

From Executive Producers
Ricki Lake and **Abby Epstein**

THE
MAMA SHERPAS
VIEWING GUIDE

A Film by Brigid Maher
themamasherpas.com

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SYNOPSIS

In 2012, the C-section rate was over 30% in America. Can midwives help solve the obstetrics crisis in America?

From executive producers Ricki Lake and Abby Epstein (*The Business of Being Born*), this topical new documentary, directed by Brigid Maher, examines a growing shift in the birthing industry: the rise of Caesarean sections. With C-section rates dangerously over 30% in America, are midwives the solution? In recent years, the idea of a “collaborative care” practice where doctors and midwives manage women’s care together has begun to gain traction. Research has demonstrated that collaborative care models produce better outcomes for mother and baby, including fewer C-sections. This moving and urgent film provides an intimate lens into how midwives across the country work within and better the hospital system, redefining how the US looks at the birthing process.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

After having my first child, I always got a lump in my throat when noting that my son was born via cesarean birth. Whether rational or irrational, I felt a sense of failure, that my body couldn't do what it was designed to do. As I began to share my guilt with other parents, I recognized that I was not alone in how I felt. When I became pregnant with my daughter, I knew I wanted to avoid another cesarean and my friends encouraged me to check out a midwife who worked at a local hospital. What I discovered, not only changed my story, but made me realize that I also needed to change the current stereotypes and misconceptions about what the general public knows about midwives. So, shortly after giving birth to Josie, I blurted out to my midwife that I had to make a documentary about midwives working in the hospital system. So just like my midwife guided me to a safe birth of my daughter in a hospital, I hope to guide the public into a deeper understanding of how midwives guide and serve women in the hospital system and how they can influence public healthy policy and practice for the better.

I had the privilege of filming women and families in their most vulnerable and emotional moments. I chose an intimate



and observational style in order to be as inconspicuous as possible. Often I filmed by myself, nestled into a corner of an exam room or beside the midwife or obstetrician during a labor and delivery. By taking an unobtrusive approach, I gained the trust of the care providers, women and families and was able to capture the emotionally powerful moments that audiences experience in the film.

I became a filmmaker so that I could tell stories that addressed issues of identity and social change. I am proud and privileged to have told these participant's stories and hope the documentary will not only alter audiences' stereotypes about midwives but also normalize how we view the natural process of birth.

-Brigid Maher

WHY "THE MAMA SHERPAS?"

The genesis for the movie title came on my first day of filming in August, 2011. The midwife explained to an expecting mama that midwives “acted like sherpas to guide the women through the birthing process.” It was an incredible moment and although it didn’t end up in the final version of the film,



it stuck with me. At that very moment, we began playing with the title of The Mama Sherpas and later did an audience survey to test the name as well as discussing it with ACNM’s national office and local midwives. The name resonated as it reflected the spirit of how midwives practice. My concern as a filmmaker is that it was a bit obscure OR the intentionality could be misunderstood as something with negative connotations. So, I waited to finalize the title until right before we completed the film...literally. We went through many, many discussions. Finally, days before “picture lock” I spent an afternoon meditating on it. As I sat in

my office, with my head down for a bit, it finally came to me that this had to be the title of the film. Like Sherpas guiding hikers to Mount Everest, midwives don’t take the glory, they’re the guides, this is their life’s work and it’s always about mama and baby. Without getting too political, I recognize that the Sherpa people have been exploited time and time again. And, choosing to use the word “sherpa” which is also a noun to mean “expert and guide” was always meant with the utmost respect, with the meaning to guide women to a safe delivery of their baby. Midwives put the woman and baby first, never in it for the glory, it’s their calling. And with that nod of respect, we found The Mama Sherpas.



ABOUT THIS VIEWING GUIDE



The Mama Sherpas is a balanced investigation into how midwives work within the hospital system. The documentary uses an observational style in exploring each of the midwives and patients, providing a participant driven narrative.

Brigid Maher, along with the consultation of American College of Nurse-Midwives and Birth Options Alliance have created this resource to help guide these important discussions on maternal health care in a meaningful, purposeful way. In the following pages, you will find guidance on how to use *The Mama Sherpas*, how to discuss the film, and additional resources for the midwifery community, policy makers and public health workers.

This resource is designed for educators, students, and public health officials working together to positively impact their communities.

WHY DISCUSS?

The Mama Sherpas explores the contemporary challenges of maternal health care, critical issues that affect women and family, as well as poverty in rural and urban communities.



