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The Politics of Abortion 50 Years after *Roe*

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Abstract:

Abortion is central to the American political landscape and a common pregnancy outcome, yet research on abortion has been siloed and marginalized in the social sciences. In an empirical analysis, we find only 22 articles published in this century in the top economics, political science, and sociology journals. This special issue aims to bring abortion research into a more generalist space, challenging what we term the “abortion research paradox” wherein abortion research is largely absent from prominent disciplinary social science journals but flourishes in interdisciplinary and specialized journals. After discussing the misconceptions that likely contribute to abortion research siloization and the implications of this siloization on abortion research as well as social science knowledge more generally, this essay briefly describes the articles in this special issue. Then, in a call for continued and expanded research on abortion, this essay closes by offering three guiding practices for abortion scholars, both those new to the topic and those already deeply familiar, in the hopes of building an ever-richer body of literature on abortion politics, policy, and law. A need that has become more acute in the wake of the United States Supreme Court’s June 2022 overturning the constitutional right to abortion

Abortion has been both siloed and marginalized in social science research. But as a perennially politically and socially contested issue as well as vital health care that 1 in 4 women in the United States (U.S.) will experience in their lifetime (Jones and Jerman 2022), it is imperative that social scientists make a change. This special issue brings together insightful voices from across disciplines to do just that—and does so at a particularly imperative historical moment. Fifty years after the United States Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* (1973) decision set a national standard amid disparate state policies on abortion, we find ourselves again in a country with a patchwork of laws about abortion. In June 2022, the same court overturned the

constitutional right to abortion it had established in *Roe* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), purportedly returning the question of legalization of abortion to the states. In the immediate aftermath of the *Dobbs* decision, state policies polarized and public opinion shifted. This moment demands scholarly evaluation of where we have been, how we arrived at this moment, and what we should be attentive to in coming years. This special issue came about, in part, in response to the on-the-ground conditions of abortion in the U.S.

As we argue below, the siloization of abortion research means that the social science literature broadly is not (yet) equipped to make sense of this moment, our history, and what the future holds. First, though, we make a case for the importance of political scientists, economists, and sociologists studying abortion. Then, we describe the siloization of abortion research through what we call the “abortion research paradox” wherein abortion research, despite its social and political import, is curiously absent from top disciplinary journals, even as it thrives in other, often interdisciplinary, usually specialized publication venues. We theorize some sources for this siloization and discuss the consequences, both to generalist knowledge and to scientific understanding of abortion. We then introduce the articles in this special issue, noting the breadth of methodological, topical, and theoretical approaches to abortion research they demonstrate. Finally, we offer three suggestions for scholars—both those new to and those already deeply familiar with abortion research—embarking on research on abortion in the hopes of building an ever-richer body of literature on abortion politics, policy, and law.

Why Abortion?

Abortion has arguably shaped the American political landscape more than any other domestic policy issue in the last 50 years. Since a nationwide right to abortion was initially

established in 1973 by the United States Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade*, debate over this right has influenced elections at just about every level of office (Abramowitz 1995; Roh and Haider-Markel 2003; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1994; Cook, Hartwig, and Wilcox 1993; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992; Paolino 1995), inspired political activism (Carmines and Woods 2002; Maxwell 2002; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Killian and Wilcox 2008) and social movements (Rohlinger 2006; Munson 2010; Munson 2010; Kretschmer 2014; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; 2008; Staggenborg 1991), and fundamentally structured partisan politics (Adams 1997; Carsey and Layman 2006; Killian and Wilcox 2008). Position on abortion is frequently used as *the* litmus test for those seeking political office (Flaten 2010; Kreitzer and Osborn 2019). Opponents to legal abortion have transformed the federal judiciary (Hollis-Brusky and Wilson 2020; Hollis-Brusky and Parry 2021). Indeed, abortion is often called the quintessential “morality policy” issue (Mooney 2001; Kreitzer 2015; Kreitzer, Kane, and Mooney 2019; Mucciaroni, Ferraiolo, and Rubado 2019) and “ground zero” in the prominent culture wars that have polarized Americans (Mouw and Sobel 2001; Adams 1997; Lewis 2017; Wilson 2013). Just under fifty years after *Roe v. Wade*, in June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion in its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, ushering in a new chapter of political engagement on abortion.

