

Oral history interview with June Larkin conducted by Ruth Belay and Daniela Ansovini
24 February 2020

- 00:00:01 **Ruth Belay**
Okay, thank you so much for agreeing to sit down with us.
- 00:00:03 **June Larkin**
You're welcome.
- 00:00:03 **Ruth**
If you could please state your name and the year that you graduated from U of T.
- 00:00:07 **June**
Oh. June Larkin, graduated in 1993, from OISE [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education].
- 00:00:18 **Ruth**
If you could tell us a little bit about your life before coming to U of T.
- 00:00:22 **June**
Oh. Okay before coming to U of T to do my doctorate an OISE, I was an elementary school teacher for about 17 years. And during that time, I lived mostly in London, I did my undergraduate and my MA degrees, mostly part time. And then came back in 1988, moved to Toronto and then I went to school full time to do my doctorate. So my- I wasn't really all that active in student politics as an undergrad because I was teaching full time. So, I basically went: a course at night, a course in the summer, a course at night, a course in the summer. So, I wasn't really very active at all in student politics when I was in university. It changed when I went to OISE and I was there full time. It was also a very political program, it was community psychology and there was a lot of feminist activist work happening. And so, I like to think that the work I was doing when I was teaching – I would identify as activism now - I didn't then in terms of advocating for students in the kind of work I did. One of the reasons I went on to OISE was I wanted to think about how to do equity work in education in a way that allowed me to think through it theoretically and be able to articulate it more. So when I went on to OISE, I wanted to make sure I didn't leave my elementary- or my teaching experience behind so my work was in the area of sexual harassment and violence in schools. So, I was able to then do the community psychology work on violence in the context of educational settings to try and bridge both of them.
- 00:02:04 **Ruth**
What were some of your initial activities that you were involved in when you started your PhD at OISE?
- 00:02:10 **June**

Well, the thing that became my primary activity was the Sexual Harassment Caucus. I think I was describing it to Danielle [Daniela]. So, it was the first day of orientation and I was an older student, 'cause I taught school for 17 years, right? So, I was in my late 30's when I went back, and hadn't been in school for a long time, hadn't been in school full time really ever. Except for one year, I was for one year, but again still teaching part time when I did that. And so, at the orientation session one of the faculty members who became my supervisor got up and talking about the department and everything, and said, "Oh, and students should know that just like other places, you know, in organizations, and in education, sexual harassment does happen here and so if that happens to you this is what you should do," and then she kind of got heckled by these other faculty and I'm like, "oh, this is kind of creepy."

So, that actually became something that, I guess for me, was a bit of a spark in terms of getting involved, but it was more like everybody began talking about that. Like it was our orientation session and that's one way some of us bonded: "Did you hear that?" "Did you hear that?" "What was that all about?" And then we found out that there'd been all of tension in the department about sexual harassment that had been happening and people were trying to address it but there was really no means of addressing it. So, I did go to the student union meeting, like I was thinking of getting involved in politics, and then this became an issue that came up as something students could get involved in. So, I was like, "okay." So, I went to the meeting for- around sexual harassment, and I think I might have even, with my supervisor's support put out the ad like, "everybody come and we'll talk about this." And we had a lot of- it was all women pretty much I think at that time, all women came and then they started telling these stories about what had happened to them in their educational experience, and I was kind of horrified and then I guess when I thought back to my own experience, I really could have shared some of those stories in my own teaching experience, but you know I hadn't named them as sexual harassment, I hadn't put anything around them.

So, we decided to meet more frequently just to think about what we might be able to do, should people have to deal with this kind of behavior and because I think some of us were really nervous about the kind of reaction that our supervisor got when she raised the issue. So, we started meeting regularly and we started talking about what could we do, and what would happen here, and we talked about education and then we also talked about, because we are an educational institute, about the fact that we didn't have a sexual harassment policy because OISE was not connected to U of T, at the time. It is now, but it wasn't so we were a separate unit. People said, "well, we would have one because other units do and that's something we should just get," and we thought, "okay, well that's a logical thing to do so," - and I'm repeating this Danielle, but is that okay? Yeah [Daniela: No, no, no that's fine]. So, we thought, "okay." So we were talking about how do we get about getting a sexual harassment

policy? Well, “we’ll see what other people do – other units, and what you have to get in place and everything.” And then one of the women said, “oh, you know, but you know don’t you feel like a shrew when you complain about sexual harassment? So, I’m not even sure I would use a policy because you know, what would it mean- you know I’d get a bad reputation...” and someone went “Oh, SHREW! Sexual Harassment Resisters Everywhere! Okay! we are going to call our group the Shrews!”. So, we became known as the SHREWS and we really became very active, and we wanted to do three things:

