

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF  
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM  
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

**SITE: ITALY**

**Transcript of Giulia Blasi  
Interviewer: Lauren Duncan**

**Location: Rome, Italy  
Date: June 26, 2018**

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**Giulia Blasi**, born in Pordenone in 1972, is a writer and a feminist activist. She is the author of several novels and short stories, including *Manuale per ragazze rivoluzionarie - Perché il femminismo ci rende felici* (2018), *Rivoluzione Z - Diventare adulti migliori con il femminismo* (2020), and *Brutta - Storia di un corpo come tanti*, all published by Rizzoli. She is the creator of the #quellavoltache campaign, a hashtag used in Italy at the end of 2017 to open a conversation on sexual harassment and abuse. She lives in Rome.

**Lauren Duncan** is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Psychology at Smith College, in Northampton, MA. She obtained her Ph.D. in Personality Psychology and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She teaches courses in the Psychology of Women and Gender, Political Psychology, and the Psychology of Political Activism. Her research focuses on individual motivation for participation in collective action, particularly among women and LGBTQ+ individuals. While at Smith, she began studying the Italian language and culture (Dr. Grazioli was her first teacher, who became her friend and collaborator) and was able to extend her research on the psychology of activism to conduct oral histories with Italian feminist and feminist LGBTQ+ activists. She has recently written about "Better policy interventions through intersectionality" (*Social Issues and Policy Review*, 2022), the childhood origins of Gloria Steinem's feminist activism (*Journal of Personality*, 2022), "Psychology and political participation" for *The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation* (2022), and "Power, gender, and collective action" for *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychology Power & Gender* (2023).

*Keywords: Media, Community Activism, Intersectionality, LGBTQ+ rights, Art/Writing as Activism*

**Lauren Duncan: I'm speaking with Giulia Blasi, and it is the 26th of June 2018, and this is an oral history. So I would like to start by asking you about your family. What do your parents do?**

Giulia Blasi: They're both retired and my mum was a nurse and my dad was in postal service -- he was postal [unintelligible].

**LD: Okay, and you have--brothers and sisters?**

GB: I have a younger sister.

**LD: And she is also--?**

GB: She is also--she also works--she works as a mail carrier.

**LD: Okay! All right, and we'll talk about college education in a little bit. How was it to grow up in your family? How would you describe your relationships with your parents when you were growing up and now?**

GB: Well it was complicated, the way families always are when people are complicated and everyone is! It's like... who was that? Flaubert? Flaubert<sup>1</sup> who said that every family is unhappy in their own way, I think so. That's probably it for my family. My parents are still together, but you know growing up as a very headstrong kid was kinda hard. I was shy, I was quiet, I wasn't rebellious when I was younger, but I wanted what I wanted and whatever I wanted I was gonna--I was gonna get. And I didn't know what I wanted until I was much older but I, when I was younger I wanted--I knew what I did not want and I resisted.

**LD: So what were some of the things that you resisted?**

GB: Well my mum I know this sounds ridiculous but I was very tall growing up and my mother had to make clothes for me because they--she couldn't find clothes that fit me. I was taller and very very tiny--very very skinny so she made me this awful set of pantaloons<sup>2</sup> that I hated; they were floral pantaloons that I hated. So we had to--I remember one day we

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Flaubert is one of the leading proponents of realist literature in France. "Gustave Flaubert." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave\\_Flaubert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Flaubert) (accessed July 16, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Pantaloons are baggy pants whose ankle parts are tied. The word itself originated from Italy, specifically from the comedy persona as a foolish old man wearing pantaloons. "Pantaloons." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/pantaloons> (accessed July 16, 2022).

had to, we had to go out together as a family and she wanted to force me to wear the horrid pantaloons and I said “I’m not wearing these” and she said “If you’re not wearing these then you’re staying home” and I stayed home. Because I was--I was not going to appear in public with those horrid pantaloons, I never did. I don’t know what happened to them to be honest! I hope she recycled them into throw pillows or something!

**LD: She might have done that--you never know! And has your relationship with your mother changed?**

GB: It has, it improved drastically once I moved away from home for good. After--way after I left to go to university. I was nineteen when I moved out of my house-- it is very unusual for Italian children to move out and never come back. Most Italian children stay with their parents for a very long time, and after they finish university, they tend to come back to their hometowns, and I never did. So I, I sought independence very fiercely because I wanted to be free, I wanted to be free from the small town where I was living in, from my family--my dad is very affectionate but he is a Southern gentleman<sup>3</sup>. He had very strict ideas about what I should look like, how I should dress, how I should comport myself in society, which is weird. It was a weird mixture of wanting me to be smart and with it, and on the other hand he wanted me to be chaste and quiet. So it was a bit weird--he really didn’t know what to do with me. I was very shy, very smart, but I didn’t--I really wasn’t the kind--I wasn’t cool, at all. And he wanted me to be cooler obviously-- I think part of the reason was that he was afraid that I wouldn’t be able to survive in society lacking—

**LD: You were afraid? Or he was afraid?**

GB: He was--I was terrified of people at the time. I was bullied as a teenager, I was bullied in school, I was bullied for a very long time, that left scars, and nobody knew how to handle the problem.

**LD: Right, did you tell your parents?**

GB: I did, everybody knew.

**LD: Did they do anything?**

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<sup>3</sup> There existed a socio-political North/South divide in Italy dating back centuries before its unification in 1861. The difference remains nowadays particularly in economic trajectory and specialization. Such realities have cultivated multiple stereotypes each region has of the other. Sanchez, Patricia. “Northern vs Southern Italy: Attitudes and culture.” Miramonti Corteno. <https://www.miramonticorteno.com/blog/2019/9/9/northern-vs-southern-italy-attitudes-and-culture> (accessed July 22, 2022).

GB: I think at the time the way grownups dealt with--the way grownups dealt with bullying was by telling children to deal with it themselves--fight back, if at all possible or just ignore the bullies. None of these strategies worked. So I just lived with it for as long as I possibly could and then I ran away.

