

Better Practices for Safer Spaces #4

*Below you can read a full transcription of the interview by [Olave Nduwanje](#) with **Marnie Slater and Claire Gilder of Mothers and Daughters** about safer spaces.*

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Marnie: My name is Marnie Slater. I'm a white cis gendered nonconforming lesbian woman. I originally come from Aotearoa in New Zealand and I've been living in Europe for more years than I can count now. I'm originally trained and am still practising as a visual artist. I have a solo practice, but I also have a few collaborations that I love dearly and that keep me alive. One of them is Mothers and Daughters, which is the context in which I'm here, I think. And the other is Buenos Tiempos, Int, which is a project I run with Alberto Garcia del Castillo.

Claire: My name is Claire. I am originally from London in the UK. I've been in Belgium, Brussels, for six years now. I work as an advisor. In my own time, I'm very much a cook and a baker. I love that that's my escape. I love to bake. This is what I do. And I am here in the context of Mothers and Daughters. I'm a new member, joined last year just before Corona. Actually, I think we only had one physical meeting. But I'm also part of an abolitionist reading group and I thought a lot about that when I read your questions. I'm a black woman from the UK. I also identify as a lesbian at the moment. And that's it. That's me.

Olave: Tell me about Mothers and Daughters? What is Mothers and Daughters, where does it come from?

Marnie: The full name of the project is Mothers and Daughters, Lesbian and Trans Bar. And well, I mean, right now, things are not what they are in the corona context, but in a normal year, Mothers and Daughters is a bar space that opens for two months a year. It's a collective of 13 amazing people. Originally, it started in 2017 when a cultural space in Brussels invited "Girls like Us" magazine. At that point, I was part of the editorial crew of the magazine. The space invited us to do some kind of program in their bar for their "future is feminist" season. And we, Jessica Gysel and I, had been talking for years about how there was no lesbian bar in Brussels and how we wanted there to be one. So we said to this cultural center, we don't want to program a film in your bar. We want your bar, please. And after some negotiations, they said yes. So for three nights in December 2017, this bar became a lesbian bar. Beginnings that had a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of love and a lot of energy, but also a lot of naivety, of course. And in those three nights in 2017, we were completely blown away by the audience, the energy, the diversity of the audience, the size of the audience, the pleasure of the audience. And this was really something I don't think we expected at all. In the end, we were invited to open the bar for two months during Pride. And at that point, we had already been talking together about somehow doing the bar again with the acknowledgement together that **as three white cis gendered lesbian women of a certain privilege, we did not represent the audience that clearly wanted to be in the in the bar. So when we were invited to do it again, the first thing we did was to make the team larger, more diverse, more representative of the audience that came to the first bar in 2017.**

Olave: Let me ask about that choice to enlarge the organizers' team. Was that in any way connected to the idea of creating a safer space at all, or was that just because you needed more representation? Then they end up getting volunteers who actually are part of the marketing plan.

Marnie: I totally understand. It's also good to be really honest by saying that we realized when we were doing the bar in 2017 that we needed more hands on deck. So it really was about **making it safer for us in terms of our energy levels**, but definitely about both an intuition and a conscious discussion point about the structure of that organization, that should **include the people that are represented** by that organization. But **also about the way people are paid, the way that time works**, ... You start to realize that if all these things are not coming from a queer and feminist place, the project will not be a queer and feminist project.

Olave: High ideals. I'm just curious how in the beginning there was a huge demand for this and an energy and a love and a joy and a pleasure for it. And it's now four years later and you still have people coming in as new members. So, Claire, was that your thing that you were like, I love this so much, let me go and help out? Is that momentum still happening?

Claire: Do you know what, I was actually invited to be a part of the collective. And I remember the day I was sitting down with Mia, who is another member of the collective and a very dear friend. And at the end of the lunch, she had something to ask: Would you like to join Mothers and Daughters? There was a lot of love and joy in the iteration that took place the previous summer in Rue Haute. I spent a lot of time there. I think I spent most of my time there. We cooked and had workshops. And **it was just a joyous space to be a part of**. And so for me, this was the driving force. I think that corona came and shook things up, in a way that really encouraged a lot of growth, at least in myself, I think. Because **coming into something as a new person, no matter how welcoming and kind and wonderful everybody is, when you're going through being in a pandemic and having to organize everything online and still be expected to work at the same pace in your regular everyday job and then still be expected to keep in touch with people, there's just a lot of different things that pile on top of each other**. And I think that makes it difficult to keep the energy levels where they need to be. I don't know about you, but I found new relationships in the past year and a half so hard to cultivate, because there's so many others to feed. Where do you get all of this energy from when you're not getting any of the natural charge? And for me, one of the most energizing aspects of Mothers and Daughters, prior to joining the collective as part of the organization, was being around other people. It was the different things that I got to experience that you just didn't have anywhere else in Brussels. I think the love and joy is definitely still there. But I would say that energy is a little bit low.

