

UCSF

UC San Francisco Previously Published Works

Title

Abortion in entertainment media, 2019–2024

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/55z4f7tt>

Journal

Current Opinion in Obstetrics & Gynecology, 36(6)

ISSN

1040-872X

Author

Herold, Stephanie

Publication Date

2024-12-01

DOI

10.1097/gco.0000000000000977

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



Abortion in entertainment media, 2019–2024

Stephanie Herold

Purpose of review

Entertainment media contribute to how people understand and make sense of health issues, especially stigmatized ones such as abortion. This paper reviews the peer-reviewed literature published between 2019 and 2024 on how abortion is depicted in scripted television and film available for viewing in the United States.

Recent findings

The majority of recent studies focus on qualitative content analysis of a composite of television shows, documenting the myriad ways that these programs reflect and are distinct from the reality of abortion access in the United States. The quantitative studies find small but significant increases in abortion knowledge related to exposure to television abortion plotlines, but no increases in support for abortion postexposure. No studies track the impact of exposure to multiple abortion plotlines at multiple points in time. Only one study included a sample of entertainment content creators to understand their motivations for creating abortion plotlines.

Summary

Media depictions of abortion are often rife with misinformation, and may influence the U.S. public's general knowledge and beliefs about abortion. More research is needed to understand possible relationships between television and film abortion content and its impact on viewers.

Keywords

abortion, communications, media studies, television studies

INTRODUCTION

Exposure to fictional health content on television can significantly influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, especially related to sexual and reproductive health [1]. Exposure to accurate depictions of contraception, for example, is associated with increased contraceptive uptake [2] and improved attitudes towards contraception [3]. Similar research across other domains of reproductive health suggest a relationship between media exposure and increased communication about sexual health [4], increased health information-seeking behaviors [5], and increased pursuit of sexual health screening [6]. Other studies document negative outcomes of media exposure, such as greater intention to engage in unprotected sex [7] or increased fear about pregnancy and childbirth [8]. The study of both the content and the impact of abortion onscreen is relatively new compared to the decades of literature studying portrayals of other health topics, and it may be of increased importance given the crisis of abortion access and misinformation in the United States.

In June 2022, the Supreme Court revoked federal protections for abortion rights in their

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision, resulting in legal and medical chaos, including bans on abortion in 14 states and new abortion restrictions in seven states [9]. Before *Dobbs*, knowledge about abortion legality and contemporary abortion restrictions among the U.S. public was relatively low [10] and the decision increased confusion on these topics nationally and locally [11]. Given this context, it is crucial to understand both the content of abortion depictions and any documented impact of depictions on audiences.

This study reviews peer-reviewed publications on abortion on entertainment television and film available to US audiences over the last 5 years (2019–2024).

Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences, University of California, San Francisco, Oakland, California, USA

Correspondence to Stephanie Herold, MPH, ANSIRH, University of California, San Francisco, 1330 Broadway, Suite 100, Oakland, CA 94612, USA.

E-mail: stephanie.herold@ucsf.edu

Curr Opin Obstet Gynecol 2024, 36:400–407

DOI:10.1097/GCO.0000000000000977

KEY POINTS

- Most recent studies focus on qualitative content analysis of US television shows, finding that these portrayals do not reflect the challenges of abortion access today.
- Many contemporary abortion depictions portray abortion as a moral decision deserving of love and support, a shift from more stigmatizing historical portrayals.
- Exposure to these plotlines is associated with small but significant increases in abortion knowledge, but not with changes in attitudes.
- More research is needed to understand the impact of abortion plotlines.

METHODS

I used a scoping review methodology, informed by the process described in the Booth and Grant frameworks [12]. Because of the specificity of the research question and the limited published research in this area, a scoping review framework provided the process by which to structure this review. This process included developing an academic literature database search strategy, creating study inclusion and exclusion criteria, summarizing the study findings, and identifying gaps in the existing literature. I conducted this review according to PRISMA guidelines [13].

Search strategy: I employed a three-step search strategy for identifying published studies. First, I conducted a preliminary search on Web of Science to identify key studies and began term harvesting. Next, I tested potential search terms, such as ‘abortion on television’ and ‘abortion in media,’ examining the first 50 unique results for each term to determine the term’s relevance. Finally, I searched the reference lists of included studies to identify any additional studies and search terms. I conducted searches twice: once on January 24, 2024 and again on April 12, 2024. I also contacted two experts, one in the social sciences and one in the humanities, to ensure that the major studies from those fields were included. I conducted additional searches on the databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, the UCSF library, and Project Muse. I limited the results to those published between 2019 and 2024 and available in English.

