

Interview with Maddie Orcutt (She/Her/Hers) - May 12, 2020



This interview contains three excerpts from a previous interview with Maddie Orcutt. These excerpts are labeled in the audio recording and transcription accordingly.

When were you a student at Middlebury?

I was a student between 2012 and 2016.

How would you describe campus culture at the time?

Well it really changed a lot because the beginning of my time at Middlebury was under President Liebowitz [*Middlebury's 16th president: 2004 to 2015*] and then my last year was President Patton's [*Middlebury's 17th and first woman president: 2015 to present*] first year. So it just sort of changed a lot between the two administrations, and there was sort of a hard pivot towards the end into a different direction.

What type of different direction did you feel like they were pivoting in?

Um, I think President Liebowitz had just been there for a long time and it felt like there were a lot of ideas that were just kind of stale. Or things were kind of just operating how they had always operated and there wasn't a lot of space for new ideas, or for innovation, or for changing things up. Which is you know understandable, change requires a lot of work and is hard. But with President Patton coming in there was um, you know, a new vision, new leadership, somebody who was at the helm of the institution who self-identified as a feminist right. And that was a significant departure from how things had been.

And what was your experience on campus like?

Um, *laughs* it was, um, you know in a lot of ways it was frustrating, because things, especially in those first years, were moving pretty slowly in terms of being able to create change. But I think hindsight kind of 2020 and I learned a lot about activism and how to get things done and how to network, and you know conspire *laughs* and do all of those things. So at the time I really hated it, and was like emotionally exhausted and drained. But in retrospect I think I learned a lot of, um, valuable but emotionally taxing lessons *laughs.*

Excerpt 1:

And I went through a Title IX proceeding as a claimant in 2013 I believe. So I did that process, like a lot of people have done that process before me and after me. Um, and it was just very frustrating. Like the Cliff Notes version is that, you know, I had to go through two separate investigations. I was 19. I was given an 18 or 19 year old MiddSafe advocate [*MiddSafe is a student run hotline and advocacy program for sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, etc. MiddSafe works closely with the administration*] Um, I was up against big New York firm lawyers, and I had like a 19 year old support system. And it was really really hard, and you know I think looking back on it the sorts of things that happened were inexcusable. And so that really mobilized me to get kind of angry, and get more involved whether that was through IHH or through other, sort of, more independent projects.

End of Excerpt 1

What were you studying at Middlebury?

I was a double major. So I did Political Science and then Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies both.

And how was that as a combination?

Um, at the time the departments, not the departments in their whole, but there was definitely tension. Um, I remember there was one political science professor in particular who would sort of needle Chellis House [*The Feminists' Resource Center*] and the GSFS [*Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*] department quite publicly. And so I was sort of, um, you know in both of these varied disciplines. But there were also beginning to be opportunities for integration, so you know

in particular Professor Fuentes-George's [*Associate professor of Political Science*] class, and there were others to, but that class in particular really started to just kind of bridge the two disciplines in ways that hadn't been done in that exact way previously.

Were you part of any organizations on campus?

Yeah. So I was one of the people at the helm of the It Happens Here Project [*anti-sexual violence campaign that collects anonymous student stories to raise awareness and give survivors a voice*] with Luke Carroll Brown and Michelle Peng, Katie Preston and Jingyi Wu, and Margo. Well Margo was a little before me, but um with like a lot of other folks. And then, yeah, so that was primarily what I did in terms of student works. And then I helped found the Director of Sexual and Relationship Respect position, um, among other various one-off projects *laughs*.

So, you know, SRR [*The Sexual and Relationship Respect Committee of the student government*] and IHH (It Happens Here) both kind of revolve around issues of sexual assault and sexual relationship respect, what prompted you to get involved in those things? Were you seeing problems on campus that people were experiencing or you just wanted to get involved?

Yeah, so IHH sort of came first for me. And it was just like a really great community of people, it was a great time to get together and learn about things that were happening across cases and across reporting experiences. And learn that, you know, at the time a lot of us were treated like, "Oh this is just some individualized quirk that happened just to you and this will never happen again." But then you get a group of people together and you realize that a lot of people have experienced very similar, um, things in sort of a repetitive way, which starts to make it seem less accidental and maybe more deliberate or at least deliberately indifferent, right? Um, so that was sort of the foundational experience and Michelle Peng and Luke Carroll Brown were really helpful in starting to piece some of that together. And after we started doing that at some point we got invited up to Amherst and they were putting on like a day long conference about sort of getting similarly situated schools together to talk about student activism and process. And not so much things that could be done on the formal Title IX side, but things that could be done on the student side. And it was really great. Katie Preston went up there, Michelle Peng went up there, I can't remember who else I drove *laughs.* And then when we were there at Amherst they had a student org position that was called the Director of Sexual and Relationship Respect, and as we were all kind of learning about each other's models and processes, we just at Middlebury thought that was a really cool thing. So that sort of got us reinvigorated to create some institutional

student side, sort of monitoring, and input pieces into place. And so we reached out to some SGA [*Student Government Association*] folks and started drafting that bill.

