

Transcript of Interview with Lawson Miller by Katrina Beattie

Recorded Interview

Interviewee: Lawson Miller

Interviewer: Katrina Beattie

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Location (Interviewee): Tooele, UT

Location (Interviewer): Lancaster, CA

Transcriber: Katrina Beattie

Abstract:

Lawson Miller grew up in Utah. He has studied Political Science and North American History at Arizona State University. He currently works as a classroom instructor at Excelsior Academy. Lawson has a partner and they enjoy extracurricular activities such as reading, school work together, and watching TV shows and other documentaries. Lawson shares that he is a part of implementing a unified LGBTQ+ community for Arizona State University students. Lawson touches on the impacts of Covid-19 specifically the LGBTQ+ community and other minority communities. He also highlights the political and social implications of the coronavirus on all social sects as of prime importance. Lawson's reflection on past significant global events includes the many school and civil shootings that have devastated United States populations, the George Floyd protests, and the many fights for civil and social rights. In this interview, Lawson reflects on COVID-19 from a perspective of civil and social rights while emphasizing the utmost regard for health and safety priorities for all.

KB: What is the date and time?

LM: Today is Sunday July 12th 2020 and it is 1: 23 PM Pacific Standard Time.

KB: What is your name, and what are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis?

LM: My name is Lawson Miller, day to day doing grad school waiting for... you know looking for jobs over the Summer because I typically work at the school so I have been looking for other options for sources of income because I am not salaried. So basically, just looking for jobs, grad school, watching TV, reading, just a different [sic] bunch of different things really.

KB: Okay. Where do you live, and what is it like to live there?

LM: So I live in Tooele, Utah, which is like a rural community. It is about 30 miles from Salt Lake City and it's a nice place to live, it is also interesting in that there is just a bunch of different.. It is not really diverse, but there is a lot of people with a bunch of different opinions about what is happening right now.

KB: Okay. When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it and how have your thoughts changed since then?

LM: I first learned about COVID in December, on BBC I believe, I just remember hearing the story in China about people having to get their temperature checked before going into subway stations, people like in suits that were cleaning and disinfecting public spaces and I just thought okay that's kind of scary. But I thought it would stay localized to China, but obviously the virus began to spread very quickly and then we are now in the situation we are today, and so my view on that has changed in that respect.

KB: What issues have most concerned you about the pandemic?

LM: There's a lot of things that concern me about the pandemic, I am worried about the economy, I am worried about people's well-being. I am worried about mental health, physical health, I am worried about vulnerable people, minority communities and populations, who already lack adequate access to healthcare, and seniors especially because of, you know, the detrimental impact that COVID has had on nursing homes. So there is a lot of things that concern me about the pandemic I don't know if there is one thing above the other, but personally my mom is immunocompromised so she has an auto-immune disease which concerns me probably the most about what would happen if she were to get it.

KB: How has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

LM: So I worked at a school as a classroom instructor when COVID-19 started to hit in the United States. And it started off kind of like we had a faculty meeting on Thursday, it was like a Thursday I believe, and then we didn't have school on Friday or Monday, so we had like a really long weekend. But the meeting was about our administrators met with some of the state education officials who were talking about the steps we would need to take when returning to school after the weekend because coronavirus cases were being detected in Utah for the first time. And we ended up not going back to school, so everything kind of just shifted into a virtual learning format, on like super short notice so we all had to learn how to adapt and figure out how to make that work on really short notice.

KB: What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

LM: I'm a little concerned about employment for me personally because I don't know if it would be possible, you know, like if we ended up closed school's being closed and stuff like if downsizing would be a possibility, I think there is just a lot of uncertainty. I am definitely concerned about the economy more broadly and people who are getting laid off from their jobs and just because it's really... it's a really bad time to be laid off right now or to be unemployed, especially when there's like a public health crisis and it's just, there's a lot of uncertainty. It's just scary.

KB: Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people you know and if so in what ways?

LM: Personally, in my personal bubble there are not people that I know that have lost their jobs because of it. But I know that more broadly people have struggled with unemployment, being

laid off, but within my personal bubble I don't know if anybody that's been laid off or personally impacted by the pandemic other than moving to a work from home environment.

KB: Okay, how has COVID-19 affected you or your family's day-to-day activities?

LM: There's definitely a... should I say more social distancing has resulted in just seeing people less, so I don't see my family as often, I don't really see anybody as often as I used to. And I think part of that is just because, you know, everyone is kind of hunkered down and trying to avoid going out and doing things as much as possible.

KB: How are you managing day-to-day activities in your household?

LM: It's pretty repetitive, just because there's not a lot to do when you're in the same place, so definitely reading has helped me a lot kind of be able escape what's happening, also watching TV shows or movies, I have been watching like Harry Potter movies and so that's kind of taken my mind off of things. So, I try to do that and also try and consume less news when possible, just because it can be overwhelming if you're constantly looking at the news.

KB: Okay, how has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family and in what ways?

