

## **Abortion Academy: Session 35 | with Abigail Peprah & Cath Harry**

### **Amelia Bonow:**

Hi, everybody. Welcome to Abortion Academy. We're so happy to have you. We'll just go ahead and get started. My name is Amelia Bonow. I am the co-founder and executive director of Shout Your Abortion. And SYA is a nationwide organization working to normalize abortion and elevate safe 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 Abortion Academy is a monthly webinar series where we speak to some of our brilliant colleagues and take a deeper dive into their area of expertise. These sessions are for anyone who is looking to deepen their knowledge, connect dots between issues that they're navigating at a local, regional, national, international level, and just get some fresh ideas to take back into community.

Every other month about, we welcome international guests because SYA is very much of the mind that movement building is not a domestic project, and we feel proud to be oriented in a global movement for abortion access. And so this is one of those sessions. We have two incredible guests who are joining us from the other side of the world, essentially. It is the middle of the night for some. And just a housekeeping thing, audience members will be off camera and muted, but you can ask questions through the chat function throughout the session. And we also have live Spanish translation available. If you go down to the menu bar at the bottom of your screen, you click the globe and then you can select the language you'd like to listen in.

So in this session, we will be chatting with Cath Harry and Abigail Peprah, co-hosts of Unholy Feminists, a podcast that promises feminist chaos that might radicalize you.

Cath is the Cambodian vlogger behind a Dose of Cath, a channel focusing on sex education, gender equality, and cultural issues from a feminist perspective. Her channel has one million followers on Facebook and 600,000 on TikTok. And she's also a writer. She was named one of Forbes 30 30 Asia 2018 and was also selected as one of the Obama Foundation's Asia Pacific leaders, no big deal. And Abigail, who you may remember as one of very few Abortion Academy repeat guests for very good reason is, God, I don't even know. Did you say Ghanaian? Or is it Ghanaian? Is that like [inaudible 00:03:03]-

### **Abigail Peprah:**

Ghanaian.

### **Amelia Bonow:**

Ghanaian. Okay, thank you.

### **Abigail Peprah:**

Yes.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Ghanaian feminist and digital advocate telling unapologetic sexual and reproductive health stories from Accra. Through her educational TikTok platform, she serves as a first point of contact for abortion seekers across Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, the Philippines, and the USA, connecting thousands to reliable, safe abortion resources. We are so honored to have these two joining us, like I said, all the way from very, very different time zones. And I think that SYA was very much the byproduct of this collective notion that stigma and patriarchy is maintained through silence and that there is something inherently radical and transformative in telling the truth out loud in public without apology. And tonight's guests are... Today or tonight for Cath. Today's guests are all about that. So I'm very, very pleased and honored to welcome Cath and Abigail to Abortion Academy.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Thank you.

**Cath Harry:**

For having us.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yay. Are we all three in the right place? There we are. Hi, Cath and Abigail. How are you? How's everybody feeling?

**Cath Harry:**

Feeling good and energized.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, I'm excited for this session.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Good. Me too. So, okay. I think that I know the answer to this, but will you just tell our guests, first of all, just how you met each other?

**Abigail Peprah:**

Okay. So I've been here before. Amelia, we've done this before. So is anyone [inaudible 00:05:09] who is also here, you probably saw me in another session. Paige, we were representing Women's First Digital. So Cath and I were both comms officers at Women's First Digital. I was working on how to use abortion pill, and she was working on [inaudible 00:05:28]. And thankfully and happily she was promoted to be my comms manager. So became my supervisor, but then our relationship sort of blossomed from there. And yeah, so we met through

WEC. We met at WEC. We are colleagues and then she became my supervisor and it's just been an amazing friendship and relationship from there.

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah. I think what was the spark, what was the thing that sparked all of this was one of our KPIs at the time, KPIs, corporate stuff.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Will you define the term since I bet a lot of people don't know what that means?

**Cath Harry:**

Key performance indicator. So at the time I was assigned to work on Twitch to promote abortion and to promote access to abortion information, safety issues, all that. And I thought, you know what? I can't do Twitch by myself. I'm not going to be playing Stardew Valley on Twitch by myself while talking about abortion. So I thought, "Hey, why don't I pull Gail into this?" So I contacted Gail while I was still the communications officer, and I was like, "Gail, do you want to be my co-host on Twitch?" So after doing a few episodes with Gail, I realized that I really enjoyed talking to her. And I'm a yapper, and Gail is a yapper. We're both yappers. That's why I have a YouTube channel. That's why I create content because I can't shut up. And I thought, you know what? Why don't we do this outside of work? Why don't we give ourselves the freedom to talk about anything that we want in any context and not just confined by work? So we decided to start Unholy Feminist because we want to break out of that.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. And what year did you start working together and what year did the podcast start?

**Cath Harry:**

2022 was when I joined WFD, and the podcast started last year.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Last year. I was going to say the podcast is kind of new, right?

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, fairly new.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yes. Okay. So before we jump into talking more about the podcast, and I know that this is a question that you could both take an entire hour to answer, but so Cath is from Cambodia. Abigail is from Ghana. Can you each just talk for a few minutes about what your local context is like specifically around abortion, I think? Obviously, there's a much greater context of patriarchy and things that women, queer folks, non-binary folks are facing, like sexual violence and all of that kind of stuff. But if we could just talk about what's up with abortion in Cambodia. Let's start with you, Cath.

