

Caroline

You're listening to the Get a Helmet podcast—currently illuminating the fullness of the human expression. Hi, I'm Caroline Aylward, a filmmaker and yoga and meditation teacher focused on the power of human connection, story and authenticity. The Get a Helmet podcast started when I was living in my grandfather's spare bedroom with one microphone and an intense passion for storytelling. To me, conversation is one of life's great adventures—it highlights who we are as individuals, while at the same time revealing our deeply human similarities. I'm curious to learn what makes us unique, but also what unites us and connects us at the heart. On this show, we hear stories of resilience, intuition, growth, perseverance, love and so much more. So what brings you joy and makes you feel safe? What grounds you down and makes you feel good... truly deep down in your bones good...because life is tough. What's your helmet?

Caroline

Hello, beautiful podcast listeners, welcome to the Get a Helmet podcast. Today is a very special episode. It's a very big week over here for Get a Helmet, honestly. How are we doing? How are we doing out there in the world? We are gearing up for the second full moon of October. Wow. And this full moon is going to be on Halloween night on Saturday. So... October packs a punch.

Caroline

Let me just say, it was my birthday month and I just got back from a big trip in Sedona. So... Big times. Big times. I hope that you're all feeling amazing out there. If this is your first time listening to the show. Welcome. I am so happy to have you. My name is Caroline. I am the creator of Get a Helmet and I help women walk the path to anxiety freedom through deeply loving and trusting their bodies. And this week is a big one because we are launching for the first time Get a Helmet brand documentaries.

Caroline

So Get a Helmet brand documentaries are very short kind of docu style pieces, film pieces about small businesses that are owned by women. And this is my mission on this planet, to lift up the voices of women and to draw awareness to their power, to their work and to the changes that they're making in this world. So it's something I've been kind of conjuring up for a while.

Caroline

I am so excited to be beginning to make these. So if you're out there and you have a small business, if you're an artist, if there's some sort of mission that you have that you want to get out into the world, send me a message, look me up, getahelmet.co, and let's talk about making you a brand documentary, because these are, you know, I've worked in film for over eight plus years before I started Get a Helmet and I've produced, I've shot, I've directed, I've edited. And I always wanted to bring more mindfulness, a different level of consciousness to film sets. And I love like the docu style. I love the documentary making process. And so with with the Get a Helmet brand documentaries, we're very intentional about talking about your story.

Caroline

So we go in, we meditate, we move our bodies, we breathe. We have a very conscious conversation before we turn any cameras on and that turns into a podcast episode. It turns into some of the audio that's used for the brand documentary, and it informs me more about who you are and what you do so that we can make a film about you.

Caroline

And it turns into being a very healing process for all parties involved and just really lifting up the voices and the work of women on this planet.

Caroline

So really excited about this one. And the first ever Get a Helmet brand documentary is featuring Amy, who is the creator and owner of The Pleasure Center, and that is who today's podcast episode is with. So today, the podcast episode goes live. The brand documentary is up on my Instagram so you can go watch it... it's on my IGTV (getahelmet_) and it was such an incredible time to make, so incredible.

Caroline

We spent time in her house. We went to a pond. My friend Katherine shot this beautifully and we had so much fun making it. So after you listen to this episode, you're definitely going to want to learn more about Amy's work, because if the name of her company hasn't already reeled you in, The Pleasure Center—she is a shame coach, and a sex educator, and an artist.

Caroline

And her work is really powerful, helping women and humans (men as well) to really embrace their sexuality, to not feel shame and guilt because of it or because of pleasure and not even pleasure in just a sexual way, but pleasure in the sense of just feeling joy. So, gosh, it's such a powerful conversation. And I can't wait for you to hear about Amy, hear about who she is and hear about her work with The Pleasure Center.

Caroline

She coaches one-on-one and leads retreats, and things like that. So definitely a big week over here.

Caroline

So, yeah, I can't wait for you to listen to this one, and I wanted to just kind of circle back since there's a full moon on Saturday. I'm hosting on Thursday the 29th at 6 p.m. EST, a free full moon ritual focused on releasing anxiety. So if you would like to come join us, I've been doing these on Instagram live, but Instagram live has been taking my videos down because of the music I'm using.

Caroline

So we're moving it over to Zoom, baby, come join us. We always get together, a lot of people in the Get a Helmet community get together to dance, to breathe, to move, to set intentions. And this one's going to be focused a lot on releasing anxiety, so if you are in my course now, you're going to be a part of this. If you've taken the course before, please sign up for this. If you have any questions about the work that I do, anxiety in general, anything you've been experiencing in this department, please bring them to the table.

Caroline

There will be time for some group coaching, some Q&A with me. So it's going to be amazing. I really can't wait. Sign up for it. It's totally donation based. So we love that. We love that so much. And yeah. So we've got brand documentaries. We've got Amy on the podcast today. We've got the free full moon ritual on Thursday the 29th. You can sign up for that, by the way, at getahelmet.co/fullmoonritual and it's in the show notes as well.

Caroline

Or just send me a message on Instagram at [getahelmet_](https://www.instagram.com/getahelmet_). I think those are all the orders of business and I'm just going to jump right into this one. Without further ado, here's my conversation with Amy of The Pleasure Center. I can't wait for you to hear this one. I'll see you on the other side.

Caroline

Well, Amy, thank you so much for being here with me. I'm very honored to be in your space... where you live, where you create. It's my first time here, and I'm so excited to hear everything about your work because there's so much to learn.

Amy

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Caroline

Absolutely. Absolutely. We are here with your sweet little cat, surrounded by your art. And this painting says "Thank you for showing me how much I could love". Is that from a specific moment in your life?

Amy

It is. For me, having children was really healing. It really allowed me to heal some of the wounds with

my family of origin around being loved and being unconditionally loved by someone. And so that painting is for my daughters. And yeah, they really they really did. They showed me how to receive love in a way that I could never have predicted when I decided to have children.

Caroline

Wow. Yeah, I feel like that's I don't have kids, but it's like a spiritual experience to not only bring a human into the world, but also, like you're saying, like that level of an unconditional love we didn't even think was possible.

Amy

Yep.

Caroline and Amy

[Laughter]

Caroline

So we met back in October of last year, I feel.

Amy

Sounds about right.