Study selection: The literature search yielded 676 studies in all databases. After excluding duplicates, I screened titles and abstracts of 353 articles. I eliminated 327 based on exclusion criteria, leaving 26 studies included in the final analysis, as indicated by the PRISMA chart (Fig. 1).

Data extraction: I created a standardized spreadsheet to extract data in the following areas: year

published, field, type of media analyzed, authors, article title, methods, single show/composite, and relevant findings. In accordance with scoping review methodology [14], I did not conduct an analysis of the quality of the studies.

RESULTS

Of the 26 articles included in the final review, 9 were in media studies, 4 in television studies, 3 in cultural studies, and the remaining in communications, public health, sociology, feminist studies, and science fiction studies. The vast majority ($n=22$) were an analysis of television, with only two on both television and film and one on film alone. The vast majority ($n=21$) focused the entire analysis on abortion content, while the others ($n=5$) included abortion in a broader analysis of media. The majority ($n=18$) included a sample of multiple television plotlines or films, while the rest analyzed a single media depiction. Commonly cited theories included postfeminism ($n=6$), entertainment education ($n=3$), and cultivation theory ($n=3$), though several articles ($n=5$) did not cite theory at all. The majority ($n=15$) of studies employed qualitative content analysis as the main methodology, whereas small proportions used quantitative surveys ($n=4$), historical and archival analysis ($n=3$), focus groups ($n=1$), and in-depth interviews ($n=1$). Table 1 includes the year of publication, study titles, authors, type of media studied, and the television shows or films they included in their analysis.

Content analysis

Many studies employed qualitative content analysis to uncover themes and patterns across television representations of abortion. Two studies examined past and contemporary seasons of a television show (*Degrassi* [15] and *Grey’s Anatomy* [16]), finding that the tone of abortion plotlines shifted with time. Earlier seasons portrayed abortion as an immoral but necessary choice, whereas more recent abortion plotlines depict abortion as a decision deserving of love and support. Three studies examine portrayals of abortion in the early years of film and television, upending inaccurate cultural assumptions of abortion plotlines as a modern onscreen innovation. Research on mid-20th century legal dramas [17[■]] and medical dramas [18] documents how these programs set the standards for today’s ‘case of the week’ procedurals while cementing stigmatizing tropes about the ‘dangerous illegal abortionist’ and the male detectives’ and doctors’ role as gatekeepers of safe abortion access and saviors of young women. Other scholarship details how soap operas

