

Transcript of Interview of Jessica Fisher by Angelica S Ramos

Interviewee: Jessica Fisher

Interviewer: Angelica S Ramos

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Location (Interviewee): Smithfield, North Carolina

Location (Interviewer): Gilbert, Arizona

Transcriber: Angelica S Ramos

Abstract – Graduate student at ASU, Angelica S Ramos interviews mother of a new born baby. In this interview she discussed the struggles with prenatal care and her experience with birth during COVID. Fisher also discusses family support as a new mother amidst the pandemic and how her interactions with her family has changed. She mentions her worries with being high risk for contraction and how she copes with her worries. She also talks about her work as a teacher and how much that environment has changed for her and her students. In this interview Fisher also talks about her close relationship with her grandmother who lived in assisted living and how their relationship has been forced to change. Lastly, she talks about her hopes for the future.

Angelica S Ramos 00:05

Let's start. Can I please have your name, date and location?

Jennifer Fisher 00:10

Sure. My name is Jessica Lumsden Fisher. It's November the third and I am in Smithfield, North Carolina.

AR 00:19

How many children do you have? And how old are they?

JF 00:22

I have one son, Caleb, and he is one month and two days old.

AR 00:28

Describe for me the moment you first learned about COVID and how it made you feel.

JF 00:33

So, I first learned about COVID. As it was sort of coming out in the European papers, I would say because I read the European papers on a daily basis. And my initial sort of reaction to it was one concern that this might start coming our way that would last, I would say that was hitting the American news at the time. And then it seemed to get closer, and then it hit the United States. And at that point, my reaction would have been a really deep concern, because I have a MS (multiple sclerosis). And at the time, I didn't know I was pregnant. But when we got to the point where I did feel fine that I was pregnant, it would have been one of my most pure panic, because I have lost children before. And so we hadn't, we've finally gotten pregnant again. And I was concerned that I might lose my child.

AR 01:28

What was prenatal care, like during COVID?

JF 01:32

Prenatal care to start with, seemed to be running fairly normally. Because my husband came to the first doctor's appointment with me, and he got to see the very first ultrasound where you know that you are pregnant. But that's, that's all he was able to do. And I think, for him, and I thought that was the hardest part of prenatal care was that I went to all these visits, and he never got to see an actual ultrasound. And he didn't get to hear the heartbeat because they wouldn't allow you to record bits and pieces of the heartbeat. So yeah, the prenatal care, though, in general, was very good. The group that I'm seeing in Clayton was excellent, they did take a lot of precautions, including there was nobody else and for a while, when you went in for an appointment, sort of at the at the peak. In the summertime, there was only the patient who was seeing in a given doctor's name point was allowed in the building. So they had spaced out appointments considerably. So you walk in, and you might see one other patient in the waiting room and that was it. Which made me feel a lot better, because it was less exposure. And then there was, I would say, the only downside of prenatal care was the there were some women that were behind the desk in registration, and the phlebotomist who seemed to think that COVID was one was some sort of hoax, right? That's information that's running around. And I had deep concerns about that. Because when they're sitting in my doctor's office, and I, the rational part of my brain knows that they're not my doctor, and they're not actually providing me any medical care, besides taking my blood and greeting me as I come in and asking about insurance. But the other part of me was like, Oh, my gosh, you work in a doctor's office, and you don't take this seriously. They also have some thoughts on education, and I'm a teacher. So their notion was that teachers that are working from home are not actually working. And I put my, I put my headphones in at that point, because I just couldn't like it was all I could do not to say Actually, this is actually a lot more work now than it was before. But thank you for your opinion. So that would be like my one hiccup in the medical care. Other than that the practice that I had was that the care was stellar. Which was great, because I've had experiences in different doctors offices where it was not necessarily as as great and I don't actually know, maybe COVID was sort of helping that along, as well, because I was the only one in the office for my doctor, there was no like line of patients waiting. So to a certain extent, that might have been something that helped because I was getting more individual sort of attention. There was no brosch maybe.

AR 04:24

What was it like giving birth during COVID?

