

**Jillian Jacobs** 00:02

Awesome. And also I'm going to be sending you a release form after the interview that basically says that you consent to having it in the archive. However, when I send you the transcript, you can look over it, and you can ask me to take out anything that you don't feel comfortable with. You can edit your answers. You basically have total control over what goes into the archive. So, the main priority is making sure that you feel comfortable with what's being put into the archives.

**Grace Derks** 00:33

Understandable.

**Jacobs** 00:35

Awesome. Okay, so before we get started, do you have any questions for me?

**Derks** 00:39

No, all good.

**Jacobs** 00:40

Awesome. Okay, well, the question I'd like to start with is basically just what got you into activism?

**Derks** 00:48

So when I was a kid, I grew up in a very - I always struggled with a word. It was a very caring community, like the neighborhood itself and where I lived - I'm from Illinois originally - was very much a caring place where everybody kind of leaned on one another type of thing like constant volunteer sort of issues. But I really give it to my parents; they were both pretty - I don't know if you would call it activism or just like their careers lined up with their values and how they push those forward. So my mom and dad were both lobbyists at different points for different nonprofits and then they both worked in the nonprofit sector for a while in different areas. So my mom worked in AIDS activism for a while, and my dad works a lot for the hospital association, and things like that. And so I grew up, and I always wanted to help people. And so I was - I think my first actual activism thing ever that I can think of - was probably sixteen; I went to the first Women's March in DC<sup>1</sup>. And then I always wanted to help people when I was looking for careers, and I thought I wanted to be a doctor. And that did not pan out. I am not skilled at chemistry. And so I kind of started looking at my life and thinking where else do I want to be career wise, and something that will fulfill me both personally and in my professional life. And

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<sup>1</sup> The Women's March in DC was a protest on January 21, 2017 aimed toward the Trump administration in order to advocate for women's rights (History.com Editors. "Women's March." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 5 Jan. 2018, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/womens-march>.).

so it really took me to humanitarianism activism and the nonprofit sector because that is where I feel the most fulfilled is when I'm able to use whatever skills that I have to help others in different areas of the world, I think is probably the best way I would talk about bringing it and so I do really attribute it to my parents a lot. But I just always grew up in this mindset of like, you should help other people always in any way you can. And, yeah.

**Jacobs 03:19**

That's awesome. So you mentioned going to the Women's March. Was there anything in particular that pushed you to go to that? Was there any reason in particular why that was the issue that you really chose to focus on?

**Derks 03:35**

Well, I think that a big thing for me growing up was that my grandpa, he's the pastor, and I'm not really religious in any aspect. But he went to the March on Washington in the 60s<sup>2</sup>. And so that was always something I knew about, and he marched, and it was a big part of his life. And it was a big part then of my mom's life, as his daughter, you know, that was something she was proud of for him. And he's always been proud of it. And I think that when Donald Trump was elected, I had this gut crushing effect<sup>3</sup>. And I was just like "How am I going to exist in this world, where, you know, if something were to happen to say, like, I would get pregnant or something, and I would not be able to access the services I need, and I'm very privileged. And so if I can't access them, what about people that have way way less than I do? And like how are they going to be able to access them?" and so for actually, the women's - the first one - my mom was only going to go and I said to her "Here's the deal. I don't care how I get there. I just feel like if I can be in DC with you - and this is like my generation's version of that march in some aspects in terms of size of the movement - I would like to be there. And I would like to be a part of that." So I took a bus all the way from Illinois to DC to go do that. And that was a big deal for me in terms of - that was probably around the time that I was gaining, like a political mindset, like I'd always had politics were always a big part of - democratic politics were always a big part of my life, just because of my family - but, you know, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, I'm starting to conceptualize, and really interpret information that I'm learning in school and the world around me, and also political values. So that's probably how I was really motivated to go there and do that. I had the opportunity to get on the bus with a bunch of other people and go do it. But I would say that's probably the time when I was sitting back, and I was like, "Okay, I can see why movements work; why they mean something in the grand scheme of things."

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<sup>2</sup> The March on Washington was a large protest held in August of 1963 to raise awareness of inequality against African Americans (History.com Editors. "March on Washington." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 29 Oct. 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/march-on-washington>.).

<sup>3</sup> Donald Trump is the 45th president of the United States and is a member of the Republican Party ("Donald J. Trump." *The White House*, The United States Government, 18 Jan. 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/donald-j-trump/>).