**Cath Harry:**

So abortion in Cambodia is legal upon request for up to 12 weeks. And when the gestational period is over 12 weeks, then there are certain exceptions like if the pregnant person's life is in danger, if the pregnancy is the result of rape, or if the fetus has any incurable disease. So those would be the exceptions and you can still request them. But the thing is, one, the education on abortion is so limited to the point where even though abortion is legal in Cambodia, and it has been legal since 1997, a lot of people don't know that. A lot of people still go to unsafe places because they don't think that abortion is illegal. They just don't know that we're not taught that and information is very limited.

And also the thing that's different about Cambodia when it comes to abortion is that you see how in the US, for example, it's very much about religion. It's very much about Christianity. That's the anti-choice movement. But in Cambodia, it's more subtle. It's more about shame. It's more about religion, but we're a Buddhist country, so it's more about karma. It's more about sin. I have seen countless people who would go online and they would go to these Facebook groups asking, "Oh, I don't want to be pregnant anymore. Well, what should I do?" And people would say, "Oh, that fetus." And they would call it a child. "That child chose to be with you already." So going into the whole reincarnation thing.

"That child chose to be with you. You cannot just abandon them. It's sinful, and then it's karma. It's going to be bad karma point for you. So you should just continue the pregnancy even though you don't want to, even though for any reason at all, you should still do that because it's bad karma point. "And also after people have an abortion, people would say, "Oh, you need to atone your karma by going to the Pagoda because you've done a bad thing." And the thing is, that kind of thinking, it is not just with everyday people, but I have talked to abortion providers who would stop providing abortions because they feel like they are being affected by the karma, for example.

I have talked to some abortion providers who said that after they started providing abortion services, they would keep encountering bad things. They would get a flat tire, they would get into trouble at home, they would have a fight with their spouse. So they think that, "This is because I'm doing a bad thing, this is my karma, this is my bad karma, so I should stop providing abortion services." And some of them actually stop providing abortion services because of that. So it's very nuanced in Cambodia and very different from the US context. And you don't see people lining up outside of abortion clinics and yelling at people or anything like that. It's more shame.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yes. That's so interesting. I can imagine that in a culture where the things that happen to you are seen as an extension of your karmic debt or whatever, that there's a very unique sense of shame. I can imagine that if folks have a miscarriage, for example, they might blame themselves in some way or be thinking like, "What did I do wrong?" Do you feel like there's a more pervasive sense of shame around just people feeling like they're to blame for the things that happen in their body and life?

**Cath Harry:**

So I actually did a whole video about this because it infuriates me so much. In our culture, we use the karmic system to justify oppression. So people would say that, "Oh, you were born poor because in a previous life you did bad things." Or if you're rich right now in this life, you're privileged because you did good things in your previous life. So people would justify that by saying that, "Oh, well, they're rich because they did a good thing in their previous life." So it's not systematic, it's not oppression.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, totally.

**Cath Harry:**

Exactly. So by saying that, we are trying to maintain the system because we think that it's our fault. We don't think that it's the system that is working against us. Also, this saying that being born a woman is bad karma because you have to suffer because you did a bad thing in your previous life. That's why in this life you are a woman. And then Gail, it infuriates me so much whenever people say that. It would even go into gender-based violence, they're like, "Oh, it's because you did this partner in the previous life. That's why now they're beating you." No, that's not how it works. But yeah, it's very prevalent. It seeps into everything.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Wow. Oh my God. I can see how the thing that you do and that you are doing together is so radical in that context and how you are probably talking to people in a way that maybe they've never heard before. Maybe they've never heard someone talk about that you have the option to love yourself and be proud of who you are and your life and accept yourself. And all of that is, I'm assuming, a very, very radical, unholy framing for folks who grow up in that kind of situation.

So Cath, when you were a teenager in high school, in your early 20s, was abortion something that you knew existed? If you or a friend were to have an unwanted pregnancy, would you have known I can have an abortion? Or is it just very not discussed?

**Cath Harry:**

It was not talked about at all. It was not taught at all. There was no information. All I remember hearing about abortion from my childhood was this one instance when my mom, out of the blue, she said, "Oh, you could have had a sibling, but I decided not to keep a sibling." So that's all she said, implying that she had an abortion. But that's about it. That's all that until I was 17, 18, and I started working the BBC at the time. And one of the projects was about SRHR. That's when I started getting really into abortion. But otherwise, I don't think I would've easily found out about abortion.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Wow. Thank you for that. That's so interesting. Abigail, can you tell us a little bit about just what is the deal with abortion in Ghana legally, culturally? What's the story?

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, so it's actually not so different from Cambodia because in Ghana, abortion is also legal under certain circumstances like in cases of rape, incest, fetal abnormality, if there's a chance of risk to the pregnant woman's health. However, that particular section makes it [inaudible 00:15:59] open and liberal because it talks of health in terms of mental as well as physical. So I think Ghana is generally known as one of the most liberal countries in West Africa when it comes to abortion. So that's the law.

However, how people think about abortion is very different to the extent that people have, in their mind, citizens have criminalized it. They talk about and think of abortion as something, if you do, you can get arrested for it and something will happen to you. And I've heard threats of, "I will report you to the police because you know this is illegal. What you're doing is illegal and da, da, da." So that's the general perception. There's also a lot of stigma.

And back to religion, I'm one of the biggest opps of religion, just putting this out there, everything religion. You will find me there, hating on this. Because in Ghana, religion is also one of the reasons and one of the ways people use to stigmatize anything that is SRHR, especially abortion. Because even under a lot of my post, I see a lot of, "You're a murder. This is murder and it's a sin," and da, da, da, and so many things. I remember very well the first time I told my mom that I have now started working for an NGO that focuses on abortion and contraception.

And the first question she asked me was, "Don't I think it's going to pull me further away from God?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm already further away from God. My God is not the one doing that, but [inaudible 00:17:53] for another time."

