Mic Check! Podcast
Episode 06 Part I: Centering Sex Worker Leadership & Liberation
Guests: Christian Giraldo, Director of Programs at Third Wave Fund, Pati Morales, Program Officer of the Sex Worker Giving Circle at Third Wave Fund, and sex worker organizers Jenna Torres and Raquel Savage
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Intro music plays.

Monica Trinidad
You're listening to Mic Check! a podcast by Third Wave Fund. For over 25 years, Third Wave has resourced youth led gender justice organizations that philanthropy has consistently left behind. We do this work because we know when directly impacted communities have the resources that they need to come together and dream up our shared liberation, they have the capacity to build stronger organizations and movements for social change. So whatever your relationship is to philanthropy, we're really glad you're tuning in to hear directly from queer, trans, intersex and sex working organizers and activists on their movement origin stories, what their day-to-day work is like and especially those that are in the funder sphere can best support them, not just in moments of crisis before the long haul.

Intro music fades out.

My name is Monica Trinidad and I've been your host for the first five episodes of this podcast. We paused in the spring of 2020 as we entered the COVID Pandemic, and we were just really trying to ensure that we made room to process, to grieve, to keep ourselves in our community safe and to sustainably move more resources to our communities than ever before. So during our podcast pause, Third Wave really focused a lot on cultivating the necessary infrastructure and sustainability that allows our resourcing of movements to grow with intention, which also means that our team had to grow. So I am more than excited to pass this podcast host baton over to our newest communications team member at Third Wave, Priya Dadlani.

So a little bit about Priya before I pass it over to them. Priya is an Indo-Caribbean queer cultural worker with a love for political education, zine making strategic storytelling. They're just an overall general badass. They currently live in Brooklyn, New York, where they organize with SPICY, a collective they founded, led by and for people of color working at the intersections of art justice and cultural archival. They're also a member of the Jahajee Sisters, who is also a Third
Wave Fund grantee, and they do work supporting survivors of gender-based violence. So welcome Priya. I am so excited for you to take Mic Check! on its next journey.

Priya Dadlani
Thanks, Monica. I'm excited to introduce today's conversation to you all. We're bringing you episode six featuring a conversation on sex work decriminalization, as well as abolition. And we're so excited to have two amazing guests with us today to share their perspectives on why we need to be following the lead of sex worker led organizing. But first, we're super excited to hear from Third Wave's very own Christian Giraldo and Pati Morales about our Sex Worker Giving Circle here at Third Wave and a quick introduction to sex worker led organizing. Welcome Christian and Pati, it’s so good to have you all here!

So historically giving circles are a very participatory form of philanthropy. A group of people with shared values, collectively decide on an organization or an effort to give to and either pool their own funds or raise the funds together. For our listeners who aren't familiar with the Sex Worker Giving Circle at Third Wave Fund, can you tell us a little bit about what it is and how it got started?

Christian Giraldo
Yes, of course. And thank you so much for inviting us to this exciting relaunch of the Mic Check! Podcast, Priya and Monica. So yeah, the Giving Circle is the first sex worker led fund housed at a US foundation. This means that we resource sex worker led organizing with funding and capacity building support. And all of our work in grant making is led by communities as sex workers, especially sex workers most impacted, and I'll share more about that in a second. And I also want to start off with some exciting history behind Third Wave Fund's connection to sex worker organizing. So Third Wave Fund has actually been funding sex worker led organizing since at least the late nineties. And our first grant to sex worker organizing was to DanZine, a sex worker industry zine in 1998. The following year, Third Wave Fund made a grant to Live Nude Girls Unite! which is a film documentary that was made in 1999 detailing the organizing that happened at the Lusty Lady, the country's first sex worker owned Peep Show establishment that existed until 2013. And beginning in 2006, Third Wave Fund went from granting here and there to making sex worker resourcing an organizing cornerstone issue more intentionally. And groups started receiving multi-year and capacity building grants around this time. The list of grants from this period included groups like Different Avenues who are a sex work harm reduction and participatory action research organization in Washington DC, the Desiree Alliance, who are a national sex worker, convener and conference space. And the Young Women's Empowerment Project. Soon after that, St. James Infirmary received a multi-year grant in 2008, and they're a sex worker led health services, an advocacy clinic and program in the Bay Area. And brought us to a really exciting moment in 2010 where a Third Wave Fund officially released a statement on
use in the sex trade, which had come up from conversations with YWEP and from that moment on doubled down in support of sex workers rights externally. This brings us seven years later to 2017 when Nicole, Third Wave Fund’s current donor organizer, came up with the idea of a sex worker specific fund at Third Wave Fund. So we brought Maryse Mitchell-Brody, our current development officer, who at the time was brought on board as a consultant to lead this grant making and thus the Giving Circle was born. And a lot of this work was done thanks to the leadership support and advocacy of groups that I just mentioned. YWEP, Shira Hassan, who's one of the founders and other organizations such as INCITE’s Fuse Network. And a plethora of other folks who informed the early years of the Sex Worker Giving Circle's existence and how we came to structure ourselves. But just wanted to share that since our five years of being in existence, we've given over $ 2 million to 40 sex worker led groups in the United States.