LM: I don't see friends and family as often just because you know, social distancing, just because I personally don't feel comfortable going out that much when I don't have to. Because I obviously don't want to get my mom sick and I don't want to get other people sick, and I don't want to get sick and I don't want to bring sickness into my home. So I've been avoiding that as much as possible which has obviously impacted the frequency which I see my family and friends.

KB: What have been the biggest challenges that you have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak?

LM: The biggest challenge has probably been adapting to everything that's happening. I feel like a lot more polarization, like political polarization, not that we didn't have it before but I think it's kind of been exacerbated by what's going on so there's definitely been lots of disagreements in the community among family about what the best approach is, how to keep people safe and right now there is a big debate going on about how to return to K-12 schools, if we even should be returning to in person type of environment.

KB: What have you, your families, and friends done for recreation during COVID-19? Feel details to include [sic], feel free to include details about shows, games, or books.

LM: We... me and my boyfriend, well my boyfriend and I, we have been mainly watching movies and TV, we read and do school, he's an undergrad student I'm a grad student so that's been time consuming. He also works from home full time, so we've been staying busy as much as possible, it doesn't... I mean the day to day hasn't really been impacted that much other than we're not doing things outside of our home, we're pretty much doing the things we were doing it's just inside.

KB: Okay, how has the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community? Remember, you may be part of many communities including school, club, church, and job.

LM: I think it's affected the LGBTQIA community at large, because as I said earlier, more vulnerable communities lack access to adequate health care... people, there's been studies that show the LGBT community has particularly faced higher unemployment during the pandemic. The Utah pride center has lost funding because donations have slowed down due to the pandemic. So in that regard, specifically with the LGBT community I think that's definitely been impacted. My local community has been very polarized. There's been lots of disagreements and arguments over social media on local community Facebook pages, about how-to best cope with the effects of the coronavirus, whether to follow guidance about mask wearing, and stuff like that. So I... I think that in a lot of ways things have been exacerbated, already existing wounds have kind of broken open.

KB: Wonderful. Have you seen the people around you... how are people around you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

LM: In my own personal family and my own personal bubble, people seem to take it seriously. My mom, obviously she wears a mask whenever she goes out in public, because of her condition. My family in general has been taking it pretty seriously, listens... tries to listen to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and public health officials. My community more at large has been full of skepticism towards public health guidance, towards, you know, suggestions about things we should be doing to keep everybody safe.

KB: Okay, have you seen the people around you change their opinions, or day-to-day activities, or even relationships in response to the pandemic?

LM: I don't think... I mean I haven't seen personally anybody's relationship change, I think that maybe people's relationships have been affected because people have kind of... I don't know the right word for it but it's kind of been spotlighted how somebody would respond to the pandemic versus, you know, somebody would respond in a different way and I think that maybe that's caused like maybe some tension or conflict in relationships or has caused people to think less of one another or something like that.

KB: Wonderful. "Self isolation" and "flattening the curve" have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How are you, your families and friends, and community responding to requests to "self isolate" and "flatten the curve?"

LM: I've been staying home as much as possible and most of the people in my bubble that I know have been, so I think that's been important to slowing down the spread of the disease. It's hard to know for sure how... I guess it's hard to know at all really how staying home is potentially helping but I guess that's sort of the point because if you stay home you're not... you're likely not to get sick or spread the virus, so I've been trying to follow public health guidance as much as possible.

KB: Has COVID-19 changed your relationships with your friends, family and community and if so, in what ways?

LM: I wouldn't say with my friends and family. The community, like my county community, I wasn't... I'm not very locally involved in my local community in terms of like... I don't know volunteer work or anything like that, but for sure it's changed based on the responses in public Facebook pages, social media and I think that that's [sic] kind of created a... tension maybe? Where people are not taking it as seriously as they should be.

KB: Have you or anybody you know gotten sick during this outbreak? And what has been your experience in responding to the sickness?

LM: I was sick for a little bit with like nausea and I didn't think it was COVID or anything like that and thankfully it wasn't, at least I don't think. But at the doctor I had like a telehealth visit, and they said it was likely due to stress from school and just everything going on right now, but other than that I don't personally know of anybody within my personal bubble, with my own personal connections of anybody that's gotten sick with it. [Slack workspace notification noise].

KB: In what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental and/or physical health?

LM: I definitely think it's definitely taking a toll on both. The mental health aspect... it really worries me because people are stuck at home, people are... I feel like, you know, people are getting depressed just because the state of the world, the state of everything and mental health is such a huge factor especially in minority communities as well which has a disproportionate struggles [sic] with mental health and that definitely concerns me, and obviously physical health as well, the physical toll of coronavirus and the pandemic has been scary and you know people... some of the doctors are saying that they're finding evidence that it causes blood clotting and people are... that have gotten the virus are dealing with the effects of it even months after they tested positive. So it's definitely scary.

KB: What have been your primary sources of news during this pandemic?

LM: I read a lot of news sources, so I don't know... if [sic] I had a primary it would probably be The Washington Post and The New York Times. Occasionally I'll also look at like CNN or NBC, I also look at the Associated Press, NPR, BBC News, so I really just have a variety, but if I frequented two the most it would definitely probably [sic] be The Washington Post and The New York Times.