Caroline

When you came to the In This Body fundraiser at the Canopy Room. And I remember you coming up to talk to me and being like, hey, I really like this and here's my work. And I was like, I feel like I have a lot to learn from you.

Amy

Same.

Caroline

You mentioned a few things about your past, a few things about your business. And then you won one of the raffle prizes, which is a brand documentary with me. So here we are, crafting a story.

Amy

Here we are, it was meant to be.

Caroline

I know, because you talked to me before you won. And I was like... then when you won, I was like, OK, this is this is a line. This feels very aligned. So do you remember what you said to me that night? Like, you kind of gave me a little briefing on your history, your upbringing in your work. Just tell us that stuff. Tell us about you.

Amy

Yes, I can do that. I do remember that I was really excited about an exercise I had made about singing a love song to yourself. And so I was using that as a way to connect to people, like giving them this postcard that described that part of my work, because so much of my work is about self-love, but it's really through a lens of sexuality.

Amy

And so what I do is I'm a sex educator and artist and a shame coach, and I really use all of those things together with my clients to help them move through shame and love the part of themselves that is their sexuality or that like fundamental human part. I also just love to talk about sex. And I think it's really ... it's a really interesting topic that people don't even get an opportunity to talk about much with people they don't know. So that's kind of fun.

Amy

I like the provocativeness of that as my profession, it's fun for me.

Amy

So I probably came up to you and gave you the self-love song exercise and explained that I was an intimacy coach. If I was to talk about my family, it might have just, yeah, been that I started out life having a ton of shame and I had to figure out a way of letting that go along with the help of many wonderful professionals and now have the honor of helping other people on that journey.

Caroline

Incredible. Do you work with primarily women?

Amy

No. In fact, at least half my clients at any time are men. Sometimes more than that, and I think men are needing sexuality work just as much as women these days.

Caroline

Yeah, I think that especially when you said, like speaking to people you don't know about sex, it's like one of those things you shouldn't bring up in conversation. Right. Like politics or whatever, which I also think is shifting right now, but. It's so stigmatized, this thing that's so natural to us.

Amy

Yes.

Caroline

Why?

Amy

I mean, it is such a... yeah, it's such a crazy idea that this fundamental part of us that creates other humans would be so shamed and so kept in the dark, so many rules and ideas that are just harmful to people.

Amy

I have like theories about why it evolved the way it evolved. And you know, whatever was going on then, pre birth control, does not apply now. But I think there's still a lot of carryover. And so one of the things, you know, that I feel is that it's my job, but it's also society's job, and everyone's job to work on becoming more comfortable talking about it.

Amy

It's just a regular old part of ourselves.

Caroline

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's that's such an interesting piece of the conversation, pre birth control, because, you know, obviously prior to that and even still people to this day, it's like you have sex to procreate, you know, and it's like birth control means that that's not the case. Did you feel like when you were growing up that, you talking about sex, that having sex was just completely not allowed, and that's what kind of grew this curiosity?

Amy

Yes, for sure. I was raised in a religious community that taught me that sexuality was shameful and specifically women's sexuality. And it was an extremely controlling and manipulative organization. And so I was taught to believe that my body was like that. My body, like, equaled shame, literally. And so.

Amy

I kind of was catapulted into the world when I went away to college, just holding all this shame in my body and having no idea what to do with it, but also some of the normal instincts and drive that we all have around sexuality, even if we've been taught that it's bad and so I had to figure it out. Trial and error, learning from people I met in college who had grown up really differently and had different

perspectives, it was really helpful seeing that there were other realities and other truths out there, which I did know.

Amy

And that was one reason why when I went to college, I really created a lot of geographic distance between me and my family because I knew that I needed that in order to grow and survive... and then also like so trial and error, learning from other people and then also, like professional help, help me heal that part of myself.

Caroline

And when you say, like, feeling shame in your body and people coming to you, you know, and being a shame coach, what does that look like? What does that feel like? You know, whether it's super obvious and physical or if it's just kind of this nuanced subconscious thing.

Amy

Yeah, it means, you know, I have a variety of techniques of helping people just bring it into the light. We're not necessarily going to try and fix it or problem solve, although, you know, sometimes those are pieces of the equation.

Amy

But the the witnessing, you know, the act of talking about parts of yourself that you've tried to hide or were told to hide is transformational and to have someone being willing to look with you. And I even think even the word shame, it's almost like the word shame is harder for people to say than sex, which is also fascinating.

Caroline

Wow.

Amy

And to look at the parts of themselves that their parents told them were shameful, teachers... and it tends to be so specific... and then people create belief systems around that shame.

Caroline

Definitely.

Amy

And so coaching is a way to get in there and dismantle those old systems and to really access your inner wisdom. So I'm really a facilitator. In that way, I'm not an educator... I'm a facilitator of people finding their inner wisdom and being willing to look at some of the hard things they find along the way together, with support, with someone who can help them through that experience so they're not alone.

Caroline

Absolutely. Yeah. Because, I mean, so much of it I mean so much of it is these natural kind of curiosities or physical sensations or desires, fantasies that we can be so shamed for. Like that's dirty.

Amy

Yes.

Caroline

Which then when you actually allow yourself to have open conversation about it or listen to another person talk about it, you realize that we all have them.

Amy

Yes.

Caroline

Part of all of us.

Amy
Yes.

Caroline
So to normalize this experience is so healing.

Amy
It really, really is. And I have a friend whose nickname for me is "the normalizer".

Caroline
That's amazing (laughter).

Caroline
I mean, gosh, what a sigh of relief it is to be able to have conversation like this and then my mind goes to like having conversations like this with my family, with whether it's my siblings or my parents, there's so much stigma in talking to your parents about sex and like being a parent. How do you talk to your child about sex? What do you what's your advice in those departments? Like does it differentiate based on who you're talking to, or is this just like let's all talk about it in this very free, open way?

Amy
I think it's a bit of both, so I think... not everybody is ready to have those conversations with you, and so there's a way in which, you know, I have no desire to make people profoundly uncomfortable...but I'm OK with making them a little uncomfortable (laughter).

Caroline
And that's where the growth lies.

