Transcript of Interview with Chanel Fu by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Chanel Fu
Interviewer: Kit Heintzman
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Location (Interviewee): Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
Location (Interviewer):
Transcribed By: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we talked about:
How being a life science student impacted reaction to the pandemic. That when studying pandemics in classes didn't feel it was personally relevant until it came. Both sisters involved in health care; wanting to become a healthcare worker; volunteering with a 2SLGBTQ organization in Ontario, Canada. Poor experiences in mental health management in Alberta, comparisons with Ontario. Being dismissed by healthcare workers, "it's just stress". Comparing the experience of going to university pre- and mid- pandemic. Online learning: issues of privacy; synchronous and asynchronous education; lack of support for instructors and students; teachers soliciting feedback. University of Toronto as a large institution and student support. Graduating during the pandemic: jobs prospects, more educational prospects. The loss of small social interactions, saying hello in the hallway and seeing communities; the pandemic requiring intentional planning for social contact. Pandemic safety precautions in music making; making music online. Difficulties of artistic collaboration online. Making less music during the pandemic. Hearing about the pandemic in Feb/March 2020, worries about family members in Hong Kong who regularly traveled to China. Anti-racism racism: rhetoric about bat-eating, speculations about the virus origin, judgment about masking. Learning about BLM circa 2013-2014, and noticing increased visibility in 2020; police brutality. The pandemic's disproportionate impact on already marginalized people. Not living with a partner of 2 years and the impact of lockdown; relationship going mostly online; not leaving the apartment for a month; committing with family not to see anyone indefinitely–partner included–and observing others still socializing. The particular impact on queer people who are in the closet. Getting better at communication. Normalized asking consent to touch and needs for safety. Fear/uncertainty about the consequences of actions, exposing others. Freeze response. Double standards about individual-responsibility for the self and others. Media and news consumption. The importance of green space; access to nature as a health issue. The difference between surviving and growing. Sources of information: peer reviewed articles, family, friends, government. Paid sick leave. Volunteer vaccine hunters. Fossil fuels in Alberta; Climate change. Recognizing one's own moment as historically important.

Kit Heintzman 00:01
Hello.

Chanel Fu 00:03
Hi.

Kit Heintzman 00:05
Would you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Chanel Fu 00:11
Yes. So my full name is Chanel Fu. The date is May 10. It's 1:05pm. Eastern Standard Time. And I'm currently located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Kit Heintzman 00:24
And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under Creative Commons License attribution noncommercial sharealike?

Chanel Fu 00:34
Yes, I do concerned.

Kit Heintzman 00:37
Could you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What might you want them to understand about you and the position that you are speaking from?

Chanel Fu 00:47
Yeah, for sure. So, um, so yeah, my name is Chanel. I currently just finished my undergraduate degree in life sciences. I studied neuroscience and psychology at the University of Toronto. Um, I am originally from Calgary, Alberta. I was born and raised in Calgary, and then I moved to Toronto for my undergraduate degree. I have two older sisters. And my family is originally from Hong Kong, and my parents were immigrants. And I'm a first generation Canadian. So yeah, that summarizes me and I got to hear about this interview through my band called cut sleeve, where I'm the lead singer. And I also met some of my really good friends through that band. So yeah, that's me in a nutshell.

Kit Heintzman 01:45
I'd like to start by asking what the word pandemic means to you.

Chanel Fu 01:51
Mm hmm. Um, I think for me, especially as like a life sciences student, like pandemic was always like, kind of, like a colder term. I knew about it as like a, it would like, really shake up the whole world and have these widespread effects. It would be something like a new disease or new illness that scientists and healthcare professionals were not yet too aware of, or maybe had gotten out of control. And to me, a pandemic was sort of, well, before the pandemic happened, something that I really didn't think could, would happen. I didn't really think that it would be something that's like, so relevant these days. And yeah, it was always just something that like I learned about in classes, and I was just kind of like, okay, well, that won't really apply to my life. So, like, that's great knowledge to have. And yeah, I didn't really see that. I, it didn't, it didn't become personally relevant until obviously, very recently.

Kit Heintzman 03:03
I'm curious, what were some of your experiences, like with regard to health and healthcare infrastructure, pre pandemic, to the extent that you're comfortable sharing?

Chanel Fu 03:13

Yeah, definitely. Um, so, I myself had, so it's actually kind of interesting. Like, I think both my sisters are involved in healthcare. And that's, that's the route that I want to take as well, is to become a healthcare worker. So, for me, I always wanted to like reflect on on what healthcare meant to me how I could improve healthcare, because for a bit of context, I do some volunteer work with and two s LGBTQ organization located in Ontario. And one of the things I've been increasingly cognizant of is how healthcare really fails marginalized communities. So I would always really reflect on that. And one of my, one of my main experiences, was with a physician. Back in my hometown back in Calgary. When I was younger, during my adolescence, I had some mental health difficulties, and I really wanted to seek help. And the process was really draining. I didn't really know what to expect. And I felt really unfulfilled from from my treatments, like I felt like they weren't accurate to what I described what I was going through. There wasn't as much assessment as I would have appreciated, I think. And I got prescribed medications that weren't quite right for me. And only was it until I came to Toronto and I met some friends of mine who struggle and have similar experiences to me that they were like, Hey, I think actually, you've been misdiagnosed. And you have this other thing. And that experience for me was really shocking that I guess I'd gone through so many years with actually, like, I think I was very privileged to have a lot of resources around me and still feel like I had been, I've slipped through the cracks, I guess, in a way just because of who I was, and who I am as an East Asian woman, girl at the time. Trying to navigate like mental health was was honestly like, pretty, pretty much just a disaster. To speak a little bit more about that, I think like, without going into like my actual specific diagnoses, like, my struggles with like, focus and memory, really affected like my stress levels. And for the most part, those things were kind of missed, just because people thought like, oh, when you're under, like, familial pressure, or you're just a high achiever, so, of course, you're stressed out. And so that was like, honestly, the main main thing about healthcare that I had an issue with, for the most part of my life.

