

Kate Cuapio interviewed by Monsserat Herrera-Vasquez
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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

New York City, feel, quarantine, pandemic, question, immigrant, mental health, people, protests, family, working class families, working class family, black lives matter, anxiety, happening, large crowd, activities, talk, quarantined, comfortable

Monsserat Herrera-Vasquez (0:00): Good evening, my name is Monsserat Vasquez, and I'm interviewing Kate. We are both on a phone call right now because we cannot be in person at the moment. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history project?

Kate Cuapio (0:21): Yes.

MH (0:22): Okay. You don't have to answer these questions but If you're comfortable, I'm going to ask you very basic questions about yourself. So, your name, I did say, your age?

KC (0:43): Wait, What?

MH (0:45): Your age? How old are you?

KC (0:47): I'm 19.

MH (0:49): And your occupation? If you don't have a job, you would, you're not working at the moment so...

KC (01:01): what's occupation? I thought it was major.

MH (01:04): It's a job. That's just like another word for job. So, you're just a student? full time college student?

KC (01:12): Yes.

MH (01:14): You can let me know if you're not comfortable with these questions and we can just skip but there's a few more questions. What's your racial identity?

KC (01:22) : Mexican American.

MH (01:24) : And if you're comfortable with telling me your gender identity and sexual orientation.

KC (01:30) : Straight, she/her

MH (01:35): Okay. And my third question is, where are you from? And is there a story that you'd like to tell about you and how your family ended up in New York City?

KC (01:43): I am from Queens, New York. Obviously. My family is from Mexico, the capital. My parents came to this country for a better life, and a better opportunity since in Mexico, it was really hard. They came here in Queens with no money, and yeah.

MH (02:13): I'm gonna ask you a few questions about things that are happening currently. So, they can vary from politics from Black Lives Matter, protests and just mental health in general. So, my first question is, do you feel as though mental health is something that you wish was more advocated in the pandemic? And the BLM protests? Why or why not?

KC (02:38): Yes, I feel like mental health should be advocate and Black Lives Matter movement, and in general, because, sadly, there's still some people that don't understand that mental health is really important, you know, and I can say, like, from living in a Hispanic household. In the Hispanic household, there's no such thing as a mental health. It's more like, *“oh, you're just lazy, you just don't want to do anything”* because your mental health is really affecting you.

MH (03:13): Yeah

KC (03:14): I feel like, it is really important. And we should advocate more.

MH (03:21): I can relate to that. I think it is really hard for people who... I think not just in Latin x or Hispanic households, but I think it definitely is a cultural thing that we're supposed to be, you know, especially in a religious standpoint, where we're supposed to look up to a higher being for healing and for... You know, all of these things that are supposed to make us feel better. And so, then they try to debunk like, any mental illnesses or having self-care for ourselves when we feel really sad or lonely, especially in a pandemic, where we're all quarantined. So, like, that involves isolation. My second question is, is there something that you wish you could have done differently during these times?

KC (04:11): Yes, the way I spend my time. I can say that this whole pandemic and everything that's happening for like, it really has affected my mental health and the way I think in way I want to do stuff that now I just don't have any motivation. There are points were I don't want to do any schoolwork and I don't want to talk to anybody, I just want to be alone. So, I just wish I was able to change that from the start and try to maintain myself occupied and try to you know, just be out there even though I'm in here.

MH (04:51): Yeah, and I think that's that really does, you know, fall upon the isolation and quarantine and so many other things that just like happen at home. You know, everyone's life is different. And we can't expect everyone to like, live the same lives as we are. Maybe someone's living like stress free, like being at home is literally the best thing for them. But for a lot of people, it's not. So, you know, I think a lot of people wish they could have gone out and said something or done something differently to make themselves feel better. I guess a follow up question would be, is there any activities that you found? have caught your interest? Any new activities during the quarantine?

KC (05:38): Yes. My friends they're into that spiritual type of thing.

