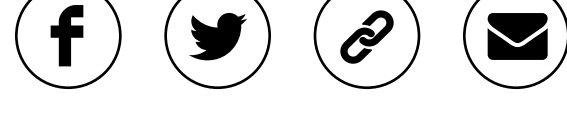


News

# How Women Sharing Their Abortion Stories Are Shattering Stigma Around The Procedure



By Caitlin Cruz  
Jan. 21, 2018



Daniela Diaz never felt shame or guilt about getting an abortion; she knew it wasn't the right time for her to be a parent. But Diaz also never saw women like her — she's a Latina originally from Venezuela — talking about their abortions. "It's something that we don't talk about enough," the Washington, D.C. resident said. "Especially Latina women who are plagued by stigma from their families, to know there are women just like them who are doing okay in life and this is a part of their life experience." Diaz has been trained in the art of telling her abortion story, which is an important part of all activism; stories like hers matter because they break through stigma to reach those who aren't aware of just how many different types of people have abortions.

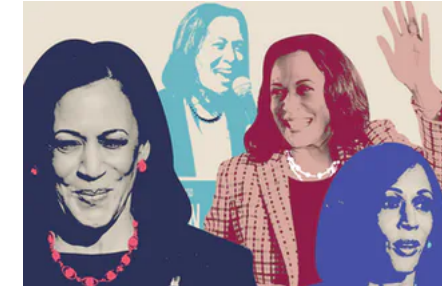
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Diaz talked with Bustle last year as part of an initiative from the National Network of Abortion Funds (NNAF) called We Testify, a network of people who've had abortions that aims to change the conversation around the procedure. A number of storytelling initiatives began during the Obama years, from We Testify at NNAF to #ShoutYourAbortion to Draw the Line from the Center of Reproductive Rights, which featured celebrities like *Girls* actress Jemima Kirke. The purpose of those programs was to normalize abortion and showcase the variety of people who have them.

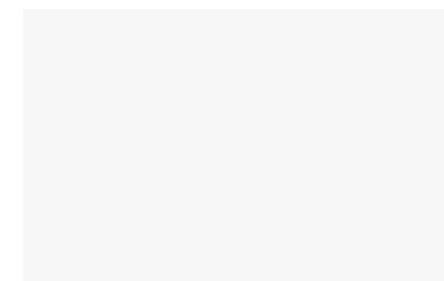
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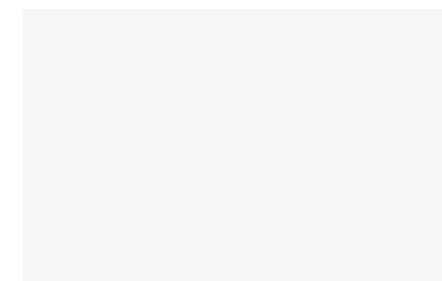
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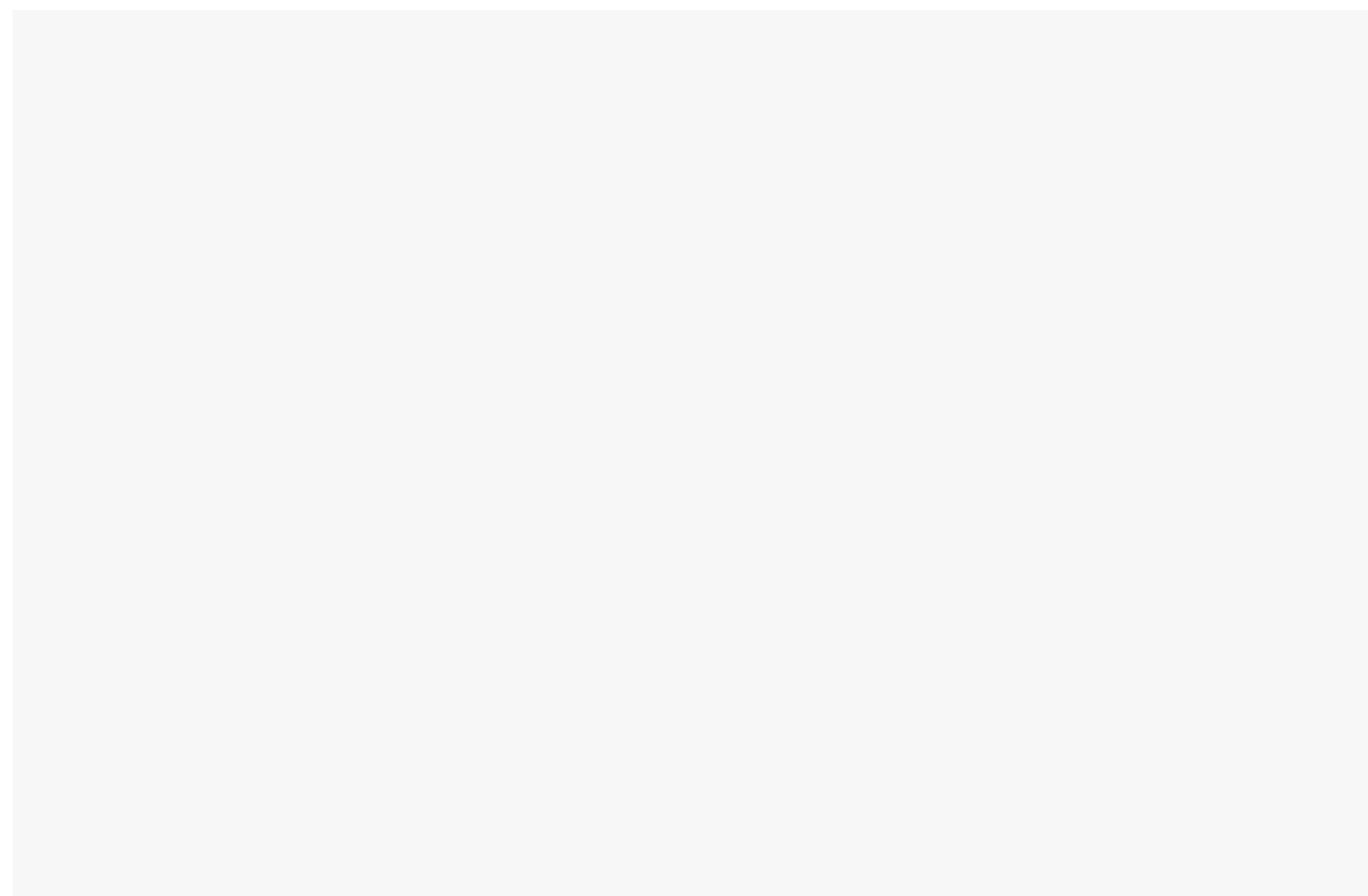
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And while public opinion on legal abortion access is at the most supportive it's been since 1997 — "currently, 57% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases," according to the Pew Research Center — storytelling stands to be an increasingly important tool for reproductive rights activists as the Trump administration moves forward with efforts to roll back women's access to reproductive care.

