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Auriluz Pacheco

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**NEW YORK CITY MATERNAL HEALTH ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT PARTICIPANT #02

Interviewer: Auriluz Pacheco

Date of Interview: October 20th, 2020

Location of Interview: New York, NY

Transcript link

NYC MHOP Interview Transcript #001

Transcribed by Auriluz Pacheco

Auriluz: It is October 20th, 2020, and today I am conducting an interview via Zoom, doing an oral history for the New York City Maternal Health Oral History Project, hosted by the Binghamton University Open Repository, which aims to document the experiences of women who underwent or are currently undergoing pregnancy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before we begin, I'll just be asking a few demographic questions, is that alright?

Participant 2: Yup, that's fine.

Auriluz: Okay thank you. Age?

Participant 2: 32.

Auriluz: Can I get like a range of your income? For example like 10-30, 30-50 thousand, etc.?

Participant 2: Um \$100,000-\$220,000.

Auriluz: Can I know what borough you live in?

Participant 2: Queens.

Auriluz: Race?

Participant 2: Hispanic.

Auriluz: So currently I'm interviewing women that are either like in birth already or are currently pregnant. So the question is just like for my knowledge, so are you currently pregnant or did you already give birth?

Participant 2: I gave birth already.

Auriluz: So when did you first find out you're pregnant? Was it before or during the shutdown?

Participant 2: It was before. September 2019.

Auriluz: So how are you currently feeling and how were you feeling when you found out you were feeling?

Participant 2: When I first found out, I was happy. I was nervous. Because as anyone can imagine brining a child into the world is pretty hectic but it's also exciting and now I'm very happy because he's just so gorgeous and cute and he just brings so much joy to my life *pause*. But it's hard adjusting to motherhood especially when there's so much uncertainty, especially with kids or doing things with him, when I'm out or his father's out. I'm Afraid of bringing something back to our home and potentially infecting him. So it kind of gives me a lot of anxiety along with the happiness because you just don't know what could happen with the baby.

Auriluz: So what concerns, if any, do you have moving forward around your health, the baby, any appointments that you might have and what concerns did you have when you first found out that you were pregnant? If any.

Participant 2: Well, I wasn't really that concerned when I found out about my health or anything like that, because I'm a pretty healthy individual. There was a scare where they told me that the baby didn't have a heartbeat. So they were asking me to terminate. And when I actually went to do it, they actually found the heartbeat. So that was kind of the biggest scare I had in my pregnancy. But other than that, it was pretty small. Now, I don't have any concerns for my health either. Again, I'm pretty healthy and more concerned about the baby's health just because he's brand new, and has an undeveloped immune system. He's more susceptible to anything than I am.

Auriluz: So were there any things that you had heard of on COVID and being pregnant?

Participant 2: No, so when COVID came about it was in March and I had three months left of my pregnancy, it was very new. We didn't know what we know now. It was just more of like, it was just chaos around it because it was so unknown. Like I would go outside onto the street or into the garden, I wouldn't take off my mask. When I first heard about it, I didn't go out for three weeks, just because I was so scared. You didn't know how you could contract it. They were saying just touching something and then touching your face. You can be infected. Yeah it was pretty scary. Just because you didn't know. You didn't know the practices that could help you prevent it. Now I feel a little bit more at ease. But it's still pretty scary just because I feel like there's some people who contract it and die off of it.

Auriluz: Can you describe your experience was like to me both like before COVID hit and then after it had hit? So you mentioned that you only had three months left when you found out?

Participant 2: Yeah, well, before I got pregnant, and I got like, pretty big. I didn't really leave the house, I was tired. After COVID it was at first it felt pretty good to just be at home like, had to be there, no choice. After a while it kind of messes with you, mentally and emotionally to know that you couldn't leave your home. So I kind of found myself trying to keep occupied and other ways around the house. Just like cleaning and reading and doing some prenatal exercises. But it still messes with you just knowing what's going on outside. Especially like after March, and then May, when you saw that things weren't getting better, they were actually getting worse. I don't want to say I was depressed because I wasn't. But it's kind of like, you feel like there's a grey cloud over you to know that. You don't know when this is gonna end, your baby is brand new moving into the world. You can do anything about it and no one knows because no one knows either. Like it's beyond your motherly capacity to protect them.

