ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lachrista Greco is an Italian-American feminist writer, speaker, activist, and yoga instructor. She is the founder of the popular Facebook community, Guerrilla Feminism, and blogs regularly on her personal site. A very 'out' feminist, Lachrista received her Master’s Degree in Women’s & Gender Studies from DePaul University in 2010. Her writing has appeared in xojane, Rebellious Magazine For Women, Everyday Feminism, Elephant Journal, MindBodyGreen, Decolonizing Yoga, GirlDrive, and Jezebel.

Lachrista is currently working on publishing the anthology, Olive GirlDrive, MindBodyGreen Decolonizing Yoga, Elephant Journal Magazine For Women Rebellious xoJane, her Master’s Degree in Women’s & Gender Studies from DePaul on her personal site. A very 'out' feminist, Lachrista received activist, and yoga instructor. She is the founder of the popular is an Italian American feminist writer, speaker, Lachrista Greco

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AFTER CHANTING, “HEY-HEY, HO-HO, SEXUAL ASSAULT HAS GOT TO GO!”, ONE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS SAID, “WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULDN’T DRINK SO MUCH”. WE WROTE DOWN THE POLICE OFFICER’S BADGE NUMBER AND NAME, AND LATER CALLED TO REPORT THIS, BUT OF COURSE NOTHING CAME OF IT.

by LACHRISTA GRECO

DIGITAL ACTIVISM ON A GLOBAL SCALE

GUERRILLA FEMINISM

I was born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin—a medium sized progressive city in the Midwest known for its cheese and beer. I started out as a feminist in preschool—after my mom took me to my first gay pride march. I remember it being very loud, crowded, and exciting. The following day at preschool, I led my fellow classmates around marching and chanting, “2-4-6-8, how do you know your kid is straight??” This was my first foray into feminist activism.

I began to self-identify as a feminist near the end of high school. At 15-years old, my older brother introduced me to Riot Grrrl music by buying me my first Sleater-Kinney cd, “The Hot Rock”. Later, I had a friend introduce me to Bikini Kill and Kathleen Hanna, and I was in love. Before these introductions, I listened to music my brother listened to—Smashing Pumpkins, Weezer, Nirvana, etc. Sleater-Kinney and Bikini Kill were the first bands I listened to where women were writing the music, the lyrics, and playing their own instruments. It was empowering and inspiring. It propelled my ability to identify as a feminist around junior year of high school.

After high school, I went to a small liberal arts college. I was proud of myself for getting into college. There was a time when I didn’t think it would happen. In third grade, I had been diagnosed with two learning disabilities (dyscalculia: the math version of dyslexia, and a language-processing disability, which makes it difficult for me to express what I know in my head on paper, or somewhere else external, thus, I’m a horrible test-taker). This information was presented to me as something negative—something no-one wanted. My teachers told me that I wasn’t smart, and that I wouldn’t be like my peers, in terms of intellectual development.

This traumatized me. I internalized all of this, and didn’t believe I was intelligent until I was in college. I decided to apply to college because of one teacher I had junior year of high-school who believed in me, and treated me like my thoughts and opinions mattered (thanks Ms. Finnegan!). In college, I finally had professors who valued my contributions to classroom discussion, and who complimented me on my hunger for knowledge.

While in college, I decided to minor in Women’s Studies and through this education, I received knowledge that allowed me to contextualize my feminism on a deeper, more theoretical level. I finally had language to confirm things I had known and felt about society for years. I started volunteering at the local Rape Crisis Center, and developed an even stronger desire to be an advocate and an educator.

In 2006, I studied abroad in Rome, Italy, where I compiled research for a project I titled, “Visual Slaving: Italian Women’s Identities and Visual Culture”. Through this project, I looked at advertisements in Italian culture, and women’s responses to these advertisements. This project furthered my hunger for activism, and was an important step in claiming my Italian American identity. In some ways, this project was the precursor to the book anthology I’m currently working on getting published.

After college, I applied and was accepted to DePaul University’s Women’s & Gender Studies MA program in Chicago. In the two years I was in graduate school, I learned so much about myself and about my feminism: the kind of feminist that I wanted to be. The classes and coursework were often emotionally exhausting. We would have three hour classes where we would discuss something like rape culture, and all the many screwed up things about society. Class would end, and I would make it back to my apartment thinking, “What could I do as one person about this huge problem?” Though it was difficult, it made me think—it made me activate my activism.

While at DePaul, I also helped organize Take Back The Night marches. During the first year that I participated in this march, we did our scheduled walk around the Lincoln Park campus with the police following us. After chanting, “Hey-Hey, Ho-Ho, Sexual Assault Has Got To Go!”, one of the police officers said, “Well, maybe you shouldn’t drink so much!” We wrote down the police officer’s badge number and name, and later called to report this, but of course nothing came of it. He is just one of the many reasons campuses across the country do Take Back The Night.

I graduated with my MA in 2010. After my academic education was over, I missed the conversations my classmates and I would have. I missed flying
images around campus with the feminist group I joined. I missed the talking, the strategizing, and the activism of it all. I wanted to create a space for this. I wanted to create an activist community.

Guerrilla Feminism, as it was to be called, began while working as a horrid boss—as most things do. I liked the work I was doing (teaching literacy to adults who had disabilities), but my supervisor made it difficult for me to come into work each day. I decided I needed to do something that was outside of my job description.

I began using the printers and laminators at work to create feminist placards, postcards, flyers, etc. I printed strong slogans like, "Rape is Rape," or images from girlVIRUS (a forum-based feminist activist collective). After doing this for a while, I almost always had a stack of wallet-sized images in my purse. I began using the printers and laminators at work to create feminist placards, postcards, flyers, etc. I printed strong slogans like, "Rape is Rape," or images from girlVIRUS (a forum-based feminist activist collective). After doing this for a while, I almost always had a stack of wallet-sized images in my purse.

