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Interview transcript participant #11

Auriluz Pacheco

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

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT PARTICIPANT #11

Interviewer: Auriluz Pacheco

Date of Interview: May 16th, 2020

Location of Interview: New York, NY

NYC MHOP Interview Transcript #11

Transcribed by Auriluz Pacheco

Auriluz: It is May 16th, 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 11: Okay, that's good.

Auriluz: Your age?

Participant 11: 31

Auriluz: Your salary range?

Participant 11: About 75.

Auriluz: Race?

Participant 11: I'm Latina.

Auriluz: Borough?

Participant 11: Bronx.

Auriluz: And your highest level of education completed?

Participant 11: Master's degree.

Auriluz: So are you currently pregnant? Or did you already give birth?

Participant 11: Currently pregnant.

Auriluz: Okay, how many months?

Participant 11: Three, no, four months.

Auriluz: Congratulations. So when did you first find out? You were pregnant?

Participant 11: It was during the pandemic, I was a month pregnant. Um, it was during? Yeah, it was during the shutdown still.

Auriluz: So how are you currently feeling? And how were you feeling when you first found out that you're pregnant?

Participant 11: Now I'm feeling less overwhelmed, due to the amount of like vaccine access. Um, but when I found out, it was very overwhelming, because, you know, there was, there was just no very little resources out there for to get vaccinated. So it was kind of scary.

Auriluz: Can you tell me about your experience in terms of like, appointments, your pregnancy, information, etc?

Participant 11: I've been fortunate enough that I have been able to go to appointments with my significant other for the most part. But there are some appointments where he's not able to attend due to like, the restrictions that the hospital has. So that's been strange. Because normally, right, you would go with like, you know, your significant other or somebody that you care about you trust to be there, because it is scary, especially during that first trimester when you know, they're telling you to be very careful, you know, so many miscarry. And to think that you could possibly be getting that news, and you're alone, right? So that that can be very overwhelming.

Auriluz: Okay, and can you tell me a little bit about the pregnancy itself?

Participant 11: Um, first trimester was rough. I was pretty sick, a lot of morning sickness, all day sickness pretty much. And I do work outside of the house. I'm not working from home. So that was really hard, because you're kind of keeping this big secret. But I'm interacting with students and teachers all day long. And I'm not feeling well, and then you're wearing a mask. And then in your head, you're really worried about like, could somebody that I'm interacting with have COVID? So it's, it was, I think, more stressful than an average pregnancy because of the pandemic.

Auriluz: Did you have any concerns moving forward about like your health, the baby your pregnancy appointments? You mentioned briefly, the concerns that you did have to mention how some of it was alleviated with the vaccine. So was there any more of that?

Participant 11: Definitely. I think average concerns as a pregnant woman, about like, health for the baby, making sure that you know, they're okay, that you're that I'm Multan, taking care of them eating healthy and all of those things. Um, but then there's the added right stress of the vaccine. And I've opted not to get vaccinated, and that's just a personal decision. But I know many, you know, doctors are recommending that pregnant women get the vaccine. But I think it was just kind of, for me was a personal choice due to the lack of research out there right now for pregnant women, especially not knowing how it's going to impact the health of the baby.

Auriluz: So have you had any conversations with your healthcare provider in regards to COVID?

Participant 11: I have, during one of our first visits. She did recommend getting vaccinated especially because I am working. I'm in a school. So I'm constantly interacting with the adults with kids with families. Um, however, for me, it was, like I said, a personal choice between me and my significant other that we decided to make that I wouldn't get vaccinated just because of the lack of research and my comfort level. And because of that, I'm taking extra precaution right, so I'm wearing I'm wearing two masks, if I'm not wearing my underneath that I'm making sure that I sanitize all the time, I'm kind of social distance at work. And then when I'm not at work, I'm very much at home to really avoid my exposure.

Auriluz: Okay, thank you. And you mentioned earlier that you had a lot of appointments. So are there any resources that they're giving you, as of now that you appreciate any resources that you hope to receive in the future? In terms of like, pp attention for the baby attention for you, etc?