Amy
Yes. Yes. And. Right, and it's not like you have to be able to talk about sex or shame with every person in your life, and I do think it can be the hardest with parents or siblings. But I think you find a way to be yourself, your full self, even with your parents and siblings. Which doesn't necessarily mean having those in-depth conversations you have with your chosen family.

Caroline
Totally, yeah, because I mean, I think of like watching a movie with my parents and knowing, like, I've seen the movie before, I know when the sex scene is going to happen, so I purposefully get up to get a glass of water so that I miss it and I don't have to sit there and watch it with my dad. And I've said this to other people and they're like, me, too.

Amy
Yeah.

Caroline
And I can feel the anxiety rise in my body. It's just as if we have to pretend that this isn't happening, like what we're watching isn't happening. But, you know, I recently watched Normal People with my mom.

Amy
OK.

Caroline
And it was really beautiful. Have you seen it?

Amy
I haven't.

Caroline

You should definitely watch it because it's a lot of sexual interaction, but it's filmed in this beautifully intimate way. And it feels real. It feels real. It's not like typical Hollywood movie B.S. It feels real. And so we're sitting there watching this together and I really didn't feel uncomfortable.

Amy

Great!

Caroline

I know. I was like, this is some deep growth, you know, because there's sexual trauma in my family history. There's tons of shame for just women's bodies, God forbid, women having sexual desires, that kind of stuff. So super healing experience.

Amy

And that's a great example of you don't necessarily have to have a conversation with your mom. But, yeah, trying a new experience and saying to yourself, I can choose to be comfortable. In some ways, regardless of what her experience is,

Caroline

Yeah. Yeah, it was interesting, too, like hearing her say things like "This is it, this is life... this is what goes on, you know". And us just being able to talk about it as like friends, you know, it was deeply healing because I have so many of those moments in my life where I was just like, oh, I know what's coming and I'll leave the room. I am not going to be in the same room. It's so interesting.

Caroline

So when you started doing this work, what kind of coaches were you working with that helped you heal? Like, what were you doing with them?

Amy

So for coaching, mostly, I did more generalized life coach training because that really teaches you to be able to coach someone on any topic, which is awesome.

Caroline

Totally.

Amy

And for more specifically, sexuality things, I did experiential workshops... and they were really edgy. They pushed me to every edge I had, but I really felt that that was.... that I owed that to my clients to get uncomfortable. And so some of them are clothing optional. Yeah, many of them involved exercises and things to try out with total strangers that I never could have dreamed of, myself. And also, I don't want it to sound... I never felt unsafe, it was always environments where we were all encouraged to do what was right for us.

Amy

But it's places where they've allowed sexuality to be on the table in a workshop. And that is so rare... so, so rare.

Caroline

Yeah. And I think by that allowing, there's a form of respect that's just like there, you know, like this is and these are experiences to be honored.

Amy

Yes.

Caroline

What are some of the things that you did in these in these, like, classes?

Amy

That's a good, good question. Let me think about an example that feels shareable.

Caroline and Amy

[Laughter]

Caroline

Totally.

Caroline

Because I think about, I don't know if you've seen the Netflix series with, like Gwyneth Paltrow and there's the whole one on vaginas and it's like. Was there through other things like this happening?

Amy

I actually haven't seen that episode. People keep telling about me about it.

Caroline

Yeah, I mean, I think we actually talked about this before.

Amy

Yeah, I should see it. No, it doesn't sound like it. The workshops that I've gone to are like, highly creative.

Caroline

Oh, wow.

Amy

So, for example, I'm thinking of an exercise where half the room was told to, you know, like lay down and touch yourself in any way that felt good. And that didn't necessarily include sexual touch, but it wasn't excluded either. It was perfectly fine. And we were wearing clothes for this. And other people were assigned to be witnesses.

Caroline

Wow.

Amy

And you didn't know who was who was witnessing you. So to get comfortable with doing what gives you pleasure, while being witnessed, is really special. Witnessing in general is really, really special.

Caroline

Yeah. That reminds me of the class that I did with you, where we were touching ourselves in a way that felt good, but we had our clothes on. It was not, didn't feel sexual at all.

Amy

Right.

Caroline

And we were being witnessed. And there's a performative aspect in a sexual situation where, like things that you're doing could potentially be as a performance for this other person when you're being and you don't really know who's watching you or you're just kind of you're ONLY doing this to feel good for yourself, that aspect of it is taken away, there's a deeper level of vulnerability there.

Amy

Yes. And it's a practice to be able to recognize when we are in performance mode, especially in sexual situations, and switch back into... Are we feeling our own pleasure? Are we getting pleasure from the pleasure we're receiving? The pleasure we're giving? The pleasure we're witnessing in someone else?

Amy

Which is not to say that some performance isn't OK. There's a place for it, but the difference is you'd be choosing it intentionally.

Caroline

That's really cool. There's like different tiers of pleasure in a way where it's like what you're feeling, what you're giving to someone else, what you're witnessing in someone else. Wow, that's interesting and yes, being intentional about it versus just it being this modge-podge of experience where you are a little bit out of your body.

Amy

Yes, and I certainly have had that kind of sex and that kind of intimate experience with someone many, many times in my lifetime.

Caroline

Totally. Totally.

Caroline

Yeah. So what is your biggest goal with doing this work? Do you think that by doing this work, it's healed parts of you?

Amy

Yes. So I think it's healed parts of me and, my goal is to take the gift I was given as someone who had to go through a very extreme shaming experience and the whole arc of working my way through that really over 20 years... and be able to turn around and maybe make someone else's journey a little bit easier, maybe a little bit softer or shorter, maybe even more fun, more creative, more playful.

Caroline

I love that these seminars, these classes and things that you're talking about that you took part in really to push you so that you owed it to your clients. Like, I think that that's so beautiful and that there's a creative aspect of it. So like this sexuality and creativity going together, talk a little bit more about that and how you use the creativity in your work.

Amy

Yes. So one of my favorite types of sessions to do for a client is fantasy development. And they may never have had someone who was so comfortable talking about all aspects of sex, who was willing to ask some different questions. I might ask a client "well, if you want that thing, would you want this also? Or "tell me more about your desire for that? I DEEPLY want to know what that's about."

Amy

And it's often something people have felt really embarrassed about thinking that they might want at all. So it's a really sacred space to work with someone. And it's also creative and fun at the same time. And so, you know, and it's without this expectation that this fantasy will happen.