Kit Heintzman 06:21
Staying in a pre pandemic world, what was your day to day looking like before March 2020.

Chanel Fu 06:29
That was a good reflection. Um, so a regular day, like I, I was a university student, I just graduated, graduated this year. So for the most part, I was attending classes in person, I'd spend some time in the library, maybe catch up with a friend, we had a lot of like on campus study spaces where you can kind of eat and also have socialize, half study. So I go to those sorts of spaces pretty often. I was part of like, a couple of clubs at university. So I might have had like, a club meeting. And of course, with my band, we might have met up for rehearsal. Um, and so yeah, most of my day would be spent at school, sometimes on public transit, like get to different places for like rehearsal and that sort of thing. And then home currently, and home pre pandemic, was, is an apartment with my one of my older sisters. So, yeah, that was pre pandemic life. For me, mostly school focused.

Kit Heintzman 07:41
What are some of the ways that you've had to adapt to day to day living? March 2020, to present

Chanel Fu 07:50
I think one of the main things was, well, two of the two of the things is one was like really adopting my social spaces, and then to learning how to separate like, my downtime, and my school time. So firstly, about like, the social spaces, like, I think the main thing was that I would see a lot of my friends and my classmates, on campus in person, and it was just like a very natural thing to run into people have like a short conversation, or even have classes with people. And then online, or when we shifted, because of the pandemic, like, I felt that I lost touch

with some of my friends, like, we just weren't typically like the type of, I feel like with some relationships, like you, you keep up like conversation. over text, and in some relationships, you just sort of like see each other when you see each other and you don't text much. So it was hard to like, keep in touch with those friends that I didn't, that I didn't text message or call much. And I felt that seeing, seeing my communities was a lot tougher in the pandemic, because it had to be like organized and structured. Like there wasn't that sort of free flowing, like bumping into each other were like attending something together. Like it would be like, oh, let's FaceTime at like 8pm on a Wednesday night, and so it just didn't feel as natural. And I have a lot of anxiety when it comes to like phone conversations. So for the most part of the pandemic, like I was just like really stressed out about like, not seeing my friends not being able to talk to them. And then in terms of like my other life, like my academic life, like it was really stressful for me to shift to online learning because I just like did not have any motivation to really engage in stuff. It was definitely tough, trying to pay full attention or trying to like engage in things but one thing I do really appreciate is that Some of my professors like made an effort to like get to know what students preferred and like what our struggles were. So that was definitely something that like, changed is I felt that there was like more feedback happening, which would be nice in non pandemic times as well. So yeah, I hope that answers that question.

Kit Heintzman 10:25
It definitely does. Would you be willing to explain a bit more about what online learning looked like for you?

Chanel Fu 10:33
Mm hmm. So, I think I was really lucky to not have proctored exams. I think that proctored exams really violate students like privacy. And honestly, it's so inequitable because everyone has a different living situation, not everyone has access to a private space, uh, let alone like a fast enough internet connection like all of these things factor in. So online learning, online testing for me, I was lucky that yeah, I didn't have online proctored tests. Most of my tests were like, open book application based even. Those were tough for me, because of like, the unstructured time. I think like in general, with online learning, unstructured time is just like, can be really hard to adjust to. So it was a little bit of a learning curve. At the beginning of the pandemic, when the all the classes were like, suddenly online, I feel like everyone was kind of like, Oh, what are we doing? Like? Do we hold like zoom classes, or some of my profs just opted to, like, send us the slides. And they were like, okay, just like, read what you want. Everyone's gonna get like, a certain this mark. And if you want to turn things in, like, we'll give you BONUS marks, and then different props would be like, I've recorded previous lectures that are not really relevant for the class, like, listen to them, and I'll test you on those. And I was like, okay, like, sure, I guess. And so, most of it felt like we were just kind of being jostled around, like, for my understanding, like the instructors did not have that much support about what online learning should look like. And the students did not have much support about what to expect from online learning. So definitely finishing like that last semester, last year was really, really tough, because we just Yeah, nobody had any expectations, there was like, nothing really set up. And I was super difficult. But then this year, I felt that it was a lot better when like, the instructors would sort of record our lectures and also hold them live, because it gave us the option to kind of structure our time even when it was so unstructured. And it really allowed us to make connections if we were able to do that. So for example, like I had a lot of difficulty feeling comfortable approaching professors and asking questions when things were in person, like I was always afraid that that like, maybe my classmates would judge me or like I was asking something like, too far off tangent, because I sometimes like that happens in university courses. So I think the the nice thing about the online setting is that when I was able like reaching out to professors ended up being actually easier than I expected. And so I did make more connections.

