[00:00:01.47]

You're listening to Masculine Birth Ritual. My name is Grover Wehamn-Brown. My conversation today is with Pérez, a journalist that has written a lot about how racism and discrimination impact health particularly the health of black women and women of color. Their TED talk, how racism harms pregnant people and what can help, has been viewed by almost 1 million people. They're also the author of the book the Radical Doula Guide: a political primer for full spectrum pregnancy and childbirth support. They're also just a really interesting person who has a house plant Instagram account and a podcast on Latin music called Radio Menea.

[00:00:41.46]

All the articles and social media accounts we reference in this episode can be found in the show notes at masculinebirthritual.com/episodes. You can support the work of this show by becoming a patron at patreon.com/masculinebirthritual and sharing the show withyour friends is another thing that would really help. We have a goal to get three new reviews and Apple podcasts in the month of February. It helps people find this show and decide to listen. A little announcement before I start. I'm scheming up some physical materials to support pregnant people and parents. Would love if you can help me out by taking a quick survey to figure out what you need. After this episode. Head over to masculinebirthritual.com/survey. It'll take three minutes and good things will come of it. With that here's my conversation with Pérez.

[00:01:33.48] - GWB

Welcome to masculine birth ritual.

[00:01:36.02] - Pérez

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:01:37.68] - GWB

Yeah. Thanks for coming on. I like to start out with people talking about their own personal self even when it's someone like yourself who has a public persona.

[00:01:49.97] - Pérez

Yes I'm I'm Miriam Zolia Pérez. I go by my last name so most people call me Pérez but I use my full name. I identify as queer and gender queer. Sometimes I would use the word masculine describe myself. I've written a little bit about how I relate to the term butch but it's not like a primary identity. I'm latinx . My family both my parents are from Cuba. I grew up in the south in North Carolina so interesting context.

[00:02:23.18] - GWB

Which area?

[00:02:23.18] - Pérez

In Chapel Hill. Yeah yeah I like to joke that I grew up like an exile from exile because all the Cubans in my life and in my family were in Miami. So we were like very far from Miami but spent a lot of time their summers and holidays with family. I identify as Latinx and as a person of color but also as someone with white passing privilege. And that's part of my experience and my identity.

[00:02:51.38] - GWB

Great. Thank you. And what pronouns do you like people to use when they're talking about you referring to you.

[00:02:58.93] - Pérez

I use they/them pronouns mostly.

[00:03:03.13] - GWB

Can you tell us a little bit about the work you do in the world?

[00:03:07.29] - Pérez

Yeah. I do a lot of different things and have done a lot of different things over the years but I think writing is kind of like a central thread amongst all of those things. I'm a freelance journalist. I'm a longtime blogger. I founded a website called Radical Doula in 2007 which is probably why we're talking right now. And as I wrote a book called The Radical Doula Guide that's a political primer for dialogues around the sort of political context of pregnancy and birth in the United States. And so that's the book I saw published I think like six years ago now. And then I also do a lot of journalism more mainstream journalism around many many topics but particularly last few years a lot of focus on the intersections of race and health and how racism in particular affects people's health. And I'm also a massage therapist which is like a newer thing over the last few years that I don't like talk about a ton and sort of like my online world. It's mostly focused on my writing. But I do also do that work now which is interesting and I'm trained as a full spectrum Dula and did that work as a volunteer for a number of years. But no I'm not currently actively doing any Dula support work but that is a part of my my background.

[00:04:30.96]

Yeah think that pretty much covers it.

[00:04:32.89] - GWB

Great. Yeah. I actually found you or came across you as a potential person to talk to for today when I was researching who who would be the best person to talk to that is doing work on racial health disparities in birth and also is queer and trans affirming. And so and then I was like "Oh! and then you made the radical doula website. How convenient."

[00:04:59.56] - Pérez

Yeah yeah yeah.

[00:05:01.07] - GWB

How your work, you know comes to the surface and what people are looking for. Got it.

[00:05:06.28] - Pérez

And did you find like the writing I've been doing or did you find the TED talk or what. What came up?

[00:05:09.88] - GWB

I first found me writing I found your rewire work.

[00:05:12.91] - Pérez

Oh nice yeah. Great. Yeah.

[00:05:16.12] - GWB

And you have a TED talk which will be linked to the show notes. Lovely lovely.

[00:05:20.23] - Pérez

I do do that was a fun experience.

[00:05:23.42] - GWB

Yeah. What was it like making it.

[00:05:25.36] - Pérez

I mean it was one of those things I was like This is my opportunity to talk to more people than I'll ever be able to talk to you again in my life which is sort of a weird thing to think about but I just knew that the video would have more reach than probably anything else I'll ever do. And I was right. You know I think the video it's been two years the video has like almost a million views like nowhere that I write gets that kind of like volume. I mean that's just really high. So. So that was like an interesting moment to be like OK what do you want to say. So like more people you know real talk to you again. And also I'd have to think about knowing that I couldn't make any assumptions about my audience knew or didn't know or believed or didn't believe which most of my writing over the years has been for a pretty niche audience that I know a good amount about especially in terms of like their politics. You know I write mostly for like left leaning publications so not that like head scarf I mean I think probably is dumb predominately like watched by people who are left leaning but much broader swath of people than I normally talk to. So that was it was a rupture in the entire exercise for me to think about how to really like distill the things that I had been writing about and thinking about into the most sort of universal and accessible way. And yeah to talk about race particularly to end racism particularly to what I assume mean I don't have any statistics but it's like a predominately white audience. Ted and so yeah it was it was challenging I spent like six or eight months just for prepping for like a twelve minute talk you know which is not normally what I do in terms of prep time but that's also what's required you know by the process to really do a good TED talk.

[00:07:07.05]

I mean it takes a lot to write and then memorize even 12 minutes takes a really long time. So I was

[00:07:13.67] - GWB

yeah right.

