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<p>Sofia [00:00:01] Okay. So the date is November 23rd, 2022. My name is Sofia Oliveri. S-O-F-I-A O-L-I-V-E-R-I And I'm here with?</p> <p>Erica [00:00:15] Erica Rand, E-R-I-C-A R-A-N-D and I use she/her pronouns.</p> <p>Sofia [00:00:23] Just a quick reminder that if at any point tonight you want to refuse to answer any questions or end the interview, it's totally up to you. You totally can. Just a reminder. Also, this is a follow up interview from your 2007 interview for querying the past</p> <p>Erica [00:00:38] 2017. Yeah.</p> <p>Sofia [00:00:43] Oh, my bad. 2017 interview. Okay, so. We'll go ahead and jump into political activism and the AIDS epidemic kind of going chronologically. In your previous interview, you stated that you had done some work with ACT-UP Portland. Can you tell me when and why ACT-UP Portland was formed?</p> <p>Erica [00:01:02] Oh, sure. So ACT-UP Portland was formed in the very early nineties. Actually, I moved to Maine in the fall of 1990 and I was surprised to discover, because I come from Chicago, a very big city, that there was a big enough ACT-UP in Maine that it had already had a political split. So there was ACT-UP Maine and then ACT-UP Portland, and I was in ACT-UP Portland. And as you know, that's the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. And we did a lot of work with HIV activism in the state. So I learned that in some ways Maine was better than I had expected. I lived in Lewiston and for example, when I had a friend who was sick with AIDS named Don Plourde and I went to the hospital to visit him, nobody was leaving his food outside the door or anything. People were taking good care of him by that point, but a lot of things were pretty bad and that included. General stigma around people with HIV and AIDS, insufficient education. In addition, there were people trying to pass laws like there was one law called we nicknamed the Dracula bill, suggesting that anybody brought to the hospital could have their blood tested for HIV without their consent. So we did successful activism against that, too.</p> <p>Sofia [00:02:46] So when did you first get involved in the organization? I know you said you came to Maine in the nineties and it started in the nineties. Was the stigma one of the reasons that you decided to join ACT-UP Portland?</p> <p>Erica [00:03:02] Yes. And so I'm going to guess it might have been 1991. Ish. And the stigma was one of the reasons. To be honest, I was very interested in finding a bunch of queer people to spend time with. I didn't know so many in Lewiston at the time and you know, we did a lot of really good work and there</p>	<p>ACT-UP formation and reasoning for it forming</p> <p>HIV/AIDS stigma</p> <p>When Erica first got involved and why</p>

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<p>was a lot of conservative politics. I will say one thing we did that was not exactly directly about HIV was that Linda Bean, the very conservative heir to the L.L. Bean fortune was running for office. And so we did a half baked being dinner to protest to sort of talk about her stuff. And also we really wanted to help with things happening in schools, because a lot of schools did not have HIV education and anti, education against, you know, anti-gay, anti queer attitudes. So we did a lot of work at high schools. Maybe one thing I'll tell you about is we got a \$20,000 grant in about 1993 to do do organizing in high school. So what we would do is we would go to a high school early in the morning, protest outside handout some zines and zines were new back then with safer sex information. And it said, if you are interested in organizing in your own high school, call this number. And then we helped people organize in their high schools.</p> <p>Sofia [00:05:00] You also mentioned that you were active in the Portland Dyke Cell and Women's Health Action Group. What was the relationship between ACT-UP Portland and the Dyke Cell and Women's Health Action Group?</p> <p>Erica [00:05:10] Okay, so the whole organization was called the ACT-UP, Portland Pissed Off Dyke Cell and Women's Health Action Group POD/WHAC. And the Pissed Off Dyke Cell was a subset of ACT-UP Portland. And the Women's Health Action Crew was the name for the people in our group who did not want to be associated with ACT-UP. A few of them were separatists, lesbians who did not want to be doing work for men, basically. So that was one thing. But we were one big group. We wanted to do some safer sex education. For approximately a minute, we had this idea that we would make a safer sex porn video, but that did not get very far.</p> <p>Sofia [00:06:05] So are the separatists the reason why the Dyke Cell needed to be form? Or was there separate reasons in your opinion?</p> <p>Erica [00:06:13] No. The Dyke Cell, So it was one big group of people. So the Dyke Cell didn't have any separatists because that was a branch of ACT-UP. Yeah, no. So that was that. And then but there were a bunch of people who wanted to work together and just some of those people did not want to be under the label ACT-UP. So those were the separatists. We were not the separatist, if that makes sense. It's it's hard to explain. And it's a very long name for a subset of a group.</p> <p>Sofia [00:06:46] It makes sense, though.</p> <p>Erica [00:06:47] Yeah.</p> <p>Sofia [00:06:48] Okay. What was the relationship between gay men and lesbians like who were engaged in AIDS activism in Maine in the 1980s? Did they work</p>	<p>HIV activism and work with schools.</p> <p>Portland Dyke Cell and Women's Health Action Group *POD/WHAC</p> <p>More info about *POD/WHAC</p>