Participant 11: Yeah, um, I think one of the helpful things that has come up is telehealth, which obviously, I didn't know was an option before, before the pandemic. So because like I mentioned before, I've only four months, but I go to the doctor twice or three times a month, to meet with specialists and things of that nature. So because of that, sometimes it's nice to have a telehealth appointment if you don't need to be there in person. So that kind of removes a little bit of the stress, and then just kind of talking to doctors about like, what the birth will look like, during the pandemic, because realistically, right, we will, I will be giving birth with a mask on. And my partner will have to wear masks as everybody else will be in the room. And then also talking to like, sorry, to talk to pediatricians to about like, what, how, what are ways that I can make sure that my child is safe, when you know, they come home, and they're around, you know, other, you know, my loved ones. So, you know, encouraging people around me to wear masks around the baby, right? No kissing the baby on its face. And just like, you know, washing their hands before they carry the baby and things of that nature. And then for me, darkness I've just said, because I've opted not to take the vaccines to really do kind of what I mentioned before, which was like social distance. When I don't have to be at work. They really did want to push for the vaccine, but I was glad that they were respectful of my decision.

Auriluz: You mentioned that you've been receiving a lot of information, and that's really good, really beneficial. I'm happy to hear that. So how knowledgeable overall, would you say that you are around like childbirth and pregnancy, and just like all of the options that you have?

Participant 11: I mean, I'm definitely no expert or master yet. And I don't think I will be I mean, this is our This is our first pregnancy. Um, but I feel really fortunate that like, you know, I have access to, like health care and to and to, you know, providers and specialists, that I can, you

know, ask a question, and then also get insight from another specialist. Because it just makes I think, as a patient, it makes you feel less worried and more knowledgeable about your choices. Um, whereas I feel like, before, I was very concerned, because I was just, you know, you hear things on the news, and you read things and articles in Google, and you just assume things without asking.

Auriluz: But when you when you're able to talk to different providers, not just one, you're able to kind of get more information and get more choices, and really educate yourself. So I feel really fortunate in that end. I'm definitely not an expert, but I feel like I'm more knowledgeable than I was at the beginning.

Participant 11: That's really important. I'm glad you had that experience, thus far, and have. So aside from like, the healthcare provider stuff, where have you been getting your information from around your resources and things you can do? I know, you mentioned that you had heard a lot of things pick what were some things that you've heard, and what it was like?

Auriluz: Yeah, I, mean, I think just like I mentioned before, like first trimester, right, you're not really sharing the news with anybody besides your significant other. So I was googling a lot like any symptom that I had, I would Google, um, and you know, Google is great. But it also gives you extremes. You know, it could be, you know, morning sickness or you could be miscarrying right now. So it is very scary, because you don't really know. So, um, it was really helpful a to be able to call my provider when something was really off, and then be, I'm finding different apps that they have like pregnancy app. So like, I know I have to right now, like the bump has been really helpful, because it gives you like updates every week about like, what your body is going through. And it's, it's interesting how your body changes in a week, right? Like, you're gonna be feeling cramp one week that you're going to be not feeling cramped and eager to be, you know, extra tired one week, and there's like, bright scientific evidence as to why. So that's been really nice to just be able to get my information from one place and know that it's, you know, created for pregnant women. And then another app that I have is like, what to expect, and that app me and my partner both have the app. So that's been nice as well, because that one does actually daily, like side effects symptoms. So that's kind of also nice, too, because you're getting information that you know, is, you know, concrete, you know, it's scientific, you know, research, but it's not overwhelming. So when you do have, you know, some kind of symptoms, you're not scared, because you're like, Okay, like, I read about this, I knew this was gonna happen.

Auriluz: Okay, so what have you had? Like, have you started creating, like a plan around how it is that you want to give birth? At home in the hospital or midwife? Water birth, etc?

