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# IN UTERO

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## In Utero: A New Documentary Brings Educational Opportunities

By Lisa Reagan



After a year of international film festivals, awards and translation into ten languages, the documentary *In Utero* became available for on demand viewing in October. Audiences quickly arranged home and clinic screenings, eager to discover and discuss the film's cinematic and epic journey through the revelation that "womb ecology becomes world ecology."

### **Through well-organized subsections**

with titles like *Breeding Hostility* and *Beyond the Blueprint*, the film tackles the complex science of epigenetics, transgenerational trauma, and the human psyche's attempts to resolve birth trauma through mythology, especially fairy tales and pop culture movies like *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Matrix*. A dozen international experts – including Gabor Maté, MD, Rachel Yehuda, PhD, and Thomas Verny, MD -- weave a coherent tapestry of diverse scientific insights amid scenes of a fetus jolting at the sound of parents arguing, caged monkeys deprived of mothering attacking each other and aerial shots of industrial agriculture and other modern ecological hell holes.

**The film received mixed reviews** and reactions, from professionals who are grateful for the careful integration of multiple fields of science to some “triggered” audience members who walked out of public screenings. The filmmakers themselves have cautioned audiences that this film’s “dark message” was necessary to “outline the problem” and may not be suitable for some pregnant mothers.

**In an interview with** Kindred Media, filmmaker Kathleen Gyllenhaal says, “I really feel it is almost 50/50. Some women come up to me pregnant and just thrilled that this film is there. They understand that it is tough, but they are grateful to have this information. I myself, having been pregnant during the making of this film and being hyper aware that all of the stress studies and all of the stress that impacts the fetus in pregnant women and so I had to navigate through all of that and I was angry. I was frustrated. The irony was not lost on me. How do I get rid of this stress so I can be a wonderful vessel for my child? But, you know, learning what I learned helped me find some ways to reduce that stress and so I think it really depends on the woman, the mother, herself. I think it is up to her to decide.

**“We had a midwife** not long ago at a screening say I would never show this to any woman that I was working with, any pregnant woman. I thought, well, okay, that’s your opinion, but I would ask her, you know, these are the things that this film is going to lay out. You can even go to our website and look at the information. Maybe that’s less confrontational, but that’s really

up to her. I say that again, based on the feedback that I’ve gotten from women who seemed that they’ve want to know and I wanted to know everything that I could know.”

**Samsarah Morgan**, executive director at the Oakland Better Birth Foundation, held a screening of *In Utero* for her regular Tuesday night childbirth class days after the film’s on demand release in October. Pregnant mothers, childbirth educator students and other parents watched the film and discussed its impact on them afterwards.

**“I sat in the corner out of the way** to gauge their reactions so I would know how to lead the discussion,” said Morgan. “I cried while watching a young mother realize ‘this is my baby.’ After the film she said she had an instinct that that was the case but other people were telling her that it wasn’t true. I was crying watching her watch this movie. She was crying about what this meant for her and her baby.”

**Morgan said she** “loves Maté and reads all of his books” but the section of the movie focusing on the holocaust, titled *All The Jewish Babies Were Crying*, could easily have pivoted to the state of black mothers and babies in America today. Black mothers in America die at four times the rate of their white counterparts, a disparity that is consistent across all income levels. Morgan says the omission of the plight of transgenerational trauma of slavery to black families in America was the focus of her group’s post-film discussion.

**“What makes it hard** for African American moms to bond with our babies is that we have cellular memories of having our babies taken away from us. It makes it hard to breastfeed because they had their babies taken away and were made to be wet nurses for white babies,” said Morgan. “We need to help heal black mothers cellularly and a cultural apology would go a long way. Can we talk about 400 years of rape and child abduction? And then you wonder why parents would have a hard time bonding with their kids? To know their black son may go out and get shot? I can’t tell you how many black mothers call me crying when they find out they are pregnant with a son. It’s not safe here. How do we counteract that?”

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**At a home screening** of the film to a group of birth psychology professionals in Charlottesville, Virginia in October, the discussion turned to the film's excellent presentation of "the problem," but its shortfall in presenting the existing resources and healing modalities available for anyone wishing to explore their birth imprints, and the blueprint for wholeness beneath it.

**Marti Glenn, PhD**, Clinical Director of Quest Institute in Santa Barbara, California, pointed out, "The film is theoretical. It does not delve into the known and applied modalities for addressing and healing birth trauma."

**In a post viewing response**, Glenn points out the vast and growing resources for exploring our birth imprint. "The film brings to light some incredibly important facts that have not yet become part of our cultural fabric. In the film we are hit with the concept that our life blueprint is established between conception and birth, a fact that we in the fields of pre- and perinatal and somatic psychology have been trying for decades to push into professional conversations.