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<p>well together?</p> <p>Erica [00:06:59] Okay, so I didn't get here till 1990.</p> <p>Sofia [00:07:02] Oh, I apologize.</p> <p>Erica [00:07:03] Did you mean the nineties? Yes. Okay.</p> <p>Sofia [00:07:06] I'm so sorry.</p> <p>Erica [00:07:07] No problem. Yes. In a lot of ways. And I can tell you a funny story, which is that in 1991, a very early iteration of a Pride March or pride weekend. The New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Very famous writer Sarah Shulman brought up some films to show in Portland. In fact, they are at USM somewhere. And it was a series of five films. And the last film was a film that basically the plot was, a gay man hooks up with a lot of other gay men, and then he has sex in the context of a meaningful relationship. That was basically the plot, wasn't that interesting. So a bunch of women were just like went out to have a cigarette basically back in the day when I did that, which was so wonderful, but don't do it. And Sarah Schulman came on and gave us a little lecture about how in New York, gay men and lesbians all work together. It's like we all work together. But actually, this movie is not interesting. And then several years later, she and other people formed the Lesbian Avengers because they wanted to start working with gay men. So who knows? But I think people work pretty well together. There are pictures. I don't know if you've looked at the Anette Dragon collection. Okay. So I'm all over that as a 35 year old person. And there's one picture lying on the grass with two other people, one who later figured out he was a trans man and then this other guy, Keith. And that was a pretty regular thing for ACT-UP, that there were a bunch of different people, of various genders.</p> <p>Sofia [00:09:10] Can you tell me about some of the people who are involved in Dyke Cell?</p> <p>Erica [00:09:15] Yeah. So one was Jed Bell, who is listed under a different name in the in Anettes collection. Who had moved here from after going to Swarthmore and was very into radical activism. One was Anette Dragon who took all those photos. One reason I know about both of those people so well is I was dating both of them for a while. And in fact, why not say for the record that one of the things that went wrong with the brief attempt to see if we could do porn was really just trying to do this very limited kissing scene. But I think Jed and I were assigned to do that. And I think Annette looked at that and thought, oh, something's going on. But anyway, so Annette, who was born and raised in Bangor and would describe herself as somebody who was butch from birth, also worked in the Photo Mart, recently closed, big photo store, and did wedding</p>	<p>Gay men and women's ability to work together to combat HIV/AIDS</p> <p>Specific people involved in Dyke Cell</p> <p>Info about attempted porn video</p>

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<p>photographs. And so we were all in different ways really committed to radical activism in a lot of contexts. So we did some things that weren't even just about, you know, HIV and AIDS. So maybe not even in. In that context, particularly, we did work on Central America, all kinds of various of us did other kinds of things. The other thing we did that I really vividly remember is that. So this must have been. But how did that. Because when was. Uh. Okay. Clinton became president in, like, 92 ish? Okay. So I think it was Clinton was coming to town for some reason, and we were protesting the lack of funding and things for HIV and other policies, including international policies. And so we went to, he was going to be at the Eastland Hotel, which is now called something else, but it's the one on Thai street or State Street with like up 13 floors. There's a big bar. But anyway, that was irrelevant to anything. Oh, no. Or with Holiday Inn, by the Bay, he was going to be at Holiday Inn by the Bay. So anyway, we went to do this protest there, and I was also protesting at other place for other reasons. So one of the protests and at that time it wasn't that I guess maybe the police in Portland were not so militarized or something because you could hear them talking to each other like they saw we were at the front waiting for him to come in and then you could hear them. They had just all they had in front was like a like a rope or something, like not very much. But then we went around to the back and these police officers came back and said, You can't be back here. And we said, we want to be back here because this is where the president's coming. And they said, no, he's going to the front door where the ribbon is. I'm like, and I remember saying no, because actually you have snipers pointed down this way. So that obviously is what you're concerned about. So it was a different kind of a time, I think, to do some protest. So that didn't actually answer exactly your question. I will say on the Women's Health Action crew, one of the main people there was this activist named Anna Kissed. So her name I will spell because it's A-N-A, middle initial 'R', K-I-S-S-E-D, but you can see if you pronounce it, it comes out to anarchist. And she's the one who was a big separatist and a photographer with some national fame as a photographer. So a lot of us were cultural creators and Annette and Jed and I also worked on Apex, that publication that's also in the Sampson Center.</p> <p>Sofia [00:14:01] Was there one thing you did that was specifically memorable like as a group?</p> <p>Erica [00:14:10] Wow. Um, there was a lot that was memorable, some of it I've actually talked to you a little bit about. I'm trying to think about something, I might add. We some great pictures at three in the morning all around Portland, which was fun and super great. And I don't know. I mean, I feel like I've described a bunch of things because we also were writing and editing and doing other things. I think that Half Baked Bean Supper was great. The Dracula bill thing, and to me especially important, was that the organization, the work we did in schools like that just seemed so important to because it was like growing</p>	<p>Protesting</p> <p>Memorable moments in ACT-UP</p>