One was we wanted to do education, and so in my own seminar, in community psychology, we had to do something to do with policy. So, I put together, along with one of my co-students who is now my best friend and we kind of bonded around this issue- a, it was a sort of educational video on sexual harassment in the universities. And it was kind of funny, but it was also very poignant, you know what I mean? It told stories. And we did that for our project and got an A+. It was sort of modeled after- I think the group was called The Company of Strangers [Corrected by J. Larkin, the name of the group was Company of Sirens, a Canadian feminist theatre company formed in 1986]? There was a group- a famous group that did a lot of political activism through song and comedy. And this is the first thing we did. We hired them to come to OISE. We got some money and they came. But they were called the- If I get the name I’ll send it to you. And so, we watched what they did. And so, we put our own little video together for the class along that.

So, we started doing that kind of education and then, in terms of policy, as we did this education and went to conferences, we met other people who were doing this work as well, and we became more familiar with the policies that were elsewhere including U of T, had a policy. So, we decided that we would do what we could to develop a policy, and then we thought, “well yeah, but if you have a policy, like you don’t have anybody to enforce it. Like, what’s going to happen?” So, then we thought, “well, U of T had a Sexual Harassment Officer, so we’ll lobby for a Sexual Harassment Officer.” So, we did that. We lobbied, I think before we did the policy, we lobbied for a Sexual Harassment Officer. We wrote a proposal for that. And we had been doing this education work in the institute, so we were kind of well-known as the SHREWS. What we did strategically, because there were a lot of resisters to the whole idea, was we sent it- we brought it forward to the government body- I think it was in a June meeting when we knew that none of the resisting faculty members would be there. And so, what happened was it passed, so we couldn’t believe it! So, we got a Sexual Harassment Officer and then worked with that officer to develop a policy, and then we got a policy in place. That for us was really exciting because U of T had a sexual harassment policy and a harassment officer, we didn’t, now we did, so we had all of this in place.

And then because I was so involved in the caucus, I thought I wanted to do some research on this, so I turned my own doctoral work into sexual harassment in high schools. And so, I kind of, you know, used a lot of the theory that I had been reading about. I took a course on women and violence, which now would be called gender and violence, but at the time it was women and violence. And it was the only course that had ever been taught like that anywhere I think, so I learned a lot about the theory around sexual harassment and was able to do a lot of work through that course as well. So, I turned my own dissertation work into sexual harassment in high schools, and then along with that, worked with research officers at OISE whom they had in place at the time and what you did was, these research officers had to write proposals every year for an education project. So, one of the research officers wanted to work with me, and we worked to get a project on doing educational resources for schools. So, we developed a high school educational kit and an elementary educational kit. And in that time, I was still doing a lot of workshops and things at conferences, and so we would do a lot of workshops at conferences where we would develop materials as well. So, we sort of did this policy lobbying for the Sexual Harassment Coordinator, and then doing educational resources at the - in my case elementary and high school but then for all of us, also the university level. And so, we developed-

00:10:36 [Interruption]

00:10:40 Can we turn this off just for a sec? I don't want to waste your time. Anyways, we also found money from the Ontario Women's Directorate when we were doing education to develop a sexual harassment poster. So, we did that, we developed this poster, and buttons, SHREW buttons. And so, we had all these really kind of fun ways of disseminating the education work in addition to doing the- you know, more serious workshops. So, these little buttons and then the idea was that if someone said to us, "oh, what's a SHREW?" then we would explain what it was and then we'd give them the button. You know? So, we did a lot of that. And the posters we sent to the top one hundred organizations in Canada and we got a grant from Ontario Women's Directorate to do it. And it says, the title was, "what to do in a sexual harassment emergency." And then it says, you know, "know you can do this," you know, and there was a list of things you could do. So that was great. And I found it all very empowering because it was so great, because I was an educator, to be doing stuff like that as well as you know, I was doing my theoretical work for my PhD. And then the really coolest thing was that Gloria Steinem got, somehow it made it to her, and she was, I guess still is, with Ms. Magazine, so it was featured in Ms. Magazine. And so, we were very excited about that. So, we became kind of famous. And then my supervisor who did a lot, I think she did it on Phil Donahue too, she was on a lot of talk shows and so she had the poster on the Phil Donahue, we're talking lots of years ago, but Phil Donahue show- she showed the poster as well.

