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Rand, Erica

Demary Danella

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Danella: This is an interview with Erica Rand on November 12th, 2017 at 9:15am. We are at the Women and Gender Studies House at 94 Bedford Street in Portland Maine, on the USM campus.

My name is Danella Demary. It's D-A-N-E-L-L-A D-E-M-A-R-Y. Could you give and spell your name for me?

Erica: I am Erica Rand E-R-I-C-A R-A-N-D.

Danella: Awesome. So I just want to remind you that the interview is going to be about 60-90 minutes, or so. If we are pushing towards the end of the 90 minutes and we still have a lot to talk about or there are still things that you want to mention in your oral history, you can ask to either come back and be interviewed by another student, or by Wendy, or by me. So, we'll just kind of keep track of time a little bit as we're going through.

Erica: Okay.

Danella: And you can refuse to answer any question you want. You can end the interview at any point. Or, if there is something specific that you want to talk about, you can feel free to bring that up too.

Erica: Got it.

Danella: So, it says for me to ask how old you are here, and if you would just give me your preferred pronouns, too.

Erica: I'm 59, and my pronouns are she/hers.

Danella: Awesome, thank you.

So I just felt like it would be kind of easy to start with just asking what kind of language you use to identify with your gender and sexuality.

Erica: Did you want me to also say that I consent to the interview?

Danella: Yes, that would be good.

Erica: I do consent to the interview, and I've signed the consent form, and I understand the advantages and disadvantages and benefits of doing it.

Danella: Great. Thank you. Awesome. I was just curious, because we are

going to be talking about gender and sexuality during the interview, if there's preferred language you would like me to use?

Erica: I don't know if there's preferred language I'd like you to use. I identify now as a queer femme dyke.

Danella: Okay. Cool. Did you want to expand at all on any of those definitions?

Erica: Sure.

Danella: Although I'm sure it will come up later, too.

Erica: Well, I've identified as a dyke for a long time, which I understand is a politicised category. I first thought it was a politicized category of lesbian. The question of how you would identify yourself in relation to objects of choice is a little bit sketchy and actually in my current life, I have a partner who is a trans man, so lesbian is a complicated term to apply in that situation so I think for a long time I've not felt like my object of choice has been specifically women. Queer, I think more takes away from the who. And I think of femme as my gender identity.

Danella: Awesome. Great. I'm excited to learn more about that. I was going to start by asking where you grew up and where you went to school and some of those more basic background information questions.

Erica: I was born in New York. I grew up mostly in the Chicago area. I went to Junior High and High School in Evanston. Then, I went to Princeton for college and I came back to Chicago for graduate school and got a PhD in art history. Partly because it was an earlier time and I was interested in studying visual culture, or what you now call visual culture. So, I might have done gender studies or cultural studies or something if that had been more possible.

Danella: That makes sense. So, I'm just going to transition a little bit. Again, if you don't feel comfortable answering any questions and any point you don't have to answer them. I was just curious to hear a little about your coming out process and sort of when you began that process?

Erica: I almost can't even answer that question because, you know, the first sort of relationship I had with a woman I was in my early twenties, but a funny thing happened. A friend from college came to town one day, probably in the early eighties. So I didn't graduate from high school. I went

to college early and I graduated from college in 1979. A friend was passing through town and he said to me, 'I remember that you're first...like during freshman week you said something about how you thought you were a lesbian," which I must have said to him, some guy, who knows why and then forgot I said something to him. So, I think things were percolating for a long time.

Danella: Okay. And did you have any reactions that were sort of unpredicted when you did start coming out to friends and family?

Erica: Yea. My mom, who is this big liberal turned out to be super unhappy with it for a long time. And it wasn't until I broke up with the long term girlfriend, who I was with for almost eight years and got involved with another woman, when she basically said I'm realizing that this is actually a permanent situation. And she slowly got acclimated. And now she's very acclimated to just about everything, but she's sort of been through a lot. I got kind of trashed a lot in Newsweek in 1994 for some stuff I did with the Lewiston anti-discrimination ordinance. You know, there was my mom, sort of panicked on the phone like, ahhh.

Danella: Oh No! Okay. So, do you feel like your mom is more of an advocate now that she is acclimated more?

Erica: She is. She has been through a lot of stuff. I mean, one thing to say about that early 90s activism stuff is that we used to talk once a week (and this was long before texting) and then suddenly she was calling me once a day for a minute and I had to say to her ... suddenly it occurred to me that she was calling ... I asked, are you calling me to see if I'm alive? and she was. She had been reading about all of this violence in Oregon and related places. So there was a lot of complicated stuff going on.

Then she had to sort of get used to the other complexity that I started dating people who didn't necessarily always have a female pronoun and stuff and who weren't necessarily women. So, a sort of funny thing about ... and she's a super smart person, but maybe relevant here is that I took her one year, because she was visiting, to the annual USM drag show and introduced her to the Kings of the Hill, and it turned out that by that point, even though she knew about trans people she did not actually know about, or had ever heard of drag kings so having to explain that to her was sort of interesting. I will say that one time I dated a woman who had a male name and my mom was saying, what pronouns should I use?