[00:07:14.60] - Pérez

I feel I feel really good about it and I'm really grateful I've had the opportunity and I have seen in those last couple of years like there's just a lot more conversation about the impact of racism on health particularly maternal health and I think that's really amazing and I'm just grateful that that that people are finally talking about this crisis because it's it's not new for sure.

[00:07:35.22] - GWB

So first can you tell our listeners what your TED talk is titled so they can find it and then tell us a little bit about the context in which you gave this TED talk in 2016 and now there's been more people writing about it and whether or not you feel like you've seen you know actual changes in terms of how health care is functioning. Aside from the examples that you lift up right.

[00:07:58.44] - Pérez

Right yeah. So the talk is called why racism is harming pregnant women and what can help and if you have trouble funny you just go on my website but don't use that to link it in the show notes be at that stuff the TED talk. And that's the gist of it. And I you know I talk about sort of the ways in which racism impacts people's health more broadly but then use maternal health as a specific example and then uplift one particular provider who's model her prenatal care model her name is Jenny Joseph has been successful at almost eliminating disparities that you tend to see among the women she works with who are black and Latina women. Yeah. I mean I think you know it felt like at the time that the conversation about racism and maternal health was really limited to a specific sector of people but even within the birth world you know birth activists world it felt like that conversation was not dominating and like I had come to a point you know I've been doing you know quote unquote birth activists work since like 2005 maybe and just had come to my own realization in doing that work for a number of years that like you couldn't be an activist in maternal health and not be focused on race because the disparities were just so alarming and you know a lot of the work in that world has focused on improving the experiences of people giving birth who are already having decent experiences obviously experiences that could be improved but they weren't dealing with like morbidity and mortality for themselves or their children you know and so so much energy into like you know moving birth out of hospitals and home births and birth center whereas and all that stuff really replicating really like being insular to like a pretty privileged group of like mostly straight white upper middle class women. So anyway I got to that point where just like you can't do this work and not be centering race because the just the facts of the matter in terms of what people are what women of color and particularly black women and also Native women and then some groups of Latinos and Asian women depending on kind of breaking down sort of those groups into more specificity you can't ignore like the crisis that those statistics. So and so I'm really happy in terms of just the conversation. I think a shift over the last couple of years. I mean I think it's connected to the political environment because there's a lot of reasons behind it but like people are paying a lot more attention to this issue and seeing taking it seriously and centering it or trying to censor it. It's been like the birth activist world but also in the mainstream you know and so there's been just that cover of The New York Times magazine like six what six or eight months ago was about how racism harms black women black pregnant women. You know it like very much the same thesis and so I don't think that would have been possible a couple of years ago. You know there's just a lot of work that had to be done to elevate the issue to that level. So so yeah in terms of the health care industry I mean that's a hard one. I don't I wouldn't say I'm an expert in sort of what's the changes in health care are I think I have more sense of what the conversations look like in the media and an activist spaces. So I mean health care is a basic right. And and change in the health care industry takes a long time. But I don't know. I mean you know I got asked to speak at the Latino Medical Student Association a couple like last winter. You know it's a matter of perspective medical students who also wanted to talk about racism in health. I'm going to speak at Johns Hopkins Public School of Public Health. You know I do think that like the topic is getting there's definitely more focus on the topic even in some of these like places that are part of the mainstream health care industry not just you know among these like really pioneering midwives like Jenny Joseph and other folks who are creating models in their own communities that work. So I would say I'm like I'm hopeful but I think change and you know and I think the point of what I what the research shows and what I argue in the talk is that it's not just the health care industry like it's the. My argument is actually not that it's about racism in health care it's actually about racism in people's lives and the ways in which racism makes people sick. So it's not just oh they're dealing with racism at the doctor's office although that is true. You know so I think people people don't always realize the like like yeah micro aggressions like make people sick you know and so you can't address this just by addressing health care like you need to address health care and like what it seems like is that if an environment health care environment is really supportive that can be a buffer to some of the stress that people deal with and can help them navigate pregnancy more safely. But but the problem larger problem is like the day to day experiences of racism and how that changes people's health and well-being.

[00:12:43.63] - GWB

Right yeah. Building off of that I am wondering if you know of any data or extended conversations about how the stress of living with racism and the stress of living with transphobia is influencing outcomes and birth and health for gender nonconforming and trans people that are birthing?

[00:13:09.54] - Pérez

right. Yeah. So there is a lot of research just about how discrimination has a negative impact on people's health and simply even just the threat of discrimination like you're worried about being discriminated against has a negative impact on your health and this work. Dr. David Williams I talk about the TED talk and some my articles. He's a sociologist who is at Harvard I believe and is has pioneered a lot of these tools that measure this fact. So it's like you ask people about their experiences and I ask them to self report kind of discrimination. And then you look at their health outcomes and you compare groups since that's how they've just how they extrapolated the fact that people who report more experiences of discrimination also report poor health. And that's true across identities it's not just true for people of color. So while I don't know of actual like more specific in-depth studies of like trans people around this question like I do know that there's plenty of evidence in terms of linking you know people who experience discrimination with poor outcomes in health. And so you know I think because like pregnancy is such a I mean it's a difficult thing to navigate even if you're like a cis gender white woman with money and insurance if you bring in like marginalized identities and then marginalized identities where like gender is at question because pregnancy is such a gendered experience the way that it's dealt with in the care industry. My assumption would be that you would probably see some differences in outcomes but you also have to factor in I think race would be a big factor too. So it's sort of like you know I'd love to see a study right that really looked at the expanses of like you know trans in general comportment people in pregnancy and looked at people's different identities and how that impacted their experience. But I don't know of anybody doing that. I mean I think it's a pretty small sample size probably at this point in terms of even access to folks. I mean I've seen calls for research and things like that. So I know people are doing it but yeah I'm not familiar with it but I do believe we know enough about the impact of discrimination on health to extrapolate that like. Yes and there have been studies by like I know like I think NCT and the Gay Lesbian Task Force have done broader studies about discrimination in the community more broadly and don't necessarily look at I don't know if they look at like pregnancy specifically but I know that there are health there are health impacts for people in the LGBT community.

