

NEWSROOM DECISIONS AND AUTONOMY IN MISSOURI NEWSPAPER'S
ABORTION REPORTING IN SPRING 2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore how newspaper journalists in Missouri covered the abortion issue around May 2019. Although research on abortion reporting and journalistic theories have been developed, not all previous research has combined them. This study is a case study of abortion reporting in Missouri in spring 2019 based on interviews with nine journalists who either reported or edited for a newspaper based in Missouri. The research questions are about the process in which the journalists covered the controversial issue, optimal approach to abortion reporting that newspaper journalists in Missouri want to realize, and the challenges for the journalists to cover abortion. Based on a qualitative study with an emphasis on interviewing, this research will see how journalists in Missouri reported or edited abortion stories so that the findings can help enhance news coverage about abortion in the future.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In May 2019, Missouri lawmakers passed legislation restricting abortions after the eighth week of pregnancy. According to a *New York Times* article, other eight states, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, and Utah, also decided to implement abortion restrictions in spring 2019 (Lai, 2019). What the local news media in the nine states often portrayed was the division between people who stand for an anti-abortion position and those who respect the right to have an abortion.

On May 21, 2019, the *Columbia Missourian*, a newspaper based in Columbia, Missouri, covered a protest where the participants stated that women have the right to make decisions about their bodies and their future. In the protest, one of the protesters said, “I will do everything in my power to elect people who will stand and fight for my right to make medical decisions between doctor and myself” (Hart, 2019). On the other hand, in spring 2019, those who are against abortion often expressed their ideas that abortion is a killing of life because there is a fetal heartbeat. Around the time of the passage of the abortion law, abortion was a topic that people paid attention to, especially for those in the nine states that passed the strictest abortion laws.

News organizations in Missouri often covered abortion in 2019: for example, the *Columbia Missourian* published 16 stories about abortion that May. However, the growing need to report abortion issues did not mean that news reporters were able to write anything about abortion. Gatekeeping theory shows that reporters or editors sometimes decide not to publish a news story. It seems that gatekeeping occurred during the abortion coverage in spring 2019.

In June 2019, freelance magazine writer Meghan Winter wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review* about her abortion story idea that eventually received a rejection. Winter (2019) said she pitched a magazine story that would show how advocates who support abortion can be extreme and outmatched in a statehouse, by focusing on the advocates in Missouri and analyzing what happened in the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City in spring 2019. She got a rejection and said editors, especially male editors, tend to have an idea that abortion is a “women’s issue,” and an abortion story should be something dramatic or heartbreaking, and doesn’t need to be political. Winter said, “‘Women’s issues’ are often siloed or sidelined to publications for women readers — as if these issues are separate from the entirety of our politics, economy, and culture.” Winter’s story shows that pressure from an editor or a news company can stop journalists from pursuing what they want.

Lindsey (2019) shows the history of the abortion controversy. She said, in the U.S., people in the 1800s discussed whether or not abortion is right and moral. Although abortion has been a discussion topic for Americans for years, most research on abortion reporting went public after the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973.

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the Constitution protects women’s right to have an abortion, some journalism researchers studied coverage of the abortion issues. Pollock et al. (1978) revealed that local news coverage reflects its region’s demographics and majority opinions. Almost four decades later, Sisson et al. (2017) said abortion reporting is still a challenge for journalists. The researchers said American journalists struggle with maintaining neutrality, finding new angles, connecting with new sources, facing harassment and needing to educate editors about abortion.

Abortion reporting seems to be something more than describing politicians' discussions or citizens' marches. As Sisson et al. (2017) and Winter (2019) pointed out, one version of abortion reporting can be very different from another if there is a difference in sources journalists talk with, editors who decide the tone of a news story, or a news outlet's or its sponsor's ideas toward abortion. If journalists are not always able to cover abortion as they wish, it is worth researching how journalists want abortion stories to be and why it is sometimes challenging for journalists to achieve the goal.

One of the possible problems of news stories on controversial issues such as abortion is that newsreaders usually have little clue about how the stories they are reading were made in a newsroom. Sisson et al. (2017) said abortion reporting is still a challenge for journalists even though it has been more than 45 years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Exploring answers to the three research questions on how journalists reported abortion issues in Missouri in spring 2019 would reveal how the abortion stories got published after going through decisions made by the journalists. This research will not only give newsreaders information on the news-making process, but can also offer journalists a look back on their reporting to clarify problems that they need to deal with for future reporting.