So anyway, that's the general... There's a lot of stigma. There's a lot of shame attached to it. And so there's also a very high rate of unsafe abortions happening in Ghana because people are having sex. Young girls are having sex. Older women are having sex. People who already have children are having sex. And then when they get pregnant, they feel like, "Yeah, maybe I'm not ready to have another child." But there's so much shame and even provider stigma. So a lot of people, even though they can just walk into a hospital and access it, they don't. They just end up doing anything. So our situation is not so different actually from Cambodia.

**Amelia Bonow:**

That's interesting. And I am glad to know, Abigail, that you are the number one opp of religion. You need to meet Jex Blackmore on our team. We'll put a pin in that. Remind me later. I need to make an intro.

**Abigail Peprah:**

I will.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Okay. So the two of you connected at Women First Digital. You became work wives, as we say, in the States.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

And you started yapping, and then you were like, "We're so good at yapping. We need to do this in the public square digitally." I was going to ask what made you decide a podcast instead of just a campaign or even build an organization together or some other kind of project. Clearly you feel like you have things to say and you really feed off of each other and you want to speak to women and people together. So tell me, what made you kick it off and be like, "Let's do this?"

**Cath Harry:**

I think we want to balance the podcast bros ratio.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yes. You're like, "This manosphere needs to get checked."

**Abigail Peprah:**

Too many men have microphones and they shouldn't. I think if a man is not radicalizing us, if a man is not willing to go the extra mile of doing the work in order to help us fight against the patriarchy, if a man is going to buy a microphone, get a full setup and everything, and just red pill rhetoric and just feed into the monosphere and impact the younger boys negatively, because yeah, we can do something to convert that on our end as well.

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah. And not only that, I feel like we need more voices from our region as well, because when we're talking about podcasts and we're talking about feminism, we do hear a lot from people in

the global north, but we don't hear a lot about feminism from the global south, which is very important because intersectional feminism is important. Every context is different. Every context is important. It's about hearing different voices. And I feel like in our region, we need to speak up more and we want to spread the message in a way and radicalize people through our experience, through our lived experience.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Okay. The premise of the podcast is you want to... What is it? You want to radicalize. You want to radicalize your listeners. What does that mean to you? In what way?

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, so I think for me, I would say even though I would have said I was a feminist before we said the podcast, and I used to call myself a baby feminist because I had just started really getting into feminist theory. And I would always text Cath. If I'm reading something or watching something and I'm confused on something, I would shoot her a text and we'll have a whole conversation about it.

So I think my radicalization journey has also, it's sort of been happening along with the podcast based on the conversations we have. So I think, especially on my end, I do think that for a lot of people in my parts of the world, because something I hear a lot is people don't often see African feminist literature. They don't often see African feminists who are speaking up about their experiences. So a lot of times it feels like, oh, whenever you're looking for anything feminist, it's always a white woman and people want to see more Black, more African people. So I was like, "You know what? I'm also looking for this. So why don't I start being this?" Because on my end, I've seen a couple of my friends say, "OMG, I watched this particular episode. It was so insightful for me. I understand this particular topic so very well, so much better after listening to both of you."

So I think it's just about listening to people and seeing things beyond just what you can envision. You get to hear different perspectives from both of us. So on my end, I think that's one way that we are radicalizing people because some of the things they hear from us in their actual life, they do not experience, and they don't also get to listen to people who have those same experiences. Yeah.

**Cath Harry:**

So for me, *Unholy Feminists* is more of a step up from *A Dose of Cath*. I actually have been creating content since 2017. I was writing a blog way before then, but I've been creating content. I still do for a dose of Cath since 2017, but my content is in Khmer. So the audience that I was reaching were Khmer-speaking people mostly in Cambodia and also the diaspora population abroad. And I feel like when I was talking about issues like that, I had to scale it down a little bit because feminism is so new in Cambodia. I mean, we went through a genocide, we went through wars. And when you go through a genocide in wars, civil rights is exactly not the most important thing for people. It's survival. It's where you can find food and shelter. And

because of that, we missed the whole second wave feminist movement. We missed many things. So I had to catch people up.

But then I feel like last year I felt like it was time for me to scale it up by reaching also an international audience and not just people in Cambodia, but also talk about feminism in a more deep dive, in a more critical way, and not just about feminism 101, like Barbie feminism, but more critical feminism. And like Gail said, I feel like a lot of literature that we get is white feminism, white privileged feminism, if we're just being honest about it. So I feel like we do need more perspective from feminists of color, from people from different countries, different regions. And yeah, I think that in a way, how I'm radicalizing people, in my opinion, is talking about things that are difficult, talking about topics that are difficult, making them question things. The number one thing that I always want people to take away from any of my content, whether it's A Dose of Cath or Unholy Feminist, is I want people to start questioning why things are the way they are and who is benefiting from the system.

Because everything that's happening around us, I'm a firm believer that every single thing is political. If you say that you are apolitical, if you say that I don't care about politics, it means that you're privileged. That's why you are able to not see politics. I would go buy a dress and then I would say, "Look, my dress has pockets." And then someone would say, "That's great." I would go into a rant about how pockets and dress is political for women. I would just be like, "Did you know that purposefully women don't have pockets and dresses because it's political?" I'm that type of person. And I want people to start questioning that as well. You look at things and ask, "Why is it like that? Who designed it and who is benefiting from it?" And I think that's my way of radicalizing people.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I can really see how that's very diametrically opposed from the karmic system of everything is preordained. You're like, "No, everything is systems of oppression." And I can see how that would be a very different lens than people are used to hearing and radicalizing to just be exposed to someone speaking on that. Cath, so you still make A Dose of Cath. It's like YouTube. It's a YouTube series, right?