Olave: Yeah, I think it's in relation to just the amount of energy that we're all expanding in ways that are really invisible. **People expect us to work at the same level of output, but the pandemic is making everything harder and longer to do**, even going to the grocery store. You know, you could be waiting outside for a very long time. You don't really know for sure. The procedures of getting from one space to the other,

washing your hands, the disinfecting things and whatnot. That is secretly taking our energy slowly away, I think. We underestimate how exhausting things are. It's not so much that the energy is not there. The longer this takes, the harder it gets. So I can totally understand that it gets just harder to manage all that. But I just wonder, one of the questions that Marnie indicated that I had difficulty with was the question: "if I wasn't part of Mothers and Daughters, would I think of Mothers and Daughters as the safest place I knew?" And why? Maybe we could just talk about that, with one of the newcomers and one of the founders? How they relate to the space and the community around it, as well as in it. And safety. I want to reflect on that. Claire, you start, you're the new one.

Claire: Yeah, definitely, I did view it as a safe space. I actually have here a little bit of memorabilia, I'm holding an eight five piece of yellow card that says Dear Allies, Dear Friends and the title, and it just outlines at Lightship. We should also do a shout out to Robin Brettar, the person who wrote the flyer. We love them. So it says: our ship is invaluable to us and we are super thankful for the work some of you are doing on behalf of our communities. This is why we want to welcome everyone to our bar and don't work with a door policy based on gender and or sexuality. **Nevertheless, we would like to underline that this space is primarily for lesbian women where we are the majority and not just accepted exception.** As we understand it, being a good ally means that you do not come to this place to watch us or out of curiosity, you do not make comments about what you think about lesbians. This also implies that we do not need to hear you say how great you think lesbians are. We know this already. **You are careful about how you and your fellow ally friends occupy our space.** If you notice that the bar is getting crowded and people are not able to enter, give room to your lesbian friends and come back at a more quiet moment. The same applies to when you notice that the percentage of men in the space is getting higher, threatening to make the focus on lesbian women invisible. You intervene when someone disrespects one of these guidelines. And then it **goes on to say that more info on how to be a good ally and it thanks people for their support. And walking into the bar and seeing this, I feel like so many spaces would be so much better if you just outlined this initially.**

Claire: And I was really very touched by that. Because in the different spaces that I've been in, they just tend to be a bit more of a commercial venture. I'm from London. We only have one lesbian bar. I was very touched by the effort expended to make that

space safer for everybody, not just for the people that it was like primarily for. It's an invitation to learn and an invitation to be a part of this space in a constructive way. It's giving people the tools that they need. I do know I feel like that is just something that for me is part of being safe. How do we make everybody feel as though they can participate, because it's only together that we're strong? And I think something that I struggled with for a long time and something that I found really brilliant about Mothers and Daughters was that there is this collectivity that transcends certain identity limits, you know? I think that's still the case.

And here is something I forgot to mention earlier. There was always someone at the door at Mothers and Daughters, but not for obnoxious policing, in an oppressive way. I think this is really important. **As soon as you don't allow people to self identify, you are just replicating the oppressive structures that we live in every day.**

Marnie: It's the replication of the idea that there are borders. As if I will know when I am trans when a letter will arrive in the mail. This is a fantasy. The idea that somebody who doesn't know you can define that border for you. How is that even possible for someone to think that they can do that? You know, Mothers and Daughters also got feedback in the past about our space not being safe. But in that way, I learned and continue to learn. But I imagine myself in Mothers and Daughters not as an organizer. I don't decide whether it is safe or not, I can't put myself in that position. I was part of the group that started the space. So, in preparation for this conversation, I was thinking about moments where I've learned about the needs of others that are not my own needs. For example, **Mothers and Daughters is the first clear project I worked on where I thought about wheelchair access. I remember in 2017 somebody came up to me at 1:00 in the morning and said, these lights give me a migraine. What can you do about that? And I had never thought about how certain lighting systems would trigger a migraine response because it's not something that I experienced myself. I don't find these insulting moments. I have to honor them.**

Olave: But we've all seen the reaction where people are told that somebody hates this kind of lighting or that the space is not accessible, or that something doesn't make me feel safe. And the people react to it as a personal attack. We've seen that, but where does that come from? Can you theorize on that? Have you ever seen it in Mothers and Daughters? How can we help people sort of avoid that trap?

Marnie: **Maybe there's a deep human need to be right.** I don't know if this comes from education systems or the patriarchy. I don't know that. If somebody articulates an experience that you didn't account for, **people can feel judged about not being right. And I feel for that.** I really do. I think that **shame and judgment can make you feel really upset.**

Olave: I was part of a group that organized something and we would have moments where people would tell us that something wasn't safe. And I remember that my first thought would be that you have no idea how hard we've worked to make it safe. **The first thing I would feel when somebody complained, was that you don't see how hard we worked.** And I want to be acknowledged first of how hard we work.