**LD: Yes, so where did you grow up? What town?**

GB: I grew up, well I grew up--I was raised by my grandmother for a portion of my life because my mum and dad were working class and they couldn't afford to have a babysitter so I moved in with my Gran who was--who lived a bit--I think forty-five minutes away from where my parents lived so—

**LD: What ages?**

GB: I was five and a half/six-ish, at the beginning of primary school and then I moved back with them when I was nine. So I spent a portion of my life in this tiny, secluded village in the mountains, and they commuted every day for a few years. And then on the last year, I think, they left me there and only commuted on weekends, and came to pick me up on weekends and that was very traumatic. And I think that's how I remember it--that's what my memory of my childhood is and a few years ago I brought it up with my parents and they denied ever doing that. So I don't know whether it's gaslighting<sup>4</sup>--where everyone is sort of removing ever doing that to me because it was too traumatic, but I do remember it very clearly.

**LD: Well, it is more important what your memories are for your own—**

GB: Of course--I've just decided it doesn't matter--I think that happened to me, I remember that happening to me, I believe that happened to me, and then I worked through it so it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter what they think or what their version of reality is. I don't really have to live by anybody's version of reality.

**LD: Right. So, what--how old were you when you were aware that you wanted to leave the small town?**

GB: Oh very young.

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<sup>4</sup> A form of psychological abuse that manipulates or misleads someone into self-doubt of their sanity. "Gaslighting." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting> (accessed July 22, 2022).

**LD: Very young.**

GB: Very young.

**LD: From the beginning—**

GB: I was --I wanted to be a writer when I was very very young, and I used writing as a form of-- as an escape hatch. That was what it was at the time and it still is for me. Writing is a way--writing fiction is a way of escaping reality. And so I used fiction--and I used to write reams of paper of fan fiction<sup>5</sup> when I was a child but there wasn't--there was no WorkPad [*online writing software, ndt*] at the time so mercifully most of it is lost in the--in the nooks and crannies of my parents' home. Some of it surfaced recently, because my mum did a cleanout so some of it ended up in my room. And it was stuff that I wrote when I was twelve and it's horrid! Oh my god it's so embarrassing and at the same time I feel such a tenderness for myself because my writing was abysmal. But, I just know that I got better with time obviously, so it's a testimony that practice makes perfect! I was really shit at twelve but yeah so it resurfaced recently. And I wanted to--I really wanted to leave. I knew I had to leave, and when the time came to select a university, I applied for the interpreter's school in Trieste.<sup>6</sup>

**LD: Oh, okay.**

GB: But I didn't think that I was going to get in so I was going to apply to another faculty [*department, ndt*] that was closer to home-- but I got in!

**LD: That's amazing!**

GB: So, I moved to Trieste and I never went back.

**LD: Okay, can you tell me a little about your relationship with your sister? How much younger is she and--?**

GB: She's four and a half years younger than me which is significant in a lot of ways. But I think what set us apart for the best part of our lives is that we have very very different personalities. I may look dominant, I may come across as an alpha but I am actually quite a—

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<sup>5</sup> A fan-made creative narrative relied on the original fiction. It is usually unauthorized and incompetently published. "Fan fiction." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fan\\_fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fan_fiction) (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> A northeastern port city and regional capital in Italy. "Trieste." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trieste> (accessed July 16, 2022).

**LD: Beta?**

GB: No, not exactly! I'm quite caring and I do listen to people, and I do listen to criticism, and I do listen to constructive criticism particularly. My sister is very headstrong--extremely headstrong...and she--whatever she does, she is like 100% convinced that that is the right thing. She runs the household like a general and she's very strict with my nephews--particularly the eldest.

**LD: And do you two butt heads?**

GB: Occasionally yeah, it was worse when we were younger. It got better with age; particularly because the kids have brought us together. I have taken a lot of care never to antagonize her in the way she raises the kids. Although I will occasionally offer some constructive criticism which is *not* accepted. Or not overtly accepted-- I do side with my nephew when there's-it's needed. But I tend never to question her decisions because I think it's unfair.

**LD: Yeah. Well I'm sure your nephew appreciates having an aunt who understands him.**

GB: I think he does, but he's a darling, he's not really not a difficult kid at all. He's really sweet.

**LD: Good! And how about your relationship with the grandmother who raised you for a while?**

GB: Ah well! That's an open wound actually.

**LD: Oh, I'm sorry.**

GB: My--my mum's mum and dad, I don't think that they were the greatest parents and they were *not* the greatest grandparents. Not to me anyway, I never wanted for anything. I had food, I had clothes. Occasionally my grandmother would sew me little dresses for my Barbies, but I don't remember being particularly cared for emotionally. But that might have something to do with the whole not really remembering my parents being with me when I was growing up. So I think everything is a bit muddy there. And I don't think there's much use in going back there to try to sort out the truth, because there's no truth in emotions.

**LD: You can't change it anyway.**

GB: No, I can't change it anyway. So, it's just weird. When I look at how my mother, my own mother, is with my nephews I'm so jealous of how affectionate she is with them.

**LD: Yeah. Well there is sort of a generational component to it I think too. Where people of those generations, and this is true in the United States too, my parents are like that too-- they are just not-- they're much more affectionate with their grandchildren than they were--**

GB: Yeah, well I did expect that from both sets of grandparents and they were never very affectionate with me. The one who was the most affectionate was my great-grandmother, my grandmother's mother on my maternal side. I used to spend a lot of time with her at hers [*her house, ndt*] with one of my second cousins. And we used to stay at hers and make pizzas together, hide in wardrobes until she came to find us. It was always the same wardrobe. There was exactly one wardrobe and we hid in there. She'd tell us stories, we'd sleep with her in the big bed and she'd tell us stories to put us to sleep. Then she fell asleep halfway through and we'd shake her awake, "How does it end? Grammy, how does it end?" It was a bit weird because we knew how it ended –

**LD: That's sweet.**

GB: And she was adorable and she played with all of us.

**LD: That's very sweet.**

GB: She died at a very old age. She had dementia<sup>7</sup> for a few years before she died so she didn't exactly recognize us. But you know she was nearly one hundred and two! She had plenty of time to see all of her great-grandchildren.

**LD: Oh that's wonderful! That's great. Okay, how do you think you learned about the political and social values of your family and can you give me an example?**

GB: I still don't know what the political and social values of my family are! I have no idea. I think that they are--like borderline conservative? But I don't really know, because my dad is surprisingly progressive in a lot of ways and my mum, because of her complicated

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<sup>7</sup> Generally refers to diminished brain functions that disturb daily life including but not limited to memory loss and judgment struggles. That said, growing old does not necessarily involve these symptoms. "What is dementia?" Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/dementia/index.html> (accessed July 16, 2022).



personal history, sometimes has views that I do not agree with. We tend to leave politics out of it, which is the safest way.

