

Anna Doel:

Today is April 12th, 2023, and I'm Anna Doel talking with Leslie Aiello at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Leslie, what's your current academic status?

Leslie Aiello:

Retired and happily so.

Anna Doel:

Are you an emerita?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, in fact, I'm a double emerita. I'm the President Emerita of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Professor Emerita of Biological Anthropology at University College London.

Anna Doel:

How would you define the discipline and the subfield that you work in?

Leslie Aiello:

With great difficulty. Anthropology is a broad field rooted in colonialism and the study of "strange and exotic people." My field is biological anthropology, which is the science of the human body, both in the past and present. This contrasts with cultural or social anthropology, which is the study of modern human populations. I've always envisioned the field as a continuum where biological and social anthropologists can communicate with each other along a continuum of interests, but the two opposed ends of that continuum have difficulty communicating with each other. Within biological anthropology, my interests have been in human evolution, and I entered the field through archeology. I realized that I found stones rather boring, and I wanted to know about the people who made the archeological cultures. So, I got into the field of anthropology through archaeology. Anthropology is a broad field, and I often describe it as having leaky edges. It's a field that includes almost anything that has to do with humans in the past and present.

Anna Doel:

As you just mentioned, there seem to be certain tensions within anthropology, within the branches, or between the branches. Have you witnessed those? What's your perspective on it? What's the problem?

Leslie Aiello:

Of course, I've witnessed these events because I was Head of the Anthropology Department at University College London for a long time. The difficulty comes from the fact that the main branches of anthropology, biological anthropology, social anthropology, and archaeology, frequently don't speak the same language, have the same theoretical basis, or ask questions that interest those in the other branches of the field. In my area, human evolution, the closest disciplines are probably paleontology or evolutionary ecology. In archeology, the focus is understanding past societies. Social anthropology has lost away a bit because there are no longer "strange and exotic people." As colonialism has thankfully drifted into the past, social anthropologists have lost their subject area, and many don't know what they're doing or why they're doing it any longer.

It takes a very unusual person to work across disciplines; unfortunately, fewer anthropologists are interested. This is why, in recent history, many anthropology departments have been fragmented, biological anthropology has moved into more biologically oriented departments, and social anthropology has moved more toward the humanities.

Anna Doel:

Do you have an example of a scholar who would be able to cross over and move between these two fields easily?

Leslie Aiello:

Certainly, there have been examples that have impressed me in the past. One of them is Robin Dunbar, who's now at Oxford but used to be a colleague of mine at University College London. He was very adept at bridging social and biological anthropology, focusing on cognition in the past and present.

Another person here in the US is Agustin Fuentes, who is at Princeton now. He is a public scholar focusing on racial issues, cognition evolution, and other cross-fertilization topics. There are relatively few broad Anthropologists like Dunbar or Fuentes. Most tend to view their own focused research as "pure" and consider even interdisciplinary research within the field not "proper" research. There is also the whole question of being a public scholar. In many cases, this is not valued within the academy as much as being a purely academic scholar.

Anna Doel:

Where does linguistic anthropology stand in this field?

Leslie Aiello:

Linguistic anthropology is diminishing as a discipline. When I was a student in the 1960s, Anthropology was truly four fields, and linguistics was one of them, along with biological, social/cultural, and archeology. However, now there seem to be fewer and fewer people who are interested in sociolinguistics.

The focus of linguistics now seems to be structural linguistics, which focuses on questions that don't relate to the social science of anthropology. There are fewer and fewer people who are interested in anthropological linguistics. It could be because of the way the world is now so interconnected that the type of linguistics that used to be done in anthropology isn't that relevant or popular any longer. One area in which there is still considerable modern interest is preserving endangered languages. Still, outside of this niche area, there are fewer and fewer anthropological linguists and, consequently, fewer and fewer students.

Anna Doel:

Now, let's go back to your own story and start at the very beginning. I know you were born on May 26th, 1946. Where did you grow up?

Leslie Aiello:

I grew up in Southern California. I'm a native of Los Angeles.

Anna Doel:

Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? Who were they?

Leslie Aiello:

My father was an aeronautical engineer. I was born in Los Angeles while he was a graduate student on the GI Bill at Caltech. He and my mother were originally from Indiana and Pennsylvania. He was in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War and thought Southern California was a land of opportunity, with a wonderful climate as a bonus. At that time, the aerospace industry in Southern California was blossoming. After he got his master's degree, he made his career in aerospace. My mom was a housewife.

Anna Doel:

Do you have any siblings?

Leslie Aiello:

I had one brother. He passed away in 2022, but he was non-academic. My parents were horrified when he became interested in drag cars in the 1960s. He worked as a computer engineer for sorting machines in the Central Valley, California, fruit packing houses. These machines wash and sort hundreds of oranges on conveyor belts quickly.

Anna Doel:

What were your interests as a child? What did you enjoy doing?

Leslie Aiello:

My mother used to say I enjoyed playing dirty, so she wasn't surprised when I became interested in archeology.

Anna Doel:

So you liked being outside?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, but my interests growing up in the 1950s were what any young child at that time would have. However, I am entirely unmusical and didn't have any musical interests at all. I like to read. My mother kept telling me to go out and play and not read so much, but mine was just a normal childhood. I remember my father kept telling me I could be anything I wanted, which was probably progressive then.

He wanted two things for me. Being in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War, he loved Australia and wanted me to attend university in Australia. He also wanted me to go into aerospace because he thought that space travel was the future of mankind. Of course, he did not know the computer revolution was on the horizon. He thought that space was the future.

Anna Doel:

Did your family have a house when you were growing up?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes. We had a modest house in a new area of Los Angeles. There were many young families in the neighborhood, so there were always kids to play with. The elementary school was within walking distance, so it was a lovely environment to grow up in.

Anna Doel:

Was it a little bit like the picket fence culture space, not so much?

Leslie Aiello:

I'm not entirely sure what you mean by a picket fence culture space, but it was homogeneous. At that point, there was no aspiration towards diversity. So, from that standpoint, I only met kids from other backgrounds once the Los Angeles City School District began a busing program. That happened when I was in junior high school (or what's now called middle school).

Anna Doel:

What kind of memories do you have from grade school?

Leslie Aiello:

Not many.

Anna Doel:

Did you like going to school?

Leslie Aiello:

I used to love going to school because I was always very mathematical. Math was my favorite subject. What are my memories? As I said, I have no musical ability at all. I remember way back in first or second grade when the teacher asked me if I'd rather paint than go with the rest of the group to sing. One other time, she told me that I should probably mouth the song's words because I couldn't carry a tune—ouch!

Anna Doel:

What kind of books did you like to read as a child? Do you remember?

Leslie Aiello:

I used to read anything and everything. I went from one end of the young adult section of the library to the other end. One summer, I read the entire Arthur Conan Doyle collection. I was very eclectic. My mother went to the library every week to check out books. I have no idea what she was reading at the time. In later life, she liked romance novels. But she did instill in me the normality of going to the library every week to get new books. That's probably where my love of reading comes from, and I still get my recreational reading from the public library.

Anna Doel:

Did you go to the library every week as a family?

Leslie Aiello:

Just with my mother. I'm not aware of my father doing any recreational reading.

Anna Doel:

Do you remember how old you were when you started going to the library on your own?

Leslie Aiello:

I don't think I ever went on my own, and the reason was that it was a little bit far, and we had to go in the car. So, it was always something my mother and I did together. This was mainly in the 1950s when I was in elementary school and junior high.

Anna Doel:

How did you fare in high school?

Leslie Aiello:

I did very well in high school. You could describe me as an overachiever. It meant a lot to me to do well. Perhaps it was insecurity? I remember I got the history prize in high school when I graduated, which astounded me because I didn't particularly like history, but I also got the biology prize, which made me feel good.

Anna Doel:

Did you have friends in school?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes. I had a solid group of girlfriends. There was no concept at the time of boys being included in the friendship group.

