

Transcript of Interview with Scott Adams by Elizabeth Sconyers

Interviewee: Scott Adams

Interviewer: Elizabeth Sconyers

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Location (Interviewee): Camarillo, California

Location (Interviewer): Jacksonville, Florida

Transcriber: Elizabeth Sconyers

Abstract:

Scott Adams, a graduate student at Arizona State University, lives in Camarillo, California. In this interview, he reflects on the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected his life. He highlights the effects the pandemic and quarantine has had on mental health and employment. He also touches on the division caused by COVID-19, politics, and the politicization of the pandemic by both the right-wing and left-wing. Scott also describes the precautions taken by he and his friends to avoid catching the virus, and how the quarantine and the current political divide has affected their relationships.

Elizabeth Sconyers 0:03

Alright, so my name is Elizabeth Sconyers. And I'm doing an oral history interview with Scott Adams for the Journal of the Plague Year run by Arizona State University. So can you tell me what the date and time is?

Scott Adams 0:20

Oh, that's a good question. October 10th. It's 9:36.

Elizabeth Sconyers 0:27

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

Scott Adams 0:32

My name is Scott Adams. And at this point, on a day-to-day basis, I am just studying for my master's degree in history at ASU.

Elizabeth Sconyers 0:45

Where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

Scott Adams 0:49

I live in Camarillo, California, and it's wonderful to live here [laughs]. It's great weather. People are nice. Yeah.

Elizabeth Sconyers 1:05

When you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts about it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

Scott Adams 1:13

Um, yeah, when I first heard about it, it scared the crap out of me. Because at that point, I was actually had a vacation schedule. And so it was like, “Oh, this highly contagious disease is happening, and they don't know anything about it.” So it was actually pretty scary. It was scary to get on an airplane, right before they start closing everything. Today, I still feel the same way. I think we're getting more knowledge about it. And I think that's good. And they're having different treatments now. And the only thing I don't like about it right now is how it's become so politicized.

Elizabeth Sconyers 2:01

What issues have concerned--have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Scott Adams 2:09

I think it's mainly- my main concerns are just how people are reacting to it, and that it's so divided, some believe it's just a, like a cold or anything like that. And some people believe it's like, you get it, you're gonna die. So there's like, there's no- there's no in between with that. And people are just set on their sides with it.

Elizabeth Sconyers 2:36

All right, so we're gonna look, and I'm going to be asking you some questions about employment. I know you're not currently employed, but if you were at the beginning of the outbreak, we'll be talking about that. Okay, has COVID-19 affected your jobs, or affected your job?

Scott Adams 2:54

Uh, interestingly enough, before COVID started, I felt ill. And I was sick for--sick for about eight months, so I had to quit my job. And then as I got better, COVID hit and then trying to apply for jobs didn't work out very well because everyone's just freaking out. So it's kind of affected a lot. I just got hit with a double whammy. So... [laughs]

Elizabeth Sconyers 3:31

Has COVID-19 changed your employment status?

Scott Adams 3:38

Yeah, 'cause I can't find a job. So- especially in like a teaching job. It's very hard to do right now. Because schools are scrambling. So... Yeah.

Elizabeth Sconyers 3:50

And what concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and more broadly, the economy?

Scott Adams 3:59

I think it's had a devastating effect. It really has. I mean, especially everyone's so divided right now. And stress levels are very high. And like, for me, it's like, trying to find any kind of work pertaining to my field is almost impossible because I think there's a lot of teachers out-- that are out of work looking for jobs, so everything's impacted by that. And as far as everyone else, you could just see it. I mean, businesses are closing, especially mom and pop places. You know, the chains seem to be doing well. But, yeah, I mean, the job market is terrible. The economy... it

seems to be okay, but if from like on the ground perspective, it doesn't look okay.

Elizabeth Sconyers 5:01

All right, and has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people, you know?

Scott Adams 5:08

There are several people that are out of work or had to be laid off due to COVID-19; their businesses had to close. And even some of my friends' businesses, they had to shut them down. So yeah.

Elizabeth Sconyers 5:25

All right. So we're gonna move on and talk a little bit more about family and household. So how has the COVID--how has COVID-19 affected you and your family's day-to-day activities?