Danella: That's a good question. Seems like she's trying.

Erica: It's a good question. Change has happened.

Danella: That's good. So, it sounds like there have been some shifts for you in relationships you've had dating women and dating more non-binary or non-traditionally identifying people. How do you feel like that has shifted the way you identify your own sexuality?

Erica: So, it has changed it a lot. In 1993, when Stone Butch Blues (we had been talking before the recorder went on about reading Stone Butch Blues), because I got stranded because of a snow storm in Detroit. Long story.

I got the first copy of Stone Butch Blues right off the presses on my way flying home and I was dating someone at the time that it reminded me of stuff (who I understood as a butch dyke). It reminded me of a lot of stuff that they had said to me. I brought it home and said hey this book reminds me of you and the next thing I knew he was living in San Francisco and running the FTM international newsletter, and blah blah blah. But at that time I felt like I could not follow him there. Like, I just thought, my erotic life has a pronoun and all sorts of things. That was in the mid-90s and times change and things change and people change. I think both from thing I've done. A person's erotic life changes depending on who's in it and what happens and so I think my desires have shifted, or expanded.

Danella: Awesome. I think that's a great point to bring up about how time shifts and we're not stagnate people in our identities. I kind of hear you saying that.

Erica: And you might try something you had not thought you would and some of those barriers, like I would never do X don't necessarily apply.

Danella: They break down a little?

Erica: Yea.

Danella: That makes sense. I know you've had quite an experience with activism work. Do you feel like your activism work has influenced your personal/sexual identity at all?

Erica: That's an interesting question because, you know, things are tied together and the whole idea that activism is separate from a person's identity and erotic life doesn't happen. So, in the 90s in Portland, I was in ACT UP Portland for a long time. That person I just told you about was also in ACT UP with me and I also had a butch girlfriend at the time. And, you

know, partly it was about who I was involved with and I was working with a lot of other people and so that shifts things about your identity. I think my identity as an activist has been consistent from my childhood.

Danella: Okay.

Erica: But, there was a lot of interesting things to learn. ACT UP Portland, for instance, used to do some work with this ... it had this subgroup called The Pissed Off Dyke Cell and then there was a separate group of women called the Women's Health Action Crew who did not want to identify with ACT UP because they thought that ACT UP was too male centered. So sometimes we did this coalition work that was about complicated ways to identify in terms of gender and sexuality so there was a lot to think about all the time.

Danella: Definitely. You said one of the branches was the Pissed Off Dyke Cell, is that right? Did you do a lot of work with them?

Erica: Yea, we did all kinds of ... First of all, frequently, a lot of the people doing work for ACT UP were dykes. And this subgroup did some work that didn't get super far with thinking we were going to make safer sex porn, which we didn't get very far on, but we did a lot of ... was theoretically was a product of all of ACT UP Portland ... but it was mostly us.

We got this big grant from Haymarket in, I don't know, 94 or 5 something-ish. You can figure it out though because the Haymarket foundation was having a 25 year thing where they give a \$20,000 grant out to some organization and we got it. And what we did with it was we went to high schools with these zines about safer sex and these zines had an ACT UP phone number in it and we gave them out. It had a phone number on it and said, would you like to do organizing in your own high school? Basically, call this number. So, we helped teenagers do their own organizing and activism.

Danella: That's really inspiring. Did you feel like you got a lot of responses from that?

Erica: Yea. Several groups did some amazing stuff. Thornton Academy in Saco. They had a big walk out and asked for a whole bunch of things including anti-homophobic sex education and, you know, all sorts of things. And various supplies in the bathrooms. One of the things they asked for that taught me a lot was they asked for tampon machines in the bathrooms. And they felt like part of the issue around HIV education was that they were not being recognized as sexual people with body parts. With

all of those body parts. And of course when you're asking for condoms and education and all kinds of stuff and a tampon machine. They got the tampon machine.

Danella: Right. Lesser of the...

Erica: Yea. And Monmouth Academy in Monmouth had a student group called KISS, which was something like Kids something safer sex, I don't know. They did a lot of things. They made their own zines and something like that. Those were two of the groups that really got a lot going.

Danella: Ran with it. That's great. So, has a lot of your activism been around youth education? I didn't notice this in any of the research I did, so I'm kind of just hearing now what you've worked on.

Erica: Well, I've been an advisor for Outright Lewiston-Auburn for probably twenty years so I've done a lot of stuff there, but I've also done a lot of other things that have been involved with multi-issue organizing, depending on the time.

Danella: Do you have sort of a favorite experience or memory that really stands out that you would like to share?

Erica: Well, I think the work that I told you about with ACT UP was pretty super great. And doing that work with high school students, especially because it's about building capacity. I don't think we used that language then, but that was pretty much the idea. I will say a few weeks ago I participated, you know surge did these anti-KKK things like, I went to Showing Up for Racial Justice, to door-to-door canvassing in places where the KKK had left flyers. I was really impressed by how building capacity was totally built into the whole project in helping people learn how to go door-to-door and things like that. So, when I look back at my own organizing right now, because I just did that a few weeks ago, that's just really standing out as a big aspect of something to have done.