[00:15:35.87] - GWB

Right yeah. And recently it seems that your work has been turning to what I think of as what works and solutions. So can you tell us a little about what is found to work in terms of buffering the impacts of discrimination and racism?

[00:15:55.75] - Pérez

Yeah. Yeah I mean it's just like part of my own journey in the last couple of years especially post election just needing needing to find more sources of hope and optimism in my own life. And then in my work as well just like I think we can you know you can talk about the problems endlessly but if we don't spend some time on the solutions like how are we ever gonna move forward. And I actually think most of the problems that we're facing people are already trying to tackle them maybe not on a huge scale but we have a lot to learn from a smaller scale. So yeah that was kind of the thoughts behind it and I looked like the last sort of six months I was looking more broadly at not just maternal health but health in general because the impact of racism that we see on maternal health is true on other types of health. It's not just unique to pregnant people in the maternal health context you know people like Jenny Joseph but also I wrote about a birth center in D.C. run by Ebony Marcel who has a similar but slightly different approach to the Jennings model and both you know working with high risk populations both having much better outcomes than the statistics would lead you to believe they would have you know a lot of the things have to do with it creating a supportive environment like a welcoming environment in your health in your birth center but they're both in center settings but most of their patients in both situations are giving birth in hospitals so it's not like a totally out of you know sort of de medicalized situation at all. So a lot of the things aren't things that's somewhat intuitive. Right. Like you create an environment that's supportive you don't turn people away for being late to their appointments you make sure that people at the front desk are welcoming and kind to the people showing up right like it's not just the provider. The whole environment the whole experience like it's a team model. So it's not just like you know the person at the end of the hire at the top of the hierarchy who you see at the end of your visit is the most important one actually everybody your interface with is really important. And you know Ebony's in D.C. uses the centering pregnancy model which is like group prenatal care. But Jenny doesn't use it. She uses a more individual model you know. So like people have to make their own tweaks for what works for them but some of those sort of connection points are definitely about just creating an environment that's supportive. I mean I I you know even if someone with like you know middle class privilege and I've always had insurance and and gotten to choose my providers I feel like I walk into a doctor's office like kind of ready to fight like I feel like this like combativeness you know.

[00:18:23.06] - GWB

Absolutely yeah yeah.

[00:18:24.69] - Pérez

And so like I think it's actually pretty endemic to the health care system it's not just true for like marginalized folks or people of color necessarily people who are pregnant but so thinking about like what what what can an environment do to like not make you feel that way when you walk in the door you know like actually create a environment where you feel like I can like I can exhale and like these people will be kind to me and they will help me like they're gonna be here to support me. And I do think that you know people especially who are like on Medicaid or or low income like their health care environment that are acceptable to them are often worse you know often less respectful like more and more hostile than like you know people with insurance going to like places that don't accept Medicaid you know. But I do think we all probably have had experiences where we feel like that's fear and then yeah based on our identities you know whether it's gender or race like we might feel a more heightened. So I think that's one of the things that's like well it's an environment where somebody feels like they can be at ease you know like what's an environment that doesn't make them feel like they're on their edge sort of ready to fight and that has a physiological impact on the nervous system. You know it's not just it's not just like a nice thing to offer people it's actually really key to people's well-being.I mean there's so many things that I looked at in the research there's lots of different elements but I mean I think that's awesome honestly kind of like what to me seems like a unifier. I mean there's things around outside of maternal health there's things around self regulation which I don't know is that a term you're familiar with Grover.

[00:19:56.37] - GWB

It's a term that I'm familiar with but I'd love it if you could say more about it for listeners.

[00:20:02.68] - Pérez

Yeah yeah. So it's like a psychology term but it's used in like education space as well. And it's basically a set of skills that we can develop that help you to sort of help regulate your emotions. So like when when you get upset when you get angry when you get sad when you get nervous like what are the skills that you have to sort of help bring those emotions kind of deep those emotions and like let them be expressed but also not do any behaviors that are like harming to yourself or to others and so it's looked at a lot with like really young children and education arena and what's been shown is that people with better self-regulation skills have better health outcomes. And I think that's all about what we're just talking about it kind of like how do you cope with stress and and are you able to cope with stress and and self-regulation while it's a term self-regulation is actually something that's done in relationships to other people so like kids self regulate through the regulation of their caregivers. So you know if a kid is crying and if your kid is crying and you pick them up and they feel like there's a physical touch but there's also like your if you stay calm right. Like your ability to stay calm through something hard helps them to calm down.

[00:21:13.00]

So there's like it's like a feedback loop you know. So it doesn't just happen like by yourself on your meditation question like it's actually something that happens in relationship and a decision could be a self-regulation skill. But yes. So one of the reasons I really found that hopeful and I found it really interesting is because you can teach people these skills it's not like if you don't get it before you're three like you're done like you can adults even can be taught some of these skills and they can improve their outcome. So I think some of what happens in like Jenny's clinic or in Ebony's clinic is some self-regulation happening right.

[00:21:45.33]

It's like they're kind of go together like you're in an environment where you feel like you can let your guard down. And then when hard things happen and come up like you're kind of able to be connected to maybe the provider you're talking to the nurse you're talking to her the educator you're talking to and like some co regulation self-regulation that was happening. So I feel like there's thread throughout it. And then the one other big piece that I thought was really trusting in the research is that identity matters a lot. Identity develop matters a lot when it comes to racism and health and so and I wonder about LGBT folks like I could see there being a connection there too.

[00:22:17.73]

But there hasn't I haven't seen research on that but so... people of color with a strong sense of ethnic racial identity and a strong cultural connection. So culturally relevant practices like in their childhood you know traditional foods, games, things like that. That's also shown to be associated with improved health outcomes and in the face of racism so even if you experience high levels of racism if you have a strong sense of identity and cultural practice you do better like your health outcomes are better than someone who experiences similar levels of discrimination but doesn't have that sense of identity or cultural practice.