So, you know from that one incident, where someone said something, and my supervisor said something and she got heckled, all of this other stuff happened, right? And so that was my activism. So, my activism was very much focused on sexual harassment. I mean of course while I was doing this, I was attending take back the night rallies, I was doing all that kind of thing as well because, of course they are all connected, right? And I saw the connections. But in terms of myself, where I was most, I guess, in maybe a leadership role, or was most active, was in the sex- we called it the Sexual Harassment Caucus- or the SHREWs.

00:13:04

Ruth

Was there any, I guess solitary support that you guys received from other women's groups on campus, or I know at one point there was like a network for different women's groups all over campus [U of T campuses].

00:13:19

June

Well, you know what, because we were separate from campus at the time, I don't think we worked as closely with those groups as we could have, because we were kind of like a whole different animal, we were also a graduate institute only and a professional institute, so when I think back that would have made sense. But having said that though, there was an incident- the famous incident, which I don't think either of you would know because it was many, many years ago, there was someone who was- she was swimming in the Hart House pool. And there was this guy who was *known* for getting into the pool and ogling women when they swam. And so, she brought one of the first complaints forward to the U of T policy. And in doing that, I mean, as most women find, I don't think she realized what she was in for in terms of the kind of backlash she got, in terms of the kind of comments he was making in the media. And so, I do remember at some of our meetings, having [name removed] there and also being, having other people from different organizations on campus come as well. So that particular incident, we supported her, but we were a number of groups that supported her, as well. So that would have been where we I think connected with groups on campus.

00:14:36

Daniela

Can I ask, 'cause it was also at the time of the Polytechnique massacre [École Polytechnique massacre], and I mean that kind of violence is a bit different than sexual harassment, but was there- what was the environment in general like? Or did these things kind of come together, were people looking at all of these issues?

00:14:55

June

Well, certainly in my program they were. I mean OISE at the time was known as one of the most progressive institutes. Like it was- it was incredible at the time. And we had the director of OISE- I guess at the time when you're the director at OISE, you had to say that you were really

supportive of these things, it was just part of the culture, right? So, we did get support. We also got, of course a lot of backlash. There were some faculty who were resistant to everything and getting the sexual harassment policy through took a bit of effort. But because my whole area was- sort of known as an area where a lot of prominent feminists came out of OISE like Mary O'Brien, Paula Caplan, Jerry Wine - like it was that era. So, there was so much feminist work happening at OISE. And we would acknowledge this- like I could do the work in an environment where I was supported, it wasn't like I was sitting in like a traditional discipline trying to do this work and nobody around me was supporting it. Not only could I do the work, but I got credit for it. You know in that, you know we would bring it into our own projects in classes, I turned it into a dissertation, it became a book as well, and then I turned that book- it was one of the times when, you know how just have the moment? So, when the book came out and when I was doing my research, the Toronto Board of Education wanted me to do the research, so I got support from them and I did it in the Toronto board because they were being mandated to develop sexual harassment policies, all the school boards were at that time. So, I mean it was also timing too, so that was the larger context. And that would have been just around the massacre, right? So, people were making connections.

But this was also at a time when institutions were mandated to have sexual harassment policies. And the concern was, that if we try and introduce this policy into our school boards, we are going to get so much backlash. We need some data, we need to be able to say this is what's happening, right? So, and there wasn't any data- qualitative data at the time, there was quantitative data. So, I did interviews with school girls and that was what I wrote my dissertation on and that's what I wrote the book on, plus the educational resources. And so, what people would do, is they would have me come in, so I travelled across Canada quite a bit, and spoke at different school boards. Because it was easier for them to have someone external come in, and say, "this is what's happening," than to have to say it themselves and deal with the backlash. And so, I did all kinds of conferences, school board meetings, meetings with educators, I did workshops with the students, with all the resources we developed, and it was because they had to do this policy, they were mandated to do it, but they needed a strategy to do it that would kind of take the pressure off the internal people. So, I came in and I left, right? So, I came in and said, "here's the evidence and here's what you need to do," and then they would follow up and it just made it easier for them. So, the timing I think was right too in terms of what I did.