Anna Doel:

What did you and your friends do together?

Leslie Aiello:

What did we do together? We went shopping. We, of course, hung out at school together. Even though I'm so bad with music and sound, we had a ukulele band that wasn't particularly good! I so desperately wanted to be part of the group. One of my memories is that we had a very good choir in high school, and all the popular kids were members of the choir. I can remember the look on the face of the guy with whom I was auditioning. He decided my strengths probably lay elsewhere.

Anna Doel:

What did your family do for vacations?

Leslie Aiello:

When I was very young, we went to the national parks. Being in Southern California, we would go to Sequoia and Yosemite in the Sierra Nevada. This was until my mother put her foot down, letting my father know she also wanted a holiday and didn't want to cook over a camp stove. After that, we would go on road trips and stay in motels with swimming pools. I remember going to Palm Springs, Las Vegas, Joshua Tree, and other places in the Southern California area. I hadn't been east of the Mississippi River until my 20s. So, I was very much a West Coast girl.

Anna Doel:

Did you enjoy those vacations?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes. I remember one time when I was around six years old. We went to Yosemite and stayed in the dog camp because our pet boxer came along. They had the fire fall then, where they would have a huge bonfire on the top of one of the Yosemite cliffs and then push it over. Of course, they don't do that anymore, but it was spectacular for a kid.

Anna Doel:

How did you figure out your college plans? How did you navigate whether you wanted to go to college, which colleges to attend?

Leslie Aiello:

There was no question in my family about not going to college.

Anna Doel:

Was that an expectation in your family?

Leslie Aiello:

It was. I was in the first wave of baby boomers. There were a lot of us kids, and one way the school coped was to put us on a mid-year schedule. So, I started kindergarten in January and graduated twelve years later in January. They were trying to space the kids out, and somehow, it was easier for them to accommodate us all this way.

So I was ready to go to college in January, and I remember my parents saying, "Oh, why don't you just go to UCLA?" This turned out to be a good choice, but I really wanted to go to Stanford. My parents convinced me to go to UCLA for the first semester and then transfer in the fall, but I never transferred. I'm sure they breathed a huge sigh of relief because even at that point, Stanford would've been much more expensive. When I started at UCLA, it was \$75 a term. Of course, this was when the California higher education system was growing. It was an excellent academic environment.

Anna Doel:

Starting college, did you know what you wanted to major in?

Leslie Aiello:

Absolutely not. All I knew was that I liked biology. I started with a double major in geology and zoology. I had some idea that I might go into pre-med, but the advisor who was supposed to help me had no interest whatsoever in freshmen and didn't set me up with the proper pre-med courses. By the time I figured this out, I was enamored with an introductory anthropology course.

In my first semester, I learned about an archaeological field school in Cedar City, Utah. I thought, "Gee, I can get eight units by going and digging at the field school," and I was hooked. I thought it was magic to discover prehistory by excavating. I came back and changed my major to anthropology.

I remember sitting in a big lecture class and thinking that it really didn't matter what I majored in because I was going to get married, and I would never have to support myself. I could indulge myself. Of course, that's all politically incorrect now, but this was the early 1960s—a different time.

Anna Doel:

What was your college life like?

Leslie Aiello:

I don't have that many memories of being an undergraduate at UCLA, except that in my first semester, my roommate and 4 other girls on the corridor got pregnant. This was before Roe, and I never saw any of them again after the end of term. There are other good reasons why I don't have many other undergraduate memories. One is that I went on a junior year abroad program

and spent a year in Germany, in Göttingen. I remember much more about that experience than I do about UCLA. At that time, the UCLA Junior Year Abroad program was an immersive program where they gave us an intensive language course - two months of intensive German - and then put us right into the German university. There were no English programs, and they said, "Okay. We'll see you in a year." So, it was very formative for me.

Anna Doel:

How fluent were you in German when you started your journey a year abroad?

Leslie Aiello:

They didn't think I was going to make it. I think it comes down to my lack of facility with anything auditory, but I passed all the courses. My pronunciation could have been better, but by the time I returned after the year, I was fluent in German and could say anything I wanted, but maybe not with the nuance that I would really like to have done.

Anna Doel:

So you spent two semesters, an academic year at the University of Göttingen?

Leslie Aiello:

You're right.

Anna Doel:

It's one of the most well-known universities in Germany. How did it feel? What kind of education did you get there?

Leslie Aiello:

The education was very... well, I was going to say foreign. Of course, it was "foreign" to me as a reasonably naive kid. I was interested in archeology, and they only had classical archeology. I was mystified by having to learn all about Greek statuary, which was German classical archaeology at the time. I remember also taking a psychology course and devising little experiments, but the most important experience was living in an entirely different environment. I must have been 18 or 19 years old. It was incredibly important for me to realize that there was life outside of Southern California.

Anna Doel:

What was different in Göttingen?

Leslie Aiello:

Well, there was so much that was different that it's hard to put your finger on any one thing. Germany still hadn't recovered from the Second World War. So, there was much physical evidence of that. I can remember the food was horrible. It was just that everything was different. However, I did take the opportunity to travel. The Germans had subsidized student travel

programs, and I could go to Egypt, Greece, and Turkey. It was a wonderful experience for me. It gave me the confidence to have my career outside the US.

Anna Doel:

Did you specifically choose those locations to travel to because they were great archeological sites, Turkey, Greece, Egypt?

Leslie Aiello:

Probably. At that stage, I thought, why not? There are these travel programs and groups of students going, and why don't I join in? There was a two-month break between classes, so the idea was to go and see the world!

Anna Doel:

Did you travel on your own?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes.

Anna Doel:

You were not concerned about that, were you?

Leslie Aiello:

At that point, the world was a safer place. Again, I was very naive. My parents were mystified, and they thought if I were going on a university program, it'd be fine.

Anna Doel:

How did you keep in touch with your parents from Germany?

Leslie Aiello:

Aerograms—if you remember the tiny blue, tissue-paper air letters I wrote every week. It was a different time and a different place.

Anna Doel:

Was there any particular story from the history of archeology that you found fascinating?

Leslie Aiello:

When I was an undergraduate, it was a magic time in East Africa. This was when Louis and Mary Leakey dug fossils out of Olduvai Gorge. In middle school in 1959, I was 13 years old, and I remember my biology teacher bringing in a picture from The Illustrated London News of Nutcracker Man (OH5), *Paranthropus boisei*. OH5 is a beautiful skull that we now know represents a side-branch of human evolution, but Louis Leakey thought it was in a straight line to modern humans. The Leakeys continued to find more fossils throughout my undergraduate years. Later, there were more excavations further north in the Kenyan Rift Valley and then into

Ethiopia. There were just wonderful fossils being discovered and so many interesting questions about the pattern of early human evolution. That's ultimately why I decided to go to the UK for my PhD, but that was a few years later.

Anna Doel:

When you returned from Germany and finished your senior year in college, did you move on straight from there to a master's program?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, straight on. I was urged on because I had done quite well as an undergraduate, and got a full teaching scholarship for my PhD. But at the time, somebody told me that no one who'd ever gotten this scholarship had completed their PhD!

Anna Doel:

So you were a master's student at UCLA somewhere during the Vietnam War?

Leslie Aiello:

Of course, yes.

Anna Doel:

How did that feel?

Leslie Aiello:

It was a notch down from the frenzy of Berkeley, but we had our demonstrations in Southern California. I still blame the Vietnam War for my inability to speak French because, in 1968, I knew I would go on excavations in the south of France, in the Dordogne, and I started taking French classes. I was very enthusiastic about it. The anti-war demonstrations shut down the university, and my French class went poof, but it was a very exciting and empowering time.

I don't know what I would've done if I'd been a guy and been drafted. I had a friend who put a bullet through his foot so he wouldn't have to go. I had another friend who went to Canada because he'd gone to boot camp and when he finished, he realized that everybody with a college degree was going to Vietnam. Everybody without a college degree was going to Germany. That's when he left and went to Canada.