Participant 11: Yes, um, actually, we just, we just announced our pregnancy to our close friends and families. And now we are, we met with our doctor who's a high risk ob gyn, and we created

a birth plan, obviously, you know, it's set to change, as you know, as we get deeper and longer into the pregnancy. But right now, we have decided to have our baby at the hospital. Um, and because of my preexisting conditions, we had really thought that it was going to be a mandatory c section. Luckily, after speaking to the high risk team, it seems like it doesn't need to be that way, which is very much a relief for both of us. Because, you know, C sections can be scary. And, you know, it is it is major surgery. Um, so I'm excited about that. And then just talking to them about the choices, you know, like, do I want an epidural? Do I not want an epidural? Things of that nature. So we do have a birth plan set right now. But I think as the baby grows, you know, things are always set to change. Hopefully not too much, though.

Auriluz: And you mentioned that, there were that there were some complications that you have. So how does that change things for you, in terms of like, planning and the pregnancy, etc?

Participant 11: Um, so pretty much due to my pre existing condition, I have to take medication, which means that the baby is right, taking in some medication, which is scary, because, you know, most medications do have side effects. Ideally, right, a pregnant woman would not be on any medication, but that's just not feasible for me. So, um, some things that, you know, I've been able to do is like, not only just have one ob, but also haven't high risk ob, so that they work together. And then my specialized doctor that knows about my, my neurologist who's aware of my condition, right, she's on the team as well. So it's really nice to have three doctors who know their specialty work together to then provide me a higher level of care. Because, you know, ObGyn don't necessarily know like, right, like everything about neurology, just like a neurologist doesn't know everything about giving birth to a baby. So the fact that they can work together gives me some relief, in knowing that, like, I'm getting the best care that I can at this point.

Auriluz: That's so important and it must be a nice feeling to have that extra support. So in regards to finance. Has healthcare been something that you've dealt with? You mentioned that you have three doctors. So how does that look? Or does it create any potential barriers or extra resources that you're given?

Participant 11: Yeah, that's another good question. Um, luckily, I mean, I have private insurance. So that's something that I feel really fortunate and grateful for. However, you know, it doesn't cover everything. So even like just last week, we just got another bill right? So you get bills. I, like I said, I go to the doctor about three times. One of them is just to get blood work every month. And you know, they you know, you get up for that sometimes, right? So sometimes it's small little bills that you can write off. And then sometimes it's, you know, a couple grand, and that's something that right, like, you don't need to, you know, call the insurance company and delegate with that. And it, you know, it does make pregnancy, like less fun, because you don't want to be stressing about finances. But it is, unfortunately, this is just how, you know, the medical world works in our country. Which it shouldn't. But that's a whole other conversation.

Um, but it does it does, it just kind of, you know, make it a little bit better. Just because you want you, every woman who's pregnant should be able to, you know, opt to have like non invasive procedures, whether it be like, you know, genetic testing, right, that's not going to hurt the baby, that's just blood work. But oftentimes, right, those options cost, you know, 1000s of dollars. And it's, its unfortunate, because then you know, you, you're pregnant, and you want all of these things, because you want to make sure your baby is healthy and doing well. And if they're not, like what can you do, right during your pregnancy to support the baby. And yet, it's stressful, because you've opted for these options. And now you have to like financially pay for them, even though you haven't.

Auriluz: Yeah definitely. You mentioned some unfair the system is in terms of things like finances. But you also mentioned earlier that you've had a lot of extra support. So what would you say your comfort level, are within medical settings.

Participant 11: I will be very honest, I'm very selective of who my doctors are. And I feel very privileged to be able to say that, to be able to say like I prefer to work with, with female doctors who are women of color, just because I think culturally, they understand things that a male white doctor, maybe not would not understand. Um, and unfortunately, like, we know this, right, like, you look at any major hospital, you go through the list of OBs, pediatricians even, and most of them are white male or white females. And for me, it's just like, I want to be able to like you said, feel safe, and also be able to be honest with the provider. Um, so I'm not like, I don't feel like I'm hiding anything. But also, I think like, culturally, I want to be able to have real conversations with my doctor so that they can give me the best possible care, because if I'm hiding something, then you know, they may not be able to answer my questions, bullying, etc. So, I do, I'm very intentional about choosing my doctors, and making sure that they're all women of color. Just because I feel more comfortable, I'm able to be more honest. And it's just for me, it's just like, if I'm going to be giving birth, and I'm going to be going through something major in my life, I want to make sure that the people in the room or the people that are walking me to or leading me there are people that I feel comfortable with and that are knowledgeable.