**Cath Harry:**

It's YouTube. It's all social media platforms actually.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Okay. It's across social media. How do you decide? So it sounds like a Dose of Cath is maybe a little bit, I don't know, is it maybe a little bit toned down, would you say? Or what's the difference in the topics that you tackle there versus with Abigail and Unholy Feminists?

**Cath Harry:**

So with A Dose of Cath, I try to bring things from Cambodian context because I want to make it relatable to the Cambodian audience and language, obviously it's in Khmer. And I also talk about things that are happening in Cambodia. For example, if there is a case of gender-based violence or any case like that, I would talk about it on a Dose of Cath. Whereas on Unholy Feminist, it's more of an international what's happening, for example, Jeffrey Epstein. So we would talk about that on Unholy Feminist because it's more on an international platform. But I also feel like when I first started A Dose of Cath, it was more focused on sexually reproductive health because when I started it in 2017, it was so lacking. People weren't talking about menstruation even. When I was in school, we didn't even learn about menstruation. So it was very much at beginner's level.

And I also at the time was in the beginning journey of my feminist journey as well. So I grew along with my audience and now I do more of a, not just SRHR, but I do deep dive video as well. For example, I just did a video on the World Cup and Argentina and the racism and everything that involves in that.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Oh my God.

**Cath Harry:**

So it's a deep dive into that now.

**Amelia Bonow:**

So I am curious to ask about, and I just want to preface this with I sort of hate when people are interviewing me and they ask about backlash or being like, "Aren't you scared or whatever?" Because I just feel like in some ways I hate framing my voice in relationship to those haters who have taken up so much airspace in this conversation forever. And especially in the beginning when SYA was a viral hashtag, it was all anybody wanted to talk about. And it was just like, "That's Not the story here." The story is that hundreds of thousands of people are speaking about their lives for the first time in an empowered way. The story is not these loud, violent haters that are trying to suppress us with fear. And all that said, given how both of you have framed your context, it's clearly not a place where a lot of women feel or are actively speaking up about these kinds of issues.

And I'm wondering, I guess, if there's certain things that, and not to say that people are not, but clearly what you're doing is something that comes with a level of, would you say risk? And I guess I just want to acknowledge that and acknowledge that you are putting something on the line in order to use your voice in this way. And I want to just ask how that feels and ask if there are things that you want to talk about that you're kind of like, that's a little, we don't want to touch that one.

**Cath Harry:**

Gail, do you want to go first or should I?

**Abigail Peprah:**

You go. I think you have a much bigger platform beyond Unholy Feminist. So you go.

**Cath Harry:**

So there are certain topics that I can't talk about despite me wanting to talk about it a lot, which is also why I pivoted my content to being more about geopolitics, but not about Cambodian politics. It's because I cannot touch anything that has to do with politics in terms of the government in Cambodia. We have a censorship problem and not just that if you say something that the government doesn't agree with or doesn't like, you get censored, but you can actually end up in jail. And I always say that I cannot advocate from jail. So I could be not in jail in order to continue my activism.

So I always have to walk a fine line between challenging the system, challenging the status quo, while also not be directly challenging the government and their power.

So it's more about walking that tricky line. For example, there's certain things that I know that I can't talk about at all, like environment, for example. Environment is a very, very sensitive topic. I can't talk about that at all. So that's why when I talk about things like system of power, I try to talk about what's going on in the US, and I would just let people draw the conclusion themselves. I would just say, "This is what's happening in the US." So wink wink, nudge nudge, you can draw a conclusion to what's happening in Cambodia by yourself. I'm not going to lead you there, but I have plausible deniability there. So that's how I usually do it.

But in the beginning, I did get a lot of backlash. I got called names, I got death threats, I got rape threats. I also experienced racism as well because some people, they were accusing me of being Vietnamese because allegedly only Vietnamese women are promiscuous and talk about sex, and Cambodian women do not talk about sex openly. So it's like there's so many layers to that. And so there's also another layer of censorship where if you say anything to challenge the morality, the morality of my women, of Cambodian women, sometimes the ministry would call you to be reeducated so that you can stop talking about things like that.

Actually, I kid you not, there was a point when they were floating the idea of creating a law to stop women from dressing provocatively. It didn't pass, but they were actually floating that around. So it is that kind of patriarchal society. That's why when I was doing content in the beginning, people were like, "The ministry should call her to be reeducated because this is destroying Cambodian women's virtues." Thankfully they didn't. But yeah, there is censorship going on from me, self-censorship and also from every aspect of it, but I'm fighting it.

**Amelia Bonow:**

That's incredible, Cath. I did not know that it was such an acute current political risk. Is that something that is mostly. Do you know of cases where journalists, activists, content creators have been jailed by the government? Is that an active thing that's happening?

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah, a lot.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. Wow.

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

So I guess I am curious, well, first of all, what does an average Unholy Feminist look like? Do you have a specific topic that you're getting into? Is it more freeform? Are you taking listener calls? Just yapping?

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, so I think it's between freeform and we usually have a topic. So we do this thing where, so one week I bring a topic and then following week, Cath brings a topic. So sometimes it's just I could be reading a book and something jumps up at me. I'm like, "Okay, this is something I want to discuss with Cath." And I think whatever comes out of it, people will also benefit from hearing it. Or it's even just a general thing that's on social media. And I think it also really helps that we are in different countries. So social media feeds are a bit different. So some of the things I will see on my TikTok, my X feed is not the same thing Cath will also see.