I knew another guy who went into the Navy because he thought he'd have a better chance of surviving than being a foot soldier. So, there was a whole spectrum. Then I knew a guy who went, and just like Good Morning Vietnam, he became a DJ. He had a very positive experience. It was an interesting time.

Anna Doel:

So when you finished your master's, you went on to teach for a few years. Is that correct?

Leslie Aiello:

I married one of my fellow graduate students, and we lived in the hills above Los Angeles in Malibu, basically living the hippie life.

Anna Doel:

Oh. Could you tell me more?

Leslie Aiello:

Well, as I said, it was the 1960s. It was a different time. We had been very fortunate to find this little cabin in the Malibu hills. It was a magical place. Oak trees surrounded us, and we raised chickens, but we had to support ourselves. We both had master's degrees, and it was at a point where you could get teaching positions, particularly adjunct teaching, with a master's degree. My then-husband and I spent time teaching in the junior and state colleges. This went on for about four years.

This experience gave me confidence in speaking. As a child, I had a severe speech impediment, making it very difficult for me to stand up in front of a group of people. This economic imperative helped me overcome my fear of public speaking.

Anna Doel:

Was it helpful in overcoming your speech impediment to just keep on speaking to people because you have to, to talk to students?

Leslie Aiello:

I stuttered badly. When I am nervous, I still stutter or hesitate. It's strange, but I never realized I stutter. It just consciously wasn't a thing for me. But even now, I never listen to any recording of my voice. In the UK, I did a lot of radio (and some TV) work with the BBC and ITV (the independent broadcasting network). However, I never would do it until I met a BBC producer at a dinner party, and she said, "Why don't I call you up and I can interview you about human evolution?" my response was, "Absolutely not. I don't do that."

We discussed it, and she said, "Well, come in and try it. We won't do it live, and we can edit out any issues." Because I never listened to the recording, I have no idea how it came across, but they kept calling me. So that gave me more confidence that I could speak in public. In California, before I went to the UK, you had to have a certificate to teach in junior colleges. They turned me down the first time because of my speech impediment. I appealed. Everything went well, and the guy who interviewed me looked at me quizzically and said, "You don't have a speech impediment." So whatever happened, the speech fairies were on my side at that time, and that's how I was able to start teaching in California.

Anna Doel:

What made you decide to go back to school for the PhD?

Leslie Aiello:

Using a British term that is very appropriate, the short answer is that my husband found me “redundant to requirements.” I was dumped, and it hit me very hard. But I knew I had to redirect my life. At that point, I was teaching at a state college in Southern California, Cal State Northridge, and a colleague there had just returned from doing her PhD in the UK. Her husband had died of melanoma when she was in her mid-20s, leaving her with two small children. She went to the UK to reconstruct her life, encouraged me to do the same.

It was fortuitous in two ways. First, she helped me make all the arrangements, and second, in the early 1970s, the UK was the center of human evolution research. To backtrack just a bit, after my husband left, I went back to graduate school at UCLA because I thought that I could use anthropology as a stepping stone to rebuild my life. My supervisor left after about nine months, and I was left at UCLA with no supervisor.

So, to make a long story short, I landed in the UK on January 1, 1975. At that time, there was no coursework for a PhD, and you started immediately on your thesis. I was at a medical school because the professor of anatomy, Michael Day, was one of the leading comparative anatomists interpreting the material from East Africa. I desperately wanted to be involved and to go to East Africa.

So it worked out beautifully. But the first year I was there was very difficult because I was coming to grips with the solo life, was in another new environment, and had no peers at medical school. Medicine in the UK is an undergraduate degree and I was quite a bit older than the other students. It was challenging to find a community my age. But I got through it and was hired at University College London. For the first four years, I worked on temporary annual contracts. University College London was unique in the UK, in that it included biological and social anthropology in the same department. Biological anthropology in the UK was generally a medical subject, and social anthropology was a social science. University College London was considering doing away entirely with biological anthropology. They hired me to help cover the teaching until a decision was made. I woke up 30 years later and was still there.

Anna Doel:

Is that the department that you came to head?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes. Initially, I was on a temporary contract, and I had to interview for the job each year. Around 1980, I got a full-time permanent contract and worked through the ranks. I got my Chair in the mid-1990s and became Head of Department shortly after that.

Anna Doel:

What was the state of the field when you began your career? What were the research questions that people were asking?

Leslie Aiello:

When I started my PhD at UCLA and then restarted it in the UK in the mid-1970s, most people interested in the earlier phases of human evolution studied skulls and teeth – and there were some spectacular fossils to work with. However, nobody was looking at the postcranial fossils – the evidence from the neck down. So my big research question was what they were like. Were they walking like us? What were their feet like? Were they climbing trees? My PhD focused on these questions. What did our earliest ancestors look like, and how did they move?

As with everything, things changed. In the context of my research, I employed an analytical technique called allometry. Allometry is the change of shape in relation to the change of size. This technique led me to my research on the evolution of the brain. So, my research focus gradually changed from postcranial evolution to the evolution of the brain and cognition in the early hominins.

Anna Doel:

Were there any ideas in the field that you wanted to challenge in the early stages of your career?

Leslie Aiello:

In the early stages of my career, I didn't have the confidence to challenge anything. I wanted to make an impact but didn't know where to begin. I was carried along by everything that was happening in the field at that time. And I enjoyed being in London, which at the time was the center of what was happening in the field of human origins.

Anna Doel:

Could you tell me a bit more about those new discoveries?

Leslie Aiello:

Students always feel lucky to study human evolution because so much seems to be discovered yearly. Now, the big focus is on genetics, particularly ancient DNA, but at that time, it was the new and exciting fossils coming out of eastern Africa. When I started out in human evolution as an undergraduate in the 1960s, you could put all the known fossils in a relatively small box. Human evolution was interpreted as a straight line extending from modern humans back to almost 11 million years.

Now, there are about 25 species, and the evolutionary tree is a bush with many branches. It was exciting to be at the beginning of this revolution. It was a time when new pieces to the puzzle that no one thought existed were constantly being discovered. The field was very small, and we all knew each other, and there was tremendous excitement in the air. While doing my PhD in the late 1970s, I was carried along by all this excitement. There was so much to discover and interpret. I did come to challenge the status quo when I began to work on the evolution of the brain. This happened almost by accident. A colleague asked me to write an entry on primate energetics in an encyclopedia. This isn't as odd as it may seem because, at that time, primate energetics focused primarily on locomotor energetics – the amount of energy it takes to move

and climb. In preparing this encyclopedia entry, I realized that there was a significant question that no one could answer. The question was where the energy came from to fuel the large human brain.

If you plot basal metabolic rate against body size, there is a highly correlated relationship, and humans are consistent with all other mammals. This is called the Kleiber relationship. If you plot brain size against body size, you get another strain line, but humans fall way above it. For our body size our brains are about three times larger than would be expected in an average mammal of our body size. So the question is, where does the energy come from to run this big, expensive human brain? No one could answer that at the time.

I reasoned that there had to be a trade-off somewhere else in the human body. To support the large human brain, some other expensive organ (or organs) had to reduce its energy requirements. I used my background in allometry (the relationship between body size and shape/size of other tissues) to answer the question. It turned out that the reduction in the size of the human digestive system almost perfectly balanced the energy requirements of the large human brain. This idea has been called “brains and guts in human evolution” or the Expensive Tissue Hypothesis. If you compare a non-human primate of our body weight to a human, the non-human primate has a relatively smaller brain and much larger intestines. Humans are exactly the opposite. The relationship fitted almost perfectly with what we knew about the fossil record then. About 2 – 1.5 million years ago, *Homo erectus* (sometimes called *Homo ergaster* in Africa) appeared in the fossil record.