[00:22:54.87]

So so yeah those are just a few of the things that I've found in that realm of like yeah what's working.What do we know.

[00:23:02.88]

And you know obviously none of these things that... I mean the answer to the question is we have to end racism. But then the second question is Well what do we do in the meantime. Because that's you know a long project.

[00:23:12.06] - GWB

right. How do folks stay alive while we end racism.

[00:23:17.55] - Pérez

Exactly yeah.

[00:23:19.59] - GWB

Thank you that's really interesting and useful and also I think helpful to think about for queer and trans people even if the research hasn't been done thinking about what we know about discrimination what we know about that research and what we do have control over in our lives.

[00:23:39.11] - Pérez

Right.

[00:23:40.53] - GWB

I know when I... So I have MS and when I was diagnosed I was like 26 and my 20s were like... involved homelessness and a lot of violence. And then I got diagnosed with M.S. And I was very sick and I was like reading the research about like what makes flare ups happen. And stress was such a common theme that eventually one of my biggest takeaways was that like I no longer could entertain bullshit. Like I no longer could just like stew in stress just because I had been wronged or something and you know it took some years to really nail that skill and a lot of adjustment but... I don't wish I had M.S. But I am glad that I learned that lesson then and you know it's helped my life so greatly and I think that's an I might say that and I often very personal and... example because I I think within especially critical left and I'm really really happily critical queer community we often dismiss things that you know this sort of like middle class white ladies straight yoga just think positive and everything will be fine model.

[00:25:03.64] - Pérez

Yeah. Yeah.

[00:25:05.67] - GWB

And but then also like how can we think about working class models or just models that like pretend those books don't exist in that whole like money making culture doesn't exist and what is beneficial to us and do we have do access to that actually does make a difference in our health? Like what do we gain by Just moving towards that right even though like even though I like I call it Berkeley bullshit like even though I think you know like I'm like oh this is so Berkeley bullshit but I'm going to do it anyway and it's...

[00:25:39.30] - Pérez

Yeah well like where did the Berkeley bullshit come from right? Like where does Yoga come from. Like I mean all these practices are like taken from other places and communities of color you know. So it's like they're they're borrowing from like mostly ancient original practices. So like those practices have value. Yeah it's interesting. Optimism is also a protective factor for health. That's another thing that comes up that like people who are optimistic have better health outcomes even in the face of discrimination. And so it's something I've been thinking a lot about as well over the last few years and doing this research and just my own experiences with like struggling and I'm like a worst case scenario thinker like 100 percent you know like my gut. And I think on the left particularly in the last couple of years and I think this goes in waves.

[00:26:26.28]

But it feels like a particularly like nihilistic moment where people are like we're all fucked you know like there's just a lot of that mentality because of what we're facing and like the climate research and like the Trump presidency and I've just been really noticing you know how does that energy like impact me and particularly my desire and ability to act and to do things you know. And then what are the things that actually motivate my desire and ability to act. And I think that's very connected to self care too right. Because when we get overwhelmed and when we feel like there's actually no hope like there's no way forward.

[00:27:05.82]

I find that to be very like shuts me down.

[00:27:08.51]

It doesn't motivate me to act but I think that yeah I don't know. I think on the left it's like there's a lot of back and forth between like we really have to understand how bad things are.

[00:27:20.85]

And this feeling of like no there's something we can do. And like we got to do it you know. So that might be a little like correlary from your experience but something I've been thinking a lot about

[00:27:31.83] - GWB

Yeah no that's great. I'm wondering what if you can name some ways in which when you notice nhialism and how you shift to the optimism?

[00:27:46.55] - Pérez

Yeah yeah totally. I mean I try to seek out stuff about what's working right. Like people who are figuring things out. And I think our news media is really bad at that because like the big news is the bad news right usually but I think there's been more in the last couple years there's there's like more like good news networks and things like that which you know I think journalists can find kind of like fluffy. But it's legitimate stories about people who are doing things that have a positive impact you know and yeah not actually fluffy and there's actually a good couple solutions journalism network that funded the reporting I did about Jenny before I went to do the TED talk like they gave me some support to go spend time in her clinic and and they're also trying to find more and more reporting about solutions to social problems.

[00:28:30.12]

So you know I'm not alone in this interests. So yes and I was just reading about good news like I. At the end of the year a couple of weeks ago I was like feeling really anxious which is like a almost daily experience for me. And I found an article on Facebook that was like ninety nine good things that happened in 2013 which sounds like you know click bait right. But I clicked on it anyway.

[00:28:53.64]

Yes. And there was actually a series of really you know it was like two sentences about each story but with a link to more information of good things that had happened in the last year that were there were significant It wasn't just like you know a kid he was safe from the tree or something but it was like you know this country in Africa banned plastic bags and this is the impact that it had.

[00:29:12.84]

You know like so not global like it's not you know it's not like we we brought the global temperature down 2 degrees or anything like that but it's like the Seychelles just like expanded the number of miles of protected you know ocean around their country by 5 million or whatever mile or something like that. So and I just noticed as I was reading I was ninety nine articles I read through the whole thing like I could feel my body relax I could feel my stomach sort of like loosening and clenching you know like I could just feel this whole the impact and I wasn't I wasn't in anxiety about the climate necessarily but just sort of like a more generalized really anxiety and it helps like I felt better I felt like some relief and some hope I was like okay.

[00:29:53.40]

Like good things are happening like yes the problems are really big but good things are happening and people are making shifts and shifting as possible you know and I think the climate is like one of the big sort of apocalyptic fears among our peers right. Because there's so much science and like legitimate alarm about what's happening but also like what what what are people doing? Like we're not giving up. I don't think we're all just deciding the planet is done. So yeah that's. So seeking out good news it's been helpful.