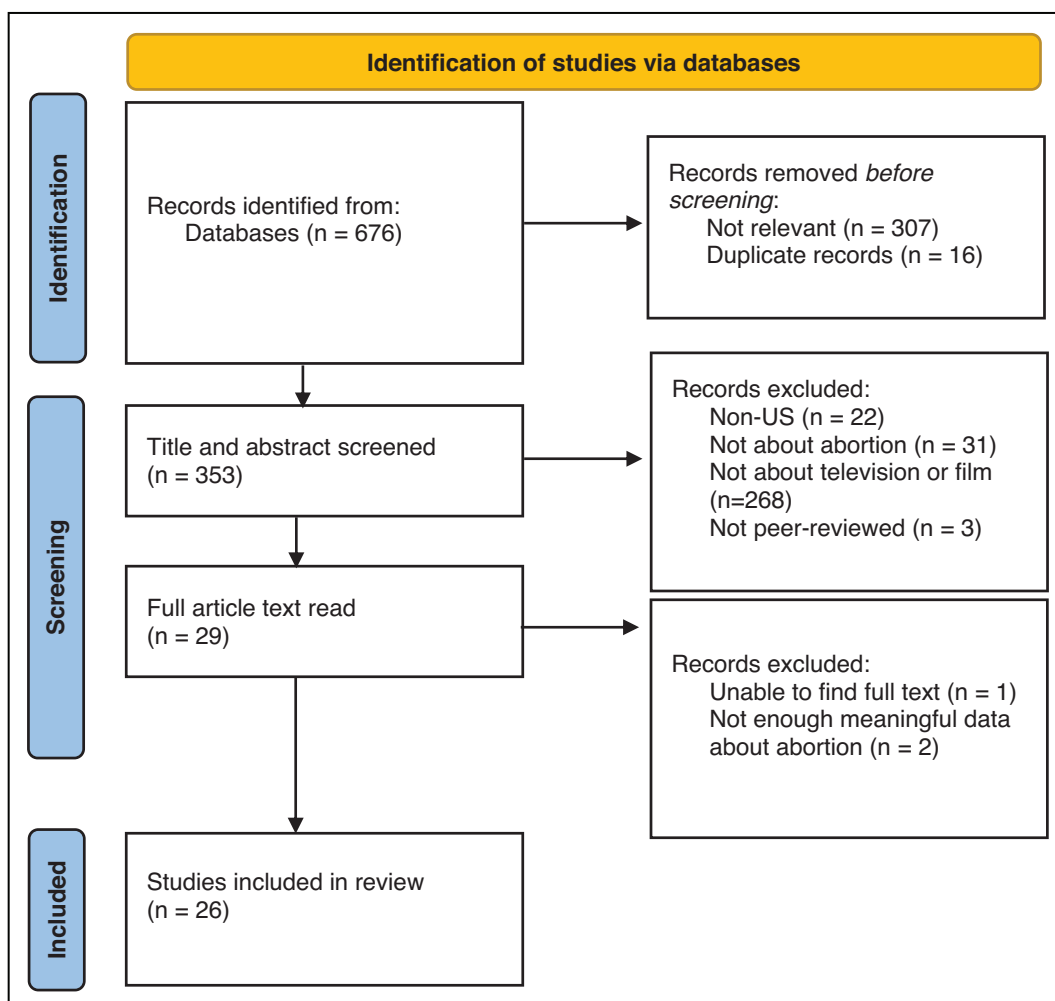


FIGURE 1. PRISMA flow diagram: abortion in entertainment media, 2019–2024. From: McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi:10.1136/bmj.n71.

of the 1960s and 1970s debuted ‘reproductive dramas’ that centered the pregnancy storyline on a main female character, a departure from the often male-centric television abortion plotlines of the same era [19].

Given the recent increase in abortion plotlines [20], it is unsurprising that the majority of research focuses on contemporary portrayals of abortion onscreen. Yet, as this scholarship demonstrates, an increase in depictions is not correlated with increased accuracy. Recent research finds that some of these depictions are both progressive and regressive, depicting characters as obtaining abortions while also reinscribing conservative ideas about gender, power, and motherhood [21–23]. Characters who obtain abortions tend to be whiter, wealthier, and nonparenting compared to real abortion patients, and face fewer legal barriers to abortion access than today’s abortion patients [24]. When the abortion procedure itself is portrayed, it is most

commonly an in-clinic abortion [25], another contrast with a reality in which medication abortion makes up the majority of all U.S. abortions [26]. Indeed, an in-depth examination of plotlines that include medication abortion found that while these plotlines did depict common adverse effects, such as cramping and nausea, they also depicted characters taking the pills incorrectly [27]. Though it may seem that there is more dramatic television potential in in-clinic abortion scenes, the diversity of the medication abortion experience is vastly underrepresented. Plotlines might investigate, for example, the variety of methods a patient might use to obtain abortion pills, including accessing them via telehealth, driving across state lines, or procuring them from a community-based network of informal providers. Given the waiting time between taking mifepristone and misoprostol, plotlines could explore what patients do with this time, and who they call on for support and encouragement. Indeed, several