Auriluz: In terms of that, how did your experience change? Attention wise, appointment wise? Different health care access?

Participant 2: After COVID you mean?

Auriluz: You could talk about how it was like when you first found out and then how it changed after giving birth or just over time. Especially since you weren't able to step out and found that hard.

Participant 2: Yeah. So before COVID like I was going to the doctor and every few months, every other month or once a month. But towards the end of my pregnancy it was every week. And because of COVID they changed it to every other week. Actually, when I gave birth at the hospital it was New York Presbyterian in Queens. They're supposed to be a baby friendly hospital. Meaning that they encourage breastfeeding heavily and they have a lactation consultant, just like you in the clinic I was being seen at they speak to you about that every single week. So when I gave birth I was having trouble with that. And there weren't any resources available to me to help me with getting my baby to latch on. And even after I left the hospital, I still felt kind of lost. So I was trying to find, like I outsourced, and I was trying to find lactation consultants myself, to help me with that because I really wanted to breastfeed, and I wasn't able to. Because of COVID, no one was making home visits. I mean, I actually never met even anyone on the phone. So that was pretty frustrating. After like, six weeks of birth, you're supposed to go in. So they do, and they check you out, just to make sure that everything is fine after birth. But that was actually done virtually so they didn't, pretty much. Mostly, we spoke on the phone with a doctor and they asked me questions about it, which I thought was pretty *pause* like, they don't consider that an important visit, which, to me, is baffling. I just gave birth to a human being. And it's very important for you to check me after to make sure I'm okay. So that's not considered important. But I just wanted to go to the same clinic for Pap smear. And that's considered important, which, to me, that's important, but I think I pushed out a baby and, you know, my organs were all over the place. That's equally important to make me go in and be checked out. So a lot of appointments were done virtually. And, you know, they were more spaced out. And it just took longer, because of COVID. When I gave birth they wanted me to wear a mask and my husband to wear a mask and gown. They were lenient on letting me take it off, but not so much with him.

Auriluz: Yeah, I think you might be the first person that I've spoken to that was allowed to have a partner there with them.

Participant 2: Yes, thankfully. That was very nerve wracking. Thinking that you would have to give birth alone.

Auriluz: I'm glad that you were able to do that. Did your health care provider provide any additional resources?

Participant 2: No, I think. I think as a pregnant woman, I felt pretty alone and helpless. I really didn't like my provider, I realized, I guess when I first was pregnant, and it's my first pregnancy, I didn't realize how important it was to research a good provider, and what questions to ask, especially since nobody thought a pandemic was going to happen. So I was going somewhere that was near to my home. And it was whatever was accessible to me. And it wasn't until maybe I was 38 weeks that I wanted to change providers. And I wanted to kind of do a birthing center, opposed to a hospital. But at that point it was pretty late. Because the birthing center is more catered to, like natural approaches, and to the mom and things like that at the hospital, you are

just another patient. They don't care about you. So an experience that I actually had was, after 40 weeks, the baby doesn't come, they're supposed to do a stress test three days after. They did the stress test a day after 40 weeks and a day and they checkup when you go every week to check the baby's heartbeat. And pretty much that's it. So during this stress test, it's the same thing just for a longer period of time. And the baby monitors weren't put on me correctly and the person administering the test left the room and didn't come back for 30 minutes. And when they left the room I was holding the monitors because I felt them sliding off. So when she came back into the room, she's like, yeah, everything's fine. But then she leaves to show the doctor and comes back and says oh your baby's heartbeat dropped you have to go to the hospital. It's getting induced today and I pretty much sent myself into a panic about that and I didn't want to go to the hospital because of COVID I just wanted to avoid the hospital at all costs until my baby was pretty much coming out of me himself. But they sent me because they said oh, one in two people stillborn so I went to the hospital. I got another stress test. It was fine. And the doctor came and I said, Okay, I don't want to be induced. So they made me kind of waiver pretty much releasing them of any responsibilities as I chose not to be induced and speak to a doctor the first time ever, and she told me, you know, you may die, right? And I'm like, oh you just did a test and it says it's fine. They're like, well, I just want you to know that your baby may die and it would be your responsibility. And I was really taken aback. Because it's pretty unprofessional, especially to a pregnant woman, you don't say those things like that. So yeah, I didn't feel supported by the doctors, I don't feel like they were looking out for me as a mom, I just feel like they were just treating me like any other patient. And then especially towards the end, they just wanted to get the baby out of me, and not really give me the help and the time for the baby to come out himself. So that was pretty tough.