I'm going to ask you a little bit more about the things you mentioned you were a part of in a minute, but I was wondering: what was the culture around sexual assault like on campus?

Um, well it changed so much so rapidly, right. So when I was initially started, literally like it was called It Happens Here because people would be like, "This doesn't happen here, like this is Middlebury, it's like this bucolic whatever, like uhh, like it doesn't happen here" and so there was just like complete disbelief. And you know even examples of administrators coming and saying like, "This doesn't happen here." And people going to Old Chapel [*The building that houses the offices of the president and other administrators*] and raising their hands and saying like, "You're wrong, it happened to me here." So um yeah, so it was a culture of denial and that sort of predated me a little bit into you know 2012, 2013. I mean like when I went to Middlebury for like "prevention programming," and I'm using air quotes for the purpose of the audio transcription. Their prevention programming was like they would give you a skit to enact and one person was the rapist and one person was the victim, and you would enact a skit and it would last about 20 minutes and that was like basically it. So there wasn't nearly the level of education or framework, Barbara McCall [*Director of Health and Wellness Education, hired in 2013*] didn't exist. It was like, you know, for twenty minutes during orientation you'd enact a rape skit and that was it. With people who didn't know, no context, no adults, it was just led by the RAs. Um so *laughs* things have changed quite rapidly. Um and then, you know, you saw sort of the Obama Administration having an increased focus on Title IX, and you know new regulations and guidance coming out from the Department of Education, the Time Magazine rape cover, The Hunting Ground movie, all of that happened. And so by the end of my time at Middlebury there was a lot more education, there was a lot more prevention, there were you know dedicated positions on campus. So it was the change that we wanted, but it happened so quickly we sort of had a little bit of, I don't want to say whiplash, but it was just hard to like, um, it was just hard to rectify how you really wanted the change but it happened so fast that it was sort of hard to trust it or believe it I suppose like that it was genuine and that it was here to stay.

Maybe you feel like you just answered this question but were there any outside movements or events that impacted what you were doing, you mentioned The Hunting Ground and the Obama administration, was there anything else that came to mind?

Yeah, and I mean I didn't necessarily like The Hunting Ground movie but there were just like, you know, those were certainly like big cultural moments that were happening. Um, Emma Sulkowicz's mattress campaign at Columbia was, you know, Carry That Weight, was hugely influential in terms of like grassroots student activism. There was performance art happening on

campus that was really like influential. Um, so yeah I mean there were a lot of things happening nationally, and there were also things happening at Middlebury, and things happening even regionally too, like that conference we went to at Amherst, um and it all just kind of collided.

I'd love to hear more about specific things you've mentioned: First of all you mentioned that you were a big part of IHH, which years were you part of that?

I think I started, oh gosh, I think I probably started getting involved in 2013 I would imagine. Um, but, and then I've maintained some level of involvement with IHH through Luke, you know until the present day; we answer emails about other schools wanting to launch chapters and things like that. We just went back, um I don't know a year and a half, two years ago, to Middlebury to have like a meeting with alumni and Sujata and Karin and all of them. So yeah, probably started in 2013, was most involved during undergrad but have still dabbled in IHH *laughs* in various capacities, um for a while.

And how long had IHH been around at that point?

I think it was founded, Luke would know this, but I think it was like 2011, 2012. So right around the time that I was a freshman at Middlebury, it had just sort of launched and started, I believe. You'd have to ask Luke, he would know. But it wasn't more than a couple of years before I got there.

And what did involvement in IHH look like? What did the event look like?

Yeah, so the event started, when they first launched there was sort of like this mystique to them. And I think there was just better organizing in the early years and more investment, so they were really packed. They were still packed through my first couple of years at Midd, and then got a little bit smaller towards the end because it was like, again, with that rapid change, I think there was this sense of like, "Oh yeah, we know it happens here now, like all of the suddenly overnight we're like *laughs* socially conscious." And so I think it was sort of like an event that people saw less of a purpose for as time went on because they saw the issue being more addressed, and so there had to be some more education about like, you know, "This isn't just an event for your education, this is an event for people to get things off of their chests." And sort of educating about, you know, why it's important to do that listening not just for your own education and edification, but also as like a supportive act of solidarity. So yeah, it just shifted. But we also did some cool things as it got older. We did a campaign one year where, um, it was like a poster campaign in the freshman dorms. And at one of the IHH events we like gave out post-it notes and we sort of asked people that attended the event to write on the post-it what they wish incoming freshmen would know about consent and relationship culture at Middlebury. And so we like posted those and they were like positive and sort of uplifting, or like tips or like I don't know, they were just kind of cute. But we like posted those around which was really cool, and

I'm sure there were other things too. There was a lot of battling with Middsafe *laughs* in the early years.

