think with you want to encourage people to take best practices, but you don't want to scare them so much

that they think they can't have an abortion, and I think that also it's like all of these things need to be measured against the fact that pregnancy is dangerous. Continuing a pregnancy is dangerous and an unwanted pregnancy is incredibly dangerous on many levels. So I think that starting from a place of we're going to help people navigate that situation is a very important jump off as opposed to making people feel like they should be too scared to try. It is a matter of like, how are you protecting yourself in the process?

And I think, Abigail, you just gave some very good tangible tips and we are excited to look at this guide and we'll definitely send it out in our wrap up after this Abortion Academy. I want to hear a little bit from you both about how you got into abortion work. It sounds like both of you have a sexual and reproductive health background. Uh-oh, did we lose Abigail? No.

Vianey Estrada:

I think she's maybe loading, but-

Amelia Bonow:

Oh, okay. Gotcha.

Vianey Estrada:

Yeah, I can go ahead first, if that's fine.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah.

Vianey Estrada:

So basically I would say it's a happy accident, how I got into abortion advocacy, but basically I graduated from university during the pandemic, and that was a terrible time to graduate during the pandemic, and while I was looking for a job, this organization came up as an opportunity, and to me, it was like a light bulb moment because for the first time I realized that you could work in abortion advocacy or social justice or human rights, which is something that I never thought of, wasn't really discussed at school. So I was like, "Oh, wow. I can combine what I know that I like with what I studied."

And I always say joining the advocacy space and abortion advocacy made kind of like a slap in the face because it made me realize that even though I always consider myself pro-choice and pro abortion and supportive, I still needed a lot to learn, and there were biases that I have and there are things that I had to learn, things I had to get rid of, things that I need to become more intersectional and become more inclusive and learn more about the different stories and testimonials and advocates working around the world. So for me, this kind of came up with this job and then it made me realize how important it is to advocate for safe abortions. I think you don't realize how much it can affect somebody's life if they don't have access to it until you hear the stories. I think a lot of the times when we get information about abortions, it's numbers. I don't know, 50% of women have abortions or 40% of women have unsafe abortions, and that really doesn't help you understand the impact they can have on individual lives.

So for me, having the opportunity to speak with abortion-seekers and people who can become pregnant and indigenous and from in America. So we have a really big culture in indigenism and kind of ancestral practices, and kind of also just going back to our culture and our roots before colonization. So to me, it was just kind of opening this Pandora's box of everything that I can learn and know more about sexual reproductive health rights. So that's basically how it got started, and then that just kind of just jumped off into me wanting to do more about women's rights and human rights and just open up a really, really pretty world for me to continue to advocate and learn more.

Amelia Bonow:

I love that you were like, "I didn't know this could be a job." It's surprising. Yeah. I mean, I think it's really hard in this world of just global capitalist nightmare. I feel like it's such a blessing. I'm so grateful, so grateful to get to do something so beautiful as my job. Even on the hardest day, it's just the best. It's still such a blessing and I can tell that you feel the same way. And also when you were speaking about how it feels, I remember the first time I spent time with a group of independent abortion providers in the United States, and I was just obsessed with the feeling that they conveyed of helping people through an abortion and not in some weird savior way, but just what you were just speaking to, Vianey, about you are in a short time able to support and witness someone in one of the most impactful moments of their lives and you feel it and what an honor that is, and just knowing that you are able to support, really change someone's life in an afternoon.

And I remember a doctor saying to me... I was kind of having that realization that I think people do when they get into this work of that abortion is everything. It's not only just sexual reproductive health, autonomy, it's racial justice, it's economic justice, it's gender justice, it's everything that happens in your life after the abortion. It's the whole rest of your life. It's freedom. It's freedom from state oppression. It's everything. And I remember just being like, "What could ever feel this way?" And a group of... I was like, "What else besides abortion could ever feel this amazing?" And this group of doctors all said at the same time, "Nothing." And I feel like a lot of activists that I know feel that same way, once you get into it's just like not only are you helping someone to end an unwanted pregnancy, you're helping people in all of those areas of their whole lives. And so it sounds like you feel that in these small interactions that you're having with people.

