



**Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 19**  
**“Fat & Sexy with Carina Shero and Jezebelly”**  
**April 22, 2021**

**What would happen if you gave yourself permission to celebrate your body, no matter its size or shape? Burlesque artists Carina Shero and Jezebelly of the Femme FATales discuss burlesque performance, being fat and fabulous, the censorship impact of FOSTA-SESTA, and intersectionality through period costumes.**

**Host: Karen Yates**

**Guests: Carina Shero, Jezebelly**

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Carina Shero

Being on stage, for me, has never been like, Oh no, I don't know, are they gonna like my body? Is this gonna be too much? It's more like, I'm giving the audience the privilege of being able to try on what it's like to not impose societal standards on people.

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation, or relationship style, based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week, I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity. You'll hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates. Today, we talk with fat burlesque artists and models Carina Shero and Jezebelly about their experiences in the public eye. We also explore the impact of censorship restrictions of FOSTA-SESTA, and chat about natural hair. Keep listening.

If you're a Wild & Sublime fan and love what we do, consider joining The Afterglow, our Wild & Sublime community on Patreon. You get a bonus Q&A session with experts every month where you get to ask the questions, my unvarnished audio creator notes, and the sassy Wild & Sublime coffee mug. Plus, in April, all new or established members receive 25% off recurring guest Corrine Diachuk's "Yoga for Sexual

Happiness" course. This fantastic series, with 16 videos and eight pleasure practices, help integrate body, breath, and spirit. Take advantage of this offer by signing up on Patreon as a Wild & Sublime member for as little as \$5 a month. Don't miss this very cool offer that you can do in the comfort of your own home. And if a monthly membership is not your thing, consider throwing a few bucks in the tip jar in appreciation for our work. More info is in the show notes.

Hey folks, welcome to season two, episode 19, "Fat and Sexy." We have had a bunch of people this past week join our Patreon program and contribute to our tip jar, which has been really gratifying, and keeps us going and growing. And speaking of growing, yesterday we hit 5000 downloads. That feels like a total milestone, and I want to thank all the people who have been listening, for getting us to this point.

Today, on this episode from the November 2019 show at Constellation in Chicago, we'll be talking a bit about fat positivity and liberating the fat body from the skinny and white lens of dominant cultural standards of beauty. You'll be hearing from two folks: first fat creator and community maker, model, burlesque performer and photographer Carina Shero. Carina, who is also an Instagram influencer with over a half million followers, is the producer of the Femme FATales burlesque shows. I'll also be interviewing Jezebelly, one of the members of the Femme FATales. In addition to performance, Jezebelly, also known as Iridessence, creates images of herself in historical attire, and in doing so challenges ideas of race and weight in that arena. And for the record, Jezebelly was exploring this long before "Bridgerton." Okay? As someone who was fat for the first three decades of life, I remember thinking during these interviews onstage that I wished like hell I had folks like these in my life during those years to counter the complete non-acceptance I had of my own body. I think you're going to enjoy this segment.

[audience applause]

Carina Shero

Thank you for having me. And hi, everybody that's here.

Karen Yates

[applause] Yes! Love it. Love it, love it, love it. So you told me earlier that you did not make a decision to become a model. That you put some sensual photos up on Tumblr, and in pretty short order photographers were getting in touch with you, and doing all of that. Did this surprise you?

Carina Shero

Yes. And, correction — so photographers did not reach out to me right away. So I started posting about 12 years ago. I started posting on Tumblr photos of me, you know, lingerie and costumes where I was not fully covered. And it was all self-shot. And so for years, I actually only shot photos of myself, because there were no photographers that wanted to shoot fat people, especially not in a more sensual and seductive manner. That's when I realized that there was a demand. You know, I posted these photos on Tumblr, and I started getting all these notes — which is like likes and reblogs — because there were not a lot of other people out there that were my size and posting, themselves in a sensual manner. And after years of doing that, then photographers started reaching out to me. But still not, like, a plethora of photographers. Because I have PCOS, and so I keep gaining weight. So I become, you know, larger and larger as I go. And the larger I become, the less photographers want to work with me, unless it's like, for some kind of artsy freak show, or something like that. So, I wish I had more photographers reaching out to me that were not creepy guys with a camera that have a fetish.

Karen Yates

Okay.

Carina Shero

I forgot your initial question.