00:18:23

Back to the Montreal massacre, I mean it was part of, I mean certainly talked about sexual harassment, we talked about it as a continuum of violence, and we talked about sexual harassment not being necessarily a lesser form of violence, but the kind of violence, emotional violence and sometimes physical violence that led to more extreme forms of violence.

And if you didn't check sexual harassment, racial harassment, homophobic harassment, it led to more extreme forms of violence. So we were very much, this was part of the theoretical work we did of course, invested in seeing it as part of the continuum when we talked about sexual harassment, we did talk about the Montreal massacre, because the kinds of harassment that women in engineering would experience for example, and so we made it really clear that if you want to deal with what happened with the Montreal massacre and those kinds of extreme acts of violence acts against women, then you need to deal with sexual harassment and that was the way we positioned it.

00:19:23

Ruth

Once- were there I guess any within the women's caucus, were there people who focused on intersectionality of sexual harassment? You did mention that racism and other forms of oppression play into it, was there any focus on that?

00:19:42

June

I would say not very much and certainly not enough. And one of the things in the course that I took, this would have been in 1988, when we critiqued the course on women and violence. What we said was that the course, I'm not even sure we used the term 'intersectionality' then to tell you the truth, I mean I'm sure- I wasn't trained in women and gender studies, certainly it's a primary analytic now. But we said that there wasn't enough focus in the course on the experiences of women of color, there was more on queer women, but race was not a factor. So, in the work that we did, initially, I don't think there was the kind of intersectional analysis that we certainly would do now, and that we did when we started doing the work in education. Because one of the things that- one of the big issues was when I was doing my work, and interviewing it was high school girls, is that the school boards at that time did have a sexual harassment policy, they were supposed to, and they were supposed to have a racial harassment policy. So, the young women of color I would interview, would experience racist sexual harassment, because of course, sexual harassment was different for young women of color, and if they'd go to someone to say they were sexually harassed, they would say, "no, that's racism," so they would go to someone to say, "I've been racially harassed." "No, that's sexual harassment." So, they were finding it really difficult to be able to find a way for the school board, and the school, to deal with their forms of harassment. And there was also a really big campaign one time at the Toronto District School Board for a comprehensive harassment policy, because they were separated that way. And we were part of that campaign.

00:21:34

Ruth

Were there any other initiatives that you worked on, or were a supporter of?

00:21:40

June

Well, I mean, we certainly worked on any issue that had to do with violence against women, the Sexual Harassment Caucus was often a partner on that. Right? And so, we became allies to other issues on campus. And so that was my primary focus and then when I came into Women and Gender Studies here [at New College, University of Toronto], because I was a TA and came here, then the goal here was – remember I taught a violence course? Gender and violence course - was to try and bring these kinds of analytics into the course in a way that allowed the students to do what I did, and that is how can you take the knowledge and turn it into policy? How can you take it and turn it into education – what can you do to make it real?

So- and then once the question moved to women and gender studies, which was where I moved, then of course as a unit we take up so many different issues, right? And so, we are part of those. But my focus had been primarily sexual harassment and then as I moved into my research, once I got into women and gender studies, my focus became gender violence, but big connection to issues around sexual violence and HIV/AIDS. So, I have a project called the Gendering Adolescence AIDS Prevention Project, and it started with- so this is kind of my transition to student activism and to research and trying to bring it with me - started with the SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council] grant in around the year 2000 where we got funding to do a project on gender violence and HIV/AIDS in Canada, although this was my site, Toronto and South Africa. And primarily in South Africa in the Johannesburg area. Am I staying on track here? [Ruth and Daniela: Yes] And this came about because McGill had a joint project with the South African Department of Education. And it was a five-year project on education post-apartheid. And there was a gender component. And Claudia Mitchell, who is at McGill, headed up the gender component of that project. It was a big huge project between South Africa and Canada. So, when the South Africans came to McGill, for- to see what was going on at McGill and Montreal, to visit some of the schools, Claudia organized a symposium. And she had some educators from, you know, Ontario, Quebec, come and talk about different things. Some of it was about homophobia, like different things that happened in school and were related to gender violence. And she didn't have anyone to do harassment and she'd heard about me, so she invited me to come. So, I went and did, by that time I kind of had a standard workshop, standard talk I did with educators everywhere, and so I did that there, and so the delegation then invited me to come to South Africa to work with them on the project there. So, then I went to South Africa and I worked with educators. I kept saying, "this is what we do in Canada, this is just... whatever you need to do here..." but they wanted sort of a model to work with, like, "what are other people doing?" So, I went there and I worked for the Department of Education, did workshops, I worked with teachers, I went into schools and taught some of the activities and we tried to revise them for- no with -