Amy

It's truly like someone developing it for themselves with an ENTHUSIASTIC partner. In the way that if you tried to talk to your your spouse or your partner about it, your real partner in real life, there's so much wrapped up in that, you know, the other person's thinking... "Do they want me to do this?" It's like very hard to suspend disbelief. So doing it with someone who's not your partner in real life is just way more fun and way more creative and open.

Caroline

Wow. Yeah, it's storytelling.

Amy

Mm hm.

Caroline

That's because I feel like even being asked that question, I'm kind of like, "I don't really know. I don't know how..."

Amy

Many of us don't!

Caroline

Yeah, I'd have to be prompted into, like, "what about this and what about this?" And I'd be like "well, maybe, yeah". But I mean, yeah, it's one, it's another thing that feels a little... stigmatized.

Amy

Yes, yes, it does. Like, that's yeah, that's for other people or that's a very subset of people on the Internet. That's a little weird.

Caroline

Totally. And that's another topic to get into with like toys and different styles of sex. And it being like that. Yeah, it's just a subculture of people. And like, I'm not a part of that. They're weird and that's crazy. And like 50 Shades of Grey and like ... stuff, you know, like... how do you feel about all of that?

Amy

I think it's another way for people to heal, and I'm highly supportive of the kink community in terms of this being their pathway to healing and... it's a very courageous pathway.

Caroline

What do you think is healing like, how how is it healing?

Amy

I don't really consider myself an expert on kink, but my kind of understanding is that it's a method for people to say their desires and have them be heard. And it gives people tools and a framework to try the things they've always wanted to try, but were too afraid... to increase their communication skills, to not limit themselves.

Amy

You know, if for someone, pain and sexuality are linked up. Great! Explore that.

Caroline

Yeah.

Amy

And that's just the most common example. There's just so much more to it than pain. So I almost hate to even bring it up in the interview. I'm also kind of blanking on like a better example that might help people understand.

Caroline

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, there's so much there and I feel like, once you open that door to kind of allow yourself to just like get curious, there's so much to discover. Because you keep that door closed for a very long time because you're just like "I just have missionary's sex... I'm not opening this door".

Caroline

And then it's like, "open the door". And you're like, "OK, that's actually this isn't super weird. This is just an experience to be had". And maybe you like it. Maybe you don't. It's just as simple as that.

Amy

Yes, right. It's a community of explorers.

Caroline

That's very sweet. That's a nice way of putting it. Yeah. And I guess by exploring and kind of moving through levels of vulnerability and being heard and seen is healing shame.

Amy

Absolutely. Yep.

Amy

To find someone who can carefully hold your desire and tell you it's OK and then maybe even act on it. In my phone sessions, we're just going to talk about it. But that community is really committed to the next step, taking it together and learning, learning from mistakes and learning how to communicate well. A huge part of that community is about communication.

Caroline

Yes. Yes, totally. When did you know in your life or in your career that this is the kind of work you wanted to do?

Amy

I think I've known for probably 10 or 15 years, so I don't actually remember the first time it occurred to me that this was my calling. But I know that I pushed it away for a long time. I mean, I think in some ways, you know, the timing was perfect. I think I was still doing my own healing. And it's hard to do that own healing and be working in that space at the same time. So... and not that my healing is done, I will always be working on it.

Amy

But I think I'm at, like, two thirds of the way there on my own healing.

Amy

The the more recent memory I have is being in my life coach training and trying to tell myself, like, "oh, maybe I won't go into sex coaching... maybe I'll just I'll just do whatever people need and maybe I'll get to talk about sex some with people... but I could just be more of a generalist like everybody else". And this deep voice from inside being like, "what are you DOING? Why are you trying to push this away? This is your GIFT. You actually don't have a choice. You have to do this."

Caroline

Wow.

Amy

And me being like, "yeah, you're right, OK, doing it... it's uncomfortable... it makes some people uncomfortable that this is what I want to talk about and this is what I want to coach on. And that's totally OK."

Caroline

So were those first few sessions that you did with people really uncomfortable for you? Were you really nervous to go there with others?

Amy

No, because I'd been talking to friends for years about it. That part felt comfortable. I think any life coach starting out that's been recently trained is going to be freaking out about whether they're doing it right. Totally. But at least it wasn't the topic.

Caroline

Yeah. That says something about you being in the right place. What do you think happened in your life or didn't happen in your life that led you to feel that this was some work you needed to do for yourself?

Amy

Hmm, that's a great question. I think I just didn't experience much pleasure in almost all aspects of my life, and it was so painful, it was like I could see that other people were enjoying themselves in the exact same experience that I had been dropped into. And it was like this deep knowing that there was something in the way. And it was so many things that were in the way for me... but specifically one thing I think about is a "pleasure ceiling".

Amy

And I work with clients on increasing the height of their "pleasure ceiling", there's this concept that some of us early on get programmed to not allow ourselves much pleasure. And there's kind of this hard limit there.

Amy

And it also can translate to other types of ways of thinking about it, like success or happiness are all kind of wrapped into this. And so I think I just had a really low "pleasure ceiling". It was like I only would allow a tiny bit and then I might feel BAD if I allowed more.

Caroline

Totally, yeah, it's like if you work hard enough, you can get this much pleasure.

Amy

Mm hmm.

Caroline

And then that's it. And then you got to work hard again or you've got to, you know, do things, quote unquote, that are acceptable in society to feel deserving of the pleasure, wherever the pleasure is coming from, not even necessarily sexually, but.

Amy

Right.

Caroline

That's really interesting. All of those things being connected and having this like upper limit pleasure ceiling even there and being completely unaware to it. But there is so much shame associated with going beyond the allotted amount of pleasure you think you get.

Amy

Yes! Yes, there is. Especially for women and especially for mothers. And many, many roles, of course. But... I'm trying to think of the specific types of shame... it's like to be SEEN enjoying yourself. It used to be that women weren't allowed to eat bananas. They had to be sliced.

Caroline and Amy

[Laughter]

Caroline

That's crazy.

Amy

Yep.

Caroline

You know. Because God forbid, a man was turned on by that...

Amy

Or a woman.

Caroline

Or a woman. Yeah... A human being.