But abortion isn’t simply an abstract political issue, it’s an extremely common pregnancy outcome. Indeed, as noted above, about 1 in 4 U.S. women will get an abortion in her lifetime (Jones and Jerman 2022), though the rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion vary substantially across racial and socioeconomic groups (Dehlendorf, Harris, and Weitz 2013; Jones and Jerman 2022). Despite rampant misinformation claiming otherwise, abortion is a safe

procedure (Raymond and Grimes 2012; Upadhyay et al. 2015), reduces physical health consequences and mortality (Gerds et al. 2016), and does not cause mental health issues (Major et al. 2009; Charles et al. 2008) or regret (Rocca et al. 2013; 2020; 2015). Abortion has a significant impact on people's lives beyond health. Legal abortion is associated with educational attainment (Everett et al. 2019; Ralph et al. 2019; Mølland 2016) as well as higher female labor force participation, and it impacts men's and women's long-term earnings potential (Bernstein and Jones 2019; Bloom et al. 2009; Kalist 2004; Everett et al. 2019). Access to abortion also shapes relationship satisfaction and stability (Biggs et al. 2014; Mauldon, Foster, and Roberts 2015). The preponderance of evidence, in other words, demonstrates substantial benefits and no harms to allowing pregnant people to choose abortion.

Yet access to abortion in the U.S. has been rapidly declining for years. Most abortion care in the U.S. takes place in standalone, outpatient facilities that primarily provide reproductive healthcare (Jones, Witwer, and Jerman 2019). As antiabortion legislators in some states have advanced policies that target these facilities, the number of abortion clinics has shrunk (Gerds et al. 2022; Venator and Fletcher 2021), leaving large geographical areas lacking an abortion facility (Cartwright et al. 2018; Cohen and Joffe 2020) and thus diminishing pregnant people's ability to obtain abortion care when and where they need. The effects of policies regulating abortion, including those that target facilities, have been unevenly experienced, with people of color (Jones and Jerman 2022), people in rural areas (Bearak, Burke, and Jones 2017) and those who are financially struggling (Cook et al. 1999; Roberts et al. 2019) disproportionately impacted. Even before the *Dobbs* decision overturned the constitutional right to abortion, the American landscape was characterized by ever-broadening contraception deserts (Kreitzer et al.

2021; Smith et al. 2022; Barber et al. 2019; Axelson, Sealy, and McDonald-Mosley 2022), maternity care deserts (Wallace et al. 2021; Simpson 2020; Taporco et al. 2021), and abortion deserts (Cartwright et al. 2018; Pleasants, Cartwright, and Upadhyay 2022; Cohen and Joffe 2020; McNamara et al. 2022; Engle and Freeman 2022). After *Dobbs*, access to abortion around the country changed over the course of weeks. In the 100 days after *Roe* was overturned, at least 66 clinics closed in 15 states, with 14 of those states no longer having any abortion facilities (Kirstein et al. 2022). In this moment of heightened contention over an issue with a long history of social and political contestation, social scientists have a rich opportunity to contribute to scientific knowledge as well as policy and practice that affect millions of lives. This special issue steps into that opportunity.

The Abortion Research Paradox

This special issue is also motivated by a paradox we dub the “abortion research paradox.” As established above, abortion fundamentally shapes politics in a myriad of ways and is a very common pregnancy outcome, with research consistently demonstrating that access to abortion is consequential and beneficial to people’s lives -- yet research on abortion in the social sciences is rarely published in top disciplinary journals. Abortion is a topic of clear social science interest and well-suited for social science inquiry, but relatively under-represented as a topic in generalist social science journals. To measure this empirically, we searched for original research articles about abortion in the U.S. in the top journals of political science, sociology, and economics. We identified the top journals for each discipline by considering journal reputation within their respective disciplines, as well as impact factors and google scholar rankings. (There is room for debate about what makes a journal a “top” general interest journal but this is beyond our scope.