Auriluz: Yeah, that sounds really discouraging. I'm sorry. Was this also Presbyterian?

Participant 2: Yeah.

Auriluz: I'm actually surprised because a lot of people recognize them for being good.

Participant 2: Yeah I thought so too but I did not have a good experience with them.

Auriluz: So are there any resources you wish that they did provide, like any information, any type of treatment?

Participant 2: I really wish I would have had a lactation consultant with me. I was at the hospital for about a day. And so I wish I would have had somebody who would have taught me how to breastfeed the baby. I wish I would have had somebody speak to me about, you know, just different exercises, maybe that I could have done to help the baby come on his own, because I did end up being induced. That's about it, I mean, everything else, it was a cold approach. It's not like I didn't feel like oh, my god, you're gonna be a mom. It's just very quick appointments. And also, every time that I was seeing the doctor, I didn't realize it the first time, I didn't realize she wasn't the doctor who was going to deliver the baby. So you pretty much whoever is on call, I wish that they would have informed me of that and would have many of you familiar with whoever would have given birth, I mean, whoever would have delivered my baby from the beginning. So I could have had a relationship with them, I think that would have been best.

Auriluz: With that, I was gonna ask was, in terms of the birth clinic, are there midwives and doulas there as opposed to doctors?

Participant 2: Yeah so they are midwives, they are midwives there. The birthing center, I took a Lamaze class which ended up being virtual as well. And that person, she recommended because I reached out to her towards the end about my concerns, because at that time, they didn't want to let that in still. So I was just reaching out to her because I was 38 weeks, and they were already talking to me about being induced. And I'm like, I still have two weeks to go, why are you talking to me about this? Instead of encouraging like something else, it's just like, it just kind of like to get rid of the baby. And I didn't appreciate that approach. So I reached out to the instructor of the class, she referred me to, I believe, one of those Metropolitan hospitals, it's a hospital but clinic? So if something were to go wrong I guess you go to the hospital, but the birthing center has a few different midwives and I didn't switch. Birthing centers, from what I've heard, just take a different approach to how they treat their moms.

Auriluz: What are some resources that wish you were receiving now?

Participant 2: I wish I had some help with putting my baby to sleep because he's four months and wants us to hold him all day. His sleeping patterns make it hard for him to sleep the day; it's really hard to get asleep. And if he's asleep, he has to sleep on him or me, and not in his crib. It becomes pretty difficult to do anything during the day, like if one of us doesn't have him carried. So I wish I had someone to like help with that or to just, I guess help us with when it comes to bathing and care for a few hours. A big thing for me is that I was busy before he was born so it's something else I have to stay on top of. So I wish we had a sitter to come here for like a few hours so that I can do stuff like for self care, things for myself. I mean, my husband is really good. Like he's a big help. But I think we both kind of need a break from time to time just a little. So I can go get my hair done or he can get a haircut. There's a time where you forget about yourself as a mother. And it's important not to, because personally, I feel like my son feeds off of me. And if I'm frustrated, I'm not feeling well like he knows and he acts on it. So I try my best to always be patient with him and try to take care of myself so he doesn't suffer for it.

Auriluz: So you mentioned you like touched on it a little bit. Okay, tell me how knowledgeable you think you were. And even now, like in terms of your options around childbirth postnatal and prenatal stages?