JF 04:28

Um, well, again, I sort of lucked out on that one the day we went in to the hospital because my water broke that morning. I actually ended up being the only person who was in labor and delivery that entire day. And the reason is, is because of where the hospitals located so there's a main Johnson County Hospital and then we are super close to Raleigh, which is capital. And Raleigh has a number of hospitals and the one in Clayton is less than 10 years old. I think so Most people who are giving birth tend to go to the Raleigh hospital because they assume they'll get better care. And we were avoiding them, because we were assuming there were many more people there. So COVID actually pushed us towards Clayton more than anything else. But I had a COVID swab two days before I went to delivery. And I was able to say that I was going to quarantine. So my test came back negative. My husband and I were both at home for two days. And so I was allowed to give birth without a mask. And I don't necessarily know that that would have made a difference to me, because as a teacher, I'm wearing one eight hours a day anyway. I don't even notice half the time when they're on my face when I leave the building. Like I forget, I'm in the car. And I think about those people who make jokes about people in the car with a mask on. And

I'm like, Oh, yeah, I can take this off. Now it doesn't like it doesn't register. In the same way they did when when COVID first started. But yeah, it was the the medical team, of course, we're all wearing a mask. And I didn't have a lot of concern, because again, we were the only ones sort of in labor and delivery that day. And then after that we didn't really see anybody like we were taken to room for postpartum care. At three o'clock in the morning, I'd given birth and we went to the room about 530. And then other than the woman who came from the kitchen to sort of deliver food and the team of nurses that came in and out until we left. I gave birth on a Sunday morning at three o'clock and we left on a Tuesday morning. We didn't really see anybody, though I remember thinking my sister in law, but she gave birth to her first son, Creed. My entire family was there. I had been I was actually home on spring break. I was at Notre Dame at the time. And he was early. He was six weeks early. But it was myself, my parents. Her dad because her mother had passed away. So it was just her dad. My grandmother was there. Because she was she's ninety-eight years old now. But she's she's not going to be she's not going to not be where there are babies like babies are her favorite like she loves. That's that's been one of the harder parts of COVID as well so that she can't hold my son. She's in assisted living facility. And we see each other through the windows. I take him over there and I sit and I talk to him for an hour, but I don't think she actually listens to a word that's coming out of my mouth. She's mostly just staring at Caleb. But anyway, you're asking me about labor and delivery. So I'm just thinking about like, um, it was a completely different experience. My brother's best friend from middle and high school was also there. And I remember when the baby was born, it was late at night the hospital kitchen was closed. And so Amanda wanted food and she sent us to this restaurant is called cookout, which is a regional North Carolina restaurant, but they do like burgers and fries and stuff to get her two corn dogs and a milkshake. And when she asked for the milkshake, I want to say was like because they crushed up things and put it in the milkshake. It's like a Butterfinger candy bar, but they don't actually make those. And (inaudible) was in such a state that he was like, What if I could buy a Butterfinger candy bar? Can you just crush it up and put it in this this milkshake, which they wouldn't do. Like everybody was there. It was so exciting. And when we gave birth, Cody and I were just over the moon, were also tapped out exhausted, because I pushed for five hours. And he had to sort of help with that. But there was nobody really there. My parents came the next day. And they stood outside the window because we were on the first floor. And so we actually like did a phone call through the window. My mom and dad got to see the baby. And then they went back to our house and they stayed there and actually cleaned my house. Because it was it was unexpected. The day that I went into labor and made us a dinner in a crock pot and like did the things that you know they would be doing anyway, if we were if we were out, able to interact with each other. But it was that was that was it my brother and my nephew were coming back from what do you call those folks, the YMCA. They're like the little boy scouts. I can't think what they're called. But anyway, they were come back from a camping trip. And they call to say they might stop by and do the same thing my parents did. And then they call back and my brother said that my sister in law says we can't go without her. So they would come they would come see us when we got home, which they did. They came and they brought us dinner one night which is awesome. But so to a certain extent, like the experience of being in hospital for us, it was very calm. I wasn't concerned about COVID but it did prevent us from having what my family's sort of the normal like we were all there. And yeah, and since then I haven't seen like my oldest cousin Daniel. We were essentially raised together, I think if you're my brother, he hasn't seen the baby yet. And my uncle Ronald, who is very close to my family as well, he, he's seen the baby. But we always stay outside because he's deeply concerned about COVID. And he's concerned about me within MS, and he's concerned about the baby as well. So he only will talk to us out in the yard, which is fine. It's more comfortable for me that way as well. But so that like sense of celebration that you get, was a little bit dampened down. And I hadn't actually thought about that as being super different until right now, when I was talking about if it really is like we didn't have that sort of, like family all together, when the baby was born.