Explication of Concepts

Autonomy. This paper follows the definition of autonomy offered by Hunter (2015) and Hellmueller and Mellado (2015). Hunter said journalists with autonomy are independent of censorship or pressures from their editors or news companies. Hellmueller and Mellado added that autonomous journalists put their values and norms first.

News-making decision: In this research, the news-making decision means a judgment that decides news of the day. Although reporters join the discussion, the ones who make a final decision are often editors. Platon and Deuze (2003) phrased it as a “control over the news from journalists” (340).

The theoretical framework for this study is gatekeeping, which suggests that media coverage does not cover all the events that happened in a day, and thus most newsrooms have discussions to decide what stories they are going to publish. Cassidy (2006) said, “Gatekeeping is a process based on forces operating on more than just the individual level of analysis and suggests that routine level forces also play a prominent role in journalistic decision making” (7). Journalists conduct gatekeeping before the publication, which means the audience usually does not see the selection process. It is also unclear if the gatekeeping of abortion-related stories looks different from that of other news topics. Furthermore, the difference of people journalists talk with can make the look of one news story different from another even if the two are about abortion. Therefore, observing how the gatekeeping theory works in the context of abortion news is beneficial for my research, the public, and the future of American journalism.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A theory with roots in psychology indicates that an incident cannot become news unless journalists select the event. The gatekeeping theory is about the judgments made before publication. Roberts (2005) said what the media choose is what the media emphasize (13), and a decision made in a newsroom can influence public opinion.

Rise of Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping theory began with Kurt Lewin. As a psychologist focusing on field theory, Lewin (1947) found that a person's behavior in a group can change depending on whether she or he is a gatekeeper who controls the situation. Lewin said the change could happen even in a family. In his example of a married couple following 1940s norms, the wife becomes a gatekeeper when buying food. It means the husband follows what his wife says about the family's diet. However, when gardening, the husband tells her what to do because he is the gatekeeper in that situation (145-147).

Although Lewin did not relate his theory to mass media in his research, he said the gatekeeping theory could be applied to mass media. Later, David Manning White's "Mr. Gates" study applied Lewin's theory to the practice in a newspaper company. Observing the newsroom of *The Peoria Star* based in Illinois, White (1950) found that an editor had the power to decide which news events will be in the paper and the perspectives used in reporting those events. White also said a gatekeeper's experience, attitudes, and expectations influence not only readers' knowledge but also their likely opinions about a news event (384). One of the criticisms of White's research was that editors are not the only ones who practice selectivity in news reporting.

McNelly (1959) conducted a content analysis of American newspaper articles about international news and did interviews with foreign correspondents from the U.S., their editors, and the readers. He found that reporters on the scene often wonder if a story about an incident would be publishable (7-8). Bass (1969) stated that selections could even occur during newsgathering, an early stage of news reporting (71). The decisions made by non-editors suggest that news judgments happen in every step of news reporting.

In the 1990s, researchers began to analyze news stories to see what factors could influence news organizations' decisions regarding what stories get published. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) said the factors vary from a news outlet's political bias to a journalist's gender, ethnicity, experience, and attitudes.

Some gatekeeping research has focused on reporters' daily jobs. For example, analyzing survey answers from 121 American newspaper reporters, Powers and Fico (1994) looked at how a newspaper company's authorities, such as editors and sponsors, influence a reporter's decision regarding sources. The research found that the reporters often want to go beyond asking questions to officials such as those who represent schools or police and to find sources that other reporters have not reached out to before.

However, the research revealed an organizational pressure: Executives at a news outlet want the reporters to have information from the officials to avoid potential conflicts with the newsroom's commercial and political interests (94). The survey showed that school officials are the least popular sources among reporters, which means they want to avoid contacting school officials. However, for news executives, school officials are the third most used source, which means editors tend to want their reporters to contact school officials (93). The researchers only speculated about the reasons for the

reporters' reluctance to approach official sources, saying, "Experienced journalists may be more skeptical of accessible, public spokespersons or other authorities" (94).

Powers and Fico revealed that a reporter and an editor can have almost opposite ideas about a news story. The finding is an incentive to see how reporters' ideas were different from editors' when the journalists covered abortion in Missouri in 2019.