**LD: Do you think that you would argue with them?**

GB: I think I would argue with my mum more than I argue with my dad actually. Which is a bit weird. My dad listens to me a lot more.

**LD: Okay then I want to ask you specifically about the types of messages you received about gender, which you talked a little bit about, and the role of women and men in society and family.**

GB: That's another thing that's very messy and complicated in my family, because my dad is from the South--and people from the South in Italy tend to be a lot more conservative when it comes to gender roles. So, when I was growing up my dad was obsessed with the idea that I was going to go out and get all slutty, which I wasn't! Partly because I was ugly, which was a very efficient deterrent. Partly because I was shy, and I was never sexy, I really wasn't rebellious at all. So there was no need to worry about it--I think he was projecting really. He was projecting his fears onto me--and there was nothing there, really nothing to worry about.

**LD: So, did he try to control your**

GB: He was very controlling, both my parents were very controlling. This was a time without cell phones so we weren't traceable at all. So, whenever I went out with friends I had a curfew and I had to come home before anyone else, like eleven o'clock every night. It was a very small town, we never went anywhere. There was no danger of us getting into actual trouble. So, one of my friends talked to her mum, who was working with my mum, and her mum talked to my mum so I got an extension--one extra hour! I could be home by midnight. Please ask me again why I wanted to leave. There really wasn't much happening when I was growing up. So you went out with friends (coughs)--why am I coughing now? Going out with friends was all I had really, and socializing was all I had. So I got into Scouts<sup>8</sup> at one point. That didn't exactly solve things but it taught me a few valuable abilities. So I can build a shelter in the wilderness.

**LD: Well that's good! What ages was that? How old do you think you were?**

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<sup>8</sup> A universal activist wave and training program focusing on the youth and informally educating them practical skill- and mind-sets through such outdoor activities as hiking, camping, etc. "Scouting." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scouting> (accessed July 16, 2022).

GB: Thirteen to nineteen.

**LD: Okay! That's a very important time.**

GB: Yes.

**LD: Yes, okay. Did you make good friends?**

GB: I did, I did! I had a couple of very good friends at the time that I hung out with but I didn't really have many female friends at the time.

**LD: Yeah.**

GB: All my best friends were male.

**LD: So the Scouts was coed?**

**LD: Excellent, okay great! So in terms of explicit messages about the role of women or what you should be as a woman you talked a little bit about appearance and you talked about chastity...**

GB: Yes, which was part of it. It really wasn't a problem but anyway! Another thing that was really strange is that I was raised in a family of working women. All of the women in my family worked, even the older women, nobody was a stay at home mum. That just didn't happen on the maternal side of the family. On my dad's side of the family my grandmother was a stay at home mum. So that was different, but it *was* different because everyone else was working--like literally everyone else. My mum started working at sixteen. She went to Switzerland<sup>9</sup> to work in a factory to pay for her studies. She wanted to go to nursing school, so she went to Switzerland, she worked in a factory, she earned the money to go to nursing school and then she went to nursing school. Last year, I found out that my dad's grandmother was a political activist after the war.

**LD: Really?**

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<sup>9</sup> A noncoastal central southwestern nation in Europe, bordering Italy to the south. "Switzerland." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland> (accessed July 16, 2022).

GB: Yes, she was with the Communist party<sup>10</sup>. She got into--this is the south of Italy we're talking about. She got into the city council of her hometown; she was nearly illiterate. She was a midwife, she had no schooling, she could barely read and write but she campaigned relentlessly against priests in spite of being very devoted because she was a Communist to the bone. So she campaigned against the Christian Democracy<sup>11</sup> and she won a seat in the city council. So she was, I had no idea, I really did not know about this until last year.

**LD: How did you find out?**

GB: I was handed a small biography that somebody wrote about her. And I was like "Dad, why did you never tell me about this?" So a couple of days ago I phoned my dad and said "I want to find out more about Nonna Stella<sup>12</sup>. Is there anyone left in the family who could tell me about her?" And he said go talk to Zia Nina, his aunt, who's like over eighty now. She might be able to tell you more. And I need to hurry because Zia Nina is not getting any younger. So one of the things that I want to do, I don't know when I'm going to do this, I want to go visit Zia Nina and get her on tape and find out stuff about Nonna Stella. I don't think she was a particularly easy woman, not somebody who was particularly easy to live with, at least my mum doesn't remember her as such. She died six months before I was born. But, I think-- I have no idea if this is scientific or not but I think some of that bloody-mindedness might have trickled down to me.

**LD: I'm sure that's true--genetic.**

GB: So when I found out about her it was like "Okay that's in my genes then." I did not make myself entirely. There's something in my family--there was someone in my family who was a lot like me.

**LD: And that feels good doesn't it?**

GB: It does! It's such a relief.

**LD: Yeah, you're not the odd one out. It just skipped some generations.**

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<sup>10</sup> *Communist Party of Italy* was founded in 1921, operating under the Karl Marx econ-political ideology of public property ownership and no class trajectory. After WWII, Italian Communist Party (PCI) became one of the strongest political party in Italy, gaining significant vote share and general electoral success in multiple councils of big cities. "Italy Communist Party." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Communist\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Communist_Party) (accessed July 17, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> A Catholic-motivated, centrist political party in Italy, founded when Italy was still occupied by Nazi. During the time period mentioned in the interview, there were 3 parties running for electoral campaigns, namely Italian Communist Party, Christian Democracy, and Socialist Party. "Christian Democracy (Italy)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Democracy\\_\(Italy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democracy_(Italy)) (accessed July 17, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Her great-grandmother.

GB: Yeah, it skipped a couple of generations but at one point it had to come out somewhere.

**LD: That's wonderful.**

GB: My mum's cousin was...part of my mum's family is Protestant<sup>13</sup>, I think they're all dead now, most of them are dead anyway. So there was a whole generation who was Protestant and she was very active in her church, like really very active in her church and she never married. So, that's another person who was interesting and strange. It was like ending up like Zia Julietta who never married could've been like the Boogiemán<sup>14</sup> at some point in my life but I always found her fascinating, she was so full of energy. So it was strange because my family basically did not provide me with a feminist education-- nobody ever told me straight that feminism was a thing. It wasn't a thing in my family. Nobody is a self-described feminist in my family apart from me but everyone worked and nobody ever thought that that they could depend on anybody else, everyone was very self-sufficient.

