

Transcript of Interview with Fiona Tang by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Fiona Tang

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 10/16/2022

Location (Interviewee): Sacramento, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcribed by: Kylee Mamon

Some of the things we discussed include:

Moving from long commutes to in-person work to remote work; office in the bedroom; work/life separation. Resisting scarcity mindset. Worries about getting sick and getting others sick. Spacing out social interactions between friends by a couple weeks, social distancing. Having relative ease in the healthcare system; self-advocacy with healthcare providers. Having a trust in science and medicine, understanding that those who have had more negative experiences don't have the same trust. Post-vaccination relief. Moving from fixed-term work to job security. The Trump administration minimizing the pandemic. Sheltering in place. Having a strong relationship with partner and friends. Implicit and explicit boundaries; asking questions and answering them, sharing information about pods and behaviors. Trying one's best to stick to safety precautions. Consideration of the others, being community minded, seeing the self as a part of the collective. Public transit and walkability; accessibility in public space. Civic tech, streamlining government services (e.g. food stamps, the postal service) for people in need of them; Code for America. The importance of teaching more about marginalized people in history.

Kit Heintzman 00:02

Hello, would you please state your name, the date, the time, and your location?

Fiona Tang 00:07

My name is Fiona Tang, the date is October 16, and I'm located on Pacific time in Sacramento, California.

Kit Heintzman 00:17

And the year is 2022.

Fiona Tang 00:21

And the year is 2022.

Kit Heintzman 00:22

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Fiona Tang 00:22

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:22

Thank you so much for being here with me this morning. Would you just introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening. What would you want them to know about you and the place you're speaking from?

Fiona Tang 00:46

My name is Fiona and I am speaking from Sacramento. Um, I don't know. What would someone want to know about me? I don't think I have an answer to that question. Um, I guess I'm a 31-year-old Asian American living in Sacramento, in as a non-prescriptive way as possible. That's, I guess, who I am right now.

Kit Heintzman 01:21

Tell me a story about your life during the pandemic.

Fiona Tang 01:25

Um, so I think during the pandemic, I was really pretty anxious in the beginning, like very concerned about both getting sick, getting my family member sick. And also like, being a vector accidentally of getting someone else sick, who, you know, may be in a less healthy condition than me to like tolerate getting COVID-19. I think I knew that if I had gotten sick, I would be more or less okay. Even pre-vaccination, I like, recognized that I was like, pretty healthy and like in good shape, and knew that I wouldn't, that I likely wouldn't die from the vaccine. And so, I think I felt sort of like a moral responsibility to keep others safe by staying sheltered as much as possible. I think also being an introvert, I was like, very willing to like, like, take-take up the world's offer to not go anywhere and not see anyone for a pretty long time. I was like, "Yeah, I don't have to commute and I can just stay in my room. And like, that's totally okay. And like if anything more socially acceptable now more than ever." So yeah, just it was, like, socially acceptable to be antisocial. And I was like, very open to embracing that. Yeah, I remember like checking the news a lot. And like being really like scared and worried for like, nurses and doctors and like frontline workers. I think I also felt really lucky and privileged in an unfair way to have a job that allowed me to make an income and have like, pretty much a normal life. Despite the fact that a lot of people were getting sick and dying. And yeah, just like a really overwhelming sense of like helplessness, and unsure of how to like, make things a little bit better for-for people. I remember just like having moments, I guess, of like, panic and anxiety where I wanted to, like make masks for people and like, I don't know. Like donate to like hospitals and like not hoard because I recognize that people like needed things that I didn't need to hoard. I think a lot of people went straight into like, sort of like a scarcity mindset, like buying, like food and toilet paper, and I wasn't quite there. But yeah, it was just a really scary time, I think. This was all like pre-vaccination, I would say like post-vaccination, I felt pretty, pretty relieved immediately. I was like, I think I remember also, like a lot of folks were we're trying to get vaccinated as soon as possible, even if it meant that they like needed to lie about their actual health status. And I think I felt pretty morally torn about that and felt like it was pretty unfair. Because I do have friends that have asthma and like, for them, it's actually a pre-existing condition to where like if they if they had gotten COVID, like it would have been really detrimental to their health and well-being. And so, I just, yeah, I just remember waiting at home patiently for like my time to do it. And um, yeah, I think well, now I'm quadruple vaxxed. So, like, you know, I feel pretty, pretty good about that. I think also a lot of like, a lot of issues with, like masking culture and like, you know. I think I'm trying to, like better understand, like, where anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers are coming from. I think for me, I've always had like, a very natural trust in like science and like the medical field, but I also recognize that like, a lot of people haven't been treated well by like, our, our healthcare system. And like, it makes sense that they wouldn't trust it, because it's like, you know, it's gone awry for them in many ways. And I think, yeah, like, the anti-masking debate was like, pretty, pretty hard, I guess. I was like, thinking a lot about like, what it means to be fascist, and like, what it means to make decisions for other people in spaces where we like, have sort of implicit consent. Like going into a public space means that you like share, like the air with, you know, other people. And for me, I felt like masking should be a default. Like sort of the default

