

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a bright pink blazer over a white top and black pants, stands in the center of a large, empty theater. She is smiling and looking slightly to her right. The theater has rows of dark purple seats and a balcony with ornate architectural details and a clock in the background.

MARLEE LISS

RSW | Speaker | Survivor | Restorative Justice Advocate

2024
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IT'S GREAT TO MEET YOU! I'M MARLEE LISS

I am an award-winning speaker, survivor advocate, somatic educator and Jewish, lesbian, sparkle-loving feminist. In 2019, my personal sexual assault case made history in the North American justice system, when it became the first to conclude with restorative justice through the courts. I fought for my assailant to go to therapy instead of criminal trial and eventually, we met in an eight-hour circle that was healing beyond what I knew was possible.

After my story was shared on major platforms like Forbes, Huff Post, BuzzFeed and the Mel Robbins Show, I began hearing from thousands of survivors all over the world. Again and again, I heard the words 'I wish I knew about this'. This collective need for awareness and access to alternatives to the punitive system is a major driving force within my work today.

With a background in Social Work (RSW) and Somatic Sex Education, I have shared my story and supported thousands in healing shame and transforming trauma. I was 1 of 25 survivors on an elite panel for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and my story is being made into a documentary directed by Kelsey Darragh.

I've had the honour of speaking at conferences, organizations and campuses globally sharing these messages of violence prevention and healing justice.

WHAT AUDIENCES ARE SAYING

“Listening to Marlee’s story was such a cathartic experience for me. As a survivor, I have never felt so seen in my life. I have been feeling really defeated lately but Marlee’s session helped me reconnect with hope”
– Student, Georgetown U

“Students shared that Marlee was ‘the best presenter they’ve seen in four years at Vanderbilt’ and that her talk ‘changed their lives’. Her language is beautiful and trauma-informed’ – Project Safe Director, Vanderbilt U

“Marlee really showed how empathizing with others is a strength, not a weakness. Thank you for teaching us that it is possible to find closure, to get past the hard things in life and to start to heal” – Student, Fordham U

“I was incredibly moved by Marlee’s keynote. After listening, I feel empowered to become an advocate for healing justice and to practice restorative principles in my work and every day life” – Lawyer, Support Survivors Conference

BuzzFeed News

Daily Mail

THE Mel ROBBINS SHOW

Forbes

CBC news

HUFFPOST

Ms.
MORE THAN A MAGAZINE. A MOVEMENT

CTV NEWS

PAPER

KEYNOTE ONE:

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR SEXUAL HARM: WHY I FOUGHT FOR A CIRCLE, NOT A COURTROOM

In 2019, Marlee's sexual assault case became the first in North America to conclude with restorative justice through the courts. She fought for the man who raped her to go to therapy instead of criminal trial and eventually, they met in an eight-hour restorative circle. After sharing with the media, she began receiving thousands of messages from survivors who shared their stories and the many reasons they wished they had known about Restorative Justice. Marlee takes a vulnerable and educational approach to talking about this alternative to the punitive system. In an environment rooted in hope and empowerment, listeners learn about breaking cycles of harm while challenging the notion of a 'one size fits all' approach to justice.

By the end of this program, participants will be able to:

- Define Restorative Justice and illustrate it's principles of trauma-informed care, needs-based communication and survivor-centred practice
- Analyze the ways in which a punitive framework may impede survivor's capacity to reclaim agency, boundaries, justice and consent
- Describe diverse and intersectional justice options for survivors which recognize that people who experience harm are not a monolith
- Build a vision of justice that is synonymous with healing thereby lessening the likelihood of secondary victimization



KEYNOTE TWO:

DOES CANCEL CULTURE WORK? HUMANE STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO HARM

Cancel culture involves public campaigns to shame and shun those deemed 'problematic' and in 2024, it's more pervasive than ever. Both on and off social media, individuals are impacted by call-outs, pressure to cut off loved ones and fear of cancellation. Research shows that cancel culture has a severe impact on our mental health, driving shame, anxiety, groupthink, self-censorship and isolation. In this program, attendees are provided a non-judgmental space to unpack the impacts of cancel culture, consider its' effectiveness and learn non-punitive strategies for harm response. As we unpack pop culture case studies and learn about the roots of carceral frameworks, participants will explore whether punishment really does prevent violence. By the end of the session, participants will formulate a vision of inclusive community that works to disrupt shame and ignite healing.