South Africans, work with South Africans to revise them for the South African context because every time I did a workshop, I worked with what they called 'gender focal people' so there were some one who was a gender focal person who worked with me, like when I did the workshop and things.

So, I did a lot of work there. And then, along with South African colleagues, they developed a gender curriculum that was sort of similar to what we had done here. The difference being, their curriculum was to educate teachers about issues of violence and how they would work with their own students around issues of violence because the HIV/AIDS rates were epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa, at that time, and gender violence was a primary cause for women and girls. So, they were the ones that helped me really see the connection between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, that I really hadn't thought about here. And so, then when I came here, and I thought we should look at what's happening with HIV/AIDS here, gender, young people in particular, and that's where we got the grant to do that. So, we did it in both sites. We have this- I can send you the link to the website it's called the Gendering Adolescent AIDS Prevention, GAAP, Project [see utgaap.com for additional information], and that was the first project, but we have a series of projects that are youth-driven, that dealt with sexual health and HIV/AIDS. So, a lot of them are based on photo-voice, you know, arts-based approaches. So, we supported youth who were doing this work and then we also support community organizations who want to do this work and need a university partner, or need a partner. So, through that project, like we've done like many, many things. We hosted the 2006? The Worlds AIDS- you know the big international AIDS conference [XVI International AIDS Conference] was here in 2006, I think? We hosted all the youth delegates, GAAP did here at New College. So, all the youth delegates from the conference came here. And we had a barbecue and you now we did some stuff here.

So, like there's- through that project I guess, I've kept up the work focused mainly on youth, but a big part of it is supporting youth to do the work, right? Themselves. So, March 17th, 16th?, we have the Annual Youth Research Sexual Health Symposium. And so that every year- happens every year, GAAP puts its on. And youth, community youth and university youth, are invited to submit an abstract for something they might want to present on the topic of sexual health and sexuality related to HIV/AIDS or whatever. And we do a sort of full day symposium, we have a key note speaker, the youth get to present their work, and we make sure we have community youth involved, sometimes they do photo or arts-based exhibits and things like that. We have youth members on the committee, from the community and then students as well. So, students and community youth working together to develop the program. So, it's kind of- it went from that. I went from my work in sexual harassment, once I got into the university system, to working sexual harassment and violence in

South Africa, making the connection to HIV/AIDS from that work developing the Gendering Adolescent Aids Prevention Project, which we called the GAAP project, which is still going.

00:29:10

Daniela

One thing that we talked a little bit about before, was your teaching and that in your work here as well, there's components of your classes that you have really tried to really encourage activism and hands on engagement with students as well through that avenue?