[00:30:26.49]

I mean a more tangible thing like for me like being able to see the sky and the horizon is really helpful. So trying to and it's hard I live in D.C. it's pretty flat. But you know it's I find that my I'm environments where I can see the horizon it helps me calm down and kind of like puts in perspective my smallness in a way that feels good. I think the ocean can do a similar thing. So you know I mean nature is also one of those things that there's like a ton of science that being outside just makes people feel better.

[00:30:55.50]

So even does that in general. And then you know I have I have like spiritual practices to you know I talk to my Well I've passed away like five years ago and has been a big spiritual presence for me. So like I talk to her a lot and that helps me feel better. You know things like that. So it's it's a mix of like very tangible like I'm seeking out positive stories and also like seeking out positive people somebody I talk about a lot is adreienne maree brown to follow her work.

[00:31:24.57]

Oh yeah absolutely yeah. Because she's like this amazing mix of optimism optimistic and like super awake right. Like she's not she's not like Pollyanna. She's not pretending like things aren't really really bad but she's still like a fundamentally hopeful person. So I like seek out.

[00:31:42.96]

It's like Who are those people that when I read what they have to say on Facebook I don't like feel like a deflated balloon afterwards you know. And she's one of those people I'm like OK , shit is real. And like we got this like we're gonna figure this out.

[00:31:56.22] - GWB

Oh yeah reading emerging strategy. Two summers ago right after it came out really changed my work. I was doing a lot of organizing at the time. And my group that I was organizing with was in a lot of conflict and and just then in my life I went on to then do like work with a generative semantics practitioner and you know build my life back basically. it was really transformative like this podcast is possible because then work for sure.

[00:32:26.97] - Pérez

Yeah yeah. She's incredible and yeah after the election she was the person I wanted to talk to. And so I did like a Q and A with her for colorlines that we can put in the Link in the show notes. And yeah was just like she you know she's like this is really bad. I'm not going to pretend like this isn't really bad.

[00:32:42.66]

Like I was you know she's like but she wasn't gonna let despair take over. You know that's what we need. Like we can't ever... for me despair is it's really just not a motivating force you know. So how do I find the things that helped me to see the path forward.

[00:33:02.99]

And I think there's something honestly a little bit privileged about wallowing in that despair. You know like I feel like people who have to survive. There's a fundamental sort of optimism in that because you have to find a way forward and you do you know and I think about my family history and like you know not multiple generations of having to emigrate due to like persecution you know political situations economic situations like you don't have like the luxury to wallow in despair like you just have to figure it out like you just have to find a way forward. And I kind of feel like that's where we're at. Like we just have to find a way forward. And. And why not believe that's possible.? You know we have a choice. So I can choose to believe that it's like it's over and this is like the end of a human existence on the planet or I can choose the way that we're gonna figure this out. Yeah for me it feels like a choice sometimes. Why don't I choose the one way.

[00:33:52.97] - GWB

So yeah that reminds me of Joy practices and like being a parent has really been really helpful and useful because I too tend towards despair and have really had to build the muscle of celebrating and having kids.. like my kids have only been talking and processing information in the age of 45. And in the age of you know protests as part of their life. And we just really.. we live in the bay now and they see unhoused people every single day. Every single day; and they see police clearing camps and and I still have to like.. you know I still get to celebrate their birthday and make a Doc McStuffins... You know my wife makes these like beautifully decorated homemade totally goofy cakes with whatever random crap they want to decorate it on it. My oldest requested a solstice party and she like outlined we're gonna have candles here. We're gonna do this. We're gonna meet these people. And so we did it. We're just like Yeah! Let's do it. It's been really great.

[00:35:15.27] - Pérez

It's so beautiful. Yeah go ahead. No no you go ahead.

[00:35:22.24] - GWB

Well I was just gonna say like and I I'm. I feel so blessed because I see that folks are having a hard time like giving themselves permission sometimes in this era of constant battles and struggles and fear. You have to remember it's going to be a very long haul.

[00:35:39.74] - Pérez

Yeah yeah yeah. And to know Joy. Yeah I've got some spiritual guidance. When I was like in the worst kind of parts of my despair after the election to spend time with like very young people and very old people you know. And that was so. And there was just like the gift like a friend a child really old childhood friend like randomly moved into the area for the year that that whole year the first year of the forty five presidency. And so I got to spend like with. And she had a three year old.

[00:36:08.16]

And so I got to spend a bunch of time with this little kid who I love and it was just it's medicine. Like there's something about kids and like how joyful they are. And then I think I didn't get to spend as much time with anyone on the other end of the age spectrum but I think there's a lot of blessings there too and perspective and wisdom and you know even my one of my mom's friends I remember talking to her who's you know she was like in her 60s and I was just so terrified and she was just not.

[00:36:35.05]

She's like and she's not like she's not her politics were similar to mine but she was just like it's gonna be OK. Like there's a different you know. So I think the kids are I think kids are such a blessing. And and there's so much joy there. They have so much joy. And I. Yeah. Adrian's new book pleasure activities coming out and I'm so excited about it because that's a lot of what she's talking about as we have to know joy like we can't. And she said that in the interview after the election she's like I want my body to know what pleasure feels like.

[00:37:06.13]

So I know when it's being taken away from me. We're already living you know as if it's like yeah you have to be you have to take really good care of yourself so that you you have an accurate measure of your conditions even right. And I think especially folks with privilege who are doing this work like you know you have a home like you like your immediate life like life needs are not being threatened necessarily in this moment but you feel threatened or you it's threatening because people you care about are being threatened you know if you're already sort of like depriving yourself of the things that your body needs to feel good like.

[00:37:47.03]

How does that advance thing you know. How does that how does that move us forward. I don't think that's I don't think that's the answer. Yeah.

[00:37:55.33]

So. That's beautiful that you've had that experience with your kids.

[00:37:59.12] - GWB

Yeah. So can we go to the past for a moment. Yeah sure. In 2007 you started the website radical Dula.

