



Marlee Liss | @marleeliss

# Speaker, Somatic Educator, Survivor & Justice Advocate

*"Beautiful, trauma-informed and relevant. Attendees told me that her session changed their lives." - Sexual Misconduct Prevention & Response Director at Vanderbilt University*



Marlee's sexual assault case made history in the North American Justice system as the first to conclude with restorative justice through the courts. Since then, her work has been featured in Forbes, Huff Post, BuzzFeed, the Mel Robbins Show, CTV News, and more. With her background in social work and somatic sex education, she has supported thousands in learning LGBTQIA+ Inclusive consent education, principles of restorative justice and tools for healing after trauma.

As an award-winning speaker, Marlee has delivered talks for: National Restorative Justice Symposium, Fordham School of Law, University of Toronto, National Sexual Assault Conference, Trauma & Recovery Conference, Georgetown University and more. Marlee was 1 of 25 survivors on an elite panel for the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence informing federal policy. Her story was made into a documentary directed by Kelsey Darragh and will be premiering internationally on a major streaming network. Keep reading to learn about her workshops, keynotes and training.

# Keynote 1: 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 8-hour restorative circle. After sharing with the media, her inbox began filling with thousands of messages from survivors sharing their stories and why they wish they had known about alternatives to the punitive system, like restorative justice.

Marlee takes a vulnerable and educational approach to talking about this alternative to the punitive system. The focus throughout the program is to inspire folks to create a vision of justice that is synonymous with healing through informative storytelling. In an environment rooted in hope and empowerment, listeners learn about this justice pathway that breaks cycles of harm and ignites cycles of healing.

# Training: Trauma-Informed & Restorative Justice Approaches to Sexual Harm



1-2 hour interactive training recommended and previously delivered for: Faculty members, title IX offices, lawyers, judges, government officials, police and security, nurses, public health workers, educators and more.

## Program Includes:

- Marlee's story of restorative justice after sexual harm
- Distinctions between restorative vs. punitive approaches
- Addressing myths and FAQ's about restorative justice. I.e. Is it too soft on crime? What about public safety? What if perpetrators don't take accountability? Do survivors really want restorative justice?
- Trauma-informed practices to support survivors. I.e. Nervous system regulation from a somatic lens, Survivor-centred approaches and safeguarding triggers, Needs-based communication and diversifying restorative justice



I can't believe how succinctly Marlee summed up the need to focus on what victims want when we know full well the court system doesn't take that into consideration. I already cared about restorative Justice but her accounting and the thoughtfulness really gave me hope for seeing this kind of thing happen for more survivors. My agency and the people in my life WILL be hearing about this!



# Workshop

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## 1. Restorative Justice Integrated: In our Policies, Relationships & Daily Lives

### Participants will:

- Hear briefly about Marlee's experience of restorative justice after sexual assault
- Distinguish between restorative vs. punitive principles
- Explore the need to embody what we're fighting for within movements
- Create a vision of community that works to disrupt cycles of violence and shame
- Integrate restorative justice principles at:
  - The micro level: Exploring ways to make empathy the foundation of relationship
  - The meso level: Learning about restorative practices in schools & communities
  - On social media: Challenging cancel culture and alternatives to public shaming
  - The macro level: Understanding why individuals may want restorative or transformative justice at the criminal legal level
- Learn about the power of accountability, conflict transformation and challenging the notion that anyone is disposable



*Potential Groups to work on campuses: Departments: Criminology, Gender Studies, Psychology, Law, Humanities, Public Health. Groups: LGBTQIA+ Centres, Survivors, Advocacy Networks, Jewish groups, Athletics, faculty trainings, campus security, Title IX or OSV office and more*

# Workshop 2: The Sex Ed we Need: Consent, Inclusion & Pleasure

Format Options: A) LGBTQIA+ Inclusive or B) LGBTQIA+ Centred



Why is this not talked about? I cannot believe I am resonating with this so much and never understood this.



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A) The Sex Ed We Need: LGBTQIA+ Inclusive: Instead of letting silence and stigma persist around taboo topics, Marlee creates a safe and lighthearted environment to break through shame and claim empowerment. Participants will: define pleasure-positivity while challenging risk-focused and shame-based approaches to sex ed, unlearn ableist societal sexual scripts to diversify pleasure, understand consent and build practices for communicating boundaries and desires, build rejection resilience to co-create a culture of consent and learn practices for safer sex and trauma-informed intimacy.

B) Queer Sex Ed: LGBTQIA+ Centred: 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 interactive program, Marlee shares her personal journey of questioning sexuality after trauma and coming out as lesbian. Participants learn about: Why we need queer sex ed, cis-heteronormative sexual scripts verses authentic desires, sexual safety and trauma-informed intimacy, gender-affirming language, communicating boundaries, improving relationship to sexuality by unlearning compulsory heterosexuality

# 3. Nervous System Regulation & Coming out of Freeze

## Participants will...

- Hear Marlee's story of reclaiming embodied safety after sexual trauma
- Learn about cultural factors contributing to stress (ie. patriarchy, capitalism, ableism)
- Redefine relaxation from a somatic lens focused on befriending the body
- Understand functionality behind trauma responses to claim compassionate body trust
- Learn about fight, flight and freeze and tangible ways to safely move through these trauma responses
- Create a plan to navigate triggers
- 5 ways to shift out of dissociation and into embodied presence
- Explore the power of co-regulation and relational healing
- Understand the radical nature of rest





# 4. Reclaiming Pleasure : Survivor-Centered

## Participants are supported in

- Understanding the need for survivor-centred pleasure education
- Redefining pleasure & understanding related trauma responses (ie. hyposexuality and hypersexuality)
- Sifting out authentic desires from societal sexual scripts
- Building associations between pleasure and safety
- Creating a trigger plan and navigating freeze response
- Reclaiming somatic wisdom, communicating desires and boundaries
- Learning practices for trauma-informed intimacy (ie. aftercare)
- Learning mindful self-pleasure practices to reclaim body trust

## 5. Reclaiming Pleasure: For Queer Survivors & Allies

This session brings together survivor-led, queer-centred conversation on reclaiming pleasure through somatic practices. Participants will be supported in redefining pleasure in a way that feels empowering and accessible. We'll explore related trauma responses like freeze, hyposexuality and hypersexuality and share tools for creating trigger plans.