Marnie: **People share this information with you because they love the thing that you're doing.** You don't put yourself out there to talk to somebody who's a stranger to say that the lighting needs to be changed if you don't want to stay where you are with every bone in your body. Right?

Claire: The first thing I thought of when you were speaking is that it is ego. Something that I'm learning and continuing to learn because **I used to take things very personally, is that I just need to not make it about me.** And I think that when someone says the light is not right, it's not about you, it's not about the work that you did. It's about their experience and how it can be nicer. And I completely agree with you, Marnie, that you're not going to come to somebody and be like, could you please change this if you don't want to be there. This comes from knowing that you have the power to make it more comfortable for yourself. I think that we're often unable to detach ourselves from our egos. That has a lot to do with the educational systems that a lot of us come up in. We can just live in a much nicer and more convivial way. This also links to this idea of being safe for me, something that I experienced a lot recently and struggle with is asking questions. **With the proliferation of certain discourses and certain spaces online, the minute you don't know something or the minute you ask a question that could perhaps be conceived as insensitive or stupid, you're burned. This is not to say that you get to ask anything in any kind of way. But I think fostering spaces where people can come, even if you could Google this, to ask these questions is really important.**

Olave: This is a bit curious. There's a thin line. I teach at the moment and I find myself struggling with conceptualising demands from students as anything other than “oh, my God, what a bunch of entitled brats”. I find it very hard because there is a culture and attitude, certainly for younger people, in which people are just being so entitled right now. They just want everything arranged for them.

Marnie: Well, I think it's really good to be like super straight up and honest when you organize projects yourself, especially queer feminist anti-racist projects within a Western European context. I think it's good to be honest about the limits of your own labour. So some requests for safety can't be contained within the collective context that you organize. They just can't be accommodated, only maybe in five years. Sometimes you have to make complicated decisions. I remember in the context of Mothers and Daughters, somebody asking me and other organizers if we would ask somebody to leave because they'd had a difficult relationship with that person in the past. And this person came to me and I made a decision on the spot that that wasn't something that I was prepared to do. That I was much more prepared for the labor to support those two people to be in the space at the same time. I don't know if that was the right thing to do. I don't know if it was the best way to handle the situation. But it's what I had at that moment. And that's really scary.

Claire: In my mind, from a transformative justice point of view, we want a better world, so we need to have alternatives. You said, Marnie, that you felt more comfortable doing the labor to keep those two people in that space together, and it's like **how do we set up accountability processes?** So, we get to a place where whatever happened is addressed and is dealt with. Knowing that that could take years. We're so in this kind of speed nation that these things might never be fully healed. But you can work towards it. So, how do we also weave this into our spaces and our beings?

Olave: But then the question obviously comes up how much responsibility is with the space and those who organize the space. How much responsibility do we take as space providers for what could go wrong. How does Mothers and Daughters think of the reach of its influence over its community?

Marnie: And how do we check our own limits? I don't have a deep knowledge about sitting down with two people to resolve a conflict. How I decided to respond to that was correct in relation to my abilities.

Claire: When you're doing something that is so close to your heart and so intertwined with you and your being, it is difficult to put those limits in place.

Marnie: One really practical thing that Mothers and Daughters has done in the past is that **almost all nights that we're open, someone from the organizing team is paid to be in the space, not working behind the bar, but just paid to be in the space.** That was something we instigated early on, and I think it's really key. **It's a practical way to enable all the organizers to really touch base with the project in a really grounded way.** But also to make sure that if someone comes to the bar by themselves, **that there's somebody there from the organizing team to say hello.** This does create a really particular potential for different kinds of ways of relating and understanding space.

Olave: So what else have you put in place to create a safer space in the bar? Claire, what are the things that were available to you as a newcomer to be safe within the organizing community?

Claire: You know what, I would say nothing specifically. I don't think that that is our intention, because I've always felt that the space was very open and that I could say what I wanted, obviously within reason. I can't say that I had a buddy when I started a new job at work. I had no mentor as the person I go to if I have questions or if I need something. There is no structure like that at Mothers and Daughters. But I didn't feel as though I could not speak to someone if I had an issue.

Olave: Have you ever considered having a code of conduct or anything like that for within the organisation and also maybe for the guests? They should be living documents, but oftentimes they tend to be dusty.

Marnie: We have like a meeting agreement. **It's two different kinds of agreements, one for a what we call a deep meeting, which is where you're not producing anything, but you're doing a lot of reflection and then a meeting agreement for**

regular meetings. The meetings are really where the collective happens. And recently, we've started to become more specific about how meetings are organized. Like there's more protocol around them, I think, because the collective got bigger. But also, there were some big conflicts that emerged within the team, and the way that we do meetings now have been informed by those conflicts.