Danella: I've heard you use the term building capacity. Can you explain that a little bit for me?

Erica: Yes. I mean by that, helping people learn to do activism themselves and to have a bigger skill set and instead of saying, 'okay, what do you want to be in your zine, we will write it for you' or 'here are some things you can hand out' or 'this is an action you can take,' you learn how to do those things. Some of the things we did that were more like hand outs was

something like 'you don't have to raise the money to have posters' or those kind of things. Just the ability for people to think themselves through how to do their own organizing seems really important. And how to do things like talk to people and things like that.

Danella: Giving them a whole skillset to take out. That must be really exciting because they are the next generation and we need them.

Erica: I've just felt very enthusiastic in Portland lately because sometimes I felt like not exactly where is the next generation, but just the opportunity to just go to things. Even Wendy Chapkis and I, at the last minute, got on the bus to go to Washington for the Women's March. You're bus for here.

Danella: Yea, that's right!

Erica: It was just really great. I think we both thought, 'wow somebody else has organized this whole thing. They've planned for every possible situation. I can just go.' It's just that feeling of so many young people organizing here right now that I'm very excited to see.

Danella: That's nice. It's shifting that emotional labour a little bit of organizing. I went to the Women's March too and the GSSO did a really good job organizing the bus and making sure that everybody had what they needed.

Erica: I actually still have in my bag, I've been using to not get wet stuff blah blah blah, the little clear backpack.

Danella: Yea. That we had to have.

Erica: That's the little orange thread.

Danella: Oh Yea. That's Good. So, what was your experience at the Women's March? Was that an overwhelming activism experience for you?

Erica: I've been to other big marches. I went to the march on Washington in 1993 as part of an anti-military intervention, which was super intense. And I went to one in 2000. And I went to an anti-nuc march in '79. So, I've been to a lot of things. I was really moved by the big number of people who were there. That was pretty intense. I was interested by people who had never done anything like that. I had some hesitation about the whole thing because, you know, what is the category woman? Who is being excluded by that? I have a lot of questions about that, as you know as a major, it's

kind of an essentializing category for people who don't identify with a particular category.

Danella: Or maybe identify with it, but they aren't traditionally...

Erica: ...embodied. Something I thought was hard is that it seems like it's hard to make change in terms of having people have a capacious idea of what gender is about and what category women is about and who is included or excluded and what would it mean to think more broadly about it.

I spent a few years on the Dyke March organizing committee, which had this slogan, 'For Dykes and the People that Love Them,' which was kind of a way to try to make that a broader understanding without policing who would be a dyke, but it's still problematic.

Danella: I think that language is liberating and can also be limiting in the way that we contextualize it sometimes. Being a women and gender studies major is what taught me that. I would have never even understood that as a concept before.

I am really interested in how that works in your personal life and your own identity. I know you had said in the beginning of the interview you said that you identify as a dyke. Does that feel more like a political identification? I also know you said you are currently partnered with a trans man, does that complicate the term dyke for you?

Erica: It kind of doesn't. I mean, it could. It definitely complicates the term lesbian, which, I mean, I probably never had very good credentials. I have some random humorous thing to say about how I don't like cats and I don't camp and I don't do all that other lesbian stuff. I see it as a political category, but also I do not want to minimize ... You know ... It's super hard to think about this...

Right now I'm the interim chair of Gender and Sexuality Studies at Bates and we just rewrote our mission statement and we took women out of the title of our major.

Danella: So is the major just Gender Studies now?

Erica: Gender and Sexuality Studies. When we first thought about adding sexuality, I really didn't want to do it because as central to gender is race, class, all of these other things and I didn't want to privilege sexuality, but we are never going to have a sexuality studies program and it seemed like, okay, we are going to take on this other central thing.

I guess, the other thing I would say, because I'm sort of writing about this,

is that one thing I've been thinking about lately, is that I had some sort of fantasy about myself as naturally femme and lately I'm thinking ... Like at Wendy's tenured party, for instance, I walked out of the bathroom and she handed me this hula hoop and said, 'I bet you can do this' and I just went sure and blah blah blah blah blah, but then I thought, yea, because I move my hips that way. For one thing I learned recently by using a really lightweight hula hoop is that my natural skill was dependent on particular technologies. But also thinking more about ableism and this idea that people's queer and gender identities described are often described by ways that are really only available to some people to some people to even occupy those gestures or behaviors and things. So, I've been thinking about what my stake is in thinking I have some natural femininity although I kind of do think so, but what's that about.

I will also say that being 59 ... Well, there's the weird how does biology actually work? At some points in this first long term relationship, I had this partner who, when we quit smoking, I gained weight in a pear way and she gained weight in an apple way and I thought that this really actually counts that within an identity we were both kind of trying not to admit. I thought that we were actually a butch/femme couple in hiding or something.

