

**BIRTHING
JUSTICE**

Every Woman Deserves A Beautiful Birth Story

EVERY WOMAN DESERVES A BEAUTIFUL BIRTH STORY

**DISCUSSION
GUIDE**



Discussion Guide

America's medical inequities have turned giving birth into a battlefield for too many Black women and their babies. **BIRTHING JUSTICE** tells the story of the crisis faced by Black mothers and their children and the solutions needed to transform the maternal care system.

This guide is intended to provide individuals and organizations hosting screenings of **Birthing Justice** with a framework for key themes addressed by the film and key questions and prompts for discussion. We hope this resource will be a useful tool in your efforts to convene critical conversations about the state of maternal care for Black women in America and what you can do.



Warm-Up Questions



Instructions:

The following questions are intended to be used after the documentary has been screened. Though they can all be used, they are also able to be edited based on the audience and time allotted for discussion. Questions that are specifically meant for healthcare practitioners, including administrators, have been labeled in bold with "Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator".

1. Which statement best describes how you are feeling at this moment after watching **Birthing Justice**?
 - a. Shocked. There was a lot that I was not aware of.
 - b. Not surprised. I'm aware of the statistics and the issues discussed in the film.
 - c. Overwhelmed. I'm just taking it all in. I don't know where to start.
 - d. Motivated. There's a lot to do to address this. I'm ready to move this forward and dialogue.
 - e. Other
2. Complete the following sentence:
The factor that most contributes to substandard Black maternal care is...
 - a. (under)Funding
 - b. Implicit Bias in medicine
 - c. Resources
 - d. Lack of Black medical personnel available to care for Black patients
 - e. All of the above
- 3) Midwives and doulas are featured heavily in Birthing Justice. Prior to watching the film, did you know the difference between midwives (clinician) or doulas (support advocate)? If you are pregnant, planning pregnancy or know someone who is pregnant, would you consider or recommend a doula based on what you saw in the film?
 - 4a) **Healthcare Practitioner /Administrator:** What is the difference between equity and equality? There is a discussion in the film about the difference in training /professional development centered around equity vs. equality and the difference it makes in treating patients of color. What type of training/professional development do you offer your staff/students and is it centered on equality or equity?
 - 4b) As a patient, what do you think your healthcare providers need to focus on and why?

Discussion Questions



Instructions:

The following questions have been created to help facilitate conversation around the topics that have been explored in Birthing Justice. The questions follow the order of the film; however, they can be edited to fit the needs of those facilitating the discussion after the film. In anticipation of the film's audience—including healthcare practitioners, advocates, mothers, parents and other community members—the questions that are specifically meant for healthcare practitioners or administrators have been labeled in bold with "Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator. Any questions that have not been labeled are for general audiences.

- 1) Reflect on the following quote: "I didn't want to be in a situation where I had to mitigate some sort of racist or prejudice experience. I didn't want to be in a situation where I would have to come in defense mode. I wanted to go into birth with peace." As a patient, advocate or healthcare practitioner, what does this quote mean to you?
- 2) Preeclampsia/eclampsia is the leading cause of death among Black mothers. Olympian Allyson Felix could have become part of that statistic. In your opinion, what played a significant role in Allyson's and her child's being able to survive?
- 3a) Contributing to the high infant mortality rate in Washington DC is the inequity in accessibility to medical care that residents who live in the wealthier sections of the city have in contrast to those who don't (e.g., Ward 3, historically wealthy and white vs. Ward 7, historically poor and Black). Community of Hope was created to address this. From their relationship with members within the community to the use of midwives and doulas on staff, what lessons can be learned from the success of Community of Hope that can be applied in communities with similar circumstances?
- 3b) Are you familiar with any medical centers that are similar to Community of Hope and, if so, what is your experience?
- 4a) In the film, Dr. Donna Adams-Pickett states "I am still dismayed at how easily I am dismissed and women who look like me are dismissed. That we can bring a level of gravitas to a situation, knowledge of a situation and how easily we are minimized..." Dr. Adams-Pickett goes on to share an instance, related to her statement above, where her knowledge as an obstetrician and understanding of her patients' need for "emergent" care was questioned by an anesthesiologist twice. What does this tell us about how significant a role implicit bias plays in influencing (or interfering with) Black maternal care amongst healthcare practitioners?
- 4b) **Healthcare Practitioner / Administrator:** What was your immediate reaction to hearing Dr. Adams-Pickett's story? Have you experienced or witnessed anything similar to what Dr. Adams-Pickett shared in the film? If so, what was its effect on how you service your patients? If you have not experienced anything similar to this, how might you imagine this would influence patient care?
- 5) What can you conclude about the correlation between funding and medical care with statistics such as Medicaid's paying pennies on the dollar for patient care and OB/GYN physicians not being available in 82 of Georgia's 159 counties?