and the norm, and like, anti-masking or not masking should be the anti-norm just because people don't have you know, ability, privilege. Or they might have asthma or pre, preexisting conditions. So, like, I think, I think in my political view, I think it's just been, it's been hard to see people not willing to wear a mask. So yeah, that's-that's kind of where I stand on that. Um, what else? What was the question again?

Kit Heintzman 06:51

Your story about your life during the pandemic.

Fiona Tang 06:55

Oh, right! It was supposed to be a story. Um, I don't know if I have a single story that stands out in my mind. Yeah, I don't know if I have a single story. I think just lots of like thinking about like, community, and like, and like, making decisions for other people and for myself, and like, respecting boundaries. Even the boundaries that like people don't explicitly say they have, because they can't, unless they weren't like a sign around them that said, like, I have asthma, you know? I guess yeah, that's my story.

Kit Heintzman 07:39

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing, would you say something about your experiences of health and healthcare infrastructure, pre-pandemic?

Fiona Tang 07:52

My experiences with the health care system pre-pandemic? Yeah, I think I touched upon this a little bit earlier, and feel free to take that response. But I would say, I've had a pretty good experience with the healthcare system in the US. I think part of it is like, sort of, I mean, good and bad. I would say like, oftentimes, when I've gone into like a doctor's office, I'm like, sort of mentally prepared to like, over exaggerate my health conditions, so that I can get the care that I need. And I think generally speaking, I've been pretty good at like self-advocacy. But I can see situations in which people like don't know how to, like, navigate that specific aspect of like, talking to a health care provider. And yeah, I would say it's, it's been mixed for me like insurance is like such an awful process here. And like getting the care you need can be so like, bureaucratic and like, unnecessarily cumbersome. But in terms of like actually getting, I guess, medications that I need, or like prescription drugs, or you know basic health care needs, I feel like that's all been pretty smooth for me more or less. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 09:19

Pre-pandemic, what was your day-to-day looking like?

Fiona Tang 09:24

Pre-pandemic, my day-to-day was sitting in front of my computer and being on video calls with my coworkers. And um, oh, wait, sorry, pre-pandemic. It was going into the office. Sorry, I'm congested. It was going into the office and seeing my coworkers and I don't know running to and from different like office spaces. Like being at my workstation and like doing a regular nine to five mostly in like spreadsheets and like healthcare data. I was like, analyzing claim line level data for the Center-the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid and that was like, my job, pre-pandemic. And then yeah, like really long commute to the office like an hour and a half one way, which

three hours total in a single day. So just a lot of like physical exhaustion moving between my office and my home. And then weekends were just like, recovery time, and like being an introvert, and like occasionally seeing people.

Kit Heintzman 10:40

Do you remember when you first heard about COVID-19?