Olave: So there were conflicts that were generative. That created things. I think that some of the **people listening might be in organizations or communities where there is a real fear for conflict. Definitely in more mainstream organizations, but also in really radical spaces, there is a real fear for conflicts.**

Marnie: I mean, **I think conflicts are always destructive and generative at the same time. I'm also terrified of conflict.**

Olave: I think that conflicts can really be incredibly generative, especially **when you move past the hurt and the anger and you are still together in the space that you like: so how are we going to deal with it?**

Marnie: Conflicts can really tell you what needs to change. **They really put a huge spotlight on something that needs to change. But they also create scars. And I think it's important to acknowledge that we can not bounce out of it with no scars, is it?**

Claire: I think scars are also growth. To have a scar, you need new skin to grow. Conflict can be productive, but obviously it depends how you enter.

Olave: Also how the space deals with conflicts arising. Do people have to take sides? Then you have a competition for the most radical, most extreme kind of positions. Traditionally, the argument has been if you put somebody out, they can no longer cause harm to the people who deserve protection.

Marnie: It's very much a victim logic to make them feel better. It's not only about banishing someone for the safety of a bigger community. And I think that is not necessarily achieved through the process of banishment. Of course, there is a spectrum. I've been a host when I've seen someone physically assault a trans woman.

And in that moment, the goal is to get that person safe and get the other person out. But dance floors are interesting spaces in that respect. **Women and trans people in our bar need the dance floor. It's theirs, like it's their space.** And if you have five gay men who are dancing big, how do you make sure that the space is shared. Well, you literally go up to people on the dance floor and say that they're taking up quite a bit of space. And that they should give a little more space to the other folks on the dance floor. That's really intense work to do. Another example is a night where a bachelorette party of straight girls entered. They were quite drunk and they were really all out. So I went with Berta, who was managing the bar that night, behind the bar and had a little powwow. We decided to give them half an hour and then we'd see how it goes. There was a DJ playing that night, but not a lot of people. I don't think there was anyone on the dance floor. Actually, that bachelorette party, all they wanted to do was dance. And the deejay was so happy. So they danced and they drank a lot of wine. They stayed for about an hour and 15 minutes and they just left. And it was really OK. Actually, if I'd intervened earlier, the DJ wouldn't have had a crowd, the bar would have sold less drinks. That was a moment where my first reflex was the wrong one.

Marnie: A tradition at Mothers and Daughters, in a way, is topless dance floor activity, which happened totally spontaneously in 2017. A bunch of women just decided we feel good, let's take our tops off. Let's dance like we want to dance in the way that we want to dance. And the first time we saw it in 2017, me and Jessica and Claire were like: wow, this is amazing. We created a space and that whole community helped us to make it safe. We all needed to be in there on the dance floor just making sure that they're going to have a good time and that they're not going to be hassled. And it was an invisible thing to them that we did that. But we fully went in and just made sure we had kind of eyes on others around them to make sure that they were OK.

Olave: But still, things happen. We had a tradition that you had to listen to our little story about the rules and you had to pay attention on how to participate. And I've had moments where somebody that has come many times was so drunk that I could not have that conversation. They really were so drunk they wouldn't get what I was saying. And we would make the decision then that they can't participate that night. How do you go about deciding whether somebody can stay, can come in?

Claire: I think it was a Pride and I remember someone at the bar being very inappropriate. And I don't think they were asked to leave. I wondered what the policy would be in future? Will we allow people that are inappropriate to stay in the space? And I just wondered, why wasn't she kicked out? In the meantime, I've learned now that this is not the way forward. Now, I think I would talk to that person instead.

Olave: Let's make it even more complicated. We always had a play room for a very long time. I have to be very honest, the organizing team all had the hots for each other. I wanted to make a space where we could play with each other as well. So it was not entirely, you know, altruistic. It was a little bit self-interested. Now, this is not something necessarily that we ever had to deal with, but we didn't have an age restriction policy. So there could be people who were 16, who were 17. So does our responsibility also mean that we would make sure that they wouldn't enter the play space? Does that responsibility mean that if they were in this place, that we would check whom they're doing things with, how old they are and so on?

Marnie: There's been conversation about holding sex parties at Mothers and Daughters but we've never got to a space where we feel like we could do it.

Olave: We ended up stopping as well. People got really angry at us, they told us they really needed it. There's no other place where they had this. And we felt really guilty. But, we just did not feel like we had the capacity to keep it safe. There always was one of us in the place, but that person themselves is a very attractive person, and people would really bother them as well. We were also kind of losing energy, because the person who really did this space had enough of the inappropriateness.

Marnie: I know that also from people that work behind the bar at Mothers and Daughters. There's a kind of expectation from people in the space that someone behind the bar is flirting with them or is sexually or emotionally available in a way that maybe they're not.

Olave: How do you deal with them? How would you deal with it now? You said you would talk to them?