In the early 1990s, we thought that there was a major skeletal change between the earlier fossils and *Homo erectus*. *Homo erectus* was the first fossil hominin that looked like us, with long legs, narrow bodies, and larger brains than the earlier hominids, but not quite as large as modern humans. The appearance of *Homo erectus* correlated with evidence of higher-quality diets in the archeological record, implying meat-eating. Stone tools also appeared around this time. The evidence pointed to the conclusion that our ancestors had transitioned to a high-quality, animal-based diet that allowed them to reduce their digestive system because the food was easier to digest. The digestive system became smaller while the brain was becoming larger. It all balanced very nicely!

What happened, and what was astounding to me, was that this conclusion provided the foundation for the field of energetics as applied to human evolution. Of course, this was 25 years ago, and the field has continued to grow. Some exciting research has established that the brain-gut tradeoff is only a tiny part of the metabolic adaptations seen in modern humans. I was in the right place at the right time. Returning to the original question of challenges, this was also my first introduction to heated academic disagreement. I had one colleague with other ideas, who went out of his way to diminish my work and credibility.

Anna Doel:

How heated did it get?

Leslie Aiello:

It got heated and reached the point where he was spreading a rumor that I'd stolen the data from a student. Later, when editing the *Journal of Human Evolution*, this same person threatened to sue me because I was going to publish a paper of a young colleague, and he wanted one of his students to publish a similar paper. It was just academic pettiness.

Anna Doel:

How did you take it?

Leslie Aiello:

It was a wake-up call. It made me realize that if you believe something and have the evidence to support your interpretation, you stand up for it.

Anna Doel:

Feel free to ignore this question, but would you be okay with saying the name of that colleague? Do you think it is relevant for the history of your field?

Leslie Aiello:

No, it's probably not relevant.

Anna Doel:

I understand.

Leslie Aiello:

Another similar thing happened earlier in my career. Before getting involved with brain research, I realized a major unmet need in the field. No anatomy book compared human anatomy to the anatomy of other primates, which would help students interpret the anatomy of the fossils. So, over one weekend, I wrote a book proposal for a *Handbook of Human Evolutionary Anatomy*. The following Monday morning, I got a phone call from the publisher saying that they were very interested. My first thought was, what had I done? Can I write this thing? I talked a colleague, Chris Dean, into co-authoring it with me. He was a specialist on dentition (teeth). He wrote the anatomy from the neck up, and I wrote the anatomy from the neck down. There's a lot on the neck because of this! The book is still in print 35 years later. We had great fun with it.

I brought the book up because I was not supported by a particular individual, my PhD supervisor. When the publisher finally showed me anonymized reviews of the book proposal, there was enough information in one letter to identify my supervisor. He told the publisher that I wasn't capable of doing the book. He always had a problem with me because I wasn't medically qualified. There was a happy ending, however. About 10 years ago, he apologized for not treating me well as a student or young colleague.

Anna Doel:

You were working on a PhD in anatomy, but you were not a medical doctor.

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, exactly. In the UK then, biological anthropology, human biology, and human evolution were medical fields taught in medical graduate programs. My supervisor was a medical doctor who had become a professor of anatomy. The fact that I was the only woman in the program wasn't an issue. My advisor had been in the first integrated cohort at an originally female medical school, so he was used to working with women. The issue was that I wasn't medically qualified.

Anna Doel:

Well, in this light, who would you nominate to be your mentors, if anyone?

Leslie Aiello:

At that time, there were three people, without whom I don't know whether I would have gotten through my first year in the UK. Working at the medical school was very isolating. The three were all at the Natural History Museum in London. Chris Stringer, who has become well known in human origins research, and Peter Andrews, who specialized in fossil apes, had just arrived to take up their first academic positions. The third was Theya Molleson, who had been at the museum for a while. They all encouraged me differently and gave me the confidence to continue. I don't think I ever had an academic discussion with my PhD advisor. I tried it one time, and all he asked was if I was a depressive.

Anna Doel:

That's rude.

Leslie Aiello:

Another story is when I was having the oral exam for my PhD. My examiners were my advisor and an external examiner, another anatomist interested in human evolution. The oral exam lasted less than half an hour. I don't think either one of them had read my thesis. My PhD advisor had asked me before I submitted the thesis whether there was anything in it that I hadn't already presented in a talk. I said that there might be bits and pieces. The other person had come down to London from Bristol and, I suspect, only read as much as the train journey allowed him to.

I felt cheated. I had spent years working on the thesis, and they didn't have the respect (or interest?) to discuss the academic issues. By this time, I had a full-time job at UCL and the support of other colleagues. I was in an environment familiar to me. I was on my own as an academic. As an aside, because of this experience, I always ensured that my students were treated well by their examiners in a celebratory environment.

Anna Doel:

Talking about museums, anthropology is probably the closest discipline to museums. What is your connection with museum culture?

Leslie Aiello:

In the UK, my research on comparative anatomy and its application to human fossils was based in museums. I used museum collections extensively. I also had friends who worked in museums, but museums weren't my full-time job. Although, I used to get bench space at the Natural History Museum for my research. Over my entire academic career, I never had a research lab. When I was head of the Department at UCL, I succeeded in getting Anthropology a new building. The building now has an Aiello Lab, but I'd left before it opened.

In recent years, I have been on the Board for the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, which has opened up the museum world to me. I have particularly enjoyed learning about museums' governance and helping guide their strategic planning and outreach activities.

Anna Doel:

What is the place of field research the opposite of the museum in your professional life?

Leslie Aiello:

I did quite a lot of archeological fieldwork before I went to the UK. After I arrived in the UK, the opportunities to work in East Africa that I had hoped for didn't materialize. I was always a museum worker and a theoretician. There can be conflict between the fieldworkers and the museum people.

One of my male colleagues, who, like me, was primarily a museum worker and theoretician, felt very threatened by the field workers, who let it be known that they were the "real" paleoanthropologists precisely because of their fieldwork. I was the first female editor of the *Journal of Human Evolution*, and I instituted an annual editorial board dinner. A trivial but obvious example of machismo in the field was that all the fieldworkers ordered steak for dinner, and everyone else ordered chicken, salmon, or vegetarian meals.

I have also seen this tension in social anthropology. Here, the theoreticians strived to establish dominance over the field workers who wrote the ethnographies. It also varies by personality, whether common interests or rivalries exist in the field at a particular time.

Anna Doel:

Looking at the entire span of your career, what can you say about gender dynamics and gender issues in your field? Has there been any change? What presence and visibility did women have when you started? What's the trajectory?

Leslie Aiello:

Younger women today believe they've made so many strides. I don't know how correct that is. There are a few reasons for this. I'll start with the UK versus the US. When I went to the UK, it was a much smaller group. I was the only woman at that time within my cohort of students and young professional colleagues, but we all appreciated that we had strengths and weaknesses, and most of us got along very well.

It was different in the US then, particularly in human evolution. Some of my female colleagues who went through their careers in the US had considerable issues with male colleagues demeaning them. I only ran across this once concerning the analytical technique of allometry, which was new then. A person in the US was working on similar issues to mine. He organized a big conference on the subject and didn't invite me. In later years, when we were both co-editors of the *Journal of Human Evolution*, he told me that I shouldn't be upset about it. He said he realized I had the primary publication on the topic but that I should understand that he had been up for tenure!

Anna Doel:

That's not a good excuse.

Leslie Aiello:

It isn't. I was lucky to be secure in what I was doing in the UK. Anthropology has a long tradition of women in the field. In human evolution, there was Mary Leakey and now Meave Leakey, and in Social Anthropology and Primatology, there have been many well-known female anthropologists. At UCL, the position of women in anthropology was not questioned. For example, you could always tell the anthropologists when we were in the Senior Common Room for coffee after lunch. We were dressed much less formally than many of them, and we always had 40% to 50% women in the group. I was hired way back in the 1970s by a female head of department. Anthropology is different from other STEM disciplines, where women have had a real fight to get into the field. However, we still had our issues.