Priya Dadlani
Wow. Thank you for that extensive history Sex Worker Giving Circle 101, Chicklet. Can you all share a little bit about why it's important for this Giving Circle to be led by current and former sex workers?

Pati Morales
Yeah, of course. I can take this on and thank you Priya, for having us and thank you Chicklet for that beautiful history about the Circle. So to speak a little bit more about that, like all marginalized groups or communities, they know best what they need to survive and thrive in the face of the oppression that they have to confront on a daily basis. And sex workers are no different. They are also the experts of their own lives. What I think is specific to sex workers though is the ways in which their livelihoods are so stigmatized and criminalized, especially for the most impacted, like Chris mentioned a second ago. So Black and indigenous, trans and gender nonconforming, disabled, undocumented survival sex workers, these are the folks that are best positioned to transform the conditions of their lives and they've been doing it and they're still doing it every day. But these movements remain largely underfunded because sex worker stigma permeates across all industries and sectors of society and philanthropy is certainly not excluded from that. So ideas about sex workers as undeserving and unworthy or of needing to be rescued or saved from their job inform even the "well intentioned" funding efforts and sources.

So instead of respecting and resourcing sex workers' leadership and autonomous decision making about their community needs, these strategies really only exacerbate the inequality and violence that sex workers already face. Because having no sex workers at the decision making table and philanthropy results in either no funding or there'll be funding set aside, but because of stigma and access barriers of all sorts, that no one at the table is there to interrogate grant making processes exclude prospective grantees from even applying in the first place. Or having to walk on eggshells and employ coded language in their applications and the hopes of securing

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resources. And even when grantees do secure funding, and they tell us this all the time, it's so limited and conditional where you have to justify and report the spending of every dollar which replicates the policing and surveillance as sex workers already have to fight from so many different directions as if ongoing state violence and political attacks aren't enough. So that is why it is so important that the Sex Worker Giving Circle is for us by us community led initiative and led by a cohort of current or former sex workers who make up the grant making panel. So the fellows are the ones who make all the high level funding decisions here. And it's our responsibility as funders to ensure that they are the ones making decisions about resource distribution.

Priya Dadlani
Thank you, Pati. That makes so much sense. And I'm also thinking that some people might not fully understand why the Sex Worker Giving Circle is housed at a fund like Third Wave. Christian, I'm wondering if you could explain that for us.

Christian Giraldo
Yes, of course. And thank you for that question, Priya. And as I mentioned earlier, Nicole Myles and Maryse really led this work internally within Third Wave Fund. But I also wanted to shout out Rye Young, who is Third Wave Fund's former executive director, and all of their initial efforts to bring this work through their political commitment to sex worker liberation, and from the very beginning, sex workers that have worked at Third Wave Fund. Maryse and I and Pati, all folks who have come through the program are all current or former sex workers. And there's always been a commitment to sex worker liberation led by people from the communities because as Pati mentioned, sex workers are experts on our own lives and Third Wave Fund resources movements to be led by those folks that are most impacted, whether it's sex workers, BIPOC communities, queer and trans people, communities of migrant folks, people with disabilities. A program like the Giving Circle can really thrive with the infrastructure and support and community networks and strong support from donor communities that Third Wave Fund has and allow a program like the Giving Circle that really needs allies, that really needs folks from within philanthropy who understand or who are down to resource sex worker organizing. We really depend on those infrastructures and those connections.

