

HEALING GUIDE

PEACE
IS LOUD



ON THE DIVIDE

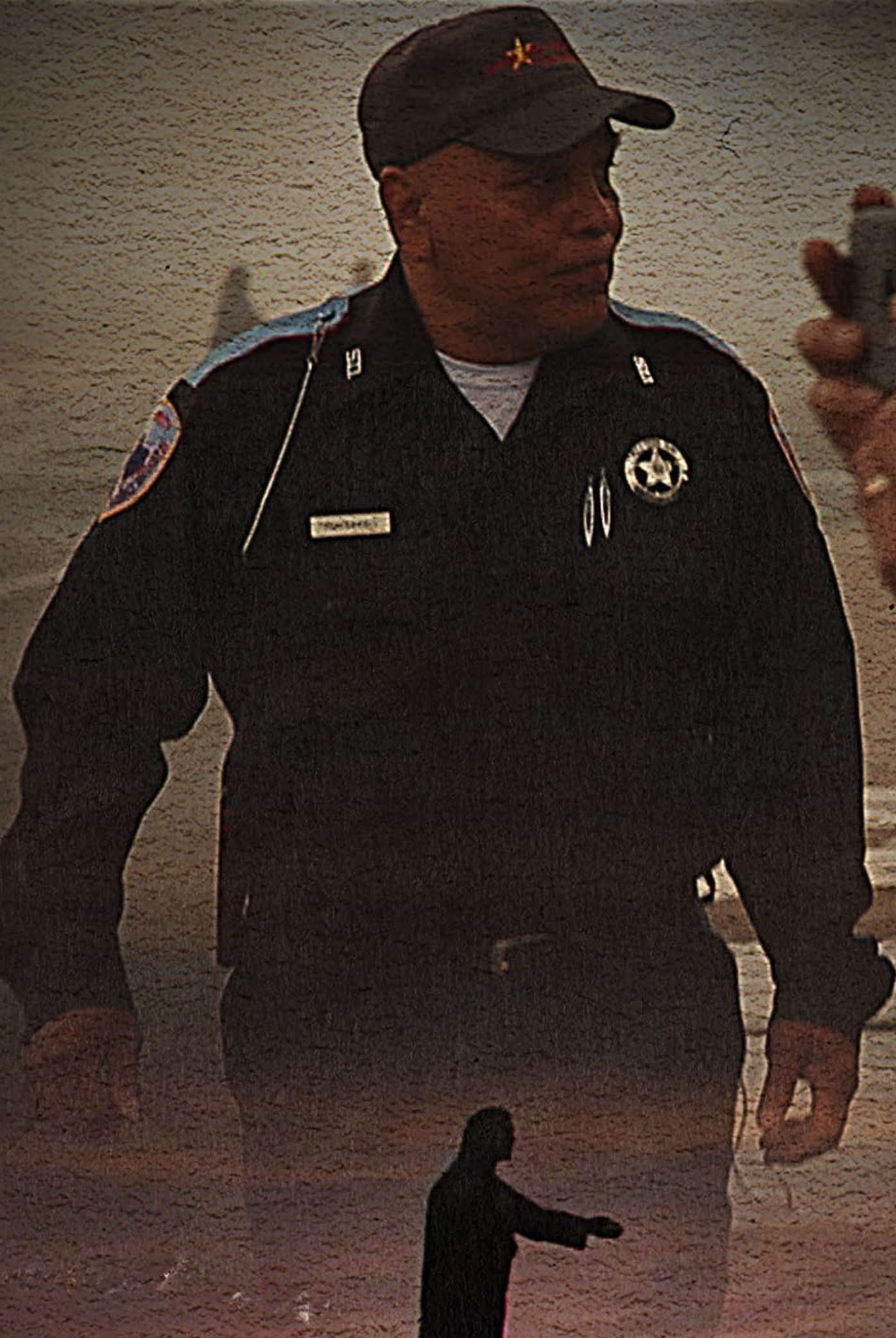


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About the Film

On The Divide follows the story of three Latinx people living in McAllen, Texas who, despite their views, are connected by the most unexpected of places: the last abortion clinic on the U.S./Mexico border. As threats to the clinic and their personal safety mount, our three characters are forced to make decisions they never could have imagined.