MH (05:40) : Yeah.

KC (5:43): And it really caught my attention. I am very curious about it since it's out of my comfort zone, especially being religious household. That's something that really got my interest. Something else is that, I try to put content out there on TikTok. But Again, sometimes I don't feel motivated or just don't feel good about myself, so I try to stay away. I really want to start like doing content and like, you know, business... I don't know something like that but yeah, I don't know if that makes sense.

MH (06:36) : Yeah. I mean, as one of those very spiritual people, I think those activities like just maybe meditating is something that people that are not that spiritual have been doing because, you know, it does calm down someone's anxiety. My next question is, if there's something that you found calming, during these times, in quarantine?

KC (07:14): Going out for a walk or not seeing like coming out with friends because we're in a pandemic, but like, being able to see someone that I haven't seen. I just like doing that and it kind of calms me down, because I don't feel like I'm stuck in a room. So, you know, I'm like someone that's open.

MH (07:39): Yeah. I think that does tie into like, the activity's part where, like, you get to hang out with friends, or, you know, of course, not in a large crowd and making sure that you're safe and making sure that you know, everything that taking precaution and I think that kind of makes it a bit more suitable when it comes to meeting up with friends again because you're not meeting up with large crowds, you're not meeting up with a significant amount of people... Versus a lot of people are doing that and you know, COVID rates are just getting higher and higher every day.

KC (07:59): Which is disgusting...

MH (08:21): And then they don't wear masks either. This is going to get a bit more personal because I also know, you know, one of my parents is an immigrant who comes from Mexico, and I know that you come from an immigrant working class family, you know, as myself working class. So, this question is

going to be in relation to that. What do you feel someone who does come from an immigrant working class family is the hardest thing to maintain while being in quarantine?

KC (09:05): What do you mean by that? Elaborate, please

MH (09:07): Yeah, um, so just knowing how your parents are and just living in this household as someone who was born here, but what are some challenges that you feel like you and your family have faced during the quarantine as someone who lives in an immigrant working class household?

KC (09:28): So, it's hard that sometimes we have to, I mean, everybody has to worry about it, but I feel like more with immigrants because we don't have the same opportunity as someone who got papers or who's a citizen. And from experience, it's been really hard with like, paying bills and rent and all that because, you know, my parents don't have any of those. They don't have any help, versus us. We just have to figure it out and it's really stressful. During this pandemic, I know, it really impacts a lot of families because you don't know where you're going to eat, you don't know if you're going to have enough for a rent, you don't know ever gonna be able to come out of this. Especially the majority of immigrants, work like in restaurants or constructions, knowing that there's a certain limit to how many people can be there. It's really affecting and, it's been very hard.

MH (10:39): Yeah. I think that issue really does run within working class families, internationally. And I think anyone who's struck with poverty, globally, or you know, nationally. Honestly, when you're in quarantine, and you have COVID, people are either being, you know, let go of their jobs, or they're just maybe they're not fired, but they can't go to work, and some people aren't getting paid. Yet, they come here, you know, with families, and they live here with children, or even sometimes they live by themselves, and they can't find the right financial resources to even live on their own, like kind of be stable as an individual. And I think in that situation, it's honestly really scary and sad. I believe it's really sad to watch families go through these situations and struggles. And in connection to the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you feel like COVID-19 has impacted you in your social life?

KC (11:49): A bit more scared. I'm scared to move around me. I'm scared. I mean, if it is people that I know and I feel like I interact with like, a more like ease. But if it's people that I don't know, or if I hear someone coughing, like, I just get nervous, because I didn't have COVID personally, but my family did have COVID. Recently, my grandma died because of it, but not here, obviously. So, it's just like very scary to know who's behind me, when I should take off my mask, when I shouldn't take off my mask but you know, I just have to be very careful with what's around me nowadays.