You know, now that I'm 59 and my hormones are changing, my own weight gain is weird and I just had this discovery like, oh no, I'm gaining weight here, which I had always understood to be some bizarro natural accounting for my queer gender and now it's like, my body's changing so who knows.

Danella: It's interesting how it sounds like you're describing sort of how we like move and shift our definitions of these identity categories through our own life experiences, which I know is true for me. That's really interesting. This kind of reminds me, in Wendy Chapkis' class you were also talking about how you figure skate. So, has your body image or body changes impacted your figure skating or the identity around your figure skating as a femme?

Erica: That's an interesting question. I mean, one thing about figure skating for me is that I understand myself as a femme, but in the very straight (on the women's side) context of figure skating, people have not always seen me as feminine. Because I don't actually like the particular kind of skirt that goes out at the bottom. I like more the kind of skirt you could probably wear for roller derby or something and I just don't exactly have that style. So, for instance, someone that I have skated with for a long time looked at me and said, 'oh, you're wearing nail polish today.' I was like, what are you talking about, I wear nail polish everyday, but I think she had these assumptions about me, basically, I think, because she thought, 'well you're

a lesbian so you must not have those whatever...And she wears perky little outfits that are different than mine, which are not perky. In some ways, my own understanding of my femininity in relationship to skating has been queerer than the context. I think that it hasn't really shaped my understanding of how I want to move on the ice. That's pretty much the same.

I've been skating to prettier things lately. I started out skating to my own routines. Sometimes I skate to things that are kind of bluesy. I've skated to an instrumental section of the Nine Inch Nails song, Closer, which most people don't know the title, but for the record, that's the one that says, I want to fuck you like an animal over and over, which was not in the routine because you have to play it over the loudspeaker. Now I'm skating to a Tori Amos cover of Smells Like Teen Spirit.

Danella: I love that song. I love the way she does that.

Erica: I know. I think that's a pretty good version of me in that it's sort of pretty in a certain way, but it's really dark.

Danella: I know that you wrote a little about gender stereotypes in figure skating. Do you feel like your music and outfit choices are sort of queer in the sense that they aren't traditional for what you saw during your research?

Erica: Yes. And people have said things to me like, oh, you're really brave to be doing that. And do be honest, when I started doing research ... And I started competing partly to do research, and I would go to these national ... At my level of skating you don't have to compete yourself up to a national championship, at some levels you can, but at mine you can just decide, I'm going to go skate at adult nationals. It's by age group and level. I'm skating a level that has single jumps and some spins, but no double jumps.

Danella: Okay.

Erica: Anyway, I thought, well, we're all grown up and I'm in this age group that at the time. Somehow the age categories keep changing as more and more people keep skating so there are five age categories and I've been in category four for ten years, partly because that category keeps changing. So, now it's like 56-65 or something.

I was really surprised because I thought, well people are going to wear all kinds of interesting whatever, but everybody practically, but me was wearing an adult version of the skating dress that you see if you watch skating on TV. It was usually longer than one who was sixteen would be

wearing, but it was a pretty dress with the matching panties and a little flared skirt at the bottom. I was just like, given a choice, we are grown ups, who wants to be wearing that? And apparently a ton of people do.

Danella: Really? Could you give me sort of a description of one of the outfits you might wear that would be a little different than that?

Erica: Sure. So, I did something a few years ago to (I guess I've been doing a lot of covers) Prince's cover to A Case of You, that Joni Mitchell song. It ended up being pretty traumatic because he died a week before I was performing it. The Portland Ice Arena has a recital every year in the spring. There's a group number for adults and then there's a solo. I was doing the solo to A Case of You and then Prince died a week before, which never had occurred to me that it might be a memorial. He's my age: Prince, Madonna and Michael Jackson were all born in '58. Super exciting, but anyway, I wore these sort of reddish-purple pants that I got at Hot Topic, which actually turns out to be, of many stores, pretty generous on the idea that you might be a person my age going to shop there for some reason, even though it's mostly geared towards people who are fifteen. I don't know if you know the former porn star, Annie Sprinkle. Now she's more of a performance artist and she's hooked up with a really good friend of mine and they've been together for a long time and now she's doing ecofeminist sexuality stuff. Anyway, I happened to be visiting them before they were doing a garage sale and I happened to sort of inherit all this free stuff, so it was sort of a purple plastic bustier. So that was one costume. For the Nine Inch Nails thing I did (it's not like I'm always shopping at Hot Topic but) I had a little sleeveless spaghetti strapped top and then a black pleated skirt with some fake chains on it.

Danella: That sound really interesting. I've watched figure skating on television, but I have very little experience with understanding the competition side of it I think. So, has figure skating or your work you did on your book impacted or come into your role as a professor at Bates? Do you use that as far as when you're teaching courses on visual culture, because it seems like those are really interconnected.

Erica: Some of the courses that I teach are specifically visual culture, and I frequently do use skating as an example, but I also teach a course called 'Queer and Trans Sports Studies.'

Danella: Oh, really? Can you tell me a little bit more about it?

