

Speaker 2: Yeah, so I guess what does the internet look like to you now and that's made you believe the Feminist Internet is necessary?

Speaker 1: So, I think the paradox of the internet is that it holds so much potential for liberation, positive social change, and the democratization of various processes, but at the same time also has the potential to reinforce structural societal inequalities, the structures of power, the structures of governments. So when you look at the internet it kind of mirrors some of the problems that are in society, so I would say, no new problems, [inaudible 00:01:08] just a technological problem, although the internet does accelerate certain issues. Like for example, with online abuse and harassment, people often say that it's easier for trolls to do what they do on the internet because there's a layer of anonymity to do it from behind. But of course, the reasons why people abuse each other are not technological, they're social.

So I think it's that kind of feedback loop between societal problems and internet as a space that reflects them back and sometimes amplifies them. So yeah. Some of the things that we've identified as being problematic is the fact that there's such a predominance of women or people from LGBTQ+ communities, people of color that experience online abuse. And a lot of that work is highlighted by Amnesty International Toxic Twitter Campaign. We've-

Speaker 2: I saw Diane Abbott in the video.

Speaker 1: Exactly, and she received such a huge percentage of all of the abuse that was targeted at all of the electoral candidates and is a very good example of that kind of imbalance. So that's one example. The kind of culture of Silicon Valley and all of its other instantiations around about basically tech sector has a kind of masculine toxicity that comes out of the way it evolved. And so I think as many of the internet's products, services, platforms are created in that environment, if it doesn't reflect equality properly it's going to be the consequences of that are felt in the technologies and the platforms.

So and I think one thing I would say is that the narratives around getting more women into tech are positive, but perhaps not nuanced enough, because I think if we just get more women into a toxic environment we're actually doing a disservice to women. It's more about changing the culture of those environments, so that there are places where at the moment women experience micro-aggressions constantly from things like not receiving as much eye contact, to being spoken over in meetings. You know, small cultural little cuts that are very deeply embedded and systemic. Those are the things that need to change as well as just more women being there.

So that's something I guess we focus a lot on gender bias that was actually built into technology, so especially this work around personal intelligent assistants, Siri, Cortana, Alexa, etc. they're a very good example of how stereotypes about women are baked into a technology unless it's challenged at the point of production and design. And one of the problems is that technology companies argue that they're meeting market preference. So they'll do some research and it says well we like-

Speaker 2: They prefer women.

Speaker 1: Prefer women's voices, so we'll give it a woman's voice. No, the responsibility is to question that preference.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And I believe that that responsibility comes because they are such strong an influence on society, so they have a social responsibility.

Speaker 2: So when you talk about the internet being unequal, is it male domination? And the reflection of society, or could it be described in another way?

Speaker 1: Well, I think it's got several dimensions. I would say at the most abstract level the way that capitalism has subsumed the internet and commodified social media is at the core, because ultimately feminism to me is about equality, so even though we're playing that out through the lens of gender, actually the bigger thing that you're fighting up against is power. And power plays out through the patriarchy, but also capitalism. So I think I could find this reference, but one of the people I've been working with [inaudible 00:05:46], she alerted me to this brilliant ... It's called the matrix of domination. So it looks at hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and then this one other kind of corner, and like that's the matrix of oppression.

Speaker 2: On the internet.

Speaker 1: In the world.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: And that matrix kind of plays out on the internet, so if you have that in reality you're going to have it in the internet, unless you intervene and try make sure that you're creating alternative narratives.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So I would say, yes it's a gender imbalance thing. But it's also a capitalism thing.

Speaker 2: Yeah, because the internet was kind of rooted in those structures.

Speaker 1: Well, let's say for example in the early days of the internet where the ideology was about information sharing and communications and that ... I mean, this is like a conventional narrative, but in the early 2000s when corporate social media took over everything and the monopolies of Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Google started to become more and more pernicious and pervasive, we somehow lost the kind of open experimental nature of the internet, which never really existed outside of capitalism, but which became more and more subsumed by it. And so I think the regulation of

platforms by those companies is such a significant development that it kind of shuts down freedom of expression in various ways.

Speaker 2: So do you mean like algorithms, promoted pages on Facebook for example, are those examples of what you're talking about?

Speaker 1: Could be. Yeah, okay, one example of it is let's say the filter bubble. So the increasing homogenization of internet spaces because the business model for them is advertising. So the more and more data is collected the more and more specific the profile of the person, the more and more specific the targeted marketing, the more and more their feed is narrowed and narrowed. And you've seen the political consequences of that in the Trump election where they had 250 ... They had 5000 data points each on 250 million Americans. And that played a very significant role in the result of the election. So we now have a different set of responsibilities which are about when we think what does it mean to be digitally literate, it's not only about knowing how to use certain tools, it's about identifying source bias, [inaudible 00:08:48] with the phenomenon of fake news, looking at the filter bubble, saying to yourself, "Okay I have to actually subscribe to feeds that I don't like." Or learning tactics that can help subvert the dominance of corporate algorithms.