Do you want to talk more about that?

Yeah, so when MiddSafe started it was a lot different than it is today. And they had, you know, college students who were trained to be advocates, which is fine, but they also had them serving as support people in title IX processes. Meaning that oftentimes the respondent would have a lawyer and the complainant or the survivor would come in with an 18 or 19 year old who had never done something like this before. And that's just a bad idea. And I think that part of that institutionally was that Middlebury, ooh, in my opinion, was reluctant to let other people in. Was reluctant to let people like WomenSafe [*local nonprofit that works to serve people across the gender spectrum who experience sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking*], who had been doing this for decades, because it's a lot easier to make an 18 or 19 year old believe that something's normal and acceptable procedurally and structurally than it is to convince somebody who's in their 40's and who's made a career out of this, that what's going on is okay. So I think it was, kind of was super well intentioned students who were putting a lot of effort into it. But because they were being used in such a direct way in the process, at a time when the process needed a lot of improvement, I think the school may have been using this as like a tool for risk management too. Um, that's just my opinion.

You mentioned that, you know, MiddSafe had a lot to say about, um, It Happens Here, what did that look like?

Yeah, so again part of this like risk management function of MiddSafe, I think in it's earlier years, was that they wanted student action and activism to come through, like, in formal channels like MiddSafe, that were closely regulated and maintained by campus officials. And what that did was take a lot of people out of the ranks from doing more grassroots survivor oriented work. Because a lot of times it was like if you're in MiddSafe you were expected sort of not to be engaging in this in other ways, or were supposed to be sort of like this neutral upstanding citizen, which for some reason came to mean not involved with IHH. And we had people who were involved in IHH who were incredibly, you know, qualified and who had served on committees and had been very involved in Title IX for a number of years, who just wouldn't get picked for MiddSafe advocates because we were seen as like too radical *laughs.* So like year after year people would apply, and year after year they wouldn't get selected and, um, so that sort of pit us in an interesting tension and then there was a lot of this idea of like triggering and was IHH triggering? And, you know, should IHH exist? There are some op/eds about that, kind of addle back at the time. But the argument coming from a lot of MiddSafe advocates was like that, um, talking about sexual violence in any capacity was inherently triggering and so basically that IHH shouldn't be doing it. And then to which I countered, like, you have posters all over campus that talk about sexual violence. So you put green posters on the back of every freaking door that talk

about sexual violence so why is what we're doing being coded in this language of triggering. You're talking about the same thing in an institutionally sanctioned way and suddenly that's like absolved from suspicion. So I think they just like co-opt the language of triggering to try and silence what we were doing. And I don't know whether it was officially sanctioned or encouraged through the MiddSafe program, but it did end up being a few MiddSafe advocates who really took up that mantle. And then there was the Green Dot [*National program that helps schools incorporate bystander intervention training*] campaign which launched, which I think is like the stupidest thing that's ever existed in my opinion. Like, "We're going to prevent sexual violence. Here's like a green cookie with green icing and like we're going to have green eggs and ham for a week and talk about sexual violence." And I was just like, it was just like, such a joke at the time. Like I don't know if it was their implementation of it or what, but um it was just like everything was green and then like if you were assaulted you were like a red, and that sort of dichotomy of like, you know, I don't know. And I think it was probably just they had this new program and were trying to unroll it and figure it out, I hope that it's evolved more since then. At the time I just remember like excessive amounts of green food and that was somewhat supposed to be helping me *laughs,* yeah I don't know. It just seemed kind of juvenile maybe, or like reductive.

Did you have anything else to say about the Green Dot program or what that looked like?

Were they trying to run Green Dot workshops at that point?

Yeah they were starting the Green Dot workshops, although I think it was like kind of an invitation only, like just getting involved. It was just launching as I was there, it was in the earlier days. Which again is why I give them a little bit of credit because they were probably like working out a new program and how to implement it, um, but yeah it was interesting. I think Middlebury's very good at like latching on to these big corporate programs that they think are going to like come in and solve everything, without like developing actual roles at the institution or capacity for facilitating those conversations *laughs.* You know I think they did the same thing, right, with some of the restorative justice consulting they've been doing for a little. Like they're maybe not implementing the most refined form of restorative justice but they're able to like glom onto this big corporate program that like has the name of the thing that they want to claim. And I think restorative justice, not restorative justice, I think that Green Dot was a similar way to be like, "Oh look we have this program, you know, we have this thing, all the food is green now." And it was *laughs* you know, one of those things that I think was well intentioned but I think it was more about minimizing institutional risk by saying, "Oh we're not doing rape skits anymore, we have green eggs and ham now" rather than you know maybe building some of

that capacity to do more meaningful work on the ground. But I'm hoping that that capacity unfolded and came out in time, because it was really early.

Do you remember which year they started the Green Dot things?

I think they did it either my junior or senior year, so it was sort of towards the end of my time at Middlebury.

