

SHOUT YOUR ABORTION

READING GROUP GUIDE

Shout Your Abortion is a collection of abortion stories and a creative action guide meant to empower readers to join the movement to normalize abortion. In order for society to become more compassionate towards people who have abortions, we need to break the silence surrounding the issue. In order for us to humanize people who've had abortions and understand how the procedure impacts individuals, families, and communities, we need to learn to listen to the people who have had them. And in order for people who've had abortions to find support, they need to realize that they are not alone. The stories in this book illustrate the fact that all sorts of people have abortions for every imaginable reason, and the experience feels differently for everyone.

We hope this guide will provide some guidelines and tips to help you create a safe, respectful, and open environment to discuss this book. There are dozens of book clubs happening all over the country—some are small and some are large, some are online and others are IRL—so not all of these suggestions will be appropriate for your group.

Group Introductions

We believe that just knowing a little bit about the people you're talking to can lend itself to more respectful dialogue, which is why we suggest starting out your book club by having each member of the group introduce themselves. We also believe it's important to not make assumptions about who other people are and where they're coming from. For example, we wouldn't want to assume that everyone in the group is heterosexual or cis-gendered, that people have a certain background with religion, or assuming we know anyone's personal experience with abortion. Some potential introduction prompts:

- Please share your name and pronouns with the group (We suggest reading the page in the very beginning of the book titled “a note on language,” and perusing genderspectrum.org if these concepts are unfamiliar to you. The bottom line is that it’s important to kick off your book club by allowing each person in the room to tell the group how they’d like to identify, and it’s important for everyone working to normalize abortion to use language that is reflective of the reality that not everyone who has an abortion identifies as a woman).
- What brought you to this group? What is something you’re hoping to get out of this experience?
- Do you have any apprehensions that you’d like to share with the group? Is there any subject matter you find particularly triggering that you’d like us to be sensitive to?

Community Agreements

Most people don’t have much practice talking about abortion, which is part of the reason it’s absolutely necessary to start these conversations and also part of the reason that doing so feels a little bit tricky for most people. Talking about abortion also means potentially touching on many other potentially painful subjects, such as sexual violence, addiction, abuse, mental illness and poverty. Because many people have trigger points around these topics, it’s important to establish some expectations with your group about how individuals will respect one another’s boundaries in potentially sensitive conversations. We suggest coming up with community agreements as a collective. Some potential agreements might be:

- **Confidentiality.** Stories shared with this group are not to leave this group. Within this group, if you have the desire to share a story that is not your own, please do so without sharing identifying information.
- **Speaking from the “I”.** Statements that are framed as a general observation about other people can feel judgmental, critical and offensive. Oftentimes, reframing a statement as a personal belief or observation shifts the meaning towards the speaker and away from generalizing about others in a way that can be hurtful or insulting. For example: the statement “abortion is a heartbreakingly difficult decision,” might feel stigmatizing to someone whose abortion was neither of those things. A less generalizing way for the speaker to express this would be to say “I’ve known people who have found abortion to be a heartbreakingly difficult decision”.
- **No assumptions, except for best intentions.** People should not assume other people’s identities, experiences or opinions. The only assumption people should make is that when other participants speak, they are speaking with the positive intentions and do not mean to offend anyone. Talking about these things are tricky, and most of us have many layers of ingrained biases to unravel. Make your group a safe place for uncertainty by giving your group members the benefit of the doubt.
- **Be aware of your privilege.** Many group environments are dominated by people who hold various privileged

identities, such as whiteness, economic status, or education. Think about the way that various components of your privilege factor into the freedom with which you take up space in a group environment. If you find yourself speaking first and often, try hanging back a bit in order to give other people a chance to contribute.

A Note About Security

- The anti-choice movement has created a cultural climate where talking about abortion can make someone a target for harassment. Before engaging with any public conversation about abortion, please check out question in the FAQ section that pertains to harassment and online security and share the Feminist Frequency resource that is referenced in that section with the rest of your group.

Preliminary Discussion Questions

Now that you've established some community goals and guidelines, it's time to dive into the book! We hope these stories inspire lots of organic conversation—here are some general discussion questions if you need help getting started or you're feeling stuck.