MH (12:30): I definitely believe that it's very anxiety inducing. Like, it's just very nerve wracking, that you now have to be so much more cautious out in public. That's a very valid emotion to feel and those are very valid thoughts to have because, you know, this was something that was very unexpected to hit the United States when it was happening. I mean, people were saying that it was expected, but the way it

hit New York City, I feel like was very harsh and it was very hard for so many people. So, I can see how [COVID] really caused, I would say a lot of social anxiety and just a lot of fear in society.

HC (13:14): And then on top of that, I forgot to mention being quarantined for like, I believe like six months was right before summer started. When summer started, I remember when people used to go out, I would go out to obviously being cautious. I also felt like I couldn't communicate with people anymore. It's like really hard and I feel like that's affecting me too. Now, especially like, I don't know how to talk to someone as I used to before, or I don't talk to them enough.

MH (13:54): Yeah, and I think that's also something else that is sort of like bringing down a lot of students as well. I think that's something that we both can relate to where there's a lack of resources for students, as much as there's a lack of like financial resources for working class families in especially in New York City, and other big cities in the country, but having those like mental health resources that our school provides, but not in a lot of other schools, you know, so even for students who are in high school, it's really hard to get a hold of those resources, especially for younger people who do suffer from anxiety and who do have other conditions and being in quarantine and being in this pandemic is a lot more overwhelming than I think they've ever experienced. So, I definitely get where you're where you're coming from in terms of like that social anxiety, like going out. I think, however, like people are taking it a lot less serious. versus, like how they did in the summer of last year.

KC (15:06): I mean, I feel like in the summer, nobody really gave a fudge about anything.

MH (15:16): I can see that. Definitely now a lot of people were very, I guess there was a lot of hype to, like, you know, bringing back the indoor dining. And, you know, being that it was all these holidays, like, people were still traveling like to different countries... They were still like going to big gatherings. Surprisingly, there's like parties happening. And I think those things that people do without thinking about their actions, causes so much anxiety in society. And so, I think it impacts all of us socially, in our in our social life. The more these things happen, the limit, you know, a lot of our social lives get limited because things get shut down. Sometimes we have like a curfew that we have to obey by because these rates are getting higher. So, moving on to the next one. And this one's more about the Black Lives Matter protest and we've seen a lot of it in New York City and other big cities in different states. We've actually seen it in different countries as well. But why do you think New York City happens to be the epicenter of protests?

KC (16:39): Wow, that's actually a good question. I feel every where's diversity, but I feel like New York is more diverse, or more... I don't know how to explain it, like, more open minded in another way. And I feel with the amount of... Oh, my God, I don't know. It's like New York City, it's a big city. There's always someone's watching us. So, like someone's watching us. And that's our time to like, put up there, what we think of what we want to do or change the things that we are seeing that is not right. I don't know if that makes sense.

MH (17:32): Yeah, it does. I think New York City, I mean, learning from, from my government class, and learning and sociology, the diversity in New York City, whether a lot of the neighborhoods are kind of segregated, meaning like, you know, in our neighborhoods, it's highly populated with people of Hispanic and Latin X descent, and, you know, ethnicity and race. Other neighborhoods are more populated with people from other countries. So yes, New York City is very diverse. But also, you know, I'd like to keep in mind that they've always, not always, but they've been saying for a little while now that New York is a blue state and so, it is, like you said, very open minded, which I do agree with, I mean, a lot of us in New York City, perhaps not New York State, but in New York City. It's very, like, you know, supporting the LGBTQ plus community and celebrating Black Lives Matter and supporting it and being an allie. So, I think that's why New York City has always been like, the center of attention when it comes to protests. So, I have three more questions. And these will be the last ones... Again, connected to COVID. What do you think the nation and the world should learn from the pandemic? Which I think is a really great question, and I think it can kind of go into different topics when we just talked about like, how some people may be very ignorant and like go to parties and, you know, just not obey by the COVID-19 rules.

KC (19:17): Yeah. Wait, what was the question again? I'm so sorry.