Chanel Fu 13:36

And I thought I would this year, which I know is not the the universal experience, but it was definitely my experience with online learning. But what I did miss was being able to connect with like my peers. So I was lucky that in some courses, I had like a friend or two, but the ones where I did like I really was just kind of floundering a little bit like I didn't have like anyone to like, bounce ideas off of or like ask, or like double check deadlines and that sort of thing. So I did have to become a little bit more independent in those courses. So yeah, I think definitely my experience was like, due to the nature of like, how large my university is and how students feel here, like I think especially at at University of Toronto, like there has been many, many calls for like, more mental health supports or like, restructuring policies because students are just like, not supported very well. And we've had like on campus suicides for many, many years, and it's always like, very upsetting like this year. I think we just heard about them a lot less I think. I do think we actually still still had some Something happened at the beginning of the year, I'm not too sure on the details now, but because of the pandemic, like these things were swept under the rug a lot more. So I think it's really hard to support students, especially supporting students with like different life circumstances like, I don't know, it's definitely, definitely a big struggle. And things were tough for me, I feel like I already have a lot of resources and a lot of support.

Chanel Fu 15:30

So I can't imagine how difficult things must have been for students with fewer resources and fewer supports, and like, even like students who are like, not adapting, or not used to like the online setting, or like just starting university, that sort of thing. So yeah, I feel like I could talk about this forever. But yet some summarize, like, for me, things were definitely an adjustment. But I still feel very lucky with the outcome of my online learning. Because of the connections I got to make, and because of like the actual opportunity for feedback, but yeah, definitely. There needs to be better support for students in general.

Kit Heintzman 16:15

And what are some of the ways that you adapted in music making and with your band?

Chanel Fu 16:21

Yeah, that was, that was tough, because so my band is we're a five piece band. Some of us are students and some of us are working. And I think even before the pandemic coordinating five people to meet up when everyone's got different schedules was really hectic. Not really hectic, like it was just like, kind of difficult to like, find time where we were all available, especially considering that like, for the most part, this was a we were doing this on a part time basis. So making music for us was difficult because with restrictions that are completely understandable, like not meeting up with people, not in your household, we just we met up maybe like, a few times when restrictions were like lightened up and we would be like masked and distance, keeping the door open for airflow, those sorts of things to make music. But like online making music, I don't think we've come up with a great solution for that. There was one opportunity, we had to write a score for a film, where our rhythm guitarist started off, start SSL started us off, and they wrote a really great like, base for our song. And then like, it got sent to our drummer who added another layer and then the bassist who added added a layer and then to me for adding some keys. And it's much harder to make music that way, because instead of it feeling like collaborative, it's almost like you're building on something that someone else wrote, which, for me, I felt I struggled a lot with it because I was like, I don't actually it's it's really hard to like keep up with what we're, what kind of like vibe we're going for here. It was hard to like even just like the more technical aspects, like the chord changes, like, those weren't

chords that I'd written, or like, I'd practiced with our guitarist, so I was like, a little bit lost there. So yeah, I feel like our music making is definitely like paused for a bit. I think it would be great to like, get together and write songs again. But even like, on an individual level, like I haven't felt like I've been able to, like engage in my music as much as I wanted to just because I feel like at the level of stress I was operating in throughout the year, like I'm done school now. But before I was done school, like I didn't really do any of like, my, my normal activities, like I was saying, like, during the day I used to like, like join a club, like, see my friends, that kind of thing. But like, I felt like everything was like surrounding the school or just like Doom scrolling social media. So there was no time for me to like there was no time and no energy I would say for me to like really meaningfully engage in my art and music like every now and then I'd pick up a guitar and like try and play something but it just doesn't feel the same without like the rest of the band. So yeah, definitely say like our music making has has been very negatively impacted by by the pandemic and everything. Even just like how we interact with each other. It's tough over like group calls and everything because so much of how we bond is over music. So it's much harder when we're all just kind of like talking on a zoom call like dealing with administrative Details

Kit Heintzman 20:04
Do you remember when COVID-19 first hit your radar when you first start to notice it?

Chanel Fu 20:13
Yes, I definitely do remember that, um, I think it was probably February or maybe even early March. Keeping up with the news, we saw, like, oh, there's this new virus, and it's really affecting people in China. And so, I remember so my family for the most part, lives in Hong Kong. And some of them also, like fly to China every now and then. So I remember like, being pretty afraid, because I'm someone who's ethnically Chinese, like I was like, a quote, afraid of like, my family's health, for one part, but also for the racist actions that could stem from all of this, like, I think there's already like this notion that like, I guess in general also say, like, ethnic minorities in North America, like eat foods that are like atypical and especially with like, Asian people, I think there's always like, there's always this idea, like, oh, like, those people eat dogs, like, they eat our pets. Like they're, like, so uncultured. And so like, people would start making jokes about like, oh, like, this man ate a fat and now everyone's like, in a world pandemic. And so, I remember, like, in when, when the news about COVID-19 started first appearing on my radar, I was like, This is gonna be like, so frustrating to hear people, like, just blame people for something that's like, not in their control. Even like, I was ready for that. And I remember one of my classmates. For context, my university has quite a large number of Chinese international students. And yeah, so when like, COVID started becoming more on the rise, like, more and more students would wear masks, which now we understand is very important to the trajectory of the pandemic. And I remember one of my classmates was like, like, they're so ridiculous, like wearing these masks, like, you're like overreacting and all that. And then like, two weeks later, like, we were in lockdown. So I was just like, I think that people are quick to make very, like, broad assumptions about an entire race of people or a whole country of people and just based off of like, the viruses origin even so, yeah, like, I think for me, like realizing that like, this might be like an onslaught of racism and also like fear about my family's health, like everyone else's health was just, it was a lot to deal with, especially what and then on top of that, being unsure about, like, what school would look like for me and like, my more like personal life matters, I guess. So. Yeah, that's what I really remember about the COVID 19 pandemic, like becoming more of a thing. Early 2020. Yeah. Early 2020.