So yes, algorithms definitely is one manifestation of it. There are obviously lots of others.

Speaker 2: Yeah, so do you ... What things do people take for granted on the internet that maybe exemplify inequalities?

Speaker 1: Well I think one thing, the trade off of free services for data is something which, like as I mentioned earlier, I think it's becoming much more of a mainstream concern. People are becoming more and more aware of how their data's being used. But even when you're really, really super aware of it, mostly don't retract from the platforms, 'cause they're so dominant and because it's so helpful to be engaged with them live, so in a way I see that kind of trade off as being a bit of a red herring in a way, because it's like the idea of having a choice if the choice to opt out is so poor. Like if the consequences of opting out are so negative on your life, not really a fair choice.

Speaker 2: Not a choice, yeah. It's sort of like even just yesterday, 'cause I'm quite concerned about my data and privacy, even yesterday I accepted a website to be able to view all my details because I really need to use that website and maybe the trade off is worth it, but yeah it's not much of a choice.

Speaker 1: No, and it's like these micro actions that we're doing that don't seem consequential. And I mean, I'm a hypocrite because I do it all the time, cookies, accept, accept, accept. You know what I mean. And I know what the data's being used for and I know what I'm complicit in if I don't resist, but it's very difficult to just live your life in a kind of reasonably fast paced way if at every point you're resisting, so don't mean to sound defeatist, but I'm just trying to say that I think sometimes, yeah, like you say, that choice isn't really a choice.

But that's why I think it's really brilliant when you have creative projects like, I don't know if you saw that Data Obscura exhibition at Protein.

Speaker 2: No I didn't, no.

Speaker 1: Really good. I think you could see the work probably online, but there were lots of projects there that are developing alternative apps that push back against invasions of data privacy and things like that, so I think that's what I love so much about Feminist Internet is that we're coming out with creative responses, we have a playful approach that comes from being artists and designers. So we're offering alternatives and trying not to stop at the point of critique. So, we have our research process, we identify certain injustices and then we go out and make stuff that tackles it. And I guess the main challenge ... Sorry I'm going off on one, but it's now we've got really good and creating alternative narratives, prototyping ideas, imagining crazy shit, but we need support now to turn those ideas into real technologies and-

Speaker 2: That can be implemented in the real world kind of thing.

Speaker 1: Yeah, exactly, so like we've had interest from people that would like to work with us to develop them, but not money.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Or tech infrastructure, so the work now is to find partners that can help us build stuff. We really want to go into a fairly intensive action phase.

Speaker 2: Yeah, and just before we get into how Feminist Internet plans to do those things, part of making the internet a more equal place through Feminist Internet, it's from what I'm sensing not just about making it gender equal or equal amongst classes, it's almost about people being treated equally by the structures on the internet, such as with data and giving choices.

Speaker 1: Exactly.

Speaker 2: Is that-

Speaker 1: Yes. So I would say yes absolutely we want gender equality, we want to recognize the intersections of different forms of oppression, race, class, gender, sex ability, not sex, gender identity, gender ability. But, and it's really hard to articulate this, but it's kind of exactly what you're saying, I see that it's a push back against power more broadly. So it's about how the internet's intended for capitalism. That is a quite neo-liberal Western positioning, because capitalism plays out in different ways in different cultural contexts, but I still think yeah, Feminist Internet is there to push back against power structures however they are expressed in relation to the internet and to promote internet equality.

So the way I define internet equalities is as having equal rights to freedom of expression, equal rights to data protection, to privacy, and to access. And then there's another piece

about having the monopolies, the people in power recognize their responsibility embed equality into the technologies that they're developing. That's the biggest challenge. Because if you're driven by the profit motive and therefore your main goal is to meet market demand rather than question that demand it's difficult to be convinced that there's another, a better more ethical alternative. But that's ultimately what we have to do.

Speaker 2: So in action, you've done the creative, artistic, quite attention grabbing projects. What comes next? Hopefully if you get your funding, how would you implement Feminist Internet actively, how would you actually go about getting it onto the internet, and where would it be? Would it be affecting the entire internet, would it be just one portion of it? How do you envisage it going?

Speaker 1: So I'm imagining, I'm envisaging four strands of work. So research and development would underpin everything, then there would be technology incubation, consultancy and public engagement programs. So they would infiltrate the universe in different ways, so tech incubation would be I suppose a space where we actually build the technologies, and then people are going to use those technologies so it could then, Feminist Internet could be in peoples homes, it could be on their phones, it could be on their devices, it could be [crosstalk 00:16:20]-

Speaker 2: On apps.

