

STUDY ON WHITE PEOPLE

The Reminiscences of

Michael Launer

INCITE

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Michael Launer conducted by Whitney Dow on May 13, 2018. This interview is part of the Study on White People.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session #1

Interviewee: Michael Launer

Location: Cheyenne, WY

Interviewer: Whitney Dow

Date: May 13, 2018

Q1: So, first of all, tell me your name, where you're from, and a little about yourself.

Launer: [01:00:03] My name is Michael Launer. I'm from Cheyenne, Wyoming. I was born in Cheyenne and currently live in Cheyenne. Is that good that—?

Q1: That's just good. What do you do here?

Launer: [01:00:16] I am a marketing strategist at a design-and-marketing firm here in town, a local company where we employ local people, and we're a small business located downtown.

Q1: What's a design strategist?

Launer: [01:00:32] Part of my role as a design strategist at a marketing firm is I take the

goals of the clients, and I turn those into actionable items. So, when a client comes to me and says, “I want to sell more WYSIWYGs,” [what you see is what you get], I say, “Well, this is how we can use technology and the web to help you sell more WYSIWYGs.” And we can frame it as more of a narrative and more of an action-oriented marketing plan.

Q1: I might say what’s a WYSIWYG?

Launer: [01:00:58] [Laughs] It’s a thing. A WYSIWYG is a random thing [laughs].

Q1: [Laughs] Okay, yes. Okay. So, what compelled you to come talk to us to get involved in this study? We recognize it’s kind of a weird study, you know, on white people. What—? Go ahead [phonetic].

Launer: [01:01:16] One of the Columbia—? What is it University of Columbia?

Q1: [Crosstalk]. Yes, it’s from the university.

Launer: [01:01:24] One of the Columbia University’s student—

Q1: Researcher?

Launer: [01:01:29] So clearly, I don't know a whole lot about what's going on here. One of the researchers working on the—this project was staying with some friends of mine, and they basically peer pressured me into participating. But part of what seemed interesting in the context of race in Cheyenne is that I have a lot of historical knowledge from growing up in Cheyenne, and a unique perspective, in that I grew up raised by a Hispanic family who worked for a lot of the wealthy people in Cheyenne. So I think maids, a lot of maids. Grandma was a maid, Mom was a maid, aunt was a maid for people such as Cynthia [M.] Lummis [Wiederspahn], the representative from Wyoming, and Mildred [K.] Arp who used to own a large percentage of Wyoming. So, I, kind of, have a neat perspective in that I was raised by a Hispanic family, but I identify as white and—okay.

Q1: When you say you're raised by a Hispanic family, is that your family or just that—?

Launer: [01:02:30] My family. So, my mom's side is Hispanic. They came from New Mexico in about the 1940s where their family goes way back with native and Hispanic groups.

Q1: Is there much like a Hispanic culture in your family? Do they celebrate Hispanic culture, like your mom, and aunts, and uncles, and stuff? Is that something that's part of your family?

Launer: [01:02:56] Celebrating Hispanic culture was a thing that, I would say, lives with my grandparents' generation primarily. Their children tend to be bilingual, but when you get

down to the grandchildren, most of us are not bilingual. And I would say that we do not outwardly appear Hispanic or celebrate Hispanic cultural events to the same degree that our grandparents did or do.

Q1: What does it mean to identify as white? What does that mean in your mind?

Launer: [01:03:25] To me, it's like when I walk into a room, what do I think other people think of me. Being half Hispanic and half white, I never feel like people are going, "Hey, a Mexican guy just walked into the room." I think when they see me leaving, they would describe me as, "The white guy that was just here" when I'm not around. So, when I say I identify as white, I think it's a—I have the privilege of not thinking about race very often. I don't feel like I'm socially aware of who or what I look like when I'm in a place in Cheyenne. I feel like I blend in very well around here.

Q1: [01:04:00] When you talk about like, you know, the Hispanic culture, is there a white culture? What is white culture?

Launer: [01:04:05] I think white culture is an interesting thought. When I look at my immediate family and my friends, I think they would describe themselves as not having culture. Like they're kind of the vanilla, or the middle, or the—they're the plain hamburger. To them, culture is the cheese so that would be the thing that makes them Hispanic or the thing that makes them black or Asian. So, I think, we feel like we don't have a culture here.