Kit Heintzman 23:46

Would you say a little bit more about your own sort of personal reactions to information as it unfolded, especially at the beginning when information was often contradictory?

Chanel Fu 24:03
Yeah, I think the contradictory information is definitely difficult. So. So yeah, a little bit more about like my own experiences, like, I think like, possibly one of the main experiences, like the thing that really centered the beginning of the pandemic for me was, my partner does not like I don't live with my partner. We've been together for almost two years now. And at the beginning of the pandemic, my family who I live with was just like, No, we really need to lock down like there's no there's no discussion about it. And as like, in my family, like I really do value their opinions and I do. For the most part, I am the youngest of three daughters. So in my role like sometimes I feel You're like a little bit less independent than I might like to be. So when I communicated with my partner that like my family just wanted us to lock down not see each other indefinitely. That was definitely a bit of a struggle, especially because we saw other people who also didn't live together and like still visit each other and everything. So it was hard to like, know what was safe and what wasn't safe. And especially with like, different lockdown levels, like what's open, what's not, who are you allowed to see. Who are you not allowed to see, like, I felt like the fear of not knowing what was like, yeah, the fear of like, not knowing the possible outcomes of my actions just really made me like lock, like shut down in a way like I just kind of stayed in my room. Like, it was not healthy for me as someone who like used to go outside every day, and really enjoy that time outside. Like, there was probably like a month or so I didn't even like leave the apartment because my family was able to like, go get groceries and food and essentials for us. And I was just so afraid I didn't I didn't go along with them. So for me, I really just like hunkered down in a way that was like I think like, I'm always reminded of like, some of the stuff that I learned in like my courses. So like, like with mice, for example, if you like scare them, like, they might run around the cage like crazy. Or they might just like completely freeze and I feel like I really felt that like freezing behavior. Like I just didn't really leave. I didn't exercise. I didn't do anything. I just kind of like stayed in my room called people every now and then. But yeah, for my personal stuff like I definitely just, it was tough. I just like froze up. I didn't see people. I yeah, I think that just about summarizes summarizes it.

Kit Heintzman 27:14
Would you be willing to say a bit about what it was you're afraid of?

Chanel Fu 27:23
Yeah, I think I think my main fear was like, being the individual responsible for exposing my partner or exposing my family to a virus and it's like with a bit of reflection, I can see like that really like blames individuals, rather than, like, the infrastructure setup to make it difficult because I wouldn't like if it was any other individual in the same position, like I wouldn't blame them wholeheartedly for their actions. But at the same time, I see like many individuals who have been less cognizant of how their actions really affect like their communities, or like the people that they live with, and everything. So I was really afraid of being viewed as being viewed as inconsiderate, but also like actually having that responsibility of putting someone at risk. And potentially making someone ill. I think that has been really hard to cope with because, especially with a new illness, and when we were still discovering how it was transmitted, how it was spread, it was just really scary that we didn't know and I just assumed, like, or I didn't just assume but like it felt like any action that I might take my like lead to some disastrous outcomes. So I think like the general like, not knowing what will happen, really made me afraid to like, do anything in a way if that makes sense.

Kit Heintzman 29:11

Absolutely. Would you be willing to share a little bit about what partnership has been like for you during the pandemic?

Chanel Fu 29:20

I'm guessing you mean in terms of like my romantic partner, um, for that? I think for me, it's definitely been like supporting each other and like, learning how to communicate with each other like mostly online. For me and my my partner like, we lived pretty close to each other. And now she lives with her family, which has been a little bit of a challenge because she's actually not out to her families. So navigating how we would still spend time with each other. With that in mind was, was definitely a bit of a learning curve. For me, I think, I think being able to communicate my needs over messenger, or like over a call has been really difficult because if we're talking about like love languages, for example, I feel like I am someone who needs physical touch from my partner. And not having that, especially with like, the amount of distress that we were in was really difficult. We like used to never really fight at all. And then because of the pandemic, I think communication just got so much harder, like the nuances with how we communicate with each other just got so messed up, because of having to talk all the time over just text or just calling. Like, things would pop up that just like never came up before. So I think I'm really lucky that we've, we've developed a like healthy relationship with each other and learned how to like, communicate with each other, learn how to ask for space, things that are definitely like useful even after the pandemic. So, in a way, I am a little bit grateful that I had that opportunity. Obviously, I wish it wasn't in such dire circumstances. But there is that bit of silver lining that came about like growing as someone who who like who can learn how to communicate better, and how to like, identify my own needs a little bit better to

Kit Heintzman 31:48

how's your relationship to touch change sort of more broadly?

