

POV Community
Engagement &
Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE



On The Divide

a film by Maya Cueva

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ON THE DIVIDE

McAllen, Texas is home to the last reproductive health clinic on the Texas/Mexico border. It is the center of the tension between religious protesters who try to stop patients coming inside and the security staff of the clinic who fight to protect it. *On the Divide* follows three different Latinx members of this community and the unforeseen choices they face for their daily survival.

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This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *On the Divide* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR FACILITATORS

On the Divide is a unique film that is specially positioned to support abortion advocacy and create spaces for community building. By embracing nuance and humanity, the film notably serves those most affected by abortion restrictions in an area that has become a battleground for reproduction justice.

Given the film's potential to spark discussion and positive change, we encourage organizers and hosts to watch the film beforehand and invite them to reflect on the goals of the event:

- What hopes do you have for this screening?
- What do you hope you will learn from this experience? What do you hope participants will learn?
- What do you anticipate will be a challenge in facilitating this event?
- What do you hope will happen after the event?

The documentary is a thoughtful, intentional, and emotional film and may bring up sensitive conversations. Consider the following tips on how to create and engage in a productive and respectful dialogue:

- Co-create community agreements ahead of discussion. An example can be found [here](#).
- Practice active listening—approach the conversation from a place of solidarity and in service to those most affected by abortion restrictions. If emotional responses arise, stay calm and truly consider what the speaker has to say.
- Ask intentional questions—when building bridges across issue divides, try to understand and meet people where they are.
- Acknowledge people's stories and emotions—if someone shares their personal experience, validate their experience and thank them for sharing. This can help create mutual respect and understanding.

In addition, consider the following suggestions to help ensure safety and care at your event:

- Co-facilitate your event so you can have a trusted partner in leading care-centered dialogue
- Invite mental health volunteers so that they can support anyone experiencing distress
- Review trigger warnings before the event begins

HELPFUL CONCEPTS & DEFINITIONS

Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?

In an effort to create a collaborative space fueled by solidarity and respect, we encourage organizers and event hosts to integrate community agreements into their events. Community agreements help provide a framework and parameters for engaging in dialogue that allows you to establish a shared sense of intention ahead of engaging in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed, and creating them can be used as an opening activity that your group collectively and collaboratively undertakes ahead of engaging in dialogue. [Here is a model](#) of Community Agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or if participants would be amenable to pre-established community agreements. Below are some sample community agreements:

- Use “I” statements—draw from your own experiences and speak on behalf of yourself rather than using “we.”
- Step up, step back—balance your participation by stepping up into the conversation and stepping back to help create space for others.
- Actively listen—listen without interrupting or centering your own response.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality—event hosts, organizers, and participants agree not to share private information outside of this space.
- Honor your needs—whether they be accessibility, emotional, or logistical needs, communicate those to event hosts and organizers and/or feel empowered to step away from the conversation if triggered.
- Center care—remember that we are here to care for ourselves and our communities. Allow caring values to guide participation in the conversation.

A note on inclusive language

Historically, the fight for abortion care and rights has centered the experience of white cis-gendered women. The impact campaign for On the Divide is committed to centering the experience of all those affected by abortion restrictions, especially those most affected—women and birthing people who are Latinx, BIPOC, and/or immigrants.

HELPFUL CONCEPTS & DEFINITIONS

We encourage event organizers and hosts to integrate inclusive language that acknowledges and centers the experience of trans and nonbinary people and people of color in the fight for reproduction justice and abortion access. For helpful definitions and clarification of language, you can visit The Gender Spectrum's "[Language of Gender](#)."



KEY PARTICIPANTS

Denisse - a Latinx young mother of four and clinic escort volunteer at Whole Woman's Health clinic of McAllen who helps guide women into the clinic, providing much-needed comfort and assistance.

Rey - a Latinx security guard at Whole Woman's Health in his late sixties who is fervent in his religious beliefs, but also deeply understands the plight of the women who arrive at the abortion clinic.

Mercedes - a Latinx woman in her thirties who used to be involved in gangs, was a part of the pro-life Church movement, and then shifted to a pro-choice position.

KEY ISSUES

On the Divide is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Reproductive justice
- Abortion rights and access
- Body autonomy
- Faith and identity
- Healthcare
- Personal as political
- Grassroots organizing
- Human rights

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Overview: Battles Over Reproductive Rights

Before *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the landmark Supreme Court ruling that recognized abortion as a legal right, almost every state in America had laws criminalizing abortion. Before this ruling, only a few states made exceptions for things such as rape and the protection of a mother's life. In response to this ruling, in the last 50 years over 1,300 abortion restrictions have been instituted across the country). Anti-abortion laws block patients from getting necessary care by intentionally targeting people where they are most vulnerable: finances and structural supports. In 2014, 75 percent of all abortion patients were living below the federal poverty line. The average cost of an abortion during the first trimester is approximately 550 dollars, and the price rises as pregnancy progresses. This reality, coupled with transportation and potential childcare, as well as lost wages from taking time off work and lodging (if the center is not local), are some examples of barriers to accessing what the Supreme Court considers a constitutional human right. Another barrier was introduced three years after *Roe v. Wade* in the Hyde Bill, which prohibited anyone enrolled in Medicaid, Medicare, and other federal programs from using health insurance to cover abortion. Currently, eleven states also prohibit patients from using private health care to do so.