We definitely identify with the Wild West culture like the cowboy and stuff like that as a whole, as a town. But I think if you're really to drill down on a lot of people or have conversations with them, they tend to see that as like a lack of culture because to them, that's the center. They feel like they're the norm. And, I think, that's the relationship with a culture that we tend to have here is we think of ourselves as culturalists even though, I'm sure, people from the outside would say that we have plenty of culture.

Q1: Yes, It's sort of weird, right? Like the idea that the dominant culture in Wyoming is overwhelmingly white, right? It's over ninety percent, not Cheyenne but around the state. That like, Oh that's—that's nothing, and that the other that, Oh, there's a black culture, a Latino culture, there's Asian culture. But this massive thing that controls everything, and runs everything, employs most of the people has no—it can't be defined.

Launer: [01:05:29] Yes. I'd agree with that. I would say that when you see people going to an event in town if they're going to go out for Chinese food, or Thai food, or something, they're going to go get ethnic food. If they're going to grab a hamburger, that's just regular I guess. That's the—where the starting point for a lot of cultures here in Cheyenne is.

Q1: Now, you say you felt peer pressured. I'm like, that makes me—and I don't want you to be pressured into doing this. Did it make you feel uncomfortable to do it when you say, "You didn't want to do it" and you're like—and your friend was like, "Come on, you've got to do

this thing?” or what do you say? What do you mean you’re peer pressured into it?

Launer: [01:06:07] When I say I was peer pressured into participating with this, I mostly mean that as a joke. But there is one cool thing about living in Cheyenne, and it’s pretty easy to get—to find an inside group or to find—I don’t—some people call it their tribe or just their clique. But here in Cheyenne, when part of the group does something, the rest of the group tends to follow. So, my group chose to participate in this, and so I’m following to a certain extent, but it has been very interesting. If it was a thing that, I think, I was approached to do individually outside of them, I probably still would have done it.

I’ve had a lot of interesting conversations and a lot of different viewpoints. I feel, like, in my job, I tend to mostly interact with locals, so having conversations with people from outside of Wyoming is a thing that is a rarity in my day-to-day life. So having an opportunity to talk about that, and especially with a group of people that are, kind of, looking at Cheyenne through a magnifying lens is interesting to, kind of, get an idea of what their experience has been so far.

Sometimes, I think the locals in Cheyenne can be a little negative when it comes to town pride. So, seeing other people’s interactions with that and learning that, like, it turns out when we sit down and talk about Cheyenne, a lot of people have a lot of really good things to say. And that’s really exciting to hear because sometimes, it’s easy to dwell on the negatives that you seem to hear when you’re reading like comments in the local newspaper, which

probably isn't the best place to get a pick-me-up.

Q1: Tell me a little about your tribe, your group. Who's in it? What's like the—some of the defining characteristics? What's, sort of, the center of gravity that pulls everybody together?

Launer: [01:07:57] When it comes to my social group that I've found here, I would say that by a large—maybe one big binding aspect that we all have is that we all tend to be career focused. That's one of the things, I think, lets us relate to each other a lot. Most of my friends are college educated, thirties, single, and or recently married. But I really don't have that many friends with children, so I think we're all in the same life place. And I think in Cheyenne, it tends to feel like we're a rarity. It feels like transitioning from high-school-aged to being thirty in Cheyenne, you see a lot of your friends leave. We don't have a really big college here and not as many opportunities to enter the professional world for young people here. So, I feel like when you find those other single thirties here, you tend to hold on to them and you don't let them go.

Q1: Do you feel like you've gotten any advantages from being white?

Launer: [01:09:04] I surely feel like I do. I—

Q1: Can you my question—?

Launer: [01:09:07] Sorry, yes. The advantages I see from being white tend to be that I don't feel like I experience a lot of disadvantages. So, I feel, like, when I'm not being self-aware, it's easy for me to not see the advantages that I do have. But when I think back to where I've had the struggle in life, those have been rare. People tend to trust me very easily. I'm the kind of guy that when I go out on a date, I do really well when I meet the parents. Like people are warm and inviting to me, so I don't, generally, have the feeling of walking into a room and feeling a level of uncomfortableness.

I think that's given me a lot of advantages because I interview very well for jobs. Coming from a small town—maybe this is part of it but part of when I have professional conversations with people, I've had the advantage of I've never applied for a job. Because of my reputation, I've been able to—people reach out to me and seek me out. And I think that's not entirely, but I do think I can blame race in Cheyenne to a certain extent. Because I feel, like, if I was Indian for example, I don't know that I would have that same advantage because I think in Cheyenne, there's—when you say there's—someone's Indian, I think, it starts to paint a picture of being unreliable. There are some racist views on that, in my opinion, around here. And. I think, the fact that I don't have to deal with that, it's just I'm two steps ahead when it comes time for me to have those conversations.