Scott Adams 5:39

Well, I think it's had a huge effect. [laughs] I was in a relationship. After the--after--after COVID hit, it kind of fell apart after that. So now single, moved out. I think it has a huge effect on that. As far as other family, I haven't been able to see my mother, because she's in a nursing home, and they completely shut that down, so I can't even see her. So yeah, I mean... yeah. [laughs]

Elizabeth Sconyers 6:23

So how are you managing day-to-day activities in your household?

Scott Adams 6:27

Day to day is just, it's just me. So [laughing] it's pretty easy. It just, you know, wake up, do my schoolwork. Look for a job. That's about it. So it hasn't really changed anything.

Elizabeth Sconyers 6:42

All right, and has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you associate and communicate with friends and family?

Scott Adams 6:50

It has, the social gatherings are not happening with bigger groups. There's only the small circles. I mean, at least for me, I just associate with small friend groups, so maybe like three other people. Nothing bigger than that.

Elizabeth Sconyers 7:12

What have been the biggest challenges that you face during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Scott Adams 7:19

I think it's just the whole disruption of life. I mean, it's like--from even from my friend standpoints, I know, they're stressed out, especially friends that I know that are single moms. They're completely like pulling their hair out because the whole homeschooling and 24/7 with the kids and no break. So yeah, it's a very stressful time. It's just, I don't know, I mean, it's- it's difficult. And I could just see it, even on all my friends' faces. I mean, it's- it's people want to get back to normal. And we don't even know what that will be or when that will happen.

Elizabeth Sconyers 8:09

And what have you, your family, and friends done for recreation during COVID-19.

Scott Adams 8:16

Basically, I've just played tennis since that was deemed safe enough, social distanced. Also, mountain biking, and hiking is... And that's what all my friends are doing. They're doing the things that they can do just to be outside and not in big groups that- something you can easily do during this time.

Elizabeth Sconyers 8:47

All right, so now we're gonna talk about community a little bit. How--how has the COVID- 19 outbreak affected your community? This could be like school, church, your workplace. You can speak about whatever you want to.

Scott Adams 9:04

Yeah, I mean- I mean, it's had a huge effect. I mean, people aren't able to go to church, for one thing. I know they've done all the online stuff, but then you kind of missed that whole kind of fellowship and getting together with people. The same with schools. I mean, I think, schools are- it's sad because teachers are put in a very tough position. Even the administrators having to decide whether--what to do. A lot of my friends are teachers, and they feel the stress. They feel like they're doing extra work. Kids aren't getting- are not being able to socialize, which especially young ones need that. Yeah, I mean, it's changed a lot of things, and I think what it's done is also kind of just divided the community. I mean, you just feel it, like, you know, people with their Trump flags. And then you have on the other side, Biden people, and there's just like, there's no, in between anymore. It's just you're on one side, you're on the other. That's it. You know, if you're- if you're a Trump supporter, you're- you know, "I'm not gonna wear a mask, and I can't do any of that." And then on the other side, I mean, it's just crazy. It--It really has I think, instead of bringing community together, it's kind of pulled it apart.

Elizabeth Sconyers 10:44

How are people around, you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Scott Adams 10:49

They're stressed out, completely stressed out. Yeah, they missed going and seeing- having family gatherings, friend gatherings. You know, work is totally different for them. Family life is really stressed 'cause you're always together. There's no apart time besides maybe working, but if you're unemployed, then it's hard. I mean, yeah, I mean, yeah, you can- you can feel it.

Elizabeth Sconyers 11:27

And have you seen the people around you change their opinions, day-to-day activities or relationships that respond to the pandemic?

Scott Adams 11:35

Yeah, unfortunately, politically, it--that has happened as far as COVID-19. I mean, they're, you know, people on both sides are taking the precautions, one complains about it more than the other.

But I've seen friendships end over the whole politic--politicize--, I can't even say the word, politicization of this pandemic. And yeah, friends are just not talking to each other. They're unfriending them on Facebook and all this stuff and it- it's just ugly.

Elizabeth Sconyers 12:16

All right. So self-isolation and flattening the curve has been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic. How have you, your family, friends, community responded to a request to self-isolate and flatten the curve?

