

Interview with Lauren Curatolo (She/Her/Hers) - April 18, 2020



What years did you go to Middlebury?

What years did I go to Middlebury? *Laughs.* That's a hard question. I have no idea *laughs.* I graduated in '06. 2006.

What did you study while you were at Middlebury?

I was a Women's and Gender Studies major with a minor in Psychology. Well, I was originally Pre-Med. I thought that's what I was going to do, and then I was like okay, Psychology seems to be my thing. And then I totally just switched in my last year and went all Women's and Gender Studies even though I basically had all the requirements for Psychology *laughs.*

How would you describe the campus culture at the time you were a student?

So, I would describe it as *laughs* a lot of different things. But I felt invigorated. I felt like people felt empowered to protest, empowered to have a voice, and I felt a momentum happening. Like I felt this, like, momentum of activism happening that I was part of, and, you know, led with a lot of—with my very good friends. And I felt like it was a time that – I, at least I personally felt like I was surrounded by people who wanted systemic change. And not just in the microcosm – in this like fairytale world that is Middlebury, but just, you know, around the world. It was like a global thing. It was – it felt revolutionary. And it was certainly not the case for everyone. I mean, I think you can go to Middlebury and have whatever experience you want. If you're super privileged and white and rich – which, you know, there's certainly that there – you

can roll with that crowd and be in a social house and do all of that kind of stuff. And then there was a really, like, large part of our campus that I felt very connected to which was like a – a mini revolution that was happening. And I felt – I personally felt very empowered and surrounded by faculty and staff and students who rallied around issues.

You mentioned you also felt like that was also happening on kind of an outside of Middlebury scale. Were there movements or events happening in the world that you felt contributed to what you were experiencing and doing?

Well, I felt like – so a lot of stuff that I – we were working on – so, I was president of Feminist Action at Middlebury [*A student organization that challenges the construction of gender as well as issues of sexual and domestic inequality and violence*], which had sort of a lull at some point. I'm not really sure when it started. But certainly, by the time I had become like sophomore, junior, I felt like I needed to be more connected to a feminist movement *laughs* and that wasn't really there. And so, me, my friends – we got together, and – or I got together with a bunch of friends, and said, let's revitalize Feminist Action at Middlebury and so we did. And it was – I would say – there was like a larger conversation happening around sexual assault on campus, which has been an ongoing conversation *laughs* I feel like for – for decades now. But we certainly were dealing with that on campus and in large numbers. And numbers were even – you know, our President at the time, Lebowitz and others on the administration perhaps did not see it as such a large-scale issue, not recognizing, you know, the ways in which sexual assault happened. Um, and so many of my friends – I feel like so many women personally were just being affected by it. If it wasn't them, they knew someone who had been sexually assaulted or, you know, an attempted assault or something of that nature. And so, yeah. And so that's what our main focus was. It was about like that, about loving your body. We used to do like "Love Your Body" fashion shows and fundraisers and things like that. And I felt that was always a larger conversation that was being had in society and in the world. And so, we were really just amplifying it in a space where it was sort of silenced. I mean, we were trying to get blue lights on campus for quite some time, and there had been some, a couple, a few, but not enough, quite frankly, for what the requirements had been – or the recommended requirements had been. And so, that was an issue, and we took it on wholeheartedly and fought for blue lights to be at *laughs* on Middlebury's campus. And the reaction to it was, well, uh, you know, we're in Middlebury, Vermont. There are beautiful stars at night, and we don't want the lights to cause light pollution for stargazers. And it's like, are you fucking kidding me? *Laughs.* Like, that – that's the reason, like, really? That's what we're going to talk about now, the stars in the sky? You know *laughs* that doesn't really matter quite frankly when we're talking about bodily autonomy *laughs* and the violation of someone's bodily autonomy or, you know, the fear – the fear that people had going home at night to their dormitories, you know. And I felt should have taken precedence. And so, amplifying that narrative and overcoming the idea of like, "what do you mean sexual assault happens here? It doesn't happen here," with actual narratives from people – survivors – on campus, to – to come into direct conflict *laughs* or, you know,

contradict that statement in a real way was probably the highlight of my time at Middlebury, to know that the blue lights went up. And still weren't as many as we wanted *laughs* but, uh, it felt like a win and a small win and yeah. I don't know if I directly answered that question *laughs.* It felt like very much we were in our own little world at Middlebury. The parallels to perhaps a similar revolution that was happening outside – I can say that I think we acted in solidarity with the general movement against sexual assault on campuses, and – and made this a priority.

