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The Business Of Being Born

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795583839279807

Ricki Lake and The Business of Being Born: A Documentary That Changed the Conversation Around Childbirth

When the documentary **The Business of Being Born** premiered in 2008, it did more than simply offer an alternative perspective on childbirth. It ignited a national conversation that continues to resonate with expectant parents, healthcare providers, and birth advocates to this day. At the heart of this powerful film is **Ricki Lake**, the former talk show host turned executive producer, whose own transformative birth experiences inspired a project that would challenge long-standing medical conventions and empower countless women to take control of their reproductive health.

Directed by Abby Epstein, **The Business of Being Born Ricki Lake**helped bring to life examines the maternity care system in the United States with a critical eye, contrasting it with models of care found in other developed nations. The documentary presents a compelling case for rethinking how we approach pregnancy, labor, and delivery. It questions the routine use of medical interventions and highlights the often overlooked options of midwifery, home birth, and natural childbirth. More than a decade after its release, the film remains a touchstone for those seeking evidence-based, woman-centered maternity care.

The Genesis of a Groundbreaking Film

Ricki Lake's personal journey into motherhood served as the catalyst for the documentary. After giving birth to her first son, Milo, in a hospital setting with a traditional obstetrician, Lake felt that her experience lacked the intimacy and empowerment she had hoped for. It was not until the birth of her second son, Owen, that she discovered a different path. With the guidance of a midwife and the support of a doula, Lake gave birth at home in water, an experience she describes as profoundly transformative and deeply personal.

This stark contrast between her two birth experiences prompted Lake to ask difficult questions about the American maternity care system. Why, she wondered, are women in the United States more likely to undergo cesarean sections, inductions, and epidurals than women in many other countries? Why is the cesarean rate so high, and what are the long-term implications for mothers and babies? These questions became the foundation for **The Business of Being Born**, a film that seeks to demystify childbirth and restore it as a natural physiological event rather than a medical crisis waiting to happen.

The Role of Ricki Lake as Advocate and Producer

Ricki Lake brought more than just her personal story to the project. Her background as a television host and media personality provided her with a platform to reach a wide audience. She approached the subject with compassion, curiosity, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. By stepping into the role of executive producer, Lake ensured that the documentary would be accessible, engaging, and grounded in real experiences rather than abstract theory.

Lake's advocacy did not end with the film's release. She has continued to speak out about birth rights, midwifery, and the importance of informed consent. Her work has helped to normalize conversations about home birth and has encouraged women to research their options thoroughly before making decisions about their maternity care. For many, Ricki Lake has become a symbol of the movement to reclaim childbirth from unnecessary medicalization.

The Business of Maternity Care in the United States

The documentary's title, **The Business of Being Born**, points directly to a central thesis: childbirth in America is a multibillion-dollar industry. Hospitals, insurance companies, pharmaceutical corporations, and medical device manufacturers all have financial stakes in how babies are delivered. The film argues that this profit-driven model often prioritizes efficiency and risk management over the emotional and physical well-being of the mother.

One of the most startling statistics presented in the documentary is the cesarean section rate in the United States, which hovers around 32 percent, far above the 10 to 15 percent rate that the World Health Organization recommends as medically optimal. The film suggests that financial incentives, fear of litigation, and convenience for scheduling all contribute to this high rate. It also points out that cesarean sections are far more lucrative for hospitals than vaginal births, raising important ethical questions about the motivations behind surgical delivery.

Comparing International Maternity Care Models

The documentary draws sharp contrasts between the American system and those of countries like the Netherlands, Japan, and the United Kingdom, where midwifery-led care is the standard for low-risk pregnancies. In the Netherlands, for example, approximately 30 percent of babies are born at home with the support of highly trained midwives. These countries consistently achieve lower rates of maternal and infant mortality, fewer medical interventions, and higher rates of breastfeeding satisfaction.

- Netherlands: Home birth is integrated into the national healthcare system, with midwives as primary caregivers for low-risk pregnancies.
- United Kingdom: The National Health Service offers midwifery-led units and home birth options as standard choices for healthy women.
- Japan: Midwifery centers and small maternity homes provide personalized care, with low intervention rates and excellent outcomes.

By highlighting these international examples, **The Business of Being Born Ricki Lake**presents a vision of what is possible when maternity care is designed around the needs of women and families rather than the bottom line of hospitals.

Midwifery: A Central Theme of the Documentary

Midwifery is at the core of the documentary's message. The film features several practicing midwives who share their philosophies and experiences. It also includes footage of actual home births, showing the calm, controlled, and intimate environment that skilled midwives can create. The documentary makes a strong case for midwifery as a safe, evidence-based option for low-risk pregnancies, challenging the notion that giving birth outside of a hospital is inherently dangerous.