AR 10:46

What has been the biggest challenges you faced during COVID.

JF 10:51

During COVID, in general, I would say two things. Since the baby has been born. I don't like people in my house. And so my husband's birth mother and his stepfather came, they were actually here last week, and the baby was three weeks old. And I had real concerns that they would not follow precautions. But trying to tell my husband that his mother couldn't come to our house was was ever going to happen. So they're promising me they are. And they live in Indiana, she works in a factory in Elkhart has had a massive number of cases in her factory has seen some cases. And there was a lot of anxiety about people being in my house. And there are a lot of people that would like to come by. And we are currently living in my grandmother's house because my aunt was taking care of her and she passed away over the summer. And my grandmother is 98. So we moved down here. And she moved into assisted living. So we're now actually sort of taking care of the house in the property. And I'm here so that I can bring her feet back and forth. Snacks, really, I mean, they feed her at the assisted living, but she likes ice cream and ice cream sandwiches, and little mini cans of Coca Cola and things like that. So that's sort of that's sort of the kind of care that I take. But yet people coming to the house has been an anxiety inducing for me, not being able to sit with my grandma, because just as COVID started, I would I would drive by the assisted living facility on my way home from school. And she would expect me I would come a couple of times a week. And I play the piano. I play a lot of old Southern gospel music on piano because my my grandmother's Baptist, my family's Catholic, my grandmother's Baptist. So I ended up playing the piano for the women that lived in her building. And they would look forward to it all the time. And we would sit and chitchat for like an hour, and then I play the piano. And then when their dinner bell rang, I would go home. And those conniving old ladies had conned the woman that did the dinner bell and pushing dinner back 45 minutes, a lot of times want to shut up. So I ended up being there a lot longer than I intended to. But yeah, so I miss seeing my grandmother face to face. And I hate that she's not able to hold my son. And then the other biggest challenge, I think, seems to be in line with a lot of challenges of motherhood. But mine's a different perspective at school. I'm a teacher, I'm a classroom teacher, I teach high school. And I'm trying to connect with my kids this year, I moved to a different school, I was at a school that was 2,200 kids. And I had some real concerns that they were going to throw us all in because of where because of where I live, and the sort of political climate that there is. And so there was a job opportunity at my brothers school. This is a Catholic school, it's private school. And I've been trying to get that forever. It's a really good school and my brother works there. My brother and I are really close. So I interviewed with them there and they offered me a position. And in order to get the position, I lost my access to FMLA because I wouldn't have worked there for a year. And so they offered me paid maternity leave for six weeks. And I'm not 100% sure. That's actually what happened. I think what happened was I blew out my sick leave. Because when I come back from maternity leave, I have two and a half days, of personal days for the rest of the school year, which is also a little bit concerning, because you know, if the baby gets sick, if something happens, I'm gonna go unpaid. And I'm sort of the primary paycheck to the house. But the real big challenge about school has been, I'm in a new school the kids don't know me. And my teaching style is based almost entirely on building relationships. I worked in a school with kids that exhibit a lot of trauma influence behavior. And before I came back to North Carolina, and that's all you do is you build relationships with these kids that won't do jack for somebody else will do a little bit of work for you. I'm currently wearing my shirt coaching basketball, I coach kids on the basketball team, even though I probably wasn't very well qualified for that role. And the first year, there were eight kids and up to eight kids on the floor never played basketball before. So like, we're like the bad news bears out there. But it was a way