Anna Doel:

How collaborative is your work?

Leslie Aiello:

It's more collaborative than social anthropology. Social anthropology has always had the ethos of the lone field worker going out and living with the group and immersing themselves in society. Archaeology and paleoanthropological fieldwork are much more collaborative. A research team is essential. Modern genetic research is also a team enterprise. From my experience at the Wenner-Gren Foundation, social anthropology is still primarily a solitary discipline emphasizing individual participant observation. There are some exceptions to this in larger comparative projects carried out in different locations by different researchers, but the field is still largely solitary.

Anna Doel:

I hope you don't think this question is completely dumb.

Leslie Aiello:

There are no dumb questions.

Anna Doel:

Oh, there are. Here comes one: Has the brain-gut trade-off ever been misinterpreted, or has it had some pragmatic applications in the public realm that you know of?

Leslie Aiello:

I'm probably the only anthropologist cited in the California Cattleman Magazine. I've also had some very interesting talks with vegetarians and vegans. My point has always been that a vegetarian or vegan diet is a luxury of modern times. We rely on a huge food chain, and of course, we have cooking. We are also more aware of the nutrients that we need to survive, and we can supplement our diet. Our ancestors did not have this luxury in the past.

My husband, who had been a social anthropologist, and I visited his village in Central Nigeria, on several occasions. This group was largely vegetarian, but not by choice. We used to joke that if a cow walked through the village, it wouldn't make it out the other end. We used to look forward to the chief's invitation for dinner because he had chicken in the soup. It's difficult for many of us today to realize what living in a basic agricultural or hunting and gathering society was like without the modern food chain.

Humans need, on average, 2,000 to 2500 calories a day. The question is how our ancestors acquired these calories. We now know that humans have an elevated metabolic rate. There is an argument that we couldn't have satisfied our energetic needs without the invention of cooking to make plant and animal foods more digestible. However, the archaeological record of habitual use of fire only goes back to about 500,000 years ago. Our brains expanded, and body sizes increased beginning about 2 million years ago. What was happening? There's an interesting idea going around now that we ate rotten meat. This sounds repulsive to us now, but there's a solid ethnographic record that perhaps this was one way to break down food that would make the nutrients available. There is also evidence that cutting food into small pieces or pounding it would help the digestive process.

Anna Doel:

Isn't there evidence in ethnic cultures around the world of this practice, rotting food?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, and with our interest in the microbiome now, one of the arguments is that our gut bacteria help to protect us against some of the adverse effects of eating rotten food. This is one of those bits of lateral thinking that has caught on in the last year or two. It could have helped our ancestors get the nutrition they needed to expand the brain. It is a hypothesis to be tested, among many others. The evolution of the human diet is a fascinating area of research.

Anna Doel:

Leslie, would you mind telling me a little bit about your husband?

Leslie Aiello:

My husband was Richard Bruce. He passed away in 2019. This was a year before the pandemic, but it brought home how rapidly life can change. He left the house one afternoon and didn't come home. He had a massive heart attack.

He was a very unusual person. The best place to start is with a story. One of his work colleagues once approached me and asked me if there was anything I could do about Richard? He wasn't the neatest person, and his coworker was always very well-turned out. It was the one time I came up with the proper response at the right time. I said, you should have seen what I started with!

Richard had come from a difficult background. He had two siblings, a brother and a sister. His mother was a single mother, and several men were involved. She had, as it turned out, serious mental challenges, and he and his siblings basically raised themselves. In the British system at the time, children took the 11 Plus exam when they were 11 years old. He and a friend were the first two kids in the memory of his school to pass the exam. The headmaster of the school gave the whole school a holiday to celebrate. This success placed him on the college track. Higher education was entirely free in the UK when he reached college age, and he completed a degree in economic and political theory at the London School of Economics.

He'd graduated and almost immediately went off to the Six-Day War in Israel, arriving on the seventh day. He ended up spending time on a Kibbutz, where he met a French anthropologist and went to Burkina Faso with her for a year. When he came back, it wasn't so much that he wanted to do a graduate degree in anthropology as he wanted to return to Africa.

He loved Africa. I think his experience there gave him the security he lacked as a child. When he returned from Burkina Faso, he enrolled at UCL. He became involved with an exchange program where he was supposed to spend six months teaching in Nigeria, and then he'd have six months to do fieldwork. His advisor, who had set the program up, lost interest in it and the exchange students. Richard ended up spending seven years in Nigeria. He is one of the only people I know who returned with more money in his grant than he started with. He lived a very basic life in the village and became involved in a few business ventures,

He never finished his PhD but went into politics and became a trade union organizer. He used to say that he learned everything he knew about politics in the village in Nigeria. He was very involved in Labour Party politics in the UK, and he said a lot of it came from the fact that he wouldn't have survived without a free orange juice program when he was growing up. He came from an alternative background and, as a consequence, had a strong social conscience.

Anna Doel:

Thank you, Leslie. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Anna Doel:

Today is April 28th, 2023, and we're back with Leslie Aiello for our follow-up session. And I think we're going to open with your role in the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Leslie Aiello:

I will start with an introduction to the Wenner-Gren Foundation. It is a quirky private foundation established with a \$2 million endowment by Axel Wenner-Gren in 1941. As the director of Electro-Lux, he was one of the wealthiest men in the world. His genius was to realize that every woman would want a household vacuum cleaner. He was basically the Warren Buffett of the time. He ran into trouble with the American IRS, the tax office. He was Swedish but sold a yacht in Florida, and the IRS got wind of it. Our foundation was set up overnight on Valentine's Day to shelter his \$2 million. In the ensuing years, he wasn't 100% happy that he lost access to that money. The foundation became one of the primary funders of anthropology, but it was initially established with a much broader remit to support general education and science. The initial idea was that Wenner-Gren would give his entire fortune to the foundation. If this had happened, it would have been something like the Mellon or Ford Foundations. One of Axel Wenner-Gren's friends, Paul Fejos, who was the foundation's first director, convinced Wenner-Gren that if he wasn't going to give his entire fortune to the foundation, they had to focus on a small area. This was during the Second World War, and Fejos argued that anthropology was both a small discipline and underfunded, but it had the potential to reunite mankind.

That is how the Wenner-Gren Foundation came to be focused exclusively on anthropology. And that \$2 million now is worth over \$200 million. My role at Wenner-Gren, and one of the things that attracted me to leave my job in London, was to give away money. We didn't fundraise, so the position had no fundraising or development aspect. And honestly, my talents aren't in fundraising. What excited me was the opportunity to help move the field forward, particularly, to help young people in their research and careers. It was very seductive for me. My husband and I thought we had room for one more new adventure in life, and moving to New York was that adventure.

Anna Doel:

Why did your husband agree to this move?

Leslie Aiello:

He was a trade union organizer in the UK and was on the National Executive of the Union of Communication Workers, the union for the Royal Mail. He thought that maybe he'd done about all that he could do at the time, and he wanted to take early retirement. At the same time, I also felt that perhaps I had gotten as far as I could in London. I had my Chair in anthropology at University College London. I'd been head of the department and was head of the graduate school. I could have continued to be happy in my career there until retirement. But we were both looking for something exciting and something new. So we were both quite happy to move. Also,

the salary I received from the foundation more than compensated for the loss of his salary. So he retired and came with me. In New York, he became quite active in local politics. That's how he kept himself busy, interested, and entertained. It turned out to have been a good decision for both of us!

Anna Doel:

Taking this leadership position at the Wenner-Gren, did it mean leaving academia for you?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes and no. Colleagues and friends used to say, "Well, what about your research? Why are you giving up this research career?" But I wasn't. I was expanding it. And Wenner-Gren was the first time I'd had a nine-to-five job in my life. I discovered there were things like evenings and weekends, and I had time to expand my interests. So yes, I backed away a bit from original research, but while at Wenner-Gren, I had two papers that were the most highly cited papers in their respective journals. One was in *Current Anthropology*. No, excuse me, the *Current Anthropology* paper had been written before I arrived in New York. The one written at Wenner-Gren was in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. I also had a paper in *Science* at that time. I could continue to be involved in research successfully, but I also had time to explore other interests.

