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Interview transcript participant #07

Auriluz Pacheco

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

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT PARTICIPANT #07

Interviewer: Auriluz Pacheco

Date of Interview: May 12th, 2020

Location of Interview: New York, NY

NYC MHOP Interview Transcript #07

Transcribed by Auriluz Pacheco

Auriluz: It is May 12th, 2021, and today I am conducting an interview via Zoom, doing an oral history for the New York City Maternal Health Oral History Project, 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 7: Yes.

Auriluz: Okay, so I wanted to ask, were you are you currently pregnant? So you could go ahead and begin to share what your experience.

Participant 7: I'm not currently pregnant. I was, um, I found out I was in June of 2020. I really found on July 1, to be frank, I started to do a lot of the legwork in July. And then I lost it. Or discovered I lost it in September.

Auriluz: I'm sorry to hear that. About how many months along were you?

Participant 7: Technically, I was around. And forgive me, it's been a while and I just spent so long trying to forget, even though that's another set of positive coping mechanism, but um, I would say I was around seven weeks when it was terminated, like, when I thought I was, I thought I was three months. But apparently, it only was the size of a seven week old fetus.

Auriluz: So were you aware that you were pregnant? Yeah, I was aware I was pregnant. I wasn't aware that I lost it until she couldn't find the heartbeat.

Participant 7: Okay, so you just feel more comfortable would you be able to share you experience to which ever extent you feel comfortable.

Participant 7: Yeah. I'm just talking more like open ended leave?

Auriluz: Yeah.

Participant 7: Okay. So when I found out, it's funny, my partner kind of knew before I did, I don't know how. He was like, yeah, you should be getting your period this week. When I took the test there was one line, then two, and then it was kind of like game plan from there. I decided that I wanted to keep it. But like, just like, I guess personal reasons, per se. So it's kind of preparing myself for all of that. I didn't really tell people because generally, there's kind of like this underlining thumb rule of thumb that you don't really tell people until after the first or second trimester just because anything could happen. In my case, it did. So I went to the doctor, I actually got a GYN I wanted to get someone who was a woman of color. So I had a black doctor, because there was just a lot of things coming out about just treatment of women of color and, like tolerance for pain within the medical field that I knew that that

was something to really concern myself with my partner being Latin, I think that unlike a home with a man, I don't feel like he really understood like, my concerns as much in school, he was doing his own research about it. And then he kind of realized, like, the struggle for like women of color a little bit more. Um, I was really taking care of myself. I actually lost weight when I was pregnant. Um, I couldn't really eat like meat. Um, and I didn't, like the only time I threw up was when I had like, I think I had like, some food that I ate that I wasn't supposed to, and just my body just didn't react well to it. But, um, the only thing that I felt comfortable eating really, and truly, was like oatmeal, and bread and fruits. Those are the only things that I could keep down, I couldn't really eat meat. I was really trying to exercise and take care of myself. So I felt more inclined to take care of myself because it wasn't just about me. I have a cat. So one of the things I also was really concerned about was that I couldn't like change the litter because there was some research on that. And how that's like, the litter isn't like the best for pregnant women. They just say someone else should change it. I downloaded a couple apps, I was one app and I also liked it a lot of like research just to find out as much as I could about making sure that like I bring a healthy baby to term. And I definitely stood away from anything negative or bad like alcohol drugs. I didn't do any of that. But you know, I was kind of hard to keep it away from like friends, because I just at the time, I did get sick, and I've taken medication. So I was just like, I'm taking medication, I can't have alcohol with it. But I know that some of them were just like, wow, you're really strong how you just stay committed to not having alcohol, I'm just like, yeah, and I'm pregnant. So I didn't know that. Um, so that was hard, because I didn't want to put myself in a situation where, you know, I was pressured to do something. And I feel like, especially during COVID, it was a little bit, everything's a little bit more intimate. So of course, the pressure to do things is more abundant. Um, I didn't really get the support from certain people that didn't know. So that's part of the reason why I kept it very, very limited. My mom knew, obviously, my partner knew. And then my best friend knew. And that was it. One of my best friends. And then that was it, I didn't really tell anyone else because I just felt like the less people knew the less drama and issues and opinions and all that I had to deal with. But it was also harder, because I was just as lonely in a sense. And then, of course, my mom wasn't really in support, but it's my life. But, you know, it was hard to deal with at the time, you know, because the few people that know, it was like, one of the three wasn't as supportive. So, um, I went to the doctor, I got my checkup, I did the, the heartbeat, and I just checked everything out. And they were good. I was due for my first trimester checkup in September, actually, it was August 26, I believe, or August 24. And I went in and she was looking for the heartbeat, she couldn't find it or hear it. Unfortunately, the hospital or the clinical I was didn't have the equipment for them to check the heartbeat. So I had to pay money to go like down the hall for another service so that they can do the heartbeat, which I wasn't really a fan of because I'm like, I shouldn't have to pay money for this. But this is your job. You should have these equipments. Like I don't know why you don't, you don't have everything set. And she saw it. She didn't say anything to me. But I could tell by the size of it, when I looked at it, its size of it looked exactly the same as the last time I got the scan. And I was like, this doesn't look great. I already know. And I started to cry, because I already had a feeling. So she brought us to the doctor, I didn't even ask her questions. And that's when I found out that it looks the same size because literally maybe a day or two after I last got my checkup, it just stopped growing from the end. So essentially, no heartbeat, it doesn't exist