**LD: What did your parents...you said you were the first one in your family to go to university.**

GB: I think I was.

**LD: So how did that happen?**

GB: I was smart, really and I didn't know what I wanted to do in life but my mum and dad thought that I was a brilliant child who didn't really...and a lazy child as well. So I was both smart and very lazy, so I didn't do exceptionally well in school but whenever I found something that I liked I did it exceptionally well. So I was super brilliant at English, and Italian, and writing. I was super good at anything that involved telling a story, spinning a tale, making things fit even where they didn't. Science however, no good; maths wasn't my thing; I couldn't be creative with maths you know? So I was terrible at other things that required discipline and learning and just learning and never creating anything and I was really good at anything that involved creativity. So when the time came for my final exams in secondary school I did liceo classico [*one of several specialized types of high school--all*

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<sup>13</sup> Protestantism is a form of Christianity that emerged as part of the Reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century to move away from the Catholic Church's theories. "Protestantism." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism> (accessed July 17, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> A generally made-up mysterious character who supposedly would punish children if they misbehaved. "Bogeyman." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogeyman> (accessed July 17, 2022).

*are specialized in Italy, ndt]* which is the school where you study Latin<sup>15</sup>, Greek<sup>16</sup> which is basically a gateway to university. And my final exams, my Italian essay was immaculate and when it came to the Greek translation everyone else got it wrong except for me not because I understood the text--there was one sentence in particular which was grammatically impossible--but I thought "Okay, this says this and this says this, this makes sense--let's go with this." And I did. And so I was basically one of three people in my class who got it right because I made it up. So creativity obviously played a part and when I went to university I was really bad at the things that I found difficult and really really good at the things that I found easy. So very patchy, my grades were very patchy but I got through it and eventually managed to find my place in the world.

**LD: So did your parents always support, because they knew you were smart--they supported you going to university? There was never any question?**

GB: There was never any question. It has to be said that when I was growing up going to university was a good way to have a good job--it was thought to be a good way to have a good job. So my mum and dad, my dad only has like--he didn't really go to secondary school at all and my mum has a high school diploma. So they were not well-educated in terms, formally well-educated, and particularly my dad thought that I could have a better life if I went to school. So, they sacrificed a lot for me to go to school. Mind you, universities in Italy are a lot cheaper. The largest part of the cost was keeping me in a flat out of town that I shared, obviously, which I shared with other people as you do. It wasn't as expensive as it would've been if I had lived in the States or in the UK. So, everyone can go to university in Italy if they want to, there are ways. So, yeah they did support me, they were very strict about it, they wanted me to do well. So they were worried when I didn't. My sister went to university too for a while but she dropped out, she wasn't academically inclined. She wanted to work and eventually have a family which is what she did. So we're all different I guess.

**LD: And she didn't need the university education to be the mail carrier.**

GB: No, not at all.

**LD: Yeah, that's interesting.**

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<sup>15</sup> Latin is an ancient Indo-European spoken language, emerging as a dialect in nowadays Rome and expanding as the main language in Italy and across Roman Empire. "Latin." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin> (accessed July 17, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> An Indo-European language, natively spoken in Greece, Cyprus, and some other European countries. "Greek language." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) (accessed July 17, 2022).

GB: If she'd finished school she would've gone on to be a teacher I think, but that wasn't her end game. She wanted--I think she wanted to have a family, she wanted to have a quiet life, and she has a perfect life as far as she's concerned.

**LD: Okay, good for her!**

GB: Yeah, absolutely.

**LD: You said that you still don't know exactly where your parents stand politically. The other questions that I usually ask about, and you can tell me that you didn't learn anything, but I also ask about messages that you might have received about sexual identity or sexual orientation, and also how you resolve political problems when they happen. Did you receive any messages like that?**

GB: Well as far as sexual orientation<sup>17</sup> and sexual identity<sup>18</sup> everyone in my village was straight.<sup>19</sup> Except for one person who was my friend and he was bullied relentlessly. He wasn't out<sup>20</sup>--he wasn't out until his late twenties. He was bullied relentlessly when he was growing up because obviously he was different from everyone else but that's where the bulk of my being an ally<sup>21</sup> comes from, because my friend was bullied and my friend was gay.<sup>22</sup>

**LD: So your friend wasn't out to you either?**

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<sup>17</sup> A term referring to one's romantic, emotional, and/or sexual inclination to other people. "Is There a Big Difference Between Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation?" Therapy.

<https://www.thrivecounselingatlanta.com/is-there-a-big-difference-between-sexual-identity-and-sexual-orientation> (accessed July 18, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> One's sense of belonging and self-identification regarding their sexuality. Sexual orientation is closely intertwined under this umbrella of sexual identity, though not necessarily, for there are people who identify with a sexual orientation. "Sexual identity." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual\\_identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_identity) (accessed July 18, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Straight, or heterosexual, is an opposite-sex sexual orientation or sexual identity. "Heterosexuality." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heterosexuality> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> The process of "coming out" refers to LGBTQ+ people publicly disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity with others after working to personally identify and accept them. "What does coming out mean?: How to come out." Planned Parenthood. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation/sexual-orientation/whats-coming-out> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Allies with LGBTQIA+ community refers to individuals who support and work towards a just society for LGBTQIA+ people despite not necessarily identifying themselves as LGBTQIA+. "Counseling Center." What is an Ally? | University of Illinois Counseling Center. <http://counselingcenter.illinois.edu/outreach-consultation-prevention/cultural-diversity-outreach/queers-allies/lgbt-ally-network/what> (accessed August 14, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> The term gay refers to homosexuality or same-sex sexual orientation. "Gay." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay> (accessed July 22, 2022).

GB: He wasn't out to anyone. He wasn't out to himself until very late. But that's what happens when you live in such a tiny place and there's no way of expressing yourself freely. And it was the 80s. So that's where my political awareness of gay rights comes from, from empathizing with gay people with whom I was in immediate proximity. What I was told by society is that being gay is wrong, being gay is bad, trans<sup>23</sup> people weren't even on the radar--nobody was trans; nobody is trans. Everyone is white, so that's where I come from. Moving out, going to university in Trieste, going to my university which was by its very nature was very cosmopolitan<sup>24</sup> because I took translation in one of the best and most important faculties in Italy. So we had people from all over the world. From Africa, from Northern Europe, from everywhere, Russia, we had everyone, so we had friends of every color, every creed, every sexual orientation and most of the men were gay! So, that was--if I hadn't already been open-minded I would've become open-minded because of that. So, that was really a crash course in diversity I think. Mostly most of us were white but not all of us.