This guide was created to share more about the reproductive justice movement, the barriers to safe abortion care, and how to bring stronger healing and community-building to the communities most affected by abortion restrictions. In this guide you will find information and frameworks for discussion, as well as ideas for how to use the film as a tool for your work.

[Learn more about the impact campaign for *On The Divide*.](#)

FILM CREDITS

Maya Cueva, Director
Leah Galant, Director

GUIDE CREDITS

This guide was developed by [Peace is Loud](#) as part of the impact campaign for *On The Divide*. Co-authoring organizations include [Catholics for Choice](#) and the [National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice](#).

**CATHOLICS
FOR
CHOICE**



**National
Latina Institute
for Reproductive
Justice**

Letter from the Filmmakers, Directors Maya Cueva and Leah Galant



In 2014, when we were both attending college, we discovered that parts of the country such as Texas and states in the South had only a handful of abortion clinics due to restrictive laws, and therefore abortion doctors had to physically fly to these clinics in order to provide services. This led us to creating our first short film together called *The Provider* about a traveling abortion doctor in Texas. During one of our trips down to Texas, we attended a rally for reproductive justice in McAllen in the Rio Grande Valley, where we met incredible organizers that loved their community deeply

and were angered by the state's lack of abortion access, healthcare resources, and the misrepresentation of the community in the mainstream media. It was after meeting the founders of South Texans for Reproductive Justice, Denni and Melissa Arjona, and realizing that Whole Woman's Health was the only abortion clinic within a 250 mile radius, that we knew we wanted to create a film which challenged mainstream reductive narratives. Seven years later, *On The Divide*, which follows Rey, Denisse, and Mercedes, who are all connected to the abortion clinic in McAllen in unexpected ways – was created.

McAllen is a cultural center - deeply rooted in tradition and family with gorgeous Texas landscapes and churches on almost every street corner. The pressure from many anti-abortion churches in the area and from the local conservative government leaves very little room for people to be pro-abortion or to have nuanced views on abortion. Our film centers those inside the battle for reproductive rights who are questioning deeply held beliefs as threats to their personal and professional safety increases. The people and community featured in *On The Divide* are most impacted by anti-abortion legislation, and if Roe vs. Wade is overturned, which disproportionately affects low-income communities of color, they would pay the highest price for it.



While our film shows the importance of reproductive justice, we wanted to make sure that the protagonists' stories led the film as opposed to talking heads or politicians. We wanted to create a film that had the ability to move outside of echo chambers and to center the experience of those most affected as experts of the issue. The film shows that there is space within the pro-abortion community to be both a person of faith and pro-abortion, and it's valid to decide to have an abortion or to not as long as the choice always legally exists. Ultimately, it comes down to bodily autonomy and how choice is necessary for survival. The film asks, what does choice really mean when you are not afforded options?

We are so thrilled to be partnering with Peace is Loud, South Texans for Reproductive Justice, The Latina Institute, Catholics for Choice, La Frontera Fund, among others that continue to strive for bodily autonomy, dignity, and justice, and to end the stigma on abortion. We hope that this Healing Guide can serve as a teaching tool and an important discussion guide as you share the film with your friends, family, and community. Thank you!



Letter from South Texans for Reproductive Justice

We met Maya and Leah early in the days of the Texas omnibus law that closed down so many abortion clinics in Texas overnight. At the time, the Rio Grande Valley still had 2 abortion clinics, and they were there to film a vigil outside the McAllen clinic on the day that it was first forced to temporarily shutter.

In the months that followed, countless journalists and film crews would arrive and get footage of the drama outside the clinic and then disappear without any follow-up. We never knew what became of many of those interviews, or we would be surprised at the publication and often be dismayed by how the Rio Grande Valley was presented.

Maya and Leah kept coming back. They were committed to transparency and building trust, and that relationship grew over the course of 7 years.

Watching the film is bittersweet for us. It's frustrating to see all of the unnecessary hoops that people are forced to go through to get the care they need. But we are so proud of all that we have accomplished in the face of so much opposition. HB2 sparked a fire and inspired countless people to learn more and get active. The fight continues, but we aren't going anywhere.