- 6) **Healthcare Practitioner / Administrator:** Where do you see the effects of funding (or lack of funding) on your patients' access to healthcare and on you as a healthcare provider? What can or should be done to change this?
- 7) Given the history of the Flexner Report, how would you describe its effect in medicine now? As a patient or medical professional, how do you experience or witness the legacy of the report?
- 8) The significant harm caused by the Flexner Report has been acknowledged by organizations such as the American Association of Medical Colleges. Is that enough? What can or should be done to reverse the Flexner Report's ongoing influence on medical education?
- 9) The history of eugenics in medicine is not limited to the Flexner Report or the distant past. Where can we find the influence of this racist false science in medical education and how Black women are provided medical care today? Reflect on your own lived experiences, examples from the film or current events when answering the question.
- 10a) During a meeting with hospital personnel, Tammy Turner explained the difference between approaching patient care through the lens of equity rather than equality as "If everyone doesn't start at the same starting point, and you treat everyone the same, then you're going to miss the mark on a certain population." What examples are given in the film that embody this approach? Have you seen or experienced this put into practice yourself as a patient or healthcare provider?
- 10b) **Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator:** Do you participate in equity training and, if so, what does it look like? How can it improve patient care?
- 11a) Only 8% of hospitals in the US have labor and delivery units led by nurse-midwives. Does the labor and delivery unit team at your hospital include nurse-midwives?
- 11b) **Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator:** If your hospital's labor and delivery unit team does not include nurse-midwives, what would you attribute this to? What opportunities do you have to create a program that would use midwives as part of the hospital staff?
- 12a) **Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator:** In the film, Dr. Joia Crear-Perry describes the need for midwives and characterizes them as people "who believe the person in front of them is fully human and has the capacity to bring a spirit into the world that might change the world." She then shares that she has been warned by her peers that she may "talk yourself out of a job" as an OB/GYN by continuing to advocate for using midwives in maternal care. As a healthcare provider, what is your perception of midwives and their role in maternity health? If you are a midwife, what are your experiences working with doctors and how do you think you are perceived?
- 12b) As a patient, what is your response to Dr. Crear-Perry's anecdote? What does it tell you about maternal healthcare?
- 12c) **Healthcare Practitioner/Administrator:** In your experience, have you come across beliefs similar to Dr. Crear-Perry's colleagues concerning midwives being job competition for OB/GYNs?
- 13) The doulas from the organizations Parents as Teachers and JAMMA Birth Village—featured in the segment on St. Louis-Ferguson, Missouri—work closely with mothers in their community. What services do they provide, and how do those services have the potential to combat the high mortality rate of Black

mothers and babies in the St. Louis–Ferguson region?

14) **Healthcare Practitioner / Administrator:**

When discussing past instances of hospitals offering support, Okunsola M. Amadou, founder of JAAMA Birth Village, poses the following question: “How can you help us dismantle the same racism that’s killing Black mothers and babies when you’re approaching us with the same racist tactic?” As a medical professional, how would you answer her? In addition, what do the very hospital systems that approached her through “white saviorism” need to do to build trust with communities that have been hurt by the systemic racism ingrained in medical institutions?

15) The Missouri Bootheel Regional Consortium employs people from the community that they serve. How does this help build trust and relationships with the organization’s clients?

16a) The Missouri Bootheel Regional Consortium includes parenting classes and mentoring for fathers in the services it offers. How important is this in supporting mothers and addressing the health risks they face during and after pregnancy?

16b) The film shows some of the ways in which male allyship contributes positively to community and family. How can we better empower Black men during the process of pregnancy so that they are more equipped to navigate the maternal healthcare system?

17) “...the answer to bias in healthcare is a diverse workforce and to have providers that look like the people they’re treating.” Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Elaine Batchlor’s statement? What do you think is the answer to bias in healthcare?

18a) The journal club featured in the

documentary followed a curriculum that was not provided by their university. They created one with a focus on social justice and antiracism on their own. In your opinion, why aren’t medical schools providing their students with training that includes antiracism education? How would a change in curriculum contribute to creating equity in medical care?

18b) **Healthcare Practitioners /**

Administrators: Medical student Tinkai “Kevin” Yin speaks of the hierarchy amongst doctors, which makes addressing bias difficult when caring for patients. Are doctors able to confront institutionalized bias in medicine with ingrained structures such as doctor hierarchy?

19) What actions do you think should happen to alleviate the issue of maternal and infant mortality for Black mothers and children? Is it...?

- a. Increased public policy and investments, including legislation (local, state and federal governments)
- b. Increased public awareness and advocacy on the issue of birth inequities and birthing justice
- c. More people of color and cultural competence in the medical field
- d. Other

20) People shared their stories of experiencing Black Joy. Do you have one of your own? Have you been a witness to it? Why is it just as important to share stories of Black Joy as it is to share the many stories featured in the documentary?

21) **Healthcare Practitioner / Administrator:**

What tips do you have for women to advocate for themselves throughout their pregnancy and while in the hospital during labor/delivery and post delivery?

Legislator Questions



- 1) Congresswoman Lauren Underwood says in the film, "This is not our burden to carry. This is a society that has allowed this to happen. We have allowed our moms to die for generations. And what we are doing now is we're saying this is unacceptable and we will not allow that to continue." So, what are we doing in this state or city to not allow this to happen anymore?
- 2) How do you view the government's role/responsibility in addressing Black maternal health in the US?
- 3) Birthing Justice is entering the landscape during a politically pivotal time for maternal and reproductive health, as Roe v. Wade was overturned in 2022 by the US Supreme Court. How important are films like Birthing Justice in bringing forth conversations around these topics to communities that might not have access to information surrounding these issues?
- 4) In the film, it's mentioned that Medicaid pays pennies on the dollar for maternal care. How does insurance (or a lack of it) play a role in increasing risks for Black women? What are other factors that impede Black women's access to quality medical care?

Wrap-Up Questions

Instructions:

The questions below have been created to help bring the discussion to a close.

- 1) Many stories and experiences have been featured in the film. Whose story/experience resonated with you and what did you learn from it?
- 2) **Healthcare Practitioner / Administrator:** Multiple organizations and medical facilities in regions across the US were featured in the documentary. What is one big idea you learned about today that you could apply to your own medical practice?
- 3) Which statement best describes how you are feeling at this moment after this discussion?
 - a. The same as I did when it began.
 - b. Overwhelmed. A lot was covered and I'm just processing it all.
 - c. Motivated. I'm ready to take what I learned today and advocate for change.
 - d. Other

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