**Interview #1**

Interview #1 was conducted with my friend and cousin, Navodya Denuwara. Navodya is 24 years old and studies Forest BioMaterials at NC state with an emphasis on Business and research. Navodya and I are not blood related; however, our fathers are friends and we are from the same country, Sri Lanka. I am interested about how her experience with birthing and pregnancy differs from mine. I do not know a lot of people from Sri Lanka given it’s small size so I think she has the closest lived experience to me.

**Transcript #1**

**Thilini:** Hi, how are you doing today

**Navodya:** I am good how are you

**Thilini:** I am great! Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. So, like, we are going to talking about the process of birthing and pregnancy today**,** but before we dive into that, I would like to you to share a little bit about yourself.

**Navodya:** Oh, haha okay

**Thilini:** How old are you and when were you born

**Navodya:** I am 24 and I was born on 1996 on November 7th

**Thilini:** Yes! I sent your birthday stuff yesterday--I almost forgot

**Navodya:** haha, yes!

**Thilini:** Tell me a little bit more about who you are and what you like to do

**Navodya:** I am a PHD student at NC State. I like to read and watch korean drama and what else? Oh and playing with my dogs

**Thilini:** Great, thank you for telling me a little bit about yourself. I would like to jump into your relationship with pregnancy and birthing unless there is something else you’d like to share?

Navodya: No, not really right now

**Thilini:** Okay, sounds good. We can always revisit this conversation if necessary! Do you know the story of how you were?

**Navodya:** No

**Thilini:** Okay, that’s perfectly normal. I guess you don’t remember it well.

**Navodya:** Weirdly yeah, yeah it’s weirdly foggy

**Thilini:** As you grew up, what did you have any exposure to birth and pregnancy as a Child?

**Navodya:** No, women would just not like to talk about that stuff. Until I was 12 I lived in Sri Lanka so like there’s not a lot of those kinds of discussions. People didn’t talk about pregnancy and birth. It was separated from everything and secret. Like a cultural thing, it’s a conservative country.

**Thilini:** Definitely, I can see that thank you. Have you ever attended a birth during your life span?

**Navodya**: Like been in a birthing room?

**Thilini:** Mhmm

**Navodya:** No

**Thilini:** Gotcha, so though you may not have had classical forms of exposure like witnessing birth or exposed to information about birth as a child, you still live in a world that interacts with birthing and pregnancy everyday, especially as an adult. When did you first get exposure to birth and pregnancy?

**Navoyda:** When my mom was pregnant with my brother

**Thilini:** Can you tell me more about that

**Navodya:** I found out, I remember the day my brother was born. I heard her screaming in the room or atleast I think I heard it. I remember going into the room and seeing the baby. I noticed her stomach was flat and all that.

**Thilini**: Can you tell me a little bit more about how it felt to you know see her stomach flat, and a new member of the family.

**Navoyda:** Um, it was like, I don’t really remember. But it was definitely a lot of wonder and he was so small. He was the first male sibling. It wasn’t that complicated when I was really young. I was surprised at how small and flat her stomach had gotten.

**Thilini:** Yeah, it is honestly a very simple thing. Thank you for sharing. So you’ve actually had some pretty up-front exposure to pregnancy and birth. Considering this experience and other things you’ve collected growing up or no, I mean throughout life, what words do you associate with birth?

**Navodya**: Uncomfortable, heavy, pain, baby

**Thilini:** So I'm hearing a lot of negative experiences associated with this process which I think is perfectly normal. Where do you think these associations come from?

**Navodya:** Um, definitely hearing my mom scream out during the birth. I, I don’t know if it’s her, but I was in the hospital. I remember I heard a woman just screaming and screaming when she was giving birth and I was like oh hell no

**Thilini:** Yeah, thats fair. That can be really jarring especially when you’re young and it’s your mom. Given these thoughts, would you want to be a part of birthing and pregnancy in the future.

**Navodya:** Yes.

**Thilini:** You’re very confident about that and I love it. What aspect of birthing makes you so certain you want to participate in it.

**Navodya:** I want children. I want a mini me thats just it. I really wanna raise a kid even if I have to go through some pain.

**Thilini:** Yeah, thats fair. It’s worth it to have that experience of motherhood.

**Navodya:** Yeah, exactly

**Thilini:** Given this, what would you sort of want it to look like in terms of what do you think is necessary for a good, safe, positive birthing experience for you.