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<p>activists like the next generation and helping them with things they couldn't do themselves. So for instance, if you do activist work, you know, you need things like. Money just for basic things like photocopying, which back in the day, you know, you couldn't really send people a bunch of emails. So and there used to be this thing that if you've gone to FedEx any time recently to photocopy stuff. Well, okay, now, if you photocopy stuff might even be the same in the library here. But many places, you know, you pay for it by putting a credit card in. They count it off. You know, you've you get what you pay for. In the nineties and before like a big thing activists learned how to do with like go to Kinko's which is what it is now FedEx at three in the morning where some very nice person would run off all our fliers for free. So that's easier to do if you're not in high school.</p> <p>Sofia [00:16:19] Did the organization have like an actual, like physical office space? And if so, where was it?</p> <p>Erica [00:16:28] Yes. Oh, well, ACT-UP Portland itself had and so we actually, after a while were most of ACT-UP Portland also ACT-UP Portland had an office in the state theater building on the second floor. And it was a year when we, you know, had this big grant we could afford to rent an office, which was kind of amazing, had furniture. I still have a table I took home with me, even though it had sort of toxic, poisonous paint on it. I think, but, who cares? And then we sent all our for the rest of our furniture to Catholic Charities, which was collecting things for a New Mainers. So it's a great place. There are still like a lot of offices with really interesting things happening there.</p> <p>Sofia [00:17:17] Do you remember what it was specifically used for?</p> <p>Erica [00:17:22] That's a good question. Officey stuff? Well, you know, it was a good place to meet. It was a central location. I think we probably did some work. Bringing materials together, we get have people come to the office. We did a lot of the sort of creative stuff making zines and posters and other things, and so I think we did a fair amount of those things.</p> <p>Sofia [00:17:51] Could you describe what it looks like or what it looked like? Or just some descriptors. It's like it was a cozy area. Or if it was.</p> <p>Erica [00:18:02] It was a cozy area. Thank you for that. Yeah. No, it was like a you know, it was a small office. Like like if you look up at the state theater building and you see all of these windows, each of them is like one or, you know, maybe one or two are in office and so and that building. So I think the thing that's more memorable to me, maybe because I've been in there repeatedly over and over, is this this is long hallways with these rooms that really are glass, you know, some with curtains going down these long winding halls and person with a</p>	<p>Working with high schoolers</p> <p>ACT-UP Portland physical office space description.</p> <p>What ACT-UP office was used for.</p> <p>More description of inside of office.</p>

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<p>bad sense of direction could get lost. And, you know, it has an old fashioned elevator, but those things are memorable to me. I was born in New York, although I grew up mostly in Chicago. But it had the feel of like an old fashioned New York apartment. And elevator like the elevator still looks like that.</p> <p>Sofia [00:19:07] When you think back to your time in ACT-UP Portland, what role do you think it played in the local queer community?</p> <p>Erica [00:19:14] It played a huge role. First of all, we were visible at a time when there was a lot of closetedness and fear of being out. Second of all, we didn't take shit that some other groups were willing to accept with this idea that you were supposed to be very polite and respectable. So. One of the things we did that I'll also say is really memorable, that did not happen in Portland, but in Lewiston. So in Portland in 1992, I think or three, there was an anti-gay referendum. So Portland passed laws against discrimination on the basis of housing, credit, public accommodations and, employment. And there are a you know, all those referendums they have there was a referendum to overturn it. So, no, was that good vote because the referendum overturned it, barely passed. Barely came out on our side. But it did come on our side. Then in Lewiston, where I was living, because I teach at Bates and I've lived in Portland now since 2001, but until then I was in Lewiston, there was a referendum, there was a the police chief and the mayor wanted to have a similar rule, law against discrimination because they had learned that people were not turning were not going to the police if hate crimes or something happened because they were afraid to admit they were gay. So anyway, there was a meeting, a community member meeting that I was deliberately not invited to in the local bar of activist because they wanted to hear what people thought. And I said, you know, I don't think we should do that because, you know, it's going to come to a referendum. I've just been involved with the other one, it costs \$100,000, which was a lot more back then. And it's really demoralizing and hard on the queer community. And we don't know if there's a voter base. So I think you should stop and do research because you can pass this, but it's going to go to referendum. And the mayor said to me, you know, radical strategies of ACT-UP of course, they were waiting for me. Are not appropriate in a place like Lewiston. And I said, you know, I'm actually not suggesting a radical strategy. I'm asking you to do research. Anyway, they did pass it. It did go to a referendum. And we did a lot of local activism, door to door activism in Lewiston. And that was amazing. Like we went and whatever color hair we had, which my hair was actually brown then and whatever, and just went door to door in the neighborhoods that were thought to be, we'll never get them, they're Catholic and just said, Hey, can we talk to you about this? To just say, you know, this the story that like gay people are going to get jobs from straight people, all that stuff, that's not true. Like we're all worried about we're all worried about unemployment. We're all worried about this stuff. And we actually did pretty well in those areas.</p>	<p>Role of ACT-UP in local Queer community</p> <p>Anti-gay referendums</p> <p>Door to door activism</p>