Vianey Estrada:

Yes, and I would like to highlight that I think in Latin America specifically, we're very much community-focused. So when you have an abortion and you need somebody, you can have four people with you, five people with you in your house and they're with you and they're always protecting you and they go out and they'll find your favorite things and help you. I think one of the most impactful things in Latin America is the Green Wave. I think it showcases how powerful it is when communities come together.

And then when you actually go to one of these Green Wave marches, you'll see it's not only them advocating for abortion, it's the advocating for SRHR, for the LGBT+ community, it's

advocating for better access for those in the disability community. It's advocating including moms, listening to the voices of mothers who are pro-choice, listening to those who don't have the financial ability to have an abortion and getting together and finding a way to make it work. I think that's what makes it really magical and powerful, and I feel like if everyone had that kind of moment of realization, they would completely change the way they view abortion.

Amelia Bonow:

Yes. I appreciate that lens so much and I think that there is a lot of overlap with the movement for reproductive justice in the United States, which obviously was an answer to this incredibly limited view of just reproductive rights and the movement for reproductive health is seeking essentially just abortion care for individuals who are exercising a right to privacy and medical care that you can have if you pay for, and you should never talk about it, and meanwhile, there are women of color who are having unfair intervention from state agencies who are not allowing them to parent and drug users being fucked with. All of the ways that pregnancy criminalization has occurred from the get go has always been happening, so that's got to be a part of the conversation. And like you said, in Latin America, it's like stuff like femicide, like violence against women. It's like that is naturally a part of the conversation. And this naturally sort of expansive and intersectional...

It's like the demands were always everything and not leaving anyone behind, and I think that the United States really, really fucked up in that way and we're still playing catch up. And the movement for reproductive justice has like that... I think lens has had it right all along and was very much, like I said, a response to the limitations of the mainstream kind of corporate white feminist approach to what we were asking for and who we were willing to leave behind. So I really appreciate you talking about the community framework as being inherent to the way that it works and that the idea that a person would be sitting there alone without... That's not the way it works. And I think that idea is very much still something we're trying to break away from in the United States, that you and your abortion, you need to be isolated, you need to be secret, private, like not being helped by community. So I appreciate you bringing that in. Abigail, do you want to tell us... Oh, did you have something-

Vianey Estrada:

No, no, no. Please go ahead.

Amelia Bonow:

Abigail, do you want to tell us a little bit about how you found your way to this work?

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah. I always say I wish I was Latin American because I love, love their community. I love how they always come together for things like that because my reality is totally different. So funny story, but I got my interest for sex and sexual health and everything started because I started reading smut, and I think I was around 13, 14, 15, I started reading smut, and I just felt like-

Amelia Bonow:

Are you saying you started reading smut? Is that what you said?

Abigail Peprah:

Yes. Yes, smut. I started reading smut because growing up in Africa, in Ghana, sex is still a bit of a taboo topic over here, and I also grew up in a very religious home, so there was nothing like that. So I started reading smut and I was like, "Oh my God, there's this really big world out there that I have no idea about." So in uni... I love writing. In uni, I started writing short stories, but they were erotica. So my friends were always interested. So I had a little WhatsApp group where when my story is ready, I put it in there and people loved it. Then I started a WordPress account where I was posting my stories. I mean, when I started, it was just a hobby. Then I started reading a lot more on sexual health and everything. So on my Snapchat, I started sharing sexual health information, and then there were times that people would reach out to me, "Oh, I mean my boyfriend," and this and that. I'm like, "Oh, okay. This is something I could actually look into."

So after my bachelor's degree, I started an event. It was called Eden. So Eden was just targeted to disseminating accurate and reliable information on sexual health for the teens and youth in Accra. I mean, the main city, I mean, the capital cities of Ghana, Accra. So I started that event and it ran for a couple of months and people were always interested in coming. So while I was doing that, I went on LinkedIn one day and then I saw a job ad for a communications officer for HowToUseAbortionPill. Initially I was like, "Maybe I'm not qualified for this role," but also what happens if I apply? And then I applied and I got feedback that, "Oh, we are interested in getting to know you more." I was ecstatic. So I did my interview and Mitchell, who is now a senior digital, she loved me. She loved what I did. And I felt so glad because after I went to look at her profile and I saw everything she did, I was like, "Yeah, I aspire to be someone like that."