[00:38:09.26] - Pérez

Yep.

[00:38:10.73] - GWB

Why did you start it?

[00:38:12.44] - Pérez

Yeah. So I got into like what I call birth activism a college after like watching a documentary and getting really kind of angry about the state of maternity care in the United States and sort of all the things that are wrong with the way that birth children are being born into the world and pregnant people are being treated.

[00:38:31.57]

And at the time was like just coming out as queer.

[00:38:37.96]

But because I wasn't gender conforming and like there's just a lot of things that we're still kind of get to come with my own like identity formation. But you know fast forward a couple of years later and I started doing I start working for a Latino reproductive justice organization and doing more like abortion rights activism but also still really interested in the birth world and was you know volunteer do love interest in becoming a midwife potentially. And I just started to realize that I felt really alone and that like the birth activist world for a lot of reasons one of which was being an abortion rights activist and there's just a lot of silence around abortion particularly then in these spaces and I go into a midwifery conference and not realizing that like nobody's talking about abortion not because they all agree but because they all disagree on the issue and then also being you know realizing there are very few queer people in these spaces.

[00:39:31.54]

Also very few if any probably none and in that time like openly trans or gender nonconforming people also being you know being Latinx being a child of immigrants all these things that were part of my identity I felt kind of alone in that space and that activist base. And so I kind of started it naively to be honest I didn't have. I mean this was a different era in blogging. I don't think anybody knew where blogging was gonna go or even where the Internet was. So I was really just like I have a perspective I have some opinions about how this all fits together like why it's not weird that I'm a Dula and all the things I just said.

[00:40:11.89]

So let me let me create a space where I can talk about that and maybe connect with some other people who feel the same way and like explain it. And so that was how radical Dilla came to be. And I would have been wild to know then what I know now about how things were going to unfold but I kind of just wanted to like explain myself I guess at the end of the day explain myself and then hopefully connect to other people who felt similarly

[00:40:39.49] - GWB

and then you created the radical do guide which you published and its subtitle A Political Primer for full spectrum pregnancy and childbirth support and like I guess my question is in creating that book and the site do you feel like you achieved what you set out to achieve?

[00:41:09.82] - Pérez

A great question yeah I think so. I mean things are really different now and I think I can take one small tiny piece of credit for that but I think it's it's also just the way things evolved. But you know I don't feel alone at all. Like I'm not the only one in the room anymore and I'm not even in the room anymore. But the rooms look so different.

[00:41:28.88]

You know like the Dula community like it's just incredible what I hear about dola spaces and what I see online and then even just like what trainings exist where organization exists. So yeah being a queer trans do love being a pro-choice or like you know reproductive justice supporting do love being a person of color and I do love being led the man to do love being an activist in a duel like none of those things I think seem to be unusual strange a contradiction at all anymore. And that's amazing. So I it's not like I set out to change that but like the sort of reason for radicals with the beginning no longer exists.

[00:42:05.17]

Like I don't feel alone and I don't feel like I have to explain myself anymore. Like people get it you know and I'm sure they're still there still. Arenas where abortion is controversial still arenas. I mean gender is definitely a big issue as you know like in the birth activist world. But the conversation is in a very different place than it was then.

[00:42:21.72]

I mean it's just light years have changed moved and all that and then the book was really just like we have been blogging for five years I think at the time or maybe seven I don't know. And I was just like what. What's what else do I have to offer. What what Marc and I kind of put it in the world and I really just wanted to give people a resource that would supplement somebody do a trainings that are very like apolitical which is just absurd to me that that's possible but it is so.

[00:42:48.47]

And luckily now there's like Ancient Song and like Amazing people doing these incredible dual trainings that are so comprehensive. But but you know for people who are still doing these more intro dual trainings or who are looking to sort of understand the basics you know as a starting place it's still I still feel good about it as a resource in the world and it's also just nice to like print something that I can hold in my hands. You know after being a blogger for all these years and be like cook I made this thing and it's a book and I still mail it to people you know.

[00:43:16.95]

So yeah that's something like kind of...

[00:43:18.84] - GWB

Do you have like a box in the corner of your apartment.?

[00:43:20.79] - Pérez

I totally do. I have like four boxes actually like almost only a few hundred copies away from those from running out of the print ones and I think I'm just gonna do make a visual version from here on out.

[00:43:31.80]

And so there's a little bit of sadness about that era ending but also I'm like there's some bookstores that have it which is sweet but also yeah like the logistics and the cost of printing you know all that kind of stuff somebody out there totally just boxes out in my apartment.

[00:43:46.10]

Yeah and you said that you're no longer in the room anymore.

[00:43:50.77] - GWB

What made that happen or how was that shift?

[00:43:57.48] - Pérez

Right. I mean it's like I'm still sometimes in the room but but no I don't feel like I feel like I choose those I go to spaces where I'm invited and people want to hear my perspective but I'm not it's not like my core kind of organizing space or the place that I'd like to be.

[00:44:19.94]

I mean I think part of it was just like as you know as my career has gone on just like getting clear more clear over the years I like writing really feels like the skill set that I have to offer. And so you know I think writers and like journalists have a particular role but not every role you know. So like there's a lot and there's so many people now doing this work around birth activism and even maternal health and race and so like I don't need to be there. You know like I don't I'm not necessarily a person.

[00:44:45.26]

There's so many people who are and who have more experience than I do a different experience than I do. So I think that's a piece of it.

[00:44:51.59]

I stopped doing dual work mostly because I like didn't I was doing it toward the end of my sort of answer do the work I was doing abortion and miscarriage support which I really liked and I left the city clinic where I was doing that in a project that that worked for me and then. So that was sort of the transition but I left birth volunteer birth work many years ago because it was so stressful like being in hospital environments and I was doing it as soon as a volunteer I was doing it while working and so you know I couldn't be on call for people so I was doing the kind of model way to show up at the hospital and just walk around and be like I'm a doula. Do you want me to hang out with you? Which would be really different now because I think a lot more people would know what the hell that was right.