Participant 2: Yeah so before I think I was like a negative 10. And I didn't realize how important it was till it was closer to me actually getting to read a bunch of books about giving birth, because I was just scared of giving birth. And I was reading like, oh, you know, you've asked these questions, which I did, I did ask my OBGYN the questions, but she wasn't the person who was gonna deliver the baby so it didn't matter what she was saying to me. As she was my doctor, at the point that I was going to deliver the baby, I was already eight months. So it really didn't matter. He didn't answer my questions the way that I would have thought. So I wish I would have read. It doesn't matter. I think that sometimes you just have to have the experience because I read a lot of these and nothing prepares you for actually having them and dealing with them. So now, obviously I know more because of the experience that I went through. So if I have

another baby, I will definitely do my research early on, before I pick a provider and I would probably interview and not just go to one just to see who I was comfortable with I would definitely do a birthing center. I always said I wouldn't go over it. But I would. I was even opting for that instead of going to the hospital because the hospital experience for me was horrendous. And there's always I think there's always room to learn when it comes to how to pick your provider for giving birth. But I think now I have better insight on what I would want in a provider than before.

Auriluz: That actually went into like the next question that I had. What are some things you learned during your pregnancy experience? What are some things you wish you knew? You can either skip that question, or you could talk a bit more about it?

Participant 2: Yeah, I just wish I knew the difference between birthing centers and hospitals. I wish I would have been more open-minded about exploring those different types of centers. Yeah, I just wish I would have done more research on it, I guess I was a little lazy. And I don't think that people speak enough about actually picking the right provider. And in a lot of books that I read they speak a lot about, you know, take care of yourself and during your pregnancy and don't swaddle the baby but they don't talk about how important it is for you to get the provider and there should be more talk about that.

Auriluz: And you also mentioned this a little bit. But then, of course, what type of birth were you intending on having? And what kind did you have?

Participant 2: So I really wanted a natural birth, the baby to come on his own time, and I didn't want to have any drugs. But that was so far off. When you're pregnant, they calculate the first day of your last period as the first day of your pregnancy. And that wasn't the case for me. I pretty much know like the week that I became pregnant, which was the week after. So the entire time my pregnancy was being counted wrong. But you can never tell a doctor that because they won't listen. So I think another reason why I ended up being induced was because when they were saying I was 40 weeks, I wasn't 40 weeks. That's why I ended up having to deliver for 19 hours because of the induction. It was extremely painful. It wasn't able to leave the bed. Pretty much tired the whole 19 hours. I had monitors on me 24/7. They put an IV in me the whole time which wasn't necessary and I was freaking out but in hospitals it is difficult. You're just like a patient and they have rotating nurses like they don't want to have to come in as a result. Like whereas in a birthing center, you know, they make sure that whatever is more catered to you. In a hospital it's just like whatever, nobody has catered to you. In hospitals you can't eat and you are supposed to be able to eat. So I mean, how are you supposed to endure all of that and not have any food? So they had a blood pressure on me the entire time. It's 30 minutes, although I have no pre-existing conditions, perfectly healthy and not at risk. But the nurse didn't want to come in so they left it on me. Yeah, so as my contractions got worse, because of the induction, it was working. You know, I learned just reading books and also in the class I took a Lamaze class. There are different exercises, they help with the pain and walking around, I could not walk around. And there weren't any massages or exercise. So I think 13 hours of labor, I was only four centimeters dilated and I couldn't take the pain anymore so I took the epidural because it was just too much. And the doctor who actually ended up delivering my baby is the same who told me, my baby was gonna die. When they started to tell me to push the epidural set in, I still

felt his head like trying to kind of push out. So I asked for more epidural, because they told me that I could get more because it was gonna take a while. When I did it from where I was 10 cm, I was ready to push. And they started to get me to push and then the doctor left the room to go deliver another baby. And then it came back at me. Yeah, it was just, I was not happy with the experience whatsoever. I asked them not to give the baby a bath. They gave the baby a bath. They came in and asked after that. I wanted to see baby, you cannot sleep because they would come into your room every 30 minutes. So like, some stupid question that they asked already before. So when I finally did give birth, and I was moved into a room that I had to pay for, I couldn't even get sleep. Because they kept waking me up and while I was sleeping they came in and asked my husband if they should bathe the baby. You know, he didn't know. Even though I had originally I said no. He was bathed anyway. So I was pretty upset. So it wasn't a good experience. I thought it was gonna be like I was preparing myself to just enjoy the pain and take it as a natural experience. And I practice all these exercises, breathing techniques and all this stuff for nothing, because it was the complete opposite of everything that I read in practice.