Speaker 1: On apps, exactly. Like that HoloBot app that was prototyped in the original studio, I would love for that to be a real app where people anywhere in the world can fight back against online abuse. From the consultancy side that would be Feminist Internet going into organizations or companies, hopefully including the big four, the big technology companies and consulting on gender equality and how that can be built into not only organizational culture, but also into the development of the technologies. And I actually think that there is an appetite and I can imagine it almost like a Feminist Internet kind of benchmarking system.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: Like a rating, like how Feminist Internet really are you?

Speaker 2: And try and get that across all websites.

Speaker 1: Get it into the culture of the companies that produce platforms and technologies.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: So.

Speaker 2: So Google might have a team, almost like data protection teams, they would have a Feminist Internet team?

Speaker 1: Feminist Internet would go into Google and discuss with Google how gender equality could be improved in their organization at various different levels. So whether that's organizational culture, whether it's in the developers bit, whether it's in the MoonShot Factory, wherever it is. But ideally you want Feminist Internet principles to be built into the design processes of companies. And into their recruitment processes, you know the way they treat their workers and things like that. The values can play out in lots of different contexts.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Speaker 1: From the public programs perspective, that's very much about real world engagement and one of the things that we're most concerned with is not just singing to the popular, 'cause it's quite easy for us to reach audiences that are in our immediate vicinity where people are already on board, but the bigger challenge is well how would we get a troll to convert, or how do we reach people that don't self identify as Feminist Internet types, or that think feminism is bullshit or don't understand what Feminist Internet would represent or something like that.

So it's a really, really interesting question, where is Feminist Internet, and a lot of the places I see it are actually real world places.

Speaker 2: Yes, in offices, in-

Speaker 1: Companies, culture, society. On the internet it exists on social media, in our website, but I think it will also exist on in browser versions of technologies that we've booked.

Speaker 2: Yeah, so there could be parts of the internet where Feminist Internet has a place, and then others where it's not so much seen.

Speaker 1: I think it's ... So I think there's a difference between Feminist Internet having a presence on the internet, like a profile, and then spaces on the internet being Feminist Internet. Do you see what I mean?

Speaker 2: I see. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1: So if you imagine that idea of benchmarking companies, you could do the same with the web. You could have a Feminist Internet button instead of a like button where you could ... Content could be labeled as Feminist Internet or the principles of how a website was built could be [crosstalk 00:19:38], do you know what I mean?

But those are different things, and you know in a way, it's very abstract to say it, but I think of Feminist Internet as kind of new internet protocol. It's a way of thinking about the internet as this sort of alternative political imaginary, and that ... It's like take the Californian ideology, where does the Californian Ideology really exist, I mean it's an ideology so it kind of plays out in all different places. It came from Silicon Valley, but its consequences are felt in very abstract ways and in a way that's what you want Feminist

Internet to do as well, you want it to infiltrate from a kind of cultural bottom up perspective.

Speaker 2: So there will be some people who disagree with the ethos of it, of Feminist Internet, and will want to internet to stay as it is, or will want that sense of either capitalist or patriarchal power that the internet is seen to have, so what about those people I suppose, who would disagree with the ethos?

Speaker 1: Yeah, there's always going to be people for whom change is harder to accept, or that aren't going to be motivated by the ethics that you're motivated by, and that is the hardest challenge. Don't really have the answers, but I think you want to strike a balance between tokenistic sense of corporate social responsibility where people'll hire us to tick a gender equality box and then actually changing peoples mindsets which is a much longer term process.

You can make a lot of arguments about why it's better to have women in the workplace than men, [inaudible 00:21:45] and you can make that argument on an economic basis, 'cause it's more productive, going to have a higher turnover, better quality of work if you have them, but whilst that argument is correct and relevant I prefer not only to use that, but also to try to keep communicating the fact that it's not only because it's more productive to have women, that women should be there, it's because it would be more equal. People should be given equal opportunities to take senior positions in technology companies, for the benefit of society, not only for the profit motive.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And I guess another strategy that's really important is making sure that we have Feminist Internet champions that themselves represent a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives and situations. Because sometimes it's just much easier to hear a message from someone that you identify with and there's so many perceptions about feminism and feminists that create a barrier.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Do you think the name Feminist Internet could hinder, because it's not just about feminism, is it? It's about, as you said earlier, all kinds of equalities, could the name in a way alienate the project from certain people?