Gatekeeping and the Internet

More recently, research on gatekeeping theory has focused on how the Internet has changed gatekeeping in journalism. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) noted that gatekeeping is not limited to those in the media industry. Referencing the past series of research, the researchers argued that people tend to like and believe popular stories online. The public might read stories they favor, ignoring news stories with ideas that do not match the public's existing ideas. Shoemaker and Vos said the news selection by the audience means that the public itself influences public opinion as people select what stories they are going to like and believe. Similarly, Deluliis (2015) said the editor-centered understanding of the gatekeeping theory is no longer sufficient because everyone can be an editor online without following any pre-established rules.

Two recent gatekeeping case studies will help this research explore how public comments have influenced abortion reporting in Missouri. Enli (2014) found that a newspaper is not the only industry that practices gatekeeping. She looked at how the staff members for a TV program in Norway pick up comments to air from hundreds of text messages the program receives when it is on the air. Enli found that the TV staff members tended to choose opinions in the majority more than the ones in the minority. The imbalanced selection can make the audience believe that what they see on TV

represents all the viewers' ideas even though the TV station had received minority opinions and rejected them (54). The study shows that gatekeeping can happen when selecting public comments to air. However, Enli looked at comments to a TV station in general and did not focus on analyzing opinions about abortion issues.

The second study, Yang (2015), focused on the Chinese-language magazine, *The Asian Magazine*, based in Texas and looked at how the gatekeeping process works when the magazine prepares a newsletter for the audience on social media. She said the newsletter usually consists of two or three stories, which means the editors must select news topics that are most likely to attract social media users from stories in recent print versions (3-4). Yang found that stories on social media are often either something that can be useful for the readers, such as a story introducing the best restaurant in town, or stories of news events in Texas because of the proximity between the stories and the audience. On the other hand, the research found that a long feature story of a person and news events other outlets also cover, such as the public concern of the Ebola virus, do not often appear on social media (15-16).

Through the interviews with the managing editors at *The Asian Magazine*, Yang (2015) found that they often make social media decisions based on data of how many times people read and shared what kinds of stories in the past, rather than the editor's own opinions (19-20). Her research about a magazine did not say if the influence of public comments on news content applies to the newspaper industry too. In this case study of abortion reporting, Yang's research can become an incentive to see if comments from online readers have influenced the Missouri newspapers' abortion coverage.

Findings of Enli (2014) and Yang (2015) on public comments will lead this research to figure out if newspaper reporters and editors in Missouri considered feedback from the readers as a significant source of their decision-making on their abortion coverage around May 2019. Yang focused on public comments on social media, not those submitted by letter or email, which implies that social media is a primary portal for the audience to engage with the magazine.

The case studies have shown that gatekeeping theory initiated by Lewin (1947) can still be applied to today's journalism, not only in newspaper industries but also in TV and magazine fields. Powers and Fico (1994) focused on sources in newspaper stories, rather than the news topics. The previous research did not often address the relationship between gatekeeping and news topics. Yang (2015) said a long feature story is unpopular on social media sites of *The Asian Magazine*. She did not address abortion stories in her research. However, it is possible that a lengthy interview with a person who went through medical abortion could be on social media if abortion protests happen daily in Texas, where most of its target readers reside. Another thing that the previous research did not focus on very much is criticisms from the audience. One of the challenges for journalists covering abortion is dealing with harassments from angry readers, according to Sisson et al. (2017), a study that will be analyzed in the later section, *Media coverage of abortion*.

Journalistic Norms

Previous studies showed that gatekeeping exists throughout the news-making process. What is the norm that can become the basis of doing journalism? One of the norms believed by researchers is autonomy, a journalist's independent desire and initiative to pursue a story.

Autonomy. McDevitt (2003) defined journalists with autonomy as being independent of editors or a news company's political standpoint and being assertive based on their motivations to be free from partisan bias and inform citizens (156). More recently, Hunter (2015) said autonomous journalists are free "from censorship, the influence of advertisers and markets and, to a certain extent, the whims of editors" (275).

