

Abortion Onscreen in 2024

This year, we documented 67 abortion plotlines or significant abortion mentions across 65 distinct television shows. This is a meaningful increase from last year's 49 plotlines, and the most we have documented since we began tracking plotlines yearly in 2016. Given the tumultuous abortion access policy environment, we expect entertainment content creators to continue to find creative ways to use their platform to tell stories about abortion providers, patients, and the landscape as a whole.

Less than half (42%) of this year's plotlines included a character actually obtaining an abortion or disclosing a past abortion. The majority of depictions were either considerations of abortion (33%) or discussions of abortion generally (17%). A few plotlines showcased characters denied or unable to access abortions, while many others portrayed characters ultimately deciding to carry a pregnancy to term. Though the most common genre to feature an abortion plotline was still dramas (27%), we also saw abortion plotlines on foreign dramas (22%), reality shows, (13%), and comedies (11%). Perhaps because of their ability to immediately cover recent events, this year's reality shows (especially *Married to Medicine* and *Real Housewives of New York*) featured touching and informative plotlines about political and cultural barriers to abortion access, including the importance of sharing abortion experiences.

We documented several important firsts in this year's abortion depictions:

- It's the first time that characters of color, grouped together, represent a higher percentage of fictional abortion seekers than white characters. More details about racial representations below.
- *Girls on the Bus* gave us the first depiction of abortion access via telehealth. Sadie has a video consultation with an abortion provider, who has to send abortion pills to Illinois because Sadie can't receive them in Missouri. Though she encounters some logistical headaches along the way, Sadie eventually retrieves her package of her abortion pills and has an uneventful abortion surrounded by supportive friends.
- The German show *Pauline*, available on Disney+, included a season-long arc about abortion access, with the entire show revolving around the main character, a young Black woman, trying to pursue an abortion by different medical and supernatural methods. Ultimately, though, she is unable to get an abortion because of the fantastical circumstances of her pregnancy – she is pregnant with the devil's grandchild.
- More plotlines than previously documented discussed cost as a barrier to abortion access. Notably, though, three of these four shows depict cost as a historical, not contemporary, barrier to care.



About one-third of this year’s television plotlines depicted political, logistical, or financial obstacles to abortion access, more plotlines than in 2023 and about the same as in 2022. Though the most common barrier is still historical illegality, several interesting themes emerged in this year’s plotlines. Four plotlines specifically detailed the challenges of coming up with money to cover the cost of the abortion. On *Big Mood*, set in contemporary London, for example, Eddie tries to use her health insurance to pay for her abortion, but then discovers that it will be several weeks before she can secure an appointment. Not wanting to wait that long to end the pregnancy, she makes an appointment at a private abortion clinic, but then needs to come up with 799 pounds. Depictions rarely represent characters dealing with the complexities of health insurance, which make this abortion portrayal especially notable. On the reality show *Married to Medicine*, Dr. Simone discusses the possibility of traveling outside of Georgia with a patient who may have pregnancy complications and need an abortion. She mentions that this would involve not only the patient paying for the abortion, but the logistical costs of travel as well. Few other plotlines discuss compounding barriers to abortion access that create onerous barriers to abortion care.

Several plotlines referenced the political and cultural fallout from the *Dobbs* decision; on *Law & Order’s* “The Meaningful Life,” IVF providers are killed by an anti-abortion fanatic inspired by the uptick of fetal personhood laws, and on *Chicago Med’s* “I Make a Promise, I’ll Never Leave You,” a patient is forced to travel to Illinois from a state where recent abortion restrictions prevented her clinician from ending her unviable pregnancy. On the comedy *Girls5eva*, Dawn goes to a prenatal appointment and is surprised by an extra man in the room. The doctor explains, “Since *Roe* got overturned, state law now requires a Fetal Citizen Advocate.” When Dawn questions if he’s a doctor too, he responds, “Better. I’m a state senator. Chuck Dennis. And my qualifications are remembering my own conception.” Jokes like these demonstrate the absurdity of abortion restrictions and how insulting they are to pregnant people. As a response to the dismal state of abortion rights, Erin of *Real Housewives of New York* decided to share her abortion story publicly for the first time through an interview with *Glamour* magazine. She explicitly mentions wanting to destigmatize abortion, and in the course of sharing her story, her friend (and castmate) Jenna shares her own as well.

As noted above, **for the first time, half of characters (50%) having abortions are characters of color**, while white characters make up slightly less than half (45%), though this is still a much larger number than the percentage of real-life white abortion patients (about 30%). The representations by race, though, are still not reflective of reality; about one fifth of characters in our sample are Black (19%) or Asian (21%), and only 8% are Latina. This is still a departure from reality, in which about one-third of abortion patients are Black or Latina, and about 4% are Asian. This year we documented no onscreen representations of Native characters or biracial/multiracial characters obtaining abortions.