By challenging compulsory heterosexuality, we'll focus on discerning between authentic desire vs. cis-heteronormative societal sexual scripts. Learn practices for queer-inclusive, trauma-informed intimacy and mindful self-pleasure.



This was so amazing!! I learned a lot even when I had been in other spaces talking to survivors I feel like there are a lot of things we don't talk about even within those spaces



# Past Speaking Experience

- Connecticut Women's Consortium: Trauma and Recovery Conference and International Women's Day Event alongside Elizabeth Smart
- Fordham University Committee on Sexual Misconduct: Week of Action
- Georgetown University, Washington, DC
- Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
- Wilfrid Laurier University, Criminology Dept.
- US Military Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Office
- University of Toronto, Criminology Dept.
- National Restorative Justice Symposium
- Mount Allison University and Action Now Atlantic: National Consent Week
- PEI Sexual Assault Awareness Week - PEI Human Rights Commission, Justices & Judges
- Seneca College, Toronto, ON
- Toronto Police Services Sex Crimes Department
- Western University, London, ON
- 1st Prize at Speaker Slam International
- Durham Region and Durham College
- 1 of 25 survivors on an elite panel for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence
- University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
- National Sexual Assault Conference, San Francisco, CA
- Université de Montreal and Dept. of Justice Canada: Victims & Survivors of Crime Week
- Women's Mental Health Conference at Yale University alongside Dominique Jackson

## Testimonials

*"I honestly think that you are one of the best public speakers I've ever heard. I myself am a SA survivor and even though it feels kind of cheesy, I honestly feel changed after hearing you speak. I didn't report because I didn't want to go through a long drawn-out process that wouldn't even have tangible results, but when you explained how your perpetrator said "I'm sorry for sexually assaulting you. I would do anything to take it back but I can't" it really hit me. I just want to thank you for all that you do. The way you told your story was so incredibly powerful." - Molly, Vanderbilt U*

*"The amount of shame & self-hatred I was able to dissolve from this program was huge. I feel like I can start to build a more loving relationship with my body After years of sexual trauma & continued unhealthy partnerships - I can finally start to understand my worth." - Karah, U of T*

*"Thank you Marlee for teaching me lessons I simply could not learn in the classroom. One huge takeaway I got from listening to you speak, is that when something terrible happens to you, you owe it to yourself to engage in meaningful, long-lasting healing. Thank you for showing me what justice really is, for pointing out the ways in which our criminal justice system is failing and the related things I want to change within myself. Above all thank you for being so brave. Without your courage I would still be in the dark, but you showed me the way out." - Brayden, Fordham U*





# What Clients are Saying



**Cara Tuttle** · 1st

Director, Project Safe Center for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response and Senior Lecturer at Vanderbilt University; Author of *Drowning in Timidity: Women, Politeness, and the Power of Assertive Living*

June 1, 2023, Cara was Marlee's client

We recently invited Marlee Liss to facilitate three workshops on our college campus as part of our April Sexual Assault Awareness Month programming. She is incredible! I have heard so much positive feedback following her visit, although the word "positive" doesn't fully capture the energy and enthusiasm accompanying that feedback. Students told me that Marlee was "the best presenter they've seen in four years at Vanderbilt" and that her workshop "changed their lives." Marlee is so prepared for the work she is doing. Her language is beautiful and trauma-informed and relevant. She tailors her approach to her audience. Her workshops were highly rated by students, faculty, and staff alike. She directly connected with our campus safety, housing, and sexual misconduct professionals, while uplifting the work of victim advocates and reinforcing the agency of survivors. I will definitely be bringing Marlee to my campus again, and I cannot overstate my recommendation for you to bring her to yours. Truly just incredible!



**Colette Anderson** · 1st

Executive Director at The Connecticut Women's Consortium

June 2, 2023, Colette was Marlee's client

I feel so fortunate to have had the honor to hear Marlee present on 2 occasions for The Connecticut Women's Consortium. The first time was at our Trauma and Recovery Conference in October of 2022. Her presentation about her personal experience and how she used restorative justice kicked off our 3 day event. There was a standing ovation.

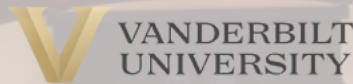
She then spoke on International Women's Day in March 2023 and did a completely different presentation about using trauma principles in recovery. She followed Elizabeth Smarts who talked about her abduction and sexual abuse. Marlee's talk help the audience see that recovery is possible. I will be bringing her back to CT. She is such a pleasure to work with.

# Thank You

Looking forward to creating an impact with you! Note:  
Custom programs are available for your community's  
benefit.

Examples include: consent education for athletes, justice  
from a jewish lens, panel events, survivor workshop series  
and more. please enquire about rates.

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