Whether these journals are *exactly* the “top 3” is debatable; nonetheless, these are undoubtedly among the top general interest or “flagship” disciplinary journals and thus representative of what the respective disciplines value as top scholarship.) Then, we searched specified journal databases for the keyword “abortion” for articles published in this century (i.e., 2000-2021), excluding commentaries and book reviews. We found few articles about abortion: just 7 in economics journals; 8 in political science journals; and 7 in sociology journals. We read the articles and classified each into one of three categories: articles primarily about abortion; articles about more than one aspect of reproductive health, inclusive of abortion; or articles about several policy issues among which abortion is one (Table 1).

[Table 1 Here]

In the three top economics journals, articles about abortion focused on the relationships between abortion and crime or educational attainment, or the impact of abortion policies on trends in the timing of first births of women (Myers 2017; Bitler and Zavodny 2002; Donohue III and Levitt 2001). Articles that studied abortion as one among several topics also studied “morally controversial” issues (Elías et al. 2017), the electoral implications of abortion (Washington 2008; Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shapiro 2005), or contraception (Bailey 2010). Articles published in the three top political science journals that focused primarily on abortion evaluated judicial decision-making and legitimacy (Caldarone, Canes-Wrone, and Clark 2009; Zink, Spriggs, and Scott 2009) or public opinion (Kalla, Levine, and Broockman 2022; Rosenfeld, Imai, and Shapiro 2016). More commonly, abortion was one of several (or many) different issues analyzed, including government spending and provision of services, and government help for African Americans, law enforcement, health care, and education, free

speech, Hatch Act restrictions, and the Clinton impeachment. The degree to which these articles are “about abortion” varies considerably. In the three top sociology journals, articles represented a slightly broader range of topics, including policy diffusion (Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer 2015), public opinion (Mouw and Sobel 2001), social movements (Ferree 2003), and crisis pregnancy centers (McVeigh, Crubaugh, and Estep 2017). Unlike in economics and political science, articles in sociology on abortion mostly focused directly on abortion.

The *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law* (JHPPL) would seem well positioned to publish research on abortion. Yet, even in JHPPL, abortion research isn’t very common. In the same time period (2000-2021), JHPPL published 5 articles on reproductive health: two articles on abortion (Daniels et al. 2016; Kimport, Johns, and Upadhyay 2018), one on contraception (Kreitzer et al. 2021), one on forced interventions on pregnant people (Paltrow and Flavin 2013), and one about how states could respond to the passage of the Affordable Care Act mandate regarding reproductive health (Stulberg 2013).

This is not to say that there is not extensive, rigorous published research on abortion in the social science literature. Interdisciplinary journals focused on reproductive health such as *Contraception* and *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, health research journals such as the *American Journal of Public Health* and *Social Science & Medicine*, and health policy journals like *Health Affairs* regularly published high quality social science research on abortion. Research on abortion can also be found in disciplinary subfield journals. In the same time period addressed above, the *Journal of Women, Politics, and Public Policy* and *Politics & Gender* – two subfield journals focused on gender and politics -- each published around 20 articles that mentioned abortion in the abstract. In practice, while this means excellent research on abortion is

published, the net effect is that abortion research is siloed from other research areas in the disciplines of economics, political science, and sociology. This special issue aims to redress some of this siloization as well as inspire future scholarship on abortion. Our motivation is not simply premised on quantitative counts, however. As we assert below, there are significant consequences to knowledge and, pointedly, to real people's lives of abortion research siloization. First, though, we consider some of the possible reasons for this siloization.