Next I'd like to talk about SRR, so it started based off of the conference you went to at Amherst right? They had some type of similar committee?

Yeah they had a, um, like a director position and we just had to sort of scale back towards the structure of Middlebury's student government.

So at Amherst was it part of the student government or no?

Yeah, yeah, it was. I can't remember if it was a committee or just a director position, but there was this lovely gentleman who we met there who put on this conference and was just doing a lot of great stuff with the role. And I think because we all saw so much of this stuff unfolding; like we saw this MiddSafe idea and there had been a committee. I can't remember what it was called, Karin [*Hanta*] would know, but there had been a committee for a number of years on sexual violence prevention that had been like under Karen Guttentag and had like gone nowhere. So like this committee was a botch, and then we had MiddSafe, and then there was this Green Dot thing, and I think we just wanted the ability to have a student side in the conversation about it and have a point person to sort of interface with the administration. Particularly because there was so much change happening in such a rapid amount of time and it just felt like there needed to be one person who was like the specialist in this area to really kind of keep track of it all. And also be sort of a face or a voice of the student body.

So once you kind of got that idea at the conference, how did you come back and implement that?

So we reached out to I think it was Josh Berlowitz, who was I believe a [*SGA*] senator at the time, and he drafted the bill and we kind of kicked it back and forth. And then Michelle, Katie, and I who had all been up to Amherst and had kind of had our hands in drafting this bill went to the SGA meeting. We sort of gave our pitch, we talked about how it was working at Amherst and to my knowledge it unanimously passed. We gave like a little song and dance before they voted.

So you would say that you and Michele were the founders?

Um, it was kind of all of us. Yeah, we all came back from this conference, we were all involved with IHH, like heavily involved too, but we had just decided that we wanted this position and then the position was created mid-year. And then they were like ok you can do this Maddie *laughs,* so I was the first director basically to just get it through, well basically just to create it, *laughs.* And I came up with some ideas, and like created some documents about what Amherst had been doing with it, and then I was like perfectly content to hand it off to some other person the next time elections sort of rolled around. It was enough work just creating it *laughs.*

If I was going to write an “about” and I wanted to make sure we know who founded SRR, who would you say it was? You were the first director, and Michele helped you give the pitch?

I would say Michelle, Katie Preston, and I. And I think maybe Shariell Crosby was involved too. We kind of all did things together and no one ever had an independent idea, like we were always conspiring together *laughs.* So I would say it was sort of the group of us that decided to do it. And then I just happened to be the one with enough bandwidth to serve as the first director.

Were you all the same year graduating?

No, so Katie was a year younger than me. And then Sherielle and I were the same year. And then Michelle was a year above us. So we all kind of like cycled through. But to my best knowledge, like, we went to this conference at Amherst, we were like wow Amherst is doing a ton and makes Middlebury look really sad in comparison. And then just on the drive back we decided like this is what we're going to do, this is what we like from this school and this school and this school, and we just felt like collectively we wanted to create the SRR position. Josh Berlowitz was the senator who like wrote it, cause you have to like do it like though somebody, so he was the one who just like offered to write it and work with us which was great.

And then what types of things did you do as Director?

That's a great question. I think because I was just, to my knowledge, I was just there for like a very short time before someone else took over the reins. So I like got the position going, I created a document of some of the different things that Amherst and other schools were doing with similar situated positions; like they did like consent fests and like all different sorts of things. And then I met with administrators, Barbara McCall, with you know folks like the Title IX coordinator and you know people who were more on the adjudication side. Just did a lot of, "You might have heard that" you know the kind pitch right like, "You might have heard that this position just was created. We're just getting started. Here's sort of our hopes for the position."

And so just doing a lot of education and meeting with people, sort of about what the position was to become, before handing it off to somebody in like a fresh school year to actually implement those things. Because to my knowledge, the bill happened like midway through a spring semester, to my best knowledge. And so it was like that school year was almost over.

Which year?

It must have been my junior year I think. I think it was 2015. Oh and I did do something, I forgot that I did do something. I had a dinner in Atwater [*Dining hall*]. We had a dinner um *laughs* we just that first year, that spring, we pulled it together fast. But we collaborated with, I think MiddSafe and Barbara McCall and we had a bunch of like table topics at the dinner. And it was like an Atwater dinner focused on launching the Sexual and Relationship Respect conversation. I think that dinner was tied to the launch of the, It's all coming like, there was so much and it's hard to remember the timeline, I'm pretty sure that dinner coincided with the launch of this new position. I think it was called like the Atwater Dinner on Sexual Relationship Respect or something like that.

You also mentioned that you did a lot of little one-off projects. And in your transition document you included your thesis and it kind of mentioned a lot of little things that you were a part of: blog posts, monologues, YouTube projects, campus articles, interviews, other things like that. Do you want to talk about any of that stuff that you felt like was feminist activism that you did?