Priya Dadlani
Absolutely. So I want to hear from both of you. One thing that you've learned from your time organizing with the Sex Worker Giving Circle that you would like to share with whoever's listening right now.
Pati Morales
Yeah. I can go first. Thanks Priya. There's so many things. So we know that a sex worker's skill sets critical discourse and thought organizing capacities activist impact are diverse and have a super wide reach. But from organizing with the Sex Worker Giving Circle where both the fellowship and the grant making are virtual and national, I've learn and seen just how truly varied and vast the strategies that sex workers around the country and their respective organizations employ and create and adapt in their work. From decriminalization coalition building like we saw with SWOP LA and decrim sex work, who successfully organized to pass SB357, which is legislation that not only repeals the law that criminalizes loitering with intent to commit prostitution in California, but it also provides a way for people to get any changes under dismissed or cleared from the records. To harm reduction and healing justice strategies, we have some groups working on migrant justice, and others collaborating with local public universities to conduct participatory action research. And none of these strategies are mutually exclusive. Of course all grantees are involved in multiple at once.

Christian Giraldo
I want to take this moment to address any funders who might be listening to the podcast to really make a call out to to resource sex workers, to do the work beyond just naming folks to panels and bringing folks on to grant making committees. Because BIPOC communities, sex workers, people with disabilities are under sustained political attacks. So as we empower communities to come on board to really own these decisions, to really own these processes, we also have to resource the material realities that our communities are currently living through. So it's beyond just naming folks and beyond just crediting folks, it's create that full support system that acknowledges and that affirms and that response to the political, economic and social threats that our communities are facing and creates the safety nests, the safety systems for folks to be able to heal and be able to hold all of that work and still fully show up as they are.

Priya Dadlani
Thank you both so much. It was amazing to lay the foundation of what the Sex Worker Giving Circle is before we dive into this conversation. Would either of you like to give a few shoutouts, or share how people could learn more about the Sex Worker Giving Circle here at Third Wave Fund?

Pati Morales
Yeah, definitely. If folks want to learn more about the Sex Worker Giving Circle at Third Wave Fund, you can visit our website at thirdwavefund.org, hover over grants and then click Sex Worker Giving Circle. There's actually a report that was released last year titled Creating Community is a Threat to Power, Three Years of Resourcing Revolution and Liberation at the Sex Worker Giving Circle that folks can dive into and learn way more in depth details on the
Giving Circle. But towards the bottom of that main page, you'll see a section titled Gratitude that lists all of the people and organizations who paved the way for this work. And I'd love to give a shout out to year's cohort of fellows and grantees. Obviously, everyone on our roster is doing amazing work across the last five cycles we've had. But as we continue to move through the grief and uncertainty of the pandemic, ongoing challenging circumstances, both in our personal and professional lives, transitions of all sorts in various organizations, doing the work is already never an easy task, let alone in this moment. So I just want to commend them for the ways that they showed up for community and for all of their service. Thank you.

Christian Giraldo
That's beautiful, Pati. Thank you for that. And I'll piggyback to also shout out all of the cohorts of our fellows that have come through the program and been leaders through this process. Our work is literally not possible without the work of the Fellows and all of the other brilliant sex worker organizers, community members that have come through the program. As well as to all of our advisors and all of the movement family, both from within the organizing world, the funder world that have held us down from day one and shouting out folks such as Cecilia Gentilli, Cathy Kapua from the Trans Justice Funding Project, Shira Hassan, who I mentioned a little bit earlier. These are folks who have been with us from the very start, on top of many others. The list of gratitude could go on forever, but shouting out those folks. And I also wanted to shout out the Red Umbrella Fund, UHAI Eashri, the New Moon Fund, all of our sex worker led fund friends and peer funders from around the world, from whom, especially with Red Umbrella Fund and Ujai, we modeled a lot of our structures knowing that there was a lot of really good work already being done at the global level and wanting to build off of that sex worker fundraising grant making and organizing brilliance that these groups have been putting out into the world for so many years.

Music fades in.

Music fades out.