MH (19:31): That, what do you think the nation and the world should learn from the pandemic?

KC (19:35): Well, they should learn that we need to be careful with what we do.

--- Part Two ---

Kate Cuapio (00:00): So, I feel like the message out of this is that we need to be aware of what we're doing, who we with. And just be cautious of everything, you know. And right now, I'm taking an environmental ethics and it just brought, it just brought up that we are taking advantage of what's happening. And it's not right. It's really nasty that some of us have the audacity to, not wear a mask or not follow the rules that the CDC has, you know, has given us. And it just shows us that, us humanity, take everything advantage, and it's until the final straw that we start crying, or we start panicking because of what we're seeing, you know, like, when this whole thing started. I remember people started panicking. People were like, "Oh, my God, how did we get here." Now they seat like nothing ever happened, and it shouldn't be like that. So, this should really teach us that we need to be careful because you never know, anything can happen. We never thought this was gonna happen. You know?

Monsserat Herrera-Vasquez (01:11): Yeah. I definitely agree with that in a way where I've seen that when coronavirus had finally hit the United States, and especially in New York, everyone was panicking. I mean, you remember when people were going to supermarkets and buying all the fucking toilet paper and buying everything they needed for, you know, for their home. So, whether it was food or

whether it was groceries, like essential that they needed, especially cleaning products, I remember, at home like it was really hard to just find like disinfecting wipes. Like people were ordering these things off of Amazon at this point, when they were things that you can just go to the supermarket for like the 99 cent store, for example, hand sanitizers are one of these things. So, everyone was really in a state of panic, when there was just a few 100, maybe like a couple 1000 cases, and now that there's millions and millions upon millions of cases, you know, globally and you know, nationally now, it's just like, not much of a problem. And I think it's because people have adapted to unfortunately, they've just gotten so used to wearing a mask, or they've gotten so used to the fact that we're in a pandemic, but it still doesn't stop them from living their life, which is okay. But the downfall is that they're just not being considerate about other people and just following the regulation. So, yes, for some people, it's kind of like they just stopped. You know, caring about it.

KC (02:49): This a joke.

MH (02:50): Yeah, some people did take things as a joke and I think that really does show in society when people don't wear a mask or, you know, they don't take these things seriously. It really does show and I think it's really ignorant of people in the society to not take this seriously.

KC (03:06): Yeah, I mean, I can see where I live, where I live. People, there's a restaurant in the corner, and this restaurant gets really packed really quick. And this area back in March, it was very terrible. A lot of people that I knew and people that every play, you know, the neighborhood, they would die because of COVID. And now this restaurant doesn't even follow like the rules of six feet apart. They don't follow the rules, people don't follow the rules about not having a mask, having a mask or not having a mask on sorry and it's just like, ridiculous. And every time I pass it, I get so mad because it's just like, bro, if we keep it up like this, we're gonna have COVID in this area again, and more people are gonna die. You know, I almost lost my dad, because my dad used to take really care of him. So, like he would try and protect himself from not getting sick, because on top of that, I have a brother who was disabled. So it's even more harder for my family and I feel like other families as well, but it's just people are so ignorant nowadays. I don't know.

MH (04:12): Yeah, it's really hard to understand why people just don't care as much as they should. My final question is a bit more on you know, my last two actually. Not so touchy side and in terms of not so political and you know, not so issue based. So, what is it like to be at home so often, and I know, both of us being very close friends since high school, it's, you know, sometimes we don't have anything to do so we stay at home but with this pandemic, it's sort of like we were obligated to we had to stay at home and we're currently not going to, you know, college in person anymore, everything's virtual. So for you, how has it been to just be at home all the time?

KC (05:09): Really stressful like I mentioned earlier. I feel like I'm stuck in a box, you know, sometimes, there's family problems or whatever, that you don't feel like coming up. So, it's just really hard. Yeah, it's been really, really hard.