Everyone at my workplace is white. That's not on purpose, but it's the reality. I've worked at two to three to four, what I would call, multimillion-dollar-revenue marketing firms based in or having offices in Wyoming, and I've never worked with anyone that's not white.

Q1: Wow. That's a pretty astounding observation. And why do you think that is?

Launer: [01:11:12] I like to think it's just happenstance. I've loved all my employers so far. I'm still very close with all of them, so I don't view them as someone who's making racist decisions. But when it comes people that are college educated and willing to move to Cheyenne, I feel, like, people self-select into their groups. Every time I meet someone from out of town, they've mostly been white. But to be fair, most of the people I meet in Cheyenne are white, so I don't get to interact with a whole lot of nonwhite people or, at least, people that don't identify as white. I've worked with people like myself who are half Hispanic or half something else, but I think they would say the same way I do, that when they walk into a room, someone would say they're the white person that walked into the room.

Q1: Is there anybody in this friend group, this clique that's not white?

Launer: [01:12:04] No. Recently, I had a conversation with my friends about the makeup of our friend group, and, I think, we discovered that we don't have any nonwhite friends. We're struggling to identify people who weren't white. We all seemed to have, Well, I'm friends with a guy from work from four years ago or The guy that I see at the at the store every day that I'm friendly with is black. But right now, my social circle is completely white.

Q1: Is that inherently bad? I mean people talk about segregation or self-segregation, is that inherently bad that it's like that [phonetic]?

Launer: [01:12:41] I don't know if it's inherently bad that it's so easy to have an all-white friend group. I do think I could if pressed, find negatives, fallbacks from that. I bet you if I were to—if my friend group were to show up at a local bar and there was a lone minority in the corner, he might be intimidated rather than openly wanting to join our group just because he's not seeing himself there already. But that's me, kind of, making that story up as I go, so I don't know if that is true. I don't know that I have the information that I would be comfortable coming up with an opinion on whether or not it's bad that all my friends are white. It, certainly, doesn't feel like it's affecting my life, but my life's great because I'm, you know, me [laughs].

Q1: The other thing is [unclear] because we've talked to a lot of white people for this project who feel like, Oh, I wish—you know, I wish if I weren't just—I wish there was some part of me that wasn't white. I feel like so vanilla, and plain, and not interesting. I wish I was part this or part that. That's funny that you aren't part that, but you seem not interested in that at all or feel, like, it defines you at all, even something that you think might even make you more attractive if—in the job park or wherever it is. You just feel no connection at all to that Latino part?

Launer: [01:14:06] I wouldn't say I don't feel a connection to my Latino part. I'd be more

comfortable saying I don't think other people think Latino when they see me, but I'm way closer to the Hispanic side of my family than I am to the white side of my family. I'm close to both, but all my grandparents live in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and I'm lucky to have all my grandparents at my age still. I see my Hispanic grandparents twice a week or more. I see my white grandparents on my dad's side maybe four times a year at most. When I think of holidays, I definitely think of the Hispanic parts of my holidays being important to me. Thanksgiving, the food is always better at Grandma Tilly's [phonetic] house than it is, you know, at the other side of my family's house. She's a great cook too, but you can't beat green chili on Thanksgiving.

And since I was raised with my Hispanic grandparents, I think I identify with their religion more than I do with the other side of my family. My Hispanic side is Catholic. The white side of my family is Lutheran. I was baptized Lutheran, but I definitely feel way closer to the Catholic side of my family, and I tend to identify as Catholic light even though technically, I was never baptized as a Catholic.

I wish I could bring more of the Latino side of my family into my life. I was raised living almost part-time with my grandparents, and Spanish is their first language, but they did not raise me speaking Spanish, so I am not a great Spanish speaker. That's one thing that I always wish that they had done is raised me speaking Spanish or just teaching me more about where they come from. I feel like that's the part that does make me a little bit more unique, especially because I—maybe all my friends are white, so it feels like my Hispanic side to them is a little bit more interesting than the white side. I know more about my

Hispanic side of my family because I find it so intriguing. I have spent a lot more time researching my family history and what my great grandparents did for a living and stuff like that as opposed to the other side of my family.