**"Though controversial**, this film containing dark images from fairy tales and cultural icons, helps open vital conversations with parents and professionals. Otherwise, I'm afraid it would just go on our stockpile of 'nice,' 'interesting' films. I participated in several such films whose reach has certainly been valuable. *What Babies Want; What Babies Know; Reducing Infant Mortality and Improving the Health of Babies* are all excellent films. However, *In Utero* brings a dimension that these films do not. It brings controversy that lays the groundwork for rich discussion and, hopefully, the opening of minds to the scientific facts that the in utero period is most critical in creating the blueprint for our lives.

**Glenn encourages** professionals and parents to watch the film together and to prepare to discuss the film and their feelings about it afterward. "I don't think the film is intended to be simple entertainment, nor is it intended to be seen alone. The film is best viewed in the company of others who can discuss the concepts and their implications. This can be a big step in helping shift the cultural norms that have too long ignored or

placed little emphasis on the importance of the in utero experience," said Glenn.

**"I believe the film** is intended to help prevent some of the negative imprints and trauma that ensue through personal and professional ignorance. It does not delve into the known and applied modalities for addressing and healing trauma that occurs between conception and birth. It is essential for all of us to understand that, yes, we want to focus on the importance of this primal or primary period, and, if that time was not ideal, it does not have to be a life sentence. Current research is demonstrating that healing can occur at any time. Many of us are devoting our professional lives to helping adults understand and heal these early imprints, freeing us to live meaningful lives of resilience, presence and connection."

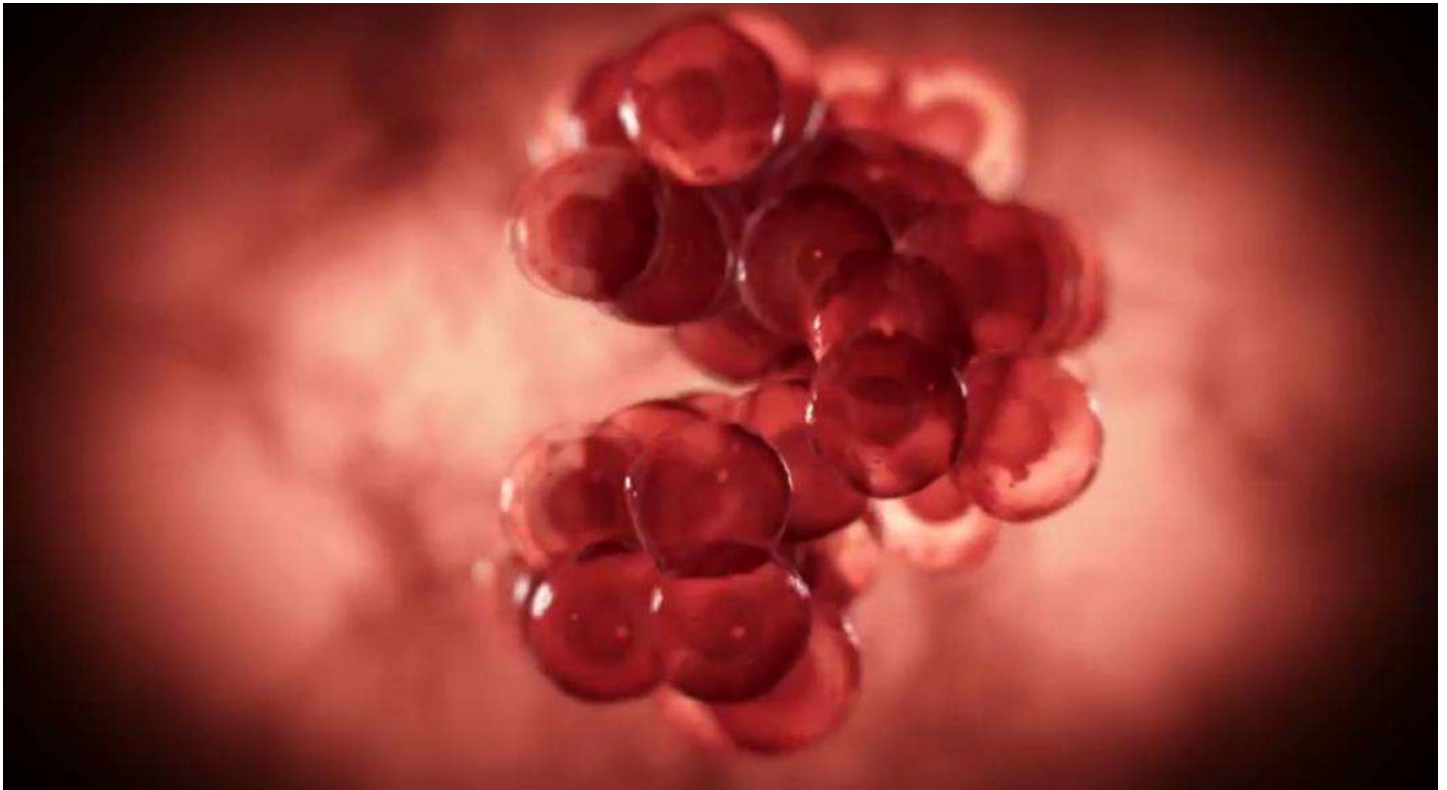
#### **A film discussion and resource guide**

