

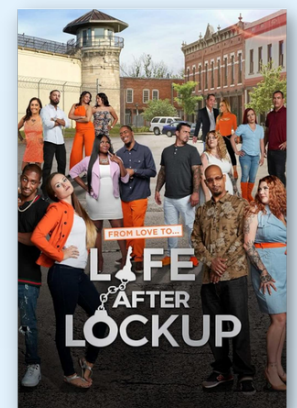
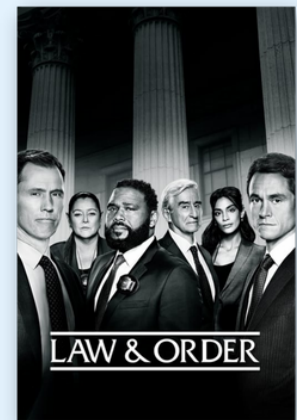
Abortion Onscreen in 2022

There is no doubt that 2022 has been the most catastrophic year for abortion access in recent memory. In the six months since the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, half of state legislatures have raced to restrict, criminalize, or ban abortion, leaving at least 33 million U.S. residents of reproductive age without access to abortion care. The grim reality of the abortion access crisis has already resulted in at least 66 clinics ceasing abortion provision, and the denial of abortion care to millions will undoubtedly have devastating repercussions for decades to come. While news media have covered this drastic landscape through local and national reporting, this report documents how entertainment content creators are responding to and reckoning with this new reality in their own storytelling.

We documented at least 60 abortion plotlines or mentions over the course of January - December 2022 from 52 distinct television shows, outnumbering 2021 (47 abortion plotlines in 42 shows) and any previous year. Half (50%) of these plotlines occurred on dramas (including eight foreign dramas), with abortion plotlines on comedies (19%), medical dramas (11%), and reality television (7%) contributing as well. Below, we analyze themes across these plotlines and how they comport both with the reality of abortion access and past representations.

In a historic first, one third of plotlines portrayed barriers to abortion access. Prior to the 2022 television season, the majority of characters who obtained abortions on television did so with few of the legal, financial, or logistical barriers that plague abortion access in the United States. In 2021, only two television plotlines depicted significant barriers to abortion access. This year, we documented at least twenty plotlines (33%) that portrayed some of the more common barriers to abortion care. Most notably, we documented more plotlines than ever before portraying contemporary obstacles to abortion care and the overwhelmingly negative impact they have on patients, including long distance drives to abortion clinics (*P-Valley*, *FBI: Most Wanted*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *New Amsterdam*, *Law & Order*, *Life After Lockup*), gestational limits (*Pretty Little Liars*, *FBI: Most Wanted*, *Law & Order*, *Life After Lockup*, *Grey's Anatomy*) and even the first ever depiction of an abortion fund volunteer (*Law & Order*). Importantly, several of these plotlines included compounding barriers, like portraying a character who needs to travel across state lines for abortion care while also raising the money to pay for the abortion, negotiating time off work, and arranging for childcare.

Because of the nature of reality television and medical and legal procedural dramas, these types of shows captured the responses of real people (on reality television) to the *Dobbs* decision, and both doctor and lawyer characters reacting to it in fictional environments. The reality show *Life after Lockup*, for example, followed Amber as she discovered that her pregnancy had a fetal anomaly, but because of a new abortion restriction in Georgia, she needed to travel to North Carolina for her abortion. Two episodes of *Teen Mom: Next Chapter* include abortion content, including the cast receiving the news about the *Roe* reversal and footage of one mom, Leah, talking to her daughters about the importance of abortion rights and how they can advocate for themselves in a post-*Roe* world. The popular Netflix reality show *Love is Blind* featured a multi-episode conversation between two contestants, Nancy and Bartise, about their views on abortion, which ultimately contributed to their break-up. While they did not mention politics, Nancy gave several press interviews where she contextualized her comments with reference to abortion restrictions in her home state of Texas.



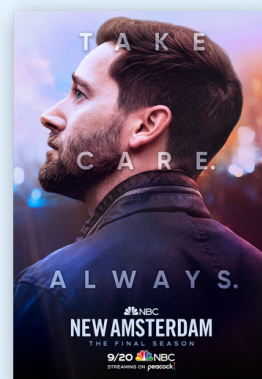
More traditional reality television of the past decade has included abortion disclosures as a way to incite drama or create tension between participants. This is an important step in providing audiences with abortion information that they may not be exposed to elsewhere.

Relatedly, widely viewed medical dramas (*New Amsterdam*, *Grey's Anatomy*) and legal dramas (*Law & Order*) featured episodes with characters reckoning with a post-Roe landscape. These depictions often included multiple types of abortion content, such as series regulars disclosing past abortions for the first time, a discussion of the ramification of the *Dobbs* decision on their workplaces, and characters deciding to change the way they practice based on *Dobbs*. We will continue to track if and how these types of shows incorporate abortion plotlines into their stories, and if they do so with one-off plotlines or season-long storylines.