And I realized I always got this rush. Even when I did not know a lot, I always got this rush when people come to me and I was able to help them. So I wanted a way to do it on a bigger scale. I knew nothing about abortion coming on. I would say I was not even pro-choice coming onto HowToUseAbortionPill. I did-

Amelia Bonow:

I want to ask you, what was your perception of abortion growing up?

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, I was anti-choice. I was so anti-choice-

Amelia Bonow:

Because is the predominant religion in Ghana, is it Christian?

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, yeah. It's Christianity. So yeah, There's a lot of stigma around abortion.

Amelia Bonow:

So is it very like you are bad if you have an abortion, abortion is [inaudible 00:37:58] and people don't talk about it?

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, people do not like to talk about it, but I can also say it's getting better now. I mean, yeah, it's not as bad as before. I started a TikTok page actually where I share the information we have on HowToUseAbortionPill to people. I've been able to build a bit of a community with even some pharmacists and all that, that I'm able to refer people to. I refer people to safe2choose counselors, I refer people to Women on Web to just anywhere because I get a lot of people... When I started my TikTok, it was just supposed to be a Ghanaian thing, but I get requests from people in the Philippines, people in the US, people in Mexico and all over the world. So I do think it's getting better now in Ghana. However, we are still not there. There's still a lot of stigma around this. Yeah. Yeah.

Amelia Bonow:

Well, so I kind of interrupted you to ask that question, but you were saying how when you started this job, you were so excited, but you were not even pro-choice. So tell us about how that transition happened and you now became this abortion icon.

Abigail Peprah:

I think I was not pro-choice because I was not privy to how abortion actually works or how it looks like. I had no information on what happens when people have abortion. I had a lot of misinformation. If you have an abortion, you would die, and those very horrid negative things that people say about abortion, those were the things... But I feel like I was at a point where I was not judging people if they had an abortion. However, I was not, "Yeah, anyone should have an abortion if they want to," until I joined HowToUseAbortionPill. So with all the information I had to put out, obviously it took a while for my biases to... So I remember I went through this whole phase where my supervisor always had to recheck my content and I was trying, but obviously, of course, I came from a background where there was a lot of stigma, there was a lot of bias. So there were times that I'm creating content and then you could see some of my bias in how the language is written.

So yeah, I've definitely come a very long way, but all the information on HowToUse is so non-stigmatizing and I work with a lot of amazing people who have also supported me, Vianey, one, because if I have any second thoughts on something, I can reach out to anyone at all and they're always so supportive to correct, and then... Yeah. So it's been a great journey for me. I did not start out this way, but I've definitely come very far.

Amelia Bonow:

I love that. I think that that's really beautiful and I thank you for sharing that because I think that sometimes... I don't know how it is in your circles of activism, but I think that sometimes there's an expectation that... I don't know. It feels like people are very embarrassed or even ashamed to share their... Or it's hard to find a place for people to work through their own hangups, and I think that it's really healthy to have a group of people around you, which it sounds like for you,

Abigail, your coworkers have been amazing in holding a space for you non-judgmentally to talk about what's coming up for you.

And it's not the way that... We live in this world of so much stigma and we've all been swimming in it. It's like the oxygen in everywhere all over the globe, and so it's like there's going to be places. I remember when SYA first started, it was like I had never considered or thought about someone having 10 abortions. I had never considered that that was even a reality, and it too ... I don't even know if I had internalized stigma per se, but I was kind of just like, "How is that a thing?" And then it's like you engage with people's stories, you talk about what's coming up for you. If you are lucky, I think that you can encounter someone who is willing to share with you, and at the end of the day, I think that you come to see this is people's lives, lives look really different. There's a lot of different ways to have sex and use birth control or not use birth control, and whether you do or don't should not... There's no moral implication to that.