**Jacobs 06:11**

Yeah, no, that sounds really awesome. And I'm glad that you were able to make it there, and that you could find that bus. So would you like to tell me about some of the organizations or some of the projects that you've been involved in, that you're particularly proud of?

**Derks 06:25**

Yeah, so some of the stuff I've been the most part of, has probably been within the past year or so. I have been able to just like with more experience, and age as well, I've been able to have a little bit more selection in the areas I'd like to work in. And so for me sexual and reproductive health, as well as sexual education is something that's really, really always been a focus for me, as well as intersectionality, of pretty much everything<sup>4</sup>. So at my school, I would say the first project that I talk about is, we have this club, and it's called Humanitarian Student Union, and I started on their executive board, like the board that leads it when I was a sophomore, and I'm the president now, for my senior year, but it's a club that meets weekly, and we always try to do our best to educate those who come to our meetings about different crises that are happening in the world. Either past or present, or we talk about broader structures, like the UN and the bodies and how they all work and then we tend to have those meetings where it's thirty minutes of a presentation<sup>5</sup>. And we try to do a quick rundown on how it goes, or how whatever happened. For instance, we did one on the Ethiopian famine and genocide that's happening a couple of weeks ago. So we did thirty some minutes talking about it, talking about resources that we can - that people can donate to look for sign petitions for or whatever. And then we open it up. And we have a bunch of conversations about why is it the way that it is, what's happening in the world that is causing this to keep happening. While we all know that there's a famine happening, what is media blockage, things like that. And so that's an awesome conversation, in which we are able to educate and look beyond just what's happening in our own little worlds, because we do both national and international crises and issues. And I've always loved that. And that's something I'm really proud of. And then, my last semester, I worked for a nonprofit - all virtually, unfortunately. But that really focuses - it's called the Women's Global Education Project - and they are an awesome organization that really, really is aiming to be - they foster grassroots organizations. So they are working in Senegal and Kenya right now. And they really work on the intersection of girls' education and anything else. So the founder was in the Peace Corps a long time ago, and she came back and realized that girls' education in Senegal intersected with literally every other section of people's lives, and she decided that she was gonna do something

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<sup>4</sup> Intersectionality is a term originally coined by Kimberely Crenshaw, who describes it as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other." (Steinmetz, Katy. "Kimberlé Crenshaw on What Intersectionality Means Today." *Time*, Time, 20 Feb. 2020, <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>.)

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations (UN) is an international organization of 193 member states. It strives to alleviate many global issues ("About Us." United Nations, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/>.)

to help improve that<sup>6</sup>. So there's a lot of programs they run that try to - they match up with grassroots partners and try to foster their programs in the areas, so then one day, these organizations will be able to just work on their own, and they won't need guidance, or money or anything like that from an outside source<sup>7</sup>. And then they extended to Kenya. And in Kenya, it was a really, really big issue of FGM, female genital mutilation, which was something that was deeply tied in with education<sup>8</sup>. So then they expanded in Kenya to really adopt a new way of fostering girls' education through kind of the eradication of FGM as well as fostering other parts of girls education, so they have it all, they have this thing that's called an alternative rite of passage. So it's a celebration that instead of getting cut the way that girls normally would, at a certain age, they have a different celebration, and they bring in a lot of cultural aspects and things. And so that's one part of it, they do a lot of menstrual supplies, providing educational supplies, anything from a motorbike ride to school, if girls can't get to school to providing the actual buildings that schools are in. And so that was awesome. I really enjoyed my time there. And then right now, I am a social media and communications intern for NGO CSW, and that will probably be like the pinnacle of intersectionality is what I do. That's what I kind of define it as. And really, our goal as an organization is to create a space in which feminist and women's rights activists can come and relate to each other and talk about issues and talk about their work and really see areas where they overlap, or they can expand because the UN itself, they do not have a ton of involvement with civil society as a whole. And that means that only member states of the UN can really have too much of a say in the outcomes of the UN, which means that, if a state does not believe in a certain aspect of women's rights or whatever, they'll never fight for it. But a civil society organization would come in and fight for it. So we offer an alternative space for collaboration and fostering of ideas. There's a program that runs for two - well, it's not a program, it's called the Committee on the Status of Women - that runs for two weeks in March. And so our version is the civil society side of it. So it runs for two weeks parallel to that. And when nonprofits and organizations and people know they can't get into the UN because they don't have the access, they come to us and this is a place. And there usually are documents that will come out and know the advocacy that has been passed along to member states of the UN. For example, this year - we have a theme every year - as of this year, our theme is climate change, really and where it is in girls and women like how can girls and women exist, and I'm getting the wording wrong, but in the time in the context of climate change. And so that's been the majority of my focus this year is stuff like that, over the past couple weeks, we're doing a lot

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<sup>6</sup> The Peace Corps allows its workers to help alleviate issues abroad (*About*, <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/>).

