



PART ONE:

A Storysharing Guide for Ethical Advocates



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The most effective advocates are those whose goals, agendas, and strategies are shaped by the people whose lives are most impacted by an issue. If you are an advocate working on abortion issues, and you are sharing or considering sharing personal stories as a way to influence people toward your position, ethical storysharing practices can deepen your impact. This quick guide will help you navigate your responsibilities to storytellers and strengthen your relationships with women and men who have personal abortion experiences.

A STORYSHARING GUIDE FOR ETHICAL ADVOCATES, PART 1

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR THE STORYTELLER: CHOOSE TO EMPOWER, NOT EXPLOIT.

A woman who is an equal partner with an advocate, who is able to direct when and how her story will be used, and who has full decision-making power over the advocacy agenda in which her story is used is a woman in an empowered position. On the other hand, it is a form of exploitation to take all or parts of a story from a woman and use it for advocacy purposes without receiving her consent or without empowering her with the authority to make decisions about how her story is used. Therefore, advocates working on behalf of the health, safety, rights, and justice for women and their families are obliged to create storysharing processes and decision-making structures that empower community members with real authority. Each woman must have the information, resources, and support she needs to share her story in ways that further her wellbeing, uphold her rights, and keep her in control of the use of her own narrative. Work with people, not stories. Be an advocate for the storyteller.

Reasons to Practice Ethical StorySharing

Stories, as all advocates know, are powerful tools. Stories have the ability to persuade, influence, inspire, or galvanize people to action. This power is so strong and so coveted that many advocates talk about collecting and distributing stories as if they were commodities to be bought and sold. Advocates' increased focus on capturing a story and having it told in public can often leave out a really crucial element of storysharing: the storyteller.

Ethical Storysharing is a practice that puts the person back into the center of the storytelling process and ensures that her rights, needs, and leadership are supported and respected throughout the process. This practice is more important than ever as the rules, rights, norms, and policies around privacy and identity are shifting with the growth of technology and social media. For women and men with personal abortion experiences, it's critical that advocates understand how the changing landscape between what's considered private and what's considered public impacts people who share stories about stigmatized experiences, like abortion.

For advocates, the benefits of Ethical Storysharing are many. In advocacy communications and fundraising, Ethical Storysharing provides the chance to learn and to increase effectiveness by letting com-

munity voices drive storysharing agendas. Also, by encouraging people to speak for themselves and by creating room for their stories to be shared in all their power and complexity, advocates can set the standard for how to treat people with dignity and respect. Empowered, supported storytellers generate new conversations about personal abortion experiences and lead the way towards a more supportive, respectful cultural climate.

The Risks and Opportunities for Women Who Share Their Abortion Stories

Exhale community members have experienced how sharing our stories can strengthen – or weaken – bonds with family and friends. Sharing can help us not feel so alone, and it can make us feel more vulnerable. We can gain new insights and we can put our jobs at risk. Advocates working with us must understand what motivates us, the risks we may be taking when we share, and the needs we have before, during, and after sharing our stories. Most important, given the challenges of our politicized climate and the changing landscape between private and public spheres, advocates should take the lead to help grow the field of Ethical Storysharing.

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THE BASICS ELEMENTS OF AN ETHICAL STORYSHARING PRACTICE

Exhale's growing community of women and men with personal abortion experiences has decades of experience in sharing stories. We have shared our stories with friends and family; with physical and mental health care providers; with clergy and faith leaders; with online communities, anonymously or by name; with political advocates and lawyers; and with reporters and journalists, among many others and in many venues. We are motivated to share our stories so that other women never feel alone, or for personal healing, or to generate more social respect for all of us, among other reasons. We promote Ethical Storysharing to ensure that we are given the respect and dignity we deserve. We advocate that storytellers must have the ability to control the use of their own narrative in public discourse, and that storytellers must have authority and decision-making power over when and how our stories are used by advocates.

Gain Informed Consent

Informed consent is a critical element of an empowered storysharing experience for storytellers because it helps protect our safety, security, and dignity. After decades of trial and error, human rights advocates have gained a unique set of expertise on how to support people with personal experiences of violence, war, or stigma to share their stories in ways that are empowering, promote wellbeing, and have the potential to create social and cultural change. Understand how the concepts of *disclosure*, *voluntariness*, *comprehension*, and *competence* can guide your ethical practice. Seek out the tools, training, and resources that are freely available online to guide advocates using stories. (See Resources at the end of the Guide)

Understand the Impacts of Technology

Reaching the most people doesn't always mean having the most influence. Though technology and social media have made it easier for more people to tell their own stories in their own words, there is a conundrum: The more broadly a story is shared through social media, the less a storyteller is able to control what happens to the story after it is told. Without proper context or privacy controls, stories can be manipulated or used to shame, hurt, or

target the storyteller. The rules, policies, and norms about sharing personal information publicly online change rapidly, and advocates must stay up to date on the latest developments, paying close attention to effects on privacy and identify protection. Make sure the knowledge you have gained is integrated into your informed consent process and shared explicitly with storytellers.