And it's like if you take that to its logical conclusion, then it's like, well, who the fuck cares? You know what I mean? But it's like you kind of have to have that conversation with yourself or maybe another person that you trust, and hopefully in a way that's not showing up with your stigma in conversation with an abortion-seeker or someone who has had whatever. So I think it's really cool that you are able to do that, Abigail, that you've had people hold you down as you kind of evolve into the work because none of us are just coming... We don't just arrive perfect stigma-free beings who are ready to provide culturally-competent care and support to anyone we ever encounter. That's just not the way that that works.

I think that Abigail, you might be frozen. I don't know if you want to try turning your video off for a sec. It might work. Vianey, do you have anything to share about... I think it's interesting what you were saying about how abortion is naturally a more communal thing in Latin America, in Mexico. And I mean, that's certainly our perception in the States is we think about stuff like the accompaniment model and we see these feminist collectives and collectives of doulas and helpers and these models that have originated in Latin America. And we very much see these things as aspirational and are doing everything we can to learn from them. And we also know that it's like Mexico is a super Catholic country, stigma is still a thing, and maybe stigma is still a thing in, I don't know, in movement spaces kind of like we were just talking about. So can you talk about how you see stigma, I guess, in your own world and internationally as well? Because we do know that it's different everywhere. It exists everywhere, but it's a little different everywhere.

Vianey Estrada:

Yeah. First, I would say we are predominantly Catholic country and region as a whole, and I think if you grew up Catholic, you know that Catholic guilt is something you just have and you never get rid of even if you're atheist or agnostic later on. It's just the way it works. I've talked to some colleagues who we were having a conversation... We were going to a church for touristic purposes and we were talking about the church, and I remember one of her said, I don't know this word in English, but basically she was kicked out of her church and the people in her region were kicked out of the church if they were supporting abortions because it's like, you can't be one and another. But I think there's ways to make up this relationship and kind of like heal it.

For example, there's this really great organization, that's Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Catholics to the Right of Choice, and they do a really great job in showcasing how your religion doesn't necessarily mean that you can't support abortion, you can't support the LGBTQ community, you can't support feminism. I think there are ways that people are adapting the kind of knowledge we have and kind of the religious way we view things. I think also colonization really did a lot of countries dirty. I feel like a lot of the issues we have was because of colonization. And there were things that were more open and liberal and understood before we were colonized into these kind of religions that are very much conservative and the purity culture and everything. So I would say that that's one of the things.

I think it's very similar in what Gail said is that there's always this persistent idea of, the thing that I'm doing, is it wrong? Is it right? Will I be judged? How can I make peace with this? And I think that it's hard. It's not easy. It'd be a lie to say that it's very easy and you can get over it. It's not. It's something that you kind of have to go through, and that's why community is so important because if I have a group of friends and I'm like, "The first time I talked about abortion, I felt very self-conscious about it," and somebody's like, "Yeah, me too. And it's normal and it's okay." And I think that's something that we do often is that we kind of have these spaces to talk about things and be like, "Okay, so how do you feel, no?" And they're like, "I'm an abortion provider. I've never had an abortion, and when I did have an abortion, I felt so many things and I was so conflicted with some of the views."

And I think that's just the things you kind of have to go through and you experiment. And I think that there's kind of three ways to view people, and one is people who are in favor of what you're doing, people who can be persuaded, so people who kind of are still on the fence about abortion, and people who are completely against abortion. We're not going to view these people because it's just not possible to kind of switch their opinion. But the people who are in the middle ground, it's usually easier when you share these experiences, like I said, instead of talking about in numbers, kind of be like, "Okay, open up this conversation." And my personal experience, once I became more active and working in SRHR, I became much more vocal about it. So people don't maybe not know what I work in, but they know that I work in this kind of landscape.

So I've been contacted by people like, "My friend needs an abortion. Can you help me? My friend is going through an abusive relationship. Do you know what I can do? My friend needs this support because of this thing," and I was like, "Oh, so that's how networks are created. That's how we sell these networks together and make sure that people have the support and the community approach that they need." And I think it's part of that people are usually scared to talk about something until one person, you just need one person to speak up and say something and then you'll have an open conversation.