**LD: So just one more question about your childhood and then we'll move on to later: but how do you think that your childhood, and your experiences in your family, influenced you to become the person you are today and in particular with regards to your political activity?**

GB: I think--I don't know, I have to be honest. The person I was--the wildly imaginative person I was when I was growing up developed into the kind of person who is curious towards the experiences of others. So when I moved out of my parents' home and I realized that the world was bigger and more interesting than my hometown--which I'd always suspected. But it was a big revelation for me and it was a big thing for me. At the end of the nineties and the beginning of the two-thousands the internet finally reached my neck of the woods and I discovered feminism, as such, and I found that feminism was me!

**LD: So tell me how that happened.**

GB: Well, at the end of the nineties we got the internet and through the internet forums I found out about-- and I got in touch with feminists

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<sup>23</sup> People who are transgender, or trans, have their gender identity or gender expression not in accordance with their assigned sex at birth. "Transsexual." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Cosmopolitan areas often openly welcome diverse ethnicity and race. With their multisectional innovation, these cities host many promising opportunities and high cultural values of freedom, autonomy, and the like. Sevincer, A. T., Kitayama, S., & Varnum, M. E. W. "Cosmopolitan Cities: The Frontier in the twenty-first century?" Frontiers. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01459/full> (accessed August 14, 2022).

## **LD: Were you just Googling things or--?**

GB: Well, let's just rewind. First, the thing that happened before then, was at the beginning of the nineties there was a huge feminist wave and I was really into music and the riot grrrls [*American underground feminist punk movement, ndt*] and Bikini Kill<sup>25</sup> and the Deal Sisters [*Kim Deal was part of the Pixies and the Breeders and sometimes played with her twin sister Kelley, ndt*] and all that wave of female musicians brought that idea to me; the idea that you could be a girl, make music, and you could like glitter eyeshadow, and still kick ass. So, it was a big thing for me--my first actual discovery of feminism was through music and then everything else happened. And in 2004 Jezebel [*online feminist magazine, ndt*] was founded and Jezebel really cemented the idea that feminism was a bit more than just growling and shouting against the patriarchy<sup>26</sup>, you could be articulate about it. You could write long essays and experience feminism through your own--everything was cycled through--the personal was political. A lot happened to me through the... I really used the advantage of learning English at a very young age. Because I think my... when I was a teenager my knowledge of English was good enough that I could read extended texts in English and I could educate myself. I remember being seventeen and in the States and knowing, and reading, and watching TV and really soaking it all in. So that was a huge advantage for me.

## **LD: So you were in the States when you were seventeen?**

GB: I spent a month there when... because my grandmother's brothers lived there--one is dead, there is only one left-- and they were part of the wave of migrants that went to the States and made a life for themselves stateside in Connecticut<sup>27</sup>. Their names are still on the Ellis Island registry<sup>28</sup> and I cried like a baby when I found them, because it's like "Oh my god I know these people. I met these people. They're my family, and they're there--they're set in stone." My great-grandfather went to follow his own father to America and they became builders--they made a comfortable life for themselves and then he moved back to Italy, and he lived his last days in Italy, and he died in his hometown. But I got to meet him.

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<sup>25</sup> A punk rock band in America 90s. They produced feminist, hard-core songs and performed them so on fire that initiated the riot grrrls movement. "Bikini Kill." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikini\\_Kill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikini_Kill) (accessed July 18, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> A male-led social or governmental system where women are primarily subordinated or excluded from possessing any power or authority. "Patriarchy." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy> (accessed July 22, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> A southernmost state in the US. "Connecticut." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connecticut> (accessed July 18, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> A database that collects nearly 65 millions records of passengers who arrived at the Port of New York in the most significant human migration in modern history, between 1820 and 1957. "Passenger + Ship Search." Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island. <https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/passenger-ship-search/> (accessed July 18, 2022).



**LD: Yeah, that's incredible! Can you tell me about your first political action? If you can remember, what was it and how did you decide to do it?**

GB: I think it was an essay I wrote with my friend about acceptance--it was something--it was a news...I don't remember where we published it...I know we did but I don't remember where. And it was about gay rights equality. I think it's the first overtly political act that I remember.

**LD: And about how old were you?**

GB: Seventeen-ish, sixteen or seventeen.

**LD: Did you write it with your gay friend--your closeted gay friend?**

GB: Yeah, I'm not entirely sure I can talk about him to be honest because I'm not sure where he stands now, we're not really in touch-- actually we had a falling out recently. But that was the first thing I did that I remember.

**LD: We don't have to talk about it. So let's just talk about your time at university-- you talked about how you met all these people from different parts of the world and lots of gay men, etc. What kind of impact do you think that had on your political activity?**

GB: Oh it was huge. It was absolutely huge. Having friends from so many different parts of the world, and friends who spoke so many different languages just gave me an idea that the life experience of any of us is just a part, a fraction of what the life experience of everyone else can be. So in a way that was already laying the ground for my intersectional feminism<sup>29</sup>--for what I define as my being an intersectional feminist. Because I cannot separate my feminism from my larger political action. I don't think that there's any difference between women's rights, and gay rights, and human rights as a larger issue. So I really don't make any difference--there's no difference for me and I consider myself a political activist.

**LD: So one of the things about intersectionality is the idea that if you understand the**

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<sup>29</sup> Intersectional feminism refers to a framework of feminism that acknowledges interweaving forms of inequality and discrimination, in which they all historically coexist and amplify each other. "Intersectional feminism: What it means and why it matters right now." UN Women – Headquarters. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters> (accessed July 19, 2022).