Fiona Tang 10:45

Yeah, I remember pretty early on, I was like, paying attention to the news. And I remember, on my commute to work listening to the radio, and a lot of people were like, not sure if it was just a common cold. And some people were pretty concerned because it felt like our response was delayed. Because we had heard about it, I think, in January, at the very beginning, but no one really seemed to be concerned. So, I think there was sort of like, I guess, for me, like trying to figure out initially whether or not it was something I should be worried about. And also, just listening to the radio and like hearing that, like, things might change really quickly for everyone. And sort of like mentally preparing for that. And then I think also learning a lot about how our administration like really failed to protect people and like, respond in an adequate manner. Like, I remember learning about how there was a dedicated team of researchers who like, had alerted the government about like, this pandemic, or like, you know, just-just the, the possibility of a pandemic. And it was, like, largely ignored by the Trump administration. And similarly, like, how a lot of scientists and researchers in like, I think it was Wuhan, I'm not sure, but in China, were alerting the government there. That there was like, you know, a looming danger. And I think just like yeah, just like thinking a lot about like, how, like, how communication could have fallen through the cracks, and how the government like really neglected to like, to like, to give attention to this, like, very pressing thing that, that they had been warned about. So yeah, I think just like a lot of disappointment in, in government. And what was the question? Sorry, I'm, like, I'm trailing off, which is I always do this.

Kit Heintzman 13:12

When you first heard about COVID-19 and early reactions.

Fiona Tang 13:15

Right! I think that was my early reaction, just like a lot of disappointment and like fear, and anxiety. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 13:25

What was it like when lockdown hit where you were?

Fiona Tang 13:29

Lockdown? Um, I think so. The company I was working for at the time, they responded pretty quickly. I want to say by end of January, maybe beginning of February, we decided to work from home as a company, and so I was able to shelter myself pretty-pretty quickly. And I remember, suddenly, everyone was not outside. Like, the streets were pretty much clear of cars. And I think initially, the Bay Area took it pretty seriously. I think there was like, just like this mass hysteria where people were like hoarding toilet paper and like staying inside. And I thought that that would last for a while. But I want to say after like, maybe a month, people were over it and didn't-weren't, like I guess weren't willing to put up with sheltering anymore. I still remember there were conversations about like shelter in place for four weeks, or I can't remember what the threshold was. But like, there was this, you know, there's a lot of conversation about flattening the curve and just stay at home for like four weeks. And to think that we've been in this for nearly three years now is wild. Like, I just, I can't. I think that if we had actually

stayed home as a country for four weeks perhaps like, we could have prevented a lot of death, and a lot of like unnecessary suffering. So, for me, I locked down pretty much entirely like I didn't see my friends, I didn't see my partner, I didn't see anyone other than the person who I was living with at the time. So, I took it pretty seriously and I didn't stray from that. But I know a lot of my friends were still going out and we're still like, not concerned about spread. And yeah, yeah, so it's just a very different mixed reactions I think in my social circle and like, in my own home. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 15:44

When lockdown hit, what was your day-to-day looking like at that point?

Fiona Tang 15:50

Um, my day-to-day, I was pretty happy to not have a commute and was just like working from home nine to five. But in my, like, in front of my computer, I think I found it really challenging to like separate work from-home. Like I remember, just being exhausted, and drained from like, staring at my computer all day, and then staring at my computer some more, and then going to sleep and then doing that all over again. It just felt like, I didn't have a break in my physical environment. And that was like, I think it took like a different type of mental health toll on me. Especially because my desk was like in the same room as my bed. So, like, I really had no physical separation between work and home. Yeah, that was rough.

Kit Heintzman 16:45

What were some of the things you were trying to do to make decisions in this moment when we really didn't know very much about anything?

Fiona Tang 16:55

Yeah, I think I tried to err on the side of caution, like, because I didn't know much about how it could be spread, or my own immunity, or you know, the bodies of other people and their pre-existing conditions are not like. I felt like I needed to just err on the side of caution. And regardless of where I went, and regardless of who I interacted with, and so that really just boiled down to like two things, which was like, shelter in place and be as clean as possible. So that's the side I took. And I, I was able to do that for a pretty long time, like, because of my job and being able to work from home. So, yeah, I took a very, very conservative approach, as compared to like, many of my other friends who would still see each other like, you know, every now and then, or, sorry, we would see each other pretty frequently. I remember also like spacing out my social interaction. So, like, if I did see a friend, I would do it outdoors, or I would like see them and then test before and after. And then if I saw another friend, I would like make sure to space out that interaction from the last one by like two weeks or so-so that I could just know if I got sick or not. Before seeing someone. Yeah, I was pretty conservative about so, relatively.

Kit Heintzman 18:25

Would you share a bit about what romantic partnership has meant to you during the pandemic?

Fiona Tang 18:33

Yeah, that's a really interesting question. Hmm. I think well, I was I was dating someone at the time. And I think for us, I was able to process a lot of my thoughts and concerns and anxieties with someone, which was really nice.