anymore. So then it was looking into the next thing was getting a DNC to, to remove like to remove it from inside of me. I was concerned because at this point for like about a month, and some change. I've been having this, you know, kind of like a dead child inside me. So I didn't know if that was gonna have any, like repercussions on me or was gonna have any negative outlook on just my health. But um, the DNC experience is I don't know if you want me to go into that, but that was just a whole nother separate--okay. So she connected me to a doctor who she said delivered one of her babies and she felt like she could trust him. His name was *muted*. When I went in, the point of the reason is I tend to always put my job first ahead of everything else. Since then I've gotten a lot better and not doing so. But I wanted to make sure that whatever I took care of happened on the weekends, so she chose him specifically because she knew that that wasn't going to interfere with my job. It was my first year being great team lead. So I know that this is also the first year at the schools planning COVID and hybrid so I knew that they needed me in the building as a lead teacher. But um, I was set to deal with this. So I met with him but I found out that I was gonna have to like he does all his surgeries on Fridays. So I just need someone to like pick me up. So I know that my sibling took me to the hospital. But what was different is that the hospital you can only really go by yourself. There was no one that could come with me. So I did like my COVID tests. I did all the each Pre checkups. And to be honest, the only experience that I felt like valued was one of the nurses like, just told me good morning, and she was just very friendly to me. And I felt like, that made me feel so much better. Especially since I was going through something I didn't want to, like, I'm already afraid of surgery. And then, like, a lot on top of this, everything on top of telling my mom and then like her responses, well, at least, you know, and I, the responses didn't help me, it was just no, I'm the doctor when I went in to see him before the checkup. You know, he was a black man. So I felt like I could be more comfortable with him. But then the way he was operating was a little strange to me. Like I just felt like the system wasn't as clear that I said, Okay, I had the surgery the day of I remember him telling me just relax, relax. But his way of saying relax wasn't really soothing. It was more so as if, like my anxiety around being put to sleep, which was my fear is like making him feel discomfort. But there was a couple different medical students that was in the room, also observing and watching. And they did the DNC on me. And then after I was fine, my partner drove me home.

Participant 7 continued: I had to go for a follow-up two weeks later. I had to check in with them when I went back to the medical field or to his office. Not only that, I spent waiting three hours of my work day, literally for five minutes of his time, I'm not even exaggerating, I waited three hours, and I was in his room for five minutes. And when he called my name, he completely forgot my name. I forgot he forgot me. He was just like, so why are you here? And I'm looking at him like, I'm here for my post surgery. And he's like, oh, what's your name again? And then he looked at the chart, and I said, Sasha, and I'm like, he completely forgot, like you operated on me. And then when I ask some questions, because I wanted to know, like medical questions in regards to what happened, what does this mean? What did you do? What are all the results? He basically dismissed me it was just like, you don't need to worry and concern yourself with that, like, you're fine. I asked him well, if I needed a support group, where can I find a support group for women who experienced the same thing I did? And he was just like, I don't know. Yeah, I guess you can look online. Like he really wasn't helpful at all. I felt really