**structural causes of one kind of oppression it makes it easier to see the other types and to see the connections between them. How do you think that happened for you? Is it just seeing all of these different people?**

GB: I just think that I have huge empathy for people. I am really, really strongly empathetic. If somebody's crying I feel like crying. I just feel people a lot. Part of it is from writing fiction I think. I don't know what is the correlation or the causality link between the two things. I don't know whether I'm a writer because I am empathetic or if I am empathetic because I'm a writer. I think that it's a circle--a virtuous circle. So I write stories because I want to experience different lives and be different people, and when I am writing stories I use my empathy to get into the lives of different people. So I think that amplified my perception of the people around me. Because I feel people, I think my political views are essentially based in trying to get into other people's shoes.

**LD: But you know if you compare you to your sister you have a way of seeing the world as a big place and seeing connections. You were talking about your sister and how she has a quiet life and she's kind of put constraints on her life purposefully...**

GB: I don't know whether she did or if she just chose not to expand her life too much. She's just weird. She just has these bizarre interests. Suddenly she got into country music which I didn't know she liked. Because she lives close to an American air base we actually went to a country music fair (which was a bit weird) but she does have sudden bursts of interest in other things-- I know she was trying to learn the guitar at one point. So I don't really know much about my sister's interior life so I couldn't really speak for her. I think she made the choices that made her feel comfortable, the same way I did. So I chose to make myself uncomfortable because I feel more uncomfortable if I don't try new things--I feel dead inside if I don't try new things and challenge myself. So I need that, so I purposefully set myself new challenges and try to do new things-- even things that I think that might be impossible because I want to try everything and I am learning to deal with rejection and failure a lot better than I used to because I've had some successes. So the tiny amount of success I've had has made it easier for me to deal with rejection and failure because I know that some things might work out and some others might not, and I can do better, and I have improved so I can still improve.

**LD: All you have to do is go back and read your twelve year old writing.**

GB: Exactly! But it's not just that you know? If I read the stuff I wrote ten or twelve years ago it's still terrible. My early blogs were horrible. So even my online writing has improved, because my ability to express myself coherently has improved because I've done it so many times. Everything I do obsessively eventually gets better. So writing is something I do

obsessively so I have got better. My English got exponentially better because I cultivated it after I left university. I was already okay but I never stopped trying to improve it because I love it so much, and it's such a means of self expression for me that I need it so I never really dropped it. The only problem I have is that I make the sounds of people around me, that's the thing.

**LD: You mimic.**

GB: Yeah. So my accent is all over the place, because I am...my basis is English so if I hang out with my English friends--my *prose* [?, makes a "hilly" hand motion, ndt]and everything is English-- the moment you take me out of England and you put me in say in New York everything goes pear-shaped and my boyfriend is like, "Stop it, you're ridiculous" and I can't help myself! I don't do it consciously just believe me" it's just that I make the sounds of the people around me. So everything changes because of that.

**LD: And the empathy maybe—**

GB: Yeah, it's just--no, it's just having a good ear. My nephew is like that too; he makes the sounds of the people around him.

**LD: That's interesting. So I'm going to ask you my key question, which is... so there are other women who have had experiences similar to you in life--not exactly of course, but they didn't become activists or feminists or anything like that. In your opinion what do you think some of the factors are--personality, life experiences--that distinguish you from them?**

GB: I think that it's personality, yes. I don't know. I was always independent I was always curious, I was always very very self-reliant even as a child so because on the one hand I seek approval and I seek acceptance and I always wanted to be told that I was good so I'm always looking for that kind of reassurance and that kind of positive confirmation and reinforcement. On the other hand I can spend days living in my own world and I don't need anyone else so I think because as I get older and older I really care a lot less what people think of me and I accept that not everyone might be on the same page as I am and they might not like me. So not caring what other people think about you and freeing yourself from what your parents think about you, particularly-- because for such a long time I did not feel seen by my family--seen or understood by my family. I mean I'm a writer, I write books. My mum likes reading and I think she's read two out of four. Not even my mum reads my books; so it's like how can I expect the rest of the world to appreciate what I write if my mother doesn't. And then I decided that I had to let go of that. I can't expect the people I love to devote their free time to me because it's not something that you have to expect

from people; you cannot ask that of people. People don't have to prove their love by sacrificing their personal space to you in any way. So getting back to your original question, I think wanting to be independent--wanting to assert yourself as a voice, and as a person--wanting to be taken seriously and not giving a shit about what people think of you are the key factors I think. If you choose to be a feminist you know that a lot of people will not want to speak to you because of that.

**LD: Did you ever feel there was an “Aha” moment--because you said that you came to feminism through the nineties and the riot girls--was there ever a moment where you saw something and you said “That’s me. That’s the way I feel.”**

GB: There were several. There was this girl band that I don't even remember the name of which is ridiculous I don't remember the name of the band but I remember them saying in an interview if you're not feminist you're a dick<sup>30</sup> which was an incredibly rude and condescending thing to say but I got the message. It was like ,”Excuse me! We're all in the same boat here and if you're not on board with women's rights then you're really missing something. You don't understand that this is going to hurt you.” So that was one thing, I think the same band--which is ridiculous that I still can't remember the name of--they're Asian all of them--it will come to me. They were raging against the idea that women had to be thin at all costs and one of them said ,”You can't have a stomach that goes into your back. You have to keep your womb somewhere.” And that was another thing, yes of course because I've always had a belly. I was really skinny with a belly so I was like “Oh! That's it.”

**LD: There's something in there!**

GB: There's something in there! So it was very reassuring for me obviously because everyone was so diverse--the skinny ones, the fat ones, the average ones, everyone had something to say and they were listened to and it was a big game changer for me. And Dana Scully<sup>31</sup> was a big game changer for me--I was a huge fan of *The X-Files*<sup>32</sup> and I grew up watching it. I rewatched most of it when season ten was released. I haven't finished watching the latest one , but anyway--when they did the reboot I rewatched the whole thing and I fell in love with it so hard because everything about it is emotionally perfect:

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<sup>30</sup> A slang term for a penis. Commonly used to insult someone, particularly a boy or man. “Dick.” DICK | definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/dick> (accessed July 23, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> *The X-Files* TV series' protagonist who is a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent and physician in charge of examining X-Files, a group of unsettled cases. She further created a Scully Effect which imparted STEM and law career aspirations to many young women. “Dana Scully.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dana\\_Scully](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dana_Scully) (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> A science-fiction, supernatural drama series that center around the investigation of FBI agents into unanswered phenomena. “The X-Files.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_X-Files](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_X-Files) (accessed July 19, 2022).

man has feeling and woman has reason which you *never* see. Someone who was written as a sidekick at first and took up so much space. She became a much bigger thing than Carter<sup>33</sup> and the other writers thought she would because Gillian Anderson<sup>34</sup> is such a brilliant actress. There's so much in Scully that's nuanced and smart and warm. And the fact that she was brainy she was a science woman but she had a heart.