Table 1. Sample of studies on abortion in entertainment media

Publication year	Title	Authors	Media studied	Shows or films studied
2023	“Domestic feminism”: The politics of reproduction and motherhood in Hulu’s <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i>	Amy Boyle	Television	<i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i>
2021	Who’s late? <i>Degrassi</i> , abortion, history	Michele Byers	Television	<i>Degrassi</i> , multiple episodes
2022	Contentious Entertainment: The role of character and narrative features in shaping audience response to abortion storylines	John J. Brooks, Nathan Walter, Erica Rosenthal, Kate Langrall Folb	Television	<i>13 Reasons Why</i>
2022	‘Fix Her Mistake’: Abortion and parenting narratives in <i>Jane the Virgin</i> , <i>Riverdale</i> , <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> , and <i>The Fosters</i>	Shara Crookston	Television	<i>Jane the Virgin</i> , <i>Riverdale</i> , <i>Pretty Little Liars</i> , <i>The Fosters</i>
2022	‘All this way, all this money, for a five minute procedure’: Barriers, mobilities, and representation on the US abortion road trip	Olivia Engle & Cordelia Freeman	Film	<i>Grandma</i> , <i>Never Rarely Sometimes Always</i>
2022	Feeling better: Representing abortion in ‘feminist’ television	Cordelia Freeman	Television	<i>Sex Education</i> , <i>Shrill</i> , <i>GLOW</i> , <i>Euphoria</i>
2023	The abortion pill and other myths: medication abortion onscreen	Cordelia Freeman	Television	<i>Vida</i> , <i>Standing Up</i> , <i>Scenes from a Marriage</i>
2019	“I’d like an abortion please”: Rethinking unplanned pregnancy narratives in contemporary American cinema	Melissa Hair	Film	<i>Grandma</i> , <i>Obvious Child</i>
2020	‘I could see myself doing something like that’: US women’s engagement with characters who experience abortion, adoption and surrogacy on <i>Little Fires Everywhere</i>	Stephanie Herold & Gretchen Sisson	Television	<i>Little Fires Everywhere</i>
2020	Abortion on American television: An update on recent portrayals, 2015 - 2019	Stephanie Herold & Gretchen Sisson	Television	85 television plotlines
2020	Hangers, Potions, & Pills: Abortion procedures on American television, 2008 - 2018	Stephanie Herold & Gretchen Sisson	Television	96 television plotlines
2024	Exposure to lived representations of abortion in popular television program plotlines on abortion-related knowledge, attitudes, and support: An exploratory study	Stephanie Herold, Andrea Becker, Rosalyn Schroeder, Gretchen Sisson	Television	<i>Better Things</i> , <i>Station 19</i> , <i>A Million Little Things</i>
2023	“You can’t tell this story without abortion”: Television creators on narrative intention and development of abortion stories on their shows	Stephanie Herold & Gretchen Sisson	Television	N/A
2020	“I can’t believe your mixed ass wasn’t on the pill”: race and abortion on American scripted television, 2008-2019	Stephanie Herold, Gretchen Sisson, Renee Bracey Sherman	Television	143 television plotlines

Table 1 (Continued)

Publication year	Title	Authors	Media studied	Shows or films studied
2024	Abortion pills on TV: An exploratory study of the associations between abortion pill use, viewership and beliefs regarding in-clinic and self-managed medication abortion	Stephanie Herold, Natalie Morris, Rosalyn Schroeder, Shelly Kaller, Antonia Biggs	Television	Chicago Med, Orange is the New Black, Grey's Anatomy, Vida, Law & Order: SVU, A Million Little Things, Handmaid's Tale
2021	"Keeping women in the dark": Science fiction, fictional science, and the legacy of maternal misrepresentations	Sara Hosey	Television	V: The Final Battle, The Silent Scream
2022	Latina/x abortion narratives in popular culture	Melissa Huerta	Television	Jane the Virgin, Vida, East Los High
2023	Reflecting up on the changing of times: Reproductive rights in Grey's Anatomy	Virginia Jangrossi	Television	Grey's Anatomy
2020	Turning to relevance: Social issue storytelling	Elana Levine	Television	Another World, All My Children, Days of our Lives
2020	It's a (boy)lorted: Fetal bodies, graphic abortion, and the option to look	Jeannie Ludlow	Television and film	Balack Horseman, 4 months 3 weeks 2
2022	The Defenders' abortion case: Revisiting a television controversy	Caryn Murphy	Television	The Defenders
2023	"Trust me, I'm a doctor": Debating reproductive rights in 1960s television dramas	Caryn Murphy	Television	The Defenders, The Nurses, Ben Casey, Slattery's People
2019	Black feminists in serialized dramas: The gender/sex/sexuality/race politics of Being Mary Jane and Scandal	Koy Siebler	Television	Scandal, Being Mary Jane
2021	Prime-time abortion on Grey's Anatomy: What do US viewers learn from fictional portrayals of abortion on television?	Gretchen Sisson, Nathan Waller, Stephanie Herold, John J. Books	Television	Grey's Anatomy
2022	Reproductive justice: The final (feminist) frontier	Zoe Tongue	Television and film	Gattaca, Alien, V: The Final Battle, Star Trek: The Next Generation, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Prometheus
2022	A not so special episode: Laughing at abortion on television	Corinne Weinstein	Television	Brockmire, Claw, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend, Dear White People, GLOW, Jane the Virgin, Sex Education, Shameless, Shrill, Veep, You're the Worst

movies (such as 2020's *Saint Frances*) and television plotlines (such as 2022's *I Hate Suze Too*, *Station 19*, and *A Million Little Things*) include characters dealing with the physicality of medication abortion, wiping blood into the toilet, for example, and the emotional intimacy of peer and partner support during this at-home process. Although there might not be drama in taking a set of pills onscreen, the circumstances surrounding access, particularly the legal, logistical, and financial barriers a character might need to navigate to access to the pills, could provide a unique opportunity for relationship building, narrative tension, and dramatic, comedic, or romantic scenes. Given the plethora of misinformation and confusion about medication abortion among the US public [28], this attention to detail matters.