Karen Yates

FYI... Okay. So, at a certain point, among many things that you do, you decided, I'm going to start a fat burlesque troupe?

Carina Shero

Yes.

Karen Yates

Femme FATales. And you had success. And my question is — this is what I really want to hear about — it is vulnerable enough, as a performer, to be onstage. It is more vulnerable to take your clothes off onstage. And now you add this whole other layer of being not a typical burlesque dancer look. What was the experience like, ultimately, for you?

Carina Shero

First of all, I want to preface with that, obviously, I have privilege, in that I'm white and cis, and mostly able-bodied. And so we have people in our troupe that have different intersections. And so for them, of course, it is an even larger, revolutionary step to be onstage and share themselves. But for myself, having an entire fat burlesque troupe — and it's in the name, Femme FATales, right? Being on stage, for me, has never been like, Oh, no, I don't know, are they going to like my body? Is this going to be too much? It's more like, I'm giving the audience the privilege of being able to try on what it's like to not impose societal standards on people. And realizing like, Oh, if that person can be sexy... [cheers and applause]

Karen Yates

Wait! I just have to stop. Can you just repeat what you just said? [to audience] I want you guys to think about this, eh?

Carina Shero

Yes. So for me, being on stage is giving the audience the privilege—

Karen Yates

Privilege!

Carina Shero

—Of trying on what it would be like to not adhere to and exist in the tight confines that society imposes on people, and the beauty standards that are imposed on people. Because really, we're all perfect. And we've had a mis-education that teaches us that there's something wrong with our bodies, when really, there's nothing wrong with anybody. We're all perfect.

Karen Yates

Right. Yeah. Right on. Absolutely. So, fatphobia is everywhere. We've discussed it. It's beyond available clothing size — it's systemic.

Carina Shero

Yes. And it literally kills people. I mean, having your doctor refuse you diagnosis, or misdiagnose. You can't sign up as a stem cell donor if you're fat, which literally means you're not able to save other people — who might potentially not even be fat — lives.

Karen Yates

And right now, I think 67% of the population is considered overweight. Right?

Carina Shero

Absolutely. So there's this huge donor base that they're not even tapping into, solely based on fatphobia.

Karen Yates

Okay. So in the face of that, and the haters and what have you, I know your body confidence is very high. But in the face of haters and the system, I actually really want to know, on a daily basis, how do you restore center? How do you come back to balance? How do you find yourself? How do you get back to confidence?

Carina Shero

That's an interesting question. Because I feel like confidence is now something that I have to seek out. It's more like having patience with the fact that a majority of society has not caught up yet. Because I'm just truly fat and free. And like I said, it's a miseducation that people have, that there could be something fundamentally wrong with a body. And I have the knowledge that like, we're actually all perfect. So it's not something you have to like, come back to. It's just like, Oh, I just need to be patient with people that need to unlearn everything society has taught them. And it's not really — like, the word "haters" for me doesn't really ring true. It's more of — people have forever been taught that they have power over people that they see as less than. And so when it comes to bodies, when people see somebody, and they think, Oh, this person is fat, for instance, so I'm better than them, because I'm less fat, or I'm thin. And when you take that power away from them, when you educate them on the reality of the matter — that really your opinion doesn't mean anything about me. Whether it's a good or a bad opinion, your opinion is null. It has nothing to do with me over here. And so, when you know that, it's really just like waiting for people to catch up to that. So there's no haters, it's just, you just don't know yet. And you're maybe mad that I don't let your opinion over me have power.

Karen Yates

I'd like to continue the conversation with another member of the Femme FATales, a dancer and producer in her own right, who will be performing later. Let's bring on Jezebelly. Yeah! Woohoo! [audience clapping]

As part of the the Femme FATales, and a burlesque dancer in general, what has struck you, listening to Carina? And what's your experience of being onstage and being vulnerable? And being a plus-size dancer?

Jezebelly

Well, first of all, I want to thank you for having me as well. What is my experience? I would say — in being vulnerable... I don't feel vulnerable...?

Karen Yates

That's great! I love it!

Jezebelly

I feel at my most powerful when I'm on stage, actually. Most of the vulnerability would come from like, an issue maybe with a costume. Like if I feel like something's gonna pop out. and I'm gonna get in trouble, and get in trouble with the venue, that sort of thing. But otherwise, I would say on stage is one of the places I feel the most alive, and at home, and present to what is happening, here and now.