And I've had this with my family. My mom had a miscarriage and I never knew about it, and when I started talking about abortions, she openly discussed this. I have friends who went through their abortions alone and then later on when they found out I work in this, they talked to

me about it and how their experience was, and I always like, "Do you need any support? Do you want to have a conversation?" I have friends who can help you out with that. I think it's just that it's not easy to get rid of guilt or stigma or biases. It's very hard and it's very hard when you have to be critical about yourself. I think everyone has an ego. Everyone's like, "Oh, no. I'm doing a great job." And then you get shown something with...

And I'm pretty sure in five years, the work we're doing right now in five years, we'll be like, "Ooh, I think this could have been done better," and I think that's part of it. I think, like I said, that Catholic guilt is always with you, but you kind of have to go through it, but my emphasis is on don't go through it alone, and even if you think that a space isn't safe, I swear, if you open that conversation up, you'll be like, "Oh, there's a lot of maternal trauma that my grandma, my aunt, my mom, my sister, they never talked about, and now that they know that they have this space, they openly talk about it and we're closer now more than ever."

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah, I love that, and I totally agree. We will look back at the things that we're writing and creating in five years and be like, "Ooh, I would change that," and that will be because we have built a better world then and we see things now. We've developed more of a lens to see things that we are not capable of seeing now, and it's not about being perfect in this moment. It's about being open to evolving and being imperfect and recognizing that that's a part of it and holding each other accountable in loving ways.

Vianey Estrada:

Yeah, I think it's possible. It's completely possible, and I don't think there's an end goal when it comes to abortion. I don't think it's like, "Okay, abortion is legal. We did it." No. So there's always room to grow and learn and just do better, be better.

Amelia Bonow:

I want to go back to social media for a sec and just kind of talk to you both about how you... I know that you both work across a number of platforms and make a range of content, and I guess I just would like to hear from you a little bit about some of those projects and how you see social media content playing a role in someone's either journey to seek an abortion or their journey to dismantle their own stigma about having an abortion or about judging people for having abortions, whatever. Just how you see social media being a part of this work that we're doing because obviously social media is so... It's so fucked up and it feels abusive to open your phone half the time, but I know that there's people like you that are actively changing the world with social media content.

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, I think Vianey is a social media wiz, so I'm just going to say a few words and then let her take it away. But I would say that, I think one thing I really love is in general, seeing shareable content, shareable access from all the brands, not even just us. So those cute posts that have affirmations, that are sometimes infographics on how to use the pills, the ones that you tend to see a lot of space on. If you're on social media, you probably see some repost, maybe you not see a lot of likes, but behind the scenes when the social media manager is looking at it, they

can see that, oh, a lot of people save this content. I love those kind of content, because unfortunately due to the stigma around abortions, people do not want to interact with the kind of content that we create. A lot of people, even when they need the information, they're not going to interact with the content. People will probably rather take a screenshot to keep in their gallery instead of liking or reposting or sharing to their story.

So sometimes it can be very difficult that way. However, I think it's always important that we focus on our reach when you're sharing on social media because no matter what it is you think you're putting out, it's impacting someone. Even if you have 20 users on your account, those 20 users are going to look at your content, they're going to see your content and it's going to make an impact one way or the other, whether it's negative or positive. So when and if you're using social media, you always need to be careful about the type and kind of content that you are putting out there, what message you want people to process when they see the content, what are you reinforcing. So it's really important. The language matters very, very much in changing the perception of the people that are on your page.

I think Vianey already also mentioned that now we are in a digital age. People go on social media, people are now... A lot of the Gen Zs and Gen Alphas are now using TikTok as a search engine. So we are just at this point where we have to use social media and it's information that people need. The work that we do, people need it. We cannot say that, "Oh, I'm going there. I did not want to go there, but I'm going there." We can't say that, "Oh, because of big tech, because of censorship, we are going to take a step back. We are not going to do as much as we are doing anymore." We do not have the luxury of that because unfortunately there are so many women, there are so many people who are able to get pregnant who live in restrictive countries. So their only source of information, of reliable and accurate information is from social media.