KB: What do you think are important issues that the media may or may not be addressing?

LM: That's a difficult question. [Laughs] I feel like... I feel like the media was on the ball about the coronavirus when it first started happening. I mean we were getting reports out of China, about what was going on, we were getting reports about when it first began spreading in the United States. And so I feel like the coverage at least initially gave us at least significant, or time or a warning for about what was about to happen because it was being covered by the media for quite a while before it even came to the United States. So I think that the media did a good job at least initially in that respect, but I think now, there's kind of been a contr [sic], I don't know, a

contr [sic]... the media's kind of contributed to the divide and the... maybe the skepticism of you know, how to properly deal with the the[sic] pandemic, and so it's kind of hard to say because there's just so many factors at play, and the media is... I don't know I feel like the media is not really monolithic, in some ways they are, but there's like so many different sources and so many different news outlets that it really just depends on what, [sic] where you're getting your information from.

KB: How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

LM: I feel like the... my state leadership has been disappointing in their response. It doesn't make sense to me that our governor is mandating that everybody wear masks in K-12 schools but the public at large isn't mandated to do so. So I don't really understand that, because I think it kind of defeats the purpose to mandate it in schools, and then not mandate it for the public. So that's kind of confusing. I feel like our state leadership also bought the hydroxychloroquine or something when it was being touted as a potential cure by President Trump, and then CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] came out and said actually that's not a cure [scoffs] and so they bought a bunch of the medicine and they ended up having to return it because it wasn't an effective form of treatment. So I've kind of been really disappointed with state leadership, as well as our federal leadership and even local leadership, which hasn't really done much of anything in terms of public awareness or combatting you know, conspiracies or skepticism about the potential lethal impact of the virus.

KB: Do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

LM: I feel like at least in my state because... at least in my state, at the local state and federal levels, have pretty much responded the same. Though I would argue that my state has responded better than at least the federal government has, just because they've taken... taken it seriously enough to put out some guidance in terms of... and the governor has taken it seriously he has worn a mask publicly, he... whereas like the federal government with President Trump, he said wearing a mask wouldn't help anything and then he wore a mask for the first time like yesterday so yeah. I definitely think there's been a difference even though he may not have been much, but overall a very disappointing response from the government.

KB: Has your experience transformed how you think about your family, your friends, you're your community and in what ways?

LM: Not really my family and friends. Maybe my community more just because maybe I didn't fully recognize the extent of some of like the skepticism and science denialism. In my community, there's a lot of conspiracies that are on my local Facebook... local community Facebook pages and they kind of just shrug off whatever doctors or public health officials have to say, it seems like everything is a conspiracy and I feel like people just aren't taking it seriously enough. I don't really know what the remedy is to that, but it's definitely changed my perception of how my local community would deal with a crisis.

KB: How does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

LM: I view it definitely as a tragic event, in terms of some of the other events that I view very tragically have been all the school shootings that have happened, all the shootings in general that have taken place like in San Bernardino, the Sandy Hook school shooting, I also think of attacks such as the the Boston Marathon bombing and 9/11. So I definitely think this is something on par with those tragic events and I think it's something that's gonna [sic] be probably etched into our consciousness forever .

KB: What can you imagine your life being like in a year?

LM: I don't know. [Laughs] Just because there is so much uncertainty right now. I don't know what to imagine my life being like in a year. I hope [emphasis] in a year, at least, that much of the pandemic is under control, there's a treatment for the pandemic - for the coronavirus - that there's a vaccine for the COVID-19. I... that's what I'm hoping, I'm hoping that there will be some return to normalcy, but I definitely think even a year from now there is going to be a lot of residual effects from the pandemic in terms of the impact on the economy and the impact just on people's health and everything. So I think that even a year from now, even five, 10 years from now we will still be reeling from the pandemic in a lot of ways.

KB: What do you hope your life will be like in a year?

LM: I hope to have a return to normalcy, I hope that there's a vaccine, I hope that there's a treatment for it in terms of some type of drug that is proven to be effective for somebody that contracts the virus, so I am just really hoping that at least we will be able to return to some type of normal... normalcy before the pandemic happened.

KB: Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

LM: I think that people need to take it more seriously, I think people still aren't taking it seriously enough and maybe it's because we don't really realize how bad... it's bad what is happening is happening [sic] until it is actually over, and I feel like maybe that's just kind of how things are sometimes which is really unfortunate. But I... it's just... I don't know, it's it's [sic] a very emotional and overall just very... there's a lot of uncertainty I think is probably the big take away from what we know right now, but something to keep in mind for sure is to take it more seriously. I think by looking how to other communities and governments, even in other countries have responded may be a good indicator for how we should be handling the pandemic, for example, like in Germany, and in countries that are similar to our countries – our country – sorry, they've handled it differently and they've had less... less [sic] issues. [scoffs] So I think that's something we can look to for guidance.

KB: Well thank you for taking this interview.