<sup>7</sup> Grassroots, or grassroots organizations, refer to local civilians working together for a common cause ("What Is Grass Roots Organizing?" *Social Work Degree Guide*, <https://www.socialworkdegreeguide.com/faq/what-is-grass-roots-organizing/>).

<sup>8</sup> Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to the non-medical removal of a female's external genitalia ("Female Genital Mutilation." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>).

with COP and how incredibly not progressive it is<sup>9</sup>. And so I would say those are the three projects that I have been the most proud of recently. So yeah, sorry, I just talked for a while.

**Jacobs 14:09**

Oh, no, it's all good. Those all sound like really incredible organizations. So first with what you're involved in at your university, is it difficult to balance basically all of your schoolwork and then just like recreational activities plus the activism?

**Derks 14:30**

Yeah, I mean, it can be. Sometimes it's tiring, I think. I think that's probably the best way to put it is sometimes it's hard to pull yourself away from certain things because you feel like you are so - I don't know, indebted isn't the right word, but like, you would feel guilty if you pulled yourself away from the activism or from whatever cause you're working on, because it needs to be talked about; it needs to be shared. And so sometimes it really can be difficult and we try to give - I definitely tried to work with my other executive board members to really balance our work life - activism life balance. But I think a lot of professors - I have a certain set of professors right now that don't really seem to respect their students time, in which you get a certain amount of assignments, or even they'll keep us late after class, which is super annoying, but that where it feels like they expect you to only be a person who is able to function in their class. And when I have professors with classes like that, when you go to college, people are like, this is a time for you to do XYZ, and you can branch out and you can find what you really love and you're passionate, "We have all these clubs, and we have all this that" and then when the school which you're technically supposed to be there for doesn't respect the fact that you also have other interests and other things you're doing in your life, it makes it kind of extremely frustrating, especially when you are in a culture where you are a - for me, I like to work I like to have a lot going on in my life. But especially for my school and junior/seniors. Everyone has a job in addition or an internship or they try to have an internship in addition to school in addition to their extracurriculars. So it can be exhausting.

**Jacobs 16:51**

Yeah, no, I'm sure. And I've also heard about like, activist burnout, and how that's been a really big thing, just because of the emotional toll that it can take sometimes because the issues that you were talking about, like female genital mutilation, it's very serious stuff and it can be overwhelming. So -

**Derks 17:11**

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<sup>9</sup> COP (Conference of the Parties) is the United Nations' climate change conference ("What Is a Cop?" *UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) at the SEC – Glasgow 2021*, 5 Nov. 2021, <https://ukcop26.org/uk-presidency/what-is-a-cop/>.)

Yeah, and I definitely only have a small - I would say, my activism is nowhere near the scale of other activists. And I can only imagine what the youth activists that are at COP are finishing that. And really on the world stage right now how that burnout can be for them. Because it can't be anything more than just depressing to wake up every day and realize that these people that are supposed to really be changing the world can't do too much. So -

**Jacobs 17:42**

Yeah, but I think that one of the good things is that with today's culture, I feel like maybe there is more of a focus on mental health. And I think I've seen that, especially through social media, which is kind of ironic, because social media can sometimes be the cause of a lot of issues. But with social media, so - you said that you were the social media and communications intern. So what has that been like? Because that's a pretty recent development in terms of activism. So how have you been able to utilize that to spread different messages?

**Derks 18:15**

Yeah, so I've done social media stuff for the past few jobs I've worked on. It's been a decent part of my job is creating content and then making sure it goes out, obviously. And, for me, I really think about social media as a way to engage new people. For example, this organization I work for now, we have this big event that happens in March, but applications for - we have these things called Parallel events, which just means like your organization can host the event during our forum. And the applications close in December. And so we need to make sure people are applying because we have a certain number that we want to meet. So I'm really trying to get that message out there. So that means I'm trying to engage new organizations who've never heard of us before, to really look at us and think, oh, maybe this would be a great platform for us. So that means I'm not only creating content and trying to create different messages and whatever, tagging people, hashtagging, whatever you want to do, but also I'm trying to find other organizations that line up or people individual activists that line up with our mission, and so I'm trying to follow them, engage them in some sort of way. "Hey, that speech you made last week was awesome. Thank you so much." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, just to get our message and our position out there into the world a little bit more to further pull new people in. Because I think when you really truly believe in whatever it is that you're doing, whether it's personal or for work, or whatever, the more people that you can bring into your world, the larger your message will spread. And I think right now, especially with just climate change, and all these different terrible things that are obviously happening in the world, the more and more we get people on a general page of fighting against whatever it might be, the larger impact it'll make. And so for me, social media is just another way to engage people through whatever it may be. So you know, an email blast is great, but you're not going to get people on that mailing list unless they find you somehow. So find us through social media, or word of mouth is great, but we have new tools now. So I really think that there are - social media is just a new way of bringing people into your circle in terms of activism, it's a new way of engaging with people. That is, beyond what