Thank you!

Key Participants



DENISSE is a Latina young mother of four and clinic escort volunteer at Whole Woman's Health Clinic of McAllen, who helps guide patients into the clinic, providing much-needed comfort and assistance.



REY is a Latino 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 patients who arrive at the abortion clinic.



MERCEDES is a Latina woman in her thirties who used to be involved in gangs, was a part of the anti-choice Church movement, and then transforms her views and learns why choice is necessary for survival.

Key Issues

- » Reproductive Justice
- » Abortion Rights and Access
- » Body Autonomy
- » Faith and Identity
- » Healthcare
- » Personal as Political
- » Grassroots Organizing
- » Human Rights



Using this Guide

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 to 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:

- » **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 other person 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:

- » Invite mental health volunteers so that they can support anyone experiencing distress
- » Review trigger warnings before the event begins

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, such as:

- » **Use "I" statements** - draw from your own experiences and speak on behalf of yourself rather than using the form of "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 to not share private information outside of this space.
- » **Honor your needs** - whether it 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 why we are here: to care for ourselves and our communities. Allow caring values to guide our participation in the conversation.
- » **Remind others this is a safe space but also a challenging one.** It is important to note that no form of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, white fragility, or other forms of oppression will be tolerated in this space.

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.

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 reproductive justice and abortion access.

Introduction: End Abortion Stigma Now

A CALL TO ACTION BY LUCY CEBALLOS FELIX,
NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Stigma is like a red stain, a seal of guilt and shame. It's a tool to dehumanize people who we see as different that allows us to distance ourselves from something we fear. *I would never do that! I'm not that kind of person!* Unfortunately, stigma is not just a societal agent, it also lives within us, an internal voice that burns a brand of self-loathing in our hearts.

Few things carry as much stigma as abortion. Abortion stigma tells us only a vile person would have an abortion, a woman who'll sleep with anyone, a sex worker. It tells us that abortion doesn't happen in good families, it doesn't happen in religious families, it only happens to single women, to young, irresponsible women who don't want kids, to Latinas/xs or Black or Indigenous people, to people with no education or low incomes. According to this stigma, having an abortion makes you a bad daughter, a bad mother, a bad person.

Abortion stigma is fueled by the lack of [comprehensive sexual education](#) and by misinformation about reproductive health. We have all heard these myths – abortion gives you cancer; an abortion will perforate your uterus; you won't be able to have children if you have an abortion, among many others. These myths are part of the misinformation and disinformation spread to strip us of control over our own bodies and destinies. They trample on our dignity, our humanity, and our rights.

Abortion stigma feeds on the stigma around our bodies, our sexuality, and women's pleasure. It is nourished by *machismo* and the patriarchy, but it is also nourished by the internalized *machismo* in each of us. We all grew up in this patriarchal society, and although we've seen some progress, many of these beliefs live on unchallenged in our psyches.

Many people believe a woman's body is a machine, made exclusively to birth children. *That's the only thing a woman is good for!* They think that someone who has an abortion is acting against the will of God and will be judged as a sinner by their family, community, colleagues, and children. *No one will love you!*

Beyond all the barriers to healthcare that Latinas/xs face – the lack of documentation and fair wages, the lack of access to health insurance, public programs, public services, childcare, transportation, and paid days off – we must also deal with society's disapproval and with an internal voice that shames us thanks to all the stigma around abortion care.

Let's end abortion stigma now! Nobody wins in a climate where people live in a constant state of shame and stigma. Each person has the right to decide if and when they want to have children, on their own terms. Each person controls their own life and reproductive health. Latinas/xs – like all people – deserve to live with dignity and justice.

To change society, we must start with ourselves, combat that inner voice that judges us and makes us judge others. Only then can we truly understand that each person deserves respect and support.

A person must first see their own worth, know that they have rights, to feel that they can make their own decisions in planning their families. During my 15 years working at the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice (Latina Institute) in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, grassroots organizers like myself have created a climate of trust in the community. You must make people feel their own worth and combat all the negative beliefs about our bodies, our sexualities, and our gender roles, and only then can you combat the stigma around abortion and reproductive health.