Amy

Right. I just think of the pleasure of, like, biting a banana and like, that's just so, so fun. It feels so good. We were just not even allowed to have THAT.

Caroline

Wow. That's hysterical. That is funny. Yeah. And I mean, even just like associating sexual desire with like eating a food, it's like... I'm just eating a food. Like not everything a woman does is to serve the pleasure of another. It's like I'm literally just existing.

Amy

Right. And to enjoy the food for its own enjoyment for yourself, like with nothing to do with someone else's gaze upon you as you do it.

Caroline

Oh gosh. This is it. I mean, this is where this is like the where our work just like really connects so deeply. because, you know, I'm sure that, you know, that there's so much shame tied up in our own body and our own body image, what our body is supposed to look like, quote unquote. Loving our body, feeling empowered in it, feeling like you can use it in a way that feels good to you versus just like do what others want you to do or wear what others want you to wear. There's so much there.

Amy

There's so much there, I like to say there's so much shame there... right now. So I add "right now" to a lot of things to remind myself that we're shifting, we're changing, we're doing the work. This state is not permanent. It may feel like it has been, but it's not.

Caroline

I love that. I think that that's how you should talk about literally everything. Because, you know, it doesn't have to be the end all be all.

Amy

I agree.

Caroline

What are some things that you do in your daily life to remind you of this work, to be in this work, to practice.

Amy

So, every day I really try and take at least an hour, maybe more, to feel pleasure in my body. And that can take a variety of forms. It might be sex with my partner. It might be a really nice erotic solo session with myself. It might involve toys, it might not. It might involve some audio erotica, that can be a really nice experience. But it also is more often, you know, because a lot of times I'm in full parenting mode and or just getting things done mode. And it might be a swim in the afternoon and just feeling how soft the water is on my whole body.

Amy

And I often start my day with dance, and it's not for exercise. I dance because it feels good to dance and I dance in ways that feel good and I tune into it deeply, and then I love that there's the side bonus of exercise on health, but it is not the intent. And that's really important to me.

Caroline

I feel that same way about it, too, and so dance is like a sacred practice for you. Where do you dance? Do you just move your body freely?

Amy

Yes, I do practice called ecstatic dance and it's a free form dance. I often do it by myself to music, in my home... but there are many places you can go and do it in a room full of people. And many of

those people are dancing by themselves. But there is something about doing it together that is extremely powerful. I normally go to a 10 day long dance camp every August. It's really hard that that's not happening this year.

Amy

In fact, I was watching a movie last night that had a kind of choreographed partner dance scene that was really beautiful and my heart just ached so badly. It was painful how much I missed that.

Caroline

Yeah, I know the world is in a funky place. It's in a funky place. And there is such power in the connection of dance, in the pleasure you feel, the freedom you feel in that moment, the connection you feel with yourself in that moment, moving through fear around like what's my body going to look like? Is anyone going to see me and judge me? Like, that's the biggest thing, right? Like we are constantly worried about being judged by others.

Amy

Yes.

Caroline

And being able to just, like, step into that... is so freeing and it's like anything else, it's a practice. The more you do it, the more open you are to doing it. And then I feel like it then trickles down and translates into other areas of your life.

Amy

Absolutely. I mean, yeah, it's like it's like practice feeling joy, practice, feeling good in your body, so that you can just weave it in and out throughout your day, coming back to it. You know, we are apt to forget and to drive ourselves hard and to ignore our thirst or our hunger or need to rest, but if we can practice and remember and keep coming back to it, it's the same kind of thing.

Caroline

Absolutely. What other things do you do in your day, in your life that bring you joy, that make you feel all different kinds of pleasure?

Amy

Well, I really ask for quality time from the important people in my life, and I love one-on-one time. I really like to go out in my canoe with a partner or a friend and be on the water. I like to walk barefoot in the grass. And I like to have deep and vulnerable conversations.

Caroline

Absolutely, and it's so funny too like the word pleasure itself immediately in the general society, like you associate it with sexual desire and sex. So it's like we can't talk about that, but like, pleasure being just like the pleasure you get from, like, the wind coming in through this window right now.

Amy

Absolutely. Or eating a perfectly ripe peach over the sink.

Caroline

Yes!

Amy

Reading a library book in the bathtub.

Caroline

Yeah, just joy, just like full body, cellular level joy. And how it can happen in so many little moments of your day and of your life and how we really starve ourselves of this, because we're just go, go, go, go, go, go, go. I have to be working. I have to be doing this.

Amy
Yes.

Caroline
Again, it's the guilt and shame associated with pleasure.

Amy
Yes, and that and at that point, one more sort of on the go, go, go. We're not listening to our bodies. And when we don't listen to them, they get louder. They don't have words, but they have deep, deep wisdom and they have ways of communicating with us. And that's where sometimes people come into my practice because maybe they haven't had sex with their partner in a year.

Caroline
Wow.

Amy
And it probably has nothing to do with the actual sex. So it's really just like a lens to get people to start listening to their bodies. And what happens when you go in there is you find all kinds of stuff going on and the body was just starting to get really loud by just shutting down sexual desire as a way of getting your attention. And so it's often you know, it's often around certain themes like body shame, feelings around self-worth. Sometimes there's also like lack of communication with your partner, like unsaid feelings. But it's really not for most people that, oh, they're just they're just "done with sex now". That part of their lives is over. That's that's the more rare case, which is also like something I don't want to shame that either. If someone decides that their intentional choices to be asexual and maybe even to claim that as part of their identity. That's wonderful, and that actually opens up pleasure for them.

Caroline
Wow, that's interesting. It's almost like the the stopping or the stillness can kind of like allow other things to come to the surface. Do you find in your life intentional moments of stillness?

Amy
I do. I really like to read, I like to journal, I like to drink tea, I like to sit on my back porch and zone out. I also really find stillness in movement. So floating on my back in a New England pond is a moment that's like really easy for me to find stillness in or in a dance that I slow way, way down. It feels like stillness.

Caroline
Wow. Yeah. Yeah, the stillness in the motion in the movement, yeah, and it's it's interesting, the juxtaposition of the two, like because the moving and the doing and the go, go, go, go, go. It can kind of like almost feed into that energy sometimes and trying to find the the presence of the of the motion basically.