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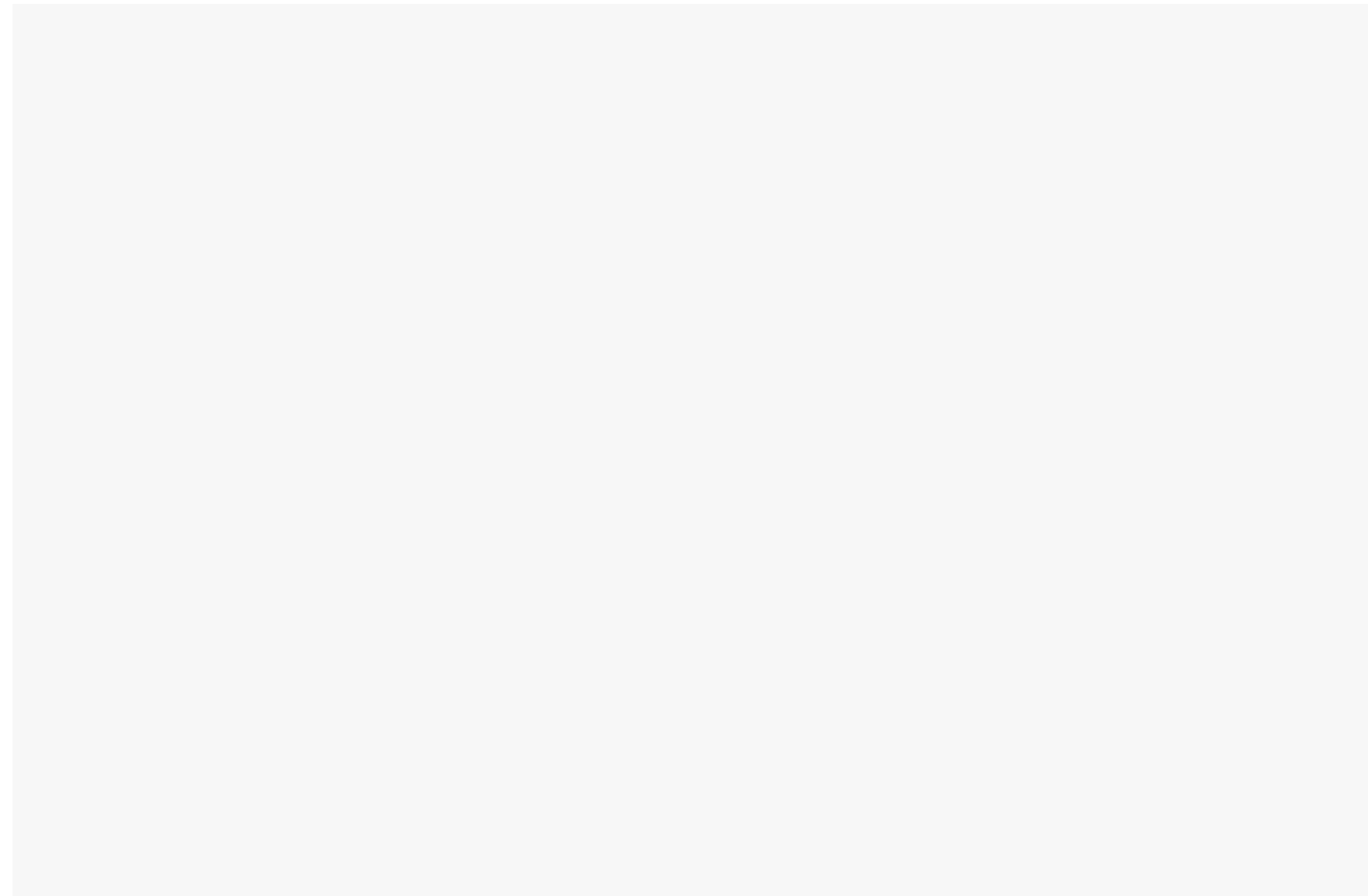
In the past year, the Trump administration restored a Reagan-era ban on providing aid to foreign groups that even so much as mention abortion as an option for family planning. The Hyde Amendment and its international counterpart, the Helms Amendment, remain in place. It's not like abortions just stopped after Trump's inauguration, but the bright future that abortion rights activists had envisioned under what they hoped would be the first female presidency was gone. Monday is the 45th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which dealt with the constitutionality surrounding abortion. Activists have been fighting to maintain the rights afforded by *Roe* ever since, and telling their abortion stories is one way that work continues.