So on each episode, we get to bring things we are experiencing, we are being exposed to in our respective parts of the world to the table. So I think I would want to also go back to the censorship.

I think we also do get censored on social media as well because I remember, so I think it was, was it last year there was a popular, I don't know if I can say his name, but a popular far right politician in the US who was unalived at...

Yeah, him, we did a video talking about. Yeah, and YouTube took our video down. It was one of our top videos and YouTube took it out, actually. So we also get censored in that way. But big tech, we are used to big tech by now. Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. I wanted to ask about tech censorship and how much that has affected you. SYA just had our Instagram taken down for over two weeks. We've had it suspended before a lot of times, but this was the first time that we got something that said it was permanently deleted. And we didn't even hear what it was about specifically, and it was super scary. And we ended up sending out a bunch of messages to various organizations, which Erin can drop in the chat. One is Repro Uncensored, one is called Speak Up and is out of Egypt, I believe. And then also just a bunch of personal contacts of people that know people at Meta or whatever. And it eventually came back, but we very much feel like those platforms are just compromised. And especially if we're talking about any number of the things that we talk about, but talking about abortion pills specifically, I think is just, it feels like the whole thing is built on quicksand to me. It feels like it's not a smart place to be building your whole house.

And I also feel discouraged by the tech platforms. I don't know, it's just like, what are you going to ask? Demand that Mark Zuckerberg stop being a sociopath? It's like these people don't give a fuck and the politicians don't give a fuck. And so it feels like a very futile to me in terms of as an organizer, it's like you want to have a target and a demand and be like, "We're demanding that you do this." And I don't feel like it's easy to do that in this kind of super opaque capitalist, just like we know they're in the pocket of the administration and that they're just going to capriciously do what they want to do and not even explain why they're doing it. So I guess, yeah, I'm wondering about tech censorship that you have experienced and how you... Is that the only time that you had a YouTube video be taken down, is Charlie Kirk?

**Abigail Peprah:**

On Unholy Feminists, yeah. I know Cath and I used to joke that maybe one of the organizations should have a feminist and SRHR funded tech platform where all these SRHR organizations could just exist on. And then we [inaudible 00:40:09] because I genuinely, I side with you, I'm not sure if we can ever be able to get rid of all these censorships because sometimes they just do not make sense.

So on my personal TikTok, which I built solely on women being able to access abortion resources and services in their country, I think for the last month, my posts have been packed in the 500 views and the 300 views, and I know I'm getting shadow banned. I know I'm shadow banned. And it's so frustrating because I'm not even promoting an actual product or service. I just give out information and I tell people, "You can send me a DM and I will look for where you can access safe abortion service in your country." And they're still doing that.

But I think Unholy Feminists, we've been quite lucky. I mean, they don't push our content as much either both on Meta and on TikTok. But yeah, at least neither of us has been suspended or we've not gotten anything like that yet.

**Cath Harry:**

So talking about being censored by big tech brings back trauma, especially-

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. I'm sure.

**Cath Harry:**

... [inaudible 00:41:43], because I remember when I was working there, I was dealing with accounts being censored left and right all the time. It was almost like a weekly occurrence. It was like, okay, I am Big Tech Bro's number one hater. And I remember when I went to RightsCon last year, I believe. So I went to RightsCon and all the big tech bros were there, not Mark Zuckerberg or the CEOs, but some of the big tech bros were there. And I thought it was so funny that we were there to talk about censorship by big tech while big tech was there joining us. And I was like, "Oh, so you're the people that we need to talk to about our accounts being banned. Funny, we're in the same room now.'."

So yeah. Anyway, back to censorship. I have been demonetized on Facebook for several years now, which is annoying because I could be. I bring a lot of views for them, but I'm not getting paid for it because I've been demonetized.

**Amelia Bonow:**

So you just can't put ads just in case people know you can't sell ads, or people can't advertise on your page and then you would take in some small amount of money from that?

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah, I can't. I mean, I do product endorsement, but it's not through the platform. So I'm demonetized. Been demonetized for several years now, and I'm still kind of bitter about it. But I've also had some videos taken down. I think one of the reasons why I stopped doing exclusively SRHR content was because when I first started TikTok, I was still doing mostly SRHR content, and then I posted them on TikTok. And I remember I would be teetering at around three to four warnings all the time. So when a one is expired after three months, another one comes in and it was so stressful for me because I'm always like, "Is this the one that's going to kick me off the platform?" And it was very, very stressful to the point where I'm like, "Okay, this is not sustainable. I cannot post SRHR content on TikTok anymore. I need to do other type of content on TikTok." So when I do topics that are about sex, specifically in graphic details, I cannot post them on TikTok.

And on YouTube, I've had some videos demonetized. I know that I had a video talking about the clitoris or the G spot, I think it was the clitoris, that was actually flagged as 18 plus just because I showed the female anatomy, but in one of those cartoon images, and I was flagged for that. And then the video was marked 18 plus until I took off that part, until I edited, and then it was fine. And I've had many videos like that, even video about female masturbation, that one has been marked unsuitable for advertisers. So I've had a ton of those. Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

God, I wish that someone would build a feminist social media. Yeah. I mean, I'm curious in that RightsCon kind of room, I wonder if those kinds of situations are almost like it's a theatrical, it makes it look like they're listening, but are they?

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah. Yeah, it's PR, essentially. And I think the issue that would arise when it comes to activists or advocates creating an SRHR exclusive platform is that my concern is that it would become an echo chamber. So it would be a place [inaudible 00:45:35] who are already in this field who will be talking to each other, but they're not talking to the people who are on the [inaudible 00:45:42].