Anna Doel:

Speaking about the Journal of Physical Anthropology for a moment, could you tell me a little bit about this shift in terminology?

Leslie Aiello:

We changed the name while I was president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, now the American Association of Biological Anthropologists. The reason for this is that physical anthropology carries much racist baggage. And there was considerable concern, particularly among our younger members. They wanted a fresh start for the field. The feeling was that "biological anthropology" reflects current interests in the field, including everything from evolutionary biology to human biology and genetics. The field wanted to distance itself from the "racial science" that characterized so much of the discipline in the early 20th Century.

In addition, the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* and the American Association of Physical Anthropologists were founded by Aleš Hrdlička, the Smithsonian curator of human evolution at the time. Many remembered him for his racial proclivities and collecting practices that did not match modern research ethics. At the same time, we instituted the name change, we de-emphasized his involvement with the association. So, we went through a reckoning, and I hope we provided a platform for our younger colleagues to rethink what discipline should be moving into the future. And, of course, this also involves parallel trends in diversifying the field by encouraging young scholars from all backgrounds to participate in modern biological anthropology.

Anna Doel:

How has Wenner-Gren contributed to these two trends?

Leslie Aiello:

I was President of Wenner-Gren from 2005 to 2017, and during this time, our interests in diversifying the field and in anthropological ethics were developing. In a way, I was the link between the old and new foundations. These topics were a constant source of discussion. How could a relatively small funding organization affect change and still meet our mission of funding research excellence? We could only fund 15% of the applications we received, and a good percentage of our money went to doctoral students. A smaller slice went to professional colleagues, and we funded conferences, workshops, and various other smaller programs.

Many other programs in the field bring diverse students into the discipline at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our funding began at the doctoral level and was primarily oriented towards funding excellence in research and research practice. However, we did have fellowship initiatives to support promising students from developing countries to study for their doctorates at world-class institutions. We also emphasized diversity in attendance at any conference or workshop we funded. Engagement with research participants was also one of our initiatives, and I believe we were the first anthropological funding organization to have a grant specifically for this purpose.

The Engaged Anthropology grant provided money to our grantees to return to their research area, engage with their research participants, and disseminate results. In many cases, western anthropologists do their research and then leave. The people they were working with never see them again. So, we developed this program to encourage continued interaction between the researcher and his or her community. Since my retirement, this program has been dramatically expanded by my successor.

Anna Doel:

Could you tell me a bit more about engaged anthropology?

Leslie Aiello:

Engaged anthropology is simply engaging and collaborating with the people who are your research informants or research participants. These are the people who help you develop the research, help you carry out the research, and expect to derive some benefit from the research results. So rather than studying "subjects," you're working with the community to further the research. This is applicable in all areas of anthropology. For example, in my field of human evolution, engagement would involve the local communities in the study from the planning stages to the interpretation of the discovered fossils.

One of my favorite examples of this is in Kenya. We funded an employee of the Kenya National Museums to excavate some of the fossil-rich sites around Lake Turkana. The local Turkana pastoralists felt he was making money from their fossils. Our funding allowed him to go back and talk to the pastoralists about the scientific importance of these fossils, the fact that they weren't worth anything monetarily, and to get them involved in the excitement of the research. The initiative turned out to be quite successful. He was also able to bring some of the pastoralists to Nairobi to visit the museum.

I should say something more about our fellowship program to support the training of students from the developing world. A particular part of this program funds African students to study at the major South African Universities, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand. We hoped to stop the brain drain of talented African anthropologists, and we have had some good success with this.

Anna Doel:

Is this a Wenner-Gren project? Is it continuing still?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, it is continuing. These are the Wadsworth Fellowships. The Wadsworth International Fellowship funds doctoral study anywhere in the world, and the Wadsworth African Fellowship funds African students who want to study in South Africa. The program is named after Frank Wadsworth, who was the chair of our board for a long time and did a tremendous amount to forward the mission of the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Anna Doel:

Could you say a bit more about navigating the Wenner-Gren? I'm sure it's a complex body and decisions have to be made on several levels, and there's also communication and diplomacy and getting along with people and getting your ideas through and supporting others or maybe not supporting others.

Leslie Aiello:

That's a very broad question. One of the advantages of the Wenner-Gren Foundation is that there are no living descendants of our founder, Axel Wenner-Gren. So, there is no family involvement in the foundation. I was only responsible to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees approves any decision about changing programs or shifting the allocation of funds. I came to them with ideas, and they'd say, "Yes, that sounds great. Let's do it." Or not! The biggest challenge I had was their worry that anthropology did not have a positive public perception.

This is not true of the entire field. The public seems always interested in new human fossils or new insights from archaeological research. Biological anthropology and archaeology are not difficult to "sell" to the public. However, social anthropologists have a difficult time communicating their research. As a result, we decided to divert funds to launch an online magazine called SAPIENS. Its mission is to make anthropology available to the interested layperson. It was a huge learning curve for all of us. But it now gets millions of views a year, has an active podcast program, and provides internship and other training opportunities to anthropologists interested in public outreach.

The success of SAPIENS is not down to me. We have a very creative editor, Chip Colwell, who took the initiative and ran with it. From the start, we wanted to be very professional. We employed science writers to help the anthropologists develop their content. Our goal was to make the research accessible and attractive to a general audience. One goal is to train anthropologists to be public scientists and intellectuals. It has been exciting, but it has also represented a significant change for the foundation from funding research to funding the

dissemination of research. But the chair of my Board at that time said not to worry about it. If you don't gamble, you don't succeed! And, of course, it was excellent advice.

Anna Doel:

Could you give an example of the kind of story that would be in SAPIENS?

Leslie Aiello:

As I said, SAPIENS isn't my baby, but it makes people aware of the humanity of individuals who aren't from your own culture. It is hard to come up with a single example. The successful stories are human interest stories, including the excavation of toilets in the Roman Empire or the tradition of kissing across cultures. It focuses on the aspects of human diversity and lifestyle that are innately interesting to all of us. It makes people aware that anthropology is both exciting and relevant. We rely on students, colleagues, and professional journalists to make pitches to us about stories. The editor's job is to pick out compelling stories for those surfing the web and looking for interesting things to read.

Anna Doel:

Has Wenner-Gren ever been interested in creating teaching tools? I'm sure SAPIENS is being used as a teaching tool?

Leslie Aiello:

There are so many good, accessible articles in SAPIENS because it is now about seven years old. There is a significant body of material available. I know of one young colleague who designed her first-year anthropology course around SAPIENS. I believe the editor wants to move forward with developing teaching plans. However, since I am no longer involved with the foundation, I don't know how far they have gotten with this yet. The focus of the foundation is still on research. However, in the past few years, its mission has been expanded to include helping anthropologists advance anthropological knowledge, build sustainable careers, and amplify the impact of anthropology within the wider world.

We have also always focused on internationalization and diversity in anthropology. We don't want anthropologists to work in silos or echo chambers. We insist that our funded workshops, symposia, and conferences include participants worldwide. In our conference funding, we prioritize applications that use funds to offset registration fees and travel expenses for individuals who would otherwise be unable to attend the meeting. This includes international colleagues as well as students. This approach has proven to be highly successful for networking purposes.

Anna Doel:

Could you say a bit more about bigger meeting programs and smaller meeting programs at Wenner-Gren?