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<p>Sofia [00:22:52] So yeah, kind of going to what you were talking about just like, you know, ways to make this activism work and ways to make things almost like an easier pill to swallow. But it's not always like that where people generally supportive of militant activism, of groups like ACT-UP Portland or the Dyke Cell or was there any tension that you guys said?</p> <p>Erica [00:23:14] There was a huge amount of tension because people assume that the way to get change was to be quiet and polite and say we're just like everybody else. So on the other hand, at the beginning of that Portland referendum work, we were initially part of the big group and we almost got thrown out. But they took our press contact list because we were very good at having, you know, we knew how to get press. So, you know, they basically stole our press contacts and tossed us out. So, yeah, there was a lot of conflict because people thought the key to support was very opposite. And everything we did was not necessarily militant either. It just was not quiet. And it was not pretending. If you. How long have you lived in Maine?</p> <p>Sofia [00:24:17] Only six or seven years now. But I lived, I was born in New England.</p> <p>Erica [00:24:22] Well, I was going to say that and you've probably seen this in other places in New England. Remember all the marriage equality stuff? A little bit. So when there were marriage equality campaigns. The aids you would see on TV. We're all like, first of all, they were mostly straight people supporting their gay kid or something, but they were all middle or upper class, or in Maine, they all blended in. They were mostly white people. They did not seem like they could be scary. Nobody was saying, you know. I'm a radical trans person and I want to marry my gay boyfriend or something. You know, nobody was saying that. So I think there was a lot of backlash.</p> <p>Sofia [00:25:18] What were some of the most important lessons about political activism that you learned organizing during the AIDS epidemic or shortly thereafter?</p> <p>Erica [00:25:28] I think to me, one of the most important things I learned was that organizing is more important than media. Like, you can't just throw a bunch of commercials on. It's weird to say after an election cycle when they're just all over and relentless and nastier and all this stuff. But the idea that you would just make the right slogan. I think that was a big flop. The more mainstream organizations like there was this Vote No against discrimination. Why? Because it's always wrong. Nobody was fooled by what that was. Nobody was full of it's like it's just like when French people came to Maine. It's not. But actually talking to people one on one and organizing ways for people to talk to each other makes</p>	<p>Tension from ACT-UP Portland</p> <p>ADs about marriage equality.</p> <p>Importance of proper organization to a social movement.</p>

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<p>a lot more sense. So I think I learned one, organizing is important. And two, you can't really, just from a distance, try to do messaging.</p> <p>Sofia [00:26:36] So that kind of goes into the second question that I had for you, which in a world like we live in today, where social media and media, in general, it's just everything and it's everybody's been source of communication. Do you think the lessons that you learned about organizing could and should be applied to contemporary activism in Maine?</p> <p>Erica [00:26:57] Yes. Well, partly, you know, I think one thing we learned, I mean, in a way, social media is great because you can say, you know, like the Dyke March, you know, Dyke March has come and gone. But, you know, the difference between just being able to put out something on a Facebook post or Instagram and maybe not anymore Twitter saying this is happening. That's great. But also, it's like you don't it seems like there are a lot of people who already have their ideas formed. And if they're formed by people, we don't really want to have their ideas formed by. That's not so good. And people are also often, you know, the whole algorithm thing where like what you get depends on what you already have. That seems dangerous.</p> <p>Sofia [00:27:49] Do you have any advice for anyone looking to participate in political activism in Maine or anywhere else?</p> <p>Erica [00:27:55] Part of my advice is, do it. And also, like, you know, activism is challenging but rewarding. And I think it's sort of great to just say there a lot of pleasure involved and we really need everybody involved right now. I mean. Might have fended off some of the worst things in the last election, but it's coming back to get us and. So I think having that mindset to be doing activism is really important.</p> <p>Sofia [00:28:44] What tools do you think are most valuable to an organization looking to make some sort of positive change in their community, other than just going and doing it and actually being there?</p> <p>Erica [00:28:53] Yeah, good question. Well, one, I think it's great to have organizers like kickass organizers. Like one thing I really have liked in the past few years. So I'll say maybe ten or 15 years ago, I would go to something like a Dyke march meeting or some protest and like I would be having in my hand or not having in my hand. We're going to get a piece of paper where people could write down their name and contact number. The reason I knew how to do that was because of doing activism with organizers who are trained organizers. A really exciting thing for me over the past five or ten years is not that I want to sit back while other people do stuff, but like I can go to things that other people, including a lot of young people, are organizing and you can be trained to be an</p>	<p>Social media & activism.</p> <p>Advice to people looking to engage in activism.</p> <p>Valuable tools for an organization</p>