Erica: Yea. It's not just about queer and trans people in sports, but it's also

about the way that sports contributes to things like naturalized categories of gender, because, as you know, many sports are gender segregated and not only does that create a problem for trans people who might wanna shift categories, but also for people who don't fit into a category and also because athleticism is frequently gendered masculine itself, it affects a lot of things about sports. Many people don't understand figure skating even as a sport, because there's dance in it and people think that can't really be a sport like Hockey is or something. So, it's partly a course that talks about how gender and sexuality categories are sort of infused in a lot about sports and are created through sports.

Danella: Oh, that's really interesting. Is that for the Gender and Sexualities department?

Erica: Yes. We changed our name on August 1st.

Danella: So, it's fresh...

Erica: It's fresh, yes.

Danella: I've heard of other schools, I think, that have a Gender Studies or Gender and Sexuality Studies name of the department, instead of Women and Gender Studies, which I think is good. I know that Lisa, the director here, has talked about the different name options and potentially changing that.

Erica: Yea. We were Women's Studies when I started, then we change to Women and Gender Studies, then we just changed.

Danella: Okay. When did you start teaching at Bates?

Erica: 1990. So, I've been there for 27 years.

Danella: And what is it ... do you love it ... what has the experience like for you overall?

Erica: It's been a really complicated experience. I never expected to be teaching at a school that now costs sixty plus thousand dollars a year. I came from teaching at an urban commuter school, which is really what I had hoped to be doing, but, so really, if USM had offered me a job, I probably would have much rather been there. But, various things happened and this is the job I got and it was totally a mindfuck to move to maine, where I had never really been until my job interview. Also, I'm not

that employable in terms of getting another job because I've written these three books, none of which are actually in the field I've been trained in. They are all in different fields and even in different fields from each other. I guess you could call them Gender Studies, but there aren't a lot of jobs in that. So, I haven't exactly been here for 27 years because I totally love the job.

Danella: Did you fall in love with Maine? I guess I'm asking, what has kept you here for 27 years?

Erica: Partly, to be honest, this is where I have a job.

Danella: Okay.

Erica: I like Portland. The first bunch of years, I lived in Lewiston for 11 years, partly because coming from Chicago it was not clear to me that it would be worth commuting from a city, which I'm using scare quotes with, for the record, which is how I understood it then. You know, my old neighborhood had 80,000 people so the whole idea that Portland ... that I would want to be commuting from where 50 minutes away. Also, I felt like the idea that you were dropping into the poor industrial town to teach did not seem like good politics for me. After 11 years I felt like, okay, I'm never going to get another job and I would like to go to somewhere closer to a city that is a city. By then I had sort of spent a lot of time in Portland. I'm happy living here. It's sort of nice to be in a ... the whole little city thing, I do think, does have some advantages. For instance, it takes me a little bit under an hour to get to work and I can just leave, knowing that it's going to take me just a little under an hour to get to work. When I was in Chicago, first I was driving to southern Wisconsin and then I was driving to a place in Chicago that was, in theory, 45 minutes away, but could be an hour and a half or could be three hours, you never know.

Danella: I've heard that about Chicago traffic. That is is very unpredictable.

Erica: Yes. Just yesterday, in fact, I was at a conference in Chicago and getting to the airport was ... I decided to treat myself to a ride to the airport because I was tired and sore and I didn't want to lug everything to the public transportation and it was a little sketchy.

Danella: Okay, well I think I've gotten a lot of information about your teaching and a little about your background. I went on your website and I checked out, Salacious, which I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about how you got involved with that and what was your inspiration for

being a contributing member in this magazine, and if you could just tell the audience about what Salacious is from your perspective.

Erica: Salacious is a feminist queer anti-racist sex magazine and it put out four print issues. The first one came out around 2013 I think, which is a kind of crazy time to be launching a new print magazine. I got involved because Katie Diamond was here and was a big activist in town for a long time. They had an interest, for a long time in doing a sex ed book. If you've seen Girl Sex 101, they were the illustrator for that amazing sex ed book. When that was not working out that well at the time, they had this idea for a sex magazine so I got involved. They invited me to be on the board.

I had also written for a queer newspaper in Portland in the 90's called APEX, which is in the archive that this very interview will go into. I had been an anonymous sex advice columnist which was called Ask Thighmaster: Advice With Holes. It was done in a kind of gender neutral way. It was both sex and politics advice both together. Anyways, I'm very interested in sex writing and it was very interesting to be on an editorial board where we really all went over every single submission and it was just interesting that we had a lot of stuff to talk about. We came from different backgrounds, well, all radical queer perspectives.

One thing that stood out to me was that we were all very insistent on some representation of consent in every narrative. So, it could happen at the end. It could happen somewhere. You know, we sent something back to someone who had some kind of puppy play thing to have them put something in making sure you knew that it was a human person being a puppy. You know, all those kind of things. We had some conflict over things. I remember having a gigantic conflict over something that I thought was really ageist and I couldn't get anyone else to understand that it was ageist.