This year’s television characters retain similar patterns to past years in terms of demographic discrepancies across class and parenting status. The vast majority of characters (89%) were not parenting at the time of their abortion; this contrasts with the 55% of real life abortion patients who have had at least one birth prior to their abortion. Perhaps the most glaring discrepancy is related to class. The vast majority of characters were portrayed as middle class (46%) or wealthy (21%), a staggering departure from a reality in which the majority of abortion patients are struggling to make ends meet. We documented no instances of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer characters on abortion plotlines.



About one-third of this year’s characters received emotional support before, during, or after their abortion. The most common source of support was from a friend (16%), followed by a partner (12%). On shows like *Life & Beth*, *Eva Lasting*, *Heartbreak High*, *Girls on the Bus*, and *Doctor Odyssey*, friends step in to drive loved ones to their abortion appointments, help them raise the cost of an abortion, accompany them, and share their own abortion experiences as a way of expressing solidarity. Sadie’s frenemy-turned-friend Kimberlyn on *Girls on the Bus* even shares that though she’s anti-abortion, she still wants to show up and support her friend, offering to rent a car and drive across state lines to pick up her package of abortion pills. Partners on *The Boys*, *Pauline*, and *Chicago Med* reassure their loved ones that they will do whatever it takes to support their emotional and physical safety during their pregnancies or abortions.



We saw a low number of medication abortion depictions, as well as several other thematic regressions. Of the 67 plotlines, only two included depictions of medication abortion. The rest were either procedural abortions, averted abortions, or the abortion method was not specifically mentioned. Given that medication abortion is the most common method of abortion in the U.S. today, this absence is especially glaring. There were also no depictions of self-managed abortions in this year’s plotlines. Other problematic trends in this year’s plotlines includes associating abortion with infertility (*Chicago PD*) or other physical health calamities (*The Baxters*), characters deciding they wanted to have an abortion and then discovering they have false pregnancies (*Emily in Paris*, *Cruel Intentions*) or then have miscarriages (*Hierarchy*, *Days of our Lives*), and characters changing their minds while in the abortion clinic (*Alice & Jack*, *Desperate Lies*, *Sisters’ Feud*). About 8% of plotlines included characters trying to coerce others into having abortions, including by physical violence (*Master of the House*, *Reasonable Doubt*) or emotional manipulation (*Showtime*, *The Perfect Couple*). Because the U.S. public has low knowledge about abortion, especially post-*Dobbs*, these troubling representations may reinforce both stigmatizing and inaccurate information about abortion.



On the following pages, you’ll find a table that includes all of this year’s television abortion depictions. If there are any that we’ve missed, please email us (stephanie.herold@ucsf.edu). For a list of this year’s movies featuring abortion plotlines and for more details about television plotlines, please visit abortiononscreen.org.

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Abortion on Scripted and Reality Television, 2024

Show	Episode	Airdate	Type of Content
<i>Sort of</i> (HBO Max)	Sort of Married	1/13/2024	Abortion
<i>Married to Medicine</i> (Bravo)	A Very Powerful Message	1/21/2024	Discussion
<i>Love & Hip Hop Miami</i> (VH1)	Unfinished Business	1/22/2024	Consideration
<i>FBI True</i> (Paramount+)	Stopping a Sniper	1/24/2024	Discussion
<i>Love & Hip Hop Atlanta</i> (VH1)	I Can't Believe It	1/30/2024	Abortion
<i>Good Trouble</i> (Hulu)	You Can't Always Get What You Want	2/13/2024	Discussion
<i>Love is Blind</i> (Netflix)	Operation Get My Girl Back	2/14/2024	Discussion
<i>Good Morning, Veronica</i> (Netflix)	Good Night, Veronica	2/14/2024	Abortion
<i>Life & Beth</i> (Hulu)	Toxic	2/16/2024	Abortion
<i>Chicago Med</i> (NBC)	I Make a Promise, I Will Never Leave You	2/21/2024	Abortion
<i>Expats</i> (Amazon Prime)	Home	2/23/2024	Consideration
<i>The Girls on the Bus</i> (HBO Max)	Pilot	3/14/2024	Discussion
<i>Girls 5eva</i> (Netflix)	Bomont	3/14/2024	Discussion
<i>Alice & Jack</i> (PBS)	Episode 1	3/17/2024	Consideration