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, you're right. Yeah. Yeah. Which I think is already a problem, is getting out of our own silos and reaching people who have not been exposed to this kind of content before. So on that note, have you received... I assume you hear from audience members, I don't know what way they have to engage with you, if it's comments or DMs or how you hear from people, but I'm curious if you can share some meaningful feedback that you've gotten from some possibly radicalized, budding, Unholy Feminists that have listened to the show.

**Cath Harry:**

Gail, do you want to go? All right. So I remember two instances. Both are in Cambodia. One was early on in my content creation career, I suppose. I remember getting a message from this one young woman. She said that she knew this man and he was her teacher, and she always thought that he was a good person until she saw him commenting under my video. And she was like, "Wow, this person is actually a terrible person." And she-

**Amelia Bonow:**

He was harassing? He was saying fucked up shit to you in the comments?

**Cath Harry:**

Yeah. And she was like, "Oh, this is actually a terrible person." And she said that it was the first time that she confronted another man about saying vile things like that. And she said that since that day, she never looked at him the same way again. So I thought that that was interesting to kind of radicalize her a little bit, I suppose. Another instance was when I was at a conference. I was also on a panel and I finished and I was walking outside and this young woman, she ran after me, and then she gave me a hug, and then she started crying. And she said that my content was, I was saying things that she had never heard from anyone before, that she didn't even think about it like that. And she felt seen. She felt heard. She felt like someone was finally saying things that she had always wanted to talk about. And in a way, she felt supported.

So she cried, and then she thanked me for my content. And that was very moving because I think as a content creator, sometimes you kind of lose sight of your audience because all you see are numbers and comments, but then you just see the text. You don't see the people talking to you. So sometimes I like to joke that maybe the views are just bots, maybe bots are watching my videos, bots are watching my content. But when I go out and meet people like that, it makes it real. It brings home the impact of the things that we are doing and it makes it, I don't know, raw in a way.

**Amelia Bonow:**

That's so beautiful. That's the best. Abigail, do you have any stories of feedback?

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah. I mean, on my personal feed, it's a lot because it's abortion. And a lot of times people feel like they do not have any help. And I get a lot of messages. Sometimes the first messages people will send me is literally, "If you don't help me, I don't know what I will do." So I do get those kind of messages a lot. And weirdly, I mean, some don't come back again, but I would be there randomly maybe in a month or so. Then someone I gave information towards randomly text me with a very long text telling me how grateful they are because they really did not know what to do and they were depressed. I get those. I think I've gotten to a point, maybe I'm becoming a little desensitized to it because I get this so much.

But there are also times where, because it gets draining because sometimes I'm just not in the mental space to talk to someone. And because of the type of situation it is, I always have to meet people with a lot of empathy. I always have to meet them with a lot of understanding, a lot of patience, a lot of grace. And there are days where I'm having a bad day, so I don't feel like I have it in me.

But then I'll open my TikTok and I'll see all these years and I feel like, "You know what? Let me just do it." So sometimes when I really sit and think about all the messages I get later on from all these people telling me how helpful I was, it definitely, definitely keeps me going. And specifically with Unholy Feminist, like I said, I started as a baby feminist. And I had also, I think a few months after we started Unholy Feminist, I thankfully was able to join a group of feminists who were also learning. And so we used to have discussions in the group and I was able to put a couple of them onto Unholy Feminist. I get feedback from them a lot of times about the episodes we have because we are all learning.

So I think one thing I'm also seeing is in my parts of the world, a lot of people say they're feminists, but their feminism is never backed by theory. It's never intersectional. A lot of times they don't realize this, but it's homophobic, it's transphobic, it's classist, it's [inaudible 00:52:01], a lot of things. But I think for some of them, the more they watch some of the things we talk about, I'm also having conversations in the background with some of these people because I think that the post has given me this, it's opened my mind. Carg opens my mind literally every time. It's opened my mind. Now I'm also reading a lot more of feminist literature. So when I'm

having conversations with other African feminists, maybe I see the old me in them and my politics was very boxed, very restrictive, not intersectional at all. So now I'm also able to have conversations with them that are more open, more intersectional, and I do see that.

I think on TikTok, we've gotten a couple of comments as well. People saying they really like our content. They like how radical it is. And not a bad rep kind of radical though. Yeah, just radical in just the right way. So I do know that in one way, one form or the other, even if people don't say it, just people sitting and watching this 45 minutes, sometimes it goes on for an hour, that we are impacting something at the end of the day and just knowing that it makes me happy and feel very fulfilled.

**Cath Harry:**

I want to add a little bit on that as well. I know Gail keeps talking about how she learns from me, but I have also learned from her as I have learned from many, many amazing feminists out there throughout my journey. I don't think that I would be the person that I am today without having read, having talked to, having listened to all of these amazing women. And I want to bring it back full circle to what you were talking about in the beginning, Amelia, about how women talking to each other. I'm full of fun facts, so I'm going to give a fun fact.

So it's very important that women talk to each other to the point where in China, there was one part of China where women were not allowed to learn how to read or write, but women found a way around that by actually creating their own language where they were able to write in this whole new language to each other because that's how important it is for women to share stories, to communicate, to talk to each other.

Because by talking to each other, we are able to learn, we are able to... That's why gossip is so important because people keep saying that, "Oh, women, they do frivolous things like gossiping," but gossiping saves lives because back then women were able to tell each other, okay, this guy is a red flag through gossips. And that's how we were able to save each other and learn from each other.