Q1: You said when you came in that you—because of your family makeup, you had a unique insight into Wyoming and Cheyenne culture. What were some of the things that you thought would be important to talk about?

Launer: [01:16:36] One of the things that's very unique about the way I grew up is I grew up very poor. My mom was a maid at a motel and so was my grandma. She was a maid at the same hotel. But it gave us access to a lot of the people who were, kind of, the movers and shakers in town. The owner of the motel—her name was Mildred Arp—she has books written about her, and so you can find she has a biography. She was hugely influential in Wyoming in maybe the 1930s through the 1980s as a business investor. Because of that I feel like I, kind of, had an inside knowledge of a lot of the ongoings in Cheyenne, and so I learned about the history of a lot of the buildings, a lot of the influential people in town from a perspective that wasn't of an equal—I don't know how to put that.

We weren't swimming in the same social circles. We were definitely near poverty when I was young, but I have transitioned out of that. I would say that I am upper middle class for sure now. So, I think, now that I know the mayor on a first-name basis, I've known the last two governors on a first-name basis, and I've been to parties with the senators, yet my mom

was the person cleaning their toilets. So, I always think that that's an interesting transition in a small town because stories don't go very far here, so you tend to learn a lot of unique information in the community.

Q1: That's really interesting. Do you feel that those, sort of, institutions of power that you move through now, buildings, institutions, organizations, that do you feel entitled to be there or—? Because when you were younger that you must have seen these like big, out-of-reach things, do you feel fully—full ownership in your present, in the space that you travel now? Or is there anything left over from the poor kid who was raised by the maids of these people?

Launer: [01:19:01] I feel sometimes with the people I interact with on a day to day that people have used the term impostor syndrome. And I think I identify with impostor syndrome a lot of the times. Sometimes, I do feel like I shouldn't be where I am, and I've tricked people. Luckily, I know that I'm pretty well respected in my career, but in the back of my head, there's always this nagging suspicion that someday they'll find out that I'm a fraud. And so that's why I really like that impostor syndrome when I learned about it because it's something that I empathize with a lot. I feel like there's a good chance that impostor syndrome comes from being raised in a Hispanic household, and transitioning to this upper-middle-class kind of white identity. I'm sure it's more complicated than that, but I do feel that plays a role.

Q1: Now just for the record, we all suffer from impostor syndrome. [Laughter] We all

[unclear] who's this guy behind the camera?

Launer: [Laughs]

Q1: But no, that's—that's really interesting. It's funny, so you—it's like you don't—do you make any effort to cue people that you are—that you are culturally Latino or you have this big piece of you? I know that certain people when they pronounce their last name, they give it a Spanish pronunciation [unclear]. Do you make any effort, or do you feel you, kind of, hide, that that's your private thing and you just want to move through the world this particular way? Are you hiding it? Are you pushing it out there? I'm just, sort of, wondering how you're navigating it then?

Launer: I don't think I hide or embrace the Hispanic part of my upbringing, but I do get excited when I find opportunities to share it. So, I don't feel like I force anything in my day-to-day life to say, "Hey, I'm half Mexican" other than when I have the opportunity to introduce people to my family. I always, kind of, enjoy the shock when they meet my grandma and grandpa, and that they have such thick accents. And they are very much what you would think of like happy little Hispanic, Catholic people. And, I think, a lot of people are surprised when they get to meet my family, and I always find a lot of joy in that.

My grandparents definitely worked for everything that they have, and I think there's some quality that you can almost see when you met them of that. My grandpa was a laborer his

whole life. He's done a lot of things in his life, but he was a shepherd for a long time with a covered wagon and everything. He's laid a lot of carpet in Cheyenne, Wyoming, so I feel like when people find out that I'm related to Pedro Pacheco [phonetic], they get really excited because what they think of when they hear about him is that really happy, funny, hard worker who was always willing to lend a hand. So there's an excitement, I find, when I get to reveal that part of myself.

In my day-to-day life though, I'm almost a little afraid to try to share it in that I think I'm going to mess it up. Because I don't speak Spanish and because I don't have an accent, I don't want to tell someone, "Hey, I'm half Mexican," and have them speak Spanish to me and then have me struggle to respond. But that's maybe an insecurity of mine, the fact that I'm not as fluent in Spanish as I really should be.