Karen Yates

And was it a leap for you? Was there a moment of leaping into it?

Jezebelly

Not so much. I grew up performing. I actually did praise dance as a kid. So I'm stripping on stage now. [audience laughs] I like to make that joke a lot. But I'm used to performing. And there's always the rush of right before — you know, when you're about to go on, the jitters and the nerves and whatnot. But I find actually being on the stage, it just starts to go away. And I feel like, there's so much going on, and so much that I have to think about when I get onstage, that I'm not thinking about like, what is the audience gonna think of my body? What is my body gonna look like? It's like, I need to remember my music, and things like that. So I feel like in a way, it's actually very relieving for me, because that's the one thing I don't have to focus on.

Karen Yates

Okay. Jezebelly on her Instagram, which is @iridessence, has some amazing historical costuming. And you do a ton of historical hair styling, which is really awesome, if you're into historical hair and things like that, like I am. How did you get into the historical movement, if you will? How did that happen?

Jezebelly

Well, it started with just historical spaces and fashion being a huge aesthetic interest of mine, especially seeing those things in cinema, but never seeing people that looked like me in those films. Both the intersection of like, my size and my weight. So right now — this is, this is a wig — but I have natural hair.

Karen Yates

[whispers] Don't tell them!

Jezebelly

No, I'm fine. This is a wig, y'all. It looks great. But I have natural hair. And for those of you who might not know, having natural hair as a Black woman is like, it's a big thing to do. You know, we're raised relaxing — literally, well, we call it relaxing. But it's literally breaking down the structure of our hair to make it appear straighter and looser, because of European beauty standards and whatnot. And so for me, it felt really important to use my own hair, like to experiment and be able to achieve what I felt like was a historical kind of adaptation or version of these styles, I would see without having to destroy my hair to get to that point. Or even without having to, like, heavily manipulate. There's a lot of styles I'll do where I'll have my my still very tightly coiled natural texture in it, and I want that to be not something like, Oh, we need to smooth down these edges, we need to make this look a certain way. Like, no, my hair is good as it is. And so, bringing that into a historical context — if you look online, it's almost impossible. You'll find like, two results in the entirety of the Internet of like, somebody doing a Marie Antoinette hairstyle on natural hair without heat. Literally, I'm the first person in history to, like, do that, [audience applause] and make it accessible to others. Because I know people are doing it, but it's a lot of work to make tutorials and things like that. And it doesn't feel like a big thing sometimes, but then people are like, I literally can't find anywhere else to do this. Can you make more? And it's a lot of work, but it's worth it at the end of the day.

Karen Yates

Cool. So, let's talk about your newest creation. Coming in 2020 is the Essence of Glamour — you're going to be producing Essence of Glamour, a vintage-inspired classic burlesque lounge keying on under-represented bodies. Can you tell us a little about that?

Jezebelly

Yes, I can! Oooh... So in 2020, I'm doing a show, basically. And what you will see later is how much I enjoy rhinestones... [audience laughter] And classic aesthetics within burlesque. And I wanted to have an entire show of that kind of vibe, but not make it necessarily exclusive to, but just definitely emphasizing people of color, people of size, people of trans experience, people of varying levels of disability, and that sort of thing. So a lot of those shows that have like, that high glamour kind of vintage aesthetic, are primarily white and thin. Or they're not curated by me, so they're just, you know...

Karen Yates

They're boring. Boring shit, right? [laughter]

Carina Shero

Irrelevant!

Jezebelly

A lot of them are very beautiful work, and I know a lot of thinner performers, and a lot of white performers who are also very supportive, and they're like, this is a thing that we see so much, but we don't get to see different kinds of bodies doing it. So I wanted to have that be a show where basically in the lineup, there's not a single person who's like thin and white and cis. My ethos with that is that if you're going to be that, you really need to go out of your way to impress me. Because this show is for people like me, and for me. So...

Karen Yates

Yes! [applause]

[to podcast audience] We'll return with more of this interview in a moment. Wild & Sublime is also sponsored in part by our Sublime Supporter, Chicago-based Full Color Life Therapy, therapy for all of you, at [fullcolorlifetherapy.com](http://fullcolorlifetherapy.com). If you would like to be a Sublime Supporter, showcasing you and your business and supporting us at the same time, contact us at [info@wildandsublime.com](mailto:info@wildandsublime.com).