Yeah, so I actually just found the article about the dinner. It's like an op/ed that I wrote. What else? There are so many things. We did the Middlebury Unmasked video which was pretty, like, edgy at the time. So we got like a bunch of survivors who had gone through the Title IX process together, and we like wore these masks and talked about what we hated about the process basically. Yeah, it was sort of, uh, an intense experience but it was like I think the first time that people had really heard in such a broad way like how much physical experience of this contempt there was with the existing process. And then once we released that we, like Michelle and I, went on the radio and did all sorts of different press related to that. And then one time there was this like high profile Title IX case, where like he was allowed back on campus and it was super like just, from like the reports that were coming out in like op/eds and things, just like not handled well I think from people's experiences. So it was like there was John Doe, Jane Joe, and like people were all weighing in on their opinions on this like thing. So I like just got a bunch of chalk, I think I like, I don't even know where I got the chalk. But I just like went in front of Mead Chapel, because it says like "The hills are his also" [*The central chapel on campus with a prominent inscription that reads: "The Strength Of The Hills Is His Also"*] or whatever and I was just like, as a feminist, annoyed by that. And so I just like chucked literally all up and down that whole area on the sidewalk like, "I stand with Jane," like a million times at night with like a headlamp on. So when people woke up in the morning it was like this focal point of campus just

like projected that message. So yeah just stuff like that. There was like a lot of little posters campaigns, sometimes we would just sit out with a table and like talk to people, um yeah. I'm trying to think of other ones. Lots of printing, lots of printing.

***laughs* You, um, in your thesis mentioned a blogpost about performance activism that you did and why you had chosen to do it?**

Yeah.

What was the experience of that like, and what was that?

Okay so, I still have it on my google drive. So if y'all haven't talked to them yet you totally should because they were really rad and I can't claim any part in this, like, event other than they were like super kind enough to let me participate in it once. But the group was called, let's look...

Stares on Stairs. [Performance activism in which some students would stand in varying states of undress with painted handprints on their skin and signs reading "I'm still not asking for it" and "Sexual assault leaves a mark," while other students engaged with the audience and passed out information. The performances were held in active party spaces on campus]

Yes, Stares on Stairs. I still have like one of their folders weirdly, it's like a shared folder. But they started doing, I think it came out of like J-Term activist class or something like that. They had all taken a class together, about I think performance activism, and had decided this is what they were going to do. So they started doing these kind of like pop-up events around campus, I think they largely started in Atwater [*Suites and dorms often belonging to athletes, sometimes referred to as "frat-water" by students for it's fraternity-like party scene*] to my knowledge, but I participated in one that was outside of the spring concert. Like the, I can't remember what it's called, but they have the like annual big spring concert. And so they had it that year inside the Athletic Center. And so yeah I did that, I was like wearing my bra or whatever, and yeah it was like a pretty powerful experience. And I think this was true of my entire time at Middlebury, like they did that event in an incredibly thoughtful way. Like they had signs ahead of it, like ahead of the installation, saying like you're about to enter this. They had an alternate route for people who didn't want to see it that they could be like guided in different ways. And then they had people who were trained to like support people there and like handed out materials, like printed materials, with recourse links and things like that. So I just remember my entire time at Middlebury like you'd get MiddSafe and the administration, other things being like you know, "You're just like doing this all wrong." And it's like this is so well thought out, like *laughs* there's been so much thought into how this happens. And it was the same way with IHH events. Like we put so much thought into having resources there and having spaces for processing. And we would plan lunch meetups after events so that people could have some time to digest what they had listened to and would have like a dedicated space to unpack that. And then like, there was always just pushback despite all of those efforts. But, uh, the performance art was like really

wildly powerful and jarring, but like in all of the right ways. I think they did it too at Rites of Spring [*An invite-only party held every spring by Middlebury's secret societies/fraternities*] at one point. Like *laughs* like they just like I don't know, they just like really had fun with it. There was like, I saw pictures of them at like the llama farm [*The private property where Rites of Spring is often held is an*] or whatever it is um *laughs* yeah.

You mentioned what kind of the orientation looked like in the skit beforehand, you know, with the RAs. That was happening when you were a freshman at Middlebury?

Yeah so that was in 2012. And then I believe shortly thereafter by 2013, 2014, Barbara McCall had been hired, and then that's when some of the programming started to shift. But it's my knowledge that for a while before I had gone through my freshman orientation in 2012, that that had been sort of the process. It would be fascinating if you could get your hands on like the old, it was like a one page handout with like the skit and it was just like so ridiculous. If you could ever find that, like, you would be so shocked compared to like *laughs* it's just so rudimentary. But that has like implication rights, of like your first messaging from Middlebury about sexual violence is basically that it's a joke and it's not taken seriously. Like that has ripple effects.

And when they kind of got rid of that programming do you know what replaced it?