anybody could have fathomed twenty years ago. And it's really powerful. You know, I'm seeing, like if we go back to this past week, again, and a week before, I'm seeing speeches that happened, like twenty minutes ago, pop up on my page, and I can say, hey, that youth activist, she seems awesome. I'm gonna retweet that because I think that's awesome<sup>10</sup>. And it lines up with our brand. And also, it can also serve as a call to action. “Hey, @ UN climate development, climate change, why isn't this happening inside the event? Why is she having to stand outside and give this speech?” You know, it can be a call to be like, “Hey, why is this so screwed up? Why is this the way it is?” Yeah.

#### **Jacobs 22:25**

Yeah, no, I think that that's definitely very important. And I'm really glad that social media has become utilized for this purpose. So it's been really nice to see. Is there a - this is kind of an odd question. Do you feel as though there's a particular social media platform that is most effective for spreading a message?

#### **Derks 22:47**

I used to think that they were all pretty similar. I definitely- my own personal life - have definitely used Instagram the most<sup>11</sup>. But I think right now, Twitter is going to be your best bet<sup>12</sup>. Just because it is, I mean, I would say it's the most user friendly on both your phone and also your laptop. And it's a constant conversation in which things can go back and forth pretty easily, as opposed to, you know, Facebook, or Instagram, where it seems very, like things can get lost really easily in the larger scheme of things. And I also would say you have different targets, depending on what you are trying to promote.

#### **Jacobs 25:03**

Right.

#### **Derks 25:04**

So LinkedIn might be a great place to promote, like, a speaking panel, or a career event or something like that<sup>13</sup>. While Facebook is kind of a crapshoot at this point. I think Instagram is good for some things. Definitely some more casual things. Like we're planning on doing a lot of introductions to our staff just to make people familiar. And that would be a great place. Because it also - The way that Instagram is set up, you can keep things pinned, you know, story highlights, and whatever. Easy access to find that sort of thing. Well, Twitter, things just are constantly rolling. You might have 3000 tweets on your page, because you've had the account since 2012. But I think in terms of quickest dialogue with the most amount of response you're

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<sup>10</sup> A retweet is when one Twitter user reposts another user's post on the platform.

<sup>11</sup> Instagram is a popular social media platform often used for sharing photos with captions.

<sup>12</sup> Twitter is a social media platform in which users primarily write short posts, although photos and videos can be included as well.

<sup>13</sup> LinkedIn is a social media platform primarily used for business and networking purposes.

going to get is Twitter. Especially because it's so easy to join other movements there through hashtags. I think TikTok is really interesting<sup>14</sup>.

**Jacobs 25:03**

Yeah.

**Derks 25:04**

Personally, I am not skilled at TikTok. Nor have I tried to use it in a professional manner. I think that I've seen it used for a lot of businesses. I haven't seen as many nonprofits or activism really on there. I've seen some, like, "This is an issue, we need to fix it." But really, I haven't seen too many nonprofits step up there. I think it'd be really interesting to try it out. But it's also, I don't understand how the TikTok algorithm works. And I do understand how the Twitter algorithm - I do understand how a feed works on Twitter versus how your ForYou page works on TikTok. But I'll be really curious to see where that goes in the next few years. Because I think, especially if you're going to try to target youth, and new people, it could be really interesting on there. And I do think - I mean, I have the personal side - I think that Facebook is probably going to fall out in the next year or two, and Instagram will probably follow. Because I just don't know if anyone's really using it for an activist point of view, or not point of view, but like, a platform, really, at least in the sector that are in the audience. And I would like to see that.