Chanel Fu 31:54

That's a That's a good question. I think. I think that's actually a good opportunity to talk about consent to touch. I think that is the main thing that has been changed. So yeah, when Link cases were lower, and things were relatively safe, I would sometimes go on a walk with like a friend. And we would always like, or like, yeah, so I would like ask my friend. And they would ask too, if like, it's okay, that we like, hug each other with our masks on and like, what are they okay, with, like, I would say like, I'd like us to continue being masked even though we're, we're walking outside as distance as we can be in the city. And so I think that like, the main thing is that we've all learned a little bit more about like, how to normalize asking if it's okay to touch someone. And I really appreciate that, because I feel like a lot of the times, like people think that like they're owed a hug or handshake or whatever, just because of the position of the relationship or like the social positions.

Chanel Fu 33:17

I'm not sure if I'm like, wording that correctly. But like, even with like someone meeting someone for the first time, like, we see, like, we don't really do a handshake right now we do like an elbow touch if even. And, yeah, I think it's definitely like changed how much we like invade each other spaces. That being said, I think it also in the other direction has made it really difficult to be able to kind of like connect with someone closely, like, for like, those relationships where you like to, like be in each other's proximity, like, that's largely missing, like I was saying, like, with my friends that I don't text much like, some of those friends, like I would hug on a regular basis or like, I would even just like leave my head on their shoulder. And that's completely missing. So it's, it's hard

because on one hand, I see like, it's nice, cuz we've definitely learned how to like ask people, what's okay for them? And learn, like, I guess what's safer in general. But on the other hand, like, I feel like many of us do, kind of need that human touch and not having it has been pretty pretty hard on us pretty hard on like, our relationships and our mental health and everything to

Kit Heintzman 34:47
You. You mentioned a little bit of the answer to this already. But I wanted to ask the question anyway to see if there was space to expand, which is that 2020 and 2021 have been His very full years with COVID as well as with political and social movements, I'm wondering what some of the most significant issues have been on your mind over this period of time?

Chanel Fu 35:12
Yeah, that's a great question. Um, I think that one of the main things about the pandemic, especially with the lockdowns is that everyone's like, paid more attention to the news in general, like, I think social movements have always been happening. But people have been too preoccupied with their work lives or whatever else they're doing that they don't see, like the horrors of what's happening on a daily basis. And so, for me, this really reminds me of the Black Lives Matters movement. Because as someone who's so I first learned about Black Lives Matters, probably when I was maybe like 14 or 15. Just being online and being someone who like wanted to change things for the better. And so

Kit Heintzman 36:09
I just quickly ask 1415, approximately, how many years ago is that?

Chanel Fu 36:15
Oh, yeah, that was around seven or eight years ago. Yeah, so around seven or eight years ago, already, I knew about the movement, I've always wanted to, like, learn more about how I can support Black Lives Matters. And so when, when yet another black person was killed by the police. For me, I was kind of like, well, this is happening again. And like, obviously, as a non black person, I was, I still kind of just like, view it from from my lens is like wanting to find a way to support but then, like, really took off on social media. And I was like, what is what is different about the loss of George Floyd's life compared to other black people who've been killed and other individuals who have been victims of police brutality. I was a little bit taken aback, I was really, I don't want to center myself in this conversation, really, because I don't think it is about me. I don't think that I would be in any way targeted by police. So I do want to preface my emotions with that, because they're not the ones that matter the most. But I would say that I was really frustrated because myself and other people in supportive Black Lives Matters have been sounding the alarm for so many years. And yet, now is when it finally like, gained some media attention.

Chanel Fu 38:09
And then I just like, really looked especially at like, my white peers who were like, suddenly posting things. I'm like, where did this like, why did you not care before this, like, I'm glad you care now. But where was all this support before. And so I really felt that frustration at the beginning, like anger, that so many important social movements have not been recognized. And then now they're just like, an Instagram trend almost. So that was really frustrating. But with a little bit of reflection, I also understand that there has been like, some positive work that has come out of that. So like, of course, nothing exists in a vacuum like that. Recent events and everything

has been like, they're both very frustrating aspects of it, and also positive aspects. So yeah, that that was something that really stood out to me too, during the pandemic was just like the sudden influx of support from people who previously do not care could not care less about these things. And suddenly like, yeah, they they really took it upon themselves to like, post about in everything. So I'm glad that social movements are garnering more understanding, more support, and that people are a little bit more more cognizant of it now, too. I guess something else that was also on my mind was really how like, the pandemic disproportionately affected? marginalized communities so Like the conversations were timely, but also was like, I don't know, sometimes I get a little bit distraught as like an individual, because I'm like, there are so many issues that I care about deeply. And I want to contribute to amending, but it's hard to feel like I'm doing something meaningful as, as an individual person. Yeah, so I think I did definitely want to elaborate a little bit more on like, the social social issues during the pandemic, and that would be the main one, they're

Kit Heintzman 40:41
I'm gonna switch gears a little bit. What does health mean to you?