Do you feel like people were actively thinking about and fighting against sexual assault in kind of the activist circles that you ran in or do you feel like it was kind of a wider campus awareness that this was a problem?

I think *sighs* that's an interesting question. I think that it was – everyone knew it was a problem for sure. I think that there were more people willing to participate in the conversation about it than others. And for example, like if you were a frat guy – you know, in the social houses – I don't wanna be – it's very stereotypical, but it's also kinda true *laughs* like it's a stereotype because – you know, there were these people who were affiliated with the social houses who you would never see at a Feminist Action at Middlebury thing. But then there were people who were part of the social houses who were allies who *were* in Feminist Action at Middlebury. And, you know, women and men alike. So, it did, I feel like, cross over a lot of different associations. So, you know, like Women of Color, the organization, they joined sort of forces with us on a lot of different things. I think that for me I wanted to bridge the gap between different organizations and also different people in different groups, and I found that that was probably the hardest thing. And I'm trying to think of – I guess the “I Love My Body” fashion show that we did, which was so much fun, and we joined with a bunch of different organizations, and the diversity of people who showed up there was fascinating. I thought that was fascinating. You had like football players, people from the basketball team, like, you know, all of these different circles of people coming to speak and hear about – about sexual assault, about confidence, about the female body and how we own it, and how it's been appropriated. And I thought that that signaled to me that people, if they weren't aware, wanted to be aware. And then there were people who just – who were not part of it. And that I think that intersected with privilege. You know, like people who were privileged to not ever have to think about sexual assault, or perhaps perpetrate it. Um, you know, those people never showed up, I would say. It's just my own, uh, you know, what I think *laughs* might be the case there about the people who weren't part of it.

You said that by the time you were a sophomore, that you wanted to kind of involve yourself more in the feminist organizations, or kind of rejuvenate them on campus. Were you seeing problems that kind of prompted you to act on campus, or you just knew that that was kind of where you wanted to go?

Um, it was a lot of conversations I was having with the women on campus. I also was, um, severely, like dealing with a pretty severe eating disorder on campus and had, you know, my own

personal struggles. And I was also part of the Posse Foundation [*A four-year, full-tuition leadership scholarship that identifies public high school students with high academic and leadership potential. These students are placed in supportive, multicultural cohort groups of 10 students at their college, and offered personal and academic development opportunities*], so I had like a group of people who, you know, supported me all the time while I was on campus, personally and otherwise. Really just wanted to create a space for people to feel safe, whatever that might be. And because I didn't – I didn't feel like I had it necessarily, like I had my – my crew, and I had the people I could call to just cry to when I was having a bad day, or, you know, come to therapy with me because I didn't wanna go talk about my feelings anymore, or whatever it might be. And I just felt like, how many people are struggling? You know, like how many people need a space to talk in? And so, we did that in Chellis House [*The Feminists' Resource Center*], and it was really beautiful. I have to say those were my happiest times. Just sitting there *laughs* you know, writing my thesis with my best friend there *laughs* and just watching people come in and come together and knowing that there would be – I would be there, that my friend Assia would be there, and that we would be welcoming people with open arms, whoever they were, in whatever sort of trauma they were experiencing, with them. And yeah, so I would say that it was personal, and which, you know, a lot of movements sometimes start as a personal one *laughs.* Um, and then it became . . . it just *became*. It became something bigger, and it was beautiful. It was really beautiful. I mean, I was just talking to Assia. Assia's my – she's fantastic, super brilliant. And we were sort of partners in crime, you know *laughs* and we would speak – we made a bunch of films while we were at Middlebury together, and we really tried to just be the voice for people who couldn't or didn't want to be. And we supported people and that was – we were just talking on the phone. She lives in Paris now, and we always think about Middlebury. We always think about that time that we had together being creative in activism and we still share that *laughs* that bond together and still try to do that in our lives, however different they may be now.

I'd like to talk to you a little bit more about your experience of the feminist organizing. You said that you were in FAM [*Feminist Action at Middlebury*]. You were the President, right? Yes.

And you said that you kind of got together with some friends and decided that you guys wanted to kind of – was it start FAM, or was it like rejuvenate it? Was FAM pre-existing? It had existed, and then I don't know. It just felt like a dead in the water, like, thing that was happening. It wasn't – there weren't like a lot of events. It wasn't – wasn't in your face. And so, I -- I just remember speaking with Karin [*Director of the Feminist Resource Center*] about it – Karin Hanta – and being like what is – where is this group? It just didn't feel like it was happening as much as I felt it should, and then we just sort of took it over and went with it.