Amy
Yes.

Caroline
That's the stillness. That's when you can hear what your body is saying to you, like in those moments of stillness while you're... Do you dance with your eyes closed?

Amy
I often do.

Caroline
Yeah, me too, even when I'm practicing yoga, like I just realize I'm the entire class, I'm just like my eyes are closed.

Amy

Yep, yeah. If you look at my yoga practice that I started in my early 20s, you know, it was all about like, you know, spandex clothes and like power yoga. And now if you look I'm like wearing like super flowy things, my eyes are closed. I might not even put my hair up anymore because there's a beauty in that looseness that just isn't attainable when you're locking it all down with the high waisted spandex.

Caroline

Oh, I know. I mean. And speaking about bodies and like our energy body and like the sacral chakra and just walking around with the high waisted pants and the tightness and keeping our bellies small and keeping them in and how detrimental it is to our health, number one, and to our mental health and just how much it feeds into this level of shame. And that's why when I'm breathing with people and meditating with people, I'm constantly drawing awareness to like, especially with women, go deep into your belly and let your belly expand or else, you know, there's so much energy locked in that area of the body that... God forbid it comes out.

Amy

Right, and you could spend your whole day using all your creative energy in a way to like keep your abs tight and pulled in... that takes a lot of energy. And it's not necessarily the energy thing. It's not like surplus. It's actually your energy for things that matter to you. Just totally heading that direction. Getting stuck.

Caroline

Yes. Yeah. You're prana, like, can't flow. You're just like like you said, using it to keep yourself small in these ways, whether it's physically, energetically, whatever. So. Just as an example, for someone who's listening, like, what would someone come to you for? Is it like relationship help? Is it like I feel like I have all this untapped sexual energy and I feel shame for it? Like what's what's an example of what someone would come to you for?

Amy

So I think a lot of times it's yeah, my partner and I haven't had sex in a while and I'm worried is one common reason why people come... which I don't see as a problem, I just see it as your body's talking. Let's listen. Let's figure out how to listen together.

Caroline

I'm sure that's a relief to them to hear off the bat.

Amy

Yes. Another reason is... I have this fantasy and it feels unusual or different and I feel a TON of shame around it. And what's fascinating to me is it's often not that unusual or different, but they've had NO ONE to talk to about it. And so I you know, I let them know this is something I hear about a lot. And it's not the first time I've heard of it. Let's talk about it. And I think just in this case, like just them hearing ME talk about it without shame, I am role modeling.

Amy

Another thing is, is stuff around polyamory, open relationships. That's a very common thing people want to talk to me about because, you know, they're not sure if it's OK. They're not sure how to do it. It's certainly not the focus of my practice, but it does often come up.

Caroline

Yeah, I hear a lot of people talking about it more openly now and just exploring it more openly now. What's your overall thought on it?

Amy

My overall thought is that we need to expand our definition of relationships on the entire spectrum, and so it's not that monogamy is bad and polyamory is good or the reverse, but to allow everyone to create the type of relationship that really feeds them and to not feel shame about it, not to feel like they have to hide it in the workplace or that they will somehow be stigmatized or punished for having

something outside of what is currently considered normal.

Caroline

Totally, and even I feel in the past, like five years, calling your person, your spouse, your boyfriend, your girlfriend... your "partner" instead. That is also still like relatively new, maybe not as new in Somerville, Massachusetts. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, but down in Florida it's definitely still new. And I feel like to me that makes so much sense to call this person in your life, your partner.

Amy

It does. And what I love about that word is that, yeah, it's so broad. It allows for everybody's definition. It allows for more than one. It's not gendered. There's some really fun variants on it, one of which is "platonic life partner", which really recognizes the people in your life that you aren't sexual with, but are hugely important. And they're not going anywhere and they have a special place in your life. I think it's a really cute term.

Caroline

I love those people in my life so much.

Caroline and Amy

[Laughter]

Caroline

Yeah. And, you know, so with all of this work that you're doing, you know, it's one-on-one stuff. It sounds like partners coming in. I've been in one of your group online virtual classes, and then you're this gorgeous artist creating art about all of this. We're surrounded by your paintings, they're all over your house. When did you start painting and what is your art?

Amy

So I started painting, I guess now eight years ago, I was thirty six. I had no idea I was an artist. I had never had an art class or anybody tell me it was OK to be an artist or that I deserve to be an artist, or that I was good enough to be an artist in any way. But I had a boyfriend who showed me how to use acrylics on a canvas, and that was the start of it.

Amy

It was also a very creatively fertile time for me in terms of it was also when I realized how much I love to dance and that that was going to be a big part of my life going forward and my community. It was also the same time as I was separating from my husband of ten years at that point.

Caroline

That's a lot happening at once.

Amy

Mm hmm. Yeah, so it's funny. I can go sometimes six months or a year without making a painting, but then it just feels right. It's like the moment to create one comes back. I did recently do a couple that I sold to a client which was really nice. That was my first time making art in this way and getting paid for it. It was a really sweet milestone I'm really proud of.

Caroline

Awesome. That's amazing. Yeah. Now they just kind of hang in your house. Are there specific paintings in this house that stick out to you? Obviously they're hanging in your home, but why the ones that are hanging? Why those?

Amy

That's a great question. I really think they I mean, these are my favorites, the ones I didn't even like, it's like I don't even really have any in storage. I just gave away the ones that weren't my favorites. I think all of these represent a feeling, or a moment in time, and there's the one with words, but that's the only one that has words. And I still remember what was happening in my life when I made that

painting, what emotions were happening, how it felt to make the brushstroke. So they are very much a representation of a moment in time.

Caroline

This is making me want to paint. It's making me want to paint. That's amazing. And you gave me the tour of your house and your space and I saw there's a painting in your room. Specifically, what does that one represent?

Amy

That one... there's a lot of hope in that piece. It's a very joyful piece, some of them feel a little dark at times. But there's kind of a rainbow kind of arc shape in that one that's layered over some other colors. And that really represents like, where my life is going.

Caroline

Yeah, very cool, very cool, yeah, so with the with the painting and then there's some, like, experiential things that you do like the walk and the sash and tell us about these things because they're so cool.