I think that a lot of people didn't have that. And I think it made like the pandemic that much harder for people who didn't already have like a really strong source of support. I think for me, I was really grateful to have already had like, a really strong relationship with my partner and also a strong relationship with like, each of my friends. To such an extent that like, being separated from them physically didn't really quite have an impact on-on like, the strength of our relationship. It was sort of just a continuation of what we already had because we had a strong bond already. So, I think, yeah, just like it was a lot of maintaining the relationships that I already had over like video and phone. Yeah, and I think for me, I had a sounding board in many ways, like, the things that I was like worried about or anxious about, I could talk to with my partner. And, yeah, I think the hardest part was being like physically separate and not knowing when that would end. I think especially because I was like, both trying to, like balance the relationship that I had with my partner, in addition to like, the relationship I had with my community. Like, just seeing my partner means that I'm not being as considerate to, you know, the city of San Ramon or the city of Oakland or whatever it you know, wherever I am. And walking around, like, it was hard for me to like, sort of manage that. And then also, how does that affect my relationship with who I'm living with? Just like a lot of like thinking through, like, how to balance being considerate to like all parties involved was like, pretty hard. I would say.

Kit Heintzman 21:01

When you would be deciding to meet with someone? What are some of the ways that you discussed safety needs and boundaries with them?

Fiona Tang 21:11

Yeah, another really good question. I remember before meeting up with people, I would ask them, like who they had seen over the past week. And I would give them the same courtesy like, just to tell them that, hey, like, I recently saw this person. I think also being clear about whether we would mask or not. So, like, if I would meet up with a group of friends, I'd be like, hey, like, are we going to mask beforehand. And if we were going to decide not to, then that would be like a very explicit, like announcement. So just being like, we're not planning to mask or we are planning to mask, I think it was really important for me to like, notify the people there, like beforehand, before they got there. That that would be what, like, the decision that the group would take. So, I think also, I had a lot of conversations about like, who, like, my friends pods for like, pod is a term that kind of came up during the pandemic that referred to like, the people who you're regularly seeing and not willing to not see. Because you you're a human who needs like, social interaction. And so, I'm talking to my like, best friend about like, who? Who, who is in her pod? And like, how are they staying safe? And then telling her about my pod? And like, who-who I'm not willing to not see. It will? Sorry? What was the question again? Like have lost track?

Kit Heintzman 22:47

How are you negotiating boundaries with people when deciding to see them?

Fiona Tang 22:51

Yeah, wait now or, or then?

Kit Heintzman 22:55

Then.

Fiona Tang 22:55

Then, yeah. Yeah, so conversations about who's in your pod? And like, are we going to mask or not? And are we going to socially distance? I think socially distancing is like was like, honestly, probably the hardest. Because I don't know wearing a mask it's like something that you-you can do on your own. But like, I don't know, staying six feet apart, that's, like really hard to do and a space that's indoors. Yeah. It was just, in some ways it wasn't that structured. It was just like, let's just try our best to, to take the precautions that we have been told me should take and fell short of it, I'm sure multiple times. So yeah, I think I tried really hard to be explicit. But like, when we're actually in the circumstances, like, sometimes we will take off their masks, because sometimes we will stop social distancing. And sometimes we would accidentally see someone outside our pod like it just it's really hard to like stick to the things, I think, when you're actually doing it. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 24:14

And how's that changed now?

Fiona Tang 24:18

So, I think now, I'm definitely less anxiety over getting sick. Generally speaking, among all my friends. I think there's almost no little to no conversation about how to negotiate those boundaries. So yeah, I want to say now it's like, there's almost I would say, there's no discussion pretty much about whether we're going to wear a mask or whether we're going to socially distance or whether we're going to stick to our pod. I think overall, there's been like, much less anxiety as country over like getting sick. And there's like almost like a-like a, like an acceptance that eventually we're all gonna get sick, which I don't necessarily agree with. Like I, I'm still trying to not get sick like that is still a goal of mine. And I would like to still, you know, protect like my friends who have asthma and like respiratory illnesses. So yeah, not-not-not too much conversation about the pandemic and how to stay safe and negotiate boundaries.