Chanel Fu 40:49
Really good question. So, to me, I think health means that you're able to engage with the world in a way that you want to. I think that other individuals really try to impose an idea of what health means on to others. And I think that's quite a dangerous notion, because like, I'm just thinking, like, pretty broadly here, but like taking, taking the example of like fatphobia, for example. I think there has been like, a long standing notion that people who are overweight or obese just automatically are not in good health, whereas people who are of average weight, or even underweight are, like automatically have good health. And that's something that really frustrates many individuals, understandably, because I think a lot of things have become medicalized when they don't necessarily need to be like, of course, it's definitely like different health issues that can come up. But what ultimately matters is, how that individual understands it, how they move with it, and how it affects their life. If someone is like, perfectly okay, like, yeah, I would say like that health matters to them. Or that part matters to matters to how they define their health. So I think it's definitely something that's like, individually decided on in a way.

Chanel Fu 42:42
And like, yeah, how it affects someone's life. There's something else I wanted to say about it. And it's my mind while I was talking. Oh, yes, I think that people also use health as like a measure of how valuable someone is to society. And that's just a terrible thing. Honestly, like, I feel like, people put like, blame on people who get infected with COVID. But there are so many nuances to how COVID is transmitted like. So many like things about like, oh, like essential workers who are not protected by like, paid sick leave, for example, like, of course, those individuals are at higher risk. And if they become unhealthy, it's not any reflection of their like, worth as a person, even an individual who does something irresponsible. I just get very disappointed, I guess, when people assume that just because someone's like, done something to harm their their own health in some way that they're like, less good of a person or like, less responsible of a person, less valuable to society. Like I understand that. Obviously, like health care comes at a cost and everything but this sort of like shaming approach that we have to it is I don't think it's effective. And I don't think it's very humane of us to approach health from that, from that standpoint.

Kit Heintzman 44:30

What are some of the things you would like for your own health and the health of people around you? And what kind of changes do you think would need to happen to make that possible?

Chanel Fu 44:41
Hmm, um, I think for my own health, the main thing right now is having more green space. I live in an area that's like, there are like very small pockets around and that's pretty much it for greenspace. And when like prepared I mean times I don't, I kind of overlooked it because campus had quite a bit of green space. I was okay with that. Like, it wasn't ideal, but now especially on like, the parks that we have are always like overflowing and it doesn't feel necessarily to like, okay to go to them, especially when they're so busy. And, like we need spaces to be able to go to, and just kind of like reconnect with nature. So for my own health, like, physical and mental, I think like having some more, some more space to just be a human would be nice. For the health of people around me. Yeah, like I mentioned, a lot of people around me actually are healthcare workers. So it's tough, like, I think, as someone who's like watching my loved ones go through so much stress, it's just kind of like, there's a lot of just like, demand put on healthcare workers? And I don't know, I think that's, in part kind of an unanswerable question. It's like more time off, like more support, more people like, it's like more people who are able to like do the work with them. And they don't feel like they're drowning in work, I think that would be the most beneficial thing for their health. Because I'm worried that health care professionals, essential workers, really everyone just doesn't have the opportunity to take some time for themselves to really engage in like, I don't know, like even like eating well, or exercising, like the things that they want to do their own health, like, they don't have the time. So I would say yeah, like, support in whatever way that looks like like, preferably just lightening their workload a little bit, I think that would be the main thing.

Kit Heintzman 47:24
What does safety mean to you?

Chanel Fu 47:30
Um, I think safety means like, feeling like I have enough space to engage in what I want to engage in. I think that when you feel unsafe, there's a tendency to just sort of like focus on like, what you need to survive. But when you feel safe, you can grow a little bit you can get to know someone new, or you can engage in like a hobby, especially art, that if you're unsafe, it's harder to make time for those things, because you're a little bit more focused on like getting to the next day. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 48:17
There's been a very narrow conversation of safety under COVID-19. And I'm wondering how you've been determining what feels safe for you and how you've been negotiating that with others around you?

Chanel Fu 48:32
Yeah, definitely. I think that so how I've been like, deciding what saved for me. I think as someone who has been in university, a lot of the things for me has been like reading papers from better, like peer reviewed or hearing from individuals who are deemed experts in some way or another. I understand that the like, medical community has really abused the trust of different communities. So that's not something that is accessible to everyone. But from my perspective, that's really how I decided what was safe for me. Um, some of it was also just listening to my family members. Yeah, as I mentioned, like, I'm the youngest sibling, so sometimes I was just kind of like, okay, I guess I will go with the flow. But what my family says here. It was, honestly pretty tough. Like, I feel like

that's where a lot of conflict comes from is like, well, this person says it's safe, but this person doesn't say it say even like, who are we exactly supposed to listen to? And on top of that, like the missing information that comes out is also just kind of like well, that's like another source of another source of ideas, I guess.