Pew Research Center

Diaz, who works in reproductive health and advocacy, saw that there wasn't much diversity among the public faces of abortion rights. "There wasn't very much diversity and not a lot of conversations about abortion access and immigration," she told Bustle. Because of her experience with non-English speaking patients who were also seeking abortions, Diaz knew just how important it was for her to contribute her story as an immigrant Latina to We Testify.

She realized that sharing her experience was the right thing to do when she talked about her abortion in Spanish at a conference. "Most people afterward said 'I had never heard [this kind of] story be told in my language before.' To see that We Testify is giving me the opportunity to do that and see what that's done for other fabulous Latinas and Latinx people who I've met is more powerful than I originally imagined," she said.



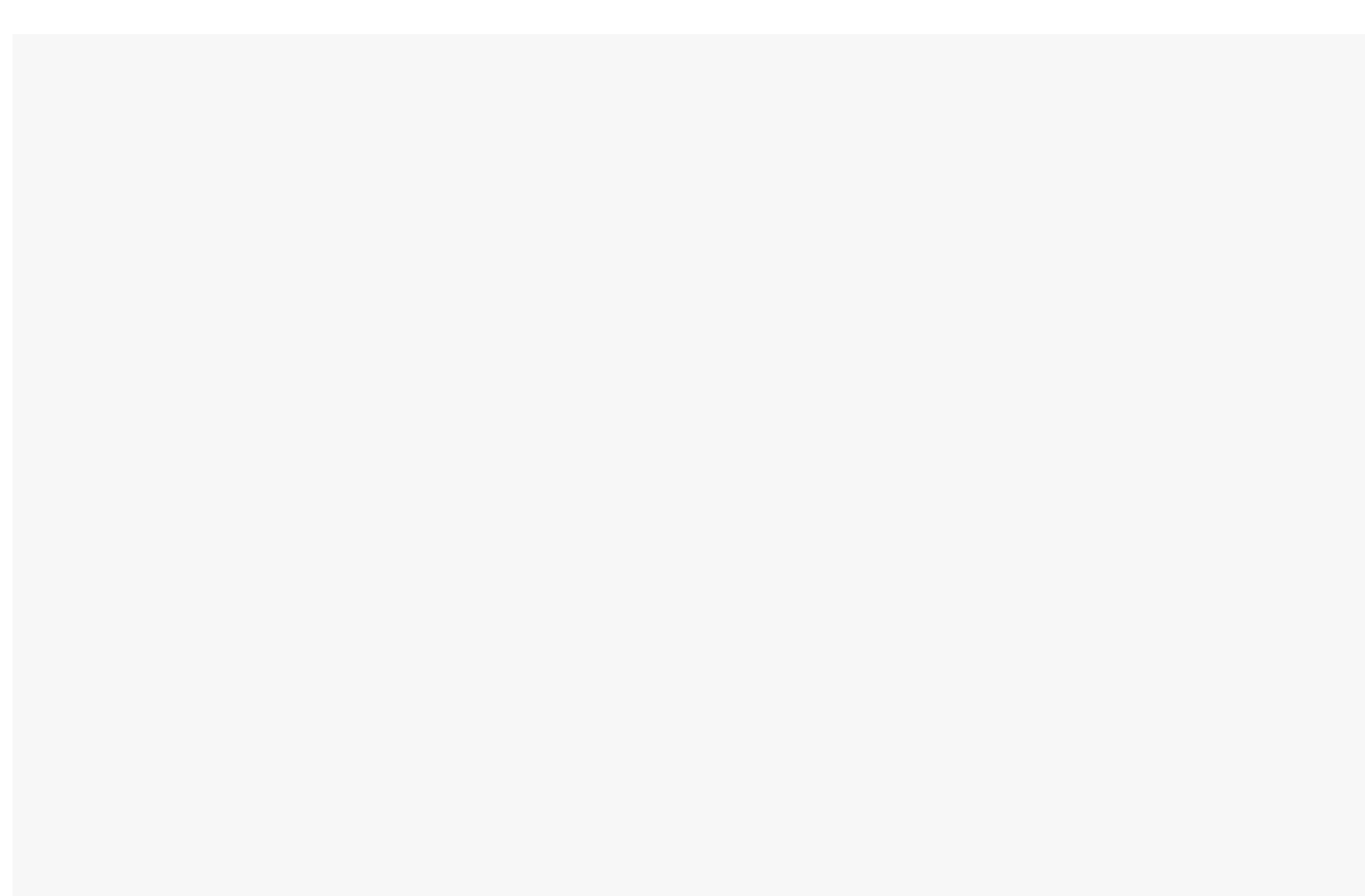
Courtesy of National Network of Abortion Funds

For Aziza Jones, a natural extrovert and fellow We Testify member, her abortion story was something she'd considered incredibly private. "I just didn't want to open up a Pandora's box because I know so many people have such strong convictions about abortion, including people in my family," the 38-year-old told Bustle.

When she was approached to be a part of the storytelling cohorts that would make up We Testify, Jones had to take a step back. "I sat with it, made a list of pros and cons, and I eventually came to the decision that I would do it," she said. She first told her story publicly in January 2017 in an interview with Rewire, a site that covers reproductive healthcare.

**"I think it's important for black women...who have abortions or are thinking about it, to know that there's something there, that they can see themselves in."**

Jones said it was incredibly important to her to open up conversations for black women. "You make things work because that's what we do, that's what black women do. We take care of things. We make things work," she said. Jones wants black women to feel comfortable and integral to the conversation around reproductive care. "I think it's important for black women, who are over the age of 30, who have abortions or are thinking about it, to know that there's something there, that they can see themselves in."