**Jacobs 26:31**

Yeah, yeah. No, TikTok is actually really interesting. Because with the way that the algorithm is, it basically creates a bunch of little different echo chambers, depending on someone's interests. And so I remember, it was around the time, when of George Floyd's death, or murder, there was - I was getting a lot of stuff about Black Lives Matter<sup>15</sup>. And so I was liking these things, because I was agreeing with the message. And so I just kept getting more and more and more, but then I realized that this was probably just reaching me and other people who already shared the same thing. So I guess a similar thing could be said about Twitter, but I don't think it's to as drastic of an extent. But yeah, it'll be interesting to see if TikTok would be able to be utilized for more nonprofit organizations.

**Derks 27:26**

Yeah, I can get that. Like for right now. For example, I'm a big Taylor Swift Fan, and all my stuff on my page is all Taylor Swift related right now. And I'm like, wow, and of course, I like them because they think they're funny, or they're good points or whatever. And then I'm like, "Oh, this is probably not the same for everybody else." But on TikTok, you tend to go to your

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<sup>14</sup> TikTok is a newer form of social media in which users post short videos.

<sup>15</sup> Black Lives Matter is an organization focused on combatting racism and discrimination within the United States and other locations abroad ("About - Black Lives Matter." *Blacklivesmatter.com*, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>).



version of the Explore page, like the ForYou page, whatever, rather than like, on Twitter, you're gonna stay on your feed, the people you follow, the people you like, the things you like, the people you follow, retweet something from someone else, rather than on Tik Tok, it's a new form of - because it makes you worry, though, that if you were to use it for nonprofit, or activism or whatever, you wouldn't be reaching really new audiences, you might be reaching people who like have previously believed in this sort of thing and are just finding out about this. But it's not like new people who are buying into your activism; they would just be people who have just not necessarily seen your organization before.

**Jacobs 28:45**

Right. Yeah, to kind of switch gears a bit. Have there been - This is going to be a very broad question, just a warning. But throughout your journey with activism, have there been any moments in particular, any stories that have particularly inspired you? Or kind of motivated you to keep going or changed your outlook on a certain issue?

**Derks 29:12**

Alright, let me think.

**Jacobs 29:13**

Okay.

**Derks 29:15**

I mean, there have been several I'm definitely I think, and this is very broad, and I think that a lot of people probably can relate to what I'm saying, but if we bring it back, so if we go to 2016, Donald Trump's elected, I am sitting in my basement, sobbing because I don't know what to do. Like, none of my rights right now as a 16-year-old that I'm worried about are really going to be taken away in the next, you know, six months and eventually they were in some states they were definitely infringed upon but, not really anything I had to worry about, but I was devastated for whatever was to come in the next four years. From there I did it - I definitely did some stuff for Biden along the way - well, Democratic primary first and then Biden when that was seeming like that was going to happen. I think the moment that really pushed me forward was the victory of Biden winning, maybe a week or so after the election. And there was this flood of relief, because that was something that in its own way, like voting - and you can talk about the definition of activism or whatever - but there was a movement to get Donald Trump out of office, and I participated in it, a ton of people participated in it, and it was triumphant in the end. You know, the effects of that are obviously debatable. But it was this moment where you could sit back and say, this worked, something worked. And, and I can be part of saying, I was part of that. And I am also here to say we have more work to do, but we've accomplished one thing, you know, this was a victory. And when you accomplish something where you can stand back and say, "Oh, I see that trajectory, and I see where we ended up. Sometimes it can make you really think like, a

lot of thinking can be done with activism and with movements, and people's voices. You know, saying really loudly, things need to change, things need to be done. And I think that, for me, storytelling is so interesting. And I always, always get inspired by storytelling of whatever capacity it is. So I'm trying to think, there are a bunch of individual girls from my last job, when I worked for women's Global Education Project, where you would hear their stories, and you'd sit back and go, "I am so glad somebody was able to give them menstrual supplies at that time in their life." So they were able to continue going to school, now they're in law school, or "I am so glad this happened at that point." So that they were able to gain access to a local organization. And they are able to avoid early marriage. And I want to make sure that continues to happen to other people. And so I mean, I am a big believer of contextualizing movements within storytelling. And I think that can be one of the most powerful things in activism is contextualizing people and issues within a story, so that it makes more sense to another human. Yeah, so those are probably the two that I can think of off the top of my head.

**Jacobs 33:19**

That's really interesting what you're saying about storytelling, and contextualizing it, because I think that in part, that's what we're trying to do with these interviews, because each of us has a specific focus. And so mine is women's rights and feminism. And so with the archive, we're compiling, like interviews that all focus around that to try and contextualize it more. So how did you discover your interest in storytelling? Was there a particular moment that it kind of clicked like, "Oh, wow, this is really impactful. This is really powerful."