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<p>organizer, and that also seems really important. So I think some of the skills are you can get training now from people doing anti-racist work, social justice organizing. That's one big opportunity for things you can do either in person or remotely. So I think, some of the tools are, I think, get tools and establish contacts and also, I think often, provide food. I had a student once who did a senior thesis that was partly a, an action research project where she was working with a group in Portland of young people doing creative writing and poetry. And basically what she got out of her thesis was the main thing you have to do is like you have to provide pizza. And I just feel like some of those things and I think the Black Lives Matter protests a few years ago, one thing I was very impressed by was there was always bottled water. You know, there was always a first aid person. There were always people to say, here, do you need to sit down? Or when there was masking and stuff. Like there was a shift at some point. Like I remember one protest was changed to another time. To have more space because they realized it was early in the pandemic and that a lot of older people and immunocompromised people were not going to show up to a crowded group. So I think sort of collective self-care is really important.</p> <p>Sofia [00:31:38] Absolutely, do you think that those who lived through the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s experienced the COVID-19 pandemic differently than other?</p> <p>Erica [00:31:55] Um, huh. Good question. I mean, they're all good questions. But here are a few things I think are different. I'm not sure how different the experience was, but I mean, one thing about like avoiding transmission of HIV in the eighties and nineties before there were all these medications and it was pretty much I can just say the traditional things, a death sentence, but it was like hard to survive. It was act like you have HIV and act like other people have HIV. And I think that model of like act like you have COVID, act like other people have COVID, like, why are we masking now? Because we just don't really know. We're in a small space. We're making that decision. So I think that is one thing as a strategy that's pretty helpful. And I also think, you know, the idea that there has never been I mean, one of the enraging things at the beginning of COVID was like, there's never been a pandemic like this before with all this mass death. It's like, yes, there has been. So I think part of the experience is this is happening again, vulnerable people and that whole idea of, well, it's just the old people who are dying, so it's not so bad. That idea that some people are expendable, I think if you lived through the AIDS epidemic, that's too familiar.</p> <p>Sofia [00:33:36] And you kind of touched on this a little bit, talking about, you know, there is there's "never been a mass pandemic like this before with all the amount of mass deaths". But what were some of the differences that you had noticed between how the government responded to the contemporary COVID 19 pandemic and how the government responded to the AIDS epidemic?</p>	<p>Importance of proper organizing.</p> <p>Importance of taking care of one another.</p> <p>Covid-19 and how it relates to the aid's epidemic.</p>

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<p>Erica [00:33:54] Well, with Trump it's a little hard to, you know, whatever. So Reagan famously refused to say AIDS for most of his tenure as president from 1980 to '88. And there was it was very challenging to get any attention. Right. So one of the big ACT-UP slogans is like kissing doesn't kill corporate greed, government indifference, and some I don't remember the whole slogan, but that slogan, you know, fits perfectly for what was going on in a lot in terms of government response. One thing ACT-UP Portland, Pissed Off Dyke Cell did is we went to the, just to digress back for a second, was we went to The March on Washington in 1993. And one of the things we did was go to an ACT-UP Women, from all over the U.S., converged on the secretary of health or whatever that was called, Donna Shalala, who then recently came back to political fame with this chant like "Donna Shalala, ask your ex, dykes really do have sex", because of this idea that women were dying before they were even diagnosed. Okay. So that's then. I think what's similar now in government response is that there just is not enough attention to differentiate like who is actually at most risk. So that's similar. What are the risk factors? Who's going to get them in Maine? You know, especially like the whole racial differential in Maine, the whitest state in the nation with the biggest percentage of people of color proportionately who got COVID. Those things seem similar to me if it's a even if it's a different cast of characters. And that's inadequate. Government response.</p> <p>Sofia [00:36:17] Do you think that the role do you think the role that sex or sexuality played in the AIDS epidemic had anything to do with this contrast of attention / government attention / government responsiveness? And if so, could you talk about that?</p> <p>Erica [00:36:31] Yes. Because of this idea that like non-reproductive sex is bad and at the time gay sex is bad, so you might as well be punished for it. Which, you know, you could say has its continuation or partner or something in the anti-abortion stuff. Like the idea that if you have sex and you get pregnant and you don't want to be pregnant, your whole life should be punished for that. That's not I mean, of course, it's all very different, but there's something similar, which is the stigmatization of sex. You know, COVID you can get without having sex. So at least some of that is less stigmatized, although they're still the same, like, are you what are you doing with your germs? Are you washing your hands? You know, how can we blame it on you?</p> <p>Sofia [00:37:31] Um, so we're going to kind of move to the next topic that I had in mind. Gender in sports, so. That'll be right up your alley. In your previous interview, you stated that you felt body shape and movement might have something to do with how femininity or masculinity are perceived. You're an adult figure skater. Can you give me an example from the world of skating that relates to the gendering of bodies and movement?</p>	<p>AIDS/HIV slogans</p> <p>Politics & AIDS</p> <p>Negative view towards sex & the impact that had on the AIDS epidemic versus the COVID pandemic</p>