was prepared by a team at the Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health with the blessings of the Gyllenhaals to help viewers find guidance for discussing the film as well as resources for healing their own birth or planning for pregnancy. "The Film Discussion and Resource Guide will help audiences and hosts create a rich and resourced dialogue about the film and the implications of the information in it. I encourage hosts to print copies and give to participants beforehand so they can be prepared for sections," said Kate White, director of education for APPPAH.

**The filmmakers**, Kathleen and Stephen Gyllenhaal, are passionate about their work and have plans to continue *In Utero's* mission in the form of a current blog featured on Huffington Post as well as an upcoming television show, *Making Modern Babies*. Stephen Gyllenhaal says an *In Utero 2* would feature the missing "solutions" based therapies, but he couldn't give a deadline for the film's production.

**Despite its omissions and dark delivery**, the film's longevity is assured, with most viewers thrilled at the sensational Hollywood treatment of decades of hard science "outlining the modern problem" of missing human connection to human development and consciousness. The welcome film discussion and resource guide will support the film's educational mission and amplify its potential and reach.

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## What is the problem?

Featured prominently in the film is Gabor Maté, MD, author of *In the Realm of the Hungry Ghost*, who succinctly says:



*"What we're not recognizing is that people are parenting and conceiving and carrying and birthing children under increasingly stressed conditions. Increasingly, it takes two people now to provide a living in this culture to families. And they're doing so in the context of less support because one of the ravages of industrialization and globalization is the destruction of the extended family, the tribe, the clan, the village, the neighborhood. Parents who are stressed have been shown not to be able to be as attuned with their infants and children as parents who are not stressed. Not their fault. Not because they do not love the child. Not because they're not dedicated, devoted, committed. Simply because the stress effect impedes their ability to attune with their child . . . And that has an impact on brain development."*

In Utero is now streaming on demand on Amazon, iTunes and Vudu.com. Visit the website to find public screenings or request to host one in your area at [www.inuterofilm.com](http://www.inuterofilm.com). The film discussion and resource guide is available on [www.birthpsychology.com](http://www.birthpsychology.com) and [www.kindredmedia.com](http://www.kindredmedia.com) or by [clicking here](#).

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Kindred Media Interview With In Utero Filmmakers: <http://kindredmedia.org/2016/10/womb-ecology-becomes-world-ecology-utero-filmmakers-interview-new-demand-viewing-insights/>

What's Behind the Increased Numbers of Black Women Dying During Pregnancy and Childbirth in the United States? <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/2016/03/increased-numbers-of-black-women-dying-during-pregnancy-and-childbirth/>

Samsarah Morgan at the International Center for Traditional Childbearing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqgNh8fAXNQ>

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: <http://joydegruy.com>

Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health: [www.birthpsychology.com](http://www.birthpsychology.com)

## Resource review continued from page 111

practitioner can be involved more in the book, but for now the team does an impressive job for the experienced.

Magnavita and his team successfully tackle a difficult, underestimated and often overlooked portion of psychology and create a succinct overview of Decision Analytics and its application to bias. If applied to practice, one who wishes to shed inappropriate bias and focus on almost exclusively empirical based treatment could successfully do so. Whether applied in part or in whole, Magnavita's encouragement to shed bias provides the psychological community with a chance to improve treatment and explore new methodologies.

## Kamamalani continued from page 67

She works at the interface of body psychotherapy, ecopsychology and ecodharma, drawing upon her experiences of being a development worker in sub-Saharan Africa, a lecturer in International Development at the University of Bristol, her current meditation practice and being a child lost and found in nature. She has published two books: 'Meditating with Character' (post-Reichian character structure applied to meditation) and 'Other than Mother: Choosing Childlessness with Life in mind'. [www.kamalamani.co.uk](http://www.kamalamani.co.uk)

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## Val Hudson continued from page 67

There is a sense that the viewer is invited to decipher meaning through their own non-verbal, non-cognitive contemplation. The paintings are also imbued with a strong visual presence because of their human scale and strength of colour and composition. The only way to fully appreciate Val's painting is to stand in front of one until the internal noise quietsens ...

<http://www.valhudson.co.uk/>