Maryse Mitchell-Brody
Hi friends. This is Maryse.

Sylvia Jung
Sylvia.

Jillian Jacobs
And Jillian!
Maryse Mitchell-Brody
The Development team at Third Wave Fund.

Jillian Jacobs
We’re not here to tell you to buy new sheets, or improve your internet security, although you should definitely do that, we’re here to ask you to fuel gender justice movements by giving a monthly donation to Third Wave.

Sylvia Jung
Whether you give $5 a month or $500, we need you. Find a donation link and other ways to support our work in the show notes. No coupon code required.

Music fades in.

Music fades out.

Priya Dadlani
All right. I'm here joined with Jenna Torres and Raquel Savage. Jenna pronouns she/her and Jenna is a community advocate, human rights supporter, author, artist, entrepreneur, mother, as well as a fellow from this year's Sex Worker Giving Circle at Third Wave Fund. And we're also joined by Raquel Savage using she/her pronouns, who is a Black, queer therapist, educator and sex worker who facilitates trauma therapy through Zepp Wellness Center, a non-profit organization she founded in 2019 that centers the mental health needs of Black queer folks and sex workers. And I'm going to pass it to them just to more robustly introduce themselves. So Jenna, I'll pass it to you first if you want to share a little bit more about your work and your role in sex worker led movement or organizing or community.

Jenna Torres
Hi. So I'm Jenna and a lot of my work started when I was a young person. I've been in sex work as a young person for survival reasons. I'm a young parent and my introduction into sex worker activist is interesting. So I work with Lysistrata, currently is a mutual care collective. I also do consulting around my lived experiences, especially around the human trafficking intervention court and how that impacted my life as a young person. And yeah, I'm just part of the community and been so since 19. So yeah.

Priya Dadlani
Thank you for sharing Jenna. And then I'm going to pass to Raquel if you want to introduce yourself as well.
Raquel Savage
Hi everyone. So I have been a sex worker for a decade next year in 2023, it'll be 10 years. And I'm also a trauma therapist and I got into sex work by circumstance, couldn't find a job. So it was like, "What else am I good at? I don't even think I initially identified as a sex worker was like, I'm just trying to make money, let's link. And then I got online and started tweeting about my experiences and people started to refer to me as Raquel, the sex worker. “You speak about sex work? I resonate so much with what you're talking about.” So it became this identity that was given to me. And then the activism piece or the organizing piece, which I'm not even sure if I would call myself an organizer, but just came by proxy of me always being someone who advocates for my own lived experiences, which then expands to others. Yeah, and I started Zepp Wellness, my nonprofit in 2019 to be able to serve the mental health and healing needs of sex workers specifically because I realized in my grad program that we were talking about all of these marginalized groups, but never talked about sex workers. And the only conversations we had about sex work was around trafficking, where trafficking and sex work was being conflated, and there was all of this really icky misinformation. So here I am.

Priya Dadlani
Thank you both. I'm wondering if each of you, and I'll start out with Jenna, if you want to just share more about what led you to get to this organizing space, if that's what you consider yourself or the specific work you're doing. Whether it was an event or something that happened that sparked your involvement in this movement.

Jenna Torres
So when I started doing sex work, I was a young person in foster care. At that time I had three children and I didn't really know what I was engaging in was considered a sex work. I didn't know there was community people who did it. I didn't even know it was illegal. So when I got arrested when I was 17, I basically was put into this program that was an alternative to incarceration program. And unfortunately I had to choose between going to college and going to this program. If I wanted to keep my kids and not have this on my record, then I needed to drop out of school and go to this program. If I wanted to continue my education, then I would then face the risk of what it looks like to be like this young person who has this on the record and also not comply with the courts. At that time, they had labeled me something called CSEC, which is commercially sexually exploited child or youth. And the judge asked me, who is my exploitation? And the answer is capitalism because there was not anybody to exploit me. So the program that I went to, they were not particularly fond of my experience and really thought that the conversation about human trafficking applied to me. And I know for a fact that that wasn't the case. So I would fight with my attorneys and I would fight with the people who were managing the program about this $5 and pizza that they were giving us to change our life and not be in the life anymore. But I was a young person who had children who was technically too
young to work in a lot of places. I was 17, I had just graduated high school, I'm trying to go to college, I'm trying to have a full-time experience in college. So it's just really difficult. And I was really frustrated because I had beaten all the statistics by far of having children graduating on time from high school. So I felt like this was a really dramatic change in my life. So they had referred me to a place called the Red Umbrella Project that was in Brooklyn and at the time, Red Umbrella Project and Persist Health were working together in the same office and they combined writing workshops with advocacy, learning to write in order to advocate for yourself and your lived experiences.