00:29:33

June

So, in all of the courses that I do, [pause] excuse me, students need to do something outside of class for two hours, like as their extracurricular activity. I think a lot of people do this now, when I first started doing it, it was kind of unique, but I think a lot of people do it now. And then they have to write about that. So, the intro students, they write a report, a two-page report, there's some questions that they have to follow, and they have to talk about what they did in the context of the course material. Now sometimes they go to lectures, they don't go to anything that is activist-oriented, but I try and provide opportunities for them to do- and I'm not saying a lecture can't be activist either- a lot- a big discussion is what do we mean by activism? This is something we're still working out through our projects, so I'll just put that on the table. But we also try and provide specific activities for them. So, for example, this year, the intro course- remember the big day with the climate change? [2019 Global Climate Strike] They had the big rally? So, we organized for- we invited the intro students to all meet us in front of New College, those who wanted to, and they met up, we met up with them and then other people from New College joined us and we walked over to the rally together and we did the rally together. And so, they will write that up as their extracurricular activity. So, a lot of students, I tell them, if you're doing something on your own, you can count that, you don't have to do anything extra. If you are not doing something yet, here are some ideas, and then we try and find ways to get them engaged. Partly it's just- it's two-fold: One is certainly trying to get students to see the connection between what we are doing in class and activism work, and then the other is, knowing, and this is become something worth thinking through more and more, students are so overwhelmed with all their courses, trying to work, trying to survive in a big city, being new to a big city and not knowing anyone, and OSAP's been cut. That they don't have time to take advantage of other activities, right? So, we try and do it in a way that they get credit for it, you know what I mean? It's part of your course, like you get credit for this. And in terms of the value of it, I think I was telling you, Danielle, that one example would be - I was a Director of Equity Studies here for 20 years. And I taught the intro course for a lot of that time. And we- I remember during that- what's the name of it? The big movement- the- where they were down at the church for- this would have been probably 10 years ago now

or more. What's the name of the big movement? Started in New York... [Ruth: Occupy], Occupy! Yes, the Occupy movement!

So, equity study students, a number of them were down at Occupy!, right? And then they would come back to class and they would report back and you know, "we need you know, warm coats, we need this, we need that." Right? But what was really clear during that movement when they would interview the youth, you know, "why are you here?" "Well we're against the wealthy, the 90- the 1%" "Why?" They really weren't able to articulate that. So, at the same time as Occupy! was happening, we were talking about neoliberalism in the course and we were talking about the 99 and the one and why that happens and what was the difference and the myth about you know, welfare, all this kind of stuff. What the students were able to do then, is to take that information back to Occupy!, so they were running workshops, you know they would be involved in workshops at Occupy!, so that when they were interviewed, they actually had an analysis. You know, because some youth who really wanted to support the cause, and I'm sure this is many of us who want to support the cause, sometimes don't really understand it. So, it was a way for them to bring their academic work and really see how you need to have this! You need to be able, if you're talking to a reporter, to say you understand what's going on and what can be done differently.

So, trying to find ways to kind of have students see that link, you know has been really, really important. And then in equity studies we actually now have, I'm not the director anymore, an initiative called Youth, Activism, and Community. And it's because one of the goals of equity studies is to become sort of a hub of activist scholarship. So again, activism that is informed by, you understand what you are doing and why. You know? And so that started about four or five years ago and is continuing and I was just- when you came in, pulling out these courses, so for example in equity- So I'm both in equity studies and women and gender studies, cross appointed. So, one of the courses we have now in equity studies is called Youth Activism and Social Change. Another course we have is Equity and Activism in Education. So, we built it into the equity studies program. And the new Director, Shahrzad Mojab, well you know she is the perfect example of activist scholarship, right? So, this initiative she and I put this together, it was actually her idea initially. I guess another thing is, having colleagues like Shahrzad, or people who you know are doing, many of us are, right? Those of us who are fortunate enough to be in a department that supports this kind of work. Like women and gender studies, equity studies. Before you were here, I was just talking to someone who's partner is in a department that does not support that work. And she has a very hard time doing that work. So, I have a lot of colleagues and so, you know Black Lives Matter, everybody is doing activist work and everybody tries to find their own little- not their own little niche, but 'this is the part that I can lead, you lead that part, you lead that part, we can all work together, we

can bring it together,' you know what I mean? Everybody is doing activism work in a different way. That kind of brings me up to now I guess.

00:35:51

Ruth

I guess, how has the shift in technology with like there being digital activism kind of shape the way students are engaging with issues?