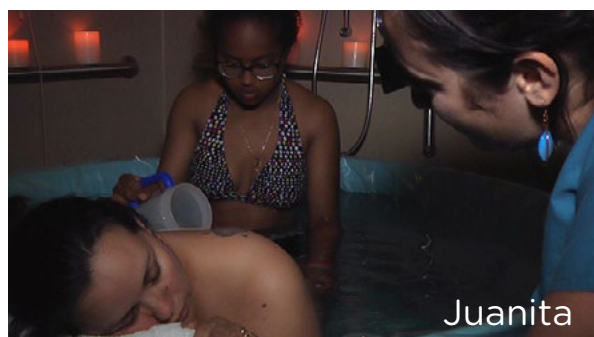
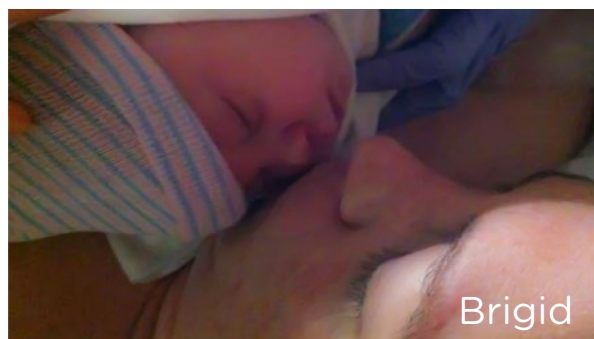
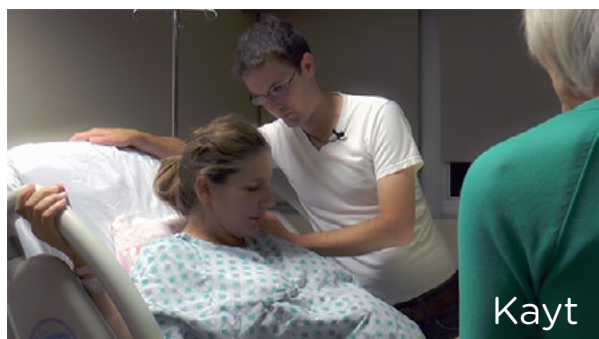
HOW CAN THESE DISTURBING TRENDS BE REVERSED?

In recent years, the idea of a “collaborative care” practice where doctors and midwives manage women’s care together has begun to gain traction in the U.S. So far, research has demonstrated that doctor-midwife collaborative care models produce better outcomes for mother and baby, including fewer C-sections.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY DECIDE TO WORK TOGETHER?

Despite the World Health Organization’s recommendation that cesarean births remain below 15% for optimal mother and child achievement, about one in three babies born in the U.S. is delivered by C-section. Alarming statistics (from the National Center for Health Statistics) prove the U.S. infant mortality rate is higher than rates in most other developed countries. In fact, more than 40 countries around the world have lower maternal death rates than the U.S.

OUR MAMAS



KEY TERMS

CERTIFIED NURSE-MIDWIFE (CNM):

An individual trained and licensed in both nursing and midwifery. Nurse-midwives possess at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and are certified by the American College of Nurse-Midwives.



CERTIFIED MIDWIFE (CM):

An individual trained and certified in midwifery. Certified midwives possess at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and are certified by the American College of Nurse-Midwives.

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL MIDWIFE (CPM):

An individual trained in midwifery who meets practice standards of the North American Registry of Midwives.

DIRECT-ENTRY MIDWIFE (DEM):

An independent individual trained in midwifery through a variety of sources that can include: self-study, apprenticeship, a midwifery school, or a college/university program.

LAY MIDWIFE:

An individual who is not certified or licensed as a midwife but has been trained informally through self-study or apprenticeship.

Reference:

<http://americanpregnancy.org/labor-and-birth/midwives/>

GUIDED DISCUSSION

The real-life stories of our brave mamas can be powerful vehicles for discussion and learning about the “collaborative care” model.

The first step to planning a group showing of the film is to clarify your goals in doing so. Take time to reflect on the impact the film may have on your audience and what you want them to get out of the experience. You can use the film and the ensuing questions as a launching point for dialogue on the issues of optimal mother-child achievement.

Audiences may benefit from exploring and connecting the issues in the film to their own experiences. Do be considerate of the unique set of challenges and opportunities your audience could face when watching and discussing the film. Lead a discussion using some of the questions below. Help your audience process their response to the film, and encourage their quest for knowledge on maternal health care in the U.S.

