

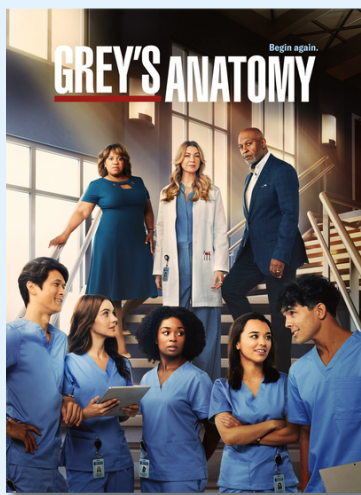
Abortion Onscreen in 2023

Over the last five years, we've seen a yearly increase in depictions of abortion onscreen, and this year marks a departure from that trend. In 2022, we tracked 60 abortion plotlines, and this year, that is down to 49. Our hypothesis is that this is not because of a lack of interest in telling abortion stories, but instead because of the vast upheaval in the entertainment industry this year, specifically the months-long strikes by both writers' and actors' unions. With their new contracts in place, we hope to see even more brave and bold abortion storytelling in the years to come.

Of this year's 49 abortion plotlines, half (51%) included a character who obtained an abortion or disclosed a past abortion, with a quarter featuring a character considering an abortion and a quarter featuring a discussion of abortion more broadly. As in past years, the most common genre for an abortion plotline is drama, followed by comedies and medical procedural shows. We hope that studios will continue to expand the genres in which we see abortion storylines to include primetime sitcoms, science fiction, historical romance, and more.

Below are the themes we tracked across this year's abortion portrayals:

Television plotlines continue to depict barriers to abortion access, but not as broadly as they did in 2022. Last year, in a historic first, about one-third of plotlines depicted characters encountering logistical, financial, and legal barriers to abortion access, compared to years prior, where very few contemporary barriers appeared onscreen. In 2023, we continued to see these barriers portrayed in about a quarter (23%) of plotlines; fewer than in 2022 but significant, nonetheless. Shows like *American Auto* and *Grey's Anatomy* discussed the broader climate of a post-*Dobbs* world, including how companies can address abortion in employee benefits in the former, and how hospitals in progressive states can support abortion providers and patients in the latter. Other plotlines, like on the legal dramas *Accused* and *All Rise*, focused on patients crossing state lines, specifically from Texas, in order to access legal abortions in other states. *Grey's Anatomy* also featured a season-long arc about the persistent violent harassment that abortion providers face on a daily basis, and also included a crossover episode with *Station 19* with an in-depth depiction of providers uncovering the deceptive misinformation provided by a local Crisis Pregnancy Center. On *The Morning Show*, a journalist advocates to report on self-managed abortion in Texas and delivers a moving monologue about the importance of supporting people seeking abortions. We hope future plotlines focus on patients traveling from many other states, particularly across the South and Midwest, to expose the geographically unique obstacles abortion seekers face across the country.



This year brought the first in-depth plotline about self-managed abortion. As mentioned above, on *The Morning Show*, one of the main characters, journalist Bradley Jackson (Reese Witherspoon), wants to report on a feminist network in Texas that brings abortion pills across the border from Mexico. She discovers that the woman she was in touch with, Luna, was arrested for her work, and Bradley's colleague Alex Levy (Jennifer Aniston) reports on the situation from Texas. While traveling to Texas, Alex reiterates to her colleagues that medication abortion is safe and shares her dismay at the national abortion rights landscape. We found this plot significant for several reasons: it mentions the safety record of medication abortion, it showcases the legal risks involved in self-managed abortion, and it features a moving dialogue in which Bradley commends Luna's work as both logistical and emotional abortion support, a nod to the feminist abortion accompaniment models that are prevalent around the world. We hope other shows pick up this thread and continue to portray safe self-managed abortion across the United States and beyond, including the stories of people who self-manage and people who help others obtain abortions.