traumatized by my experience with him on the fact that he didn't remember my name. He didn't remember he operated on me. He didn't seem to care about my interest in like, knowing the medical and the science behind it. And he didn't support me and having the help. And the fact that this is my first time ever going through this, I'm so I was kind of like shut down from all the options medical. And honestly, it wasn't until last week that I told my GYN, my experience with him and I said, please do not recommend him, again to people because this was my experience. And then this was terrible. So that was kind of it. And it's unfortunate because me talking to him or my interaction with him was towards the end of everything relating to that the kid. So it just like the cheered me 1,000% from just even processing it or thinking about it, because I just wanted to not think about any of what I went through. Specifically with them, you know?

Auriluz: I'm so sorry you went through all that. Did they tell you what the tests were gonna look like and how the procedure was moving forward, or they just kind of get told or you have to come here and do this XYZ,

Participant 7: I was asking questions to him and the nurse. The nurse said that I could ask him questions, but he just said, like..., all I knew was that there was suction. And that was it. Like I was being put to sleep and they were going to do suction. That's all I knew. And that's all I got. And I was always told to me and any questions that I tried to ask her that it was just like, don't concern yourself with that.

Auriluz: And then what did the aftercare look like for you in terms of like what happened?

Participant 7: When I woke up? I was in I think, the ICU and I was fine. I woke up when I stood up I was like bleeding a lot. So they had told me to like have like a pad so like I used a pad just to catch the blood that was coming out, which makes sense because it was just right after surgery. But like when I went home, like after a day later, it wasn't like I wasn't bleeding anymore, to that level. I took the medications they asked me to take to help with anti infection even before the surgery, like that was the first time like discovering I couldn't eat before, like 12 hours before. That's why they tend to do surgeries in the morning. And, but the post care was more so just me taking my medication. And then after for those two weeks of healing, I went to see him but I felt like I healed perfectly. I felt like I didn't really have any issues or cramping besides like, the initial bleeding after the surgery.

Auriluz: So then, since the doctor didn't really provide you resources and stuff around, like, personal follow up, and just like mental health, resources, etc. Did you take any steps for that yourself? And what options were offered to you in terms of just like well being?

Participant 7: No, there were no options offered. There was nothing offered. Actually, it was a headache to even get it scheduled. But um, what I will say, actually, yeah, there was a headache to get it scheduled. I completely forgot about that part of the story. Yeah, I remember being in the office, and he kind of gave me off to one of his other co workers. But um, the issue was, I was working and I was

trying not to leave work to do it. But they ended up scheduling me for September 11. So that's when I that's the day that I had my surgery. I, I do have anxiety and depression. So I did take medication. So the problem is when I was researching the medication, I'm pregnant. I can't technically take the medication. But when I spoke to my psychiatrist, he said it usually affects around the third trimester. So what I started to do was he was weaning off of the medication throughout the pregnancy. So I started to take just instead of one and a half or so to take a half a pill every day, and then I moved to every other day. So that way, I can eventually wean off of it completely. But with the termination of the pregnancy, I had to find a way to go back on. So that kind of changed the cycle of everything. What I did was I also see a therapist, so I just spoke more so to my therapist about it. And for some strange reason, my life just happens to always be so eventful that I don't remember exactly what I did, but I just tried to like move forward as much as I could, with what I could. I don't know if that meant I dived right into work heavy.

Participant 7: But I do think that I utilized like for my mental health, I utilize more of like my therapists. And then I started to increase upon speaking with my psychiatrist. I think about a month or two later, I started to increase the medication I took from half a pill every other day two, just one pill each day. And I've been like that since which is great, because I was thinking more before. So it, I guess, went back into like normality.

Auriluz: So were these things that you had to tell the doctor when going through it that they didn't take into consideration that you didn't really even have the opportunity to bring up?