Other scholarship critiques contemporary portrayals for emphasizing abortion as an individual issue without incorporating the institutional, political, and cultural components of abortion access. An analysis of four 'feminist' abortion portrayals, for example, found that these plotlines depicted abortion decision-making and the procedure itself in an empathetic manner, yet lacked any critique in the power structures that make accessing an abortion in the United States so unnecessarily onerous [29]. In comparing depictions of white characters seeking abortions to characters of color seeking abortions, another study found that issues of race and racism are largely invisible, obfuscating structural barriers to abortion access [30^{***}].

Despite these critiques, two studies praised the welcome complexity of today's abortion plotlines, particularly related to connecting abortion to other emotionally salient topics. Though they are not common, the few abortion plotlines that revolve around Latine characters include meaningful narratives about family relationships, religion, and Latinidad [31]. Recent comedies have been successful in showcasing the absurdity of abortion restrictions, and feature supportive partners or friends providing comfort and care to the abortion seeker, who is often portrayed as sure of her decision, strong, and independent, inverting gender normative caretaking roles [32^{*,}33].

Of the limited scholarship on the depiction of abortion in film or across both film and television, the existing studies echo the above themes. Recent abortion-related films have subverted traditional genres, such as the romantic comedy and road trip film, depicting characters overcoming obstacles in pursuit of an abortion, yet the majority of these representations are of white, middle class or wealthy women [34,35^{***}]. Two analyses of portrayals of abortion in science fiction films and television plotlines find that the use of futuristic reproductive technologies or alien pregnancies often reinforces

conservative ideas about patriarchy and the inevitability of motherhood [36,37].

Impact analysis

The limited studies on the impact of exposure to abortion plotlines on audiences generally mirror patterns in the evaluation of the impact of other health issues in that there are significant but small increases in knowledge, but no significant changes in attitudes [38]. Exposure to medically accurate plotlines about medication abortion increased awareness about medication abortion safety compared to nonexposure [39]. Two other studies found that exposure to abortion plotlines resulted in increased knowledge about abortion compared to nonexposure, but did not affect abortion attitudes [40^{***},41].

The context and content of abortion plotlines is also related to audience impact. Two studies examining narrative context find that an abortion-seeking character's positive attributes did not lead the audiences to have more positive attitudes towards abortion [42], and that an abortion-seeking character depicted with little nuance led to a very critical reception by focus group participants [43]. More research is needed to understand how audiences interpret depictions of abortion across a wide variety of television plotlines, films, and different types of characters.

Only one study examined abortion depictions from the supply side, interviewing a sample of 46 entertainment content creators about their motivations in writing these plotlines, finding that showrunners did not necessarily aim to reflect the reality of abortion access, but instead sought to normalize abortion by presenting what they believed to be compassionate, stigma-free representations [44^{***}]. Because these interviews occurred pre-*Dobbs*, it is unclear if and how content creator motivations and experiences may have changed since then.

DISCUSSION

Most of the recent research studying abortion on television and film uses qualitative content analysis to examine themes and trends across abortion depictions, with a focus on analyzing if and how these depictions differ from the political, clinical, and cultural reality of abortion provision and experience in the United States. Much of this research finds that television misrepresents who obtains abortions, the type of abortions they obtain, and the process of obtaining an abortion, while simultaneously praising the emotional tenor of these plotlines as grounded in empathy and support for abortion seekers. Given that the ultimate goal of

the networks producing entertainment television is to make money, not to educate viewers on the particulars of abortion access, these inaccuracies are, perhaps, not surprising. Although one study [44¹¹] investigated how writers, producers, and showrunners make decisions about when and how to include abortion in their storylines, more research is needed to understand who they imagine their intended audience to be, what impact they hope their plotlines have on these audiences, and how that relates to the type of abortion plotline they create. Indeed, scholars critique contemporary plotlines as ultimately conservative interventions in the American imagination in which abortion is an individual choice, easily obtained, and unmarred by the structural inequities – namely, racism, sexism, and classism – that are the unfortunate hallmarks of the journey to obtain an abortion in the US healthcare system. Studies evaluating the impact of exposure to these plotlines on audiences, while limited in scope, suggest that there is a significant association between viewership and increased abortion knowledge, with more research needed to evaluate what, if any, relationship exists between exposure and abortion attitudes, beliefs, and action-taking.