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<p>Erica [00:37:57] Yeah. So figure skating is a sport that gender is like really baked into because the idea of what you're supposed to do and how you're supposed to do it. Are you supposed to like when you play hockey, you don't, you know, stretch your arms out in graceful ways. There are different ideas of what men and women are supposed to do in figure skating. But the very idea that you might be trying to be graceful or do something like dance, like almost disqualifies you from masculinity, if that's what you would like to represent. What I can say differently from my last interview is that now I'm skating, I'm training as in pair skating, which ordinarily has a man and a woman, but I'm training with a partner who is nonbinary and Anna Kellar K-E-L-L-A-R, who also is running like Democracy, Maine and League of Women Voters. So you might see them around some time, anyway. So we for various reasons, we decided we wanted to be a pair. It's super fun and everything. But the rules right now, we're hoping they're going to change, the rules right now, say to be able to, like, test and compete as a pair, even if you're, you know, at our level, which is an adult level, we're not trying to get to the Olympics or anything you have. You're supposed to be a man and a woman. And Anna is non-binary. So and when originally when they signed up with the figure skating organization, they signed up as female. So we have two female gender markers officially. We have two different gender identities. But the thing we have and this gets to the body type is that Anna is 5'11, so we're seven inches apart in height. And that makes us map very traditionally on to what would ordinarily be a male female, male female roles. And it's amazing how many of the tricks in pair skating are basically designed to be really good if a short person and a tall person does them. And they're also and also because of that, you're always telling these stories. I mean, we're not telling the story, but frequently there's a big invitation to tell a story about a frail woman and a big, strong man, even though you have to be really strong for someone to throw you across the ice or lift you up or, you know, like it all takes muscle.</p> <p>Sofia [00:40:39] Does this feel like, it's a sense of like activism for you in a way, like kind of challenging the preconceived notions about, you know, body and ability and feminism or femininity and masculinity in figure skating.</p> <p>Erica [00:40:56] Yes. So I actually, I mean, one thing that attracted me personally to skating was the femininity of it. So I like that part. And it's been interesting that when we skate together, you know, we're not doing like a butch-femme thing that I might have just initially been comfortable with because Anna does not identify as just butch. So we're playing around with some different things. But also some of my activism is I do all this writing about it. I, you know, try to work with - Skate Canada, it turns out, really likes me. The National Figure Skating Organization of Canada and U.S. figure skating, you know, does not have as much use for me. But in order for us right now to even get into the</p>	<p>Figure skating & gender</p> <p>Anna Kellar information</p> <p>The difficulty of being a figure skater as a non-binary person.</p> <p>Gender stereotypes in figure skating</p> <p>Femininity associated with figure skating</p>

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<p>system, we're going to have to change the system. And the system should be different. I'm also a coach and group lessons mostly for adults, although lately also for kids. And one of the things that's been great is that because of who I am, people feel more comfortable like coming out as, I'm really a non-binary skater and I didn't know if I could even skate because the rules are sort of seems so rigid from the outside. So that's also small scale activism</p> <p>Sofia [00:42:18] So like I said, I had done a little bit of Internet digging.</p> <p>Erica [00:42:22] Yes.</p> <p>Sofia [00:42:22] And then I watched an NBC segment about sports, gender, sexuality. And you were featured. You provided some information about figure skating and identity. What was that experience like for you.</p> <p>Erica [00:42:34] Doing this podcast?</p> <p>Sofia [00:42:35] Yeah, or doing the there's like an NBC segment about Olympic figure skating.</p> <p>Erica [00:42:41] Oh, yeah.</p> <p>Sofia [00:42:41] Yeah. You were featured on that? I just wanted to know what that experience was like for you.</p> <p>Erica [00:42:46] It was fun. They had the, you know, the thing that happened. So I wrote this book on figure skating. The most recent book has some figure skating in it, but it's not totally about figure skating. But I wrote a book on figure skating that came out in 2012 and finally this year people are interested in it. So I think because I you saw in that interview, Timothy LeDuc, a non-binary skater was skating. So anyway, it was pretty exciting. And I got to do something for CNN also. And yeah, I don't you know, it was fun and. It's nice to be able to do, and I also wrote some more popular things and it's nice to be able to connect with a broader group of people.</p> <p>Sofia [00:43:36] Do you see yourself as an activist in the world of sports as well as a scholar? If so, could you talk a little bit about what your activism in that area looks like? Talking about like your participant observation.</p> <p>Erica [00:43:49] Yeah, so first of all, I think I answered a little bit that question in that some of that activism is about what I do when I coach, what I do when I skate, what I do when I meet and talk to people, all those things. I also at Bates, I'm getting going into my third period as the chair of this committee called the Athletics Committee. And that's a committee that sort of helps with the interface</p>	<p>NBC segment Erica was featured on with Timothy LeDuc, and her experience with it all.</p> <p>Bates inclusion policies for trans individuals in sports</p>