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Define and analyze 'cancel culture' while upholding anti-oppressive values
- Formulate trauma-informed strategies for accountability in ways that centre survivors and de-escalate violence
- Apply conflict transformation strategies within nuanced situations
- Challenge individualized understandings of behaviour by contextualizing harm through a socio-cultural lens



“Continuous scrutiny and public shaming can erode an individual's self-worth and sense of value.”

-Sedona Sky Academy

“Shame, isolation and exposure to violence are shown to be the biggest drivers of violence”

-Danielle Sered,
Until We Reckon



TRAINING SESSION:



TRAUMA-INFORMED & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACHES TO SEXUAL HARM

This is a 1-3 hour interactive training recommended and previously delivered for: Faculty members, title IX offices, lawyers, judges, government officials, police, security, nurses, public health workers, educators and more.

In part 1, participants will: A) Hear a first-hand account of Restorative Justice after sexual harm and it's comparison to the criminal legal system, B) Learn to distinguish between restorative and punitive processes, C) Learn the roots of Restorative Justice in pre-colonial societies, D) Engage in group discussion around the most common misperceptions and biases against Restorative Justice. I.e. 'Is Restorative Justice too soft on crime?', 'What about public safety?', 'What if the perpetrator doesn't take accountability?' and 'Do survivors really want Restorative Justice?'

In part 2, participants will: A) Examine trauma-informed practices to support survivors navigating diverse experiences of justice, B) Reflect on their own relationship to accountability and potential carceral bias, C) Learn somatic skills to support victim's regulation and to safeguard triggers when responding to harm, D) Learn to apply a needs-based approach to communication in order to embody principles of consent



"I work in the DA's office and hope to become a sexual assault prosecutor one day. This really opened my mind to how Restorative Justice can be used to support survivors & give them more of a voice"

-Trauma & Recovery Con

"It is estimated that less than one per cent of sexual assaults experienced by women lead to an offender being convicted"

-Canadian Women's Foundation



WORKSHOP ONE:

THE SEX ED WE NEED: CONSENT, BOUNDARIES, INCLUSION & TRAUMA-INFORMED PLEASURE

Instead of letting silence and stigma persist around taboo topics, Marlee creates a safe and lighthearted environment to break through shame and claim empowerment. Together, participants will challenge societal sexual scripts in order to diversify and enhance access to pleasure. Folks will deepen their understanding of consent as an embodied, everyday practice that opposes rape culture and prevents violence. Attendees will learn somatic skills that support effective communication of desires and boundaries while building rejection resilience.

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Define pleasure-positivity while challenging risk-focused and shame-based approaches to sex education
- Criticize ableist and cis-heteronormative narratives around consent and sex education
- Create experiences of connection and intimacy that embody trauma-informed care, holistic safety and consensual communication



WORKSHOP TWO:

LGBTQIA+ SEX ED: DIVERSIFYING CONSENT & QUEERING PLEASURE

Within the context of sex-negativity, homophobia, transphobia and rape culture, it's all too common to hold shame and confusion around sexuality. In this program, Marlee shares her personal journey of questioning sexuality after trauma and eventually, coming out as lesbian. In this interactive session, shaped by trauma-informed language and somatic grounding, participants learn why we need queer-centred sex education. Attendees will explore historic and modern-day barriers while learning about gender-affirming language and diverse expressions of desire.