Chanel Fu 50:17
So I can see that like, especially if you're feeling like disenfranchised by by like medicalization. It's hard to know who to listen to, and who's giving you like reliable information. So for me, from my perspective, I just like tried to read as much as I could, and like, try to be critical of how my government's handled it, while also listening to their recommendations, which sometimes feels a little bit difficult. But yeah, for the most part, I've used like, maybe like a mix of like, recommendations from the government, and also like my own worldview constructed by academia. Honestly. I think you had a second part of that question about safety, but I can't remember it. If you can repeat it, please. How you've been negotiating that with others? Oh, right. Yeah. Um, yeah, like I said, it was sometimes just like, going along with it. Especially if I was like, yeah, that's approximately how I see it as well. Or like, that is how I see it as well. Sometimes negotiations were a little bit tough. Like, with some people, I definitely just don't think I can negotiate with them, like, especially individuals who have like a completely different worldview for mine, and may say, like, masks are not useful, or they actually harm you. Like, I haven't been able to negotiate that with someone. Because it's just like, a very damaging conversation for me, I guess. And I don't think it would be like a worthwhile use of energy. For me at this time, and like, as who I am, but sometimes, like, I think we would just like talk about like, what do you think about this restriction? Like? What evidence do you have for what are you thinking about it? For the most part, I've really just stayed like with my family, and then occasionally visiting my partner. But, uh, one of my one of my peers, let me know that they had been like, going for walks with friends pretty frequently. And so they were like, oh, you know, you can like, see each other. Right? And I'm like, well, like, the government says, you can but that doesn't necessarily mean that like, I feel okay, doing that. And like, I think that's fine. Like, I feel like more hunkered down is more safe for me? Yeah, definitely, like, ongoing conversations there.

Kit Heintzman 53:21
Would you say something about you had mentioned tensions with how you see the government handling the situation? Would you say a little bit more about not necessarily just tensions, but how you see the Canadian or possibly provincial government responding?

Chanel Fu 53:40
Yeah, definitely. Um, so I think the main thing for me, especially recently was like seeing how it paid sick leave is happening, which I think I mentioned, like briefly earlier, but as someone who's a student, I don't work right now. And I like pretty much just like I was following a little bit of the paid sick leave. Why not call it like the proceedings? And I think like, that was pretty mishandled. I think that like many different communities, like the medical community, and like, employees, like a lot of people were asking for paid sick leave, that was like, a reasonable request, and would make a lot of sense to stop the spread or like, prevent the spread of COVID and also just support people in general like, it was really disappointing to see that. Instead of paid sick leave, the provincial government decided to institute more policing, especially given like the earlier happenings of this year when everyone well, when There were was a lot more support for like, reducing the amount of policing. So that was shocking for me. I was like, really like, this is how we're going to do it right now, that's really interesting. I think that it's because we have this notion that like, Oh, if you're like, going to give people like free money, they're going to abuse it. And it's going to cost so much, and all that kind of thing. But I think it's a really

backwards way of looking at it. Because when you invest in your people, then like, people will be more well, like, there will be, in general more well being people can afford the things that they need to afford. So yeah, I would say that like, having, having less than ideal. That's a call, like less than ideal, like ways to deal with recent events has definitely been difficult to cope with. Not to mention, like the confused, confusing and like conflicting messaging, like what's safe, what's not safe, you can do this, but you can't do this and like how often it changes. And I think another thing with that is just like how things are announced, I think, like, once I saw, like, maybe someone report that, like Doug Ford was like, stay tuned for, like, further restrictions or something like that. And I'm like, This is not like a game show. Like, it's hard to take things seriously when it's announced like that. So yeah, definitely, I feel like it's been pretty disappointing. And it's been pretty damaging for the most marginalized communities. The way things have been handled.

Kit Heintzman 56:55
How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Chanel Fu 57:00
I'm fairly stressed. I'm someone who's recently graduated, like waiting to hear back about, like, future schooling for me right now. Or even like applying for employment, right? Like, I don't know what that will look like, for me. Um, it's hard to, I think sometimes I walk the line between like, hopeful and like despair. For like, the general population and like the world in general, because sometimes hearing like negative rules, repeatedly all the time is like, wow, like, Will we ever be able to solve these huge problems? Like, it sounds like, there's always so much polarization. And I'm like, I have no idea how we're going to overcome this. Like, in general, like there's, I, it's hard to see like, a time where we'll all agree.

Chanel Fu 57:59
So for the immediate future, like, I'm pretty scared. And sometimes I try and like, hold on to hope by like, recognizing like, like, for example, like vaccine hunters has been doing, like, so much positive work for the community, and like, trying to make things more accessible, like, okay, like, there's still like, that glimmer of hope there that things can work out in that domain. And so I just try and find a little bit of that everywhere. Hopefully, in my personal life, too, but yeah.

Kit Heintzman 58:34
Would you explain to someone listening to this, what vaccine hunters are?

Chanel Fu 58:40
Yes, definitely. So um, my understanding vaccine hunters are like a volunteer group that are helping, I think Canadians locate like a vaccine. So they're on social media, I think they're most prominent on Twitter, to really just like distill information and get it out there. Because I think anyone who's been trying to get a vaccine can understand like, it is really difficult to figure out what you're eligible for and what you're not, and where you should go and what you need to bring. So yeah, they've been doing something that I think would be expected of like the government to do. But yeah, it's a very needed service. Yeah, I think that just about covers what I know about them so.

Kit Heintzman 59:36
And what are some of your desires for a longer term future?

Chanel Fu 59:41

Well, I think one of my main desires is seeing more individuals engage in equity. As well as like, seeing a hope for the environment or for the future. Because I think like I keep seeing things that are like so And to say we have like one year to figure it out otherwise, like our planet will burn. And like, that's a terrifying idea. And so my real hope is that, especially as someone who's originally from Alberta, and Alberta is still very much tied into fossil fuels. Seeing that change, and seeing people have a bit more respectful regard for others. I feel like a lot of the time when people are like, I don't know where I was actually going to go to elaborate with. But like, with these conversations, I think that like, sometimes it can get very nasty. And there's not much like unification about like agreeing that we need to take change about something or like agreeing that something's even like a problem to begin with. So I don't know, it's very hard with like, how much we have to worry about these days. But the main thing that I would hope for is that more people engage in equity work and like understanding how how things work, I guess in this world from different people, or at least being open to like conversations. And then that like some real change happens with environment and with like policy changes. In the with, like supporting different groups of people that have been saying that they need things to change for a long time. I think that would be my long term. Very broad goals.