The mere portrayal of abortion barriers, however, does not leave these depictions without problematic elements. In both *FBI: Most Wanted* and *Law & Order*, the people seeking abortions either die or kill others in the process of obtaining an abortion. Whether intentional or not, this equates abortion both with death and criminal behavior. Popular dramas like *Grey's Anatomy* and *New Amsterdam* continue to perpetuate tropes about doctors as saviors and showcasing "exceptional" instances in which abortions may occur, such as ectopic pregnancies and fetal anomalies, instead of more typical abortion circumstances, such as a parent struggling to make ends meet. We hope these shows and others continue to build on these depictions by giving main characters abortion plotlines instead of only guest actors and working to reflect the reality of abortion patients in the U.S.

Our previous research found that the most commonly portrayed barrier is illegality, and our analysis this year comports with that finding. Of this year's plotlines that do depict barriers, the most commonly portrayed one was still illegality (on eight plotlines, about 40%). These plotlines often took place in countries where abortion is illegal in the time period of the show (*Ramy*, *Black Butterflies*, *Two Summers*) or are past disclosures from pre-Roe era United States (*New Amsterdam*, *Better Things*, *Flowers in the Attic*). Moving into the 2023 television season, we will be curious to see if content creators depict contemporary experiences of illegal abortion in the United States.

Abortion patients on television continue to misrepresent abortion patients demographically, especially when it comes to who faces barriers to care. Television has long misrepresented who gets abortions, choosing to tell the stories of characters who are whiter and wealthier than their real life counterparts. This trend remains the same for the 2022 abortion plotlines; of the characters who obtained abortions, the majority (58%) were white cisgender women. This is about 10% fewer white characters than in 2021, yet in reality, white women make up slightly more than one-third of the abortion patient population in the U.S. Eight plotlines (23%) included Black characters obtaining or disclosing past abortions, the most we've seen in recent years yet still under-representative of actual Black abortion patients who make up nearly one-third of the abortion patient population. Similar patterns of underrepresentation hold for all characters of color, including Latiné, Asian, and biracial characters.

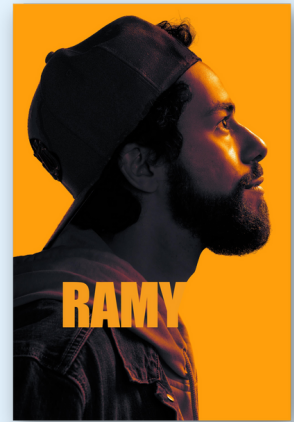


Perhaps most disappointing is that despite the increase in depictions of barriers to abortion care, these portrayals misrepresent *who* is most impacted by abortion restrictions. On television, the vast majority (80%) of characters who faced barriers to abortion care were white and portrayed as middle class (45%) or wealthy (35%), a distinct departure from real life in which the majority of patients who face barriers to abortion care identify as people of color and are living at or below the Federal Poverty Line.

Past patterns of demographic discrepancies between onscreen representations and real abortion patients persist as in years past; the majority (59%) of abortion patients are parenting at the time of their abortion, whereas only 18% of this year's abortion plotlines included characters raising children at the time of their abortion. This continues to erase the very common experience of parents who obtain abortions, and perpetuates the false dichotomy between raising children and having abortions.

Television plotlines continue to feature few portrayals of common abortion methods. Medication abortion makes up more than half of all U.S. abortions, yet only 4 plotlines (6%) specifically portrayed a character having an abortion by pill. Of those, both *Station 19* and *Grey's Anatomy* included dialogue from clinician characters stating the accurate abortion pill protocol, which may contribute to increased knowledge among viewers about medication abortion. No plotlines portrayed characters safely self-managing an abortion with pills.


On the following page, you'll find a table that includes all of this year's television abortion depictions, including plotlines in which characters discuss abortion, consider having an abortion, and obtain an abortion. 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, 2022