- Did any particular story stick with you the most? Why do you think that is?
- Did any particular story challenge you to confront biases or internalized stigma you didn't know you had? Where do you think that this bias/stigma came from?
- A person's abortion experience is shaped above all else by their ability to access the service safely and affordably. Anti-choice legislation has decimated access to abortion in many parts of the country. In some of these stories, the pregnant person experienced significant barriers to access. How did those barriers seem to impact their overall experience with abortion?
- Many of these stories include components of sexual violence, abuse, addiction, and mental illness. Even if the abortion wasn't directly related to these circumstances, many storytellers naturally frame their abortion experiences as being connected to these traumas. Why do you think this is? How are these experiences all related to the concept of autonomy?
- What are some emotional and thematic through lines that you notice throughout the book?
- In the *Providers* section, did you learn anything new about abortion restrictions? What stood out to you about these providers?
- In the *Inspiration* section, did any of these projects feel especially provocative or inspirational to you?
- The *Reverberations* section is comprised of photos of previous generations of abortion activists, and the SYA Resources and FAQ sections. The section tagline is a Shakespeare quote, *What's Past is Prologue*. Do you think your own activism has been shaped by people who came before you, consciously or unconsciously?



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Understanding Your Local Landscape

You might decide to have group members research abortion rights and pro-choice organizations in your area. Some things you might look into:

- **Policy.** What are the abortion laws in your area? Are there waiting periods, parental notification laws? How do these policies control the availability of abortion at a local, state, and national level?
- **Clinics.** How many clinics are in your area? Are they independent clinics or Planned Parenthood?
- **Reproductive justice.** Are there Reproductive Justice organizations in your area? What is the definition of Reproductive Justice? How do these organization's missions differ from pro-choice organizations?

Continuing the Discussion: Ways to Get Involved

- Shoutyourabortion.com is an interactive website which allows visitors to share their abortion stories in text or video. If you have a story of your own, consider adding your story and becoming part of an ever-growing community of people telling the truth about our lives and helping others find the courage to do the same! Post your story on social media using #ShoutYourAbortion to let your friends, family, followers, and the rest know your perspective. Before doing this or engaging with any public conversation about abortion, please check out question in the FAQ section that pertains to harassment and online security.

- Call, email, and/or connect with your elected officials on social media, sharing your perspective on abortion. Engaging in the public dialogue around abortion is a great way to help secure reproductive rights and normalize abortion. Abortion should not be an invisible community. Being open about your position encourages progress as others can find inspiration in your story and your voice can bolster the broader call for reproductive rights.
- Support your local abortion care provider as a volunteer, donor, social media follower or clinic escort. The majority of abortions take place in independent clinics—small, locally-owned clinics that lack the resources of large, national organizations. The best way to do this might be to email or call them and express your interest in supporting them, but indie clinics are understandably very busy. Another way to support indie clinics is by supporting the Abortion Care Network, which provides support to independent clinics. You can also find tons of ways to get involved with Planned Parenthood and NARAL, who support reproductive rights and have strong lobbying contingents (see Resources section).
- The best way for you to directly help your community members pay for abortion care is by contributing to a local abortion fund. Visit the National Network of Abortion Funds: abortionfunds.org/need-abortion to find a local fund in your area, or become a member of NNAF and offer a monthly contribution.
- Lend your copy of Shout Your Abortion to a loved one or at a Little Free Library in your neighborhood. Sharing this collection of stories about abortion illuminates this previous “invisible” community and helps dispel ignorance through understanding.
- Call your local bookstore and ask if they can carry the book. Request a copy from your local library.
- Host an SYA event! Every year, we cosponsor dozens of events all over the country. Check out the FAQ section for more information.

US Abortion Facts (Guttmacher Institute report)

- Nearly one in four women in the United States (23.7%) will have an abortion by age 45.
- By age 20, 4.6% of women will have had an abortion, and 19% will have done so by age 30.
- 59% of women obtaining abortions are mothers.
- 19% of pregnancies ended in abortion in 2014.
- 42% of pregnancies were unplanned in 2011.
- The abortion rate among poor women remains the highest of all groups at 36.6 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age.