Help Storytellers Rise Above Stigma

Stigma, while a social condition, is personally experienced. People who experience stigma can feel alone and isolated, and they will often keep their feelings, stories, and experiences to themselves, rather than risk judgment or criticism. Because it is nearly impossible to form community with those you cannot see or hear, it is challenging for women who feel stigmatized after abortion to advocate for themselves. Therefore, helping women hear each other's stories in supportive environments reduces stigma and increases storysharing.

Use Whole Stories, Not Talking Points

Human, vulnerable, authentic personal stories don't fit easily into talking points, but they have incredible power to connect with others across differences. Advocates have an important role to play in creating the conditions necessary for a storyteller to feel encouraged and supported to share their whole truth, and once those conditions exist, advocates can benefit from incredibly compelling storysharing.

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RESOURCES FOR ETHICAL ADVOCATES

Ethical Storysharing Practice

- Thaler Pekar, “Ethical Storysharing, Part 1” on PhilanTopic, April 2011
<http://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/2011/04/ethical-storysharing-part-1.html>
- Thaler Pekar, “Ethical Storysharing, Part 2” on PhilanTopic, April 2011
<http://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/2011/04/ethical-storysharing-part-2.html>
- Thaler Pekar, “Working with Stories,” Stanford Social Innovation Review, June 2011
http://www.ssireview.org/opinion/entry/working_with_stories/
- Thaler Pekar, “Pro-Voice and Pro-Chaos,” PhilanTopic, July 2011
<http://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/2011/07/pro-voice-and-pro-chaos.html>

Informed Consent Tools and Trainings

- Witness, “Informed Consent in Human Rights Video”
<http://www.witness.org/training/resources/informed-consent>
- Witness, Video for Change book, Chapter two: “Safety and Security,”
<http://www.witness.org/training/video-for-change/chapter2>
- Sam Gregory, “The Ethics of Online Video: Questions on Dignity, Re-Victimization, Consent, and Security,” on The Hub, August 17 2009
<http://hub.witness.org/en/blog/ethics-online-video-questions-dignity-re-victimization-consent-and-security>

Technology, Privacy and Stigma

- danah boyd, 2010 Keynote Address at SXSW: “Making Sense of Privacy and Publicity”
<http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/2010/SXSW2010.html>
- Aspen Baker interviews Amy Hill of the Center for Digital Storytelling, “The Expert Teacher: When Stigma is Part of the Story; Aspen Baker Interviews Amy Hill”
<http://exhaleisprovoice.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/the-expert-teacher-when-stigma-is-part-of-the-story-aspen-baker-interviews-amy-hill/>
- Aspen Baker, “Technology Matters to Women Who Have Had Abortions,” Mag-Net.org, April 2011
<http://mag-net.org/blog/technology-matters-women-who-have-had-abortions>

Upholding the Dignity of the Storyteller

- Chimamanda Adichie TEDTalk on “The danger of a single story,” July 2009
http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html
- Melissa Harris-Perry (formerly Harris-Lacewell) speech on “Embracing Your Promise,” at Planned Parenthood San Diego and Riverside Counties, May 14, 2009 VIDEO:
http://www.youtube.com/user/ExhaleisProVoice#p/a/f/0/QXiJ_bOFKY8
- Brene Brown, TEDTalk on “The power of vulnerability,” June 2010
http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html

For more recommended reading, visit www.exhaleprovoice.org/media-blog-archive.

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NEXT STEPS TO GROW YOUR ETHICAL STORYSHARING PRACTICE

Our hope is that this guide will help advocates who work on abortion issues think through the opportunities and obligations inherent with public abortion storysharing. We want to inspire you to consider our community of women and men with personal abortion experiences as experts and partners whose contributions can improve and strengthen any advocacy agenda. We have shared our stories, been empowered and been exploited. We know what it's like to feel heard with dignity and respect, and we want every person with an abortion experience to know how it feels, too. With a practice of ethical storysharing, advocates and storytellers can work together, in partnership, to shape what's next in the lives of our families and communities.

Share Your Experiences with other Advocates

Ethical Storysharing is a growing field, and your efforts have the potential to shape and influence the future of this practice. Be transparent about what's worked, what hasn't, and your lessons learned on your journey to empower storytellers and be their advocates. Role model and set the standard for ethical storysharing practice, and inspire your colleagues to follow your lead.

Share Your Experiences with Exhale

We need your input in order to publish Part 2 of this guide. Please share with us what you found most useful, most confusing, and what you need more or less of in our next guide. Exhale is a learning organization that develops programs and strategies in direct response to the needs our community members. Your voice and experience matter, and we want to make sure you have the tools and information you need to succeed. Email info@exhaleprovoice.org with your feedback.

Join our community at www.ExhaleProVoice.org.

Thank you

Exhale has benefited from the expertise and wisdom of Amy Hill of the Silence Speaks program of the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.silencespeaks.org / www.storycenter.org); Sam Gregory of WITNESS (www.witness.org); and Thaler Pekar (www.thalerpekar.com). We are grateful for the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned with such tremendously smart and thoughtful advocates, and we are honored to be a part of growing the field of Ethical Storysharing.



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