Midwives featured in the film emphasize the importance of continuity of care. Unlike the fragmented model common in hospital settings, where a woman may see multiple different doctors during her pregnancy and a stranger at delivery, midwives typically build long-term relationships with their clients. This continuity fosters trust and allows for more personalized care. The film argues that this relationship-based model leads to better outcomes and higher satisfaction rates.

The Role of Doulas in Birth Support

The documentary also explores the invaluable role of doulas, trained professionals who provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to women during labor and delivery. Doulas are not medical providers, but their presence has been shown to reduce the need for interventions, shorten labor, and improve overall birth experiences. The film highlights how doulas can bridge the gap between the clinical environment of a hospital and the emotional needs of a laboring woman.

1. Emotional support: Doulas provide reassurance, encouragement, and a calming presence throughout labor.
2. Physical comfort: They use techniques such as massage, positioning, and breathing exercises to help manage pain.
3. Advocacy: Doulas help women communicate their preferences to medical staff and make informed decisions.

The inclusion of doulas in the conversation about birth reinforces the documentary's broader message: that the business of being born should prioritize the holistic well-being of the mother and baby over institutional convenience.

Critical Reception and Lasting Impact

Upon its release, **The Business of Being Born**received widespread attention from both mainstream media and the natural birth community. Some critics praised the film for its eye-opening examination of the maternity care industry, while others argued that it presented a one-sided view that overly romanticized home birth and unfairly criticized hospital births. Despite the debates, the documentary succeeded in doing what all great documentaries do: it started conversations.

In the years since the film, there has been a noticeable shift in public awareness about birth options. More women are seeking out midwives and doulas, and there is growing interest in birth centers and home birth. The documentary has been credited with inspiring a new generation of birth activists and with influencing some hospitals to adopt more woman-centered practices, such as allowing laboring women to eat and drink, move freely, and choose their preferred birth positions.

Criticisms and Counterpoints

No documentary is without its critics, and **The Business of Being Born**has faced its share. Some medical professionals argue that the film understates the risks of home birth and overstates the dangers of hospital interventions. Others point out that the documentary does not address the reality that for many women, especially those with high-risk pregnancies, hospital birth with access to advanced medical technology is the safest option.

However, even critics acknowledge the film's value in prompting women to ask more questions and to seek out evidence-based information. The documentary does not advocate for a single approach to birth but rather urges women to become educated consumers of maternity care. This message of empowerment and informed decision-making is perhaps the film's most enduring legacy.

The Legacy of Ricki Lake's Birth Advocacy

Years after the documentary first aired, Ricki Lake remains a passionate advocate for birth reform. She has spoken at conferences, participated in panels, and continued to share her personal story in interviews and on social media. Her advocacy has helped to destigmatize home birth and has encouraged a more open dialogue about the challenges and joys of childbirth.

Lake's work has also inspired a follow-up project,

The Business of Being Born 2 explores the ongoing landscape of maternity care in the United States, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on birth options, the rise of freestanding birth centers, and the ongoing struggles of midwives to practice legally in all states. This sequel reaffirms Lake's commitment to the cause and demonstrates that the conversation she started is far from over.

Practical Takeaways for Expectant Parents

Whether or not you agree with every point made in **The Business of Being Born Ricki Lake**, the film offers several practical lessons for anyone preparing for childbirth.

- Educate yourself: Learn about the full range of birth options available in your area, including hospital birth, birth center birth, and home birth.
- Interview providers: Ask potential obstetricians, midwives, and doulas about their philosophies, intervention rates, and approach to informed consent.
- Create a birth plan: Write down your preferences for labor and delivery, but remain flexible in case your circumstances change.
- Consider a doula: Even if you have a supportive partner and a skilled medical team, a doula can provide an extra layer of comfort and advocacy.
- Trust your body: Childbirth is a natural process, and your body knows how to give birth, even if modern medicine sometimes suggests otherwise.

Conclusion

The Business of Being Born, driven by **Ricki Lake**'s vision and personal experience, remains a landmark documentary in the world of maternity care. It challenged a deeply entrenched medical system, gave voice to midwives and doulas, and empowered countless women to approach childbirth with confidence and knowledge. While the debates it sparked continue, the film's core message endures: that the way we bring new life into the world matters deeply, and that every woman deserves access to safe, respectful, and evidence-based maternity care. As more families seek out personalized birth experiences and as the movement for birth reform grows, Ricki Lake's contribution to the conversation will not be forgotten. Her documentary is not just a film; it is a call to action, a source of inspiration, and a reminder that the business of being born should always put the mother and baby first.

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