**Derks 33:53**

I'm not sure, I think I've only been able to verbalize it like, it is storytelling that can really be - made me invested in something recently. I think I've always been attracted to a story. I always talk about it in the terms of history. Like, I have always hated, like, regular history classes, like American history, like war, history, anything like that. You give me names, dates, I don't really care. And then the first time I took an Irish lit class, it's called text in context here. And so mine was Irish lit. And so we were reading Irish literature alongside small brief interjections of oh, this is when the Easter Rising happened in Ireland, and you're reading this, and you can see the impacts in this story. And so that was when I was like, "Oh, I care about history now, because I've read this thing that corresponds with it." And that contextualized - the context makes me like the story more. And so, I mean, I've always loved documentaries. I'm trying to think, gosh, what's the name of it? Biggest Little farm, I don't know, there's a documentary. And it's on Hulu. And it's this very cool, sustainable, cyclical farm where everything in it has a place. So it's like, Okay, we have, I don't know, like not like groundhogs or something. But they do XY and Z through a farm and they create fertilizer, I don't know, I'm not describing oil, but everything feeds into one another. And at the very end, they talk about the California wildfires that were coming in, and they were really jeopardizing this farm and how scary it was. And you know, just things like that, where you realize, okay, I get to learn about this very quaint farm that they were

- that was also like this man's dream for so long. And also, he did it in the context of like, he always talks about how he promised, he had a big dog when he was living in an apartment in the city. And he was always like, "I'll get you land one day", whatever. And then they accomplished it. And so it was like if you took it out of the context of climate change, or whatever, you get a very sweet story. And then you realize, "Oh, this is a documentary, it's a real world situation." And this farm that is so beautiful in and of itself, and cyclical, and whatever, but there's a bigger issue at stake, and it could ruin it all. And immediately, you've already fallen in love with the people in the documentary, and the land and everything. And all of a sudden, there's, "Oh, I don't want that to be ruined by wildfires. Like, that's horrible." I love narrative, that's always been - I was a kid who read a lot; I love a good story, I really do. I cannot tell a very good one. My neural is like, I break them up with a lot of other little stories. But I wish I was more creative in terms of writing or drawing, or whatever it is to create stories for other people or not create them, but portray them, but I think it can be one of the most effective things in activism. Because if you see an activist in a more real life example, like if you see an activist, and you're like, she's 17, and she's from, I'm making this up, I promise, I don't actually know. You know, she's from Honduras. Why is she here? Like, why? Why does it - Well, there was a rainforest, and she was involved in - she was from the indigenous community. And you see how her personal life has been so affected by these issues. And that's why she's here. And that's why she needs her message to be heard. At least my personality type is one that's like, I immediately care because I know your backstory, and I get where you come from. Yeah.

### **Jacobs 38:23**

Wow, that's really interesting. It's a really interesting perspective. But I completely agree. I had never thought about that before. But now that you're mentioning it, it definitely makes these issues more personal. I think if you've invested your time into someone else's story, and then you see these issues, and I think that it also helps to kind of humanize things. Because I remember Malala, I put her on this huge pedestal in my mind<sup>16</sup>. And I was like, "Oh, my God, I'm never gonna be able to do as much as she has", that sort of thing. And I read her book, and she was talking about going to school and gossiping with her friends and all these different things. And so it really kind of humanized her. And you know, that, like helped inspire me like, "Okay, well, like I still can make a difference, you know?" And so, yeah, no, that's really interesting. Okay, I lost my train - I had a question prepared. And then I completely lost my train of thought, Oh, okay. I remember now. So you've been mentioning climate change, and then also kind of how that intersects with women's issues. Would you be able to kind of explain that issue more?

### **Derks 39:34**

Yeah. I think if we're going to talk activism and progress, the only way forward is to realize how everything that we talked about in terms of changing the world for the better. All these different

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<sup>16</sup> Malala Yousafzai is a youth activist who was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize after advocating for a woman's right to an education.