And so, when you guys kind of revitalized it, it was you leading it and anyone else?

Me, uh, there was Assia. There are different people that are coming to my mind, like Morgane Richardson and Trinity Gaddy. Just all of my friends. Darcelle Williams. All of my friends sort of just rallied around it. Women of Color – the Women of Color group was also being run simultaneously. I'm forgetting names of everyone. I just sort of remember that we were trying to work in tandem as much as possible, too. Yeah.

How was the gender distribution of FAM?

Lots of women *laughs.* Mostly women. There were a few men who would come and participate. I would say like two . . . two to three consistently, but really it was just mostly women.

Do you remember how big the group was?

It – it would vary, depending on people's lives and schedules at the time, but typically we'd have like between fifteen to twenty people, I would say. And then our events were well attended, I would say.

And what kinds of events did you have?

So, we did like, um, a few protests where we protested social house -- what we felt was rape culture, things that were happening in the social house that we didn't agree – didn't – that were just terrible.

What did the protests look like?

We got together, made a bunch of posters, like a hundred percent of protests *laughs.* Like we were in the streets of New York City *laughs.* Um, and yeah, marched through the social houses with our – I – I just remember – I have pictures somewhere of it. Ugh, I wish I could find them, but it was, um, all of us just marching through with our picket signs and chanting. Um, I can't remember any of the chants so don't ask me that *laughs* but it was great. I remember there being like a very significant number of people actually part of it, like thirty to forty people. It was so much fun. Unless I'm just inflating that number in my head, but it felt like thirty to forty people *laughs.* Um, then of course the "I Love My Body" fashion show. We did LoveFest where, you know, we partnered with other organizations similar – similar to – it was like a speak out. We did another – I don't know that we would necessarily call it a protest, but we did do a speak out during one of the dance events that was happening on campus. Things like that, yeah.

I was wondering if you would tell me a little bit more about LoveFest, and also who started it? Was that something that you guys came up with?

Yeah, something we came up with, and it was – I still have some of the stickers from it, actually *laughs.* Yeah, we definitely started it. And gosh . . . LoveFest. It was – I remember it was on the steps of what's that –

Mead chapel?

Mead chapel, yeah. We were on the steps of Mead Chapel. People were sharing stories, doing spoken word, I remember that – singing. It was really beautiful. Like, we had such wonderful – a wonderful time putting that together and organizing it, and then it being like so well attended was really inspiring and fun and liberating. Yeah, we – yes, we did – we did invent that. I wish I could find the – I’ll find some – some of the stickers and send them to you. I still have saved them. I even think I have – if I *really* search I have like the planning documents for that *laughs.* Um, but it was a lot of fun to put together. We wanted to feel – we wanted people to feel connected and fun and inspired and free. You know, like I feel like we were born in the wrong decade *laughs.* Like, we were the bra burning, you know *laughs* feminist free-for-all-ing of people that we wanted – and we wanted that feel, like, that’s what we wanted to exist at Middlebury, and so that’s why we did LoveFest. It was so much fun.

That’s super cool. You have mentioned the “Love Your Body” fashion show a few times, and I was wondering if you could just describe it a little bit more so we get a better idea of what it is?

We all made T-shirts that said on the front, like, “I love my body because . . .” and then on the back, it was whatever word you had to describe your body. And so, it was very personal, and it was, you know, women from – and, and men too – who were dealing with eating disorders – raising awareness about disordered eating and eating disorders. And also, just embracing – I guess embracing like an empowering narrative around bodies, especially female bodies, that are sort of – and still – ravaged by, you know, this public ideal of what a woman should look like. How a woman should carry herself; what a woman should wear. I mean, you know, these are still things. When Hillary Clinton’s running for, you know, President, and Elizabeth Warren is running for President, we don’t talk about the substance of what they say, but the – the outside appearance of looking aged or – you know, it’s ridiculous. It’s absurd. And so, we were trying to just deal with that in whatever way that we could then to feel empowered in our own skin and to really talk about how important it is to be kind. Like, it was it’s always so basic, right? It’s like, just be kind to people, and to recognize that everyone is sort of going through a struggle, and so why are we dehumanizing people in this way that’s so superficial? So, yeah. That’s – that’s what we did, and it was so fun. Ugh. I wish those – I think maybe it’s recorded, but I just remember it being really beautiful. And like, my friend April sang a song that – that was just gorgeous, and it was this round-up of people who just wanted to empower other people and change the narrative around bodies. And it was really well done, I thought, and just, yeah, it was great.