Claire: In certain situations on which we're now reflecting, I should have gone and spoken to people. I don't think I have an answer for you, because I think this is something that I'm still thinking on and working through. Thinking as an organizer, do I want to put a young person in a situation where they don't feel that they can do what they want? Especially if they are coming from a homophobic home space? **This could be the one place you get to go and just be playful and affectionate and show that physically, to have a physical connection with someone.**

Olave: I make it more complicated, also because I am more legally trained. Here is the case of "The Hangout". One of the reasons why youngsters would come to the hangout and not to the more mainstream LGBT organizations in the city was because they felt that there were a lot of older men mostly who preyed on them. So, we would police a bit, so that they wouldn't have to deal with some of the grooming and predatorship. There's a lot of testimonies of people, especially in the gay culture of young people, saying like it's not safe to go out in gay places because older people kind of prey and groom. I think it kind of made them empowered enough that if somebody who was older would come up to them, they could say no. It's a sort of mentorship I had for them. Strictly speaking, we weren't at the party policing and making sure that all the people were of legal age, because you can't really tell anyway.

Marnie: Yeah, this is where the conversation gets depressing and also really great. It's this realisation that the work that we're doing is so much deeper and harder than a list of protocols taped to the door of a space. Because you spoke about how those kids felt safer in the play space because of the work that had been happening in the other space. It's intense work. It is depressing because you're in deep and it's going to take so much, but it's also exciting, because it's then you start to really understand how change happens.

Claire: Definitely. And it goes back to what you were saying earlier about how much responsibility you take on? I don't think it's necessarily black and white. It's this responsibility that you all took on that led to this change. I think I've learned over the past year in an online space, I'm rubbish. In the physical parties, we'll see them at the bar and they're always safe because "mom" is here, and I love that. I think that in the physical space, this is much easier to do. In this online world that we're living in, I think that I don't know how to approach this.

Marnie: I've been thinking a lot about this actually. About how, in a Brussels context, **so many institutional spaces in Brussels have suddenly started feminist programming, queer programming, anti-racist programming online during the pandemic. What is the effect of an institution running such an important program without being able to see their audience?** They can see the numbers of audiences and maybe they're happy because a huge part of them are from outside of Belgium. So they're reaching broader audiences, whatever. But what does it mean when regular programming starts? The regular programming is not queer, not antiracist, not feminist. They don't know if the same audiences are coming back to hold them accountable.

Olave: Let's think about this online thing. I complain about the online thing 24/7. However, I'm also thinking of the number of **people that indicated to us that because of different kinds of disabling factors in their lives they had no access. With all these things happening online, how many of those people are finally for the first time able to participate? What if we go back to normal? What will that mean for them? Will we do hybrid thing?**

Claire: I would say yes. For me, when we were talking about online, I'm talking about managing safer spaces. This is something that I find difficult. I can only manage what is being broadcast and it depends what is broadcast and who's involved, what that looks like. I'm not in your house, so I don't know how you're going to take that. **In the reading group that I was talking about, we always have trigger warnings** when we discuss certain things, and people can log off. So **you say what you're going to talk about at the beginning, and then if someone doesn't want to hear it, they can mute their computer. Then you talk about your thing and when you say that you finish you type in the chat or you send them email that we're done talking and now you can come back. That's like a very rudimentary way of trying to protect people when you're talking in that space.**

Olave: I don't know if there's enough time, but one of the things I want to get into a little bit more is this notion of transformative justice. And the other notion I want to talk about was the notion of the conditions in which we labor for space. You already mentioned, for example, that you would have at least one paid host in the space. How do you do that with very limited resources? A lot of work needs to be done if it is going to be how we

want it to be. How have you as Mothers and Daughters designed the working conditions? It's valuable work, obviously, but in the larger economic and societal practice it's not valued. It's not just about pay, but also about workloads, for example. About accountability, but also about autonomy. It turns out that salaries turn out to be not necessarily the best motivator for people. A sense of purpose turns out to be extremely high and also people feeling satisfied with their work. Autonomy turns out to be a good one. People feeling like they have ownership and room to really make their own decisions. And that is respected and encouraged. There could be other things that make for great job satisfaction. But considering that it's labor, what you are doing to organize it to be safe so that people can thrive.

Marnie: Well, maybe the first thing to say is that **the organizing team of Mothers and Daughters gets paid a fee that comes from subsidies. In no way does this pay cover the work. It's not even close. This is a really unresolved and maybe unresolvable problem. My understanding is that, in this situation, you would get people, who had more privileged identities in terms of economic stability, more free time, less commitments to things like child care and care for family and friends**, et cetera. I could be really wrong, but that's what I assume. It is so important to acknowledge the need for financial remuneration because we all live within a capitalist structure. How that translates in reality and Mothers and Daughters is fees that don't echo the amount of work that is done. We really try, I think, to be as fair as possible. Mothers and Daughters is definitely not a business. There's no profit making motive or reality in the project. So a huge amount of money that comes through the bar goes into wages. Really a big part of the project's budget goes to people that work behind the bar, for cleaning people and for performers and teachers and workshop givers, et cetera. It's really important that there's an economic remuneration for that work. **The communities of Mothers and Daughters do spend a lot of money at the bar. And it's important for me that that money goes back into the communities that those people need. The amount of energy, love, commitment, time, stress, passion that goes into setting up the space and managing the space is unbelievable.** It blows me away every year. And I think that in the one month before the bar opens, and in the two months of the bar being open, there are often people in the team who go beyond what would be a kind of healthy limit for energy and stress. I think maybe one thing that's happened during the pandemic that I think is really good is that **we as a team have got better at reading each other and supporting each other and asking for breaks and**