Resistance to gains made within fights for reproductive justice has been ongoing since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, but 2021 was a record-breaking year for anti-abortion restrictions. In 2021, over 100 restrictions were instituted across the country, including the most restrictive ban reflected in Texas Senate Bill 8 (SB 8). This law cuts off access to abortion care at six weeks, despite the reality that many do not even realize they are pregnant that early. In Texas, approximately 85 to 90 percent of people who receive abortions are at least six weeks into their pregnancies, so this bill essentially seeks to remove general access to abortion care. SB 8 also empowers private citizens to enforce the law by recruiting them to report and sue people seeking to obtain abortions after six weeks.

Texas has a long history as one of the most aggressive anti-abortion states in the nation. In 2013, Texas lawmakers passed House Bill 2, a law with so many restrictions that it forced over half of the abortion clinics in the state to close due to the unnecessary and demanding standards imposed upon them. The closure of clinics happened before the Supreme Court was able to strike the law down as unconstitutional in 2016. Today, there are only 19 clinics to serve the over 5.4 million people of reproductive age in Texas.

In the face of this record-breaking year for anti-abortion restrictions, the pro-abortion movement also made strides to protect the right to choose. In 2021 almost 100 bills expanding abortion support were put through across the nation, 11 of which mandated insurance coverage of abortions, increased provider protections, and repealed major abortion restrictions, including criminal penalties).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Reproductive Justice and Marginalized Communities**

Anti-abortion laws consistently impact the most marginalized communities in this country. A higher level of unintended pregnancies in these communities stems from numerous factors, including stymied access to health care and poor sex education in schools. In Texas, people of color make up 59 percent of the population, yet they are 74 percent of those receiving abortions. In the face of numerous barriers to abortion care, these communities have done what they always do when the government restricts access to their constitutional rights—relied on mutual aid and community-based support.

Numerous nonprofits and grassroots community organizations formed and/or gained stronger support in the face of anti-abortion laws in order to provide sex education, ride shares, child care, abortion accompaniments, partial or full funding for abortions, lodging, and emotional support. These organizations work to educate communities about life-saving resources, lead pro-abortion campaigns, and coordinate mutual aid. In the wake of SB 8, many reproductive rights organizations in Texas were faced with needing to make major shifts. According to Anna Rupani, the executive director of the pro-choice nonprofit Fund Texas Choice, the bill “increases the average driving distance to access an abortion clinic by nearly 15 times. Since September 1, 99 percent of [our] clients have had to travel out of state to get access to care.” While providing abortion care is becoming more complicated for organizations navigating this latest restriction, the outpouring of support from the pro-choice movement has also offered many organizations greater capacity to support patients and communities. One example is Whole Woman’s Health in McAllen, Texas, which is now able to provide completely free abortion services because of the generous funding that came in reaction to SB 8.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with partners before starting a group discussion.

- What moment or story in the film impacted you the most? In what way? Why
- What are some examples of things you learned from *On the Divide*?
- What about the film aligned with your beliefs about who gets abortions and why? What challenged your beliefs?
- What were some of the reasons people sought abortions in the film? What are some other reasons people may choose abortion?
- What are some examples of barriers to abortion care people in the film faced?
- Understanding that lack of abortion access can sometimes result in death, how can we recognize that abortion is a health issue rather than a political/ideological one?
- What were challenging moments for you to watch in the film? What was uplifting? Why?
- In what ways did *On the Divide* help you consider choice as a necessary component for survival?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FAITH AND ABORTION

- In what ways does faith influence individuals' ideas with regard to abortion? Does this, perhaps, limit possibilities for considering abortion as a health issue?
- Were you surprised by anything you learned in regard to faith and abortion while watching *On the Divide*?
- Organizations like Catholics for Choice make clear that people of faith support abortion access because of their religious and moral values, not in spite of them. How does this expand limiting beliefs that all religious people are against reproductive justice?
- How are justice and Catholicism represented in the film? Did anything about this representation expand your thinking, resonate with you, and/or surprise you?
- How do you feel about the way Rey was treated by his church and community?
- How do you feel about how Mercedes was treated by the church community and pro-life community? And Denisse?
- What does choice mean to you?