So we had things like massage therapy, tinctures from St. James Infirmary that we had in these wellness kits. We did outreach, we paid people to come and talk about their experiences in our writing workshops. So it gave them an additional incentive to come, we would feed them, we had clothing closets. It was really, really great. And that came to an end in sometime 2018. They closed their doors. A lot of those places helped me understand where my position is amongst all of the activism. And I think that my activism has come just through telling my lived experiences and my stories of what is it like to be a parent? What was it like to do survival-based sex work? Why survival-based sex work and trafficking run parallel to each other but are not the same thing?

What we're actually talking about is labor rights. We're talking about exploitation of labor and that the most harm that I've ever faced in the process of working ever has come from a traditional job at a non-profit. So how my goal for my sex worker movement and why I feel led to do this work is one safety, I want people to be safe. I also have a perspective lens of young people who are in the industry where I'm much rather give them real opportunities to make informed choices about their involvement in the sex industry and if there is an alternative to that. And then also just as regular adults who are engaging in the sex industry to know that there are resources that their community, that you don't have to be isolated, you don't have to be ashamed. So stigma and then also providing direct services to folks around testing, healthcare, peer mentoring. If I need to show up to an office and cuss them out, I will. All the things.

Raquel Savage
Thank you so much for sharing all of that. It's so annoying and frustrating how non-sex workers and just people outside of this industry and this community can't fucking grasp any of the realities or our humanity, and hearing you say they brought you into this thing to be, "Get out of the life," but all they were providing was basically nothing. I feel like that sums up how... At least for me, my academic experience has been with trying to, without outing myself, encourage people or try to get people to understand the experiences of sex workers because there's no capacity for understanding the distinctions between these kinds of identities. And like you said, how they run parallel but do not overlap. And sometimes they run parallel and they do overlap.
And I think that prompted... I don't even know if I'd say it radicalized me, but it helped make me so angry when I was in school and I was a baby sex worker realizing that nobody got it. And the folks who were positioned as scholars and academics and the helpers had no sense of what our needs are or were.

Priya Dadlani

Thank you both. Thinking about sex workers organizing from place of lived experience versus outside, not sex workers trying to lead the work or tell you what you need or don't need and what we could have in a world where sex workers are leading this movement and are leading movements and included in every conversation like you said. So one of those conversations that we want to talk about today is about sex work decriminalization and the overlap between sex work decriminalization and abolishing the police industrial complex. What does sex work decriminalization mean to you?

Jenna Torres

So sex work decriminalization is not the same as legalization and I want people to understand that because there's some places in the US where you can engage in certain types of sex work that would be considered to be legalized. Decriminalization means that there's no interference when government policy regulations. And I feel like decriminalization ultimately means that you have true autonomy over your choices and how you choose to make income. There's other models in the world that people go by that may be helpful for people to model something in the US of how that can work. But also understanding that the US is a really unique position because we profit more from criminalization than anything. So yeah, sex work, decriminalization ultimately just means that people have the true autonomy to do what it is with their body without government interference. Yeah.

Raquel Savage

The only thing that I might add to that or snowball is when folks are thinking about the difference between decrim and legalization, and I want folks to do this always, and especially during this conversation, is to think of the folks who occupy the most marginalized identities at once. Because I think a lot of people when they think of sex work, their view is so limited because they're thinking of, in my experience, one of two things. They're thinking of the romanticized the White strippers who get a lot of money and they're so fancy or they think of street based sex workers. So there's already no nuance. But what I want folks to think about is the most marginalized, because when we think of legalization, that typically means there's going to be some regulation around this work, which means it's not going to be accessible to the most marginalized, which means the most marginalized will continue to be criminalized in some capacity. So when we're thinking about the distinction between these two, the reason why among a lot of other reasons, decriminalization is the thing and not legalization is because we want to
center the most marginalized, the folks who are the most impacted, not folks who have the privilege to be able to fucking register for, I don't know, a card or do whatever the fuck they need to do to be able to be an official sex worker.