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<p>of academics in athletics. And one thing we did in 2011 was we had one of the first trans inclusion policies in the country, and it was the very first one that included recreational sports. So it wasn't just about being on varsity teams. And then a few years ago, we then went back to look at it for thinking about like now if we think about people who are gender queer or non-binary, what can we do? Can't always do things for intercollegiate sports because, you know, there are NCAA rules. But what can we do on site? You know, in all these different contexts. And then that bleeds into some other things. So for instance, Bates is now having another bathroom equity fight. Because like my office building has eight multi stall bathrooms, all of which are gendered specifically. They put the bathrooms with accessible features inside those bathrooms. So there's like a closed off room. And then up on the very top floor there are to single use bathrooms, but they're locked because they're up at this fancy room where the trustees are supposed to, you know, so it's for rich, fancy people. And stuff and dorms and but I won't go into the details. So thinking about accessible spaces, both in athletic contexts and in other contexts, is one of the sort of extensions of that, I think. But those trans policies in sports are really important. Even if they often default to binary gender ideas. We have to do that. And just to say something else. As you know, all over the country, people are trying to enact laws preventing trans children from participating in sports, so working up from there is important.</p> <p>Sofia [00:46:29] What do you think has been the greatest challenge in putting those policies into place?</p> <p>Erica [00:46:35] Well, first of all, at Bates structural things. So everyone's happy to have them in place. But we don't actually have a locker room. We don't have a separate bathroom. We don't have I mean, people should have the opportunity, like lots of trans people want to use the, if they're on a team, they want to go to the locker room for their team. They don't want a separate place, but we don't even have separate options. So partly it's money and structure. Also, there's resistance like the kind you hear about on the news all the time, which is this feeling that if you're a trans woman, for instance, you must be better placed to win than if you're not trans. Like there must be something in your initial history and your initial body configuration that makes you superior, you know, and that doesn't take into account, I think a big challenge is that people there's just this idea, you know, really beaten into everyone's head that an equal playing field is about gender when it's not. Like, you know, my skating partner, a good example, competed in various things as a woman, being a 5'11 person. Some people have more hemoglobin. You know, it just so much is different. Some people have money to buy an expensive bike or skates. So I think this assumption it all defaults to gender is a big challenge.</p> <p>Sofia [00:48:10] Why do you think there is such a negative focus in the U.S.</p>	<p>Barriers for trans inclusivity</p> <p>Bates structural barriers for inclusivity policies</p> <p>Competition & trans inclusion</p>

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<p>right now about trans athletes? Many states, as you said, are passing laws to prohibit trans youth from just participating in sports with cisgender athletes. Why is this?</p> <p>Erica [00:48:24] Well, first of all, there are so many reasons. One is that people some people are like grasping - some people first of all, some people just want to win things. And it's weird what they think are fair and not fair rules. So just to digress a little, to figure skating, when I started competing as an adult, to my shock, all these people were sandbagging. In other words, like, let's say you could take a test and get into a higher level. You might not take that test because you'd have more of a chance of getting a medal. Okay. So that is a ridiculous desire to win. You know, like I was in my fifties. There are people my age basically cheating to win. Okay, so one thing, I think there's this particular idea of what competition is about overall. On the other hand, there are people who are trying to pay for college with sports. Like there, people are trying to get college scholarships. So Kye Allums for example, K-Y-E A-L-L-U-M-S was a trans athlete, I think around 2011 ish. Yeah. It may be Washington University. I don't totally remember, but he came out as trans, but he stayed on the women's team because he hadn't done any physical changes and everything. But people were really suspicious because they were like, He's got a scholarship my daughter does not have. And people are, you know, afraid that that competition is going to stop them from actual material things. And the reason Kye did not have any physical changes partly was because then he would have had to leave college because there are people who cannot go to college without sports funding. So I think there's so many different levels. And also racism. Because one thing I like to mention, those girls in Connecticut, young black women, all of those international track and field things, when they go after people, they're all black and brown women from the global south. So it can be just described as "women", but the criteria for "women" is very racist.</p> <p>Sofia [00:51:01] This next question is kind of bringing it back to like current day sort of things in like your own personal life. Just what are you currently working on in terms of your writing or do you have a new book project that you wanted to talk about? Maybe you're just in research, or?</p> <p>Erica [00:51:18] Yeah, so I actually think I might be making a book about physical partnering. I thought I was writing a book about something else, but the more time I've been doing training and figure skating again, I did not think I was going to be doing writing more about that. I'm interested in that. And the problem with - and also is thinking about binaries in one sense. But I also spent a little time with Queer in the Ballet and I'm thinking about so basically two things that I'm not sure where it's going, but one has to do with all the sports stuff and the other is partly about partnering because an interesting thing about having a figure skating partner is that, it's like a big physical relationship you have with someone</p>	<p>Negative focus on trans individuals in sports</p> <p>Racism in sports</p> <p>Current day activities and book writing</p>