articulating limits. I don't know whether that will translate again when the bar is produced, whether we're all just going to put way too much of ourselves into that process again. But I think I have had a sense of that changing in a pandemic context. I do have a sense that the pandemic has for some people, produced a bigger awareness of boundaries.

Claire: Definitely, it's easier to have boundaries when you're not physically present, isn't it? It's much easier to turn a computer off or not respond to an email than not to talk to someone directly? In any case, I completely agree with what you said about living in a capitalistic society. The way that we set up our fees was to take into account that certain people have privilege.

Marnie: It's based on the gender gap, which is a slightly more complex equation. That's not only about what you're paid, but like your gender access to political representation and permanent contracts, etc..

Claire: **The way the fee is set up is that you can opt out. So, we have a fee for people that need more financial support, for people that feel they need less financial support, and for people that feel that they need no financial support.** That's so important.

Olave: Is there anything you would say to, for example, organizations? Like cultural organizations that find it very difficult to pay people. My inbox is full with requests to come and give a workshop to Company X. But when I ask about the fee, they're like, what?

Marnie: I feel that there also might be more of an assumption for people that do something that could maybe be understood as activist work that such work doesn't require payment.

Claire: And this is why when we set up our organization we wanted to redirect our funding to people that do activist work. It's not fair to presume that, just because you're doing something that is related directly to your identity, you don't deserve to be paid. What enrages me is if someone wanted an economist to come and give a lecture on

economics or like the circular economy, that person is getting paid. The way the world is set up in this cis white patriarchal world, this person definitely must be remunerated.

Olave: It's the extension of the ways that our bodies are devalued and our existence is devalued. And especially care work, like to give a workshop about how to create safer spaces. People just don't value the knowledge enough, especially when it is such valuable knowledge. We've kind of touched upon some of the emotional cost of this work that we do. But there's no concept that that is as valuable as something that we acquired. I'm hoping that some of the organizations that are listening get this.

Marnie: I think it's because **it's considered extra and not fundamental. I used to work for many years as a proofreader, a copy editor of English for Institutions, and every single time an institution emailed me about a job, they would ask me how I wanted to be paid. As an artist, that question was rarely asked.**

Claire: **How much do you want to be paid? I just find it inherently unfair to ask you. I think that you should just give people the top budget.** If I ask you how much you want to be paid, I'm paving the way for someone that maybe doesn't have experience or the boldness to ask the right price.

Marnie: I don't completely agree.

Olave: Once, I looked at the roster of what the people were going to be paid. There was one speaker who was able to secure five times the amount of everything else that was happening. This person was the only person who stated a minimum budget. This person, obviously a man, was able to negotiate five times as high as the others.

Claire: That is unfair. And then young queer black women are going to get paid something completely different, because they won't necessarily ask.

Marnie: I'd actually like to go back to the question of working in collectives. Negotiation about a fee is so different when you do it for a collective than when you do it as a solo artist. I'm the daughter of a unionist.

Olave: It is very rare to see people that are unionized in our sectors.

Claire: This is why I've always tried to make it a bit of a habit to have jobs that I can disassociate from. And recently I had a job that I couldn't disassociate from at all because it was about gender equality. And I found it incredibly difficult. And I see a lot of my friends that work in things they're very passionate about, they don't think about the working conditions. The passion is exploited, right?

Olave: So I came up with something. I've worked many times with volunteers and coordinating mostly young volunteers, young people, queer people who want to do stuff, who are very eager. And, you know, you sit in a meeting and they take on so much. And I can tell that they're taking on a lot. And that they're not going to be able to do all this. So I came up with the proposal that we agree with the volunteers that they will not work any more than four hours a week.

Marnie: How did you come up with the number four?

Olave: Half a working day in my brain is OK over a week for unremunerated work. And the idea was that if anybody worked more than four hours, the organization actually had to pay them.

Marnie: And did you account a budget for that?

Olave: That was my proposal, but I don't know if they actually did it. But I noticed that there was a lot less promising things that they don't end up doing. I noticed that people were much more reliable in the things that they did. Is that something that you could imagine? Such systems that make sure that people don't end up overworking if you're not paying them more?

Marnie: There's something really interesting in that proposal. I'm not sure if it worked, mainly because I don't know if everyone in the collective would agree to that. But I think there's something really interesting about that proposal, because it also does mean that you can't monopolize certain areas of work. Because at the end of that four hours, somebody else has to take over the wall that you were painting.