Scott Adams 12:32

Well, yeah, we took it very seriously. When that, when they first said that. Yeah, totally self-isolated, didn't- didn't go out anywhere. Just trips to the supermarket and even that was scary because you just had no idea. So yeah, I mean, even friends on both sides, they self-isolated. You know, politically. So, yeah, I mean, as far as for myself, yeah, I took it very seriously. You know, it was hard. I mean, some people took it very seriously and didn't go out for months. But yeah, I think... Yeah, for the most part, I thought it was important. I looked toward whatever the scientists were saying. How to flatten the curve, self-isolate, wear mask, wash your hands, sanitize everything. Yeah, did all that.

Elizabeth Sconyers 13:38

Alright, so I'm gonna ask just a couple of health related questions. Have you or anybody you know, gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Scott Adams 12:47

Yes. I had several friends actually get COVID, thankfully, they've been okay. And they just said it was miserable, miserable couple weeks. But yeah, I mean, they--they—it was funny because I have a friend that was not serious about self-isolating and just kind of doing whatever, and he got it. For him, it was like a two, three week or deal. He's fine now. And then I had another friend where she self-isolated for like three months, and then went out one time and she caught it. But now she's okay. So. Yeah, yeah. Nothing serious.

Elizabeth Sconyers 14:40

All right, what has been your experience in responding to the sickness?

Scott Adams 14:45

Uh, basically, just make sure to wear my mask when I'm out, sanitize all the time, use hand sanitizer, wash my hands. Made sure to social distance, it's hard because sometimes you just forget, you go back to normal ways when you're hanging out with your friends. And then you're like, "Oh, wait, I gotta stand back." Or- or when you go to the store, you always seem to forget your mask [laughing]. You have to turn around and get it or you've left it in the car or, yeah. Yeah, I mean, it hasn't changed, like too much. I think. I think these are things that we should have been doing in the first place, especially with just even the common flu. People should be wearing masks and washing their hands. And you know, hopefully this will lead to more of that in the future and not go back to complete normal.

Elizabeth Sconyers 15:54

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

Scott Adams 16:02

Think physically, people seem to be okay; they're actually getting out more. I think being-- having to self-isolate, I think a lot of people have, look to get healthy, at least physically. Mentally, I think it's been a drain on a lot of people with stress, and even people who have mental health issues, which I know several people that have that, and it's been- it's like depressing for them. Like day-to-day, living is very difficult, especially if they're not able to visit close family members who have medical issues. I mean, it's- it's- I think it's more so now, mental health has come to the forefront than before.

Elizabeth Sconyers 17:09

All right, so we're gonna move over and talk about news and information sources for a few questions. What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Scott Adams 17:25

I've been watching, like CNN, and I read AP news. I tried to steer more to--towards the moderate and the middle. Yeah, it's just like, it's hard, because it's like, every day, it's the same crap, basically, and you get tired of hearing it. And but, you know, I try to stay informed that way. It's interesting because watching other news sources, it's funny, the difference. If you look at right wing media, and left wing media. The left can be kind of overboard, and the right can be just like, "Oh, it's no big deal, whatever" kind of thing. So it's- it makes it hard. It makes it hard. You know? I think that's why there's this distrust of media right now. Like, "Oh, we can't believe that, because that's left wing media," or, "We can't believe that, because it's just right wing propaganda." It's- it's stupid, really.

Elizabeth Sconyers 18:46

So have your news sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

Scott Adams 18:52

Not really, it's kind of been the same. I mean, it's, yeah, it's been- always been the same. I try to stay in the middle look at sources that are in between the political spectrum because I want to get, you know, close to the news that is closest to what's actually happening without any opinion connected to it.

Elizabeth Sconyers 19:22

What do you think are important issues that the media is or is not covering?

Scott Adams 19:33

I don't know, they've been covering a lot of stuff. I mean, we- I think what is missing is the mental health aspect of it. Watching the news, you don't hear about it at all. Really, I mean, it's basically you talk about the social injustices you hear about, a lot of political news about it, and then you have medical experts talking about COVID-19, but you don't hear too many stories about how it's affecting our society mentally like, children, elderly. I mean, I haven't seen it in the news sources I've watched.

Elizabeth Sconyers 20:20

All right, so I'm gonna ask you a couple questions about government now, how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Scott Adams 20:32

I think they've done a good job. It's hard because I think they're presented with something that had never happened to them. And so you err on the side of caution, and I know a lot of people didn't like it. But I think our community leaders were just smart about it. It's better to be cautious and like, okay, well, I don't know. I think like our governor, and even local officials have listened to medical experts, and they've kind of gone out of their way to make sure everyone in the community is safe and trying to control this pandemic and trying to, you know, calm people down or whatever. Yeah, I think they have done a great job.