I feel like in various places in the last decade I've been the old person on a board of something. Like, the old person on the organizing committee of the Dyke March. The old person on the board of Salacious and having some kinds of perspectives and things.

I also started writing an advice column there because what happened was that someone in the community was writing sex advice columns. So, that person was going to write this column and they got the first letter and someone who was a trans woman wanted to start dating was having concerns about safety and all kinds of issues who was newly out as trans. I was the person kind of editing it and I made a lot of suggestive changes because I thought they had missed a lot of the points. Whatever, that's all not important, but what happened, as it turns out is that the person who wanted to do it really was imagining giving sex instruction, not relationship or other kinds of advice and I was interested in other things. So, we sort of

worked it out. So, the next question we got was, how do you deep throat? Well, to be honest, I don't really know. She did. So she wrote the things like that.

Danella: So you collaborated together.

Erica: Yea. She did those and I did the more relationship-y things. You can actually find those by going to the Salacious website, and the ones that are signed ER are me.

I wrote one by a non-binary person who was upset to discover that they had a thing for straight guys. I wrote one about someone with a trans partner who had really traditional expectations. You know, like once he came out as trans then wanted her to be cooking food. And then one I made up because I always wanted to write one about having a bizarre erotic, well not exactly erotic, but having some crisis with my GPS that had some dimensions of topping.

Danella: Okay. Would you feel comfortable telling me more about that and how you made it up?

Erica: I could tell you. I feel like I gotta remind myself of what it said, so you can read it. It was basically about this idea because I had no sense of direction. It was basically this thing saying I'm usually good at being topped, but the GPS is totally fucking with my head and I can't figure out how to deal with that. So, I had made up that question. To me, part of the answer was that a GPS could be better designed by now. You ought to be able to program it to say, don't take me on any back roads, or find me a bathroom that will be nice to my fancy shoes, or other things. It was kind of about the way that if people had a more kinked way of doing things like inventing technology that it would be a better world.

Danella: I really like that idea. That is so neat. I didn't read that particular one, but I am going to go back and read it now. It sounds like you've done a lot of work with sex positivity and sex education and your work with Salacious. How do you feel like that has impacted your own erotic identity? Or I should ask, do you feel like that has impacted your own erotic identity, and if so, how?

Erica: Good question. Let me think about that for a moment.

Danella: Yea, take your time. That's fine.

Erica: Well, for one thing, I've gotten to read a lot of porn. I guess I could

say because I have written about this a fair amount, and not only because I have written about this a fair amount. When I went to college it was sort of the anti-porn years, and I took for granted that there was some distinction between pornography and erotica.

Playboy came to our campus and I went to a protest and had this hilarious chant like, 'Playboy. Playboy. We're not neurotic ah. No to pornography. Yes to Erotica.' Did not even think much about it.

And then, I think, in graduate school and other kinds of things, writing about sex and reading about sex and also reading some anti-porn feminist stuff, I realized that I was actually, to be honest, turned on by some of the examples that were given of some of the horrific porn. Not super horrific porn, but when people were being tied up or whatever. And, in my art history research ... when I thought I would be writing a dissertation, which is not worth going into too much, on nude women and clothed men in 19th century French painting. I thought that's all terrible. And then I thought, those women chained to rocks, that's actually hot. So, I think one of the things that happened from working on sex and sex writing and research, is that I started to question my own idea of what limits were.

Also, I'm very very interested as a researcher in not thinking about ... I think schools often teach students to think, we are this superior analyst of culture and those other people are being totally tricked by whatever. And I think a lot of anti-porn stuff is about how people see things and then they do it or want to do it or something. So, all those things combined together have probably reshaped a lot of my ideas because it gave me an opportunity to watch and read more porn and think about things. And just think about the way that people's sexual desires, including maybe my own, were not necessarily so ... Both are not always that much about what you would want to do or watch, but also could be more expansive. So, I think just thinking a little more expansively has been related both to my academic work and my activist work. Good question.

Danella: Awesome. So, you mention both porn and erotica. Can you tell me how you would define the differences in those?

Erica: So, I don't really think there's much difference anymore, but back in the day ... and I'm sure some people still hold on to this idea ... there was an idea that there was sex in the context of something with redeeming social importance like an erotic scene in a beautiful novel versus something that was just designed to get you off. So, to me that has a kind of moral judgement and value and I don't really like that, so I tend not to use that. Although, I do think there is a category of porn that is designed to get you off and as a main concern you're not ashamed of having in the production of it. You know, it's not mysterious that it's there. The erotica category

seems more complicated because it often seems more political and you know, those people who go buy it at 7-11 are buying porn and those people who go see it in a museum are looking at erotica.

Danella: So there's highbrow and lowbrow?

Erica: Yea.

Danella: Okay. That's interesting. That kind of makes sense to me in the context of salacious because it brings together some of the more fine art or high art with some of the more contemporary, I'm not sure if I'm using the right word...

Erica: It's not so arty really, although it has really good photographers and graphic artists. It's basically a porn magazine, I would say. But, it does have some amazing work in it.