**Priya Dadlani**

I think we've already touched on the ways that carceral systems impact sex workers. I want to hear more from about how we can begin to see these sex work decriminalization and abolishing the prison industrial complex overlap as the same issue. And for people that might not be as familiar, how can we do that?

**Jenna Torres**

So I can give some interesting ways in which sex work is criminalized, and this might not pertain to in this right very moment, but historically how things have happened. So in New York City there are five boroughs and within the five boroughs, each of the boroughs having human trafficking intervention court. And when we were going to observe Red Umbrella Project and ourselves and people from the community would go and observe the courts, a lot of time people would be prosecuted for an APA charge, which is considered to be loitering for solicitation for the purposes of prostitution. And there was also a conversation about criminalizing condoms. So if you had five or more condoms, then that's evidence of sex trafficking and that's what they were using as evidence of the crime. So ultimately what that meant was people will ultimately stop using condoms or walking while trans was a really big thing. The loitering policy for New York City was any person in a particular area trying to stop passer-byers for five minutes or more. So those were really vague, really broad sweeps that people were doing in order to criminalize sex work. And what that ends up looking like is that people are either not utilizing safety devices that they could be using to protect themselves. Those who are actually in trafficking situations then won't feel comfortable enough reaching out or getting the right types of support, especially when you're having everybody as a trafficking victim, there's no distinction between people's experiences.

In the case, for myself, I didn't even know that was such a thing. So being labeled as a victim, but you're only a victim if you're get arrested first is a problem. So for me it's about the criminalization that we see regardless of the circumstances because the US racially motivated love finding ways to criminalize marginalized populations but there's also real impacts to that. Like if you're a parent, in my case where your children are then subjected to not being separated, I had the FBI come to my door at some point. Even when you are considered to be a victim, there is no support that you would be given as a regular victim. It doesn't come until after you're incarcerated, after you pled guilty, after you've done took a plea. And there's no real sense of, if I'm a victim, then where is the rehabilitation? Those things don't exist in the same conversation. So for me, it's like when you look at other models and other places where they do have full
decriminalization or legalization of sex work, I still don't think that is applicable here just because of the ways in which we criminalize our communities, tracking our communities. There's some folks who went through the Red Umbrella Project that had been arrested over a 10 year span. And because they knew this person was in the sex industry, they knew that any given point they could arrest this person and it would be plausible because of their history that they were doing sex work.

So just figuring out what it's like to, if you truly do believe that all people in the sex industry are victims, then arrest should not be the first answer to that. I don't believe that. I believe that people have autonomous choice. And then when you're even talking about the spectrum of what trafficking looks like, it's because of lack of access to a need. And that's really it. So the outside of the decriminalization is also providing people in the community with resources that they need to make informed choices about how to stay safe. So decriminalization in this moment looks like harm reduction, looks like blacklist, looks like making sure that we're doing safety calls. That's what in this moment, what decriminalization looks like. But hopefully in the longevity of this career here, I hope that at some point we can really get to a true place of decriminalization because the way that we are going now, it just makes it inherently unsafe for everybody. And then not to mention the exploitation that cops inflict.

When I was arrested... First of all, I was arrested in this sting. The cop told me that if I would've told him who arrested me in this moment, he would let me out of the truck. There's some places where they lie to you, the entrapment of the whole process. So there's nothing fair about this system and never has been and I don't think there ever will be. But I do think that it's not just the act of sex that is criminalized, it's everything around it and who has more access. If you're a street based worker, you have more access to law enforcement. If you are marginalized survivor based sex worker, you're are going to be more exposed to law enforcement as opposed to somebody who can take the time and the privilege to ask for IDs, ask for screenings, ask for whatever that looks like for you to be a little bit safer. But criminalization of sex work really does hurt and harm people who are most marginalized, people who need the most access, people who need the most resources because there's no barriers. So yeah.

