



# OUR BODIES OUR DOCTORS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

The tone and content of post-screening discussions depend on the audience. Some groups are deeply familiar with the material explored in OUR BODIES OUR DOCTORS. Other groups are only vaguely familiar with the world of abortion services or may be hostile or ambivalent. Whatever the backgrounds and attitudes of audiences, it's important to maintain a supportive and open space for dialogue. This does not mean granting hostile voices an open forum. Sometimes it's enough to just move on rather than engage. But the aim of the film is to deepen dialogue and ways of talking about abortion. With the history of silence and shame attached to the topic, people often don't know how to "get it right" or how to talk about the issues.

The film team has found that even those who work in abortion clinics describe how much they learn from the film. One effect of the isolation and stigmatizing of abortion is that cultural representations of abortion are profoundly limited. Providers have little opportunity to see their own work or that of their colleagues. It's important to open space for students, providers and advocates to initially respond through the lens of their own experiences.

Facilitators are encouraged to include a panel or persons for a Q and A, including a facilitator, after the screening. The facilitator may select a few scenes from those identified below—or may include their own selections for discussion.

It's also important to include "calls to action" that the group can take after watching the film. Enlist local organizations to provide materials, including upcoming ballot measures or organizing campaigns. The choice of scenes for discussion may be guided by what is happening politically in the region and the lessons to be drawn from the film.



## THE FILM

### Introduction

The film opens with the voice of Texas attorney Sarah Weddington presenting final arguments in the landmark Roe v Wade Supreme Court case and one of the Justices' questions of her. Weddington represented "Jane Roe," whose real name was Norma McCorvey, the defendant in the case was Dallas County District Attorney Henry Wade who represented the State of Texas.

Sara Weddington:

*We are not here to advocate abortion.*

*We do not ask the court to rule that abortion is good or desirable in any particular situation.*

*We are here to advocate that the decision as to whether or not a particular woman will continue to carry or terminate a pregnancy is a decision that should be made by that individual.*

Supreme Court Justice:

*But any doctor I suppose may refuse her?*

Sara Weddington:

*Certainly your honor.*

*He may refuse any kind of medical procedure whatsoever.*

*Here it's the question of whether or not the state by the statute will force the woman to continue.*

*The woman should be given that freedom, just as the doctor has the freedom to decide what procedures he will carry out and what he will refuse to his patients.*

Why do you think the film opens with this interaction from the Roe v Wade case? What questions does the film raise about this landmark decision?

### Scenes: Ideas for Critical Discussion

1. The Oklahoma City setting opens with Katie Knutter, medical assistant, explaining the irrational and burdensome legal requirements for scheduling patients for a procedure. How does she both comply with the law and resist at the same time? What struck you as important about the first abortion procedure in the film? What seemed important about the relational side of the procedure?
2. Judith Arcana, a member of the JANE underground abortion service before Roe v Wade, tells her story of why the service was important. She emphasizes the importance of women and girls being able to make their own decisions around carrying pregnancies. Our goal was to say, "I could outline the reasons for you but I don't have to." Why is the issue of explaining yourself so important? How does this same issue come up later in the documentary?



3. Dr. Willie Parker describes the Tuskegee syphilis experiments as an example of the history of racist abuse in the health care system. How does he relate that history to the more recent anti-abortion billboard campaign?
4. Dr. Deb Oyer carries out a procedure terminating a seven-week pregnancy. What stood out about this scene? What lesson do you think she was conveying about the products of conception?
5. The Medical Students for Choice meeting included interactions between students and panelists Sarah Prager, Deb Oyer and Lois Backus--Executive Director of MSFC. What would you have wanted to ask the panelists in this setting? Which of the questions and/or responses stood out for you?
6. Dr. Mark Nichols at Oregon Health Sciences Center describes the reliance of big medical centers on the independent women's clinics for training residents and fellows, particularly in OB/GYN and Family Medicine. How does this dynamic of dependency relate to abortion stigma? Are there other examples in the documentary where we see how a community depends on abortion services, and where denial of this dependency operates as a dynamic in abortion stigma?
7. Dr. Jim Newhall tells the story of threats to his life that he and other abortion providers experienced in the 1990s and the civil suit they filed in response. What were some of the historical factors that contributed to the terrorism of that era? How are the threats to providers different now than during that period? How do different providers in the documentary explain their own philosophies and assessments around risk?
8. When a patient suddenly leaves the clinic in Oklahoma during a medical abortion, Dr. Chiavarini explains her concerns for the patient and for herself and other abortion providers. What is at stake in this scene? What are some of the stresses and risks for providers who are geographically isolated?
9. Providers in the Pacific Northwest, with some of the most progressive abortion laws in the country, face restrictions on a different legal front than in the South. What restrictions are posed by hospital mergers between formerly secular and religious hospitals? Why is access to hospital care important even though most abortions are performed in outpatient clinics?
10. Dr. Parker describes an affinity between the abortion rights movement and LGBTQ communities. What is he saying about that affinity or alliance? Why are these kinds of alliances important in social movements?
11. Dr. Parker also describes the influence of organizations such as SisterSong and the role of black feminists in framing abortion in the context of reproductive justice. What are some of the different political arguments for abortion? How is a reproductive justice framework different from other political pro-choice positions? abortion?



12. The abortion procedures in the film move from very early to later term pregnancies. Why do you think this was a choice in the structure of the film? What do providers themselves say about terminations during later gestational periods and what makes them difficult?
13. Both Drs Leo Han and Deb Oyer speak of the black box of public information around abortion procedures—and how providers themselves are reluctant to talk about the realities of abortion care. What do you think they are calling for in the reproductive health movement? What are the political and ethical issues here?

Why are abortions after the first trimester so controversial? What is the film saying about that issue?

## CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing your experience of “Our Bodies Our Doctors,” what stayed in your mind? Was there anything that surprised you or challenged some of the ways you had been thinking about abortion?

Sometimes the filmmakers are asked why they made a film about abortion providers rather than telling the stories of women seeking abortions. What do you think those reasons might be? What do their experiences teach us about abortion politics and about health care more generally?

A song titled “Sisters” plays over the credits. The song was written and performed by Shelly Short and inspired by the stories told in the film. How do you interpret this song? What do the lyrics say to you?

## Call to Action

In concluding your discussion, remember to invite attendees to share events, organizational contacts, and campaigns that are relevant to the group.

## Keep in Touch with Our Bodies Our Doctors

Go to [www.OurBodiesOurDoctors.com](http://www.OurBodiesOurDoctors.com) to sign up for updates and be notified when this documentary will be made available on streaming platforms.

Do a search for “Our Bodies Our Doctors” on your favorite social network or go directly to our accounts via the following links:

Website: <https://ourbodiesourdoctors.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OurBodiesOurDoctors/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ourbodiesourdoctors/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP8Y7F7khrjA19zsr6Sqyhw>