Olave: I was inspired by the notion that if we go to 30 hours a week as a standard minimum, as the full time, that it actually creates more jobs. If 30 hours is the full time, then a lot more people can get work. I think we can all work for free for like half a day, but beyond that, you should be paid.

Claire: It's difficult as well though. **Everybody needs different amounts of time to do things, right?** So, I really appreciate the idea of a guideline, and I think it's really important that you know when you're not being paid, but also when you're getting a fee. I sometimes have a day and I'll get a ridiculous amount of stuff done, and then I'll have three days where I do nothing and I'm crippled with procrastination. And so then I wonder, would the four hour thing work? **It is easier to have a bit of a longer time to do the thing that you need to do. Is that actually motivating because, when you just got four hours, you pass it on and you share the job with somebody else.**

Marnie: **You have to make questions of time and productivity more subjective, yet specific, right?**

Olave: Negotiated. I had to talk to them and notice that they really got all this done. In my experience, writing emails really takes a lot more time than you think. You're basically spending an hour thinking of what you're going to say. Then you write for 20 minutes. That's an hour and 20 minutes of work! I found myself doing more proactive negotiating with people and talking to them to be realistic.

Olave: But let's talk about transformative justice. So, banishment doesn't necessarily help. However, we live, especially in this sort of ephemeral spaces with the promise, I think, of a safer space, that there are people that will do harm and people that don't, people who are victims and people who are perpetrators. In that mindset, people will say that punishment helps the person who is the victim. And that's the kind of rationale on which we're operating, most of us, that we need to protect the victims. People who are perpetrators are inherently bad, so they're not worthy of that space. I said that makes sense to me, I think.

Claire: This is the society we live in. This is exactly right. And for me, banishment is not a long term solution, and abuse and harm often comes from a deep place of hate. However, **I don't understand why we have come to accept that some people are**

more valuable than others or some people are more worthy than others based on their actions in a particular moment. I really struggle with the idea that some people can just be thrown away. And **I've seen the benefits of people being given a chance and people being able to work through what it is that caused them to perpetrate.** And I've also seen what it is to be a victim of a harm and see that person **transformed literally like a different person.** And that only comes through a chance, right?

Olave: We're told that victims do not owe their perpetrators anything. And anyone that in any way creates opportunities for the perpetrator is complicit and enabling.

Claire: I have to disagree with that. One of the beautiful things about community and having a support system is that in these situations, anybody can be supported in whatever role. All these things are subjective. I think **the society we live in makes us feel as though we have to take an objective standard that fits everybody. And that's not the case.** I think that people have to have alternatives. I really feel like there are so many people that we fail on a daily basis because of a certain behavior that they have learned or that they have been around, that they then perpetuate because they are just told, go away, we don't want you here. **I'm not an expert in conflict resolution, but I can offer to listen to you instead of just being like, that was awful, get out.**

Marnie: There's an interesting question in here for me, because I was thinking about when I was a host at Mothers and Daughters and I saw somebody walk off the street and physically assault a trans woman. In that moment, I made a decision about who my community was. Yes. My community was the trans woman that was being physically harmed, not the person that was doing the harming. And part of the consequence of that decision was that I didn't have to care about the person that I was kicking out. I had to care for the person that had been harmed, you know what I mean? This is a random person off the street here. But it's different when we have community with them. Then we have more options, right? **This is the situation that I had in mind when I was talking about this: how do we help this person in our community? And this is not to say I don't think that this random person doesn't deserve help, but I think this is where signposting comes in. You know, you could point this person in the**

direction that they need to be pointed in, but I don't necessarily think that that's something you need to take on.

Olave: But you didn't call the police?

Marnie: No, no, no. This is really so important for me and others. Mothers and Daughters is a place where the police should not enter the space. It should be avoided at all costs. Every year, there's an argument about at what time we open the space. I'm always arguing to keep it early, because we don't want police walking through that door. There's so many people who come to Mothers and Daughters who had police trauma. Why would you then set up a situation where that is triggered? What kind of message is that?

Olave: The police is what we're conditioned for to do if something like that happens. And you could even argue that I know a lot of queer activists who are very much about: you need to report transphobia and homophobic violence. You need to report it to the police. But you don't seem to subscribe to that idea.

Marnie: It's really complex because the police is the tool that we didn't choose to have. So, what are the spaces where we can create different tools with autonomy and care? What are the spaces that we can't? There's no black and white answer to this, I think.

Olave: At our parties, we would have people come and say, I'm having a problem with a man. I know that when they do something inappropriate, the people who are identified as causing the problem were either black or brown men and oftentimes also people whom we tended to know or we could tell from their behavior that there was some underlying mental health issue. So, for example, not a flamboyant gay guy who dances big, but somebody who is a bit shy and is in the corner and just looking. How do we deal with this? Can a black cis heterosexual man also just have fun at a party? Yes. We would go up and talk to them. Most of the time we found that they would be understanding. And then we had a few times where somebody would come back. So, we had to talk to him again and he was not going to do it anymore. But, what he did was not OK. It gets tricky because we want to have a safe space. But, we also feel to a certain extent, that **there is a bit of a racialization factor going on** here.