**LD: Right. That's so powerful.**

GB: That was. I loved her so much. I think she was a brilliant character . I remember talking with people on forums on ask.com<sup>35</sup> in the late nineties plotting about writing a paper on Dana Scully as a feminist hero--which I never got around to doing. A couple of years ago I wrote a media post called "I still love you Scully" as a payante<sup>36</sup> to her and how I grew up with her.

**LD: That's great--all right. How important to your activism are relationships with other people?**

GB: Oh, they're more important than they've ever been because I was alone for such a long time. Being a feminist in a small town and being a feminist with no other feminists around is a very isolating experience. So, when I *finally* found my home and met other feminists my age and younger I sort of became the leader of the pack; reluctantly at first and then I realized that people need a leader. And you don't have to be a despot<sup>37</sup>, you can be smart about it and empower people to become leaders too, which I think is working out well so I can delegate. It's the whole point of feminism. It's not one person making decisions for everyone else, it's every woman and man thinking for themselves and coming up with new ideas and becoming the leaders of their own movement. So, right now being surrounded by other feminists is very important for me. I'm trying to find common ground with the second-wavers<sup>38</sup>. I'm having trouble with some of them because they're. I'm close to trans-

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher Carl Carter, an American filmmaker and writer, the producer of *The X-Files*. "Chris Carter (screenwriter)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris\\_Carter\\_\(screenwriter\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Carter_(screenwriter)) (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> The American actress who played Dana Scully. "Gillian Anderson." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gillian\\_Anderson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gillian_Anderson) (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> A question-driven search engine founded in 1996. "Ask.com." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ask.com> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> A french term literally meaning *paying* or *subscription*. Here it can be contextually interpreted as *tribute*. "Translation of "payante" in English." payante - Translation into English - examples French | Reverso Context. <https://context.reverso.net/translation/french-english/payante> (accessed July 23, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> A dictator, someone who rules other people with their absolute possession of power and authority, often in an oppressive way. "Despot." DESPOT | definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/despot> (accessed July 23, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Second-wavers refers to people involved in the second-wave feminism, which took place across Western countries in early 1960s and drew the attention to an expanded succession of gender issues, compared to the

feminists<sup>39</sup> and that's very hard for me because it hurts. It's like they're hurting my friends and I have trouble with those who cannot understand that there's such a thing as Muslim-feminism<sup>40</sup> and I know a couple of women who are very vocal about it one is a hijabi<sup>41</sup> one isn't. So, there are so many ways of being Muslim<sup>42</sup> and so many ways of being feminist and I'm always trying to learn from these people all of the time. I'm also trying to learn from the younger girls who experience feminism in a completely different way, often more radical. And they're stronger on sex than we were so it's interesting for me to watch them deal with it, and talk about it even when it makes me uncomfortable. because that's not the way I go about it. And I couldn't do that, it sometimes makes me uncomfortable but feminism was never about being comfortable let's face it. So, I want to be uncomfortable and it's good when people tell me things that I didn't know and they force me to question myself.

**LD: So, the intergenerational part of it can be very difficult because each generation has their own issues. They have things that they take for granted and things that change during their lifetime and so trying to match those things up can be difficult.**

GB: I was abandoned by the feminists of my generation who tell me ,“ Well you didn't seek us out.” Like ,“I didn't know where you were. I didn't know that you existed.” They lived in their own tiny circles within universities within the collectives and there was no collective where I was living so they didn't reach out to me. There was no internet, let's face it so they had no way of reaching me but at the same time they were so isolated and so shut off and then they decided at some point ,“Okay! Our work is done.” and that was when they were in their forties and I was in my twenties and they should've handed the baton and they did *not*. So, I had to reinvent the wheel basically. Occasionally, I will meet one of them and they will look at me condescendingly going ,“Woah, do you think you're inventing things, I said this thirty years ago.” Well, I didn't hear you and I didn't hear it *from* you, I heard it from somebody else. So, to quote, “Tough tities<sup>43</sup>.” What I want to avoid is repeating the same

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first wave, including sexuality and pornography, workplace, reproductive rights, etc. “Second-wave feminism.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave_feminism) (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Feminists who are transgender and perceive that both their own liberation and women's are all closely and inherently intertwined. “Transfeminism.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfeminism> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> A feminist movement for Islamic women's rights as well as social justice, aiming to emphasize equality taught in the religion's central texts. “Islamic feminism.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_feminism) (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Muslim women who wear hijab, a head covering that conceals the head and neck. “Hijab.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijab> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Followers of Islam, an Abrahamic religion that worship the God of Abraham and practice the teaching of Muhammad who was revealed God's word. Islam's central text is Quran. “Muslims.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslims> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> An exclamation refers to someone showing little to no thoughtful understanding of how another person feels or what situation they come from. “Tough titties.” The Free Dictionary. <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/tough+titties> (accessed July 23, 2022);

mistake. So, right now people look at me as a public feminist that hadn't happened before and it's happening now. So, my job is to make sure that nobody gets left behind. That the girls know that there's a struggle that will go on *long* after I'm dead, long after they're dead. This is going to go on for centuries. We are *not* going to finish this. I know I'm not going to finish this. With any luck I'm going to see a better world before I go but it's not going to be an equal world. So, my job is to lay some of the groundwork to start again. So, what I'm doing right now I'm working on a book that will probably feel and read as simplistic, if you've been a feminist all your life, because there will be nothing new in there for you. But if you're twenty years old or sixteen years old and you're approaching feminism for the first time that's *your* book. I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you. And I want you to take that book and rip it to shreds and make your own book.

**LD: I think that's the right approach.**

GB: Yeah, that's what I want. I don't want people to use my book as a Bible<sup>44</sup>. It's not going to cover the whole thing. And it's very personal let's face it. My experience as a straight white woman is not going to be a universal. I want people who are not straight not white and not women to write their own stories.

