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Academic (abbreviated) Review and My Thoughts on “Birth-Time...The Documentary

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Academic (abbreviated) Review and My Thoughts on “Birth-Time...The Documentary

By Gloria Bobbie¹

Abstract

Anthropologists and other social scientists as well as many in the field of healthcare have for decades published articles on the detrimental effects of the medicalization of pregnancy and birth. There is no dearth of information in the academic databases, yet little progress has been made in stopping the harm being done by unnecessary medical procedures such as Caesarian sections (World Health Organization, 2021).

Since Smokey the Bear was introduced, the concept of humanizing topics by putting faces and voices on social issues is recognized as psychologically effective (Herbert, W. 2013), and that is what the documentary “Birth-Time” does. It gives voices to the words on paper found in our databases.

The video offers first-person stories through interviews of women and their partners who felt traumatized by their birth experiences as well as confirming testimony from experts in the field. It offers important insights into the problems inherent in our medical systems that lead to women feeling traumatized and often suffering from postpartum depression or PTSD after the birth of a child, the helpless feelings experienced by partners and fathers who feel left out of the birth experience, an understanding of how denial of culture affects minority women, and also why those in the medical fields often feel compelled to work in a system they themselves do not support. What is unique is that in addition to identifying the problem, the documentary offers ideas for solutions.

Keywords: Birth Time, Reproductive Justice, Childbirth, Medicalization, Reproductive Rights, Epidurals

Introduction

Anthropologists and other social scientists as well as many in the field of healthcare have for decades published articles on the detrimental effects of the medicalization of pregnancy and birth. There is no dearth of information in the academic databases, yet little progress has been made in stopping the harm being done by unnecessary medical procedures such as Caesarian sections (World Health Organization, 2021).

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¹ Gloria Bobbie is an Anthropologist at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh and has researched and taught about the effects of the transfer of ideas and practices from developed to developing nations for over 20 years. One such transfer is the medicalization of health issues, especially those affecting women. Her work has received a Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, the highest award given to teaching faculty in the SUNY system.

birth of a child, the helpless feelings experienced by partners and fathers who feel left out of the birth experience, an understanding of how denial of culture affects minority women, and also why those in the medical fields often feel compelled to work in a system they themselves do not support. What is unique is that in addition to identifying the problem, the documentary offers ideas for solutions.

Keywords/phrases I have used in researching this

- Reproductive justice
- Reproductive rights
- Fathers and childbirth
- Interference in birth process
- Growth of Cesarean sections
- Unnecessary medical procedure in pregnancy and childbirth
- Medicalization of pregnancy
- Medicalization of childbirth
- Medicalization of maternal health
- Epidurals in labor and childbirth
- Using drugs in labor and childbirth
- Natural childbirth
- Postpartum Depression
- Intervention in pregnancy and childbirth
- PTSD and childbirth
- Mental health and childbirth
- Childbirth and indigenous populations
- Childbirth and aboriginal populations
- Caesarian sections in developing nations
- Role of midwives
- Hospital profit from medicalization of childbirth and pregnancy
- Doctors and medicalization of childbirth and pregnancy

Keywords from producers of video:

- Birth
- Childbirth
- Birth documentary
- Birth time the documentary
- Birth time
- Childbirth documentary
- C section
- Cesarean section
- Caesarean section
- Caesarean delivery
- Caesarian
- Cesarean
- Intervention in childbirth
- Induction

- Continuity of Care
- Continuity of Midwifery Care
- Labour
- Natural birth
- Natural labour
- Giving birth
- Baby
- How to birth my baby
- Pain
- Pain management
- Hospital birth
- Normal Physiological Birth
- Obstetrician
- Midwife

<https://www.birthtime.world/>

I accidentally stumbled across this and found that it offers great value to our understanding of the effects of the medicalization of the birth experience, so I am sharing this to create an awareness of a valuable resource and why I find it to be one. As an academic who teaches about the negative implications of the medicalization of birth that are well documented in the literature, I find that humanizing the words that are found in that literature greatly influences my students. This documentary does just that.

Production

Produced by Eagle Rose Productions and Sparry Studios, the film follows the journey of three women, Zoe Naylor, Jo Hunter, and Jerusha Sutton, as they travel across Australia to learn why women are emerging from birth both physically and emotionally traumatized. The video was four years in the making with delays due to COVID and was released in 2020. After its production, Olympian Selina Scoble joined the team.

Context and Accuracy

During the late 1990's through the early 2000's, the medicalization of health and healthcare was prominent in research among the disciplines, and there was a strong focus on the medicalization of pregnancy and birth. As the abortion issue became a dominant topic in the political arena, focus was redirected, and it was the COVID pandemic that reintroduced the topic as interest in home birth rose because of fear of giving birth in hospitals filled with COVID patients.

The film features many interviews with experts in the field who substantiate the claims made. In addition, our academic databases are filled with papers and articles which share the same information. We have long known about the psychosocial conditions, increasing trends in C-sections in both the developed and developing world, (World Health Organization, 2021) racial and ethnic implications, postpartum depression and PTSD after delivery, the politicization of pregnancy and birth, and other related issues. There is no dearth of literature on the subject. So, why is this documentary an important addition?

Value Added

I feel this documentary is a valuable addition to our resources because:

1. It humanizes the words on paper that are in the journals that we so often rely on in the academy. It puts faces and voices on those about whom the papers speak. Listening to the women speak of their experiences and trauma they incurred fosters a better understanding of the problems inherent in our systems.
2. It gives voice to often overlooked fathers and partners whose roles are often undefined and who often feel like “helpless spectators” or feel that they are in the way during the birth process. The value of their support during the birthing process is well explained and illustrated.
3. It gives voice to an often-overlooked segment of the world population—indigenous and minority women—for whom a connection to their own cultural norms and values is often missing.
4. It is not a condemnation of and does not put blame on those in the medical field and explains how they themselves are often compelled to participate in a system in which they do not fully believe in.
5. The video offers solutions, not just a statement of the problem, by discussing what it would take to change the system to make birth physically and emotionally safer.

Recommendation

I do recommend this video for use in multiple disciplines which have an interest in gender issues throughout the globe. The video can be viewed at Birth Time World (<https://www.birthtime.world/>). I will be incorporating this documentary in my Global Issues course unit on world health where we will be focusing on reproductive justice.

****NOTE**** I have no financial incentives for this review.

References

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