00:36:00

June

Well, one of the things I think- the big thing of course, is advertising events for one thing. So, there's an event tomorrow that's happening in supporting Indigenous hereditary chiefs and Indigenous people, and one of the youth activists, this is part of the youth in activism initiative, one of the youth activists was arrested by the RCMP. And she's coming tomorrow, and she is going to be doing a presentation here. I didn't organize this, Chandni Desai, if you know her she's amazing, she organized it, she teaches the course Youth, Activism, and Social Change, and so she advertised that on Facebook and said there were 4,000 people who responded. I don't think we'll get 4,000 people, but what I'm saying is, the ability to be able to advertise an event, and even if people can't come to your event, they can support your event, right? And then there's all this solidarity that builds around that. And then I think there's also just interesting ways of doing activism. I remember when Omar Khadr was released, right? And the students did this photo thing in equity studies where they had a sign that said, "Omar Khadr welcome home," you know? And they sort of did all these photos and put it up on the- on social media to sort of try and counter the backlash, you know? To his being released you know, that he was a terrorist and, you know, whatever. So, I think that, I mean I'm not the best at technology, but this new generation of students have all kinds of creative ways, I mean to work with technology. So, I'm talking about media here, I'm not sure if you are talking about something else-

00:37:43

Daniela

No, I mean I think, I'm not sure in terms of technology- [Ruth: Yeah] that's sort of what I would have anticipated.

00:37:49

June

So, I just think it's, it's so many different ways to do activism now. When I think about when I was doing this sexual harassment caucus, and emailing- by hand, mailing, all these things to all these organizations and you never knew if anybody got it or not, right? I mean it, I mean given I think that we had no technology at the time, I think we did amazingly well. But I mean if we had technology it would have been incredible, right? Yeah.

00:38:20

Ruth

You've kind of documented the ways in which this has shaped your career and also your teaching, as well. In what other ways has activism

that you did in your- during your thesis and your graduate work, really shaped the orientation of everything else?

00:38:41

June

Okay well, I think well, of course, it's shaped my career. Clearly it shaped who I was as a person. And I guess, I mean I'm going back, but when I was a teacher, as I said, I worked with kids who had- I mean the last class I taught in the system before I left was the quote "behavior" class. So, it was the kids who could not be handled in any other class, so they all came to me. Which was very challenging. But on the other hand, I learned to think about them as embodied people in terms of the kinds of lives they were living, you know? So, these kids were kids, "oh, they are very violent you have to be really rough with them," and all this kind of stuff. Well they were violent because they were treated that way, like you know? They were treated very aggressively. And so, I think through them, I had a very different approach to working with them. Like you know, there was no aggression, I never raised my voice, and you know, understanding the context of their lives and what kinds of things did they need differently? But I didn't have any way of articulating that.

So, I think what it's given me now is, like I guess my education, is a way of talking with people about some of these issues outside of- let's say an activist circle. You know what I mean? So, on the other hand, I'll be the first to say this, I still sometimes find it really hard to talk about these things outside of an activist circle. Because you know you're in situations and, I think one of the great things, but one of the problems, is that we are pretty like-minded around here. And my students are pretty like-minded, I mean women and gender studies / equity studies. They are there because they are interested in these issues, I mean it's kind of an ideal place to do this work. And so even though I think I have- I can articulate it, I have a lot of experience, like when I get outside of an activist circle and I'm trying to talk with someone around some of these issues, like supporting the hereditary chiefs, you know like, you know, I find I still struggle sometimes. So, I think for me it's an ongoing learning process to be able to, I guess take, take what you know theoretically or whatever, and how do you make it accessible to people? Like how do you- and I'm not at all saying that I know more than people and they just don't know and I know everything, it's not that. But how do you say, "let's think about this a different way," you know? Without sounding arrogant, without getting angry, which I do sometimes, I don't ever with students, but I do outside you know- [angry voice] "why can't you understand this!" And so that's something I constantly work on, is thinking about how to do this work in a way that is an accessible everyday language because we use a lot of jargon and we just accept that jargon. And sometimes when somebody really says, "what do you really mean by neoliberalism?" It's like, "well, I guess it kind of depends," right? But we throw it around all the time. So, I think that's the challenge. The challenge is, you know, yes with my career, yes with my colleagues and friends, but how do you do this in

your everyday life with everyday people without sounding like your arrogant, without getting angry, like how do you do this? And how do you make this knowledge accessible. I guess that's the challenge for me.