Q1: Do you feel like that this, sort of, white part of you now, this white identity that you have, do you feel any connection or responsibility to the sins of our fathers, the complicated relationship we have with Japanese Americans, Native Americans, black Americans as white? Now that you've entered this white identity, do you feel them—like do you also carry white guilt to responsibility for some of the things that happened in the past or feel a special obligation to somehow make amends for that?

Launer: [01:23:05] I don't feel like I feel a lot of white guilt. I think when I'm being thoughtful, I feel like I should, and then sometimes, I feel guilty that I don't feel white guilt.

But my experiences growing up didn't put me in a lot of scenarios where I had to think about that. It was very easy for me to not realize what it was like to grow up Japanese or black and not understand the difference that I experience with people like that.

I feel, like, I have an interesting thought there in that growing—now that I'm thirty and I think about my grandparents more, there's maybe more signs growing up with them that I should have picked up on of some, like, racial dynamics that they experienced. My grandfather on my dad's side, on my white side, was a soldier in World War II. And I know because of that, we weren't—he wasn't fond of Japanese cars, but I think when I was little, I didn't put one and two together there.

I don't know that I've ever met a Japanese person in Cheyenne, Wyoming, living in Cheyenne, Wyoming. We have a lot of tourists but not a lot of Japanese people that I interact with day to day. If I had had the opportunity to have a Japanese classmate, I think it might have brought up some conflicts or at least some stories that my dad could have told me, my grandpa and why, maybe, I should not mention that I'm going to my Japanese friend's house for—to—you know, for a sleepover or something. But those opportunities didn't really come up.

Q1: Was there any issue with your dad marrying your mom, the fact that he was a white Wyomingite marrying a Mexican woman? Is there a conflict between the families or unhappiness?

Launer: [01:25:02] I don't know if there were any conflicts with—between my parents getting married, one being white and one being Hispanic. The culture of my mom's side, the Hispanic side and my dad's side, I would say, is that you don't talk about negative things. If a bad thing happened in the past, we just never talk about it again. So, well, I like to think that that was a beautiful, happy, all-good, everyone's in wedding and union, I don't know that that is true or not.

Q1: How would you describe, like, Wyoming culture, white Wyoming culture?

Launer: [01:25:40] I would describe Wyoming culture maybe a couple of different ways, kind of mainstream and counter-mainstream maybe. I don't know if you've had the opportunity of spending time in Laramie [Wyoming], but Laramie and Cheyenne are interesting in that we have a lot of what we called "tech-ers" - kids going to tech [technician] school, so automotive, diesel tech, auto body, those kind of careers, heavily white careers, and heavily working class, and a lot of pride in a really bullish, masculine kind of pride, which can conflict with a lot of the other counter-culture things in this area. The college kids tend to not get along with the tech kids, and I think that there is a lot of grasping to culture within those kind of circles. We, definitely, have the, you like your big trucks, your country music kind of attitude here, which is a very loud and boisterous culture. And so—sorry. I'm struggling to try to think of how to phrase it.

So when I think of culture in Wyoming, those are the things that pop up right away. Like if you give me a few seconds to answer what is a culture in Wyoming, I'm going to say cowboys, I'm going to say trucks, I'm going to say ranches, I'm going to say horses. I do think that there is—as a result of that being the mainstream culture, a lot of people, maybe like myself, who, growing up, didn't want to participate in that part of it because those were the cool kids, and I wasn't a cool kid as much as I wanted to be. So, I grew up with an attitude of not liking big trucks and not liking country music. And so, I think that's the way I think of that is that kneejerk growing up kind of experience with if you're not a cowboy, if you're not—if you don't have chew in your mouth, and if you don't have a truck, well then you're feminine and—or you're gay, or whatever else they would say about that.

Q1: Do you feel like this movement, this move towards whiteness was a conscious choice? Did you look at the possibility and say, “Look at my family? And this is something that I don't want to carry out into the world with me?” Or was it just something that happened because you weren't great at speaking Spanish? You know, I'd imagine if you're living with your grandparents who are these very, very, very identifiable characters with a very identifiable culture, was it something that you made, sort of, a conscious choice to move away from, do you think?

Launer: [01:28:19] I don't remember growing up ever making the decision to identify as one culture or another. I do remember becoming an adult and becoming aware of some of the cultural themes I grew up with or qualities that I was unaware of. I had a girlfriend in my early twenties that after hanging out with my grandma for the day told me, “I really love

your grandma's accent. It's really cute." And my response was, "My grandma doesn't have an accent" because I didn't realize that my grandma had had an accent growing up because to me, it was just grandma and the way she talked.