And do you remember what years you did that fashion show?

I did it my junior – I think we did it both years, junior and senior year.

So that was like 2003, or 2005 and 2006?

Yeah.

In terms of the blue light activism that you guys did, how – what form the blue light activism took and how long that took you guys to get done and what it looked like?

It came up in a meeting – in one of our, our FAM meetings, it came up, and someone was like – I feel like the New Yorkers spoke up about it, because like, people who lived in cities were like Middlebury's creepy at night *laughs.* Like, there are no – there are no lights. And like, you – I always felt safer around noise and lights. That's like the life you grow up in when you grow up in the city, and like in Middlebury, that's not what it is. Right? It's like, country. It's the country. So, and it's beautiful and idyllic and all of those things, but it's a little bit – it's a little bit creepy too, or it can be *laughs.* So, I just remember it coming up like that. And then we were doing research on blue lights and finding out if there were any federal rules or, you know, things about how far – how many blue lights each campus needs and what are some of the regulations around it? And then we just sort of advocated for it. There – I know that there was this committee started, and Sujata Moorti [*A GSFS professor who became the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Dean of Faculty in July of 2019*] was – I think it was either her first or second year. I love her. She's the best. And we were on a committee together, and I believe it was a diversity – something about diversity and inclusion.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Yeah, does that still exist? That still exists? Oh wow. And I feel like it came up in one of those meetings, too. There was like something about safety planning at Middlebury, uh, things like that, and I met with President Lebowitz [*Middlebury College President 2004-2014*] one-on-one. Essentially, I got like all of this research together. We did a petition – everyone signed it – we got as many people to sign it as possible – that we wanted blue lights on campus and why it was a necessity. And then I met with him one-on-one and sort of pitched it to him. And at the time – my God, what was his name? His second-hand man, Tim? I can't remember his last name right now. Sujata would know, and so would Karin [*Karin Hanta, Director of Chellis House (The Women's Resource Center)*]. Um *laughs* so I basically just made my pitch, and I was like, listen, this is something that we need for safety. It's – you see it in on every college campus. I forget how many feet apart they're supposed to be. You're supposed to be able to be standing at one and see the next one. That's the whole point of it. And, you know, there might be not that many reports of sexual assault on campus, but there aren't a lot of reports of – the – all of the reporting on sexual assault is pretty low compared to what the actual number is, but there were also people who were experiencing different kinds of fears around this. So it's like, are we going to address this as a campus and make a statement that we care about how people feel and how they perceive their safety, even if it's just symbolic to all of you? It's an actual prevention mechanism for every kind of crime. So, I just remember there being a feeling, and that like, sort of spurred our protest. We had a protest that – I remember that the feedback that we had gotten was that there was a concern of light pollution from the local neighborhood. People who lived in the neighborhood, they didn't wanna be affected by it, and I'm like, what are you talking – I – I just felt like that was so insane, you know. And everyone sort of was like, oh, okay, so it doesn't matter if someone gets raped, as long as you can see the stars. You know, so that's cool, except

it's not. *Laughs.* So, so, um, we did a march around the President's building, and it was a really significant number of people, because we were able to totally encircle it, and we marched. And that's when his number two person, Tim *laughs.* God, Tim comes outside and starts engaging the crowd. And he was like, you know, I'll take the time to listen to everyone. And people were like speaking out, and he finally said, I don't understand the problem, because sexual assault doesn't happen here in the way you guys are saying it does. Which then spurred survivors, who were so brave, I thought, to do this in front of people that maybe they didn't even know – hadn't interacted with – and then him, like some administrator at Middlebury – staring to say like, I was raped here, I was raped here. And it became, it was sort of, uh, deafening to me *laughs* that there – like *there* it is. There are the statistics. One in three. One in four. Whatever it is now. At the time I believe it was one in four women were going to be the victim or survivor of sexual – some sort of sexual violence in their lives. And it was – I just remember being like moved to tears by it and being like, *fuck you*. Like, you know, *laughs* how – how dare you say something like that, when we all know – like, have you read the news? We all know this is true and that it's happening in one way or another, and it's your responsibility to know and to protect people or at least try to help protect people or let them define for themselves what it means to feel protected and be protected. So, that was a – that was a huge thing, and then we saw blue lights go up, and it became a real conversation. And even when I go back to Middlebury – I went last year I guess, and I saw the blue lights and it made me so happy, because I felt like, that was everyone. That wasn't me. It wasn't Assia. It was everyone who came together to sort of demonize the narrative of “this doesn't happen here.” It happens everywhere. That's just ignorance. *Laughs.* You know, if you don't want to know that it happens here, that's one thing, but don't tell us it doesn't, when clearly these are human beings with stories of violence – of sexual violence. So that's what that sort of looked like, and it was it was beautiful. I loved it.