things. They all overlap with each other at some point and climate change, not only is - it's a double edged sword, kind of, but not in a negative way, girls' education and girls' advancement is going to be the number one tool to solve climate change and fix these issues. I don't know if we can say solve anymore, but fix some of the issues that climate change has caused. Like people like the Brookings Institute, and a lot of other research institutes have come out with that data and that science and said if we educate our girls or girls around the world, we expose them to all these opportunities, they are going to be able to help us fix these issues, we are going to further advance them. But climate change also stands in the way of girls being able to do those things. If you stand back and you say - If we're going to look at gender roles in society, women and girls are more likely to be the ones that are at home, taking care of children, going to do the household chores. So say, for a real life, or like real statistics that I'm not going to say the actual numbers to, because I don't know off the top of my head, but girls are more likely to go, let's say fetch water, or get firewood. If they're out, especially in rural areas, for longer periods of time, they are more exposed to gender based violence. And the more and more the climate changes and different resources are getting used up or destroyed, whatever. It might either cause, it probably will cause those journeys to find those resources. They're longer, you know, or if we take it, which increases the risk if we take it, okay. There is flooding in your town, your house gets destroyed. You've lost everything, your money, whatever, your family, your community, whatever, you have to flee, you go seek refuge somewhere else. Internally displaced people's at refugee camps are some of the most dangerous places for women to be because a lot of them are not officially set up by the High Commissioner for Refugees, and they are makeshift, or even if they are set up, a lot of times, women and girls are preyed upon and they are exploited sexually. You know, we can't we need food, okay, well, can you do XYZ for me in order to get that food or for if they are, you know, receiving care of some kind, you know, whether it's medical care or if they're going to counseling or resources for past experiences with gender based violence, it leaves them exposed to more because they are usually on their way to a very public facing building that people are going to notice. And then more and more climate forces people out of their homes, out of their communities into refugee camps, or just forces people to look further or really struggle financially because the resources they've been using are gone, it leads to more opportunities to be exploited and to be really, for their gender based violence to go up. And also, climate really, really intersects with girls' education if we bring it back to that. So because of not only disasters, but also if your family is experiencing financial issues because there's been a drought and you can't, you know, grow crops anymore then they might in order to de burden themselves of someone to feed, they might decide that early child marriage is for them, and you get married off. So there's all sorts of like, it is one of the most like everything you look at in terms of girls' rights, and girls' and women's rights and climate change, you tend to see like intersections and one of the saddest things. I mean, it's all incredibly sad. But in the - especially in the global south right now environmental activists tend to be some of the most vulnerable people to both gender based violence and, and also murder. And because they're either in the public eye, or because they - Just people are so enraged by what they're doing that human rights

defenders get exposed to some of the most brutal treatment. So that's, that's been something I think I'd grown in understanding of these intersections in the past year or two. And I think it's one of the most powerful things and activism right now is understanding that everything really intersects from our food systems, to our climate, to our education, etc, etc. And it can be a tool that can be utilized. But if it's also ignored, it can be really bad. Because you can seem so narrow minded that you block out entire communities or entire communities back to this.

**Jacobs 46:19**

Absolutely. Yeah, I think that it's really common. Well, I'll speak for myself, before coming to college, I felt like I was very politically active, and I really cared about a bunch of different issues. But I always viewed it as like women's rights, climate change, Black Lives Matter, you know, very in their own world. And so it was only since doing the Human Rights focus cluster that I even learned about intersectionality, and was kind of forced to start considering how all these different issues, they're not separate. And so I hadn't heard about how climate change was specifically impacting women. So thank you so much for sharing that with me, that was really interesting. And I want to look into that a lot more. Okay, so I think that we're nearing the end. So I have one more question for you. If someone were to approach you and say that they wanted to get involved in activism, but they just had no clue where to start, what would be your advice for them?

**Derks 47:21**

I think - not to, like, really sound cliché here. But I think that social media is a great place to look. Because if they want to get involved in activism, ideally, they would have an idea of where to start. But, you know, not an idea, sorry, an idea of what they want to get involved in. And it's very - it can be easy to find different movements on social media that are active that are fired up. And if you find hashtags, or whatever, and then you want to know more from there. You can I mean, it's really easy to go on the internet and do some Google searches of the words that, you know, frequently, I feel like people share in the activist community, a lot of articles and information or resources that I think that are great starting points, you know, from time to time, somebody will be like, "Oh, this is a great New York Times piece on this issue." And then I just think like, for me, personally, I'm the type of person like if I don't know about something, I will keep digging, you know, I don't know that word. I don't know that term. I'm going to keep digging, see what I can find on the internet, see what I can find elsewhere. About that thing, that phrase, right, if somebody was like, "What is intersectional environmentalism?" And I don't know what that is, okay, I'm gonna go look it up, do some research, figure it out. And if I want to become more involved in it, I would say like, social media is great, because it keeps you up to date. You know, say, if you were in Black Lives Matter, you wanted to know more about that movement, especially, I'm saying like, summer 2020, right after George Floyd died, there was up to date information on there. I was in Boulder, Colorado, when the marches were taking place. And we didn't realize there was one in Boulder that day. And we accidentally ran into the march