00:42:25

Ruth

Before you had mentioned there's different forms of activism, how have you seen that, like I guess, debate evolve from, you know, I guess traditional conceptions of what activism is to now having a wider and broader perspective of, you know, lived, embodied experience to maybe conducting rallies to doing activism in institutions –

00:42:52

June

What I would say is- I don't know and I have a project now where I'm trying to think that through. [Ruth: Okay [laughs]]. You know because, remember when we were- when I would say to them in equity studies- you know you can go out and do your activist work, and like a lot of them were going to- remember when they had all the- rallies around globalization in the early 1990's, a lot of the students would rent a bus and go right? And so that's what they saw as activism. But the person who stands outside of the welfare office and says, "I'm not leaving until you-" You know? That's activism. You know what I mean? So how do we think about activism differently? Or like you know- so I tried to think about, but again not theoretically, right? So, this is why I want to do this now, different forms of activism in terms of what students did, like some students would write a letter to the editor, this is activism, right? So, we try to think about different kinds of activism, but the question you raise is the question I want to think through more.

Now I guess Chandni Desai, who's teaching that course, I probably just need to go out and have a drink with her and talk about it because I'm sure she does this in the course, but one of the projects I'm looking at now in GAAP is called Youth Activism Over Time and thinking about what are the youth activists doing now? So, like, the students who have been involved with projects in GAAP, you know, what are they doing now? What have they done with that information? So, one of the projects we had with- was funded by the Trillium Society, called the Empower Project, and it was run out of Queen West Community Health Centre, actually a woman who was in here just before you who's teaching here was the coordinator of the program. And it- we had funding to train youth from diverse communities to do workshops on HIV/AIDS in their own communities. So, youth who were street-involved, trans youth, Indigenous youth, youth who were associated with Queen West, and it was a training program they- we hired mentors who already did this work, who worked with the mentees, and then they developed the arts-based workshops and then they would go and do them in their own communities, right?

So, we had a lot of those kinds of projects, we were involved in the Toronto Teen Survey. I'm not sure if you've heard about that project

where it was a more traditional project where, over a thousand youth in the GTA were surveyed about their sexual health education, what it was like, what they needed, what they didn't get, that kind of thing. So, it's a very standard study, but it had a lot of- and I wasn't the principle investigator, Sarah Flicker is so she gets credit for that, GAAP was just involved, but from that came a lot of work with community organizations about the particular youth in their communities. The project was developed because people were saying in organizations, we've got this one size fits all model around sexual health for youth. "Well, I have refugee youth, I have trans youth. Like it doesn't fit, you know? We need something more specific." So that was the purpose of the study, but that was published, I think in 2007, so we want to know, what are those youth doing now? So that's why I'm sort of thinking, through this whole notion of what do we mean by activism? And how do we think about that and the youth who were involved, and we would call that activism- like the youth in the Toronto Youth Survey, it was, the surveys were done by youth, the workshops were conducted by youth, youth developed the survey, they were trained to do that, so they were involved every step of the way. So that would be like activist research, right? So, thinking about what are those youth doing now? So, that's what we're interested in finding out. Were they able to take this work? And do something with it in their lives? Or does it have meaning for them now? That's the project we are trying to work on now.

00:46:49

Ruth

Probably a big question, you can answer as much as you want but, we've kind of touched on the emotional toll that activism takes on activists in this space, is that something that you have given consideration with? Or discussed- had conversations with students or other faculty members about?

00:47:12

June

Well, certainly I know in courses, for myself what made things really easier for me was of course, I came into programs I was surrounded by activists, right? So, I think I'm in a very different situation. I came to it late in terms of calling myself an activist and I came into a setting where I was supported, and whatever. Now that doesn't say I didn't have some very uncomfortable family situations, like there's emotional toll that way, in terms of, you know your family doesn't agree with what you say and, "what's happened to you, my god, you've gone all radical," but then students have the same issues, right? So, I know supporting students who will express, "I've just opened my eyes to these issues, I see it differently now, now I don't know what to do with my own life," and that's why we're trying to do this youth activism initiative to sort of think about it not only in terms of what you do, but how you support yourself. So, I know the Equity Studies Student Union used to have a lot of workshops on burnout, that kind of thing. One whole day they used to have a conference every

year, was dedicated to self-care and burnout, and so those kinds of terms are terms that come up and that people are working on.

00:48:25 **Ruth**
Is there anything else you'd like to add?

00:48:27 **June**
I don't think so, is there anything I missed?

00:48:30 **Ruth**
No I don't think so.

00:48:31 **June**
Okay, okay? Thanks, that was great!

00:48:35 **Ruth**
Thank you so much

00:48:36 **Daniela**
Thank you.