But then patriarchy deems as this useless things that women do when it's not. So anyway, back to the whole thing in China. So women actually created a whole new language to communicate with each other, to write letters to each other. Because by doing that, we are sharing our experiences, we are communicating, and we are writing our stories because we know that throughout history, women's stories have been rewritten and erased for so often. That's why it's important for us to have a platform like this where we talk to each other and we share stories and we in a way cement our legacy as women.

**Amelia Bonow:**

You both just said so many beautiful things. I don't even know where to respond, but I want to remind folks, attendees, that you can ask questions in the chat if you have questions for Catherine Abigail. This is such a beautiful conversation. I guess going off what you were just saying, you're both really talking about meeting people where they are and understanding that

even just somebody engaging with listening to your conversation, that you both can remember just being exposed to a person thinking or talking that caused you to evolve as a feminist and know and understand yourself better.

So if a listener is hearing the two of you and they're like, "Oh my God, these women are so smart and badass and fearless and empowered and they have a little inkling inside of them, but they're scared." They're like, "Oh, that's not me. I'm just a tiny baby feminist." What is some baby steps? What kind of steps can someone take to grow into their voice more the way that you both have and continue to?

**Cath Harry:**

I would say read and listen and watch a lot. Read feminist stories, read feminist literature, listen to other feminists. I mean, I feel like at this point I've curated my TikTok For You page too, which is a lot of feminist content. And they have opened my eyes a lot as well. So for example, very recent example, I went to see *The Odyssey* and I thought this is not too bad. And then I started reading Emily Wilson's dissection on it. She talked about it, and then I started watching other people, other feminists talking about the story. And it opened my eyes because I was like, "You know what? They actually have a point and now I'm seeing the story, the movie in a different light." And that's the thing about perspective. You talk to other people, you listen to other people, that's where you get different perspectives.

But I also have this little trick because sometimes I also get scared, especially in situations where I don't want to call attention to myself. For example, if someone is interrupting another woman or claiming her idea in a meeting, you don't want to bring attention to yourself because we're so conditioned into being demurred, into being submissive and not being confrontational. But then I always ask myself, "What would Gloria Steinem do? Would Gloria Steinem sit there and allow another woman to have her idea taken from her?" And I would put myself like, "Okay, I'm going to make her proud. I'm going to step in her shoes and I'm going to speak up because I can be like her too." So yeah, that's the little trick that I do.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I love that. I think that she really does live that life and call people in and out and just articulate what she sees going on around her in that way. And yes, I totally agree. That's really sweet. I love that. Do you have anything to add to that, Abigail, as a self-identified growing baby feminist?

**Abigail Peprah:**

I think now I'm dropping the baby.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. Okay.

**Abigail Peprah:**

I mean like a teen feminist.

**Amelia Bonow:**

A teen. Yeah. Yeah.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah, I'm a teen now.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah.

**Abigail Peprah:**

I'm a teen now. So I think even before I started identifying as feminist, I've always been very vocal. Before I even knew was... Because I literally recently became a feminist. I was one of those women who would say, "I'm not a feminist." I really used to be that person. Because in my parts of the world, there's a very negative connotation when a woman says they're feminist. There's a way people perceive you just as soon as they hear you're feminist. So growing up, I did not want to identify, but I always knew. I was very curious about sex and how the body worked and everything that has to do with sex education. So I think I started pretty early talking about those. So one thing I would say about reclaiming your voice is do not feel pressure because sometimes I think people feel pressure to give an opinion on everything that is happening because people see you a certain way.

You should never feel pressure to give out your opinion. Your opinion is yours. Whatever though you have is just yours. If you want to speak on something, that's okay. Go ahead and do it. But you should never feel like people expect you to, so you want to speak on it. Also, it's okay not to speak on everything because we as humans, we as feminists do not have this omnipotent knowledge. You don't have to know everything. So you don't have to speak on everything because it's better you be knowledgeable about what you are speaking about than open your mouth for you want to [inaudible 01:01:27] and then end up sounding very dense. So yeah, just take your time. No pressure. At your own pace.

I started on my Snapchat where I was not using my voice. I used to write on the dash feed. That's how it started for me and I still do it. But I've progressed to a point where I can set up a camera and talked. So yeah, just the little things. It could just be you and your friend having a conversation. That's how it can start for you. There's room for good always. It does not matter how old you are. It does not matter where you are in life. There is always room for good as long as there's life. So take your time and no pressure.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I love that so much. And I remember you in our last session saying some of the same thing, Abigail, about just there's no shame in not knowing, there's no shame in not speaking about everything. And I feel like the social media era, even for people who are not content creators or whatever, I feel like there became this pressure to have an opinion on everything and be speaking on everything all the time. And I think it's led to just a lot of uninformed, just loud ass conversations. And I think that it's really a healthy thing to be like, it's totally okay to not know or to be like, "I haven't thought about that enough to know how I feel. I haven't engaged with enough other perspectives to have found my voice in that conversation." Yeah, I love that. I think that first of all, if either of you have books, podcasts, content creators that you love, that have been formative to you as feminist thinkers, we would love to, in our newsletter, send a little reading content list out to people because I'm sure that you have very well-curated libraries of feminist thinkers.

And I wanted to ask... This has been such a beautiful conversation. We so appreciate you taking the time and taking time of your day, and in Cath's case, your night. It's consistently come up that most of the voices in this space, even internationally, are white feminists or Western or American or European white privileged women. And I think that there are a whole lot of reasons for that that are not good and that we could probably spend a whole nother hour talking about. But I guess I have a two-part question. One is what is something that you wish that a Western feminist audience would stop assuming about feminists from your context? What assumptions from white feminism drive you crazy? And the second part of that being for Western or European white feminists who are engaging or listening to this conversation, are there ways that we can support and elevate your work and your perspective and hopefully contribute to a more diverse universe of feminist voices?