and joined it because we cared about the issue. And then they were like, “Oh, we're having one tomorrow, too. But you can just log onto social media and find the details. Just find our Twitter handle or whatever.” And we were able to go on, find the details, figure out where to meet, blah, blah, blah, and we went back the next day because it was up to date information. And so that's also what's great about this new era of Zoom and everything is there are more ways to get involved like yes, ideally, we'll be getting back to a lot of in person stuff soon<sup>17</sup>. But you know, if you want to learn about something, there are webinars or panels or whatever are free to join, like, all of the time, which cool people are talking about cool things. And, you know, sometimes there are opportunities to ask questions. And it might be happening in, you know, there might be activists on the call from like China, but you're sitting in your bedroom in New York like I am, and you get to watch the call. And that's why I believe in the power of social media in terms of like, creating new activists, you know, because it sounds stupid to be like, it's easy, but there is so much information out there and granted, not all of it is trustworthy. But if you find a couple trustworthy sources, they can lead you to a lot of other trustworthy sources. And you can get up to date information right then and there. And there are easy ways to start from there. And I would also say on that front, like, follow other find other activists like that's find other people your age that are doing things that you want to be involved in, or not even your age, but doing things that you want to be involved in, maybe they don't represent a nonprofit, maybe they're not, you know, the CEO of whatever, like Friday's for future, I don't even know if they have a CEO, but all these things. But maybe they're just this really cool person that has taken it upon themselves, like they are going to be somebody that speaks out and participates. Well, I'm sure they also have things that they'll share, you know, weekly, at the very least, about, like how you can get involved because I think a big thing for activists is trying to get other people involved at all times. So that's what's so great about social media, which sounds like an elevator pitch.

**Jacobs 51:46**

No, but it's like everything that you're saying is true. And it's really good advice. So thank you for that. So do you have any other stories or anything else that you would like to share?

**Derks 51:57**

No, I - Okay. I said that too quickly. I would say I feel very under, not prepared. Like, I am definitely not the person who is all the way out there in terms of activism in terms of being a public figure, that's not been my thing ever. And I really, really look up to those who have been able to put themselves on an international platform - public platform, and really have their voice heard by some community somewhere. But for me, I have really decided that professionally, I mean, obviously, I believe in these issues deeply personally, and I wouldn't be able to do the work I do if I didn't believe in them personally. But I've decided that professionally, I want to work on these issues as well. So more than just, you know, a hobby or a cause that I really believe in, I don't think I've used the right word, but you know, something along those lines. But

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<sup>17</sup> Zoom is an online video chat platform that became extremely popular during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I've decided to take my skills that I have and turn them into change through a different way. We had a guest lecture in one of the classes I'm taking this semester, and he does really cool engineering, AI stuff in which he predicts which trees are going to fall on power lines in order to tell people in the Global South if they can expect a power outage. I don't know, very cool stuff. But he always said, "I was always talented at XYZ in school. And I noticed these issues in my home country. And I tried to figure out how I could bring my talents and my passions together into a service of some sort that he could do professionally." And for me, that's social media. Well, it's not all social media, I could work in development, but in the nonprofit world. I care and I have communication skills, and I'm detail oriented and XYZ all the stuff you would put on your resume. But for me marrying those the passion and the skill together has resulted in this path of nonprofit work. And so it's done - I don't want to say it's advice, but I am trying to be a different form of activist because I think when we say activists we really think like I think a figure like Greta Thunberg, or really out there, and I don't think that has to be everything. You don't have to be a public figure to be an activist. You don't have to be someone who is the face of a movement. But you can channel your activism through other mediums as well.

**Jillian Jacobs 55:25**

Absolutely. And I'm really glad that you're able to pursue a career that also intersects with your passions, and it's also helping a lot of people. So that's kind of rare, I think, in today's society. So that's nice to hear. Okay, so, thank you so much for talking with me. I may have some follow up questions when I'm reviewing the transcript. So I might be hitting you up with some of those if that's okay. And then once I get the interview transcribed, I'll send you a copy of that. And I'll also be sending you the release form. And if you have any questions for me after this or anything like that, then you can DM me or you can email me or anything like that, and I'll be sure to answer, so thank you.

**Derks 56:05**

Sounds great. Yeah, shoot me an email. I check my school email all the time. So all good, thank you so much for reaching out to me.