On the way to and from work each day, I would leave feminism on trains, buses, newspapers stands, etc. I wanted to show people that this existed. I wanted them to feel the authenticity and validity of the person asking said question. Because of my professional training at the Rape Crisis Center and at the domestic violence shelter in town, I don't generally take these stories 'home' with me. I don't generally lose sleep over them. Once in a while though, when reading a question through Guerrilla Feminism, the story will really stick with me—so much so that I will spend hours trying to articulate the best possible response. I take leadership and advocacy roles seriously—sometimes to a fault. When a young woman writes me telling of how her partner raped her 20 minutes ago, and she needs advice, there is no other option for me than to step into this role of Advocate. I can’t leave a message like this unanswered. I can’t pretend it’s not happening. Our culture is constantly pretending it’s not happening.

One of the most recent questions I received was from a woman I’ll call "Sophie," living through domestic violence at the hands of her husband. The two have a daughter. Sophie, living in an Asian country, stated she was unable to leave her husband, and that she had no friends to turn to. She also said there were no crisis centers she could go to or call in her area. For the next couple of hours, I researched all I could and sent these resources to her. I informed her that she didn’t know how much help any of them would be since they were all outside of her country, but I let her know she had options, which she appreciated. I didn’t hear from Sophie for a few days, and I found myself getting increasingly worried about her and her situation. Then, about a week later, she wrote me. She told me she used some of the resources, and was able to safely get herself and her daughter out of the situation.

Because of GF, I have a sizeable online presence, which I enjoy, but sometimes I receive very difficult questions and comments. Part of what happens when you head up a community is that some people see you as an expert on the topic. I’ll say that, I do have a few credentials—especially if we’re discussing yoga or feminism—however, I’m not a licensed therapist (and I don’t pretend to be).

Through Guerrilla Feminism, I receive a lot of questions from women who have either just been raped, or who are dealing with trauma from a past rape. Previously, I have volunteered at the local Rape Crisis Center, and I currently volunteer at the domestic violence shelter in town, so I have some legit professional training (as well as some personal experience—having been raped myself).

It’s maybe not so much the topic of questioning that is difficult for me, but rather the fact that it’s through the computer—at all seemingly disconnected and not personable. I always come away from answering one of these messages feeling like I wish I could do more, or wondering if I did enough. Sometimes I’ll hear back from the person, but more often than not, I don’t—so I’m left to wonder…. Did I do any good?

Even though Internet questioning might not be that personable, I still deeply feel the authenticity and validity of the person asking said question. Because of the inclusion that GF mandates from its community is one of the biggest things that seems to cause internal fighting (and sets us apart from other feminist news and activism. The page has over 37,000 ‘likes’ and continues to grow.

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Therefore, I decided to use Facebook for motivation. Within months, the group exploded. I started posting feminist news articles, and received such a good response that this became largely what GF is today—a one-stop-shop for feminist news and activism. The page has over 37,000 ‘likes’ and continues to grow.

Because of the population of this online community, the need for moderators is enormous. Internet harassers, or ‘trolls’ as we know them, infiltrate the page often, typing terse sexist comments like, "Go make me a sandwich." This is when the ability to ‘ban’ someone comes in handy. On any given day, myself or another moderator will end up banning at least one person. Most of the banning that goes on is self-explanatory—someone posting a sexist, misogynistic comment.

I created this community to be inclusive of all feminists. I think critiquing different facets of the feminist movement is a good thing (and it’s needed!), but I don’t think denying the existence and experience of a whole group of people does any good for anyone. I don’t know how anyone can be a feminist without looking at the intersectionality of oppressions. Feminism is not just a cis white woman—maybe it was during the 2nd wave (not to knock the 2nd wave, because a lot of great work was done then)—but feminism has since progressed and transformed. We shouldn’t be working so hard to exclude others. We should be working harder for inclusion—for support—for compassion.

How can we in the feminist movement be of any service to this world if we are too busy fighting each other (and ourselves)? We will, of course, differ in opinions, but we do have a few core beliefs that should bring us together. We can’t exclude people because they’ve had different life experiences. This is acting like the oppressor. It comes down to this: treat others how you wish to be treated. Think about how your comment, words, etc will make someone feel. How would it feel for someone to deny your existence? For me, feminism is about unlearning and relearning. It’s about action and activism. It’s about inclusion.

The inclusion that GF mandates from its community is one of the biggest things that seems to cause internal fighting (and sets us apart from other Facebook pages). There is a definite bifurcation between feminists who are inclusive and feminists who are not. Like I said earlier, GF is about applying an intersectional analysis to feminist issues. Because I’m vocal about trans and queer inclusion, I’m sent hateful messages from other feminists. It saddens me, but I can’t back down from my beliefs. I don’t want anyone to feel triggered or unsafe in the GF community—sometimes this is out of my control, but I will do all that I possibly can so its members do not need to relive violence in an online community.

The intention with Guerrilla Feminism was never to ‘convert’ people to feminism (though, if it happens, that’s awesome), but rather to create a dialogue in various communities about women’s and gender issues. It’s up to the community if they choose to take this dialogue offline, or choose to keep it in the confines of the online realm.

What keeps me going through any criticism I might receive is this quote by Kathleen Hanna from an issue of the Bikini Kill zine in the 90s: “If your best friend gets it, that’s all that matters.” Lucky for me, my best friend is also a moderator of GF, so she most definitely ‘gets’ it.