The Origins of Siloization

We do not know why abortion research is not more commonly published in top disciplinary journals given the topic's clear importance in key areas of focus for these disciplines, including public discourse, politics, law, family life, and health. The siloing and marginalization of abortion is likely related to several misconceptions. For one, because of social contention on the issue, peer reviewers may not have a deep understanding of abortion as a research topic, may express hostility to the topic, or may believe that abortion is exceptional in some way -- a "niche" or "ungeneralizable" research topic better published in a sub-field journal. Scholars themselves may share this mischaracterization of abortion. As Borgman (2014) argues about the legal arena and Roberts, Schroeder and Joffe (2020) provide evidence of in medicine, abortion is regularly treated as exceptional, making it both definitional and reasonable that abortion be treated differently in the law and healthcare than other medical experiences. Scholars are not immune from social patterns that exceptionalize abortion. In their peer and editor reviews, they may inappropriately—and perhaps inadvertently—draw on their social, rather than academic, knowledge. For scholars of abortion, reviews premised in social knowledge may not be constructive to strengthening the research and, moreover, may require additional labor to

educate reviewers and editors on the academic parameters of the topic, including what social assumptions about abortion are scientifically inaccurate. Comments from authors educating editors and peer reviewers on abortion research may then, counterintuitively, reinforce the (mis)perception that abortion research is “niche” and not of general interest.

For two, negative experiences trying to publish about abortion or reproductive health in top disciplinary journals may compound as scholars share information about journals. This is the case for research on gender; evidence from political science suggests that certain journals are perceived as more or less likely to publish research on gender (Brown et al. 2020). Such reputations, especially as a venue that does not publish abortion research, may not even be rooted in negative experiences. The absence of published articles on abortion may itself dissuade scholars from submitting to a journal based on an “educated guess” that the journal is not welcoming of abortion research. Regardless of the veracity of these perceptions, certain journals may get a reputation for publishing on abortion (or not), which then may make future submissions of abortion research to those outlets more (or less) likely. Authors, after all, seek publication venues where they believe their research will get a robust review and is likely to be published. This pattern may be more common for some author groups than others: research from political science suggests women are more risk averse than men when it comes to publishing strategies and less likely to submit manuscripts to journals where the perceived likelihood of successful publication is lower (Key and Sumner 2019). Special issues like this one are an important way for journals without a substantial track record of publishing abortion research to establish their willingness to do so.

For three, there might be a methodological bias, which unevenly intersects with some author groups. Top disciplinary journals are more likely to publish quantitative rather than qualitative approaches—which, notably, can result in the exclusion of women and minority scholars who are more likely to utilize mixed or qualitative methods (Teele and Thelen 2017). To the extent that investigations of abortion in the social sciences have utilized qualitative rather than quantitative methods, that might explain the underrepresentation of abortion-focused scholarship in top disciplinary journals.

Stepping back from the idiosyncrasies of peer review and methodologies, a fourth explanation for why abortion research is not more prominent in generalist social science journals may lie far earlier than the publishing process. There may be an under-supply of scholars at PhD-granting departments in social sciences with expertise in reproductive health to provide mentorship of junior scholars interested in studying abortion. (We firmly believe one need not be an expert in reproductive health to mentor junior scholars studying reproductive health, so this explanation only goes so far.) Anecdotally, we have experienced and heard many accounts of scholars who were discouraged from focusing on abortion in dissertation research because of advisors', mentors', and senior scholars' misconceptions about the topic and the viability of a career in abortion research. In data provided to us by Key and Sumner from their analysis of the “leaky pipeline” in the publication of gender at top disciplinary journals in political science (Key and Sumner 2019), there were only 9 dissertations written between 2000 and 2013 that mention abortion in the abstract, most of which are focused on judicial behavior or political party dynamics rather than focusing on abortion policy itself. If few junior scholars focus on abortion,

it makes sense there may be an under-supply of cutting edge research on abortion in the social sciences submitted to top disciplinary journals.

The Implications of Siloization

The relative lack of scholarly attention to abortion as a social phenomenon in generalist journals has implications for general scholarship. Most concerningly, it limits our ability to understand other social phenomena for which the *case* of abortion is a useful entry point. For example, the case of abortion, as a common, highly safe medical procedure, is useful for examining medical innovations and technologies, such as telemedicine. Similarly, given the disparities in who seeks and obtains abortion care in the U.S., abortion is an excellent case study for scholars interested in race, class, and gender inequality. It also holds great potential as a case for exploration of public opinion and attitudes, particularly as a case of an issue whose ties to partisan politics have solidified over time and that is often—but not always—“moralized” in policy engagement (Kreitzer, Kane, and Mooney 2019). Additionally, there are missed opportunities for theory-generating from the specifics of abortion. For example, there is regular evidence of abortion stigma and stigmatization (Hanschmidt et al. 2016) and its effects on people who obtain abortions (Sorhaindo and Lavelanet 2022). This research is often unmoored from existing theorization on stigmatization, however, because the bulk of the stigma literature focuses on identities—and having had an abortion is not an identity the same way as, for example, being queer is. (For a notable exception to this trend, see Beynon-Jones 2017.)