As in past years, **the demographics of characters who obtain abortions continue to be out of step with today's abortion seekers.** Nearly half (47%) of this year's characters are white, with small percentages of characters of color across the board (16% Black characters, 10% Latinx characters, 8% Asian characters, and 18% unknown). The racial demographics of U.S. abortion patients are quite different from what we see onscreen (in real life, about 39% of patients are white, 28% are Black, 25% are Latinx, and 9% identify as other races or ethnicities), continuing longstanding patterns of onscreen misrepresentations. Other demographic discrepancies include television characters being notably younger and wealthier compared to their real life counterparts; the majority of people who have abortions are in their 20s, whereas onscreen characters obtaining abortions are still more likely to be teenagers; and nearly half of people who obtain abortions live below the federal poverty level, while 81% of this year's onscreen characters were portrayed as middle class, wealthy, or their financial circumstances did not come up at all. Just as troubling, the majority (63%) of 2023's characters seeking an abortion onscreen are childfree, while the average abortion patient is raising children at the time of their abortion. These misrepresentations, which repeat year after year, continually reinforce a misleading single story of who needs and deserves access to abortion care: young, white, wealthy, childfree women.

Unlike last year, the characters who encountered barriers to abortion access in 2023's plotlines were more reflective of abortion patients in real life. About half of them were characters of color, as opposed to 2022 when they were mostly white characters. Unfortunately, none of them were parenting at the time of their abortions, and the majority of them were depicted as middle class. This is a missed opportunity to portray characters coping with some of the most common barriers to abortion, such as securing and paying for childcare, managing days off work at an inflexible job, and coming up with the funds to cover the cost of the abortion.

This year brought slightly more representation of medication abortion. Six plotlines this year included discussions of medication abortion or characters who had abortions by pill, compared to four in 2022 and four in 2021. Notably, this year included four plotlines that depict medication abortion-specific support, including on the plotlines on *Accused* and *The Morning Show*, described above, and on a *Grey's Anatomy* plotline in which two friends come into the emergency room, one to give birth and one to have a medication abortion. On *Everything Now*, teenage Becca turns to her mom for support in pregnancy-decision making, and her mom expresses unconditional love as Becca chooses to have a medication abortion. Though none of these plotlines depicted the actual experience of having an abortion by pill, they did provide much-needed blueprints for treating abortion seekers with compassion and care.



Given that medication abortion now represents more than half of all U.S. abortions, we hope future plotlines will explore the broad landscape of abortion pill provision, including different regimens (using mifepristone and misoprostol or misoprostol only), obtaining abortion pills via telehealth, via a clinic, or via an online provider, and the plethora of possible support before, during, and after medication abortions, including from friends, family, and from organizations like All-Options, the Repro Legal Helpline, or the M+A Hotline.

We also noted the return of a troubling theme: the averted abortion. In the 1990s and early 2000s, a common television trope was having a character face an unintended pregnancy, decide to have an abortion, and then either change her mind at the last minute or have a miscarriage, exempting her from having to make a pregnancy decision at all. This trope has become less common in contemporary depictions, and we were surprised to see it emerge in four plotlines over the last year on *And Just Like That*, *Special Ops: Lioness*, *American Horror Story: Delicate*, and *Rain Dogs*. In the first two, characters face unintended pregnancies and ultimately miscarry. In the latter two, characters go to abortion clinics and end up not having abortions. While it is important to represent a broad spectrum of reproductive experiences, these portrayals stigmatize abortion by avoidance instead of providing more depth and nuance to depictions of miscarriage or pregnancy ambivalence.

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 so we can add it to our database. 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, 2023

| Show | Episode | Airdate | Type of Content |
|---|--|---------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Lady Voyeur</i> (Netflix) | Crime and Punishment, Shadows of the Past | 1/1/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Sky Rojo</i> (Netflix) | The Lucky Cat | 1/13/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Women at War</i> (Netflix) | Episode 3, 6, 8 | 1/19/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Class</i> (Netflix) | Episode 7, Episode 8 | 2/3/2023 | Consideration |
| <i>The Ms. Pat Show</i> (BET+) | Guess Who's Coming To Dinner | 2/22/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Will Trent</i> (ABC) | Unable to Locate | 2/23/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>The Connors</i> (ABC) | Possums, Pregnancy and Patriarchy | 2/25/2023 | Consideration |
| <i>American Auto</i> (Peacock) | The Letter | 2/28/2023 | Discussion |
| <i>Grey's Anatomy</i> (NBC) | All Star | 3/2/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Divorce Attorney Shin</i> (Netflix) | Episode 10 | 3/4/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>90 Day Fiancé: The Other Way</i> (TLC) | Lies Have Got No Legs, Love Is One Thing, Knowledge Is Another | 3/5/2023, 3/12/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>The Good Doctor</i> (ABC) | Old Friends | 3/6/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Superman & Lois</i> (The CW) | Closer | 3/14/2023 | Consideration |
| <i>Station 19</i> (ABC) | Even Better Than the Real Thing | 3/16/2023 | Discussion |
| <i>Accused</i> (Fox) | Jack's Story | 3/21/2023 | Abortion |