Kit Heintzman 1:01:47

So self care has been a really prominent part of the pandemic narrative. And I'm wondering if you found ways to take care of yourself, if you would share a little bit about what that's looked like.

Chanel Fu 1:02:01

Yeah, I think self care recently for me has looked, has looked like a trying to restructure my, my relationship to like myself. Like many people, I've gained some pandemic, wait, I wasn't previously like a super active person or anything, but just like not walking anywhere, or like not even like, occasionally going to the gym, or going to the pool or anything, has just like, been pretty difficult for me. And so this is my pretty recent, like, even over the past month, and I think self care has been to recognize that, like, being sedentary has like, not been healthy for me, like it's made me pretty upset. But I'm trying to view it not through a body image lens, but rather than like, but rather like a well being lens. So I know that like sitting all day, every day has has made me upset, but I want to improve that because I want to be able to, like interact with like, future children, if I have children one day, or like, continue to engage in activities after the pandemic that I'm used to. Rather than being like, wow, like I'm beating myself up for not fitting into like the jeans that I haven't worn in a year, if that makes sense. So self care has not only just been like trying to get some physical exercise, but also like, change, change my motivation for it from something that's very, very much about like vanity in shame, to something that's more about wanting to do what's best for my well being.

Kit Heintzman 1:04:04

This is my second last question. You had mentioned involved in Alliant life sciences that peer reviewed medical journals is one of the places you're turning for information. I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities and social sciences could be doing right now to help us understand the social and political aspects of COVID-19?

Chanel Fu 1:04:26

Oh, that's a really good idea. I think that like one of the main things that we're missing is like understanding like, ethical decision making. So I think, from my understanding, like social, and humanities, social sciences, and like humanity's I feel like people can really be identifying and emphasizing which communities are particularly harmed by how we've handled the pain endemic and just by the pandemic in general. And ideally, there would be conversation between life sciences and social sciences to make some policy changes or to better understand, like, how to support different communities? I think that, um, yeah, with the ethical decision making, I think that one of the things is that like, I think with like disability justice in particular, from what I understand, like healthcare, in general like, or like hospitals have had to, like make contingency plans in case they run out of like, beds in the hospital, like, who are they going to prioritize treatment for like, I think those things are definitely opportunities for us to make connections between different disciplines. Because I don't think someone who has been purely focused on Life Sciences their entire career, can consider all of the different aspects about like that, the humanity of it. So I think, definitely, it's important to like, also be like engaging in like, how does this affecting our social worlds and how our social worlds also affect like, our biological science and everything like that. So, um, and then on top of that, like, taking histories like this interview, I think it's really important to recognize that everyone's had a different relationship with the pandemic, and it's affected everyone quite differently.

Kit Heintzman 1:06:59
And this is my last question. So this is an oral history interview. And I'd like you to imagine speaking to some historian of the future who never lived your best moment. So someone who has no experience or knowledge, what would you want them to know about this moment? And what kinds of stories would you ask that they not forget are worth telling?

Chanel Fu 1:07:24
That is a heavy question. Um, I think I was like, a historian of the future to know how, like, how profound this experience was for the entire world. I, as I mentioned, I study psychology, we always learn about like flashbulb memories, or like specific events that have a huge impact on a population. And this is something that it's interesting, because when you're living through it, I feel like, sometimes it feels like this is just regular, like, this is just what happens. And then sometimes I'm like, Well, I'm actually going through history right now, like this is a very important historical time. So just it's important to recognize that this is like a huge moment that really flipped most people's worlds upside down in some way or another. And it really revealed some flaws in our societies in general. And I would ask that they not forget how important the arts have been for all of us. I think that like realizing like how we've used like music and films and television, to cope and to deal with, being alone and not having connections is really important. So of course, like, as a science student, I would recognize like that too, but as a musician, it's really important to value all the different types of labor that is put into Yeah, is put into like our life, life. And arts have been so incredibly important. So definitely do not forget the important work of the artists that are trying to capture this moment and trying to convey the the emotions that come with the pandemic and come with like, being so isolated or being so confused or whatever else that we're feeling

Kit Heintzman 1:10:01
Want to thank you so much for everything that you've shared today? That's all of my questions. And at this point, I just want to open up some space for you. If there's something you want to talk about that my questions haven't given you the space to talk about, to claim that here.

Chanel Fu 1:10:21

I actually feel like I've probably covered a lot and I can think about, about how I feel about the pandemic, um, my knowledge about everything. Um, I think I would lastly just want to like, thank my communities, my family and like my partner for supporting me through the pandemic. And recognizing that so much of my coping is due to them. So for me, like I definitely want to recognize that those are the people who really have helped me through this difficult time. And I think that goes for a lot of individuals is that like other people are really helpful and are really valued for for getting us through such a difficult time.

Kit Heintzman 1:11:15
Thank you so very much.