to get them outside the classroom to build a relationship with me. And now I have a hybrid teaching environment. And it's a lot of work on lesson plans, because they gave me two classes that I have not taught. Well, one I taught and seven years ago, world history was the only time ever taught it. And the other ones economics. And I've never even taken an economics class in college. So I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. I mean, I've got the basic content down. But if we were going more depth in supply and demand, I would be so hosed. So I was trying to like, come up with lesson plans and substitute plans for maternity leave. And, to be honest, the most heartbreaking part of this for me is I can't tell you what my kids look like. Because I see them on zoom, but you see 20 kids on zoom. But you're also looking at 20 kids in the classroom who all have masks on. If I saw them in the hall without their mask, I don't think I would know what their name is. And I've always sort of prided myself on the great relationship I have with my kids. And I'm not, I am finding it so hard to build that kind of relationship in a classroom where I see them once a week in the room. And then once a week on zoom. And I, I, part of it was about pregnancy too, because I won't go anywhere near them in the classroom. And we talked about that on the first day that I was I was pregnant. And it wasn't about them, it was about me and this baby, but I could not come really like within six feet of them, I just wouldn't do it. And usually on like day two I like to go find some poor schmuck of a kid who has an empty seat next to them, and scare them to death because I sit down. And they're doing like their little class warm up. And they panic up until the point when we start talking about what they're watching on television. And that's what we talked about. We talked about television, we talked about what they do at school, we talk about movies they've seen, or whatever, and I get to know them. And then I tell them that they don't have to do whatever classwork assignment I just asked their friends to do, we're gonna exempt that, and I'm gonna move on. And then I moved to the next kid, like another group of kids. And then there's no chair, I just sort of squat and we talk. And I do this with my kids for weeks. Actually, I usually do it for the entire year, because it's fun, and it's funny. And it makes our class much more conversational, and they do a lot better. And this year, we have all struggled. And I think it's important because my teaching style no longer functions during COVID. So I really don't have a lot in terms of like motherhood with COVID other than the anxiety of people being my house. But the biggest challenge for me is also like when my kids are not my kids, biologically speaking, because I do consider them my kids. Because I can't connect with them. There's no way for me to really build the same sort of relationship. So yeah, those would be those would be sort of my top three there.

AR 18:09

What kind of support do you have or wish that you had as a mother during the pandemic?

JF 18:16

So we're four weeks in and my support has been great. Like I told you, my parents came to the hospital to see and then my, my dad came home and cleaned things that I don't think had been cleaned in my house for for months. As we were sort of like moving towards the late stages of pregnancy there and I was exhausted all the time. And then him my mom. My mom is currently holding Caleb right now. And if I let her she sit there on that couch till midnight holding Caleb, which is which is fine. So I've actually had a lot of support. And it's been one of the good things about actually being back here is that my family has always been super close. So my folks come. My husband works for Tractor Supply. And so yesterday was his long day, he's usually gone for 12 hours. And since I'm currently not working, I tend to do a lot of the overnight sort of getting up and feeding. And so I called my parents last week when my in laws were here and said that I was going to need somebody on Wednesday and they live two hours away on Monday rather, and they came up on Monday morning. And they got here just as I was to the point where I'm not sure if I can stay awake any longer and they would brought me breakfast and then they took my baby and I went to bed and slept for six hours at a stretch which is the longest I've slept in a month. It

was beautiful. My brother and his wife live like an hour away. They've come by (inaudible) so they brought they brought dinner. Well they we ordered Papa John's and they dropped it on our porch. And I'll see them again this weekend. They're coming by and they're going to do lunch with us, I think. My uncle lives a couple hours away, but he travels for the state of Ohio. And he audits banks. And he comes by to see my grandmother on a regular basis just to make sure everything's going okay, because he's sort of her, um, he takes care of all the legal stuff and paperwork in that. And so he comes by, and he drives by the house. And he's always asking if there's anything we need. And to be honest, I think if I said, we need to fill in the blank, like a car seat, and it would be something expensive, he would go and get it, like, immediately. So I've had great support. I spent a lot of time thinking actually about women who are single mothers. I'm thinking about single mothers last night, because I was like, Oh my gosh, my baby hasn't slept at the moment, he's having trouble sleeping. He asleep for like an hour. And then he's awake. Or it gets kind of fussy, almost almost to the point where we are your most ready thinking, is this colic? And I don't know how you would do that. I don't know how you would do that without being able to call somebody and say, I need your help. Like, can you just come sit and watch TV on my couch with my son? So yeah, no, my support has been fantastic. My family is has been great. Even my even my in laws, and I would not have counted on them to be good support, to be honest. When they came, it was I got to sleep quite a bit. Because in the morning, Cody's father, stepfather would get up usually about five o'clock in the morning. So I could say, here's Caleb, here's what the bottles are go with God, I'll be up in a little bit. And his mom would hold the baby all day, which left me free to do things like dishes. So I wasn't trying to figure out okay, where can I put you in the kitchen so that I can hear you I can see you but also be able to do these things. And I, yeah, I feel very fortunate in that regard. Because I do have so much support, and it is anxiety producing to have people in my house. But for the most part I couldn't have asked for better care from my folks. In my my work actually has been super supportive. I started out breastfeeding. And then I got an infection him up to and come in like it like I would have hoped. So I'm not I'm no longer breastfeeding. But my brother, there's a co-worker that works at a school that I don't know very well at all. But she is a member of La Leche, the, the sort of I don't, I don't know what to call them. She She does a lot of work with breastfeeding support. And it was not going well. latching was not going well. And she texted me encouragement like every day, she offered to take a day off of work and come down and spend the day with Caleb and I so that she could help, which I didn't take her up on because my pediatrician also had a lactation consultant I eventually met. And things were starting to improve a bit. But that's the thing I think that has been the most surprising about motherhood was how hard like in my mind, I guess I always just assumed that you hold the baby there and bang things happen, but it does not. things do not happen. Screaming happens squabbling happens you thinking oh my god, I don't know that I can sit here and do this, like you cry happens. I cried a lot to breastfeed my child. And so that that has also been had been like great community like this one I didn't even know was gonna take off work to come sit with me and my kid to see if she can help us figure out how to get the latching to happen, you know? Because she's friends with my brother. So yeah, great support from all kinds of places.