Kit Heintzman 25:36

Consideration of others has come up a few times in the interview, I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about where you got those values? Where did you sort of learn to start paying attention to those needs in others?

Fiona Tang 25:52

Gosh, I don't know. I mean, I don't know, I guess I've always been community minded and like, thinking about others has always come pretty naturally to me. So, um, yeah. I think I'm always like, sort of thinking about me as a part of a whole, the whole being like a system of people, like an ecosystem that needs to live together. And both, like, take into consideration like individual circumstances as well as like, a collective whole, or a collective good. I don't see myself as like, separate from a society I see myself as very much like part of a society and part of a community. So, I think I'm not sure where it came from. But I know that it's like pretty integral in my personality, and like, in my way of life, like that is just how I that's just how I move through my life, I guess. Like thinking through, you know, how my actions are impacting others and how others actions are impacting me. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 27:10

2020 was such a big year beyond just the pandemic. So is 2021, as is 2022. I'm wondering other than COVID-19, what have been some of the issues on your mind and heart over the last couple of years?

Fiona Tang 27:29

Yeah, I think, I think living circumstances like finding, finding like a city, a location that like works for the lifestyle that I want. In particular, like not driving and living in a walkable city, where I feel like I'm part of part of the city, I guess. I think, I've thought a lot about like city planning and the walkability of cities and how the Bay Area has really like, not met my standards for like being part of like a region that like infrastructure, like a regional infrastructure that supports the lifestyle I want. So, when I think about, like, having lived in Oakland, and Fremont and all these, like suburbs in the Bay Area, like, I see, like a lot of bubbles, so there's like, the home bubble that people move to and from, by being in their car bubble, and then they're in their work bubble, where they're like, at the office, and then they go back into their car bubble to like, be in their home bubble. And I think for me, it's just very like, just brute and feels really, like separate. And so, I think, interestingly, I think the pandemic gave me a lot of time to like process, like, what I want and where I want to live. And like both in the context of like a pandemic, but also outside of the pandemic context, like, "Where do I see myself living my best life?" and, "How can the city like support that?" I guess. What else have I thought about? I think, like, career. Like, I think the pandemic sort of nicely coincided with like, job stability, which I hadn't had during the pandemic, or sorry, which I didn't have before the pandemic. Like, I feel like finally, I'm sort of in a place where I can just like, take a deep breath and like not have to worry about like, my next job. So that has been really nice. I would say 2020 to 2021 I was like, I was technically in like a fixed term, like job. But I had been like that pretty much set up for success like after that, after that job. And like, if anything, I feel like my personal professional network expanded during the pandemic as opposed to shrink. And I felt much more like, I had a much stronger sense of like, where I was and where I was going. Career wise and professionally so like, and knowing, like, I just sort of had a sense of calm and assurance that everything would work itself out. Because I had, like, really built up a community. So, yeah, I think another thing that's been on my heart and mind is like, how I can move back into civic tech. I'm like, I think I think having breathing room with my job has also meant that I'm, I am thinking about where I can fit into like this broader, I guess, area of like, civic tech and like, giving back to the community, my community in ways that are like very tangible and like how my skill sets fit into like, that overall, overarching mission, I guess. Yeah, that's it.

Kit Heintzman 31:29

Would you explain what civic tech is?

Fiona Tang 31:32

Yeah, so civic tech is- it refers to technology that enables- that streamlines government services, for, in particular for people who both who are most in need of them, but also generally speaking, like anyone who relies on like, a government agencies like services. So that could be like food stamps, or the Postal Service, or like, the education system, anything that's like public oriented, and is like, possibly subsidized by the government would fall within the realm of like, of civic. And a lot of that was informed by my work at Code for America. So, I think just like sort of returning to, to where I started, would be like, awesome. If I could do that. Did I? Did I answer your question? Cool. You froze for a second, so I wasn't sure.

Kit Heintzman 32:49

You mentioned walkability in cities and having a really long commute. I'm wondering what your thoughts are about the kind of changes that happened with people's mobility during the pandemic?