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Show	Episode	Airdate	Type of Content
<i>Palm Royale</i> (Apple+)	Pilot	3/20/2024	Abortion
<i>The Good Doctor</i> (ABC)	Date Night	3/26/2024	Consideration
<i>Chicago PD</i> (Peacock)	On Paper	3/27/2024	Abortion
<i>The Baxters</i> (Amazon Prime)	The Moment of Truth, A Step Forward, Unexpected Guest	3/27/2024	Abortion
<i>Heartbreak High</i> (Netflix)	The Grapes of Voss	4/11/2024	Abortion
<i>The Girls on the Bus</i> (HBO Max)	Nothing to Fear But Fear Itself, Life is a Highway	4/18/2024, 4/25/2024	Abortion
<i>Big Mood</i> (Tubi)	Episode 5	4/19/2024	Abortion
<i>Mary & George</i> (Starz)	The Golden City	5/3/2024	Abortion
<i>Days of Our Lives</i> (Peacock)	Episode 181	5/6/2024	Consideration
<i>Dark Matter</i> (Apple+)	Trip of a Lifetime	5/8/2024	Abortion
<i>Maxton Hall: The World Between Us</i> (Amazon Prime)	A Piece of Happiness	5/8/2024	Consideration
<i>Franklin</i> (Apple+)	Begin by Creeping	5/10/2024	Abortion
<i>Doctor Who</i> (Disney+)	Space Babies	5/10/2024	Discussion

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<i>Pauline</i> (Disney+)	Nothing Special	5/22/2024	Consideration
<i>Hacks</i> (Max)	Yes, And	5/23/2024	Joke
<i>Under the Bridge</i> (Hulu)	Mercy Alone	5/29/2024	Joke
<i>Hierarchy</i> (Netflix)	Episode 6	6/7/2024	Consideration
<i>Doctor Climax</i> (Netflix)	Abortion	6/13/2024	Consideration
<i>The Boys</i> (Amazon Prime)	Wisdom of Ages	6/20/2024	Abortion
<i>Evil</i> (CBS)	How to Dance in Three Easy Steps	6/27/2024	Discussion
<i>Savage Beauty</i> (Netflix)	Episode 2, Episode 3	6/28/2024	Consideration
<i>Desperate Lies</i> (Netflix)	A Love Divided, My Other Half	7/5/2024	Consideration
<i>House of the Dragon</i> (HBO)	The Red Dragon and the Gold	7/7/2024	Abortion
<i>Eva Lasting</i> (Netflix)	Letters to a Young Poet, The Second Sex, LIVEFOREVER	7/10/2024	Abortion
<i>Another Self</i> (Netflix)	Episode 2	7/11/2024	Abortion
<i>Showtime</i> (Hulu)	Badnaam Workplace	7/12/2024	Abortion
<i>Grantchester</i> (PBS)	Episode 5	7/14/2024	Abortion

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<i>Master of the House</i> (Netflix)	The Offer	7/18/2024	Consideration
<i>Lady of the Lake</i> (Apple+)	Episode 5	8/9/2024	Abortion
<i>Emily in Paris</i> (Netflix)	Love on the Run	8/15/2024	Consideration
<i>Chastity High</i> (Netflix)	Is It a Crime to Fall in Love?	8/29/2024	Consideration
<i>Reasonable Doubt</i> (Hulu)	Primetime, Venus vs. Mars, Who You Wit	9/5/2024, 9/26/2024, 10/10/2024	Consideration
<i>The Perfect Couple</i> (Netflix)	Never Gonna Give You Up, That Feels Better	9/5/2024	Consideration
<i>Midnight at the Perla Palace</i> (Netflix)	Episode 7	9/12/2024	Consideration
<i>Envious</i> (Netflix)	The Game of Life, Pizza Delivery	9/18/2024	Consideration
<i>Grey's Anatomy</i> (ABC)	I Can See Clearly Now	10/10/2024	Consideration
<i>Grotesquerie</i> (FX)	In Dreams	10/23/2024	Discussion
<i>Law & Order</i> (NBC)	The Meaning of Life	10/24/2024	Discussion
<i>Citadel: Honey Bunny</i> (Amazon Prime)	Home	11/6/2024	Abortion
<i>Disclaimer</i> (Apple+)	Episode 7	11/7/2024	Abortion

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Show	Episode	Airdate	Type of Content
<i>Sisters' Feud</i> (Netflix)	Mother and Daughter	11/13/2024	Consideration
<i>Real Housewives of Potomac</i> (Bravo)	Hard Launch; Soft Landing, Healing, Thriving, and Surviving	11/17/2024, 11/24/2024	Abortion
<i>Cruel Intentions</i> (Amazon Prime)	Epsilon	11/20/2024	Discussion
<i>Doctor Odyssey</i> (ABC)	Quackers	11/22/2024	Consideration
<i>S.W.A.T.</i> (CBS)	Hot Button	11/22/2024	Discussion
<i>Real Housewives of New York</i> (Bravo)	Coming Clean	11/26/2024	Abortion
<i>The Trunk</i> (Netflix)	Episode 6	11/30/2024	Consideration
<i>Bad Sisters</i> (Apple+)	Person of Interest, Boom, Who By Water	12/4/2024, 12/11/2024	Consideration
<i>Echoes of the Past</i> (Netflix)	Episode 5, 7, 8	12/6/2024	Consideration
<i>General Hospital</i> (ABC)	Episode 67	12/10/2024	Consideration