“THIS FILM WILL SAVE LIVES.”
— People Magazine

and the director of *Endo What?*
Shannon Cohn

BELOW THE BELT
The last health taboo.
BELOW THE BELT

Directed by: Shannon Cohn

TRT: 52 minutes

Executive Producers:
Hillary Rodham Clinton
Rosario Dawson
Corinne Foxx
Mae Whitman

Featured:
U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch
U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren

Edited by:
Christopher Seward
(Fahrenheit 9/11, Sicko)
BELOW THE BELT

SHORT SUMMARY:

Through the personal & inspiring stories of four women urgently searching for answers to mysterious symptoms, *Below the Belt* exposes widespread problems in our healthcare system that disproportionately affect women.

Through the lens of endometriosis, a disease that affects 1 in 9 women, the film shows how women are often dismissed, discounted & disbelieved. During the 10 years it takes to be diagnosed with endometriosis, women are often told that symptoms are in their head or part of being a woman. Due to outdated notions, they are then often treated with an array of ineffective drugs and surgeries and erroneously told that pregnancy & hysterectomy are cures. Nearly 50% of infertility cases in women are due to endometriosis & almost all are preventable.

From societal taboos and gender bias to misinformed doctors and financial barriers to care, *Below the Belt* shines a light on how millions are effectively silenced and how, by fighting back, they can improve healthcare for all women.

[CLICK HERE FOR FILM ASSETS](http://vimeo.com/502642649)

Link to trailer (downloadable):

[https://vimeo.com/502642649](https://vimeo.com/502642649)

ABOUT ENDOMETRIOSIS:

Endometriosis ("endo") affects approximately 200 million girls, women and transmen around the world - that's at least 1 in 9 women. Even so, it takes an average of 8 doctors and 10 years to properly diagnose. A [greater diagnostic delay](http://vimeo.com/502642649) exists for women of color who are less likely believed, diagnosed & effectively treated. During that time, many are often told incorrectly by doctors that an array of ineffective drugs, pregnancy & hysterectomy are cures. Many are left infertile - nearly [50% of infertility cases](http://vimeo.com/502642649) in women are due to this disease.

Endometriosis makes a tremendous global impact as well putting a burden on society of an estimated [$119 billion annually](http://vimeo.com/502642649) in the US alone in lost wages and associated medical costs. 1 in 6 women with endometriosis lost [at least 1 job](http://vimeo.com/502642649) due to symptoms as patients lose an estimated [10 hours of productivity](http://vimeo.com/502642649) per week.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

*Below the Belt* is a moving and captivating documentary that follows a diverse selection of women with endometriosis as they navigate their diagnosis within their individual circumstances and ages - including personal symptoms, impact on their relationships, and navigating their everyday lives. The film brings a much needed personal and relatable perspective to a disease that affects so many women around the world, but that still lacks key awareness and education.

The film follows the stories of JENNEH, a young, African-American nurse visits the ER 7 times in 2 years with unexplained symptoms; EMILY, a teenage girl from an affluent family in Boston sees the best doctors at the nation's best hospitals and finds no answers; LAURA, a 30 year-old Canadian has 4 unsuccessful surgeries and tries 22 different medications over 17 years with no relief; and KYUNG, a Korean American artist in Brooklyn desperately tries to start a family with her new husband. Over a period of 7 years, we see the toll endometriosis takes on each of their lives as they search for answers and effective treatment.
Below the Belt will spark urgently needed conversations about these injustices & the need for widespread systemic change. Through its powerful, intimate storytelling, the film calls for a future where all girls and women have equal opportunities for education, fulfilling careers, family and healthy, vibrant lives. It’s a tribute to the strength of women and a stirring message for better care.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT:

Below the Belt is a personal film. When I was 16, I first had symptoms of endometriosis - debilitating pain, GI symptoms, and fatigue. I went to my pediatrician who told me in successive visits that the symptoms were part of being a woman, that I needed to suck it up and that maybe I was trying to get a little attention? Years passed and I navigated demanding university, law school and work schedules while continuing to search for answers to my worsening symptoms. I began the carousel of specialists, tests, medications and procedures that millions of women endure in pursuit of an answer.

We’re all grappling with a disease called endometriosis, an unfriendly name for an even less hospitable disease. In my teens and 20s, it wasn't a disease I had ever really heard of, read about, or seen films made about, even though it is an extremely common condition. It’s a story that’s been flying under the radar for decades - while devastating countless lives.

After my 2nd daughter was born in my early 30s, I read an article about the 7x increased risk of endometriosis among sisters and mothers/daughters. This fact galvanized me to act - to find a way to do something to help change the path of my daughters. To stop them from sharing the fate I had walked for years before them.