Fiona Tang 33:08

People's mobility? Yeah, that's so interesting, I think, I think if anything, people being at home longer, has also made people reflect on where they're living, like the city that they're in, and whether it works for them. Like a lot of folks have moved away from like, major cities like New York and San Francisco. My guess is that because the cost of living is so high there, and because they're at home anyway, like, they're trying to find just a nice home, perhaps, and not necessarily a nice city, but I'm not sure. I think there's been a lot of like movement during the pandemic, like just people reflecting on like, whether their city in their in their hometown like works for them. Yes, I think that's all I can say about that is like, people have like responded to, to the circumstances that they're in during the pandemic, as opposed to just staying in place. I mean, I think a lot of people have also stayed where they are. So yeah.

Kit Heintzman 34:43

I'm curious, what does the word health mean to you?

Fiona Tang 34:49

Yeah, health is like super multifaceted. I think it's a combination of mental and emotional health and physical health. And I think like, a lot of it boils down to like your outlook on life. I almost feel like mental and emotional health is like the root. And physical health is almost dependent on emotional and mental health. And I think the more I guess the longer that I'm on this planet, I'm realizing that a lot of it hinges on like social relationships and feeling supported by people who are empathetic and caring. So yeah, I guess, I guess mental and emotional health sort of depends on social health largely. And physical health is something that I sort of see as like following from that, perhaps. But I also recognize that that's like a very able, able centric, able bodied centric perspective. As someone who like doesn't really have too many physical barriers or physical like, yeah, hinderances physical ailments. Yeah, I think for my health, it's been mostly like emotional and mental. And like improving that as much as possible.

Kit Heintzman 36:39

What are some of the things you want for your own health and the health of people around you?

Fiona Tang 36:48

Yeah, I love that question. Um, I think I think I'd like to see public spaces be more accommodating for different bodies. I think there's so much that we can do so much better. So physically, I think cities and yeah, public spaces should just be more accommodating for like, different types of people. And I think that I think that like, like, for example, if someone has asthma, like, I feel like there should be signage on buildings and such to be more explicit about whether or not masking is happening there. I think it sucks that it's kind of based on, on what the I guess the owner of that building decides to do. Like, I think I would prefer if all spaces like, required mask wearing so that whoever has maybe a preexisting condition can decide for themselves whether like, instead of instead of needing to decide between doing it and not doing it, like being in that space, and not being in that space based on the mask condition, like they can decide on what they actually want, which is like, do I want to be part of that space? Yeah. Wait, the question was sorry, I'm like, trailing against.

Kit Heintzman 38:25

What do you want for your own health and the health of people around you?

Fiona Tang 38:30

Yeah. Um, I think when I think about like, mental emotional and social health, like I dream of a world where everyone has, like, community and like, people who they can, like, trust and like, share with and like, just feel grounded in. I think a lot of people feel really alone. And they don't necessarily know how to, like, make friends or like, maintain friendships. And I don't think it's because they don't know how to or that they're not worthy. I think they just haven't reached that place, I suppose. Like, you know. So, I think that would be what I wish for other people is just like having like a really solid strong group of like, people who they can like trust and rely on and like, share with. I think also, access to medical care is a big one, like being able to get the services you need, or the medication you need in a timely manner is like a huge barrier for a lot of people. So yeah, like thinking about that. Yeah. I feel like I have more thoughts on that but like, my brain is like potty right now. So, you know.

Kit Heintzman 39:58

What's the word safety mean to you?

Fiona Tang 40:05

I think my first thought goes to like physical safety. Like, do you have a roof over your head? Do you have water and your basic necessities? Like do you have food do shelter? Do you feel like you can just exist, I guess? And like breathe and be human? Like, do you feel taken care of in the most basic way? That's what I think of when I think of safety.

Kit Heintzman 40:37

Thinking in the really narrow confines of biomedical safety, I know you've already mentioned some of them, but I just want to invite more space. What are some of the things that you've been doing to keep yourself feeling safer from COVID-19?

Fiona Tang 40:54

Feeling safer from COVID-19? Biomedical? Um, what are some of the things that I'm doing currently to feel safer? Um, I still wear my mask whenever I can. And like if I'm on the train, or on a bus or walking around, and if I can wear my mask, I will wear it. I think that's- Oh, also, like just staying as clean as possible. I know that COVID-19 isn't spread by contact or so they say, but I do like sanitize way more than I ever did pre pandemic. And I wash my hands a lot. So yeah, I would say socially. I've been pretty, like relaxed. Like, I haven't really been taking too much caution now. Not, not thinking about pods, not thinking about social distancing. And not really like negotiating boundaries or talking about it explicitly beforehand.