Participant 7: I spoke to my actual GYN about the fact that I'm taking medication. So she told me she was the one who told me actually not was my therapist, because I was speaking to my therapist, my GYN who are both women of color, I spoke to them about like this and my therapist was like, are you is that even? Are you okay to even take that medication? Or is it something that you can't take now that you're pregnant? So when I spoke to my GYN, she said yeah, no, they have the begin to kind of like when you are asked to talk to your psychiatrist about it, and that's when I spoke to my psychiatrist about it. They gave me pre meds. So our prenats, so I was taking prenats, as well. Which I think probably contributed to like some of the healthier things that happened to me. After she told me like my GYN told me when I lost he's like you know, you can always go might not have happened now, but doesn't mean that it can't happen again. So if you want to continue to take your prenatal vitamins that would help with like getting pregnant, to some degree like just to keep me fertile in that sense. But I had to really think if that is something I want right now. And I don't think it's anything I want right now.

Auriluz: Would you say that it changed your perspective on like motherhood and what maternity and like the maternal experience is gonna look like?

Participant 7: Definitely, definitely, um, there's a lot of levels to motherhood, like support can make or break a person tell you that. It makes you wonder how people just do it on their own, and then just keep treading, because it's very difficult. It's also difficult within the medical field, especially during COVID,

especially during COVID, because everything was kind of shut down, nothing was the same, you had to do things in advance, everything was so different, that there were just more hurdles to get through. And then not only that, but the hospital was probably one of the least safe place to be. Because everyone that was there were in severe, like COVID part of their life, you know, it wasn't like, Oh, you have a cold, you're going to doctor, it's like, no, you're on your deathbed. And you're in the hospital. So I had to also be very, very weary and protective of myself and the child. Hope I'm answering your question.

Auriluz: Yeah you definitely are Yeah, you're fine.

Participant 7: Yeah, for motherhood? Yes. So it definitely made me have so much respect for mothers, I had a friend who was pregnant with twins. She had her baby shower in August. And then like two weeks later, she was giving birth to twins who were like, four months early. Um, it was just kind of crazy that all that happened really fast for her. Um, I know that like people who do go through miscarriage I think at the time, Christy Tiegen and John Legend was going through that. So I felt like I could relate to them. But it was hard because everyone's getting pregnant. Everyone's getting married. So I'm like, every time I come looking, and not only that, but I do a lot of like research with baby steps, you know, the algorithm is on my damn phone, have nothing but baby stuff. So I kept getting emails and messages about deals and this and that. And that I had to basically kind of like...find myself also...all of that. Because I was, it was just a constant reminder of what I lost. On top of just even on Instagram, someone's pregnant, someone's pregnant, like every freaking time. So I just had to take a minute away from everything. Just to like, try to recollect myself. But I don't think that I really processed it. And I don't know how mothers who do lose kids and or mothers who do give birth, there's a lot of levels to motherhood that I learned to appreciate my experience. And like I said, with COVID, there was a lot of restrictions even for my partner, so that he couldn't be in the same place. I was, for example, you know, he couldn't come with me inside the place where I got to have my surgery; he had to wait outside of the car. So there was just a lot of a lot of levels with that too.

Auriluz: What kind of information would you have liked?

Participant 7: You mean, in terms of-

Auriluz: Everything, in terms of like, what the process was like. What would have made the process easier, what would have eased your mind just a little if at all.

Participant 7: If I didn't have that surgery doctor, if I had someone else who actually add more empathy for the fact that I lost a kid and I have to go through surgery. I think that that would have made me be a little bit better. I think that a lot of my resources, I'm glad that there are a lot of resources out there for first time mothers. I did a lot of it. I was a research so I wasn't like miss a provider for me. But what I did research, it seemed to be pretty good in like explaining like, the language of even operating within weeks. Because as a random GDI. I looked at weeks and I'm like I don't understand these 40

weeks, 30 weeks I have to just do math, but like as you're going went through it, you begin to kind of understand that language as well. And it made sense to me. So I guess for me, if there was anything that I wish was like better, I researched my GYN. So I handpicked her. So I felt pretty good about that. What didn't happen quickly was the person to do my surgery. Honestly, just that experience, overall, I think I would have loved to have more. The whole point of me having him was to do it on the weekend, I think I would have just done research for someone else, or been recommended someone else that would have probably eased me a little bit more maybe a woman. I don't-- I know, like gender and sex gets very muddled. But for me, I think I would have felt more comfortable with a woman as well to like, show a little bit more empathy towards what I was going through.