I think my experience growing up is we didn't have conversations around culture, so I was very unaware of what culture could be or what was. So when I made decisions on the way I was going to dress, or the people we're going to hang out with, or the things we're going to do, I don't remember making choices to move towards the Hispanic side of my family or away. I don't remember having those kinds of critical thinking moments about ethnicity and culture growing up.

Q1: Do you think that the community views you differently than they viewed your parents and grandparents?

Launer: [01:29:39] I think the community views me very differently than it did from my grandparents. In fact, my dad told me a story once—which now looking back, always seems very interesting to me—about how he used to think people with accents were less intelligent. I don't think he was proud of that, but it was a story he was telling me. And he used my grandpa as an example of if my grandpa had come in to work to buy something, that my dad would immediately be somewhat irritated that he would have to handhold this person or deal with this person because maybe they struggled with English.

I think that my grandparents and the parents and in their accents when you meet them, you know that their first language is Spanish. They speak great English, but I do think those kind of things are judgments that people make all the time. And the fact that my dad was willing to admit that, like, the way my grandpa talks made him think that he might be less intelligent was kind of an aha moment as an adult having that conversation with him. So, I am sure that I am viewed differently than my grandparents than—in Cheyenne than people view me.

Q1: Do you plan to stay in Cheyenne? Do you, sort of, see yourself here long term settling, or do you have other plans? Like do you have some, sort of, aspiration of going someplace else, do you think?

Launer: [01:31:02] I struggle with whether I'm going to stay in Cheyenne long term or not. There are parts of it that I fall in love with very easily, and there are parts of it that I'm not fond of at all. It is very easy to be a big fish in a small pond here. Economically, I feel there's a lot of advantages to living in Cheyenne. And maybe this is my impostor syndrome, but I feel like I've been able to build a life for me that would have been very difficult to build in another location. I dropped out of college, and I had over \$100,000 in student loan debts with no real plan on how to deal with that. And somehow, I fell into a web development job in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where a guy was willing to teach me how to do that. And I've been able to pay off those student loans, and I've been able to buy a house. I make more money than my parents combined. I don't know that those are things that would happen in a place that's not Cheyenne, Wyoming.

On the other side, I do feel like there are opportunity and experiences that I am missing out by choosing to stay in Cheyenne. Dating sucks in Cheyenne. Meeting new people sucks in Cheyenne or, at least, feels like it can. Those are things that when I weigh what's important to me, I've chosen to make those less important in order to make more money or be able to build my career in a way that I don't think could happen in a big city. I can say that I am the best at what I do in Cheyenne, and I can say that I'm the best at what I do maybe in the state of Wyoming. I don't think I could say I'm the best at what I do in Fort Collins [Colorado]. It has its advantages, and sometimes, those can be weaknesses as well.

Q1: In dating and then possibly having spouse down the road that do you see yourself—do you have any sort of— one way or another like, Oh, I'm more attracted to Latino women, or black women, or white? Do you feel yourself becoming more white or is that, sort of, like— do you see yourself an individual building whatever comes along?

Launer: [01:33:13] Can you ask that again?

Q1: Well, I'm trying to figure out—it's kind of weird question, but, you know, like dating and then the idea of possibly having a family with a partner, do you—I guess the question is would race or ethnicity play any role in your decision-making about who you would date or so—

Launer: [01:33:33] I like to think that race and ethnicity wouldn't play much of a role in me choosing who I would date or marry even. That is something that I've never had the opportunity to experiment with really. I've dated Hispanic girls, and I've dated white girls, but I've never dated anyone who was Asian or black. I feel like it would be exciting just [laughs] to because—I don't know it's cheesy. Maintaining like my white identity wouldn't be important to me in building a family or pursuing a relationship. To me, way—there are more bigger, important things, like do they have a career or are they liberal? I don't think could date a conservative just because I don't think we would get along, but that's just kind of the way I'm wired.

Q1: You know, sort of going even further that you had—if you had—if you married someone of another race? You've gone from like being in a Latino family to being a white man, what if you—would you be opposed to having your children be of a different race than you?

Launer: [01:34:42] I wouldn't be opposed to having children—my children be a different race than me. I tend to not be very fond of the idea of ever having children [laughs] either way, but I like to think I would like or dislike those kids equally, no matter what race they were.