Danella: Yea. Awesome. Okay. I know you did mention this a little while back and I kind of wanted to touch upon it. I know you said a lot of times, on a lot of the boards you're sitting on and in some of the activist work you're doing, you kind of felt like the old person. I'm using the air quotes right now, but like the old person opinion or perspective in the room. I was just wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about like how ... I know you've been doing activism work for a long time, so how has that sort of impacted your activism work? Do you feel like your position has changed or shifted as you've gotten older or that people receive you differently?

Erica: One thing I will say, which is not so much about the activism, is that you hear all this stuff about how women get to be erotically invisible at a certain age. So, first of all I will say that it is absolutely true. Just, FYI, even knowing intellectually that it was true, experiencing it is almost astounding. To the extent that activism is erotically generating, that has not been so much the case for me lately. And it's complicated.

A more activist way to think about this is different. The organizing committee for the Dyke March was this kind of a group of people in this femme organization decided to host a dyke march. So, I was approached by that organization when they were, they were called the femme something-or-other. I don't even remember what it was called. Somebody said to me, we are creating this organization together for a group of femmes. I thought she was asking me to join, but what she was really asking me was to talk to the group about our history and I'm like, what are you talking about?

Danella: Okay.

Erica: Anyway, years later .. some people in that group were friends and everything ... I was invited to come to a meeting basically because I had been extremely cranky about why everybody on your organizing committee under 40, like everybody's 22-40, what's that about. Anyway, I came to one meeting and I wasn't necessarily planning to get involved, but they were floating some images for the t-shirt of the year, and actually, Katie Diamond, the person who started Salacious, had made this one image for the very first one that had a bunch of all these people on it ... So usually they were picking out a few of these people, so the image they had for the march this year was a woman with a walker. I think they were trying to make it less ageist by having an older person on it, but, you know, it was a woman with a walker and a hairdo from the 70s and whatever. It's like okay, but is this actually going to be the whole one...

Danella: Representative...

Erica: And for me part of the point is that, and you know, do you think that people have never changed their hair. Like, if you got a hair style in the 70s it's like the one you're still...

Danella: You're always going to have it.

Erica: That's a small example, but I think it's changed. It's funny, I was on a panel once about activists and someone in the audience who was maybe 10 years older than I was, was like, now I want to sit on the couch. I don't want to sit on the couch, but I do feel pretty excited that I'm not the person going to Kinkos anymore. Well, it's probably not called Kinkos anymore and it's probably not open at three in the morning, but ya know. There was a time when I might be going to photocopy material at three in the morning with the nice person who was not going to charge ACT UP and was just going to look the other way. Now all of this is technologically impossible. Nobody can give you free copying. Nobody can sneak that to you, but ya know. I'm happy to not always be the person there at three in the morning.

Danella: So, it sounds like your role has shifted.

Erica: I'm super happy that people are doing a lot of organizing. It's not like I'm never organizing things, but I'm excited that other people are doing it. Just being able to show up. Sometimes I would show up to something that was supposed to be community building, but nobody would have even a signup sheet.

Danella: Oh. Okay.

Erica: You know, just even the little things. Even though, there's always been amazing organizing, so I don't mean to imply that there's a lull, but I just feel like now it's just pretty exciting to show up to things that I'm not organized myself.

Danella: That's awesome. I guess when I asked you that question, you responded by saying that you feel like older women's' sexuality is not acknowledged in the same way. Do you feel like that was a shift from when you were younger and you were doing activism work that there was a different culture around about erotic pleasure and sexuality for you and now that you're older that's like not acknowledged as much?

Erica: I feel like people people just, in general, more than you would expect, deerotinize people and you can see that in various situations. Just to give you one example. I don't know if you read or watch a lot of queer porn, but do you know the Crash Pad series by any chance?

Danella: I don't.

Erica: So, there's this series. If you've never read this anthology, The Feminist Porn Book, it's pretty interesting because it gives you a lot of sources of feminist porn and I reviewed it for the magazine Jump Cut. So I've followed up on some...

I'm not trying to give a rationale for why I was watching porn, but I'm just telling you the context for why I started looking at this porn. So, Crash Pad is this feminist queer porn thing where the premise is that somebody has a key to an apartment and different characters show up. It was filmed in San Francisco and there's six volumes of it. Anyway, but when I went to look at it, because it was one of the things people wrote about, you know, everybody was sort of 27. All the actors are nonprofessional and general actors. Anyway, there was one person in their 30s and one person in their 40s. I mean, this was filmed in San Francisco which is like the spectacle of hot older people everywhere. There are hot older queer people everywhere around you and still you are producing queer porn that is implying it's over after you're X age.

Danella: It sounds like there's no representation it sounds like.