**Navodya:** um pain meds

**Thilini:** Okay, what else

**Navodya:** just like all the anesthesia

**Thilini:** Okay, yeah. So the regulation of pain is really important for you, that's fair. Can you tell me more about what the setting would look like? Who would you want there with you.

Navodya: My husband and that’s it. I am close to my family, but it would be weird to have them in the room I think

**Thilini:** Sure, you want it to be intimate

**Navodya:** Yeah

**Thilini:** And who would you want to be your providers?

**Navodya:** Like doctors?

**Thilini**: Yeah, so would you like to have doulas, midwives, nurses, ect on your birthing team?

**Navodya:** I haven’t given it that much thought honestly. I don’t know anything about the whole process. I just like don’t know and like birth seems like thousands of years away. I can’t even imagine doing that right now I am too young. I just like would need to do a lot research because I don’t even know the difference between a doula and mid-wife?

**Thilini:** That's fair, I think thats a common misunderstanding and after this interview I am happy to go over a few things. I understand however that you’re saying that that kind of information feels irrelevant to you since you’re not going to be apart of birthing for a long time.

**Navodya:** Yeah exactly. Like I will want to know all that stuff really soon and I know I am going to come to first, but like I don’t know what I would do with it right now, I mean the information

**Thilini:** Perfectly fair, so I can hear that fear of pain, confusion and maybe even feelings of like, this isn’t something I'm a part of, comes up when you think of birthing. When you think of pregnancy and birth on a larger scale, outside of an experience of an individual, what do you think of?

**Navodya:** Cool, new experience, beginning of something new, and thats about it

**Thilini:** So outside the individual experience, you perceive birthing as something exciting?

Navodya: yeah

**Thilini:** What causes the difference in tone compared the feelings you said earlier of discomfort and pain?

**Navodya:** I would be the one to go through it so it’s scary stuff and that would be my body and my vagina that is like producing a thing. But like, with someone else’s birth everything is so cool and exciting and I am not a part of the pain that’s theirs.

**Thilini:** Yeah, so the separation of the physical process makes it exciting

**Navodya:** Yeah

**Thilini:** When you think about maternity care in general in the United States, what comes to mind?

**Navodya:** Expensive, health care in the U.S. is so expensive so I bet maternity care in the U.S. is very very expensive because you get hospitalized and theres all these doctors and tests even before and it’s a lot.

**Thilini:** Yeah, so the money and capitalistic aspect comes up first for you. That’s so real.

Thank you for coming here and sharing. Those are all the questions I have for you, is there anything else that you’d like to share with me?

**Navodya:** No, nothing

**Thilini:** Okay great, have a good day

**Reflection**

Navodya’s thoughts about pregnancy and birthing offered a new lens to birthing belief systems. Originally, I had chosen Navodya because, like me, she is a Sri Lankan immigrant. I wondered if the impact of our conservative Sri Lankan culture shaped similar experiences early on with longstanding effects. Though the interviews touched on this conservatism, it revealed that our lived experiences are not solely defined by our culture. A large amount of Navodya’s thoughts surrounding birthing were attributed to the experience of her own mother giving birth and excitement about motherhood.

When Navodya described her mother’s birthing process her body language changed. Suddenly, she lost her polite smile and her eyebrows scrunched up. An open frown settled on her lips revealing clenched teeth as she remembered her mom screaming. After she described the process of her mom giving birth she said, “hell no.” It was obvious that the thought of birth is associated with not only her mom, but her pain. This experience fundamentally changed how Navodya wants to experience birthing. When asked, she confidently said she wants drugs and anesthesia to numb the pain. A pregnancy without an epidural is not an option for her. This insight was revealing because it reminds me about the complexity of birthing decisions. A pregnant person preparing for their birthing experience doesn’t just have cold information, but perhaps, like Navodya, has lived experiences of birth that shape what they want. I am interested in whether Navodya will explore other options when this time in her life approaches.

Despite the fears about pain, Navodya thinks birthing is a wonder. I found this dichotomy fascinating. Navodya associated birth as negative when it was about her, but another person’s pregnancy was beautiful, new and exciting. Navodya looked forward to becoming a mother and having children-- the physical process exclusively shaped birthing as a negative experience. This discord between being excited and scared shows me what new mothers may be experiencing and how to respond. Through approaching pregnancy not as painful, but instead a journey that needs to be worked through could perhaps transform their entire view of birth.