**Typically open to LGBTQIA+ identified folks and allies.*

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Define cis-heteronormative sexual scripts and compare them to authentic desires and boundaries
- Apply trauma-informed care, holistic sexual safety and gender-affirming language to experiences of connection and intimacy
- Develop a more empowered relationship to sexuality by unpacking compulsory heterosexuality and building communication skills



“Marlee created a safe space for vulnerability and deep learning. I left her Queer Consent Education workshop with not only valuable information but also with hope in my heart”

-Student, Niagara College

“Fewer than five percent of LGBT students have health classes that included positive representations of LGBT-related topics”

-CDC



WORKSHOP THREE

FROM DISSOCIATION TO EMBODIED SAFETY: SOMATIC SKILLS TO MOVE THROUGH TRAUMA RESPONSE

In the aftermath of trauma, it's common for survivors to experience hypervigilance, dissociation, a sense of urgency and many other distressing responses. In this interactive and survivor-led program, participants will be given a trauma-informed space to learn about trauma responses from a somatic lens. We will explore the function behind each response in order to cultivate self-compassion, autonomy and choice. Marlee will share a first-hand account of reclaiming embodied safety after trauma while supporting participants in building a personalized trigger plan. Within this context, folks will explore the power of co-regulation and community-based healing.

**Recommended for survivors, service providers and supporters.*

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Analyze cultural and systemic factors contributing to stress
- Describe fight, flight, freeze, fawn and other responses
- Formulate somatic strategies to move through trauma responses with a sense of agency and choice
- Criticize capitalist narratives that oppose rest in order to recognize the radical nature of decompression



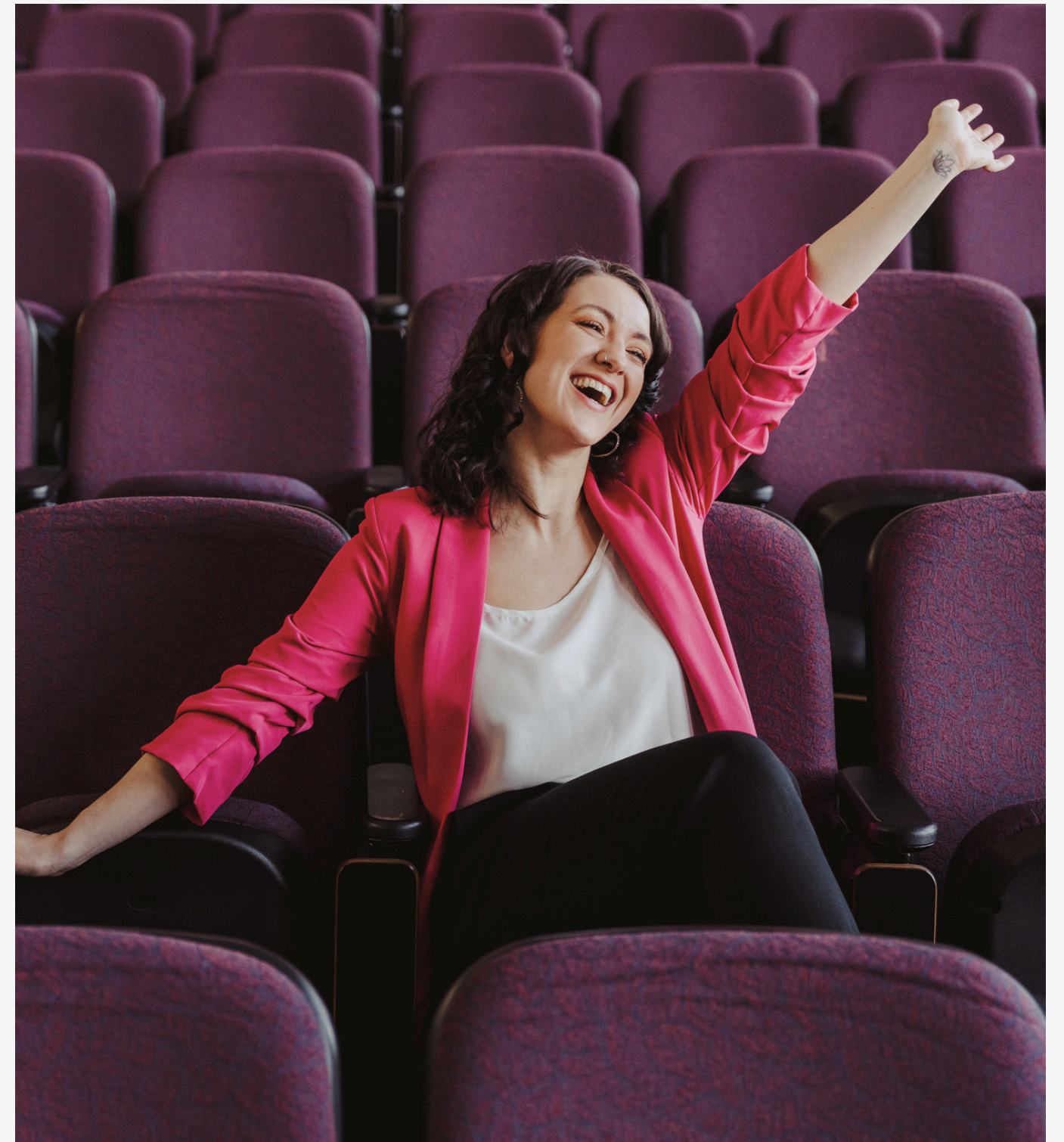
WORKSHOP FOUR:

RECLAIMING PLEASURE: A SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACH

It's rare for survivors to have safe spaces to talk about reclaiming pleasure after trauma. However, research shows that survivors frequently express a struggle to reclaim their sexuality alongside a desire to do so. In this program, we create a trauma-informed and interactive space to understand the need for survivor-centred pleasure education. Participants will be able to define common trauma responses that impact our relationship to sexuality (ie. hypersexuality, hyposexuality). Through somatic teachings, participants will be empowered to reconnect with pleasure in ways that feels safe and accessible.

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Criticize societal sexual scripts that are typically habitual and reflective of rape culture
- Build associations between pleasure, safety and authentic desire
- Create a trigger plan and learn practices for trauma-informed intimacy (can be applied with the self and/or with partners)
- Communicate desires and boundaries from an embodied place
- Develop a version of mindful self-pleasure that supports the reclamation of body trust



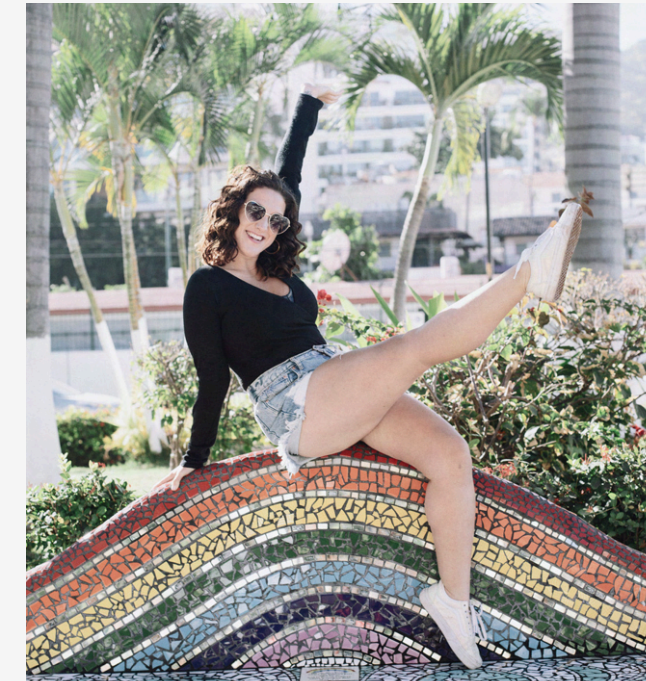
WORKSHOP FIVE:

TRANSFORM TRAUMA & RECLAIM PLEASURE: FOR LGBTQIA+ SURVIVORS AND ALLIES

The journey of survivorhood as a 2SLGBTQIA+ person can feel lonely and isolating. Often, we navigate survivor support services that speak a cis-heteronormative language and don't reflect unique barriers and needs. In this queer-led, survivor-led session, participants will dive into conversation on reclaiming pleasure through inclusive somatic frameworks. Participants will be supported in redefining pleasure in a way that feels empowering and accessible. Together, we will explore related trauma responses and build a vision of expressed pleasure that is as diverse and vibrant as the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

By the end of this program, participants will be able to,

- Identify barriers to supports that are specific to LGBTQIA+ survivors
- Compare and contrast parallels between survivorhood and queerness
- Modify definitions of pleasure and intimacy in order to enhance LGBTQIA+ experience and accessibility
- Break down compulsory heterosexuality in order to rebuild safety within pleasure
- Build skills for trauma-informed and gender-affirming intimacy



Statistics make it clear that 2SLGBTQIA+ community is one of the most at risk groups for gender-based violence

“As a Queer survivor of sexual assault, I felt alone in my experience of reclaiming pleasure. But Marlee provided an empowering roadmap to communicate my needs. I felt seen and heard in her workshop”

–Student, U of Toronto



PREVIOUS SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS



Campuses: Vanderbilt University, University of Oregon, Georgetown University, University of San Francisco, Winthrop University, Fordham University, Barnard College-Columbia University, Boston Collegiate Charter School University of Toronto, Mount Allison University, Seneca College, Humber College, Mohawk College, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University, University of Guelph, Concordia University, Fanshawe College, Niagara College, Université de Montreal, Simon Fraser University, University of Regina, University of Guelph-Humber and more.

Conferences: Annual Clery Lecture Series, National Sexual Assault Conference, Action Trauma Conference, Justice as Trauma Conference, NOVA 50th Annual Conference, Trauma & Recovery Conference, National Restorative Justice Symposium, Women's Mental Health Conference at Yale, Consent Conference by the Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity, Supporting Survivors Conference by Ellis-Gluckstein Lawyers, Dis(Closure) Conference with Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre and the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Transforming Trauma Conference with the Gatehouse, etc.

Organizations & Brands: Wisp Sexual Healthcare, Journey Project Newfoundland, Women's Support Network York Region, Action Now Atlantic, Safe Passage & Catawba Nation, Justice Options for Women, WomenatthecentrE, Durham Rape Crisis Centre, PEI Human Rights Commission, CHW Toronto Shoshana Chapter, CJVAC, Valor US, Lanark County Community Justice, US Military SAPRO and more.



Panelist Participation & Creative Collaboration

Beyond the programs listed here, Marlee is also happy to participate as a panelist at events. Additionally, we are glad to work with you to customize programs that may best fit your community's needs.



International In-Person & Virtual Programming

Marlee is glad to offer international in-person programming as well as virtual options. We are here to work together to determine the most impactful and accessible format for your event(s).



Social Media Training & Content Creation

Working together means we will happily support with social media promotion. Beyond this, Marlee has extensive experience with ethical social media strategy and content creation. If you're interested in social media specific collaboration or training, let us know!

INTERESTED IN CREATING AN IMPACT TOGETHER? LET'S CONNECT!


EMAIL OUR TEAM, FILL OUT OUR [ENQUIRY FORM](#) OR [SET UP A CALL](#) FOR MORE INFORMATION. WE ARE ALWAYS GLAD TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS, ADDRESS CONCERNS, PROVIDE QUOTES & DREAM UP CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS TO BEST FIT YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Website : www.marleeliss.com

Email : admin@marleeliss.com

Schedule a 1-1 Call with our team:
connectwithmarlee.youcanbook.me/



A woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a bright pink blazer over a white top, is smiling and speaking at a podium. A small microphone is clipped to her blazer. Behind her is a large presentation screen displaying a slide with a circular portrait of her and some text. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on her.

"Start by visioning and acting towards a world that makes healing and justice synonymous"

-Marlee Liss