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<p>who's not actually your sexual or romantic partner. But there is stuff in common like, you know. You know you're going to hurt the person, but you how do you get over that or, you know, it's not like, you know, in the land of therapy speak, you know, it's not like you're not going to hurt your person you care about. But like, then what do we do with it? So just so much of how do you navigate things? Who is the person who's on time and isn't and what do you do? It's just pretty interesting and just the way you get to know, you know, different ways people get to know each other's bodies. So I'm thinking a lot about that. So I guess the answer is, I don't know, but those are some things swirling around. Oh, and I guess one other thing I'll say is in the coming year, I'm going to be a faculty fellow at Bates at the for the Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning, which is C-I-T-L. And I you know, it hasn't been announced yet, but it's and what I'm working on is a sort of pedagogical project for the school that I created about like what would happen - what could you do pedagogically starting from the idea that gender is not binary. And also that binary gender has a colonialist and settler colonial history. So those are some of the things I'm doing.</p> <p>Sofia [00:53:37] You've worked with queer youth in the community of Lewiston for many years. What kinds of changes did you see of their lives and their challenges over time?</p> <p>Erica [00:53:47] Wow. Well, even in the mid-nineties, like you would think - I mean, there was a lot of stereotype about the Lewiston area. But even so, you know, I - you would be surprised at how, resourceful maybe queer youth have been in that area for a long time, but also dealing with a lot of prejudice and stuff. So for a while with Outright Lewiston, Auburn, early on we met in a room at the Y, and one reason we did well, one was that the Y WCA, not the YMCA, and we did that for several reasons. One is that the YW you know, just like the Girl Scouts is different than Boy Scouts. YW was very supportive. And they let us keep a box there of supplies, so we used to call it "Outright in A Box", but also kids could pretend that they were going to the Y. So I think now some people are still dealing with prejudice and challenges and stuff. But, you know, I think there is more knowledge, there is more support. But also it's super hard and they're economic challenges and people are struggling to survive in so many different ways. So, and I think I've just really been reminded lately that the idea that, like things are so much better for queer youth is like, yes, of course, in some ways, but it can be so hard. And even just this isn't somebody in Lewiston - but you know, just a few weeks ago, you know, I got texted by a young person who said my mom broke into my email and found out I was a lesbian, you know? "I'm scared". That was two weeks ago. So I think that's really important, too, that there are more resources. A lot more resources. And a lot more people who know stuff. But still, it can be hard.</p> <p>Sofia [00:56:21] Absolutely, so I kind of wanted to go back a little bit to what</p>	<p>Figure skating and how it relates to a relationship</p> <p>Bates inclusivity programs</p> <p>Colonial history and the effect on gender</p> <p>Queer youth in Lewiston</p> <p>YWCA and YMCA involvement with queer youth</p> <p>Current day struggles with the queer community</p>

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<p>you talked about with the YWCA, just partly because we're doing the History Trail Project also - That's the project that we're doing. And I just didn't know if you had any more information or whether you want to talk about what the YWCA said, because it's like, awesome. It's an awesome thing you had access to.</p> <p>Erica [00:56:45] Yeah. And so I don't have too much else to say, but they also. So when I lived in Lewiston, the YWCA was in Lewiston and the YMCA was in Auburn, and it was also the YWCA that did some anti-racism stuff. And I didn't have so much more contact with them than those two things. But it was really amazing, and, you know, it was a small room like maybe half the size of this, and we pull out our little box of stuff and there weren't always too many people there, but it was pretty great.</p> <p>Sofia [00:57:30] From your perspective, how has the queer community in Portland changed over the decades that you've lived here.</p> <p>Erica [00:57:37] Huh. Well, there are more visible people. I feel very challenged by the sort of big development of a mainstream emphasis on things like so-called marriage equality. So. It's been challenging to me that with sort of the mainstreaming of some, you know, LGBT type issues, that has happened. I feel like there's still a conflict between kind of a more mainstream and more progressive arms of things. And, you know, the question about assimilation or not, and I'm not a big fan of trying to be like everybody else, but because there's a lot more opportunity to be like everybody else. There's more opportunity to, you know, be married and do mainstream things and whatever. I think there's also still a lot of challenge with like entitled white gay men. And one of the things that really struck me and I was just talking to Chris O'Connor about it, the guy who runs Equality Maine, who's probably not that happy with me right now, but. You know, over the years, so which now I can tell you, is 2018, a different group of people took over, not including me, but including some people I knew took over the Pride Organization, the Pride Committee, to organize pride. And it was a group of people who are very committed to changing who was at the center of pride, like what about trans and non-binary people? What about people of color? They, you know, listen to people say that for like a lot of bipoc people, it's not a great joy and pleasure to have the police be featured or to have corporations be featured. Like the Dakota Pipeline protests were happening, but usually TD Bank had a big feature. Why was everybody all young at the center of everything? So anyway, they did all this other planning. And first of all, it turned out like a lot of people were angry, like we want TD Bank to be really big and our police chief came to our wedding and all that stuff. So there's a lot of hostility and anger and I think white gay men who are really being asked to like step out of the center felt like they were excluded because they didn't feel included if they weren't in the center of everything. So one of the things that went wrong at that large was that some people on the organizing committee messed up several times getting -</p>	<p>Describing what the YWCA did for the queer community.</p> <p>Evolution of problems within the queer community.</p> <p>ECC & Pride parade</p> <p>Involvement of companies in pride parades</p>

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<p>Sofia [01:09:18] Um, I have no other questions.</p> <p>Erica [01:09:20] Well, you had a lot of questions.</p> <p>Sofia [01:09:22] I did have a lot of questions. But is there anything I didn't ask you that you would like to talk about or mention or just like a parting note or anything like that?</p> <p>Erica [01:09:39] Um, I don't think I have one except thank you very much. I think that was a great set of questions.</p> <p>Sofia [01:09:44] Thank you very much, it was fun! And I think I might have even like a little bit about myself in the way that I think so during this, it was great. Thank you. I loved it.</p>	<p>Thank you and conclusion of interview</p>