Q1: That's a good answer.

Launer: [01:35:02] [Laughs]

Q1: So, let's see. What time is our next?

Q2: I'm not sure.

Q1: You know, we talked a lot about race, anything we didn't talk about in the context of this conversation that you think is really important to say either about whiteness, Wyoming, you?

Launer: [01:35:30] No. There's not a whole lot that, I think, we haven't talked about when it comes to race that I feel like is super important. Other than, I do think the fact that—I bet you if you were the man on the street, ask a lot of people about ethnicity in Wyoming, a lot of people would say that's not something they've ever thought about. It's so easy here to not think about race and ethnicity, but I don't think a lot of people do. Probably because we're all white, so it's not something that ever really comes up.

It seems like the most times that you'll find race come up in the public forum in Wyoming is when there's been a robbery and they're a minority or a homeless person that's a minority. I do think that there tends to be a lot of judgment about their race. I like to think that all newspaper websites are terrible places for people to have comments on, but if you explore the Wyoming newspaper website for more than five minutes, you'll be guaranteed to find

some racial reference if you—if there's a story about anyone doing anything that's illegal. I do think because of that, there's a lot of racism that could be under the surface. But I also don't know if that's true because I never have to deal with it. To me, if race is a problem in Wyoming, it's not something—I don't think that's the way I want to put that. I wouldn't say that race is a problem in Wyoming, but I wouldn't know if it was because it's something that is so rarely talked about or dealt with in my life in Wyoming.

Q1: Are you proud of what your grandparents and your parents and what they did?

Launer: [01:37:35] I'm very proud of my family. I think they have interesting stories. I think in a nation where we really pride the idea of meritocracy, they embody that. I think when you look at my grandparents, they couldn't have been any poorer when they were growing up, and yet, they have large families and they—all their family is—are great people. All of my cousins are wonderful. I'm proud of the reputation I have just by when people find out that I'm related to the Pachecos. I feel, like, they only have good things to say about that.

I do think comparatively the white side of my family while I'm not proud of that part of my family, you can't put the same story against it. They're an example of the kind of—especially because they're boomer age that they went into a place, got a job, and worked there for thirty or forty years that, and were able to retire, so their life was a little bit more formulaic. My grandparents' side on my Hispanic side, they didn't have that formula to follow, so they had to make their own. And so, I am very proud of what they were able to do

with no education and just with hard work.

Q1: And how does, sort of, the national conversation on immigration strike you knowing where you came from? Your parents are immigrants, and you're the offspring of immigrants, how do you feel about the conversation of immigration going in here, especially in this community?

Launer: [01:39:17] Immigration's interesting to me because I feel we were so far removed from it that it's not something that we have to deal with in our day-to-day life, so most opinions are built around what they see on TV. Well, clearly, because I'm not Indian, like, both sides of my family immigrated to America at some point. But the level of pride in that action is different on the white side of my family versus the Hispanic side of my family. And I think what's interesting about, you know, the pride is on my white side of my family. It's when they came over from Germany.

Whereas the Hispanic side of my family doesn't have the knowledge of when they came from wherever they may have come from. There's a lot of native on that side of the family, so that might be part of it. But I feel, like, for them, their immigration, and their history, and what their—where their parents came from, what's important to them is who they were and not what they were. And on the white side of my family, I feel, like, it's maybe turned a little bit because there is a little bit more of what they were and maybe not so much who they were. I don't know what kind of person my great-grandpa on my white side of my family

was like, but I do know he was German, and when he came here from Germany, and that he worked on a farm. But I have no context for what his personality was like. Was he a good person? Was he warm?

Whereas on the Hispanic side of my family, they all have stories about my great-uncle Henry, and how warm he was, and how funny he was, but they never say, “This is when he got here,” and they don’t identify him by what his job was. It tends to be more about the quality of what it was like to be around him and whether people wanted to be in his presence. And those are the kind of things I don’t know about the white side of my family.

Q1: Is there anything we didn’t talk about that, you think, is important to be said in the context of a conversation like this?

Launer: [01:41:14] I don’t know. [Laughter]

Q1: I suppose where it feels like they have to give an answer to that question. [Laughter]
That was good. Now, you have this really interesting story. I really thank you so much for sharing it with us, a really interesting perspective of—

Launer: [01:41:30] Cool. Well, this was interesting.

Q1: Yes. We’re just going to take a couple of stills of you now, so just—

Launer: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]