Despite the myths about who has abortions, the reality is most people who seek to end a pregnancy already have children, have partners, and have families who support them. They may be part of the disability community or the LGBTQ+ community. Lesbian, bisexual, and nonbinary people, as well as transgender men, may also need abortion services. Access to abortion is essential for all our communities to live with dignity.

Anyone might need an abortion, including those closest to you – your colleagues, neighbors, sisters, aunts, or maybe even you. And no one owes us an explanation, it is not ours to question. No one should interfere with such an intimate decision.

We must end abortion stigma now!

As part of a larger movement for reproductive justice, we fight to live in a world where everyone has the right to decide if and when they want to have children, and so that they can keep a pregnancy or end it on their own terms, without shame or stigma, in a healthy environment with the support of their community.

We know that education busts stigma because knowledge is power and power fuels commitment. When a person realizes their own power, they feel compelled to take action, organize, and mobilize their community to ensure their rights are respected.

When we educate Latina/x communities about the abortion restrictions in their states, they're shocked and want to mobilize. They understand these barriers harm their loved ones.

The situation is worse than ever for Texans. Although abortion has been legal nationwide for almost 50 years, politicians in my state keep undertaking cynical maneuvers to violate our rights. In September 2021, the most extreme abortion ban in the country went into effect in Texas. SB 8 cuts off access to abortion care at 6 weeks, before many people even realize they're pregnant.

¡Pero aquí se respira lucha! We won't stop fighting to continue raising the voices of our communities so that they can take action, talk to their legislators, and defend their rights as human beings who play a vital role in this country.

At Latina Institute, we will continue to build our base of abortion access advocates state by state, community by community. We know that despite certain narratives that paint our community as conservative, many understand and sympathize with Latinas/xs around consequential decisions about reproductive health services.

Recent polling shows that 7 in 10 Latina/x voters see social and personal benefits when women have control over their reproductive decisions. And nearly 8 in 10 Latinas/xs agree that people should be able to have an abortion without fear of being investigated or criminalized.

Everyone should be able to get abortion care in the way that makes the most sense to them. Each person is the best agent for their own care and the care of their family. We fight for a world in which we all have the right to choose what we do with our bodies and get the safe abortion care we deem necessary.

We fight for our communities because we know that reproductive healthcare—including abortion and treatment from before pregnancy, through delivery and postpartum services—is crucial for communities to thrive and for people to live with dignity and justice. And so it shall be!

Reproductive Justice as a Catholic Value

A LETTER FROM CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

You may have heard the claim that "you can't be Catholic and pro-choice." Here's the truth: most Catholics in the United States believe, in good conscience, that abortion should be legal and accessible to all who seek care. One in four people who have abortions in the U.S. identify as Catholic and, for them, equitable and compassionate care is a blessing. Ultimately, the majority of Catholics are pro-choice because of their faith, not in spite of it.

Church teachings on moral decision-making and abortion are complex. In Catholic theology, there is room to question and disagree with these teachings and to support policies that favor access to the full range of reproductive health options, including contraception and abortion. Furthermore, someone's stance on a particular social issue does not determine whether they are Catholic.

Catholic tradition draws upon various sources in its search for theological truth, including teachings from Scripture, insights of theologians, facts presented from science and other academic disciplines, and the wisdom of human experience, including the experience of the laity. Neither St. Augustine nor St. Thomas Aquinas, two of the most important Catholic theologians, considered the fetus in the early stages of pregnancy to be a person, or "ensouled," as they expressed it. In its last statement on abortion, the 1974 Declaration on Procured Abortion, the Vatican acknowledged that it does not know when the fetus becomes a person, saying, "There is not a unanimous tradition on this point and authors are as yet in disagreement." Claiming that life begins at conception is scientifically inaccurate.