Sounds incredible.

Yeah.

Some very brave people. You said you went and kind of sat down with the President. Was there a Health and Wellness Office or Title IX Coordinator, or . . .? Because often, I think, these days, when we have something, we bring it to them. We don't bring it directly to the President, and it gets handled through other channels. So there – there was no other administrator figure that you would go to?

Oh, there probably were, *laughs.* But, I mean, there were people, like Karen Gutentag. She was part of, I believe at the time, like the Judicial Committee of bah bah bah. I don't know what they call themselves – what they called that Judicial Committee on Student Misconduct, right? Or something like that. It was like their own judicial system, but I didn't know of anyone who – anyone else who existed on campus who I would go to to talk to about this, or at the time at least. Or I was just being brazen and *laughs.* Yeah, I just felt like, you know, why not talk to him about this? I feel like President Lebowitz was vocal at the time, as like a someone who wanted to – who had like an open-door policy in a way, and like you know, so I just figured why not just

meet with him and *laughs* and talk with him about this? And then you can't say that you didn't know. It's like, I don't know how it would filter up to him or how the message would be delivered, but to have like a voice who has personally interacted with people with specific experiences and concerns, I would just talk with him. He was in charge. So yeah, that's what I did.

In terms of your activism against sexual assault with FAM, you mentioned the Lovefest and the blue light stuff. Was there anything else big that you wanted to mention?

Those were the events that really stuck out in my head. Um, of course we had like a bunch of different smaller things or we joined forces. We did like a lot – we invited like Stephany – Staceyann Chin to come do spoken word, Alex Olson, all of these awesome kickass feminists. We did – oh, we won like the first – we did the first – God, I can't believe I forgot this. The first Women's and Gender Studies Symposium. I guess they get – we got funding for it. So, they would choose certain groups to run a week-long symposium at Middlebury. I don't know if they still do this. They do? It was awesome, and we had all of these awesome spoken word poets come. We held talks. We showed films. Yeah, and we were so proud of it, because I think it was the first time that feminism had been so widely talked about on campus. And, yeah, and I can – I can say with certainty that every single event was really, really attended, you know. It was like *laughs* and it was almost surprising but also just made us feel like we were doing something important, and like people were ready to have these conversations and these deliberative dialogues about gender. It was awesome. I remember that being a big win. I can't believe I almost forgot to bring it up. Yeah, and Assia would be able to tell you more, I'm sure. She has a sharper memory at this point *laughs.* Maybe not. I don't know. It's been so long. But, yeah, that was awesome.

Was there anything else you wanted to talk about regarding FAM or your activism with FAM?

No, I still look back on that time and recognize that it was probably the most important time of my life. I mean, I learned how to use my voice. I learned about bringing people together. I learned about leadership, and it was an intellectual time. It was – it felt like I was going to change the world and *laughs* with these wonderful human beings that I got the privilege of meeting and still being friends with in my life. And that we were able to leave something behind in the form of blue lights. I was able to be the school – the graduation speaker that year, of graduation, and used it *laughs* as yet one last platform *laughs* to talk about blue lights and being part of a movement, and that, you know, as we're leaving Middlebury, that we need to carry what we've learned here – the lessons of whatever we were part of – or not part of *laughs* – into the world with us, and to affect it in some way positively and to change it. And I think that that part of me, it was really formed at Middlebury. Sujata Moorti, Karin Hanta. Like, these two women were so magnanimous to me, and when I was writing my thesis, Sujata – when -- any time I had an idea – I want to do – I want to do a class on necrophilia and sexual assault and see if there's any overlap between the two psychologically. And like, okay. But like, let's do

– let’s do this! And so Assia and I just came up with this curriculum and we – and we did it. And we were able to go to Algeria and film a documentary on, you know, on women who were being essentially marginalized and put into these facilities, these shelters, were rendered helpless and homeless because they weren’t virgins on the night of their wedding. And like, I got to see the world, and I got to create and organize and protest, and that was the most important time of my life, and it guided what I did after Middlebury, and it still guides what I do today, so yeah.