AR 23:49

Alright, my last question, is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview?

JF 23:57

I don't know. Like, I'm not 100% Sure. Like what kind of thing's you're interested in, in this interview. Like I I keep thinking about what does this look like next year? Like we're already in the school system talking about what do we do next year? And you know, there's a lot of anxiety for a lot of parents about things like my kids. And I see this a lot. My kids social life in high school has been curtailed to nothing. I'm seeing kids that are depressed.

Because they're not being able to interact with their kids the same way. I'm also seeing kids because the school I go to, is the school there's a lot of privilege to things like getting gas to go on trips. So like, several weeks ago, a number of kids went to a party on a college campus. And there are people there there had COVID-19, and they were exposed to it. So even like going back to work because I'll go back to work right after Thanksgiving. I think I'm gonna lose a lot of sleep. Because I'm going to be potentially exposing my kid, you know, and Cody goes to work all the time. And he sees all kinds of people at tractor supply. And, you know, even as my son gets older, and how is this going to change the world that we live in like it? Because I think to a certain extent, nobody thinks that hybrid education or online education is is a great solution for everybody. But I'm afraid we're going to find out that it's a little bit cheaper. And school systems tend to go with what's cheaper, you know, and I don't want my job to turn into that I don't want my kids in school to be impacted by that kind of kind of notion of what's, you know, cheap and cost effective. This is how we like this, how we get the block was that she could put more kids in the classroom, and you didn't have to give, you know, as many periods off for planning time for teachers. So I worry about that kind of stuff I worry about sending him to daycare. And what does that look like? As a matter of fact, we're going to talk to my cousin Daniel has a stepdaughter who is taking community college classes online, thank God, and I'm gonna ask if she wants the money I would spend on daycare, I'll just give to her if she will be willing to come. Cody works part time at the tractor supply so he's, he's only gone during the week, maybe two, two and a half days. And at this point, I think I'm almost willing to cough up more money than I would typically pay for that kind of care for her to be able to be here and not send my child to a daycare facility with people I don't I don't know. And kids who may be exposed to other people. Money has become something that means altogether something different to me. And again, I am super blessed that I'm in a position where I can think about I'll pay somebody more than I would have other than how the hell am I going to make this work? But, yeah, those would be sort of the things that didn't really come up in this issue that this interview that are on my mind about COVID. Like, what does this what does this mean, for the next six months? What does this mean for the next year? What does this mean for the next five years for my kid in terms of education and social opportunities, but then also, me and these kids that I think of as my children, who are not really my children, who I'm watching struggle? And I'm wondering, like, at what point do we think, well, this is also the cost effective? You know? Yeah, those would be sort of my last thoughts on COVID. And then, of course, today is Election Day, there's no way to not acknowledge that. And I was doing really well at not Doom scrolling, as they would say, or obsessively checking things like 538 in Real Clear Politics, and those maps that they make the electoral college until last week. And then I think I was I it was almost like, it's almost unhealthy. So to a certain extent, like today is a big day in terms of I get a piece of my life back one way or the other. And then I am desperately afraid of what that looks like, if it goes poorly, let's say. Yeah, I can't I can't stop thinking about that at all. Really. You know, have a view on that as well. I don't know. But I have lots of concerns. Lots of concern.

AR 28:16

Yep. I am there with you. And I totally agree. But I wanted to thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to do this interview with me.

JF 28:25

Sure, sure. No, this is this has been great. When Katy posted it up. I thought that's, that's amazing.