There is, it must be noted, at least one benefit of abortion research being regularly siloed within social science disciplines. The small—but growing—number of researchers engaged in abortion research has often had to seek mentorship and collaborations outside of their disciplines.

Indeed, several of the articles included in this special issue come from multidisciplinary author teams, building bridges between disciplinary literatures and pushing knowledge forward.

Somewhat unique in the academy, social scientists studying abortion regularly engage with research by clinicians and clinician-researchers. The interdisciplinary journals noted above that regularly publish social science abortion research (i.e., *Contraception* and *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*) also regularly publish clinical articles and are read by advocates and policymakers. The audiences that social scientists studying abortion reach, in other words, frequently include clinicians, advocates, and policymakers, marking an opportunity for social science research to influence practice.

The siloization of abortion research in the social sciences not only impacts broad social science knowledge; it also dramatically shapes our understanding of abortion. When abortion researchers are largely relegated to their own spaces, they risk missing opportunities to learn from other areas of scholarship that are not abortion-related. Lacking context from other topics, abortion scholars may inaccurately understand an aspect of abortion as exceptional that is not or reinvent the proverbial theoretical “wheel” to describe a phenomenon for which abortion is not unique, but simply a case of. For example, scholars have studied criminalized behavior for decades, offering theoretical insights and methodological best practices for research on illegal activities. With abortion now illegal in many states, abortion researchers can benefit from drawing on that extant literature to examine the implications of illegality, identifying what is unique about abortion illegality and what is common to other illegal activities. Likewise, methodologically, abortion researchers can learn from other researchers on illegal activities about how to protect participants’ confidentiality.

The ontological and epistemological implications for the siloization of abortion research extend beyond reproductive health. When abortion research is not part of the central discussions in economics, political science, and sociology, our understanding of health policy, politics, and law is impoverished. With both conceptual and practical consequences, we miss opportunities to identify and address chronic health disparities and health inequities. These oversights matter for people's lives. Following the June 2022 *Dobbs* decision, millions of people with the capacity of pregnancy are now barred from one key way to control fertility: abortion. The implications of scholars' failure to comprehensively grapple with the place of abortion in health policy, politics, and law are playing out in their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

Articles in this Special Issue

Into this landscape, we offer this special issue on “The Politics of Abortion 50 Years After *Roe*.” We seek in this special issue to illustrate to some of the many ways abortion can and should be studied, with benefits not only to scholarly knowledge about abortion and its role in policy, politics, and law but also to general knowledge about health policy, politics, and law itself.

The included articles represent multiple disciplines—including, as noted above, several articles by teams that are multidisciplinary themselves. Although public health has long been a welcoming home for abortion research, authors in this special issue point to opportunities in anthropology, sociology, and political science, among other disciplines, for the study of abortion. We do not see the differences and variations among disciplinary approaches as a competition. Rather, we believe that the more diverse the body of researchers grappling with questions about

abortion, abortion provision, and abortion patients, the better our collective knowledge about abortion and its role in the social landscape.

The same goes for diversity of methodological approaches. Authors in this issue employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, showcasing compelling methodological variation. There is no singular or best methodology for answering research questions about abortion. Instead, the impressive variation in methodological approaches in this special issue highlights the vast methodological opportunities for future research. Diverse methodologies enable diverse research questions. Indeed, different methods can identify, generate, and respond to different research questions, enriching the literature on abortion. The methodologies represented in this issue are certainly not exhaustive, but we believe they are suggestive of future opportunities for scholarly exploration and investigation. We hope that these articles will provide a roadmap for rich expansions of the research literature on abortion.