So at some point they had or started to do the like online trainings too. And I don't know at which stage that came into play, I can't remember. But I was only a freshman once so I don't know exactly the ways in which that changed. But I know that she started doing more programming, and not just during freshman orientation. But there were attempts to have meet-ups throughout the year and in like the Commons [*Middlebury had a Commons System consisting of five Commons that all students were sorted into. It was abolished in 2020*] in various sorts of like types of conversations. And sometimes they would post plays and do other things so, um, yeah I don't know how freshman orientation specifically changed but I know there was like more programming in general.

In your thesis you also mentioned a monologue that you gave at a Taboo event?

Yeah, so I did that. I did a similar thing at an IHH event my senior year.

And what was that about?

Oh, it was about my Title IX process. And so yeah, so I did that a couple of times. And then I over time just started to interact more with administrators, so like Karen Guttentag and Sue Ritter, and those folks. And we'd attend webinars and talk about things. I think that the first half of my college experience I was just like pissed off, and then like about midway through I was like I'm still really pissed off, but I want to do things so I have to be a little nicer *laughs.* And so then I started getting to know folks that I previously hadn't maybe had as much interest in doing that with, and started to actually make more progress that way. I sort of had to, uh, it was

like a tough pill to swallow in some ways, to like work with people that had been so personally frustrating to you in the past.

You mentioned that you were a GSFS major, did your classwork contribute at all do you think to your feminist education? Or did it inform your feminist activism?

Oh yeah. I mean like I'm sure anyone *laughs* would say that. I mean certainly I think one of the best experiences that I had academically was working with Sujata on my senior thesis, because that was just really like a nice piece of closure for me academically and otherwise. Um, so that was probably the most meaningful academic experience I had sort of in this realm. But, you know, I also remember taking some sociology classes with Laurie Essig that, you know, informed some of the ways that I think about how violence operates sort of socially and structurally but yeah. And then Karin was always there to support, Karin Hanta was always there to support. Like however many things that I needed printed or you know if we ran out of push pins or just like wanted to vent. So they were all very important.

What did you write your thesis about?

I wrote my thesis about restorative justice as a feminist response to campus sexual misconduct. Um, so it just basically broadly argued that there was an adjudication only model at Middlebury at the time, and that framework for justice didn't make sense to some people, and how in order to better support survivor autonomy there should be some more restorative kind of like harm centered options rather than, you know, purely punitive options. And it's actually kind of wild because this month restorative justice, um there's just a final rule promulgated by the Department of Education which is an utter disaster. But the one good thing to come out of it is that we can now offer restorative justice as a response to campus sexual misconduct, which is not something that the Department has always allowed and at times it's expressly forbidden, at least with respect to mediation. But anyhow, now like, at the time I was writing my thesis, there were some scholars who wanted to see this happening and who really believed in it, but we weren't entirely sure that there were the laws and regulations in place to like actually do the thing. And now as of this year there are the laws and regulations in place to like actually do the thing. And there are some schools that have been doing it for a little bit longer than that but, um, it's like sort of wild. And I just actually, just got notification that I've been working with somebody who I cited in my senior thesis and who came to campus and ended up moving to San Diego where I live. His name's Dr. David Carp and he and myself and some others just wrote a law journal article about how to, sort of like, practically implement restorative justice in the Title IX realm, particularly when it comes to legal considerations because it's a law journal and we just got that published. So in some ways I'm still thinking about that same problem *laughs* like many, many, many years later. But, yeah. I didn't know that I would be thinking about that for so long, but I still am so *laughs* yeah.

Did your umm work in IHH, SRR, or the like one-off projects, the performance art, is there anything that stands out about how it was received by fellow students or how it was received by administration?

I think fellow students were mostly supportive from what I remember. Um, you know, it was a lot of the same students doing the work like on the ground, right. It's like the same faces showing up in terms of like who organizes. But I think, you know, we didn't really have any negative reactions to our work other than like with MiddSafe and the administration. They consistently had a laundry list of questions about what we were doing. But in terms of like students, you know they'd come up if we were tabling and voice support or would show up to events even if they weren't helping in the planning. So yeah I think it was fairly well received.

And by Administration, you feel like it was not well received?

I think there were certain people in the administration who had more or less comfort with what we were doing. I think there were some people who always got it, and there were some people who, um, had more questions. But I think President Patton changed that because she changed the tone of that, where I think there was more acceptance for what we were doing. Just you know in terms of from leadership right, and that message trickled down. I did sense a pivot.