- WHAT DID YOU KNOW ABOUT MIDWIFERY BEFORE WATCHING THIS FILM? WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT MIDWIFERY DID YOU LEARN? WHAT NEW QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?
- DID THE FILM HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE COLLABORATIVE CARE MODEL BETWEEN MIDWIVES AND OBSTETRICIANS IN THE U.S.?
- WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN THEMES OF THE FILM?
- DID ANY BIRTHING RITUALS IN THE FILM SURPRISE YOU?
- DO YOU BELIEVE MIDWIVES TAKE BETTER CARE OF PATIENTS THAN DOCTORS? IF SO, WHY?
- IF YOU COULD ASK ANY OF THE MAMAS A QUESTIONS, WHO AND WHAT WOULD YOU ASK?
- PRIOR TO THE FILM, WHEN YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WOMEN GIVING BIRTH, WHAT DELIVERY METHOD DID YOU BELIEVE TO BE THE SAFEST OPTION? DID THE FILM AND INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE AFFIRM OR CHALLENGE THESE IDEAS?
- DOES THIS FILM MAKE A STRONG CASE FOR THE BENEFITS OF HOSPITAL-BASED MIDWIVES? IF SO, WHY?
- WHAT BENEFITS, IN ADDITION TO REDUCED INTERVENTIONS/C-SECTION RATES, DO YOU THINK MIDWIFERY CARE HAS FOR WOMEN?
- WHAT DO YOU HOPE FOR MATERNAL HEALTH CARE IN THE U.S.?

BEYOND THE FILM

Host a Screening

Holding a group screening of the film can provide an excellent format to bring together people of different viewpoints, creating a space for the exchange of ideas and opinions. By watching this film together, your group can work to promote the increase in knowledge of maternal health care. For information and tips on holding a screening, contact brigid@thehospitalmidwife.com

The Mama Sherpas has a multimedia website including excerpts and outtakes from the film, educational materials and links, as well as ideas for ways to get involved.

Check out: themamasherpas.com

Purchase a copy of the film

For information on how to buy a copy of *The Mama Sherpas* or book a screening, please contact bend@bondinfluence.com



RESOURCES

WEB RESOURCES

American College of Nurse-Midwives
<http://www.midwife.org/>

Birth Options Alliance
<http://www.birthoptionsalliance.org/>

DONA International
<http://www.dona.org/>

Baystate Midwifery and Women's Health
<http://www.baystatehealth.com/Baystate/baystatemidwifery>

Sutter Davis Birthing Center
<http://www.sutterdavis.org/services/birthing/>

George Washington University
<http://www.gwhospital.com/hospital-services/womens-services/midwifery-services>

Coalition for Breech Birth
<http://www.breechbirth.ca/Welcome.html>

Have A Natural Childbirth
<http://www.haveanaturalchildbirth.com/>

Giving Birth Naturally
<http://www.givingbirthnaturally.com/>

Pushed Birth
<http://pushedbirth.com/>

VIDEO RESOURCES

The Business of Being Born, Produced by Ricki Lake. 2007.

Laboring Under An Illusion: Mass Media Childbirth vs. The Real Thing, Produce by Vicki Elson. 2009.

Woman to Woman, Directed by Aminata Maraesa. 2002.

Orgasmic Birth, Director Debra Pascali-Bonaro. 2013.

It's My Body, My Baby, My Birth, Produced by Natural Childbirth.

Pregnant in America, Directed by Steve Buonaugurio. 2008.

Born in the USA, Produced by Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider. 2000.

The Face of Birth, Produced by Kate Gorman. 2013.

PRINT RESOURCES

Gaskin, Ina May. *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth*. New York: Bantam Books, 2003.

Simkin, Penny. *The Birth Partner - Revised 3rd Edition a Complete Guide to Childbirth for Dads, Doulas, and All Other Labor Companions*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Common Press, 2008.

Buckley, Sarah J. *Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering: A Doctor's Guide to Natural Childbirth and Gentle Early Parenting Choices*. Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 2009.

Gaskin, Ina May. *Birth Matters: A Midwife's Manifesta*. Seven Stories Press 1st ed. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

Karp, Harvey. *The Happiest Baby on the Block and the Happiest Toddler on the Block 2-book Bundle*. New York: Bantam Books, 2013.

Mongan, Marie F. *Hypnobirthing: The Mongan Method : A Natural Approach to a Safe, Easier, More Comfortable Birthing*. 3rd ed. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2005.

Scott, Ashley. *HypnoBirthing - An Introductory Guide - Basic HypnoBirthing Techniques Explained (Busy Woman's Natural Birth Series Book 1)*. Amazon Digital Services, 2014.