By way of brief introduction, we offer short summaries of the included articles. Baker traces the history of medication abortion in the U.S., cataloging the initial approval of the two-part regimen by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), subsequent policy debates over FDA-imposed restrictions to how medication abortion is dispensed, and the work of abortion access advocates to get medication abortion to people who need it. Weaving together accounts of healthcare policy, abortion advocacy, and on-the-ground activism, Baker illustrates not only the unique contentions specific to abortion policy but also how the history of medication abortion can be seen as a case of healthcare advocacy.

Articles by Roth and Lee and Carson and Carter focus on state-level legislative policy on abortion. Roth and Lee generate an original dataset cataloging the introduction and

implementation of statutes on abortion and other aspects of reproductive health at the state level in the U.S. monthly, from 1994-2022. In their descriptive analysis, Roth and Lee highlight trends in abortion legislation and the emergent pattern of state polarization around abortion. A valuable resource for future scholarship, their examination adds rich longitudinal context to contemporary analyses of reproductive health legislation. Carson and Carter similarly attend to state-level legislation, zeroing in on the case of abortion policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to show how legislation unrelated to abortion has been opportunistically used to restrict abortion access as well as how abortion is discursively constructed as a risk to public health. This latter move, the authors argue, builds on previous constructions of abortion as a risk to individual health and points to a new horizon of antiabortion constructions of the meaning of abortion access.

Kim et al. and Kumar examine the implementation of U.S. abortion policies. Kim et al. use an original dataset of 20 years of state supreme court decisions to investigate factors that affect state supreme court decision-making on abortion. Their regression analysis uncovers the complex relationship between state legislatures, state supreme courts, and the voting public for the case of abortion. Kumar charts some of the impacts of 50 years of U.S. abortion policy on global access to abortion, offering a window into the under-attended to implications of U.S. abortion policy internationally as well as insights into social movement advocacy around the world that has expanded abortion access.

Karlin and Joffe and Heymann et al. draw on data collected when *Roe* was still the law of the land to investigate phenomena that are likely to become far more common now that *Roe* has been overturned. Karlin and Joffe utilize interviews with 40 physicians who provide abortions to

examine their perspectives on people who terminate their pregnancies outside of the formal healthcare system—an abortion pathway whose popularity increases when abortion access constricts (Aiken et al. 2022). Contextualizing their findings on the contradictions physicians voiced—desiring to support reproductive autonomy but invested in physician authority—in a historical overview of how mainstream medicine has marginalized abortion provision since the early days after *Roe*, the authors add nuance to understandings of the “formal healthcare system,” its members, and the stakes of people bypassing this system to obtain their desired health outcome. Heymann et al. investigate a process also likely to increase in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision: the implementation of restrictive state-level abortion policy by unelected bureaucrats. Using the case of variances for a written transfer agreement requirement in Ohio—a requirement with no medical merit designed to add administrative burden to standalone abortion clinics—Heymann et al. demonstrate how bureaucratic discretion by political appointees can increase the administrative burden of restrictive abortion laws and thus further constrain abortion access. Together, these two articles demonstrate how pre-*Roe* data can point scholars to areas that merit investigation post-*Roe*.

Finally, using mixed methods, Buyuker et al. analyze attitudes about abortion acceptability and the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, teasing apart what people think about abortion from what they know about abortion policy. In addition to providing methodological insights about survey items related to abortion attitudes, the authors expose a disconnect between how people think about abortion acceptability and their support for the *Roe* decision. As polarized as abortion attitudes are claimed to be, in other words, there is unacknowledged and largely unmeasured complexity in how the general public thinks about abortion.

Future Research on Abortion

We hope that a desire to engage in abortion research prompts scholars to read the excellent articles in this special issue. We further hope that reading these pieces inspires at least some readers to engage in abortion research. Having researched abortion for nearly three decades between us, we are delighted by the emerging interest in studying abortion, whether as a focal topic or alongside a different focus. This research is essential to our collective understanding of abortion politics, policy, and law and the many millions of people whose lives are affected by (U.S.) abortion politics, policy, and law annually. Thinking about the limitations of the current field of abortion research, we have several suggestions for scholars of abortion, both those new to the topic and those already deeply familiar.