Excerpt 2:

There was this grant that the college got for, this is just one example, but they got a grant for sexual violence prevention. And they wrote in IHH for the grant and talked about our program and how great we were. And you know it was our understanding that we would get to have some say in how those funds were used or maybe even access to some of those funds. So it was like IHH was used as this innovative idea to secure funding, but then once the funding was received, we really had to fight to actually have a say in how any of it was used or if IHH got to be a part of that, even though we were a large part of the grant narrative. You know, there was another example where we fought really hard to have a support group for survivors on campus that wasn't funded through Parton [*Center for Health and Wellness*], but that had WomenSafe advocates at the helm of sort of leading that group. Because a lot of survivors had lost trust in the campus and, um, in services and infrastructures that were supported by the campus, right, so it was important to us to have an outside perspective coming in and to get together and to share our stories. And I think in a lot of ways that was the college's worst nightmare, right, because people start telling their stories and piecing together what happened to them and, you know, what happened to the person sitting across the circle from them, and you realize that you know these things aren't just individualized, one-off moments, but it was really sort of injustice that was happening on a broader scale. So um, you know we eventually did get the support group going, but there was a lot of resistance to that. You know, "Why don't you want it to be funded through the college? Do we really need this?" And then following up, "How many people are coming? How big is it?" You know, wanting to know a lot of information about the group members. And

it's like no *laughs* we're not going to tell you who's there, we're not going to give you a list of, you know, who's receiving this service. It's an important service and you know, we're just going to keep on doing it. Uh, like thanks for your frustration but, uh, we're going to keep on moving forward. And it was hard to, you know, it was just a lot of communication challenges and I think administrators were caught between wanting to do their jobs to protect the university and also seeing the real suffering of people who had been engaging with this system. Um, and it was really tricky I think. I don't envy college administrators, but I just remember, you know, trying to educate people. To get funding for that support group and to keep that support group going was really really taxing and took a lot of education and time. Um, and similarly I remember there was a lot of frustration about us being written into this grant narrative and then really similarly having to fight hard to be able to sort of have a survivor led direction for how those funds would be used.

End of Excerpt 2

You mentioned something about an administrator saying "Oh, this doesn't happen here." Some event at Old Chapel and people had to kind of stand up and be like, "Oh no it happened to me." What happened there? What event was that?

I wasn't there. That's like one of the founding stories of *laughs* this sort of like movement. But I know that it did happen because I've talked to people who were there. So Lauren Curatolo, who I'm sure Sujata has mentioned, she was one of the people there. And there were others but yeah they sort of, to the best of my knowledge, they sort of encircled Old Chapel. And there are pictures of that even. I'm sure Karin [*Hanta*] has like their pictures of people with signs and you know they're all out protesting. And so that was sort of where things that happened in sort of like Lauren's generation, and then Luke sort of was influenced by that, and others who sort of picked up the flag with IHH. Even though a lot of us weren't on campus at the same time, I mean now we know each other, but you know one generation of people would do something, and you know you're left with this frustration. And then there was like Take Back The Night [*A national program through which people can hold event/marches to support the mission of ending sexual violence in all forms, raising awareness about sexual violence and supporting survivors of sexual violence*] and then there was IHH, and it all just sort of was new ideas and came up through the ranks, you know. We would try not to forget what they had done and would just try to sort of build on it.

Did you have any specific mentors or allies in the feminist work that you did?

Um, yeah. So like Michelle, Luke, Katie, Jingyi, Sherielle, like all of those folks that I've mentioned already. And then you know Karin, and Sujata, and Laurie were just like always unwaveringly supportive.

Excerpt 3:

So I look back and, uh, how sort of difficult it was to be a publicly visible survivor. And I look at it now and there's still certainly challenges. And, you know, people of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds, and all sorts of different things right, it's not necessarily easy for everyone to do that. But we've had the conversation on such a different scale now that, you know, I think IHH was a small but a very important voice in making it okay to be angry and making it okay to be frustrated. And, you know, not having to present yourself as this together victim, right, this like perfect victim with a, you know, rock solid narrative in a very emotional place. Like no, it's, you don't have to be the good victim or the believable victim. You can be angry and you can still be believed. And so I'm super grateful for the people at Middlebury who let me be angry and who still believe me.

End of Excerpt 3

We've been asking people what the best part and what the worst part of their experience organizing was and their experience with their feminist activism, because we feel that often it gets portrayed as one or the other. So what was the best and worst part of your experience?

I think the best part for me was just feeling like I had the opportunity to rewrite my own story. Like I felt like that truth had been taken from me, and like put through this process that I never really wanted. And, um, I had lost control over my own narrative and learned that there were a lot of other people who had too. So the best part was just being able to tell our own stories in our own voices and engage in activism that made sense to our trauma and our lived experiences, and like to not wait around for the institution to create that closure for us because they clearly were not, and to just take that into our own hands. So that was like really powerful. And also just people supporting people generally is like, that have had similar experiences right, that's really powerful. And then the hardest thing I think for me was just when the IHH events started, there was just about a year period that they started having lower attendance. And they had had such high attendance and so just figuring out how I had failed in that, but also just trying to make sense of how to do activism in a time where everything was so rapidly changing at a national level. Um, and just how to figure out how to kind of re-market or rebrand yourself or you know how to pivot. So that was really tricky to figure out. Like you know you have your project, but then all this stuff is happening outside of it and how to figure out how to make those two things like do a nice dance together *laughs* um was a learning curve.