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|---|---|--|-----------------|
| Grey's Anatomy (ABC) | Training Day | 3/23/2023 | Abortion |
| Daisy Jones & The Six (Amazon Prime) | Feels Like the First Time, Rock 'n' Roll Suicide | 3/23/2023 | Abortion |
| Who Were We Running From? (Netflix) | Episode 4 | 3/24/2023 | Consideration |
| The Power (Amazon Prime) | A New Organ | 3/30/2023 | Discussion |
| Rain Dogs (Max) | Emotional Erection, Jesus Loves a Hustler | 4/3/2023, 4/10/2023 | Consideration |
| Station 19 (ABC) | It's All Gonna Break | 4/6/2023 | Discussion |
| Grey's Anatomy (ABC) | Cowgirls Don't Cry, Shadow of Your Love, Gunpowder and Lead, Wedding Bell Blues | 4/6/2023, 4/13/2023, 4/20/2023, 5/18/2023 | Discussion |
| Tiny Beautiful Things (Hulu) | The Ghost Ship | 4/7/2023 | Consideration |
| The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (Amazon Prime) | Go Forward | 4/13/2023 | Abortion |
| Station 19 (ABC) | Let it All Out | 4/13/2023 | Discussion |
| Love After Lockup (WeTV) | Busted & Disgusted | 4/21/2023 | Abortion |
| Dead Ringers (Amazon Prime) | Episode 2, Episode 4, Episode 5 | 4/21/2023 | Discussion |
| Chicago Med (NBC) | Look Closely and You Might Hear the Truth | 5/3/2023 | Abortion |

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| Show | Episode | Airdate | Type of Content |
|---|--|---|-----------------|
| Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies (Paramount+) | Or At the High School Dance... | 5/18/2023 | Abortion |
| City on Fire (Apple TV+) | The Demon Brother | 6/9/2023 | Consideration |
| The Surrogacy (Netflix) | Episode 2, Episode 3 | 6/14/2023 | Abortion |
| Act Your Age (Bounce) | Snip Snip | 6/28/2023 | Discussion |
| Cruel Summer (Freeform) | Its The End of the World, The Miseducation of Luke Chambers | 7/10/2023, 7/24/2023 | Consideration |
| Special Ops: Lioness (Paramount+) | The Choice of Failure, Truth Is the Shrewdest Lie | 8/6/2023, 8/13, 2023 | Consideration |
| And Just Like That (Max) | The Last Supper Part One: Appetizer | 8/17/2023 | Consideration |
| The Morning Show (Apple TV+) | The Kármán Line, Strict Scrutiny, DNF | 9/13/2023, 10/18/2023, 10/25/2023 | Discussion |
| Obituary (Hulu) | Hiccups | 10/3/2023 | Discussion |
| Everything Now (Netflix) | Episode 5, Episode 8 | 10/5/2023 | Abortion |
| The Winter King (MGM+) | For He Who Wears The Crown is Tested by His Friends, Not Enemies | 10/8/2023 | Abortion |
| American Horror Story: Delicate (FX) | Vanishing Twin, Preech | 10/11/2023, 10/18/2023 | Discussion |
| The Burning Girls (Paramount+) | Episode 6 | 10/19/2023 | Consideration |

Abortion on Scripted and Reality Television, 2023

| Show | Episode | Airdate | Type of Content |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| <i>All Rise</i> (OWN) | I Will Not Go Quietly | 10/28/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Shining Vale</i> (STARZ) | The Miracle | 11/10/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>The Curse</i> (Showtime) | Pressure's Looking Good So Far | 11/17/2023 | Abortion |
| <i>Family Guy</i> (FOX) | Boston Stewie | 11/19/2023 | Discussion |