Amy

Thank you. So the Walk of Shame is part of a bigger project called the Shame Experience. And the walk specifically is a pageant, but instead of a beauty pageant, it is a pageant of your own making. So you get to claim a sash and wear a tiara and have flowers and walk down a ramp. And I announce you for something that you've CHOSEN.

Amy

And it's something you felt shame about either currently or in the past. But that you can actually see is a REAL gift in your life. And that's what I talk about when you walk. I announce you, I announce what's on your sash, and I explain why this is a gift in your life. And so it's a TURNAROUND. And so there's a little bit of coaching in it, which is so fun for me. It's like I get to do weird art, which is my favorite kind. I get to see people light up when they put on the sashes, I get to announce them. Other people clap. So there's also this way of like we are collectively re-patterning people's old beliefs about themselves into something positive as a group.

Caroline

Phenomenal, phenomenal, and like the idea, number one, the phrase walk of shame, is associated with like walking home after sleeping with someone. Because... It's really just women, though. It's really just kind of like...

Amy

Yep. Yep. So I am claiming and reframing that phrase just to start with.

Caroline

Totally. And because why is that a walk of shame?

Amy

Right? It's not.

Caroline

You're going home.

Amy

Yeah. You just had a great night. If the Walk of Shame was wearing its own sash it would say 'Walk of Shame' and I would say "this is the walk of shame and the walk of shame is a gift because it means you had a really good night". We hope, you know, maybe it wasn't that good. Maybe it was just mediocre, but it might have been fantastic. And maybe you're feeling really great. So walk of shame. Thank you for that beautiful gift.

Caroline

Gosh, so much shame associated with. Yeah. That.

Amy

Yep, And so what I do is I create, depending on the size of the event and what's going on, 100 to 200 pre-made sashes for people to browse from. And that really helps them get the juices flowing about what they might feel shame about. And then people can also make their own and they often do.

Amy

So, you know, some of the sashes are things around like Vow Breaker or it really all started with a sash I made for myself called Ms. Divorce. And I felt so much shame about getting divorced, I felt like I had failed, you know, my children, my family, society at large. I felt like I FAILED SOCIETY. And over time I realized what a gift this divorce was to me. I got to be an artist. I got to understand how much I loved dance and I'm absolutely a better mother for it. I'm a better friend. I'm a better SOCIETY MEMBER.

Amy

And that's where the project started, and so a lot of it is around, you know, maybe another common sash is Childless by Choice.

Caroline

Mmmm. So funny, I was just having that conversation with a friend because she doesn't want children and her dad often says to her, "do the right thing".

Amy

Well, you could just hear that and say, "OK, I won't have children". [Laughter]

Caroline

Because "the right thing" is doing what feels right and good and in integrity with you... not doing something just because everyone else in society thinks that you should do it. Like, it's so blatantly obvious but so deeply rooted in our society and in our culture.

Amy

It really, really is. And. Yeah, we I mean, it's like we want to do things that make other people happy, we want to do things that make our society better, but they're often at odds with what makes us happy. And it's a very complicated process to reconcile and prioritize those things.

Caroline

Absolutely, because if you feel like you've got to do something, be someone to be considered good in this world, and then you feel all of this resistance in your body because you don't genuinely want that or want to be that way. That's an incredibly confusing place to be. And that is your work essentially.

Amy

Yep.

Caroline

Is being with those people through that process.

Amy

Correct.

Caroline

Which is all of us. Yes. Moving through some thing. Yeah.

Amy

Finding the bravery and the the words and the knowledge and the skills to be who we really are. And, and in my work, you know, it can be it's kind of like you come in through the window of sexuality or you've done that work for like a lot of places in your life. But you yeah, for whatever reason, sexuality

was pushed down or neglected or shoved aside. And you've decided it's time to shine a light on that part of you, too, because it's all connected.

Caroline

It's all connected. And it makes me think of Pleasure Activism. The book that I'm reading that I saw in your bedside table, which I'm not even that far into, but I've just heard so many people talking about it. What are you gaining from that book?

Amy

I think. It's not those that isn't a term I would have put together myself, pleasure activism, I, I think arranging my life around pleasure has just become so normal for me. I almost FORGOT it was activism work. So reading that book is reminding me of how shut down people are around pleasure, how important this work is, you know, get a new perspective on how to do it or how to. You know, it's important for me to understand what that other experience is like in order to be a good coach.

Caroline

Totally, and it is it's a really important reminder and how beautiful that you almost forgot that this is literally an act of resistance, like being in pleasure, being in alignment with yourself if it's not like, quote unquote, fitting into the box of society, societal norms.

Caroline

It's radical, which is pretty badass when you think about it.

Amy

Absolutely.

Caroline and Amy

[Laughter]

Amy

I love that being a total heathen is now badass. It's great. It's great. This works for me.

Caroline

And then the other book, The Body is Not an Apology. How is that book? What are you gaining from that book?

Amy

That book was so wonderful to read from the perspective of a woman of color, it just added because of everything that was happening with Black Lives Matter. It just added to have those words come from her directly was so critical for me. And and it was. It wasn't like any of the concepts were so radical. And yet it was another time of me remembering. That I can love every part of my body, I can love the parts of loose skin, I can love the aging parts, I can love... specifically, the society just told me NOT to love. So it was a wonderful reminder, and I think to hear it from a black woman's voice was really important.

Caroline

Absolutely. And I think it's important to just bring up in this conversation because it's like we can talk about feeling shame all day long and then it won't even compare to the experience of someone in a black body or a person of color. You know, there's just a whole other unfortunate reality there.

Amy

Yes, I think there are some ways in which I was rather unlucky to have to experience different kinds of abuse that I experienced growing up, one of which I call spiritual abuse. And often someone who's experiencing spiritual abuse is also experiencing emotional abuse and physical abuse. And so there are ways in which I was yeah, I did not have it easy. And then I read about experiences in The Body is Not an Apology, and I think, well, yeah, in some ways I really did (have it easy).

Caroline

Yeah, I can't wait to read it. I'm very excited to read it. It's really powerful. It's really powerful to just I mean, have these conversations and I feel so grateful to be having these conversations and that work like this exists, like how incredible that this is your work, you know, and that, like, we get paid to do things like this, to help others step into their authenticity.