I read all the books on endometriosis I could find. I went online and met hundreds of people, all over the world, living the same experience. Many were isolated, without effective treatment or care, and often disbelieved. I thought, “How could this possibly be happening to so many people?” There was this deep social justice issue at the heart of it. An entire community had been virtually ignored by medicine. That is when I decided to make films. First, Endo What? an educational film to provide an accurate base of knowledge for patients and healthcare providers. Followed by Below the Belt, a social justice film.

Below the Belt follows the intimate stories of four of the women that I met during my investigative journey - all from different walks of life - ages, races, socioeconomic statuses, hopes, dreams and more. Different women with different stories, yet walking the same complicated, devastating journey.

This film has been a saga from the very beginning, when it was just me, my camera and a certainty that this story must be told. As we started shooting, and I started down the minefield that is endometriosis, the film became about some of those burning questions that I had. How can a menstrual taboo still be so pervasive globally in the 21st century? Why are women still relegated to an average 10 year delay to diagnosis? Why don’t doctors believe their pain? How does the pervasiveness of pharma and other commercial-driven interests effectively write the treatment protocols that so many patients follow? And importantly - what can be done about it if it doesn’t work?

It’s our goal that by sharing these stories we can build a movement to transform the lives of patients with endometriosis; lift the veil on the unjustice they experience, accelerate the search for a cure; and bring a greater level of compassion, awareness, and empathy to millions upon millions of patients and their loved ones wrestling with endometriosis, chronic illness or invisible disabilities.

- Director Shannon Cohn, New York, NY - Fall 2023
PRODUCERS' STATEMENTS:

"Endometriosis is an issue that has been overlooked, ignored and dismissed for so long. I hope these women's stories that Shannon has brought to the screen will result in a change towards how endometriosis is seen and handled. The statistics are overwhelming – more than 200 million women around the world suffer from endometriosis and associated symptoms. In the US, it often takes up to eight doctors and specialists before women are properly diagnosed. So much of women's health is still not given the attention it deserves. We need to do more to raise visibility of this disorder, to get the medical profession to buckle down and provide more support, and we need more federal action, which is still going on in a bi-partisan way in the senate. This is a condition that needs to be recognized widely, so that more women can be helped immediately."

- HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

"We deserve to be believed. We deserve to be understood. We deserve to be empowered to understand ourselves, our bodies and any medical treatments presented to us. We deserve better across the entire healthcare system. Below the Belt aims to revolutionize the status quo so that people with endometriosis get what we deserve - the right to live healthy, informed, fulfilling lives."

- ROSARIO DAWSON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

REACTION:

"I'm a freaking investigative reporter, and it took me more than two decades to get answers. Below the Belt rightly frames the disease as a social justice issue."

- MEGAN TWOHY, THE NEW YORK TIMES
  Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist
  for breaking the Harvey Weinstein scandal

"You will be blown away by the courage of these women."

JAMIE FOXX, Oscar-winning actor

"A vitally important and powerful film."

EMMA BARNETT, BBC Host, Woman's Hour

"The film just blew me away- it is so powerful. It should be required viewing for every medical student and OBGYN, nurse and more. I don't think anyone who sees it will think of endometriosis the same way again."

Roni Rabin, Health Journalist
The New York Times

“This film will save lives.” People Magazine

"I have to confess, as an endometriosis surgeon spending all my working hours listening to endometriosis patients and hearing their stories, I didn't expect to learn anything new from a movie on endometriosis. I was wrong. 'Below the Belt' is a movie for everyone. Not just endometriosis patients or people around them. Not just GPs [general practitioners], not just policymakers. Everyone."
"This movie needs to find its way to every classroom, university, medical school, workplace, social media platforms, mainstream TV and every government building where policymakers need to understand the internalized pain we carry as women on a daily basis."

Nighat Arif, MD, OBGYN
London, England

**FILM TEAM BIOS:**

Shannon Cohn (Director/Producer)

**Shannon Cohn, JD**, is a filmmaker, lawyer and social impact producer who has worked across Africa, Europe, the Middle East & the Americas on topics related to gender equity, inclusion initiatives and combating stigma and taboo. Her films and TV series have aired on PBS, Nat Geo, Discovery Channel, Amazon and Netflix. Her new PBS documentary Below the Belt, executive produced by Hillary Clinton and Rosario Dawson, approaches endometriosis as a social justice issue. The film is one element of a larger social impact plan to create meaningful change in endometriosis and women's health including increased research funding, policy changes, medical education initiatives and widespread awareness. As one part of that strategic plan, Shannon co-taught a Bioethics class at Harvard Medical School in early 2023 utilizing the film. Her previous film Endo What? was called "the first step in a plan for change" by NEWSWEEK and "film of the year" by The Guardian. Before becoming a filmmaker, Shannon practiced international law and was part of the legal team that prosecuted Enron Corp in the largest white-collar crime investigation in FBI history. She has endometriosis and has two young daughters who have a 7x increased risk of having the disease.
**Hillary Rodham Clinton (Executive Producer)**

Executive Producer Hillary Rodham Clinton is an American diplomat, attorney, writer and speaker who served as U.S. Secretary of State, U.S. Democratic Senator from New York, and First Lady of the United States.