Auriluz: I'm sorry that sounds very overwhelming. You asked me if I have a baby, I don't. But I'm super interested in these things because I've seen my mom go through a lot of these things. I lost my little brother when I was about 11-12 and he passed away like two days after my mom gave birth after malpractice. Before that even happened my mom was being monitored for preeclampsia. So I'm passionate about these things.

Participant 2: I don't know, I hear these stories and I'm kind of like something has to be done. *pause*. It's very sad. When somebody loses a baby, I can't even imagine. I think when they first I mentioned earlier that they first told me that the baby didn't have a heartbeat and I'd have to terminate. I was only about maybe four weeks. So I didn't feel any emotional attachment. I was sad, but I didn't feel any emotional attachment. And now that I see him, I'm like, Oh my God, if anything were to happen to this baby, I can't even imagine not having him. But you don't need to have a baby anytime soon. Definitely don't. I'm 32 and I've saved my life and I've had my fun and I'm still overwhelmed by motherhood. So I can't imagine how younger women do it.

Auriluz: Yeah. My mom always says that.

Participant 2: Yeah, it's no joke. Nothing prepares you for that.

Auriluz: Yeah, she said that too like how people don't really realize how much their life changes after it happens. And all of the things you have to not give up but that you kind of really can't do the same way you did before because you have a responsibility and she was like you can be a bad mom and act like everything is exactly the same or but all good mothers have the ability to do so know that it's not the same.

Participant 2: 1000%.

Auriluz: In relation to mothers and motherly instincts, were you receiving information regarding maternity, both before and during the shutdown? Was it friends, family, medical professionals, online, a mix?

Participant 2: So, someone at work actually gave me a book from the Mayo Clinic. So I read that book. I also subscribed to the baby center, okay. And they give you a lot of like insight. I mean, it has an endless amount of articles that you can read and be informed on. And the clinic that I went to as well they gave you like, they give you like a pamphlet and they tell you about giving birth and things like that. And then also, they offered like a class that kind of gives you information about caring for the baby after. And then of course, I paid for a Lamaze class. But by the time I took the class, I pretty much knew everything that she was telling me. A lot of the stuff I had already read because most of the maternity books, they all say the same things.

Auriluz: And you said that it was on Mayo Clinic?

Participant 2: Yeah the book I read was from Mayo Clinic.

Auriluz: Aside, from the books, how often were you in contact with the healthcare provider during COVID to receive information and services? Was there more? You mentioned that it was from one week to every two weeks?

Participant 2: Yeah. It should've been every week and it went every two weeks.

Auriluz: And how is it now?

Participant 2: Well, now there is no contact because the baby's already been born. Like I mentioned, after I gave birth, I tried to get in contact with them. Because they're like, very big on lactation consulting. All of them...I felt like they were kind of resistant to helping me. And I didn't get anybody to really call me back for like a week. And by then I had given up breastfeeding. And then with my whole checkup, which is six weeks after I give birth, it was just pretty much too late. After that there is pretty much no contact. Unless something's wrong with your baby. Well, I have a separate doctor for the baby, who happened to be my doctor before and I really did like him. I really do like him. He's gone to see him three times. And everything with him seems to be fine. I think he's very responsive with the baby. And there's like a portal where I can send him messages, have any questions or anything like that, and actually it was two months. His acid reflux was really bad. And I sent him a message about it. And he called me the very next day to have me come in to check him out. So I really appreciate it because as the new mom. You always think that every little thing is like something. So it's helpful to have somebody who is responsive.

Auriluz: What were the things you thought would have happened but didn't?

Participant 2: During my pregnancy?

Auriluz: It could be like before, during after, whatever you think.