ANTI-ABORTION ARGUMENTS

- How would you describe the relationship between Mercedes and Yolanda?
- How do “crisis pregnancy centers” and fake clinics harm patients? Can you point to examples in the film?
- Did any of Yolanda's actions or things she said surprise you? In what ways?
- How does Yolanda represent the way that reproductive choice is politicized to create harmful circumstances for people seeking abortion?
- What are some ways anti-abortion activists organized and pushed their agenda in the film?
- What does the presence of security and clinic escorts teach you about the anti-abortion opposition? Were you surprised by their tactics? In what ways?
- How do you imagine the presence of protestors outside of clinics impacts the already challenging experiences of people seeking abortion?
- In what ways does *On the Divide* illuminate connections between abortion restrictions and systemic racism in the United States? What are some examples from the film that helped you understand this relationship?
- In the beginning of the film, Mercedes expresses that she is pro-life, but by the end of the film, she has shifted toward understanding why choice is necessary. Based on your viewing of the film, what experiences or factors shaped her trajectory?
- Did the transformation of Mercedes's views change your views at all? How are abortion and access to other forms of reproductive health care connected?
- In what ways did Mercedes's experience offer hope for people's capacity to change their views? What do you think it takes for people to shift their thinking about reproductive rights?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MOVEMENT FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

- What role did reproductive justice organizers play in the film? How did they show up and support individuals and the movement for reproductive justice?
- What are some of the tactics that South Texans for Reproductive Justice (STRJ) used to fight the opposition?
- Did you recognize any clear distinctions between the foundations in which the strategies of anti-abortion protestors and activists for reproductive rights were rooted?
- Based on what you saw in the film, what is required in order for people to have an actual choice? How could these needs be met?
- How would you describe the role of STRJ in the McAllen community?
- How would you describe the relationship between the members of STRJ and Rey?
- Understanding intersectionality as the ways different identities are directly harmed by interlocking systems of oppression, in what ways do these intersections (of identity-positions and oppressive systems) show up in the experiences of the people seeking abortion in the film?
- What would following the leadership of those most affected by abortion restrictions look like in your own communities? Which communities are most threatened by abortion restrictions?
- What is the role of allies, such as partners and fathers, in the pro-choice movement?
- How does intimate partner violence affect a person's need for reproductive healthcare?

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- What would it mean for abortion to be truly accessible for all who need it in this country?
- In September 2021, Texas passed Senate Bill 8 (SB 8), which bans abortion upon any detection of fetal cardiac activity (approximately at six weeks) and allows anyone to sue abortion providers and others who aid a person in obtaining abortion care. Support for legislation such as SB 8 is growing in other states. In what ways does this bill, and others like it, create increasingly dangerous conditions for people seeking abortion access across the country? What might an organized resistance and response look like?
- What does your community need to do to grow support for abortion? What would healthy sex education and accessible health care look like in your community?
- Now that you've watched the film, what do you feel inspired to do? How can you help the movement for abortion?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TAKING ACTION

Host a screening of *On the Divide* in your classroom or community by visiting POV's Free Lending Library, [The Community Network](#) and creating an account.

RESOURCES

Here are some resources you can use to continue educating yourself and your community about the state of reproductive rights nationally and locally:

[Catholics for Choice](#) aims to create a world where everyone has equal access to safe and legal abortion.

[Clinic Access Support Network](#) provides transportation, meal stipends, accommodations, childcare assistance, and compassionate care to people seeking abortion services in Houston.

[Frontera Fund](#) provides financial and practical support for those from the Rio Grande Valley and/or traveling to the Rio Grande Valley for abortion care.

[Fund Texas Choice](#) provides people with a way to get to a clinic and/or find a place to stay in order to support people's access to the reproductive care they need.

[Indigenous Women Rising](#) provides culturally safe accessible health education, resources, and advocacy to all Indigenous people in the United States and Canada who have the capacity to become pregnant and are seeking an abortion in the United States.

[Lilith Fund](#), the oldest abortion fund in Texas, serves the central and southern regions of the state with direct financial assistance for abortions.

[National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice](#) works in the Rio Grande Valley on reproductive health for Latinx communities.

[Texas Equal Access Fund](#) provides emotional and financial support to people who are seeking abortion care.

[West Fund](#) provides education, community building, and gap funding in order to empower west Texans in the El Paso area, helping them make informed decisions and access health care.

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



[Peace Is Loud](#) (with support from Catholics for Choice and Lucy Ceballos Félix of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice). Peace Is Loud is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with women and gender-expansive changemakers to advance transformative peace and social justice through storytelling.



Devyn Harris (they/she/love) is a queer, genderqueer femme grassroots organizer, peer support specialist, mental health coach, and artist. They believe compassion, grace, and connection are the keys to change in our own bodies and the world. They are a fierce advocate for Black trans folks living on the streets, and as the housing director for Black Trans Leadership of Austin (BTLA), they work to create support systems for all QTBIPOC (queer trans BIPOC) folks who need it. They also serve as a member of Austin's HRS (Homelessness Response System) Leadership Council. A self-professed love warrior, they are in this world to help people heal with love.

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