Comics For Choice

These storytellers aren't just speaking to journalists or sharing their experiences at conferences, either. Last fall, cartoonist Hazel Newlevant took the call to action much more literally. Newlevant saw a TV segment about TRAP laws in Texas — TRAP stands for "targeted regulation of abortion providers," and the regulations are meant specifically to hinder access to abortion — was incensed and decided to do something about it. When her friend Ø.K. Fox, a fellow cartoonist, suggested creating a comics anthology, the 25-year-old realized it was the perfect melding of their skills. *Comics For Choice*, an anthology of abortion stories, was born; Newlevant and Fox would edit, along with Whit Taylor.

To fund the book, they turned to crowdfunding. Apparently a lot of people were attracted to their form of storytelling: They raised just under \$32,000 from 913 people in two months, and donated \$21,678.59 of that to the National Network of Abortion Funds. The anthology ended up being 300 pages long and featured 63 artists and writers, who produced 40 comics and two illustrations. "[The book] had this dual purpose of being something that we could then sell to raise money for the National Network of Abortion Funds but also be a collection that we think are really important and should be put out into the world," Newlevant said. It will be available in bookstores and comic book shops on Feb. 6.

While finishing up the book last summer, Newlevant realized the importance of collecting these abortion stories so that ignorance or misinformation doesn't limit the choices of someone considering the procedure. "We want readers who haven't had abortions to really see the breadth of all of the many reasons that people do have abortions and all the many types of people who have abortions," she said. "It's so broad."