**Cath Harry:**

Gail, do you want to go first? So I think one of the things that really grind my gear is that feminists from the global north, white feminists, they tend to think that the struggles are the same. So for example, things like we were talking about earlier with karma. So they frame the whole gender-based violence. Let's take gender-based violence as an example. They frame it as this universal thing where it happens because of manipulation and also the women don't leave because a survivor doesn't leave because of a certain way. But there are nuances to that. For example, in Cambodia, we would go into the whole karma thing about how people would accept that it is their fate, it is their fault because of previous karma. So it is very nuanced in a way. And the thing that I see when white feminists come to Cambodia and they mean well, they're trying to help, but then they would see things from a surface level.

So saying things like, "Oh, Cambodian women are getting education or they're in the workforce." And that means that the country is equal, that it's equal, there's gender equality there, but it's more nuanced than that. Another example is, for example, people would see how Cambodian women, they are the ones managing, in a way, managing the money. As in the husband would go to work and then he would give money to the wife, the wife stays at home. And people would view that as being progressive because the woman is the one controlling the money, but she is not controlling the money because the nuance, again, is that the man is the one earning the

money, and he still has control over whether or not he is handing the money over to her. But then it's very surface level. You're not seeing the forest for the tree.

You're using a global north lens, you're using a white privileged lens to view issues, patriarchy that is supposed to be very nuanced. So I do think that white feminists needs to listen to feminists from the global south, feminists of color, feminists with disabilities, women in general, people in general, people of diverse genders as well. They need to listen more and not speak on behalf of us. And I think that was the problem with the second wave feminist movement, is that white privileged feminists, they were speaking on behalf of all women and they were excluding gender diverse people. So I think right now it's about listening. It's about knowing like what Gail said, knowing when to listen and when to not chime your opinion in because it is not your place to speak on behalf of other people with lived experience.

There's this thing with Southeast Asia is that some people, they come to Southeast Asia with the intention of helping, but what they do in a way is having the white savior complex where they think that, oh, Cambodia or Southeast Asia is this underdeveloped country, underdeveloped region, and we need to save them from themselves. We need to save them and bring them into gender equality and save them from patriarchy where it's supposed to be. They can support us, they can act like a support system, but not in a way that is speaking on behalf of us or saving us, like being a hero to this region or to this country.

**Abigail Peprah:**

I would just say on this one especially, I'm [inaudible 01:09:28] going to agree with her because I've not personally been in any kind of proximity with white feminists. So it's just digital content as well as literature. So I do not have any practical examples I can give in my context. Sorry about that. But I think it will probably be the same way that they have to look at things from my angle of we have a culture that is very different from their culture, whether they're American, whether they're European, despite the fact that at the end of the day, we might all be women. Our experiences are not the same liaison. The culture we grow up in sometimes people's religion, sometimes just the [inaudible 01:10:18] you end up in.

So yeah, they should just have a localized lens or just help in a way that also gives the local people room to do things on their own hands and not just jump in and then, "Yeah, I'm your savior, I'm this hero that's coming to save you."

Yeah, we don't want that.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, I think that's a very... I appreciate you tying it back to the second wave, the limitations of that movement path, which I think there was a lot of just projection from white women that our problems are what everyone else's problems are like. And I think that it's a lot of projection to use a psychology word, but it feels like that's what you're talking about essentially, Cath, is people that are, their heart's in the right place, their values are maybe in the right place, but they're still inside their own lens and unable to not... They're still seeing other people through

their own lens instead of really listening and understanding the nuances of difference. And I think also equating structural change and progress with equality in a way that is ultimately just extremely reductive. So I guess my last question is just, do either of you have anything to add?

This has been such a great conversation. I didn't even realize we were over time, but is there anything that you wanted to yap about that you didn't get to yap about or anything that you'd like to ask our audience to... Any project or campaign that you'd like to uplift or just anything else that we didn't get to that you'd like to bring into the convo?

**Cath Harry:**

I want to add a little bit on what you were just talking about. There is a book recommendation that I have, which is called *White Tears Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color*. It is by Ruby Hamad. So definitely a book to look into if you want to learn more about white feminism and how the movement, how white feminism has left people or women of color behind. There's also hood feminism as well. Very insightful, great read. I read that. I loved it. And let's see, I think we've talked about so many things. I just want to thank you for having us. It's been amazing. And also thank everyone for joining as well. We always love an opportunity to yap about patriarchy and capitalism.

**Abigail Peprah:**

Yeah. I think I'm currently reading [inaudible 01:13:28], and that's also giving me some perspective of how white women used to act back in the day during slavery and it's kind of like a progression. So I think just on this conversation, that might also be a really good book to read to see how racism and sexism interface and how the Phi women usually get to other themselves and put themselves on a pedestal because racism does not affect them as well. So yeah, I think that's also a good recommendation. And yeah, this has been very insightful and amazing conversation. I'm so glad we have it.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Me too. And I'm grateful to Erin Jorgensen, SYA's Communications International Connections person for connecting with both of you. And I'm so happy to hear from you and so grateful for your work, both independently and the work that you're doing together with Unholy Feminists and just sending you love and solidarity and have really appreciated our conversation today. And we're going to bother you for some reading and content recommendations, and we'll send those out in our next newsletter so that everyone can get up to speed.

**Cath Harry:**

Perfect. I'll send a huge list.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yay. Perfect. Okay. Thank you, Abigail and Cath. Thank you everybody for coming to Abortion Academy. We'll see you next month. Bye.

**Cath Harry:**

Bye.