**LD: Yeah, that's a great goal. I'll ask you two more questions. What does the word feminism mean to you?**

GB: It means a lot of things. It means history, it means sisterhood, it means caring for other people. But mostly it means that the female principle and femaleness are so devalued in our society that we still need to be called feminists because we need to give female-ness new value and the qualities associated with femininity need to have more value. As long as boys are told they cannot cry, as long as boys are told they cannot wear pink, or nail polish, or eyeliner because it's girly. As long as girliness is devalued we still need feminism. The day that girliness is as valuable as boyishness then we're not going to need feminism anymore. So the reason why I feel that men are entitled to call themselves feminists is because maleness is not devalued, femaleness is and I think a lot of men want to recover that kind of quality for themselves. Which doesn't mean that they have to become *like* women. There's no *like* women, but they might want to recover part of it for themselves or all of it for themselves and still be men and the same goes for women. But it's easier for a woman to act like a man because acting male or adopting the male code is considered appropriate because it's more valuable. So, it can be like a guy, men? Not so much. So yeah, basically that's that.

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<sup>44</sup> The Bible is a sacred compilation of religious divine texts in Christianity, Judaism, and many other. "Bible." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible> (accessed July 19, 2022).

**LD: Alright, and so if you had to think about talking to younger generations of women or researchers coming in and seeing your oral history in an archive and had to choose an important point or two from your story, what might that be? What would you want other people to learn from it?**

GB: Probably that I never ever in a million years thought that I could be a leader. I thought I had zero charisma. I didn't think that people would listen to me or look to me to provide guidance and on a very tiny but significant level they have and they still do. So don't devalue yourself and don't underestimate yourself and if you don't think that you're going to be a leader you can be a leader, look for a good leader. Look for someone who will make you feel empowered and valuable and will care about what you have to say. You don't *have* to lead but if you want to lead then lead. Don't wait for people to give you permission to do *anything*. Anything that's safe and legal of course. Don't wait for people to give you permission, just go out and do things. People never appreciate being questioned or being challenged but sometimes somebody has to. So, go on and do it.

**LD: Is there anything else that you'd like to say?**

GB: No, I think I've pretty much covered it really. Two years ago I didn't think that I had it in me to listen all over the world to something that I cared about. That happened. And then I didn't *think* I had it in me to make a Facebook<sup>45</sup> group that worked, and it *did* happen. And then we did this campaign and I thought that it was completely serendipitous but it worked and it happened. And the girls and the boys and the groups said "Okay, let's do this other thing." and it's working so obviously it's not serendipitous. It's not serendipitous. One thing is accidental, five or ten things, not accidental. This is not accidental, something has changed in me. It's just scary sometimes you know?

**LD: Do you feel like you've found your purpose?**

GB: I think I do, yeah. And it's strange for me because I thought that my purpose in life was to tell stories and my boyfriend sometimes says, "You're a writer. You shouldn't give up that part of yourself." And I haven't written fiction in a very long time and I miss it so much. And I want to go back to that safe and warm place of making myself uncomfortable on purpose through fiction. But it's so enjoyable and it's so beautiful and I want to go back there but I can't. If there's anything that activism has taken away from me right now it's my ability to escape. I feel that I have to stay connected to the world all the time, at all times.

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<sup>45</sup> A virtual media service of socializing, networking, and further more offered by Meta Platforms. "Facebook." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook> (accessed July 119, 2022).



Fear of missing out is ugly for an activist because at some point you feel that if you don't perform all the time if you're not there. If you don't say things, if you don't act all of the time, you will be blamed for things not happening, and not doing things. Which is a very millennial<sup>46</sup> thing to do.

**LD: Yeah, and that's not fair.**

GB: Which is precisely why I want the people around me to be empowered to do things without waiting for me because let's face it, I will have to retreat at some point.

**LD: Absolutely. You don't want to burn out.**

GB: Exactly! At the beginning of the year I got this really ugly dermatitis<sup>47</sup> all over my face. It was obviously stress related and it wouldn't go away, it was so frustrating. And I had to go on tele and I was basically disfigured, forever covered in makeup.

**LD: I'm so sorry.**

GB: It's okay, it happens. It's just your body telling you to slow down. Stop now, and I didn't. I didn't, I'm still alive. I'm beginning to see myself as somebody who has to be always on and I can't be. So I'm doing a few things now and I've begun to say, "No." I don't do this I don't do that, I don't take every opportunity that I'm offered because I can't handle it.

**LD: You don't do anybody any favors by getting sick or doing too much. You have to be careful.**

GB: Yeah, plus let's face it I'm not Superman, I'm not saving the world. I'm not going to save the world by doing one more hashtag campaign<sup>48</sup>, that's not how it works. Yeah and plus that worked and that happened and that was big but it didn't make a dent as much as people would've expected it to. And it's frustrating for me to see that say the American media whenever they cover the Italian situation they completely overlook the campaign, it gets left out. Or, if it gets quoted it's like the "Italinizer movement" like it came after the

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<sup>46</sup> Millennials, also known as Gen Y, refer to people who were born between 1981 and 1996 and presumably share some similarities in behavior or expression tendency. "Millennials."

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>47</sup> A popular term for skin inflammation in which skin might get itchy or rashes. "Dermatitis." Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dermatitis-eczema/symptoms-causes/syc-20352380> (accessed July 19, 2022).

<sup>48</sup> A form of social media communication project and/or Internet activism that centers around a hashtag of a word or phrase. The featured hashtag then hosts a virtual interactive space, gathering all media posts with related information, sharing, and discourse on the topic. "Hashtag activism." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashtag\\_activism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashtag_activism) (accessed July 23, 2022).

#MeToo movement<sup>49</sup> when in fact it was completely original and came before the white feminists picked up something that was created by a black feminist and it didn't get any traction. It's very frustrating for me because people only see the bad side. They only see the war that we're losing--or rather the other way around. The battles that we're losing and not the fact that we are still in the war. We haven't retreated, we are not beaten, and we will not be beaten. It will take us some time but we will win eventually. And we have to stay in the fight for as long as we can. And it's very frustrating for me when someone covers our situation and they cover it as being hopeless and like a cul-de-sac where feminism goes to do when in fact feminism is *very very* alive.

**LD: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much Giulia.**

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<sup>49</sup> A social movement, initiated by a sexual assault survivor Tarana Burke and becoming viral through hashtag #MeToo on social media. It aimed at the solidarity, empathy, and empowerment for people who have experienced sexual assault and rape culture in any form. "MeToo movement." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo_movement) (accessed July 20, 2022).