Leslie Aiello:

We have a very successful conference and workshop program, and we also have a separate symposium program. The symposium program is our baby. We used to own a castle in Austria called Burg Wartenstein, which was the intellectual center for anthropology from the late 1950s through the 1970s. The foundation staff would decant to Austria yearly and host waves of

anthropologists for week-long and sometimes two-week-long meetings. The participants were also treated very well. A series of landmark volumes emerged from these events, which were influential across the field. The foundation continues to run these meetings, although we no longer own the castle. Castles are costly! We now publish these meetings as special issues of our journal, *Current Anthropology*. The foundation has an active role in organizing these symposia and, of course, in ensuring an output appears.

We also fund conferences and workshops organized by the applicant for funds. International anthropological associations generally organize our funded conferences. And, as I said earlier, the money is primarily designed to ensure a diverse group of attendees. So, the money typically goes to funding students or international colleagues. Our funded workshops are small workshops designed to bring about 20 colleagues together. We emphasize discussion meetings that allow participants to debate ideas and not just listen to papers. Interestingly, most workshop applications come from outside the US. This format seems to be much more popular in Europe. Many of these meetings have been both productive and influential.

Anna Doel:
Why do you think they work?

Leslie Aiello:
They work because they allow a group of people to escape their everyday lives and focus entirely on the academic issue they're discussing. Usually, our symposia and funded workshops require papers to be circulated in advance. The papers are not read at the meetings but discussed and debated. At the symposia, we even ban laptops from the table. We want to avoid any distractions from the topic at hand. We aim to create an environment for engagement and discussion.

Anna Doel:
Is there a requirement for a workshop's output?

Leslie Aiello:
Output is highly desirable, but we have no way of enforcing it. We require a statement of how the meeting's output will be disseminated. Because funding is comprehensive, it is imperative to provide a convincing answer. Frankly, unless the output is available to colleagues, it is hardly worth the money or effort!

Anna Doel:
Is this one of the reasons why you dedicated quite a bit of your time to editorial boards?
Dissemination of knowledge among colleagues?

Leslie Aiello:
Yes. My involvement with editorial boards came earlier in my career. My first serious involvement was when I was the co-managing editor of the *Journal of Human Evolution* during the mid and late 1990s. I am still trying to figure out why I took the position. I may have been crazy, but I did enjoy being the journal's first female editor. I was surprised that as soon as it became known that I would be the co-editor, I began getting messages from female colleagues

saying they felt confident submitting papers to JHE. There was a feeling that male colleagues discriminated against them in this and other journals.

At that point, I had a male co-editor, and when I mentioned this to him, he was astounded. He had no idea whatsoever that there was that impression in the field. And he came from a very high testosterone department. Being in London, I hadn't experienced the level of discrimination that some of my contemporaries in the US experienced. I got a kick out of knowing what cutting-edge research was in the field and having a reason to be in contact with my colleagues. But I also looked at the editorship as a dripping faucet. If I missed a few drips, I would drown.

The job was largely unpaid. However, after a while, I realized that my male co-editor got considerably more financial support from the publishers than I did. The publisher was Academic Press, which is now part of Elsevier. When I queried this with our managing editor, he said my male co-editor needed more support than I did. Why this was so, he couldn't explain! They gave him enough to hire a full-time research assistant. I only had money for (very) part-time secretarial assistance -- everything was still done by mail then. But we were able to reconcile this as the years went on. The person I took over from as editor told me to rotate off after five years. This was good advice. The novelty and excitement dissipate, and it begins to become drudgery. It was time to move on.

Anna Doel:

Is there a sense of burnout as well?

Leslie Aiello:

Yes, very much because, in my case, it was an add-on to my regular teaching and research responsibilities. I didn't get any course release or other support from my university. It is worse now because the publishing world has changed so much. Nothing was online when I was the editor, so it was all done through the mail. On the plus side, the publishers had excellent copy editors and other means of support for the editors. So I didn't have to do any copy editing myself. Now, it has changed. The publishers do no copy editing and give minimum support to the editors. If the editors want papers copyedited or checked in other ways, they must do it themselves. The big commercial publishers seem to have little interest in quality and more interest in profit. Many current editors and members of journal editorial boards are becoming increasingly frustrated with the culture of exploitation. There is tremendous uncertainty about the future of academic publishing.

Anna Doel:

How easy or difficult is the communication with authors? Is it what people call herding cats?

Leslie Aiello:

Not so much. Feedback is always a very sensitive thing. This is even truer for the grantees. If you criticize somebody, it is viewed as an ego attack. Some people crumble under it, and some people come back fighting. At the foundation, I was adamant that every person who applied got feedback. It was my husband who edited the foundation's feedback to make sure nothing inappropriate went out. Some reviewers would get frustrated and question the applicant's intelligence or suitability for anthropology. They would say: "This person has no business in the

field." Or "They're idiots." That type of feedback is not helpful. I used to write a personal note to each of the declined applicants to let them know why their application was rejected, encourage them to rework it and resubmit it for another funding round. I used to say they may disagree with the feedback, but I wanted them to know the basis of our funding decision.

I wanted to give them the confidence to reapply and continue. I had to be very careful because I couldn't promise somebody they'd be funded if they reapplied. But I wanted to let them know that if they addressed the issues, they would have a better chance of being funded in the next round. And I used to get thank-you notes from declined applicants.

Anna Doel:
I bet you did.

Leslie Aiello:
Yes. When we went online the first time to make the funding awards, we were scared that we would get a barrage of angry, unsuccessful applicants. We used to look at our watches and see how quickly we would get the first angry email from an applicant. Each season, we would have one or two very upset people. Usually, these arrived within half an hour of when we sent out the decisions. I used to take particular care of those people because they obviously were very hurt. Theirs was a knee-jerk reaction. I used to review the feedback and then write back, saying, "Your project isn't that bad, but here are the issues." They were looking for some reassurance.

It's the same with journal editing. There was one colleague from the Indian subcontinent who had a very exciting archeological site with an important human fossil. However, he worked independently, mainly outside the academic context necessary to interpret the material. JHE had a culture of support for colleagues in such circumstances. One of the reviewers gave him the comparative data he needed to interpret his material. As editor, I also helped him organize the paper and make his point. We worked together on the paper, and he was ultimately able to publish it in the highest-profile journal in the field. It is satisfying to have the opportunity to help people in their careers.

Anna Doel:
During your tenure at Wenner-Gren, was there something you wanted to happen or to create that didn't get to happen?

Leslie Aiello:
Not really.

Anna Doel:
That's wonderful.

Leslie Aiello:
It's a hard question to answer. If something isn't broken, you don't want to fix it. The one thing that worried me was the prospect of employment for the young people we funded at the doctoral level. About two-thirds of our money went to fund doctoral research during each funding cycle. The problem is that employment opportunities for PhD anthropologists are not good. Our worry

was whether we were doing harm by putting so much money into training young people when their prospect of becoming professional anthropologists was not as good as it had been.

That was an issue that I never really solved. One of our problems was that the field had become so dependent on us because we funded so many students. If I had cut back the funding significantly, every graduate department in the country would have complained to me.

The COVID pandemic posed a massive issue for the foundation because many of our applicants intend to do fieldwork. I was very happy that I retired before the pandemic and didn't have to deal with this issue. But it also allowed the foundation to recharge and change its trajectory. The current president has been expanding the engaged side of the program much more, with a focus on diversity initiatives. For example, the foundation has partnered with the School of Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to support fellowships for Native Americans. The challenge is to know how to use our resources to ensure that anthropology flourishes in the future. The approximately \$6 million the Wenner-Gren Foundations puts into the field each year is not insignificant!

Anna Doel:

What are other funding sources for anthropology?

Leslie Aiello:

Very few. The problem with anthropology is that it is so diverse. It includes everything from social anthropology to primate behavior. The only other major funding source for general anthropology in the US is the National Science Foundation. There is the European Research Council in Europe, and there are national funding bodies like the National Science Foundation in various European countries. Each country has its way of funding or not funding anthropology. There are also a few sources for specific areas within anthropology. For example, the National Institutes of Health is a source for some genetics and human biology projects, and the Leakey Foundation is an important source for research into human evolution.