So I think we cannot do without social media for the work that we do. We have partnerships that does a lot of on ground activities, and that pulls a lot of reach as well. However, we cannot deal with social media. It's amazing enriching so many people that we cannot reach in person because now everyone is online, everyone is living their life online. So yeah, I will let Vianey take over from here.

Vianey Estrada:

Okay. Thank you, Gail. She said a lot of great things, so I'm going to try to complement what she mentioned. I think first of all, something that people need to know is that, like Gail mentioned, TikTok and other social media applications are being used as a search engine, and I do that too. If I want to go to a cafe, I'll be like, "Cafe in this area," and then I'm going to look at the videos and be like, "That one looks good." Now, when you're looking for a cafe, there's two things that can happen. You can get a really cool cafe and go there and it's affordable and it's delicious based off of a video, or you can go to a cafe, the food is bad, the surface is terrible, it's not in a great location, it's too expensive, and you're like, "Ah, why did I listen to that video?"

That's the same thing that happens with abortions. You either get information that's accurate, that's safe, that's quality, or you're going to get really terrible information that's going to scare the

hell out of you and it's going to make you be afraid of accessing abortion and it's going to make you anti-abortion, right? So those two things exist on social media. What we have to do is make sure that the information on safe abortions that's verified and it's accurate is more readily available than the one that's going to scare people. How do we do that? We utilize social media as a really great tool. And there are a lot of tips and tricks on this as you use keywords, you make sure that it's SEO optimized, you make sure that you're like whatever... You go onto these apps and then you look at what people are searching associated to abortion, to SRHR, to pro-choice and whatever. So there are really great ways to do that.

But I think more than that, it's telling your story, it's being as human as possible, it's showing that real people are behind this work and real people are interested and care about you, and that's what's going to make people be like, "Oh, this is changing my perception on this one thing," and that happens to everyone with every topic. I think we're all ignorant to some extent. It's totally normal and it's okay to not know everything. We have to give ourselves the chance to learn and to grow, and social media is a really great way to do that as long as we know how to filter out the information and make sure that we're not being clickbaited or we're not listening to AI videos of animals jumping on trampolines, which is very [inaudible 00:58:09] right now.

But I think social media in that sense is really great, and I think it's a way to give information that's not too medical. I think one of the issues also is that people feel like, "I can't speak on abortion because I'm not a doctor. I can't speak on abortion because I'm not a nurse," and it's like, well, I mean, if you could get pregnant and you can have an abortion, then you can speak on it because it's your body. And I think people always think that something's not going to happen to them. I'm never going to have an unwanted pregnancy, I'm never going to have a pregnancy that leads to a medical issue, I'm never going to have a pregnancy that could put my life at risk.

And you might think that hopefully you never have to go through that, but if you do, I want to make sure you have access to that information. And if you're scared and your first thought is to see if somebody shared their story on TikTok, I want to make sure that you have access to a real story that's not going to scare you, a story that's going to share that experience that's going to share accurate information.

So that's why we think social media is a very powerful tool. I know a lot of people are kind of sick of all the bad information and bad things that are happening in the world. I can only imagine how it feels to be in the United States and every video you see on abortion is just like, abortion was banned here, abortion was banned here, the abortion pills or whatever. But I think part of a way to combat that is just to make sure that people share the goodness. It's like, okay, abortion might be banned here, but you know what? There's this really great collective that can give you information, that can travel with you to another state, that speaks Spanish if you're undocumented and you need that help, that can provide this financial support for all that you can do.

So I think social media is a very powerful tool. It's not going to go away unless the world explodes and we have no more access to internet. It's here to stay forever. So we might as well learn to ride the wave of social media, learn how to use it smartly and try to make sure that our

content, whoever we are, is reaching the people that actually need it. And I think a good way to do this is also just to continue to collaborate, support all the organizations, because we're not competition, we're sisters or friends who are trying to help out. So I think that's a good way to do it too.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah. I mean, I think you know that we totally agree. That's very much our philosophy as well, both the uplifting of other organizations and seeing one another as members of a family or an ecosystem that we need all of us, and I think that sometimes capitalism pits people against each other, especially when it's like you have to fundraise. And sometimes it feels like in the United States, there is a mentality of people who work in... I don't know, people needing to argue that their thing is the solution or something, and it's like, no, we need abortion funds, we need pills and doulas and SMA information, we need independent clinics. We need all of it. We need advocates, we need storytellers, we need all of it. And so I appreciate that.