Erica: So, I think, I don't know, it's that you move in the world differently and it's hard to define how it happens and I have a partner who is 23 years younger than I am. So, it's interesting to be in places together. First of all,

there's a lot of reasons why people don't necessarily expect that we are together for a million reasons. But, the weirdness of being around someone who is getting a lot of play while you are not in the very same setting. It's hard to even explain. And I hate to say, you'll find out about it. I hadn't really thought about it so much before. In that whole world of ACT UP that I was in partly this hellish world with two different sexual partners. If you look, there's a bunch of photographs that are circulating in Maine on an educational board by Annette Dragon. She was one of my lovers at the time. First of all, I wound up in way more of those pictures than I thought. I just saw some of them.

Danella: I did see some of them when I did some research on you.

Erica: So, I just find myself on the wall being 35 a bunch of times. You know, I was getting attached to somebody else and Annette was taking these pictures, and eventually she looked at the pictures and said, ohhh, fuck, what's going on here. But, at the time it was sort of erotic life that was intensely involved in activist life that doesn't happen in the same way. I'm sure it's happening for other people, which now that you mention it, seems like an aspect of my life that's not as tied into much anymore.

Danella: That makes sense. So, we're just at the one hour mark. I wanted to open it up to see if there was any aspect of your activism or of your life that I haven't brought up that you want to talk about?

Erica: You've raised a lot of things.

Danella: I know, I feel like we touched upon a lot of things.

Erica: There isn't anything where I think I have to get it into the record. I also did two of those bar things already. Wendy also did this bar story thing where she interviewed people about their lives. Tell me a story about something that happened to you in a bar. Actually, it was probably like spending a little time with Annette over the 90s where I'm recorded more than many people. So, anyways nothing is jumping up, but is there anything else you would like to ask?

Danella: Well, I have this other question that I think we have touched upon it a little bit, but I didn't know if you would want to expand on at all. The question is sort of how you see your role in pornography in queer people's lives over the course of...

Erica: This doesn't exactly answer your question, but one thing I'm thinking

a lot about now and I don't even know if it's true, but it seems to me that one way that queer porn has changed (probably not mainstream gay porn), but the whole question of how people describe their bodies in relation to what is actually on their bodies.

So, a thing that would happen in Salacious for instance is one way people would designate queer genders is there would be some whole scene or whole story or whatever, and in the end it would turn out that the cock was silicone and not flesh, but you wouldn't really know that until the end of the whole thing. When I think about porn in the 90s, at least dyke porn, it seems like now, both in my experience in real life and in reading and watching things, it seems like people might describe themselves as hard or wet whether or not whatever body parts they have that might not be hard or wet in the traditional ways and have different kinds of gendered embodiment.

There's this book called *Her Tongue on My Theory* from the mid 90s that was a super great history by a lesbian collective and I used to assign it to my students partly because they would have to go buy it at the bookstore.

Danella: The whole experience.

Erica: The whole experience turned out to be big. But the thing I liked about it is that there was a lesbian performance art group and it was about some of their trials with censorship and some other things and they had something that basically said sometimes writing about sex and sex theory is right on sexy. They have a porn story running across the bottom of the whole book. There were a bunch of different stories about this one character. First of all, I must have blocked out every time I was about to assign the book that the character is a travelling queer studies scholar. So, it really implicated me more than I would ever want to do in assigning things to the class, however it interests me that of all the other kinds of embodiment. That other people would show up ... One would just be some grad student trying to hook up with them when they gave a talk at a bookstore and once they were running from neo nazis and someone grabbed them and pulled them onto the roof and whatever, but really the gender did not shift much.

Danella: Okay.

Erica: And, even when somebody presented themselves as male at the moment that sex was happening they kind of revealed themselves as female. Really the point was that this other character was the same person was kind of the thing you figured out by the end of it. And it just seems like things ... I don't know ... I wonder how porn has changed in relation to

different ideas about embodiment. I'm actually a little on the tails of this because I hired one of my former research assistants who I would not hire to do this while she was still in college, but I was able to get a grant to send her to read a bunch of the porn magazine, On Our Back, from like 91-95 to see, and I'm still in the process of looking at the data, to see if my understanding of people were really ... if the stereotype of the dildos being all lavender is really true and you know that kind of stuff. That's not a totally coherent answer, but it's something I've been thinking about a lot.

Danella: I feel like in all of your answers what is clear to me is that all of the different major passions and facets of your life intersect really well with one another. So, your teaching and your activism and your interest in erotica and sexuality, and then your own personal life sort of all come together.

Erica: I think if people are kind of open ... I'm going to say this, but I don't really believe that everyone is non-binary or that everybody is sexually superfluid. There are things I'm not interested in. Not everybody can be open and do a million different things, but I do think if you don't totally make presumptions about what you want or who you want you can have a more interesting life.

Danella: I like that. I think it's a good place to end too. Is that okay with you?

Erica: That's great.

Danella: So I just want to thank you for sharing your stories with me, even though I personally have a ton more questions, I'm so glad we got to do this and cover some of the important parts of your life and experience. I'm going to send you an electronic copy of our interview as soon as I figure out how to do that from this recorder and also I think you will get a copy of the transcription, once I finish with that. If you do have any other questions you can ask Wendy, or you have my contact information so you could ask me too.

Erica: Awesome.

Danella: I'm going to turn off the tape recorder now.