Now we return to our interview with Carina Shero, where she talks a little bit about FOSTA-SESTA, the 2018 legislation that originally attempted to curb sex trafficking, but is now routinely used to censor free speech involving sex on the internet.

[in front of live audience] Okay, to wrap us up, Carina, I want to ask you — the last time I was on stage, I talked a little bit about FOSTA-SESTA, the act designed to curb sex trafficking, the federal act that's had a terrible effect on the internet around censorship and what have you. Can you briefly chat a little bit about that around — I know, I know — fat activists, and being shut down, and the shadow banning that's happening.

Carina Shero

So in the essence of time, basically any kind of marginalized group is being censored on Instagram, and of course Facebook, which owns Instagram. And especially if you're an activist of any kind, speaking out about the experience of any kind of marginalized group. So I'm going to speak really quick about specifically fat people.

About three months ago, Instagram acknowledged in a sit-down meeting with the APAG union that they have a bot that's built into the algorithm that measures the skin-to-clothing ratio. Which means, the fatter you are as a person, the more skin surface you have. So it's inherently fatphobic, having this bot built into the algorithm, and which is why fat folks are disproportionately targeted by the censorship. So I have photos removed where I'm in like, jean shorts, a button-down t-shirt and a little cowgirl hat, but I have my leg up and you can see my thigh. And so they're measuring the amount of skin that's on my thigh, and to them, it's like, oh, you have to be naked, of course, because there's so much skin showing! But actually, I'm just super fat! It's really, really frustrating, because a lot of fat folks make their living online, including myself. And I'm not able to get brand deals, sponsorships, or anything like that, because my engagement is really low, because the algorithm actively pushes me lower. I have not showed up in a single hashtag for three years. I constantly have Instagram deleting followers of mine. I'll have a photo removed, and then 1000 followers are just gone, within five minutes. I can't run any promotions, I can't promote any of my sites where people could buy my photos or my videos, I've been deleted seven times. This is my seventh account. I've been deactivated twice on this account, and so on and so on. And it really affects people's livelihoods, and also their ability to express themselves and have a platform. And as fat people, especially super fat people, especially people that have big bellies and are not what we call like, "good fatties," and are not like, thicc, but actually are fat everywhere — we don't really have representation in the world. We don't get to be seen as a positive role in a movie. We are not seen in commercials, or in anything in the media, basically. And so social media is the only place where we can represent ourselves the way that we want to represent ourselves. And that's being taken away from us. And we're consistently and constantly being silenced, and told that our bodies go against community guidelines, when they really don't. And you look at thin people constantly posting in tiny little triangle bikinis, or if you go on the Playboy Instagram, there's people that literally just have a little blur over their nipple, and maybe you're holding a lemon over their crotchular region, and that's enough — but me in a bikini, or like I said, jean shorts and a button-down shirt, is somehow too vulgar and hyper-sexualized.

Karen Yates  
Okay.

Carina Shero

Yes. Okay. And that's all because of FOSTA-SESTA. But basically why that's happening is because FOSTA-SESTA was passed. And so the app store now tries to only post

apps that are family friendly, because they want to comply with FOSTA-SESTA. They don't want to be on the hook for anything that's on the site. But like I said, they disproportionately affect [and] censor marginalized people, and they don't actually enact the things that they say they're going to enact when it comes to, you know, privileged, thin, white, cis straight people.

Karen Yates  
Thank you.

Carina Shero  
I tried, I tried! [applause]

Karen Yates  
Now you know!. Thank you, Carina Shero! And Jezebelly, who you will see later! Thank you so much.

[to podcast audience] For more information and fantastic images of Carina Shero and Jezebelly, go to their Instagram links, which are in our show notes. And we will be posting pictures from that November show this week on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, where you can see Jezebelly performing on our show that night. Go to social media @wildandsublime.

Well, that's it for this week's episode. Have a very pleasurable week. Thank you for listening. If you know someone who might be interested in this episode, send it to them. Do you like what you heard? Then give us a nice review on your podcast app. You can follow us on social media @wildandsublime and sign up for newsletters at wildandsublime.com. I'd like to thank associate producer Julia Williams and design guru Jean-Francois Gervais. Theme Music by David Ben-Porat. This episode was edited by The Creative Imposter studios. Our media sponsor is Rebellious Magazine, feminist media, at rebelliousmagazine.com.