Auriluz: Do you believe doctors of color specifically women of color bring to a different perspective and level of care into the healthcare field?

Participant 11: Yes In my experience, I think there's just more personal to like, it's just so much more personable conversation that you can have with them. Sometimes in my experience of dealing with men, men, male doctors, who tend to be white, it's very, it's almost too formal. Um, they not they're not explaining what, you know, what you're, what they're doing is very, like, I'm the doctor; I know what I'm doing. And I don't have to tell you, the patient the process and I'm very against that. As somebody who also works in a similar field. I'm big on like, explaining to whoever I'm working with, like what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. Are you comfortable with

me doing this? So I'm very big on doctors who will explain like, hey, like, these are your options. These are the pros and cons and being honest about those pros and cons because we know that, you know, you know, medicine is no joke. You know, you take something and it can have long term side effects. So I'm very big on that. I'm also big on, you know, women of color tend to also be open to like other remedies, which I'm open to as well. So if like, you know, you can do this or you can do some homeopathic things and if, you know, see how that works. We'll monitor it for a few weeks. And if not, then we'll you know, we'll look at other alternatives. So I'm also big Just like being able to have those conversations and not feeling judged or not feeling belittled by a doctor.

Auriluz: I love that. Is there anything that you're hoping to receive? Like after you give birth in terms of treatment conversations resources?

Participant 11: Yeah, I'm hoping that, you know, my OBs won't let me down when it comes to it, we're doing great so far, but also providing like mental health care, I think stuff just goes so unnoticed for women who are pregnant. And then especially women of color, right? They say like, you have, like, all these appointments during pregnancy, and then you have one post partum appointment, and that's it, and then you're all of a sudden supposed to be awesome, then you're off with your baby. And it's, it's scary, you know, you're, you're, you're a whole new person, you're taking a whole new role, right, which is motherhood. And you have this little infant that you're going to be taking care of, and, and, you know, your body's still going through a lot post labor, whether you had it natural versus caesarean. And I think like, I'm hopeful that my doctors will be able to answer my questions, be available for resources, whether it is like, you know, counseling, therapy, support groups, or anything, based on how I feel, I mean, hopefully, I'll feel great. But if I don't, I want those options, because I want to make sure that I'm getting what I need. So I can be the best mom and the best wife and the best daughter, and the best me.

Auriluz: I hope to get all of that and more. Mental health is placed on the backburner in so many instances yet we as a society would all benefit from in being placed on the forefront. Is there anything else that you want to add at that? So do you have the opportunity to tell anything to new mothers, expectant mothers, and healthcare providers?

Participant 11: Um, I would say to expecting mothers, advocate...it's hard. It is so hard when you're the one on, you know, on the receiving end, to ask questions. You know, at all times, nurses, medical assistants, doctors, you know, some of them are amazing. And some of them, you know, they may be having an off day and they come off as rude or things like that. And then you're already hormonal and you're very sensitive during your pregnancy. And I think just like advocating asking questions, if you are not comfortable doing it, hopefully you have a significant other who is comfortable doing it. Um, I think those were my big things like advocate, ask

questions. Don't just accept things that are being told to you. Because I feel like there's always other choices.

Auriluz: Is there anything you just want to add that you want to incorporate to your story or into the interview that you thought was missing?

Participant 11: I think it's pretty obvious that I am a social worker. So I'm pretty... I'm a shaker of this stuff. And I'll talk about it any chance I get.

Auriluz: It's important that we can do so. If not we can't move forward. Thank you for your time and the interview.

Participant 11: Of course, thank you so much.