Kit Heintzman 42:09

You'd mentioned earlier getting quadrupled vaxxed. Could you tell me a bit about the decision to get vaccinated? And then once you made that decision? How accessible was that to you?

Fiona Tang 42:23

Yeah, I think the decision for me is probably rooted in my trust of the medical of just vaccination period. And also, my fairly smooth interactions with the health care system. And when I the second part of the question was-

Kit Heintzman 42:52

How accessible was it? So, when you decided to get vaccinated, how easy was it?

Fiona Tang 42:58

I think it was pretty easy, super easy for me. I just made an appointment at my local pharmacy and then went in during that appointment time and got the care I needed or got the vaccine. Yeah, I don't feel like I experienced any barriers getting the vaccine.

Kit Heintzman 43:21

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Fiona Tang 43:31

Um I mean, I think I'm still worried. I'm worried that our nurses and doctors are gonna get burnt out. I'm worried that people are forgetting that it's still a problem. And it's still a concern. I think I worry about like political misalignment. And just like this very fundamental disagreement about how we should like occupy the same spaces. Yeah, I would say I would say that's probably my biggest concern is like, there seems to be like, just still a lot of like disagreement about whether to wear a mask and whether to vaccinate. Yeah. And then maybe also, I think, at least within my social circle, like it's becoming less and less a conversation topic, I feel like the pandemic and COVID-19 and like getting sick. It feels like it's kind of been put in the background a little bit like people are, are loosening up. So, I guess I'm, I'm worried in the sense that maybe we should be more worried.

Kit Heintzman 45:02

What are some of your hopes for a longer-term future?

Fiona Tang 45:16

I think it starts with understanding, like different perspectives. I think until we can sit at the same table and like talk to each other about, like, where we're coming from and why we feel a certain way, like people will not be aligned. And I think I think it really just kind of boils down to that. And also, like, maybe helping people understand that, like, we're not just existing in a vacuum, like, our behavior does impact others, and, and vice versa. So yeah, I think my hope for the longer-term features like getting people to understand that like, that they live in a system like an ecosystem. And we can't just like impose our, our views onto other people about how they should live their lives, because inevitably, we affect each other. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 46:22

When you've been in need of support over the last couple of years, who have you been able to turn to?

Fiona Tang 46:31

I've been able to turn to my friendships, both in like my direct area, and also like those that are pretty far away. So yeah, my friendships, my family. So, my brother, my mom, and my dad, and my professional network who really are sort of like part of my personal sphere as well. Yeah, I think all of that. I think in many of those circles, I've been able to talk about pretty freely like my anxieties and thoughts. And they've been mostly it's been well received, I guess, and I feel like I can share and like get support from them.

Kit Heintzman 47:34

Has your relationship to touch changed?

Fiona Tang 47:38

For sure, I think it has. Um, I think I am less like willing to shake hands and hug people not because I feel concerned about the contact but more so because I don't want to assume that people are comfortable with that. Yeah, I think I've more or less accepted that COVID isn't spread by contact. So, I'm like not really concerned about being a vector, I suppose through-through contact. But I also recognize that people might be anxious about it still. And so, I'm, I'm not-I'm not trying to assume that they're comfortable with a hug or a handshake. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 48:26

Do you remember the last time you touched a stranger?

Fiona Tang 48:32

Hmmm? No, I don't remember. I mean, when I if I'm thinking of a stranger or someone who like really don't know when I've met for the first time, I don't think I've done that. I don't even think that was normal. For me. I guess pre pandemic? Like maybe shaking hands would be the extent of that. And I think now I just probably don't-don't even consider shaking someone's hand. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 49:09

What are some of the things that you do to take care of yourself?

Fiona Tang 49:18

I think cutting off work after work hours is something that I do I'm just trying my very best to set healthy boundaries between like my-my work time and my personal time. I think also affirming to myself that I've done enough in a single day has been really challenging, like even pre pandemic. But yeah, like telling myself even if I don't really believe it, that I was productive and then I did enough and that even if I don't feel like I did everything I was set out to do. Or if I didn't do everything that I set out to do, I will still try to tell myself that I did my best. Yeah. What else do I do for self-care? I like in regular contact with my friends, like always, like, just trying to like remember the days that are important to them and like, reach out to them and ask them like how they're doing, like just checking in. And yeah. Checking with family too. Checking in with myself. Like, where am I? How do I feel today? Um yeah, I think that's mostly it.