And also what you said about how it feels in the United States to be looking and seeing all of this bad news about abortion all of the time, and that's definitely something that we very much believe. It's like if you look at SYA's Instagram account for the last... I mean, since before Dobbs, because we knew that that was going to happen and because access was already really bad way before that for millions of Americans, and so it's like if you look at our account, you're going to find abortion access. You're not going to find us being mad about laws that aren't ultimately going to stop us. You're going to find keys, you're going to find doors, you're going to find helpers, and I think that it's really... I don't know, sometimes there's a mentality of if you're not freaking out... If you're not using your personal platform to freak the fuck out about bad things happening, then you're being a jerk.

I mean, I don't know, that's a complicated thing in some ways, but I think that you're right, we have people's attention in that place that this is a place where people are, like you said, just finding... They're using it as a search engine. So we got to be there helping them find healthy, safe care and support, and it's like, I don't know, how much does it help people to post something that's just like, "This terrible abortion thing happened." It's like, how about here's how you use abortion pills.

Vianey Estrada:

I was going to say, it's not easy. I know it's easy to get consumed with fear and despair and be like, "What's going to happen now?" Obviously. And we also have to allow ourselves to feel bad and be sad and kind of be [inaudible 01:03:27], but I think it's also really good to be like, "This happened, let's mobilize each other so this never happens again." And I think that's a really great way of kind of twisting it so it's not always just doom and despair and maybe like, okay, we can get something out of this.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think movements in Latin America have been incredibly inspiring in showing progress being made that seemed impossible to many people 15 years ago, but we

can do it different. I think that everyone that I... I feel like when people are like, "I feel so fucked up, how do I feel better?" I'm like, "I think that if you just get involved in some way, you will feel better." And also it's like when I'm around people like you all day, it's like our siblings in the movement, we are undeterred and we are going to win. We are unstoppable. And if you want to feel that way, get in here and it will rub off on you because you will see that it is true that no government has ever shut this shit down and it's not going to start right now.

I want to make sure that we're taking any questions from the audience. I'm not sure if there will be, but I wanted to ask also if... This has been amazing chat, you're both incredible, your work is incredible. It's so inspiring. I'm so... I mean, even just knowing that the chatbot and the counselors, and you said six different languages, that's incredible. I'm so excited to share that good news, but I wanted to ask both of you if there's stuff that you wanted to highlight or talk about that you didn't have a chance to so far.

Vianey Estrada:

I think I would mention precisely that. I feel like sometimes when you're not... I think it's hard for people to declare themselves advocates or activists. I think sometimes it's like, I don't think I've earned that badge, but I feel like I mentioned just having that one conversation with your family or sharing that one story on the resources can change complete trajectories.

So I would say if you think that our resources and Shout Your Abortion resources are valuable, share them on your story, repost them on your social media, talk about them to your friends and family and be like, "Wow. I didn't know that so many people experienced this when they had their abortions," or like, "Wow. I didn't know that I can actually get abortion support and it's not super complicated or scary." So I think social media has a lot of power. The really great thing is that you don't have to be an influencer with a million followers to upload a video. Maybe one person views your video or two, on a good day 15 people, but it doesn't matter because that one person, they might have a better life because of that.

Amelia Bonow:

Yes, absolutely. That's so good. Abigail, what do you think?