You said you felt like you saw a change at Middlebury during your time there?

Yeah.

What do you wish you had known about organizing before or what advice would you give to current Middlebury feminist activists?

I just think, you know, at different times in a movement or a piece of change that you want to achieve, you can work from the outside or from the inside right? So you can show up at the president's house with poster board and that's totally great. Or like show up and surround Old Chapel or do things externally, and in different moments I found myself doing that. But then at other times it was very strategic and advantageous to me to go inside of Old Chapel and sit down and have meetings and get to know people. Even people that I really disagreed with in like very fundamental ways. So yeah I think that's one thing I learned, just being able to sense when I needed to work from the outside and when I needed to work from the inside. And I think sometimes having different people having those different roles can be helpful, you know like even I'm thinking of FAM [*A student organization called Feminist Action at Middlebury that challenges the construction of gender as well as issues of sexual and domestic inequality and violence*] or something. Like if you have one person that already has a great relationship with somebody that you need to be a strategic part of your vision, like have that person be the designated like inside person *laughs* that like does the relationship building. And then other people can like hurl rocks, like metamorphic rock rights. But you kind of need both in my experience.

Have you continued to organize elsewhere or what have you been up to since Middlebury?

Yeah I like to think so. I means so I still have been working on coauthoring this law journal piece on restorative justice and sexual violence, so that's like a piece pf continuity in all this that I'm still working on, like literally this morning *laughs.* And, um, I'm also like the president of Pride Law at my law school, which is a catholic law school, so there's plenty of opportunities for learning and growth and challenging there at times. And then I think just like going to law school was a decision that was deeply informed by my like going through a Title IX process and like wishing I had understood more about what my rights were. So I think even in some small ways like gaining that skill set is a continuation of some of that stuff that I did at Midd.

What law school do you go to?

I go to the University of San Diego. Yeah, it's really nice.

And do you know what type of work you want to do with your law degree? Or you're still thinking about it?

Um, I've been doing sort of more like policy and legislative law stuff within like, uh, judge made law, courtrooms sort of stuff. So that's sort of where I'm most comfortable. I think Sujata referred to me as a policy wonk during my thesis defense and that's still true, *laughs* so I kind of live in that world.

Very cool. That's really interesting to hear about. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?

No, I don't think so. Well I would love to know, does the SRR position still exist? Like is it still a thing? Is it, I don't know like, *laughs* I just created the thing and was like I hope this is helpful. But I don't know what it's like now or even if it still exists *laughs*.

I directed SRR this year.

Oh yay.

And it's well. We have done lots of things with it. Kind of interesting to see how like different initiatives are passed over time as people remember what the generation of activists before them did, exactly like you said. People after you started trying to get, you know, the pads and tampons machines in public buildings to be free. And then, you know, after that we passed a bill where we could get free pads, tampons, condoms, dental dams, and lube in all freshman housing and this last year we expanded that to all underclassmen housing.

Oh that's awesome. That's a big project.

Yeah *laughs.* We've been trying for years but kind of struggling to get orientation programming because we actually didn't really have consent orientation programming. And I actually did quite a bit of research at the beginning of this year and contacted every other NESCAC school and like interviewed them about what their programming was like, and put together a proposal, and worked with our new administrators and Title IX coordinator this year to implement like orientation consent programming for the first time in awhile. Which was something we'd been trying to do for lots of years so that was exciting. I just had a meeting in San Diego with the new Title IX coordinator, Marti. But if you ever like in your efforts ever need alumni to like be like, "Hey what happened to consent education programming? We were having this debate like a decade ago, what the F?" Like in a nicer way, there's definitely a group of us, like Luke, Michelle, all those people who would be more than happy to be like, "Hey, we heard this isn't happening, like, that can't be true." So if you ever need that, like, now you have my email so feel free.

Wonderful. So we did that. We also had a Sex In The Dark event where we had like a panel of Sexperts, people from Parton, Title IX, our Health and Wellness Office, and also people from Burlington who were like pleasure centered and queer centered, you know, sex educators come and had students come and ask anonymous questions through a go link.

That's awesome.

Yeah, we have a website now with go links where people can ask anonymous questions and we'll like post the answers basically on this website.

Y'all are doing so much more than I ever could have imagined. That's incredible. That's awesome.

Yeah! So lots of super cool things and it's been wonderful to kind of be inspired by, um, by all the work that you guys did. Part of why we're doing these interviews is because you guys are doing great work that gets to influence us and then help us influence other generations of Middlebury students. So we wanted to say thank you and have your work immortalized.

Well thanks, this had been lovely. Especially during finals week, good luck! I know that that's a stressful time. And I really appreciate your time too.

Last thing is what pronouns do you want us to use?

Oh, she/her. Thanks for asking.