**Orrin Hatch (Executive Producer)**

Executive Producer Orrin Hatch was an American politician who served as a U.S. Senator for 42 years, the longest-serving Republican U.S. Senator in history. He was President pro tempore from 2015 - 2019 and served during the administrations of seven Presidents — four Republicans and three Democrats.

**Rosario Dawson (Executive Producer)**

Executive Producer Rosario Dawson is an American actress, producer and activist. Her film credits include *Kids*, *Seven Pounds*, *The Mandalorian* and the Disney Star Wars series *Ashoka*. 
Executive Producer Corinne Foxx is an American actress, producer and activist. She has appeared in TV and film for over a decade, most recently as the DJ on “Beat Shazam” and in the Hulu series “Dollface”

Executive Producer Mae Whitman is an American actress, producer and activist. She has appeared in TV and film since she was 6 years old including award-winning roles in " Arrested Development", "Parenthood" and "Good Girls".
Jenneh Rishe, RN (Subject)

Jenneh Rishe is a registered nurse, author and founder of The Endometriosis Coalition. Her first book, *Part of You, Not All of You*, was released in June 2022.

Laura Cone (Subject)

Laura Cone is a Canadian early childhood consultant, therapist and endometriosis advocate.
Emily Hatch Manwaring (Subject)

Emily Manwaring is an events coordinator, videographer and endometriosis advocate

Kyung Jeon-Miranda (Subject)

Kyung Jeon-Miranda is a Brooklyn-based visual artist, designer at Somos Arte and director of La Borinqueña Grants Program.

Elizabeth Warren (Featured Subject)

Senator Elizabeth Warren is an American politician and former law professor who is the senior U.S. senator from Massachusetts, serving since 2013.
1. *The View* - November 2023 -

2. *The Guardian Feature* - August 2023-
   https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/aug/10/its-really-only-the-beginning-are-we-on-the-cusp-of-a-breakthrough-in-endometriosis

3. *Good Morning America Cover Story* - July 4, 2023 -

4. *PBS NewsHour Feature* - March 26, 2023 -
   https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/below-the-belt-highlights-uphill-battle-for-endometriosis-treatment

5. Tamron Hall Show Segment - April 24, 2023 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUBSYMGHill

6. *The Guardian Feature* - June 20, 2023 -

7. *New York Times* - June 19, 2023 -

   https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/one-in-10-women-has-endometriosis-so-why-is-so-little-known-about-it-t23mwhsr2

9. *Newsweek Feature* - May 27, 2022
   https://www.newsweek.com/below-belt-endometriosis-movie-documentary-director-interview-1710510

10. *BBC Women's Hour* - June 13, 2022
    https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00187fs

11. Forbes Feature - June 28, 2022

12. *iNews Feature* - June 18, 2022
    https://inenews.co.uk/opinion/emma-barnett-women-endometriosis-shared-pain-decades-years-still-no-cure-1691897

    https://www.thewrap.com/below-the-belt-endometriosis-documentary/

14. *Healthline Feature* -

15. People Article - October 4, 2022

16. The Hill Article - March 2, 2023

17. World Economic Forum Feature - April 24, 2023 (Top 5 most watched WEF Instagram Reel in past year)
   https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/04/endometriosis-diagnosis-women-health/

18. Ms. Magazine Feature - June 2023

**FILM CREDITS**

Directed by:
Shannon Cohn

Executive Producers:
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Rosario Dawson
Corinne Foxx
Mae Whitman

Produced by:
Patricio Cohn
Shannon Cohn
Megan McCormick
Gethin Aldous

Written by:
Shannon Cohn
Christopher Seward

Edited by:
Christopher Seward (Oscar winner Fahrenheit 9/11, Sicko)
Mary Lampson (Oscar nominee Trouble the Water, Oscar winner Harlan County USA)

Music by:
Rob Teehan

Cinematography:
Patricio Cohn
Shannon Cohn
Zelmira Gainza

Featuring:
Senator Orrin Hatch
Senator Elizabeth Warren

Jenneh Rishe, RN