Marnie: The way that judgment is dealt out when people don't know the right words or don't know the codes of a space, makes me wonder **how to make the codes of the space transparent?** One of the ways is when somebody is acting in a way that makes other people unsafe because they don't know or understand the codes of the space, is to share those codes with them. That is really important. Chances for education or growth are also important, but that's a messy process.

Olave: Yeah, it definitely can be. We would have conversations with people about touching other people with very loud music, while the person is a little bit inebriated. And even the fact that we would have these conversations at the door would still not be enough, and you'd have the talk again. At some point, we'd be like, look, we're going to have to ask you to leave. And they would go apologizing. And also, what is interesting, the people who come up and say that this inappropriate behavior happened to them, would very rarely tend to be people of color. They felt like they had permission to go and indicate this person is doing something.

Claire: This comes all the way back to your point. Remember, you asked earlier, how do you know if someone who's asking the question is entitled? And I think what you said about non-normative behavior is really interesting as well. Like with the staring? **As children, we are told, do not stare.** It's rude when you stare. But with my mom, when people used to stare at my mom, we would give a good show. This is the other side of all this. **I feel like being curious, it is very natural and human. And I think that our society conditions people away from that curiosity. This is why we feel uncomfortable or why people feel uncomfortable with people staring at them, because you've just been taught that that's not something you should do.** I think also by acknowledging people's needs and comfort, while also demonstrating that this is not a behavior that deserves punishment.

Olave: We had, for example, a nudist camp. Because we really explicitly gave people in our invites an event description. We would say: you can wear clothes or not wear clothes, you can wear gendered clothes. We wanted to create a space where people and nudity is also drag. So that's why we're like every drag is possible. So there was somebody that came as a nudist. At times they would be visibly aroused and other times not. And they were really kept to themselves. A very nice, gentle person who would kind of move through. And we all knew this person. We saw them often. There

were a few nights where people who did not know them would come and complain like they're naked and they're sitting in our neighborhood and they're visibly aroused and that's inappropriate. That's non-normative behavior. And I think for them, it was something that they really loved coming to this party, because this is one of the few places where they could be nude and just be and have fun and nobody telling them they have to leave and stuff like that. And we also had people whom we knew better, who we know that at some point in the night they would really act big because of different kinds of diagnoses. And they had shared that with us. We would almost always have a complaint about them at the end of the night. But we wanted them to be able to be there. We thought that it was important that they were, that they could be there. And sometimes we would go up to them and ask to bring it down. **So you're talking about investing in people and in their pedagogical context of being aware that they might need a second chance. Again, though, a lot of the trauma that people have had in commercial spaces is that they might indicate something bad happening to them and that for the interests of commercial gain that nothing is done. They don't talk to them. I think people come to our spaces thinking or hoping that that will be different.** We showed that we do go about it in a different way, a different intentionality.

Claire: I think it's through practice that in these spaces, someone says something's wrong and nothing is done, and that's not what we're advocating here. If you come to me with a problem, I'm not just going to tell you that I'll sort it out and not do anything. I'm going to say to you: OK, I hear you. I'm going to go and speak to this person, and I'm going to take you through that. And then if you don't think that I've done enough, then you and I have to have a conversation, because I don't want you to feel unsafe. I had this situation again recently in the reading group. Someone didn't give a trigger warning when they went into something harmful. When they went into a triggering discussion topic, this caused this person to disconnect. It was very difficult because then this person came at me as the moderator as soon as this person said three words. But it was enough because one word can be enough and everyone is different. This was challenging. This person then came at me as a survivor, but talking to me as though I wasn't a survivor. And it's like, honey, you don't know where I'm coming from. Everybody has different boundaries, but I just had to explain to them, we're all in a space where we're trying to grow and learn together. When you enter into such a space, you're accepting that we're all learning, and apologies can happen. Our intention is to learn

and to grow and to care for each other, and nobody is intentionally trying to hurt you. And I think that one of the things that late stage capitalism is doing to us in the pandemic especially, is making us like our own little bubble. And so it's only my needs that are important. And that's not how it works.

Marnie: I think you're totally right. There's also something about how you build trust. How, as an organizer, you build trust with the communities that you serve. Something that always surprises me is queer and feminist organizations or groups or whatever that don't tell you who they are. They don't name themselves, often because they don't want to put themselves in the center of things. But if you don't put your name on something, where is the accountability?

Olave: We had the same kind of thing with the Black Lives Matter situation here in Belgium: who is the person behind us? What does it mean when we don't know who it is? What kind of risks are you taking calling people to come to the streets, to go demonstrate, but we don't know who you are? But anyway, listen, we've gone so much over time, my apologies. I want to thank you so, so much for your time.