In reality, there is nothing in the Bible directly addressing abortion. Regardless, Catholics value the separation of church and state and religious pluralism. Our nation's founding principle of freedom *of* and *from* religion is integrally bound to reproductive freedom. Religious liberty includes the right to follow one's own faith or moral code in making critical, personal reproductive health decisions. While we respect the right of every individual to hold their own personal beliefs, our nation's Constitution and our Catholic faith demand that no single religious viewpoint be imposed on all. No country committed to human rights and democracy can legislate when life begins or the morality of abortion.

As Catholics, we know that each and every human person in our society has inherent dignity and must be treated with respect, especially those trying to navigate a systemically unjust world. To truly care for the life and dignity of each and every human person, we must advance the right to determine how we build our families, including if and when to have children. Caring for pregnant people with compassion and understanding is the true way to protect God's creation.

Supporting people during pregnancy and during their abortions is a way to model Jesus' teachings and his own way of life. We know that Jesus would have welcomed those who have had abortions to his table, met them where they were, and listened deeply to their stories; he would have defended them against the judgments the religious extremists of his time and challenged the taboos that oppressed them. Catholic social justice teaches we should support all our neighbors, but that caring for the most vulnerable among us should be our first priority. Ideological battles about abortion and contraception access always inflict disproportionate and tangible harm on those who face systemic oppression due to the identities they hold.

As Catholics, our advocacy must center the most marginalized people in our society, as all people deserve access to the economic, social, and political power and resources they need to make their own conscience-based family planning decisions. As Catholics, we must fight to protect the health, rights, and consciences of *all* our neighbors, not just those who hold certain privileges. We must advocate for workers' rights, protection from domestic violence and abuse, nondiscriminatory immigration policy, a clean and safe environment, adequate education, comprehensive healthcare, and access to childcare.

The reproductive justice framework views people through the totality of their lived experiences rather than along a single dimension in its search for solutions to societal problems. It recognizes the interplay of lived identities in one's ability to access care and nurture their families. In this way, reproductive justice and Catholic social justice teaching have shared strengths. That's why reproductive justice is a Catholic social justice value.



Guiding Questions for *On The Divide*

General Reflections

- » What moment or story in the film impacted you the most? Why?
- » What did you learn from the film?
- » 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 could other reasons be? In what ways did the film intersect with other reproductive justice issues surrounding abortion?
- » How were some people in the film denied access to abortion?
- » How can a lack of access to abortion result in death? What needs to happen to prevent unnecessary deaths among women and birthing people?
- » What were challenging moments for you to watch in the film? What was uplifting? Why?
- » In what ways did you learn that choice is necessary for survival?

Faith and Abortion

- » Has your faith influenced your views on abortion? If so, how?
- » What does the Bible say about abortion? Were you surprised by anything you learned in regards to faith and abortion?
- » Why do you think the dominant media narrative represents only the views of the Catholic hierarchy rather than those of the majority of Catholics who are pro-choice? What can we do to make clear that people of faith support abortion access because of our religious and moral values, not in spite of them?
- » How can one be Catholic and pro-choice at the same time?
- » What does Catholic social justice look like/mean to you? How is it represented in the film?
- » 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?





The Anti-abortion Opposition

- » 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? What is the impact of Yolanda telling Mercedes to "please vote Republican today" and that "democrats want to abort at nine months"?
- » What does the presence of security and clinic escorts tell us about the anti-abortion opposition?
- » How would you respond to protestors outside of the clinic?
- » How do anti-abortion activists organize and push their agenda in the film?
- » What links do you observe between abortion restrictions and systemic racism in the United States?
- » In the beginning of the film Mercedes expresses being pro-life, but by the end of the film, she has shifted towards understanding why choice is necessary. What experiences or factors informed this trajectory?
- » Did Mercedes's transformation of views change your views at all? How are abortion and other access to reproductive healthcare connected?

The Movement

- » How did you see reproductive justice organizers show up in the film?
- » What are some of the tactics that South Texans for Reproductive Justice (STRJ) uses to fight the opposition?
- » 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 do 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 how the overlap of different identities creates interdependent systems of oppression, how do you see this showing up in the experiences portrayed in the film?
- » What does it mean to follow the leadership of those most affected 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 of 2021 Texas passed Senate Bill 8, which bans abortion upon any detection of fetal cardiac activity (approximately at 6 weeks) and allows anyone to sue abortion providers and others who aid a person obtaining abortion care. Support for legislation such as Texas's SB8 is growing in other states. What does the response need to be?
- » What does your community need to do to grow support for abortion?
- » Now that you've watched the film, what do you feel galvanized to do? How can you help the movement for abortion?