Were you part of any other organizations that you wanted to mention besides FAM or any other activism?

I *laughs* was on the cheerleading team, which was . . . *laughs.*

How was that for you? *Laughs.*

You should read the article I wrote, “Cheer Cheer for Feminism.” *Laughs.* It’s in the archives. I actually saw that. Yeah, that was like a fun – it was just fun. I never pictured myself as a cheerleader. I’m not some, you know, that typical, quote-on-quote, the quintessential cheerleader that you read and see about, but that’s why it was so cool. No one on the team was, and we were just so – we were just having fun. And I remember, we went to a competition. It was the competitive cheer team, so we went to a competition, and on the way back *laughs* we were going by a Hooter’s, and we got out of the van and protested in front of Hooter’s *laughs* in full uniform. It was hilarious, and yeah. I mean everything sort of revolved around Feminist Action at Middlebury for me. There was nothing I was part of that was as – that even came close or compared to that level of commitment I had to that group.

You’ve mentioned Chellis House a few times. What role did Chellis House have in campus culture at that time?

Well for me, it was my home, like, that was my second home, and Assia and I would go in there and light fire – light fires *laughs.* You know, use the fireplace and hold – hold like a peaceful place, and I think that it was our stomping grounds. It was like our second home, and that’s where you could find us if we weren’t out on campus doing something or in our dorm rooms just studying or whatever. We were – we would study in there too, so yeah. I think Chellis House was our – our heaven. Like, it was just a safe place to go, and I feel like everyone who was part of FAM and who knew about Chellis House used it in the same way. So, it always felt like if we were going there, we were going to be seeing people who were likeminded and wanted to be part of, you know, bringing feminism into the conversation at every turn possible, and really just supported each other. Yeah, I would – I think that the role it played was a safe space for people who felt marginalized or just wanted a place to feel safe.

How did your classwork contribute to your feminist education or activism, or did it?

I mean sure, yeah. I think you can’t have any sort of knowledge without – I mean any sort of power that’s real, um, without knowledge. And so every single class I took contributed in some way, shape, or form to the kind of activism I would participate in, and recognizing that what I

find as freedom as a white woman is different from what my friends who were Black or Brown, um, were experiencing, or what they deemed to be the right approach to their – like, their feminism was different, you know. And – and a lot of the work that I do now – I mean, I was a public defender for some time and now I'm still – I'm a lawyer but I run a courthouse and programming, and you see intersectionality in every – everywhere you turn, right? The intersectional oppressions that happen, and having the words for that, to think about, you know, the birdcage and what that means for a person who's inside of it. Like, that analogy always stayed with me, and there were – and I still, like my bookcase is just filled with all of my books from Middlebury, and how, and I still turn back to them, you know. And all of the things that I've learned have played a role in my activism for sure. And the professors I had were just incredible. I mean, I was able to also have the freedom to come up with my own classes that really were geared towards what I wanted to learn, and um, I think writing my thesis was also – I think everyone should write a thesis. It was a really powerful time in my life in terms of knowledge-gaining. I spent so much time researching and having intellectual conversations with Sujata and, um, and Assia and traveling and doing the supplementary documentary work for the thesis. And then presenting it. I mean, all of the things I did academically certainly empowered me as an activist, for sure.

Do you feel like – or how do you feel like your work was received by students and by Administration?

My work – academic work?

No, activist work.

Ah. People respected me, and I think that because of that, they understood my – what I was doing. They understood, and – and I think that, for the most part, I was – I felt supported by the Administration. Now, maybe that's because I was -- I mean it's not like we were doing anything violent, you know. We were speaking about basic – basic things that were sort of being taken for granted, like the right to bodily autonomy, the right to a fucking blue light, like why would anyone come down on – on me for that? I think there were people who just didn't care, and that's fine. It wasn't their thing. It wasn't their fight. They were, you know, doing whatever sport they were doing or running or, you know, whatever and weren't – they didn't wanna be part of that and that's fine, but I never felt like I was demonized or branded in some negative light or way because of the work that we were doing in FAM.

Did you have any specific mentors or allies that you haven't mentioned with your activist work?