[00:45:34.96]

They were like how you know who are you. But so it was beautiful and I was supporting people who didn't have support but it was so stressful like I would have I would leave the room and go the caffeteria and have a panic attack kind of thing you know although I didn't have a lot of skills you know and my own journey in terms of just managing my own emotions and empathy and all these different things I figured out.

[00:45:57.67]

So yeah. So I stopped doing that and now I'm like I'm kind of getting an age like my kids are my friends are having kids coping like I'll get to be at some births just like as a friend and supporter but you just haven't felt the urge to go back to like the one on one support.

[00:46:10.24] - GWB

Yeah yeah. Great. Well thank you. Thank you for your work. I feel like I've seen so many doulas follow Masculine Birth Ritual and listen to us. It's often I feel like it's all in your wake. So thank you for that.

[00:46:28.68] - Pérez

Sweet yeah very sweet. It is interesting to look like after the TED talk went live. The first comment that I saw and you know how like negative comments stick out to you much more than you. One of the first tweets I saw with some random person I don't know.

[00:46:44.89]

Be like hey like hey is like Pat from SNL giving a TED talk.

[00:46:50.94]

I know and I didn't even remember the reference well enough. I went to Google pat from SNL. I remember that like horrible transphobia like disgusting whole skit about Pat is like person who nobody knew their gender and who is also like fat. And that was the whole skit and I was like gah like you know.

[00:47:09.50]

So there's definitely some interesting complications just like being a gender nonconforming person as well and like that work doesn't talk about that at all of the stuff that work is not... That work is about about race and like adults. Really it's not about me and my identity and it's not it's not about gender or gender nonconformity but it's like in some places you can't avoid it right? Like the ways in which people bring that in. So it's an interesting complication. But but I'm so grateful that there's so many people in these spaces now who are you know trans and gender incoming and clear and doing things like normalizing that you know you have to be the best just that's just that's not a thing necessarily right.

[00:47:57.57] - GWB

Yeah yeah it's great. And also a lot of people that follow the podcast and our Instagram accounts are cis and sometimes straight women do list that just want to be saying they just want to be doing the right thing.

[00:48:14.51] - Pérez

Right. Right.

[00:48:15.39] - GWB

Or so... And some people would say like I know nothing or I'm queer but I really want to nail this.

[00:48:23.27] - Pérez

Yeah right. It's right. Yeah.

[00:48:25.64] - GWB

I'm so glad people are doing that work.

[00:48:27.60] - Pérez

I'm glad that you're doing this to create the resource for people to learn about it.

[00:48:32.82] - GWB

Great. Yes. And you also have a music podcast.

[00:48:38.04] - Pérez

True. So many lives. Yes. I do have Gemini and a four on the...

[00:48:43.91] - GWB

You're a Gemini! Me too! and I wear a lot of hats.

[00:48:47.34] - Pérez

There you go. I know Gemini has got a lot of pain but it's actually I think we're really great.

[00:48:53.37]

Are you are you into the anagram at all?

[00:48:54.94] - GWB

What's the Eneagram?

[00:48:54.94] - Pérez

It's like another personality typing thing.

[00:48:59.78] - GWB

Oh like the ENTP?

[00:49:00.27] - Pérez

kind of like that but you it's numbers it's like one through nine. Oh no I don't know this. Yeah it's an interesting. My friends are really into it. But yeah Four is my number on the integral I'm also sort of explains mentally why I have so many projects I'm looking for anybody. OK there's the anagram. So yeah I have a podcast called radio Meanea anyway with my good friend Veronica Flores and we talk about Latinx music and we... yeah it's been almost three years.

[00:49:34.20]

I just I like to joke that I turn my hobbies into hustles you know starting my love into music although you know mostly low paid to no paid hustles but they're still really beautiful.

[00:49:44.94]

So yeah. So music has been a big big source of cultural connection for me over my entire life. And also as an adult and so yeah we talk about every week we we have a different theme and we talk about music by luck and people that we that we love and she's into like kind of indie stuff and I'm into more mainstream kind of cheesy things and so we have a fun mix of stuff on our show.

[00:50:08.97]

And maybe the other that I don't get which is also like a hobby turned hustle kind of thing although I say hustle very lightly. But I've been getting really into plants the last couple of years also a beautiful source of optimism for me because they grow in all sorts of conditions including our homes which are really not ideal for them in any way shape or form.

[00:50:30.23]

So I started an Instagram account to just kind of talk more about my love of plants and share tips with people who want to have plants in their home and it's called house plants parenthood and it's all one word.

[00:50:40.55] - GWB

So @HousplantParenthood. You are about to get a new follower.

[00:50:47.27] - Pérez

I'm just like a millennial stereotype. it's fine. Yeah. So yeah lots of lots of things.

[00:50:55.61]

I mean I'm just I'm grateful that there are these platforms to get to connect to people who also care about the same things I care about.

[00:51:02.12]

And yeah there's definitely break a lot of breaking isolation and radical doula definitely serve that purpose for me for many years and I'm just grateful that people are that that world is so vibrant and there's so many people who want to want to do this work and support people bringing through pregnancy and beautiful thing.

[00:51:19.79] - GWB

So what is up for you in your life and your work in 2019?

[00:51:26.03] - Pérez

Well every last few years I've had like a theme for the year. I don't do a lot of resolutions but last year my my focus was on cultivating optimism.

[00:51:35.96]

I was really thinking about what that looked like and it's been really interesting to be focused on that and like trying to be more hopeful.

[00:51:43.85]

This year I'm trying to like just like let Joy in more like experience joy as a global theme.

[00:51:54.23]

And one of the things that I'm working on right now that that does bring a lot of joy actually is young adult fiction. So I wrote a young adult fiction novel. Yeah. Over the last many years. But I mostly finished it in the last few months of 2018.