Amy

Yes. If someone had told me, you know, 15, 20 years ago, I would be doing self-love work through the framework of sexuality, I don't even know if I could have understood the concept.

Caroline

Totally, totally. I feel similarly about about my work, too, and how every single person moves through this in some way, you know, like it needs to and wants to in some way and how liberating it is to be held in that space energetically, emotionally, spiritually, to be allowed to fully express, to be heard, to be seen, and how healing it is, how healing it is. It's incredible.

Amy

Yeah. To feel safe enough to be yourself, express your desires, your needs, your feelings. It's a real gift.

Caroline

It is, it really is. So what is next for you and your business?

Amy

Yes, so I'm in the process of getting certified to do couples work, and I really intend to offer something different than is on the market right now in terms of something more experiential, something edgier, something where I might be on, you know, on a Skype call and really talking with a couple about really intimate stuff and maybe even witnessing intimate stuff and really wanting to see, like, how else can we do this work together instead of the very traditional let's get into a room and talk about it. And often couples feel really bad leaving that space. And how can we make it more fun? More experiential is my goal for couples.

Caroline

Very cool. And so The Shame Experience was the name of your business. Now it's The Pleasure Center?

Amy

Correct. Yes. And so what I realized is that The Shame Experience is a suite of art projects and The Pleasure Center is my coaching practice, that includes art, but that they're going to work together.

Caroline

So incredible, so incredible, yeah, and I mean. I just think that there's so much power in in this work and in the connection of it all in your story and your own experiences, just kind of your own exploration leading you here and just the continued growth to go deeper, go deeper, go deeper, push, take you to your edge so that you can take others to their edge is really, really powerful and oftentimes we're scared to go there, you know? So I commend the people that are willing to do this work because it's, you know, even going to therapy for a lot of people is like it's too intense. I don't want to know what's in there.

Amy

Absolutely. And I have experienced that. Yeah. So it was kind of interesting, it's like we have so many ways of talking about difficult topics, including sexuality or trauma. We don't have that many ways of experiential healing, and that's where kind of, you know, my art and my coaching come together and my creativity to offer something that's more experiential.

Amy

We have done a LOT of talking. Talking's great, but I think to have other options for other times in your

life when you've exhausted all the talking that you can do with your partner or with yourself and you want to try movement, or wearing a sash and having people clap for you as a way of healing, or letter writing, that's another art experience is Dear Mom and Dad, and that's a therapeutic letter writing experience I created. You write a short letter on a real typewriter to your parents from a year in the past. And you say something that you couldn't say then. And you don't send the letter, the letter is for you.

Caroline

Amazing, amazing, it's such a healing thing to do with any relationship, honestly, the things that you wish you would have said or could have said or felt safe to say.

Amy

Mm hmm.

Caroline

And just like the intentionality of having to take your time on a typewriter. You really got to be in it now and make those words that you're typing like, you know, really think about them. Yeah, it's amazing. So when what brings you, like, the deepest gratitude in your life right now?

Amy

The chosen and created family that I have. So being surrounded by people who see me, love me, celebrate me, support me. I need a lot of support, I'm not a person who just kind of goes through life with things being really easy all the time. Maybe that person doesn't exist, but I think I always thought it did. So really having people I can rely on and trust is something even pretty new to me at forty four.

Caroline

So cool, so for anybody out there listening who's curious about your work, what's something that you can tell us about your coaching sessions that we might not expect or something that like so we can kind of get an inside look on what a session with you looks like?

Amy

Sure. I would say they're way more playful and fun than one would think. I think we go into healing work thinking this is going to be HARD work. And sometimes it is. But I also think we laugh a lot. There is crying, but it is more crying because we've really used maybe dark humor to see the beauty of something that you've never been able to see before, and it's really collaborative. So they're phone sessions and we explore the deep and wise parts of yourself together, I think it's really fun.

Caroline

So cool, so I ask everybody on the podcast this question: What is your helmet, Amy? What is it that you turn to, to ground you down, to help you feel safe? And of course, we can have many helmets, so take it away.

Amy

OK, so... My helmet is vulnerability. It's a very soft helmet, it's kind of unusual and I can really explain how, how and why it is my helmet. I growing up, I put on a helmet of invisibility to feel safe, and I didn't feel seen or heard and I continued to use that invisibility helmet for a long, long time. And as I progressed through my own healing work... In my 30s, I learned how to sometimes put on the helmet of vulnerability instead of invisibility. And now it is a source of great, great comfort to me to vulnerably and bravely reach out when I need support and say what I'm feeling, what my fears are, what my anxieties are, and have someone else witness them and feel seen. And now THAT's how I feel safe.

Caroline

Incredible. Incredible. Yeah, I love that answer, I think that might be one of the best I've gotten so far.

Amy

So where can we find you if anyone listening is curious to reach out, wants to see your art, wants to work with you, where can we find you?

Amy

Yes. So go to my new website, www.thepleasure.center

Caroline

Ooooh, happily I will go there. Amazing. Well, thank you for being here. Thank you for telling your story and for sharing this work, because I think it's going to create a lot of space for people listening.

Amy

Thank you so much.

Caroline

OK, my loves, I really hope that this chat resonated with you as much as it did with me. This conversation was something that kind of ruminated in my system for the weeks to follow. And we had this conversation prior to filming the brand documentary, because that's my process.

Caroline

We go through, have this conversation, and there are there are parts of our conversation that are not in this podcast episode that are actually in the brand documentary. So go check it out at [getahelmet_](https://www.instagram.com/getahelmet_) on Instagram, on my IGTV and go seek out Amy's work, thepleasure.center on Instagram, and that is her website. And learning about this stuff is so, so important.

And she talked about two really important books: *Pleasure Activism* and *The Body is Not an Apology*. And they are. I'm reading *Pleasure Activism* right now. So more on that TBD. And I can't wait. Like the first few pages, I was like, oh my gosh. So go check those books out. And once again, thank you so much for being here. Hopefully I'll see you on Thursday evening in the full moon ritual. It's going to be a party.

Let's release some anxiety. Let's cultivate some self-worth. Let's dig deep together and set some really juicy intentions as we round out 2020 and say goodbye to all of the heavy shit we have been carrying. I love you so much. Thank you for being here. Have a beautiful week and I will see you next time.