Anna Doel:

Thinking about the pandemic, how did it change the field? I know at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a statement released by the anthropological community titled Patchwork Anthropology. But that's the extent of my knowledge.

Leslie Aiello:

I don't really know because I had retired by that time. However, the main problem was that no one could travel during the pandemic. The Wenner-Gren Foundation tried to work with each grantee to devise a plan to allow them to complete research that did not involve travel. It was a big challenge. At any one time, we had over 250 active grantees. The foundation worked first to get them home. We always would approve any amount to evacuate grantees from dangerous situations, whether a war zone or, in this case, a pandemic. The big question was how to help people whose careers were interrupted. The applicants had to have a Plan B for about two years during the pandemic. If it turned out that they couldn't go into the field, the question was how they could still carry out their research.

This strategy was quite successful during the pandemic funding rounds. It is only now that people are getting back into the field and doing field-based anthropological research. One sign of pandemic disruption was the submissions to Science magazine. I am on the Board of Reviewing Editors and noticed that many more review papers, as opposed to research papers, were submitted. This is entirely logical when people are isolated.

Anna Doel:

Do I understand correctly that the Wenner-Gren Foundation has an emergency fund?

Leslie Aiello:

There's an emergency fund and a discretionary fund. The emergency fund isn't really a fund, but we have sufficient cash liquidity, so we have available funds if needed. The emergency must be honest, however. For example, when the Brazilian Natural History Museum burnt down, the foundation was able to provide some support. We also provided funds to help some of the anthropologists working with the migrant crisis in Greece, particularly Lesbos. Having the resources to offer some help and support when needed is satisfying.

Anna Doel:

I know you stepped down as president by then, but are you aware of any measures that the Wenner-Gren Foundation took to address the situation in Ukraine? Should be on the same level.

Leslie Aiello:

I don't know. If I remember correctly, we had no active association with Ukrainian universities or researchers. During my tenure, we supported an Institutional Development Grant that helped anthropology departments in areas where a little cash injection would be useful to develop their program.

Anna Doel:

While you were president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, I understand you continued your research. How did the decision to leave academia come about?

Leslie Aiello:

At that time, I felt I had probably done everything I could in London. The funding situation in the UK for my type of human evolution research also could have been better. This was before the European research grants. Because of historical reasons, human evolution fell through the cracks of funding by the British equivalent of the National Science Foundation. Social anthropology had funding, but it was only for research on living people. Archeology was funded, but not if it was carried out in Anthropology departments. In earlier years, human evolution was supported by the Wellcome Trust. This was wonderful, but it was a short-term program. I was on the awarding committee and remember asking ourselves at the last meeting whether any of these proposals would have been funded through their other Wellcome programs. Our answer was no. At the time, the Leverhulme Trust, the soap people, who also funded some human evolution research, put their money into Cambridge University. I was in London and realized that funding for my research was drying up.

This happened about the same time that I became aware of the Wenner-Gren opportunity. I was looking for something new, and having the chance to relieve the funding strains of colleagues was attractive. After I left the UK, the European Research Council became a significant new funding source. However, Brexit has posed a new problem. Sadly, UK research funding for human evolution may not be there anymore, and we may be back to the situation when I left the UK in 2005.

Anna Doel:

Did it feel rewarding at the Wenner-Gren to remedy the financial situation for your colleagues?

Leslie Aiello:

Of course. However, I could only remedy the financial situation for 15% of my colleagues. I used to feel very popular among those 15% and was the wicked witch for the other 85%. We didn't have the resources to fund everybody.

Anna Doel:

I have a sense that you are just as busy now as you were at Wenner-Gren. What takes up your time? What keeps you busy?

Leslie Aiello:

What keeps me off the streets? I keep my hand in academia. As I mentioned, I'm on the Board of Reviewing Editors for Science magazine, and that's fun and interesting. Some weird and wonderful papers are submitted, and I feel like I have my thumb on the pulse of what's happening in the field. I have also been on the Board of the National Museum of Natural History for the past three years. It's a nine-year appointment, so it will keep me busy in the near future. It has introduced me to the museum world at the highest level. The ethical issues they are dealing with are very interesting and important. The Smithsonian has over 34,000 human skeletons, many of which were collected in ways that wouldn't be considered ethical now. I've become much more involved with repatriation and the broader ethical issues surrounding anthropological research. It is also interesting to be involved with wider issues in the museum world, such as public outreach and continuing to engage people, particularly young people, with natural history in a rapidly changing world. I feel honored to be involved. Of course, I am also involved with the APS and enjoy how it has introduced me to a broader intellectual world.

Anna Doel:

What's your current role?

Leslie Aiello:

I'm chair of the Class 2 Nominations Committee. Class 2 is a comprehensive class that spans medicine to paleontology, passing through ecology, biology, biodiversity, and immunology. I am also on the Library Committee covering the APS library and museum. They have just made me the Curator of Art and Material Culture. I am not yet quite sure what that means. I am also on the APS Council and have just rotated off the Program Committee. I've been quite involved with the APS. In my spare time, I have been doing botanical art.

A friend advised me to challenge myself with something new when I retired. I've always liked art but have never given myself the time to do it. Through various serendipitous events, I became aware of a certificate program in botanical art at the New York Botanic Garden.

Anna Doel:
So you're taking it really seriously?

Leslie Aiello:
Yes. I'm getting my certificate. I have completed all the required course units and am in the process of creating a portfolio for my final degree. It's satisfying to stretch yourself, and it has introduced me to the artistic world—a new experience for me. The trick for a successful retirement is to find and pursue(!) what you want to do. It is the first time since childhood that I have had the time and mental freedom to explore my broader interests.

Anna Doel:
It sounds like a lot of fun.

Leslie Aiello:
Yes, that's what it's supposed to be.

Anna Doel:
And do you create paintings? Do you work with watercolors?

Leslie Aiello:
Yes. Traditionally, botanical art has been primarily watercolor art. This is because of the translucency and subtlety possible with this medium. But botanical art also employs graphite (pencil) through pen and ink, to colored pencils, which are great fun because you don't have to wait for the paper to dry. Some people break with tradition and use acrylics or oil paints. But I stick with graphite, pen and ink, colored pencils, and watercolor.

Anna Doel:
Have you done drawing and painting before?

Leslie Aiello:
No. I enjoyed art classes in school. The last time I did any art was when I was an undergraduate. After that, I was caught up in academic research. Life took over, and I didn't seem to ever have enough time. Being retired allows you to rethink what really makes you happy and engaged.

Anna Doel:
For your own research, have you ever kept field journals?

Leslie Aiello:
No, as I said earlier, my career was not based on field work. As a student, I participated in archaeological digs, but always as part of someone else's project. There were two wonderful summer-long field seasons in the Dordogne in southern France. I was working on an Upper Paleolithic archaeology site about 15,000 years old. These were very formative experiences for

me. When I went to the UK for my PhD, I intended to excavate around Lake Turkana in Kenya. However, when I arrived in the UK, my supervisor was no longer involved with the research. So, I did a thesis on the comparative anatomy of the fossil hominins. I have notes and papers relevant to this research and subsequent research, but they are packed away in my basement. I never kept academic journals. However, now, with my botanical art, I keep a daily journal with drawings and impressions of my experiences whenever I travel.

Anna Doel:

Have you been to, or are you planning to go to Kew Gardens for this botanical art project?

Leslie Aiello:

Oh, Kew. Because I lived in London for 30 years, I'm no stranger to Kew. They have a gallery devoted to the work of Marianne North, a very prolific 19th-century botanical artist. I will be in London in a few weeks and will try to make time to go to Kew and see her work. I live around the corner from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which is a real treat but on a much smaller scale than Kew.

Anna Doel:

I was going to ask about that.

Leslie Aiello:

Also, I can get to the New York Botanical Garden in a little over an hour. There is no shortage of things to do in New York!

Anna Doel:

Thank you so much, Leslie.