Take Action



Learn more about South Texans for Reproductive Justice and their important work in South Texas and [contribute to their efforts.](#)

- Hashtag: [#SoTX4RJ](#)
- IG: [@sotx4rj](#)
- FB: [@sotx4rj](#)
- Tw: [@sotx4rj](#)



Find out more about [National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice's](#) work in the Rio Grande Valley on reproductive health for Latina/x communities.

- IG: [@latinainstitute](#)
- FB: [@NationalLatinaInstituteforReproductiveJustice](#)
- Tw: [@LatinaInstitute](#)



Learn more about [Catholics for Choice's](#) work to help create a world where everyone has equal access to safe and legal abortion.

- IG: [@Catholic4Choice](#)
- FB: [@CatholicsforChoice](#)
- Tw: [@Catholic4Choice](#)



Host a screening of *On The Divide* to grow and foster pro-choice support in your community.

Contact: kaitlyn@peaceisloud.org

Additional Resources



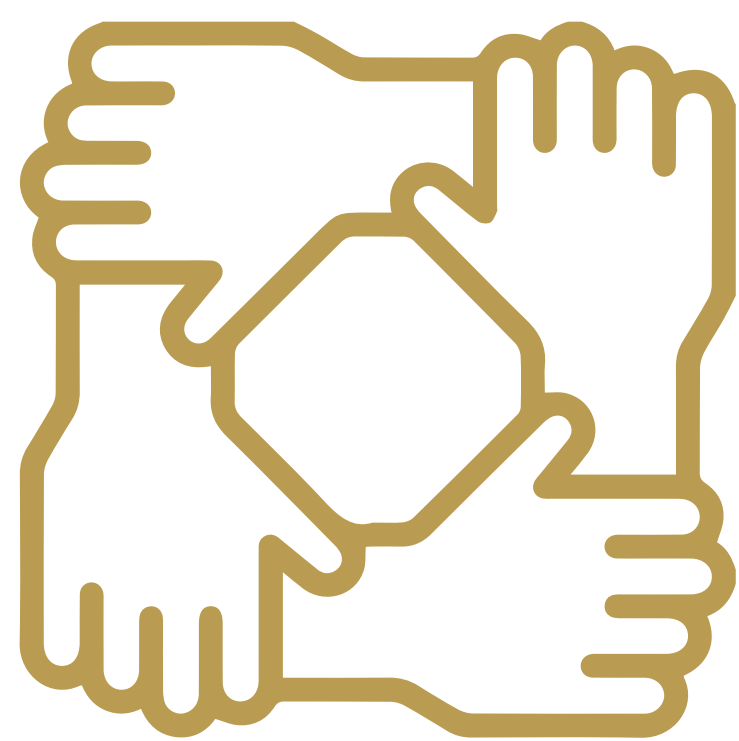
Abortion Funding & Care

- [Abortion Finder](#)
- [National Network of Abortion Funds](#)



Emotional Support

- [Exhale](#)
- [Faith Aloud](#)
- [All-Options Talkline](#)
- [The Human Rights Resilience Project](#)
- [Catholics for Choice's You Are Not Alone](#)



Protect Yourself & Others

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)
- [Crisis Pregnancy Center Map](#) - protect yourself and your communities and learn more local fake clinics and crisis pregnancy centers

—> *Fake clinics, also known as crisis pregnancy centers or pregnancy resource centers, are a tactic used by anti-choice extremists. These centers do not provide comprehensive reproductive health care and prey on those most vulnerable, impacting lower-income communities and/or people of color the hardest. There exist more than 3,000 fake clinics in the United States - more than double the amount of actual abortion clinics offering healthcare to patients.*

Do you live in Texas? Check out these additional resources local to your area!



ON THE
DIVIDE

Images courtesy of *On the Divide, LLC*