Kit Heintzman 50:50

Do you think of COVID-19 as a historic event?

Fiona Tang 50:55

Oh, yeah. I mean, for sure. It's affected everything. I mean, so many things. And I think even after it passes, there will still be like, like, a trailing effect. Yeah, I think that, um, it'll be something for sure that people remember. In particular, I think about like children and adolescents who grew up during this time, and even college students that had to go to school remotely. I, Yeah, I can't even imagine, like, growing up during this timeframe. Like, it sounds so hard and challenging. Yeah, I mean, in many ways, I'm really glad that I was not growing up during this timeframe. Like, I'm so glad that I like made it through the really hard years. Before the before the pandemic struck. Um, and yeah, like people have lost loved ones. And it's like, I mean, how can people forget that? You know, how can people forget that they lost someone that they cared about? So yeah, definitely, definitely considered a historic event.

Kit Heintzman 52:24

What do you think people in the social sciences and humanities should be doing to help us understand the human side of the pandemic?

Fiona Tang 52:41

It's interesting that you- I mean, I guess the first, the first thing I really think about is like community organizing. Not so much like academics. Like, we have the most impact in our direct communities. So, like, we can meet up with people here, and where we're like, located in our like, specific locale. So, I think about I don't necessarily think about experts in the field, you know, or like people who like have thought a lot about- about maybe like, who are like positioned in the social sciences I think a lot about like, therapists I think a lot about like community organizers. I think a lot about people and like conflict mediation spaces. I think about people who like are practiced and empathy and like can like help bridge gaps and divides, I guess. And I think that we should be thinking more on a local level and thinking more about our neighbors and people who we like directly interact with on a day-to-day basis Yeah, cuz like America is so huge and like there's no way that we can like possibly agree across like all of our states nor should we try to like I think I think if we can you know, negotiate boundaries and like, agree with each other. On a more local and micro level, like I think that is already a huge win. So yeah. Yeah, I think like, just like people who are like really well versed in like, better understanding, or I guess, people who are well versed in like bridging divides, cross differences. I feel like that's needed more now than ever.

Kit Heintzman 54:59

Thinking back to when you were younger, what are some of the things you wish you'd learned more about in history?

Fiona Tang 55:13

I think I wish I learned more about people of color and marginalized groups and people who like aren't often written about in history. I don't even know how my reality would have been, like, my reality now would be different if I had learned those things in school. Like that's yeah, I just have no idea. I mean, I know now, like, I have a friend who's a schoolteacher, and he makes it he makes it a point to like, include that include those like, perspectives in his curriculum, but like, I never had that. So, I don't know how I could have how that could have helped me or benefited me. Yeah. But I do wish I had had that maybe like, more of a focus on the immigrant experience or more of a focus on ya know, non-non-normative views, I suppose.

Kit Heintzman 56:24

This is my last question. I'd like you to imagine speaking to a historian in the future. Someone far enough away that they have no lived experience of this moment. What would you tell them cannot be forgotten about right now?

Fiona Tang 56:41

Wow. Oh, um-um, okay, so I think two things stand out to me. One is like, and I've alluded to this a lot, but just like the importance of empathy and understanding each other. I think that's like the starting point for a lot of like, reconciliation and restorative solutions. And I think the second thing would be government accountability. So, like, when people are screaming at a government being like, hey, like there's looming danger, because we see this virus is like on its way, like, we should probably pay attention to this. I think the government should pay attention to it. I think those are like two very important learnings for me and for our for society at large is like when people

are like, heeding warnings like those warnings should be taken seriously rather than gaslighting those people or making them feel like they're like crazy or not, you know, don't have something valid to say or share. Yeah, those two things.

Kit Heintzman 58:13

I want to thank you so much for the generosity of your time and the thoughtful kindness in your answers-

Fiona Tang 58:23

Thanks-

Kit Heintzman 58:23

-[inaudible] questions I know how to ask at the moment, but I'm wondering if there's anything you'd like to share that my questions haven't made room for? Please take some space and share it.

Fiona Tang 58:41

I don't think so.