Given the growing landscape of television and film depictions of abortion, there remain many opportunities for future research in this area. Television and film historians might examine early 20th century silent films about abortion to understand if and how they established many of the tropes that persist in films related to abortion today. Film scholars might investigate how and why films with abortion plotlines changed between the 1970s and today as the antiabortion movement became more politically and culturally active and, arguably, successful in restricting abortion. Though some past literature examines the impact of films with abortion plotlines on audience attitudes [45,46], more contemporary research might investigate if and how today's abortion dramas (i.e., *Happening*, *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*, *Call Jane*) and comedies (i.e., *Unpregnant*, *Saint Frances*, *Cherry*) reflect or shape viewer attitudes and beliefs about abortion, in addition to inspiring (or discouraging) action-taking related to abortion activism.

Relatedly, additional rigorous research is needed to untangle what types of content might significantly influence viewer knowledge, attitudes, and mobilization – comedic portrayals vs. dramas, main characters seeking abortions vs. one-off characters, portrayals that do or do not depict barriers to access. Experimental studies might clarify which of these elements, or others, are associated with significant knowledge, attitudes, or belief shifts among viewers. This research might test if and how content

resonates similarly or differently with audiences by race, class, gender, religion, and political affiliation of both audiences and fictional characters. Similarly, communications studies research might uncover the mechanisms of influence (i.e., transportation, identification, parasocial contact) that lead to possible changes in audiences in order to better inform future entertainment education interventions and content creators eager to develop new avenues for abortion storytelling onscreen. Finally, more research might further investigate the experience of entertainment content creators in developing abortion plotlines, especially post-*Dobbs*.

Though much of the current literature on abortion onscreen is qualitative content analysis, there are still gaps that may benefit from future examination using this methodology. Only one paper, published outside the timeframe of this review, examines abortion depictions by genre [47], and contemporary researchers might take up the call for more thorough investigations of abortion depictions through this lens, particularly of abortion in horror, science fiction, and comedy. Analyzing if and how depictions of abortion change to reflect the ongoing post-*Dobbs* crisis in care may provide important context for how audiences interpret these portrayals.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the literature in this review broadly suggests that onscreen misrepresentations of who obtains abortions, the lack of challenges they face in accessing abortion care, and an absent analysis of abortion as it relates to broader societal inequities, shape a largely inaccurate portrayal of abortion in US entertainment media. Given the influence wielded by television and film on the US cultural imagination, understanding what types of media do or do not influence audience abortion-related knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, policy beliefs, actions, and voting habits is of crucial importance.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Jill Barr-Walker for her guidance on an academic database search strategy, and Dr. Lauren Herold and Dr. Tracy Weitz for their input on relevant studies and frames of analysis to include in this manuscript.

Financial support and sponsorship

The research was supported by an Anonymous foundation.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

Papers of particular interest, published within the annual period of review, have been highlighted as:

- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

1. Coyne SM, Ward LM, Kroff SL, *et al.* Contributions of mainstream sexual media exposure to sexual attitudes, perceived peer norms, and sexual behavior: a meta-analysis. *J Adolesc Health* 2019; 64:430–436.
 2. Wang H, Singhal A. East los high: transmedia edutainment to promote the sexual and reproductive health of young Latina/o Americans. *Am J Public Health* 2016; 106:1002–1010.
 3. Saucier CJ, Suresh S, Brooks JJ, *et al.* The effect of an entertainment-education intervention on reproductive health of young women of color. *Health Commun* 2022; 37:1093–1103.
 4. Montoya JA, Plant A, Neffa-Creech D, *et al.* Overcome the fear (Vencer el Miedo): using entertainment education to impact adolescent sexual and reproductive health and parent-child communication in Mexico. *BMC Public Health* 2022; 22:2366.
 5. Suresh S, Demetriades SZ, Walter N, *et al.* From watching to calling: linking variations in an entertainment-education storyline with calls to a health hotline. *Health Commun* 2023; 0:1–12.
 6. Love GD, Mouttapa M, Tanjaisiri SP. Everybody's talking: using entertainment-education video to reduce barriers to discussion of cervical cancer screening among Thai women. *Health Educ Res* 2009; 24:829–838.
 7. Moyer-Gusé E, Mahood C, Brookes S. Entertainment-education in the context of humor: effects on safer sex intentions and risk perceptions. *Health Commun* 2011; 26:765–774.
 8. Vitek K, Ward LM. Risky, dramatic, and unrealistic: reality television portrayals of pregnancy and childbirth and their effects on women's fear and self-efficacy. *Health Commun* 2019; 34:1289–1295.
 9. Forouzan K, Guarneri I. In the first full year since roe fell, a tumultuous year for abortion and other reproductive healthcare. 2023. Available at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/2023/12/state-policy-trends-2023-first-full-year-roe-fell-tumultuous-year-abortion-and-other> [Accessed 19 April 2024].
 10. Jozkowski KN, Bueno X, Turner RC, *et al.* People's knowledge of and attitudes toward abortion laws before and after the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision. *Sex Reprod Health Matters* 2023; 31:2233794.
 11. Sparks G, Schumacher S, Presiado M, *et al.* KFF health tracking poll: early 2023 update on public awareness on abortion and emergency contraception. KFF. 2023. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/poll-finding/kff-health-tracking-poll-early-2023/> [Accessed 16 April 2024].
 12. Grant MJ, Booth A. A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Inf Libr J* 2009; 26:91–108.
 13. Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, *et al.* Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Med* 2009; 6:e1000097.
 14. Arksey H, O'Malley L. Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *Int J Soc Res Methodol* 2005; 8:19–32.
 15. Byers M. Who's late?: Degrassi, abortion, history. In: *Representing abortion*. Routledge; 2020.
 16. Jangrossi V. Reflecting upon the changing of times: reproductive rights in Grey's anatomy. *Fem Media Stud* 2023; 23:3064–3079.
 17. Murphy C. The defenders' abortion case: revisiting a television controversy. ■ *J Pop Film Telev* 2022; 50:168–177.
- This paper analyzes the content of one of the first abortion legal procedurals on U.S. television, and also the experiences of the content creators, reactions from network executives, and responses from audiences.
18. Murphy C. 'Trust me, I'm a Doctor' debating reproductive rights in 1960s television dramas. In: *Abortion in popular culture: a call to action*. Rowman & Littlefield; 2023; pp. 27–45.
 19. Levine E. Turning to relevance: social issue storytelling. In: *Her stories: daytime soap opera and US television history*. Duke University Press; 2020; pp. 106–152.
- This chapter provides crucial historical context for how and why early U.S. soap operas incorporated 'reproductive dramas' into their storytelling.
20. Sisson G, Herold S, Kimport K, *et al.* Abortion Onscreen database. 2024. Available at: <https://www.ansirh.org/research/abortion-onscreen-database> [Accessed 19 November 2020].
 21. Boyle A. 'Domestic feminism': the politics of reproduction and motherhood in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Telev New Media* 2024; 25:133–149.
 22. Crookston S. 'Fix Her Mistake': abortion and parenting narratives in *Jane the Virgin*, *Riverdale*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *The Fosters*. *Fem Encount J Crit Stud Cult Polit* 2017; 6:1–14.
 23. Siebler K. Black feminists in serialized dramas: the gender/sex/sexuality/race politics of being Mary Jane and Scandal. *J Pop Film Telev* 2019; 47:152–162.
 24. Herold S, Sisson G. Abortion on American television: an update on recent ■ portrayals, 2015–2019. *Contraception* 2020; 102:421–423.
- This paper provides insights into how characters who have abortions on television compare to real life abortion patients, tracking discrepancies between these two categories and also comparing more contemporary abortion representations to representations of years past. More contemporary representations portray abortion

as safer compared to earlier depictions, yet they still show abortion patients as white, wealthy, and not parenting.

25. Herold S, Sisson G. Hangers, potions, and pills: abortion procedures on American television, 2008 to 2018. *Womens Health Issues* 2019; 29:499–505.
26. Medication abortions accounted for 63% of all US abortions in 2023, an increase from 53% in 2020. Guttmacher Institute, 2024. Available at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2024/medication-abortions-accounted-63-all-us-abortions-2023-increase-53-2020> [Accessed 18 April 2024].
27. Freeman C. The abortion pill and other myths. In: Boudreau B, Maloy K, editors. *Abortion in popular culture: a call to action*. Rowman & Littlefield; 2023. pp. 177–199.
28. Kaller S, Upadhyay UD, Ralph LJ, *et al.* Awareness of medication abortion among a nationally representative U.S. sample, 2021–2022. *Contraception* 2023; 126:110078.
29. Freeman C. Feeling better: representing abortion in 'feminist' television. *Cult Health Sex* 2021; 24:597–611.
30. Herold S, Sisson G, Bracey Sherman R. I can't believe your mixed ass wasn't ■ on the pill!': race and abortion on American scripted television, 2008–2019. *Fem Media Stud* 2020; 22:932–948.