Speaker 1: Yeah, I think it definitely has the potential. I think it's got a Marmite quality, love it or hate it. I don't love talking about the brand, 'cause it sort of seems overly corporate somehow, but the kind of identify, the visual identity and the name, everything like that, I think it's ... 'Cause of our amazing graphic designer Connor, who's going to talk later, I do think the name and the identity of Feminist Internet has been very central to how much it's taken off.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And so as much as I think that it could alienate audiences, I think it's really carried us very far as well. And I actually quite like having a contentious term, I think it's our

responsibility as a group to articulate what we mean by feminism, and do that fairly straightforwardly upfront so that people can dissolve their prejudices against feminists. I mean, I don't think that there's ... We're not like typical, stereotypical ... Not that there is such a thing, but you know, hopefully we're challenging the idea of what a feminist is as a group.

Speaker 2: Yeah. And then there would be questions of net neutrality and censorship, I thought it was really interesting what you did with the nipples projects against gendered censorship on social media, but are there risks that the Feminist Internet could in its own way be a form of censorship or could it oppose net neutrality in any way?

Speaker 1: How do you mean?

Speaker 2: I suppose if it was to create pockets of the internet where Feminist Internet was active or that button on certain websites, could it jeopardize the neutrality of the internet? Does that make sense?

Speaker 1: I mean, to me net neutrality is about circumventing monopolies over the telecommunication pipeline, like literally the cables, and having an equality of access. Which is something I think Feminist Internet would support. I think in advocating for any cause there's a risk that you can alienate, create some kind of other, I think as long as we remain open and discursive and not militant and inclusive of a lot of very ... As long as we try to integrate a lot of voices into what we're doing, I think we're at less risk of closing down net neutrality.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Hopefully.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I suppose that question just came out of the very strong, I guess it's a movement online of people supporting, especially in America, free speech, no matter what. So despite whether there's hate speech or inequality being free to say and do on the internet what you like comes first for a lot of people.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: So how would you relax those concerns maybe is a better question?

Speaker 1: It's a really good question, and we've ... When we did the digital clinic at the Somerset House one of the presentations from Jelly Luise was about that kind of tension between free speech and censorship, which I think is a really, really core debate, I'm glad that you raised that. Because obviously on the one hand one wants to protect the right to free speech, that's a really fundamental human right, but we're really against online abuse, and I think the question is around who's responsibility we want it to be to moderate what happens on the internet, so at the moment there's a lot of ... If you look at the Facebook moderator guidelines, they're bizarre. And they come with all sorts of weird biases and problematic rules and-

Speaker 2: Could you just name one of those?

Speaker 1: I could go back to the presentation and get you a concrete example. Basically they'll give examples of certain things that should be taken down and other things that should be left on, and when you look at what they decide should be taken down and [inaudible 00:28:44] should be left on it's very skewed. You know, there'll be some guidelines on social media platforms that allow a beheading to stay on, but a picture of a nipple not.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Very bizarre set of conventions being implemented by probably remote laborers who find it difficult to interpret the guidelines. You know, it's a very bizarre set of circumstances.

Speaker 2: Yeah, a bit obscure maybe.

Speaker 1: Very obscure. And full of agenda. And so I think it's about finding a collective responsibility, so it's like well who should moderate the internet? Should it be the platforms, should it be law? Should it be law enforcement? Should it be users? And I think in the end the answer is it should be somehow a balance because communities on the internet are going to self regulate to a certain extent and the law doesn't always ... The law isn't always fast enough to catch up with the [inaudible 00:29:47] of digital media anyway, but I think it's about distributing the responsibility and educating people about that responsibility as well, so that we can do it together rather than saying ... It's like Twitter isn't only responsible for shutting down online abuse, we're kind of all responsible for calling it out, detecting it, working together socially to ... You know.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So ... Sorry I think I've sort of gone off on [crosstalk 00:30:17]-

Speaker 2: No, no, no, I think you did answer that question. What I'm most interested in is, so for say if Wiki Tribune came to Feminist Internet in a years time or whatever and was like, "Okay we want to make Wiki Tribune identify with Feminist Internet." We're a collaborative journalism platform so we have a huge ... It's almost like a social network of writers, anyone can come in and edit and write articles alongside professional journalists, so how would we make it Feminist Internet?

Speaker 1: That's a great question. One of the things that I'm interested in is the issue of labor and workers rights, equal pay and I think the journalism sector is notoriously unfair in terms of compensating people for their labor.

I write for the Huffington Post, it's free, I know I contribute a lot of value as do hundreds of thousands of people that are spending their time doing that shit for free, so I guess what I'd be really interested in discussing with an organization like Wiki Tribune would be how are labor rights ... How do labor rights play out? How are they protected?

What's the gender balance in the journalism sector, how are you guys engaging with that? Is there anything that we could do to fight for that in your corner more?