Abigail Peprah:

Yeah, I love that. So I was just going to say, like Vianey said, it could literally just take one person. I set up my TikTok page with about 25 followers and now I have over 14,000 followers. So yeah, you never know who you're helping. When I made my first video, I got about 20 views. I was like, "Oh, okay." But then I kept going and now it makes me so happy to see. So yeah, I mean, not everyone has the luxury or even has their willpower. Maybe willpower is not a word to use, but not everyone wants to sit behind a camera or sit in front of the camera and that's totally okay, that's totally fine. I just feel like one way you can also be an advocate is just to share resources from other feminist organizations, abortion organizations, sexual health organizations, share them on your story, share them to your friends. You can take a screenshot, put them on your WhatsApp status.

And if there's a hashtag trending on Twitter especially, it could just be as simple as just using the hashtag. I think there's so many ways you can help the movement. And yeah, one thing that is prominent is sharing, making sure that people have information available to them. That's all you need to do. You do not have to go the extra mile if you feel like that's not something you want to do. It's totally fine. Just support us by sharing our work to the people you know. That's all.

Amelia Bonow:

Yeah, I love that. I don't like being in front of the camera at all and I think that sometimes it just feels like a lot of pressure to... Yeah, like you were saying too, Vianey, to be perfect or be like, "I don't want to be..." I don't know, a fear of being a bad advocate or whatever, but I really like the way that you're both talking about this. You can take little steps, you don't have to be out there alone trying to say the perfect thing. You can just uplift the work that people are already doing.

You don't have to do it all the time, just like a thing here or there, and also just I think that we all conflate scale and numbers with success, but I really, really love what you said, Vianey, that you may literally change the course of someone's life with one post, with one conversation, and I think that anyone in this work has felt that and knows that, and we welcome you. We welcome you to just tiptoe into it, just start sharing a thing here or there, work from other organizations like yours, like your incredible, incredible organizations. Will you tell us for the last thing, if there's ways that we can... Aside from just elevating your work, are there ways that folks can support you and I guess safe2choose and HowToUseAbortionPill and the chatbot?

Vianey Estrada:

I would also just answer this question, we will be at ICFP. Maite and Lina, who are our colleagues will be there, so please look out for them. They have a presentation on the safe2choose counselors too that will be at ICFP. So that's really cool. They'll give out more information on that. In regards to supporting us, you can donate. safe2choose has a section where you can buy a gift for someone in the form of a donation, and that way you can support the work we do. I think another great way to support, for example, HowToUse is signing up for the free e-learning courses. They're literally free, and they're there the whole year. You can do them the time and pacing you want, and it's just like a free resource that will help us out because the more people know that they're interested in learning with us and growing with us, the more success we'll have because people will find out about our work and everything we're doing.

Like we mentioned, just sharing the resources, that's really cool and just sharing the love. I think that's a really great way to help us out. And then also, I think that just saving things, reposting things, things that are super simple is really great. And I think also that we work with a lot of content creators. So we work with a lot of people localized in different regions. If you see a video of us with them, you can go ahead and follow them and ask them like, "Oh, do more videos with them. I want to learn more about this," and that way we can continue to collaborate with more people. I think that's a really great way of doing that. I think Gail can share just another tip of how to support us.

Abigail Peprah:

You covered everything. You shared all the ways in which we can be supported. So yeah, I would also love to highlight amazing designers. So when you go on our social media pages, we have our designers handles under all the posts that they make. So you can follow them, you can support them because I think [inaudible 01:11:53] is also one of the amazing ways that we use to communicate to people, especially when we can't use certain words, when the words fail us, our designers come through for us. So you can also support them by following them and sharing our work whenever you come across this. That's always appreciated.

Amelia Bonow:

It's been so wonderful talking to you today, both of you. Thank you so much for your time and for your work, SYA loves you. We are so grateful for our connection. We are so fueled by international solidarity and you are a big part of that. So thank you for your work and for everything that you've shared with us today.

Abigail Peprah:

Thank you too. We love SYA as well. Whenever I'm asked what's one of my favorites, off the top of my head, is always Shout Your Abortion. I'm in love with everything you do. So thank you so much for having us.

Amelia Bonow:

Thank you. Back at you. Back at you both. It's good to be in this movement together and we're so glad that we have each other. Have a good rest of your day. Thank you for everything.

Vianey Estrada:

Thank you both. Talk soon.

Amelia Bonow:

Bye.