Participant 2: My baby was born in the summer. And I was very happy about that because I thought that we'd be able to take him out a lot to the park and things like that. But we didn't really take him out. I was actually very nervous about taking him out especially if it was me by myself. Just like he's so delicate and to take him out into COVID world was pretty nerve

wracking. So we really didn't take him out much. Yeah, I thought it'd be a funner time with him. And pretty much we've been locked up most of the time. Now towards the end of the summer that I kind of like loosened up and had more education about COVID, I was open to taking him up but before that. But before then, we basically never left the house.

Auriluz: With all of these rightful concerns, did you ever have a conversation with your healthcare providers around COVID?

Participant 2: Um no. Not really.

Auriluz: Do you feel safe in medical settings?

Participant 2: Yeah I do because I'm pretty outspoken. But I don't trust them. So I guess no, I don't know, I don't feel like they really care.

Auriluz: If you had the opportunity to tell something to your hospital, what would you say?

Participant 2: They need to have caring nurses, if they're going to be labeled a baby friendly hospital, they need to cater more to the moms and have nurses who are not going to be lazy about, you know, going in to check blood pressure, make sure you're hydrated. Make sure you feel comfortable while giving birth, because it's not an easy process. That's, that's pretty much it. I feel like, I feel like they're lazy and they just treat you like another statistic. And they should have more staff to make the mom feel comfortable during the process and make them feel like they're being supported during the process. And not just like, for example, when I wanted to keep on my nursing bra, I wanted to keep on my own gown, my own stuff but they were like no you gotta wear the hospital stuff. But why? Why can't I be comfortable in my own stuff? I don't get it. And so they just wanted to do things their way, they're very close minded. It's not a patient centered approach it's the hospitals.

Auriluz: So you feel like they weren't really transparent?

I mean, I guess that was also something that maybe I just didn't know. Because upon reading things and just taking my Lamaze class, I was under the impression that you could wear like your own clothes, socks, maternity bra, and all these things. And when I got to me it was like no you can't. Meanwhile I thought it was a no brainer, like, why can't I? For my nursing bra they were like no don't put it back on and I put it back on. Like go to hell. I am giving, giving birth over here just trying to make myself feel comfortable. One thing that I was just like no and I did was sneak some crackers. I got caught. But I just, I just feel like, I don't even understand how they got a certification when women can't even bring crackers. Before going in they were speaking to me about them being labeled a mother centered hospital, which I was like, Oh, this is great. I'm so happy about that. But it's like, whoever has those certifications, look harder. Because they're basing that off of like, just black and white rules, probably the standards that they have to follow and so on.

Auriluz: If there was anything that would have made your journey easier? Now or even then? What would you have?

Participant 2: I would have liked someone to put me at ease. Especially the last few weeks when COVID was at its worst. I really would have liked to feel more comfortable about giving birth. Just be reassured because for some you're nervous, you don't know what to expect. Everybody can tell you what to expect, but it's not the same. And I feel like it was the opposite. Like my doctor was just like, up here, induce. Whoa, you know? Can we slow down for a minute and talk about other options that we can attend? And then the lactation consultant tried the formula three times and we stopped because he didn't take well. So if he would have breastfed, not only would we have saved money, but he would have had better nutrition and he wouldn't have had those issues with acid reflux and the colic he was experiencing.

Auriluz: This was all so insightful and helpful. Is there anything else you want to share with me? Anything you wish I asked?

Participant 2: No your questions were really good. I think it's just not everyone's the same. Some people are stronger than others. Personally, this really took a toll on me emotionally and mentally this pandemic. You had your good days and your bad days where you're trying to make the best of it and like Boom. Covid happens and it's like I can't believe this is happening. And I really think that there should be the same or more support for moms, I know that there was a shortage with medical professionals but bringing a new life into this world is no joke and there is no excuse for a hospital to not have that support system for a mom. It is unacceptable.

Auriluz: Hopefully with these stories we can push for that to happen.

Participant 2: That's right, mothers need it.

Auriluz: Definitely, thank you so much for your time.

Participant 2: Thank you too!