

Sabbatical Leave Report for Academic Year 2022-2033
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The purpose of my sabbatical was to expand my research into the links between abortion access and women's wellbeing across the United States. The project goes back to the Summer 2021, when I began data collection by interviewing twenty-seven women across ten US states about their abortion experiences. I take a state-by-state approach to understanding the nuances of abortion access, with the emphasis being on the most restrictive states on one hand, and most permissive states on the other. Ultimately, I was able to make substantial progress toward my goals for this research and I am very pleased with the outcome.

My original objective for my sabbatical year was to complete another seventy-five interviews by adding an additional fifteen states to the analysis. However, shortly after my sabbatical commenced, the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case was decided, unraveling half a century of abortion law precedent by overturning the landmark 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision. Twenty-six states across the US immediately implemented trigger laws severely limiting or effectively banning access to abortion. In many cases, state legislatures passed contemporaneous laws allowing for self-proclaimed interested parties to sue women and doctors retroactively for accessing abortion care. In other states, such as Texas, "vigilante" laws provide bounties for citizens who identify abortion-seekers to state authorities. As such, since July 2022, a new curtain of secrecy and fear around abortion has descended across many parts of the United States, and there has been a(n understandable and) severe silencing effect on the willingness of women to come forward to talk openly about their abortion experiences. This made it much more difficult for me to recruit participants for my study compared to just 18 months earlier. By the beginning of 2023, I had only been able to effectively recruit and retain two participants (compared to twenty-seven within a four-week period in mid-2021.) Notably, I also had at least a dozen "no shows" for scheduled interviews, where presumably the participants grew anxious at the last minute and opted not to follow through (compared to 2021, where this happened only once.) By early February of this year, I was concerned that I would have to call off or significantly revise the project and plans for data collection. At that point I was beginning to panic, but necessity is the mother of invention. I first tried expanding the research population, with approval from SSU's Institutional Review board, by extending 1) the number of states of investigation, and 2) the timeline of when the subject's abortion took place (to as far back as 20 years.) I also formulated a new sampling strategy, which was to use TikTok to engage in outreach and recruitment. I created a TikTok account in February 2023, and then for several months I dedicated significant time (approximately 200 hours) and labor to

creating content related to reproductive rights and American politics. By late May 2023, I had built my following on TikTok to 10,000, and at that point, I began my recruitment campaign again (the logic being that because TikTok is a video-based platform, people would get to see me and hear my voice and consequently would be more likely to trust me with their stories.) This approach worked, and as of August 19th, 2023, I have conducted an additional thirty-four interviews from nine more states (Louisiana, Florida, Massachusetts, Indiana, Idaho, Missouri, Michigan, South Carolina, and Wisconsin), as well as eight of my original states of inquiry (California, Texas, New York, Ohio, Georgia, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington.) Each interview took place on Zoom between March and August of 2023 (all but two took place between June and August) and lasted between two and three hours. More than ten of the participants had two or more abortions during the period of investigation, so the actual number of cases for analysis is 75 (from the 61 total interviews.)

The unanticipated barriers to recruitment have slowed down the data coding, analysis, and writing, but I am still on track to have a draft manuscript by the end of 2023. In addition to the interviews (which is the primary source data for this project), I was also able to engage in some material observation on Mother and Baby Homes during the Fall 2022 semester when I lived in Ireland. Ireland (as well as Romania) is a case study for my project. Specifically, I was able to find and photograph the locations of several homes in Counties Sligo, Leitrim, and Roscommon.

I also engaged in the following activities related to this project during the 2022-2023 year:

- Presented and received feedback on the first phase of the data analysis at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.
- Gave a talk to the Pace e Bene organization on early findings of the data analysis.
- Gave a talk for Planned Parenthood of California on lessons gleaned from early data analysis and findings.
- Gave a presentation to the Forum for Law, Ethics, and Society at SSU on the arguments used to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*.

In addition to the obvious contributions this past year's work has made to my scholarship, it has also provided a rich pool of data from which to build upon for my *Politics of Reproductive Rights* course at SSU, which will be offered again in Spring 2024.