This is the only paper that uses race and power as a prism through which to examine onscreen abortion storytelling, finding that even on television shows that center characters of color, the plotlines rarely engage with issues of race and racism.

31. Huerta M. Latina/x abortion narratives in popular culture. *Fem Stud* 2022; 48:839–843.
 32. Weinstein C. A not so special episode: laughing at abortion on television. *Crit Stud Media Commun* 2022; 39:427–440.
- This paper analyzes 11 recent abortion comedies on U.S. television and found that comedy was often deployed to draw attention to the absurdity of abortion restrictions and as a way to leverage support and empathy for abortion seekers.
33. Ludlow J. It's a boy! borted: fetal bodies, graphic abortion, and the option to look. In: *Representing abortion*. Routledge; 2020.
 34. Hair M. 'I'd like an abortion please': rethinking unplanned pregnancy narratives in contemporary American cinema. *Fem Media Stud* 2019; 19:380–395.
 35. Engle O, Freeman C. 'All this way, all this money, for a five-minute procedure': ■ barriers, mobilities, and representation on the US abortion road trip. *Mobilities* 2023; 18:297–311.

This paper analyzes two novels and two films with abortion plotlines, using the concept of 'reproductive mobilities' to analyze recent depictions of abortion road trips. They argue that these depictions focus on structural inequities in the abortion seeking experience and might support audiences in placing abortion in a wider context.

36. Tongue Z. Reproductive justice: the final (feminist) frontier. *Law Technol Hum* 2022; 4:95–108.
 37. Hosey S. 'Keeping Women in the Dark': science fiction, fictional science, and the legacy of maternal misrepresentations. *Sci Fict Stud* 2021; 48:462–482.
 38. Hoffman BL, Hoffman R, VonVille HM, *et al.* Characterizing the influence of television health entertainment narratives in lay populations: a scoping review. *Am J Health Promot* 2023; 37:685–697.
 39. Herold S, Morris N, Biggs MA, *et al.* Abortion pills on TV: an exploratory study of the associations between abortion plotline viewership and beliefs regarding in-clinic and self-managed medication abortion. *Contraception* 2024; 134:110416.
 40. Herold S, Becker A, Schroeder R, *et al.* Exposure to lived representations of ■ abortion in popular television program plotlines on abortion-related knowledge, attitudes, and support: an exploratory study. *Sex Roles* 2024; 90:280–293.
- This paper analyzes the impact of exposure to three abortion plotlines on television, finding that exposed audiences were more likely than unexposed audiences to have increased abortion knowledge and state that they were more likely to support a friend seeking an abortion. This study found no significant changes in attitudes between exposed and unexposed audiences, suggesting a need to reconceptualize how plotlines might be impacting audiences.

41. Sisson G, Walter N, Herold S, *et al.* Prime-time abortion on Grey's anatomy: what do US viewers learn from fictional portrayals of abortion on television? *Perspect Sex Reprod Health* 2021; 53:13–22.
42. Brooks JJ, Walter N, Rosenthal EL, *et al.* Contentious entertainment: the role of character and narrative features in shaping audience response to abortion storylines. *J Health Commun* 2022; 27:232–240.
43. Herold S, Sisson G. 'I could see myself doing something like that': US women's engagement with characters who experience abortion, adoption and surrogacy on *Little Fires Everywhere*. *Cult Health Sex* 2023; 0:1–16.
44. Herold S, Sisson G. You can't tell this story without abortion': television ■ creators on narrative intention and development of abortion stories on their shows. *Commun Cult Crit* 2023; 16:190–197.

This is the only study to interview entertainment content creators who developed abortion plotlines, finding both that they are motivated to do so in order to destigmatize abortion or create a 'new' type of abortion depiction, and that some face significant backlash from peers or networks in the process. This insight provides media advocates with new possibilities for engagement with Hollywood creatives.

45. Sisson G, Kimport K. After After Tiller: the impact of a documentary film on understandings of third-trimester abortion. *Cult Health Sex* 2016; 18:695–709.
46. Mulligan K, Habel P. An experimental test of the effects of fictional framing on attitudes. *Soc Sci Q* 2011; 92:79–99.
47. Sisson G. From humor to horror: genre and narrative purpose in abortion stories on American television. *Fem Media Stud* 2019; 19:239–256.