Auriluz: Are there any resources that you're currently using or seeking now? In regards to like, the pregnancy, for yourself,

Participant 7: I mean, processing that, the only thing really is my therapist. I don't know how I was able, I don't even know if I'm like over it. But I feel like March 11, was the due date for me. And my life obviously has drastically changed within the last few months. So I obviously didn't have a kid. But I remember it passed. And I was going through my own stuff, like non depression on the side of it. And it clicked with me like, oh, shoot, I was doing it was due last week. And I didn't really feel anything. Like, it was kind of like I moved on. Um, which is, it was weird, because I didn't think that I was going to be able to think. I definitely feel like the experience stuck with me. But it opened my ears up and my eyes up for like preparing for a next time. I definitely want kids in the future, I know that much. But for me, I guess the only resources that I'm kind of using, which isn't in relation to exclusively the pregnancy, is my therapist. I have my psychiatrist, but I don't really feel comfortable with him. He just gives me the pills. My therapist is the one that I usually talk through a lot of things with.

Auriluz: Okay, have you researched, like support, safe spaces?

Participant 7: Initially, that's what I wanted the doctor to help me with. I initially, I was trying to research support groups. But then because of my experience, I was just turned off completely from anything dealing with any of this that I didn't. Um, and I don't necessarily know how I don't really necessarily feel like I'm interested in those support groups anymore. At least at this point, right now, maybe in the summer, I might feel different. But now I actually like the fact that I have my therapist and it's one on one to like talk to her.

Auriluz: I know sometimes healthcare, Medicaid, etc, may pose barriers to services. What was your experience with that?

Participant 7: Yeah, so my job they give me health insurance Cigna and Cigna. I was able to, you know, pay for my visits with my GYN. I think with the surgery, it was an additional cost outside. But for me was just the additional expenses like when I got the ultrasound, both of them I think they were

separate costs. I guess I wasn't expecting anticipating or expecting it. I caught the pregnancy very early, like I knew literally right away, and I was pregnant. It was like I was risking my period. I didn't get weak. I took the test and booms I was pregnant. So I felt great that it wasn't like I was weeks down the line. I was like, oh, I'm like two weeks pregnant. I was like wow, or four weeks. I think that's when they start counting. But I feel like the financial aspects for me was just the side bills. I felt good that I had a part now who could support me financially when it came to those type of things. I didn't feel completely alone in paying for anything because he was there too.

Auriluz: In all of these exams, conversations, and just back and forth was there any insight on what may have caused the miscarriage?

Participant 7: I tried to ask. They just told me that it just happens. My partner thought it might have been just a cat, like, because there were times that I did change the litter before I knew that I couldn't. Um, and I, you know, kind of got upset because I think there was one time that hacks and like, I'm gonna need you to do that. And he just like those aren't real, that's not real. And I'm like, well, all these sources that I said are say that it's real, is that there's many people who had cats that gave birth on this, like, Whoa, according to the sources, you know, I think that that's something that's hard is that you read the sources, but you don't really know. The level of accuracy isn't necessarily across the board, if that makes sense. So it would be nice to have like, well, your wife is pregnant to have a support group you can talk to for first time moms, and just how to like navigate, what you're going through, the ins and outs, the do's and the don'ts without it being too micromanaging. I don't know, just a source of information that if you wanted to look up, you can find the correct one. I specifically utilize this one video that I found on YouTube, that was really, really helpful. And just each week, I kept looking it up. I also had this app that each Thursday, it will tell me like, congratulations, your baby is now the size of a blueberry, congratulations. And this is all the things that are forming. And here's what you should maybe try doing that, that definitely helped me. And just knowing what to do, especially since I was kind of alone and the only people that I can kind of rely on was, you know, like I said the one person I wanted to axe more support with my mom just that was her last kid. And that was like 20 years ago. So you know, not only that, but like the Jamaican way. So you know it wasn't as complex as it is today didn't have as many resources as it is today. But those apps definitely have me I will check for remember what those apps work. But I also got a pregnancy journal that I wrote, I wrote everything down, it would ask me questions. I still have it. I don't really know what to do with it because it's obviously already written in. But yeah, I just, it just had me be more open to just like self health, and like self care. So I guess the biggest takeaway is since then, I have been very meticulous about just trying to make sure that I'm putting myself first. But I think that I did more of that. Um, I would say late April early. That's what I decided to do eating from it a little bit. Yeah. I mean, the way that I healed was just not thinking about it and shoving it to the back of my mind and not processing it. Me talking about it now doesn't have me feeling sad. I don't feel anything though. I know that I'm more traumatized less by what happened to me with the pregnancy and more but my experience of after the pregnancy, I think that the anger topples the sadness. For me, that makes sense. I cried, cried for like three weeks straight. And then it was just