Show	Episode	Date	Type of Content
<i>The Hookup Plan</i> (Netflix)	The Worst Plan, The Sorority Plan	1/1/2022	Abortion
<i>Peacemaker</i> (HBO Max)	A Whole New Whirled	1/13/2022	Joke
<i>Kings of Napa</i> (Hulu)	What's Port Got to Do With It	1/25/2022	Consideration
<i>The Girl Before</i> (HBO Max)	Episode 3, Episode 4	2/10/2022	Consideration
<i>Station 19</i> (ABC)	Searching for the Ghost, The Little Things You Do Together	3/3/2022, 3/10/2022	Abortions
<i>Better Things</i> (Hulu)	Oh, I'm Not Gonna Tell Her, Family Meeting, England	3/7/2022, 4/4/2022, 4/18/2022	Abortions
<i>Minx</i> (HBO Max)	Not Like a Shvantz Right in the Face	3/17/2022	Discussion
<i>Human Resources</i> (Netflix)	Rutgers is for Lovers	3/18/2022	Abortion
<i>Standing Up</i> (Netflix)	A Streetcar Named Nezir, Good Evening, Olympia	3/18/2022	Abortion
<i>A Million Little Things</i> (ABC)	Fresh Start	3/23/2022	Abortions
<i>Forecasting Love and Weather</i> (Netflix)	Episode 14, Episode 16	3/27/2022, 4/3/2022	Consideration
<i>Shining Vale</i> (Hulu)	Whispering Hope	4/3/2022	Joke
<i>Heirs to the Land</i> (Netflix)	Penance	4/15/2022	Abortion
<i>Russian Doll</i> (Netflix)	Schrödinger's Ruth	4/20/2022	Joke
<i>He's Expecting</i> (Netflix)	Episode 2, Episode 3	4/21/2022	Consideration
<i>Our Blues</i> (Netflix)	Episode 5	4/23/2022	Consideration
<i>Call the Midwife</i> (PBS)	Episode 7	5/1/2022	Discussion

Abortion on Scripted and Reality Television, 2022

Show	Episode	Date	Type of Content
<i>The Resident</i> (Fox)	Neon Moon	5/17/2022	Consideration
<i>The Baby</i> (Hulu)	The Baby	5/22/2022	Consideration
<i>Two Summers</i> (Netflix)	Episode 5	6/3/2022	Consideration
<i>Baby Fever</i> (Netflix)	Is It Time to Say Congratulations?	6/8/2022	Consideration
<i>The Orville</i> (Hulu)	Gently Falling Rain	6/23/2022	Discussion
<i>Flowers in the Attic: The Origin</i> (Lifetime)	Part Two: The Mother	7/16/2022	Abortion
<i>P-Valley</i> (Starz)	Jackson	7/24/2022	Abortion
<i>Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin</i> (HBO Max)	Chapter One: Spirit Week	7/28/2022	Consideration
<i>The Sandman</i> (Netflix)	Sleep of the Just	8/5/2022	Consideration
<i>Sweet Life: Los Angeles</i> (HBO Max)	Spring BAEcation	8/11/2022	Abortion
<i>Ms. Pat Show</i> (BET+)	Stormy Weather	8/11/2022	Abortion
<i>Bad Sisters</i> (Apple TV+)	Explode a Man	8/19/2022	Joke
<i>House of the Dragon</i> (HBO Max)	King of the Narrow Sea	9/11/2022	Abortion
<i>The Serpent Queen</i> (Starz)	To War Rather Than to Bed	9/18/2022	Abortion
<i>FBI: Most Wanted</i> (CBS)	Taxman	9/27/2022	Abortion
<i>Law & Order</i> (NBC)	Battle Lines	9/29/2022	Abortions
<i>Ramy</i> (Hulu)	American Life Coach	9/30/2022	Abortion
<i>Zatima</i> (BET+)	The Element of Surprise	10/6/2022	Abortion

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Show	Episode	Date	Type of Content
The Good Fight (Paramount+)	The End of Ginni	10/6/2022	Discussion
Life After Lockup (WeTV)	You Got Served	10/7/2022	Abortion
Station 19 (ABC)	Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey, Dancing with Our Hands Tied	10/13/2022, 10/20/2022	Abortion
Black Butterflies (Netflix)	Episode 2	10/14/2022	Abortion
Teen Mom: The Next Chapter (MTV)	I'm Tired but I'm Fired Up; You're His Keeper	10/18/2022, 11/15/2022	Discussion
Grey's Anatomy (ABC)	Let's Talk About Sex	10/20/2022	Abortion
Love is Blind (Netflix)	Episode 6, 7	10/26/2022	Discussion
Big Mouth (Netflix)	Rice Purity Test	10/28/2022	Joke
New Amsterdam (Peacock)	Maybe Tomorrow	11/1/2022	Abortions
Chicago Med (Peacock)	Mama Said There Would Be Days Like This	11/2/2022	Abortion
Grey's Anatomy (ABC)	When I Get to the Border	11/3/2022	Abortion
The Crown (Netflix)	The System	11/9/2022	Consideration
Elite (Netflix)	Separation	11/18/2022	Abortion
Yellowstone (Paramount+)	Horses in Heaven	11/27/2022	Abortion
The Good Doctor (ABC)	Boys Don't Cry	11/28/2022	Discussion
Days of Our Lives (Paramount+)	Episode 53	11/30/2022	Abortion
Dead End (Netflix)	Episode 6	12/1/2022	Consideration