MH (05:31): Yeah, there's so many limited things that you can do for certain people. Of course, for some people. For other people, there might be like, there's just so much stuff to do at home.

KC (05:45): I remember when celebrities were like, "stay home, stay home, don't go out." I remember, I also got mad because I was like, "bro, you live in a big house, you know, you have everything that you need." Sadly, us working, working class people don't. We have to go out and risk our life, we have to, you know, stay at home, because we can't really do anything outside. For them to have the audacity to say, "stay home, don't do anything." It's just like, I can't. There are bills to pay, there's many things that we need to do and luckily, they have the opportunity not to do all those things. I don't know if that makes sense.

MH (06:31): Yeah, it does. I've seen that too, like on social media, which is one thing, like, you know, you're stuck at home, you're just always on your phone, social media. And I've seen celebrities try to encourage people like, you know, "stay at home," which is, I guess, you know, they are doing a good thing by telling us to stay home. But they're here posting in their huge pool that they have outside of their backyard, or, you know, they have like, five different rooms for like five different things. And it's very spacious, and it doesn't seem like a boring place to be in. And that's honestly from a perspective of someone who doesn't have that lifestyle. So, I can definitely see where you're coming from in, in that perspective. I guess social media kind of puts out there, like how this is what it's like to stay at home all the time. And it's like, very luxurious, but it's honestly not, it's really not and being those people that don't live in a big mansion, and don't make millions of dollars every day on a company we all like, it's definitely not like that. And so, being at home every day can be stressful in for many different things. There are so many stressors that are in our life, whether they're as severe or not, but it's different for everybody. And so, this, I think you mentioned this before, however, but I'm going to ask if there's anything else that you wanted to point out? So, the last question is, have you seen your peers doing anything that you find inspiring?

KC (08:11): Yes. For instance, my friend, or you, you're one of them, like, I see you trying with all the many obstacles that you have in life, I see you trying to take care of yourself... I see you be that person that you want to be and it makes me think like, I want to be like that to like to be confident, even though that's like a struggle for you. It's just like, you also have that are coming out of it or being able to be vocalize. I have a very hard time sometimes speaking and I just admire that about you, or like other people. I don't know, I'm just thinking about you because you're that one friend that I'm really close to.

MH (09:11): Yeah. It is really hard. I think you and I have talked about it several times on our own. And we both know what we've gone through... Pre-pandemic, during the pandemic and who knows what's

happening, what's going to happen post pandemic. I think I also get inspired by a lot of other friends and I think being in touch with the closest friends has helped me a lot to ease this anxiety. As weird as it may sound, it's almost like a distraction, but it's kind of like one of those things where, you know, fake it till you make it kind of thing. It works for some people, meaning that it helps to do things that you do find joy in. Even if it's hanging out with friends, if you can't do that, the alternative would be video chatting with friends, texting friends, just being on a phone call, keep social distancing and keeping your mask on. I definitely see where you come from when, and I see what you mean, when you say like, what I'm going through and the way you know, my progresses and mental health, it's something that I've advocated for some time already, as someone who's going through therapy, and who's struggling with anxiety and depression and you've seen me through that, you've seen me through my downfalls, and I've seen you in yours. I think it's inspiring for both of us to not only experience those things together, but grow together like that **growth is very important, especially in a time like quarantining and the pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter movement, and all of these really important events that are happening...** We want to vote together, like we do have this close connection and I think both of us do find things in each other that are very inspiring, and it kind of motivates us even just a little bit to just continue on whatever we're working on. And even if it's just the rest of the day, I think looking forward to speaking to each other. Whether it's to speak up to vent to one another, I think that's also really inspiring because you look forward to doing that.

KC (11:32): Yeah, maybe that's why I get along with you.

MH (11:40): I think so too. So, do you feel like there's anything else I should have asked or is there anything that you feel like you would have liked to talk about?

KC (11:49): No, that's pretty much it.

MH (11:52): Okay. So, yeah, that was all my questions.