straight anger at like my experience, so I definitely think like women of color. Sometimes the answer isn't always finding a doctor color, which is really sad to say. But a lot of it, it's gonna be like for next time, I need to definitely do more intentional research. And even if someone's recommended, still do my research and not just fully trust what they said based on their experience because their experience might not be mine, you know. So that's something that I learned. I would really like to know how I process the loss. Outside of the three weeks of crying. My best friend sent me like edible arrangements by surprise. I didn't even know she had my freaking address. And I think that made me feel better. My principal surprised me and brought like her chili, and my principal who I for my job. And she because they knew I had surgery, but I don't think she knew like the extent of what I was going through. I told her when she came to my house, but she came over to my house, she bought me chili, and that was the first food like meats that I could eat.

Participant 7: After I was like, pregnant, so or like after the termination, so that, you know, I felt supported after by the people who are I'm surrounded by, I just didn't feel supported by my doctor. Or the person. He's not even my doctor, the person who did surgery on me.

Auriluz: Support plays a huge role.

Participant 7: A huge one I didn't even recognize like, recently, I watched an episode of the good doctor. And it was juxtaposing like two different alternative views and two kids got shot, and just the way that the doctors handled one mom to another way that they're greeted, they actually their name, and we're gonna handle it, my name is this versus the other one that it was just like patient zero than even like, ask the mom if that was her son, anything, you know. And I saw the juxtaposition. And I think that flared up emotions within me, because I felt like the person who was just neglecting and ignored. You know, like, I'm a human being amongst all and I think sometimes people get wrapped up in their job that they forget the human component. So for me, I know that whatever doctor I have in the future needs to have a human component. So I learned I learned a lot of lessons from it. I'm like, yeah, I'm okay. I'm doing well. I'm just trying to take I've been taking everything one day at a time. That's how I've been.

Auriluz: Yeah. It's hard. Especially with everything else going on.

Participant 7: *Sigh*

Auriluz: Thank you for sharing your experience, I know this may have been a difficult conversation. Is there anything that you want to add anything or share?

Participant 7: Yeah I'm actually- give me a second. I'm gonna find the app-if I could find it. Okay. Baby center? Was it this? That was a good app? I would say so because that helped me. I think it was baby center. They always sent a whole bunch of like, different...oh, yeah, here we go. Eight weeks. Yeah, Baby Center. They always sent everything on, like, for me was a Thursday, because that's when I

like registered and put everything in of like images, birth charts, like other tools that you can get to like links to other websites that helped how your baby looks develops, all that stuff was really, really, really helpful. So baby starter and then I would also say bump boxes. Bump boxes was kind of like you can do a six month or a nine month like each month they sent you like a different like bump box for like mothers and things that they can help themselves with inspect random things like I got like a face roller, a skin exfoliates a water bottle that says something was a clever, clever saying I don't remember right now. Just different things that like helped me like push through each month ago, I would have award myself so those two things I would definitely like recommend to other people, their baby Center, the app, and bump boxes as like a treat.

Auriluz: That sounds so cool, I hope other women see this and learn about it.

Participant 7: I think that's it for me.

Auriluz: Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to speak to me to share your story. I hope things continue to get better moving forward.

Participant 7: Thank you for this. One day at a time