First, know and cite the existing literature on abortion. To address the siloization of abortion research and, particularly, the scarcity of abortion research published in generalist journals, scholars must be sure to build on the impressive work that has been published and conducted on the topic in specialized spaces. Becoming familiar with existing research can, moreover, help scholars avoid several common pitfalls in abortion research. For example, being immersed in existing literature can help scholars avoid outdated, imprecise, or inappropriate language and terminology. Smith et al. (2018), for instance, illuminate the production and implications of clinicians deploying seemingly everyday language around “elective” abortion. They find that it muddies the distinction between the use of “elective” colloquially and in clinical settings, contributing to the stigmatization of abortion and abortion patients. Examinations like theirs not only further understanding of abortion stigmatization, they highlight for scholars the importance of being sensitive to and reflexive about language. Familiarity with existing research

can help scholars avoid methodological pitfalls as well, such as incomplete understanding of the organization of abortion provision. Although Planned Parenthood has brand recognition for providing abortion care, the majority of abortions in the U.S. are performed at independent abortion clinics. Misunderstanding the provision landscape can have consequences for some study designs.

Second, we encourage scholars of abortion to think critically about the ideological underpinnings of how their research questions and findings are framed. Academic research of all kinds, including abortion, is better when it is critical of ideologically informed premises. Abortion scholars must be careful to avoid uncritically accepting antiabortion *and* abortion-supportive premises, especially as those premises unconsciously guide much of the public discourse on abortion. Scholars have the opportunity to use methodological tools not to find an objective “truth,” per se, but to challenge the uncontested “common sense” claims that frequently guide public thinking on abortion. One strategy for avoiding common framing pitfalls is to construct research and analysis to center the people most affected by abortion politics, policy, and law (Kimport and McLemore 2022). Another strategy is to critique what Baird and Millar (2019; 2020) have termed the performative nature of abortion scholarship. Abortion scholarship, they note, has predominantly focused on negative aspects and effects of abortion care. Research that finds and explores affirmatively positive aspects—for instance, the joy in abortion—can crucially thicken scholarly understanding.

Third, related to our discussion above, scholars of abortion face an interesting challenge regarding when abortion is and is not exceptional. Research on abortion must attend to how abortion has been exceptionalized—and marginalized—in policy and practices. But there are

also numerous instances where abortion is only one example of many. In these cases, investigation of abortion under the assumption that it is exceptional is an unnecessary limitation on the work's contribution. Scholars of abortion benefit from mastery of the literature on abortion, yet knowing this literature is not sufficient. There are important bridges from scholarship on abortion to other areas, important conversations across and within literatures, that can yield insights both about abortion and about other topical foci.

As guest co-editors of this special issue, we are delighted by the rich and growing body of scholarship on abortion, to which the articles in this special issue represent an important addition. There is still much more work to be done. Going forward, we are eager to see future scholarship on abortion build on this work and tackle new questions.

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Table 1. Number of Articles about Abortion in Top Disciplinary Journals, 2000-2021

Discipline	Journal	Years	Abortion	Reproductive Health	Abortion Among Policies
Economics	<i>AER</i>	2002, 2008, 2010, 2017	1	2	1
	<i>QJE</i>	2001, 2005	1		1

	<i>JPE</i>	2017	1	
Political Science	<i>APSR</i>		0	
	<i>AJPS</i>	2006, 2012, 2016	1	2
	<i>JOP</i>	2005, 2006, 2009, 2009, 2022	3	2
Sociology	<i>ASR</i>	2004	1	
	<i>AJS</i>	2001, 2003, 2015, 2017	4	
	<i>ASR</i>	2014, 2015		2

Note: AER = The American Economic Review, QJE = The Quarterly Journal of Economics, JPE = Journal of Political Economy, APSR = American Political Science Review, AJPS= American Journal of Political Science, JOP = Journal of Politics, ASR = American Sociological Review, AJS = American Journal of Sociology, ASR = American Sociological Review