Elizabeth Sconyers 21:32

And do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

SA: 21:39

I think locally, we've been great, in California. Some areas are better than others. I think federally is another issue. I know it gets totally politicized. But I don't think our federal government had a plan in place to deal with this. And to be honest, I think the leadership in the federal government has been shitty. It's just there's no direction. There's no leadership. You know, I think what--I don't know it's just [laughs] I can't even- I don't like talking about it because it's pretty--it's pretty upsetting from what I've seen, and- and just how people have just gone to their sides. And like, "Oh, they're doing a great job. They're doing a terrible job." And there's just no- no one- It's like cheering for a team or something. Like, like a sports team. Like, they'll cheer for them no matter what. And I think that's ridiculous. I don't know. I definitely don't like talking about it.

Elizabeth Sconyers 23:13

Alright, so we're almost done. There's just one last section that we're going to talk about, and this is about the future a little bit, has your experience transformed how you think about your family, friends and community, and in what ways?

SA: 23:33

Yeah, I mean, it has. It's transformed a lot of things. It's transformed how you kind of feel about your friends. Sadly, this whole thing being politicized, you know, makes you think differently about your friends. It's funny, because- because of it, people have been more political. Like, before, you wouldn't even know what side they fell on. And they wouldn't even talk politics. And then after this, it was like, that's all they talked about. And so, I think, you know, for me, I- I just kind of let it go, like, "Okay, that's your view, and I have mine. And so let's not talk about it, because I'm not going to change your point of view, and they're not going to change mine. If we can have an actual discussion, that's fine." But what tends to happen is a yelling match, you get yelled at for why do you--why do you believe that? Why... So I think, even within family, it's done that. I mean, I don't know, it's changed the way you think about people. I think. You kind of see their true colors come out.

Elizabeth Sconyers 25:00

How does this pandemic compared to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

SA: 25:08

It's scary. Yeah, I mean thinking back. I mean, the only real thing that happened during my lifetime is 9/11, the whole terrorist thing, which was very scary. But like, on a global platform, this--you know, COVID-19, it's freaky because you just don't even know what it's about, how its controlled. And then it's- it's not just localized. It's like, worldwide. And so... yeah, I mean, it's there's nothing like it that I mean, there's- there really isn't. There really is nothing like it. It's changed a lot of things.

Elizabeth Sconyers 26:04

All right, so what can you imagine life being like in a year?

Scott Adams 26:10

Now, hopefully better. [laughs] Hopefully- hopefully be able to find work and do like--do be in the classroom. And that's what I'm hoping. I'm hoping this, all this politics crap just kind of comes down. And--but I have a feeling it's not just- it's just gonna depend who wins the election. Like, hopefully, from year--a year from now, things will be better and closer to a new normal, then what we are doing right now.

Elizabeth Sconyers 26:54

And I think you kind of already answered my next question, but I'm gonna ask it anyway. What do you hope your life is like in a year?

Scott Adams 27:04

Uh, yeah. Hopefully. Just kind of, yeah, I would like to see it better for everyone. I would like to see things, find a normal, it'd be nice to be able to hang out in big groups with your friends and do those things, go to concerts again, and, you know, going to the movie theater would be nice, or even theater shows, can't even do that right now. And so I'm hoping in a year, at least some of that will come back. I know they're trying to bring it back at certain capacities. But I think the fear still out there. But I do think that in a year, I think there's going to be even more fatigue with COVID-19. It's already happening. People are just tired of hearing it, tired of dealing with it. So I'm hoping in a year that things will get better. I mean, we'll know more about this virus. Hopefully there will be a vaccine. Yeah, I try to look on the positive note.

Elizabeth Sconyers 28:25

Alright. So this is the last question actually. Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Scott Adams 28:37

Uh, I think we have to try not to politicize something like this. It shouldn't be about politics; it should be about community. And I think people and government and all our leaders really need to focus on that. And there should be more coming together than division. I mean, even if you're looking at- looking at after 9/11, everyone came together didn't matter what political party you're on. People came together, and this has been totally different. So I think going forward, there needs

to--there needs to be better leadership coming from our government and- and focusing on coming together as a community instead of, you know, just going to your different sides and sticking with it.

Elizabeth Sconyers 29:38

Alright, thank you.