Priya Dadlani
Thank you. And I'm going to pass the same question to you, Raquel, and also if you want to expand on or build on anything that Jenna shared, please feel free.

Raquel Savage
I think my entry point to talking about abolition broadly and as it pertains to sex work is my position as a therapist. And I think because I am a Black person, because I am a Black woman, because I am a Black woman sex worker, realizing the harm that happens with mental health
spaces just as a client throughout my life has been really obvious. And then once I occupy this position to offer the service while being required to be within these regulations that ask me to use state intervention, it prompted me and required me to get more clear about my own politic and how the mental health industry is essentially the police. I mean therapists and other mandated reporters are required to report, and this is to the state any instance of harm to yourself or others. And that's all very vague and left to the therapist to decide what that means and what that looks like. And we know that with bias, it means that people who occupy marginalized identities are going to be disproportionately impacted by state intervention in mental health spaces. And this is again specific to sex workers as well. And again, even more specific to youth who are doing sex work. I've had conversations with future counselors around youth sex work. And their immediate thing to what Jenna spoke to earlier is, "We have to save them, we have to help them, we have to report, we have to do this." And with no understanding of how that furthers the harm, how reporting it is impossible to involve the state and not inflict harm. Period. Full stop.

People can do all gymnastics around how they can decrease harm, sure. But eliminate entirely. Absolutely not. So I think that that's my entry point, is figuring out what it looks like to be a Black woman, a sex worker and a therapist, and to ensure that the mental health and healing services that I offer that I am not an accomplice to the state. And for me, that looks like essentially betraying my mental health requirements and being pushed out of professional spaces because I'm seen as an outsider, which I'm totally fine with because I'm not accountable to the state. I'm accountable to my community at the end of the day. To ensure when folks come to me for session or when they come to Zepp Wellness to receive services that if they don't want to use their government name, they don't have to. If they don't want to send us an ID, they don't have to an ID, that's fine. If they come to us to tell us about their experience about being in the industry, they don't have to be concerned about any impacts. They don't have to be concerned around any involuntary hospitalization, that would never, ever happen. They don't have to be concerned around us involving the child policing system to ultimately attempt to get their children removed from them. Those are things that will just never happen in my care. And that to me is my individual way of attempting to disrupt the state and my personal practice of abolition more broadly and as it pertains to sex workers since I am a sex worker. And that is mostly who I see as clients.

**Priya Dadlani**

Thank you both. And I think it's important to lift up that you're both creating models through your work and organizing to support marginalized communities under capitalism without being an accomplice to the state, which requires lots of creativity and organizing.
Raquel Savage
It has been really interesting for me to disrupt that and to see people's responses to that other therapist, even other Black therapists, other Black queer therapists, how they respond when I say, "Yeah, actually I don't practice mandate reporting. Actually, I'm not going to become licensed because I don't want to be an agent of the state," and seeing their reaction. So yeah, just to speak to the creating new models thing, we're doing amazing work. And also it's scary fucking work. And it's work that puts us at risk in some capacity and we're going to do it anyway. I'm here. I'm doing it and I don't give a fuck because again, what is most important to me is trying to carve out space for folks to be safe. That is my priority.

Priya Dadlani
Absolutely Raquel! Thank you both so much for joining us today. We're actually going to pause this conversation here and return next week with Jenna and Raquel for Part 2, where we'll be getting into the ways that sex worker liberation and the fight for reproductive justice intersect and overlap, and how folks in philanthropy can better step up and prioritize funding for sex worker-led organizing across the U.S. and its territories.

Outro music fades in.

Thank you all so much for tuning into this episode of Mic Check! Podcast at Third Wave Fund. This episode was produced and edited by Priya Dadlani and Monica Trinidad, with support from Christian Giraldo and Pati Morales. Our intro music was created and produced by Jordan W. Carter. If you want to hear past episodes, find us on Spotify, Soundcloud, or Apple Podcasts, and visit our website at thirdwavefund.org under Podcast to see episode transcription and guest information. If you like this podcast and want to show us some love and help our podcast reach beyond our networks, you can do so by subscribing on Apple Podcasts and leaving us a review, following us and liking this latest episode on SoundCloud or Spotify, or by sharing this podcast episode on social media. See you next time.

Outro music fades out.