Um, there were so many. Ann Hansen. Um, I was part of the Posse Foundation – the Posse group that came in, so, um, I felt really supported by everyone in my Posse. Uh, we had Roman, who is just, ugh, the best. So funny. He – he was very inspiring to me and also an ally. Obviously Sujata, Karin, hands down. I'm forgetting someone, I'm sure of it, but yeah. I would say those were predominantly the people that I really connected with the most and who were certainly there for

me through a lot. Karen Gutentag was also very – part of Posse, and certainly encouraged my activism at – on campus, and I think she even attended some events. Everyone really did, and it was – because it wasn't just a message. It was also a lot of fun. And everyone could relate to everything we were talking about in some way, shape, or form, so yeah, I would say those were my primary mentors and people who I really felt connected with.

We've been asking people what they felt the best part of their experience of activism was and what they felt like the worst part was?

The best part was actually having an impact and seeing something resulting from our work. Most notably the blue lights was a huge win for us, and also just successfully creating a safe space for people. That was definitely the best part of my activism – our activism – and feeling empowered and connected. And then the worst – the downfall was maybe *laughs* that it's a lot of work, you know, *laughs.* It was sort of exhausting in a lot of ways, because you kind of, you always have to be ready for the fight, and I – because that's what I wanted. So that's what I did. But it was still tiring. It was still exhausting. It was still like I – sometimes when you're leading something, you don't get to be someone who like falls apart a little bit *laughs.* You know, but luckily we – I did have Assia and my personal Posse to support me when that was happening, but I think that's – that's the hardest part of anything you care about is that it's a lot of work. And you have to you have to get up every day and live – live your message, however that might look.

Did you feel like you saw a change over the time you were at Middlebury?

Um, I saw a change in myself, and so, yeah. And even with my classmates. I felt like we all grew up together, in a way, and there were always going to be the people I was like – you're never going to be in my crew, but I'm sure people felt the same way about me *laughs.* Um, and, but I felt like the more confident people became about their connections and their own personal beliefs, the more they would show up at events and be, like, connected to our group and our messaging and engaging in deliberative dialogues. I think we did that too, deliberative dialogues, where we would like invite people from different groups on campus to come sit down and have a conversation about feminism and, like, what it means, and so, yeah. I felt like by the time I was giving our graduation speech that more people knew me, you know, even people who I would never necessarily be friends with today *laughs* or back then. But we all sort of respected our roles, and – and that was a nice thing to see. And also, everyone just grew into – into their fight, you know, whatever it was that someone was standing up for or standing against. It was more pronounced by the end, by year four. And no one – and by then, you're just like, I don't care. And now you're in your late thirties and you're like, I really don't care. Like, I'll say whatever I want *laughs.* And so I can't imagine what the rest of my life will look like. But yeah and so, I think that's what I saw. I saw people growing into their messaging and getting stronger in what they wanted – in who they were, and that was really nice in different ways.

What did you wish that you had known about organizing before? Or what advice would you give to activists now at Middlebury?

To reach outside of your circle more. I think that's always the hardest part of – like how do you get people who won't engage in this conversation or in this fight, how do you get them on your side? How do you cross the line and bring them over it? Um, and sometimes you won't be able to, and other times you'll – you might be able to change someone's perspective a little bit. So, I think that. Just getting out – getting outside and figuring out like, how to – how to talk to people who aren't necessarily on your side, yeah.

You've mentioned that your feminist activism at Middlebury has kind of informed what you've done with your life since Middlebury. What have you done since leaving?