[00:52:08.42] - GWB

Congrats.

[00:52:10.79] - Pérez

Yeah and so I'm kind of hoping to get that out in the world.

[00:52:15.17]

So we'll see I'm I'm in the process of looking for an agent for that book which I've never gone through that process with fiction. So yeah. And I'm already writing working on a second one. It's just that even just the act of writing I was working on it right before we got on the phone and there's just like a lot of joy for me in creating new worlds right.

[00:52:32.87]

I mean I'm very realistic books but even just creating characters and and getting decide what their experiences are going to be. So yeah. Fiction has not been a big part of my writing but I'm excited to be exploring it and to see if that's another kind of way in which my writing can transform and this year.

[00:52:49.07] - GWB

That's amazing. Well I look forward. I look forward to seeing out in the world. Are you up for a little pretend Before we close out?

[00:52:58.88] - Pérez

Sure.

[00:53:00.55] - GWB

So pretend that it's 30 years into the future. And you walk out of your house and you sit down at the table maybe at a coffee shop or something with someone who's your age now and doing some similar work in the world.

[00:53:19.65]

However you want to think of that about what your work in the world is now and what that might look like in 30 years. And what do you hope that they are focusing on and what has changed in your life?

[00:53:35.05]

Like what rock are they pushing uphill?

[00:53:40.96] - Pérez

Yeah. These kind of future thinking experiments are also I think really helpful for some of the topics we've been thinking about right around like hope and stuff. I remember when the election happened.

[00:53:50.46]

I never did it but I thought about I was like You know I should sit down and write to myself now as myself after this presidency is over like eight years from now. And like worst case scenario I'm assuming democracy still exists. What would that person say you know what would and at that point it would've been I think I would've been 40. So it's like whoa 40 year old me say it's like thirty two year old me about what I'm going to deal with you know. So I just shout out to that process of like talking to yourself from the future you know beautiful and I'm on my birthday actually do that I write a letter to myself for next year.

[00:54:27.82]

And it's really been beautiful every birthday to go back and read the letters the last few years and sort of talk to myself and way. Man I mean coffee shops exist. We're talking like 20 50.

[00:54:38.52]

You know it's like yeah well that's a great way. And we'll coffee shop all alive you know it's like I could go either way.

[00:54:44.52]

What will the world look like man. I mean I think it's pretty clear that like for us to sustain life on this planet we have to pretty radically change the way we do things and the way we share resources and the way that we consume.

[00:55:03.19]

And I think there's a lot of beauty in that. And my hope in that. Just like how differently that can look and how much better that could be both for the planet but also for ourselves and each other.

[00:55:12.30] - GWB

Mm hmm.

[00:55:13.15] - Pérez

I mean I definitely hope they're not working on the same shit I'm working on right now.

[00:55:16.63]

Just like let's really hope that we've transformed you know the ways in which privilege and identity and discrimination play out in people's lives. Not that I think we could eliminate it in 30 years but I think we could transform it. So I hope they're like continuing to further that that work. But from a really different starting place than than where we're at now. And yeah just you know I and I think we need to talk about this much but adrienne talked about a lot. I think one of the root things that we have to really figure out is how to how to deal with people who do harm.

[00:55:54.72]

And I'm I that's that's something I think a lot about as well in the conversations that we're in and how difficult it is to be in relationship with other humans and how much capacity we all have to harm each other to be harmed. And I think that's what we're going to have to be in a collective relationship and even more radical ways than we are now. I think as the as we figure out how to be on this planet in a different way and we're gonna need a lot of tools for how to deal with harm.

[00:56:22.83]

So I'm hoping I hope that they have a lot more they know a lot more about how to do that and that we've learned a lot more about how to do that over the next 30 years so that we can be in relationship with each other in a different way.

[00:56:34.64] - GWB

Yeah yeah. Thank you.

[00:56:37.26] - Pérez

You're welcome.

[00:56:39.36] - GWB

Where can people find you?

[00:56:40.83] - Pérez

Yeah. I spent a long time on Instagram. I feel like that's the social media that like I find the most joy. Although I did actually take a big break from it over the last like a month but so I put my handle in the short notice maybe but it's Miriamzperez. It's like at miriamzperez s on Instagram. It's also what I'm on Twitter. I'm more of a lurker on Twitter but I'll post things that I'm writing on Twitter. I think newsletter that we can maybe link in the show notes that I send maybe once a month or once every two months Just kind of an update of the things I'm working on and articles I've written. So if you really want to know what I'm up to that's a good place. And yeah I do have a radical dola Facebook page that's pretty active in terms of I like to have especially posting articles and things that are like mostly positive things that are kind of going on around you know reproductive justice and whatnot. So that's a place if you're still into Facebook you can like the radical do less put page on Facebook and I kind of mostly repost other people's stuff but sometimes things that I've written over there and then they're radicals you will dot com.

[00:57:49.32]

These days is more of a resource than I an active blog. There's lots of resources there for folks who are interested in learning more. And like if you want to if you're looking for a volunteer do a program for example I keep like a you know only updated as much as updated as it is based on what people send me via email but on list of volunteer dual programs around the country and then also and again not super comprehensive but list of do a trainings if people are looking for I do a training there's lots of organizations that do that.

[00:58:19.44]

So those are two resources on radicaldoula.com that folks can access as well.

[00:58:24.75] - GWB

Great. Thank you so much.Thank you for talking with us

[00:58:28.90] - GWB

thank you for listening to masculine birth ritual. You'll find show notes with links to all the articles and social media accounts that Perez and I talked about at masculinebirthritual.com/episodes. Don't forget to head over to masculinebirthritual.com/survey to take the survey about what kind of materials can support pregnant and birthing people and parents that listen to this show. As a reminder you can support the show via Patreon at future dot com slash masculine birth ritual. Follow us on Instagram @masculinebirthritual and on Twitter @MasculineBirth. This week may you feel the solidness of the earth as it holds up every glorious ounce that is you.