I went to Goldman Sachs for right after I graduated, and that was because – I didn't, I mean, I honestly never thought I would ever work at a place like that but *laughs.* I didn't – I knew I wanted to go into the law – the field of law, and I didn't really necessarily know what that would mean. Like, did I want to go work at the United Nations? Did I want to do this? But I felt like this would be a good time to go fuck up some heteronormative shit while I still could *laughs.* So I went to Goldman Sachs with all of the people from Middlebury that I didn't wanna be around *laughs.* No, I'm kidding, but it was the place where I interacted with people who are in like the 1%, kind of. You know, like the – who didn't talk about feminism, who didn't like, you know – it was like the social house crew of the campus, you know *laughs.* Like they were in frats and sororities and going to Wharton Business School, and I had like – no way in my head was I ever gonna do any of this crap. And, you know, one bet later, and I'm working at Goldman Sachs on like – I remember my internship was on the floor of the stock exchange. And I remember there being, like, all of these men. There was literally one woman who was a trader there that I could see. Uh, and I remember every day they'd be like, oh, Lauren, like you can't go get the lunches downstairs because you're a woman, so you just like stay here and talk to us. And I was like—so I would in my heels, like, go downstairs, wait for the guy to deliver the lunch and bring them upstairs and like dump it on the desk. Like, here, I can – I can actually do this. Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean – and it was the first time I was really engaging people in feminism that were in a completely different world, you know, and like, and we would talk about it. We talked about my – my major at Middlebury, Women's and Gender Studies, and like what it meant. And it was a huge focal point of my interview at Goldman, actually, is like – was about women in economics and, you know, and if we gave microfinancing to women in Sub-Saharan Africa, like, and let them build their own businesses, what would that look like? How would that change the economy, stimulate the economy, give people autonomy, especially women? And – and I connected with a woman named Susie Scher, who is now I think like running Goldman Sachs, essentially. She's brilliant – was on the board of Posse – the Posse Foundation. And I just kept admiring her as a woman being in this business as a leader, and what that must have taken for her to do, because there were so many microaggressions there. Like, it was a boys club, like an actual boys club *laughs.* And I remember being – when I got hired out of my internship class and thinking about, is this really the smartest decision I can make? And thinking, like why not go have an impact in a world that is super heteronormative and outside of what I would ever be in? And, you know, I can save for law school and et cetera, et cetera. And what an awesome

experience it was. I mean, I used to send out like feminist haikus to our floor *laughs.* And I had conversations with people at hedge funds that I would never have talked to, about just sexual – like sexual discrimination. And I was sexually harassed multiple times. I mean, like, and then you really – it really puts your activism to work, and you're like, how do I stand up for myself? And how does that translate into standing up for all the women who are in this position at this company, and in any company really? So, and I found my female mentors there, who are still to this day my very good friends, and I learned so much. I learned even more, perhaps, about one's voice and how important it is, uh, in the world. And then I left, and I went to law school. I – I spent three years there. I said, I'm gonna do my contract with Goldman, but essentially, I wanted to go to law school. And then the stock market crashed, which I swear I had nothing to do with it *laughs.* And uh, I bounced, and I went to law school, and I wanted to do public interest work. I interned with the with the United Nations and then, it wasn't really what I wanted. I was working a lot on – in my third year of law school, I was in the International Women's Human Rights Clinic, and so I was doing vacatur motions for women who had been trafficked in New York and were getting arrested and charged with prostitution-related charges. And so we were working on getting those – those people's criminal records vacated, which was really inspiring work. Again, directly because of my feminist activist work at Middlebury, that's – it became my mission, my life, my purpose. And so, everywhere I have gone since then has been really -- it draws from that experience at Middlebury. So yeah, I did that, and then I took sort of a year – I took the Bar exam and luckily passed the Bar exam *laughs* and then just figured things out for a year. And I worked in housing court. I worked with Legal Aid Society, doing more of the vacatur motions. I was doing some independent work with another women's organization and trying to figure out, where is my voice best going to be used in this world, the legal world? And so, finally I decided I need to be at Legal Aid. I need to be representing the most marginalized people in our society, and I can't think of a more marginalized group of people than people who are in the criminal justice system. And so I went to Legal Aid Society and worked in the Criminal Defense Division for about five years. And now I am the Director of Midtown Community Court in Midtown Manhattan, and we work on coming up with innovative programming for alternatives to incarceration, reentry. And it's really creative work and exciting work and yeah. I don't know what's next but certainly all of the things I've done since Middlebury has been shaped by that experience. And I miss litigation. I will say that, but *laughs* everywhere I turn, I am – I do feel like I am part of representing the disenfranchised and the marginalized. And because of my academic experience at Middlebury, I recognize my – my whiteness in that and, you know, the things that can be isolating for the people with whom I work that I can't help. And so, owning that about me, owning my whiteness, owning my femaleness, my privileges as a white woman, has really furthered my work with my clients and with the people I interact with generally. So, yeah.

Was there anything else you wanted to talk about?

No, I think this is such a cool thing that you're doing, and I'm really happy that there's going to be a sort of oral account of everything *laughs.* And I hope I didn't say anything that would preclude me from running for office but, *laughs.*

No, it was wonderful. Thank all of you guys for the work you did that still gets to support and affect us in such a positive way in our time at Middlebury. So, thank you so much.

Thank you so much. Um, this was so fun walking down memory lane, so, thank you.