In their review of more than 70 related studies, Lauk and Harro-Loit (2017) stated that autonomy is essential for credibility in journalism. They defined two characteristics of autonomous journalists. One is the analysis that evaluates information critically, and the other is the independence that allows journalists to be free from external pressure and have loyalty to the public (5). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) said being independent does not mean that journalists should not have opinions. Instead, the researchers said journalists should be independent of the sources or topics they are covering. If the journalists fail to do so, it will be difficult for them to see things from other perspectives and obtain the trust from other sources or the readers (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 143). The researchers said, "Having an opinion is not only allowable and natural, but it is also valuable to the natural skepticism with which any good reporter approaches a story. But a journalist must be smart enough and honest enough to recognize that opinion must be based on something more substantial than personal beliefs if it is to be of journalistic use" (168). Kovach and Rosenstiel argued that journalists must seek for truthfulness, an allegiance to citizens, by informing them (144).

Scholl and Weischenberg (1999) established the foundation of the autonomy research by providing three levels of journalistic autonomy: individual, organizational, and media systems levels. At the individual level, journalists should be independent and

free to select information and to cover stories. At the organizational level, a news outlet is a subject that seeks autonomy. At the media systems level, the focus is whether a society guarantees press freedom and the absence of censorship.

In 2017, Lauk and Harro-Loit said there is a tendency for autonomy at the organizational level to overpower the individual level, meaning that journalists have to follow the orders of managers in the newsroom, such as an editor. They added that freelance journalists also often need to follow the direction from someone at a news outlet they work for when reporting.

There can be another factor that could cause a loss of journalistic autonomy. Through observations of local TV stations, Bantz et al. (1981) found that the American TV industry tends to lack autonomy and becomes a news factory that characterizes the routinization of a news organization (271). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) explained that a news factory is a place where people produce a news story within a highly routinized structure with little flexibility as if the news were in the assembly line (103).

About twenty years later, Picard (2015) said the recent journalism, whether it is print or broadcast, is a news factory because people still think that doing journalism should mean working for an established news company. He also said journalism schools often direct the students to go on a career that pursues corporate employment and tend to believe that the more a news company is large and famous, the more a graduate has a fruitful career. Picard said the curriculum of journalism schools is often “designed to produce news factory workers who can be dropped into a slot at a journalism factory” (8). Instead, he stated that journalists should be good at entrepreneurship and be more independent and self-sufficient. What he is suggesting is that the current journalists tend

to act like a wheel of a news company rather than being an autonomous journalist who makes decisions, being free from pressures from their editors and their news organizations. It is still unclear, however, if newspaper journalists who covered abortion in Missouri were like machines that do things as told, without their will.

The previous studies on autonomy have offered the definition of autonomy and descriptions of how journalists can achieve it in journalism. However, the studies did not focus on particular topics to see if journalists become more willing to follow journalistic norms when they cover something controversial, such as abortion.

Autonomy relates to newsroom discussions, mostly the ones between reporters and editors. If an editor is authoritative and forces a reporter to do what she or he wants the reporter to do, it could make the reporter obey the editor, which might result in losing autonomy. If American journalists often cannot fully be autonomous, it is worth researching what prevents journalists from pursuing the norm in journalism.

Reporter-Editor Relationship

Since editors can influence reporters' autonomy, it is essential to analyze the relationship between a reporter and an editor. When Tanikawa (2016) studied how a reporter's background influences a story, he also interviewed an editor at the *New York Times*, John Geddes, who supervised two business reporters. One was majoring in technology in college, and the other studied political science in college. Geddes said he does not kill a reporter's own voice in a story as long as the story is accurate. Geddes also said he does not even tell his reporters what to write about except during breaking news (327-328). Through content analysis and interviews, Tanikawa found that a reporter's perspectives and ideas almost always appear in a story.

Banaszynski (2002) noted that editors tend to tell reporters how to report or what to write. However, she stated that a reporter and an editor should supplement each other for better news coverage. She said a reporter tends to be more knowledgeable about the topic of a story, and editors usually know about writing more than reporters.

However, not all Missouri journalists would agree with the idea that editors are often knowledgeable about a topic. Winter (2019) wrote that male editors have never accepted her abortion story ideas even though she has written abortion stories for more than seven years. She said male editors tend to stereotype abortion as “women’s issue,” which carries the connotation of being less critical or soft news such as a personal story of a woman going through abortion-related challenges, often written in the first-person. She said male editors rejected her story idea about the process of passing a stricter abortion law in Missouri because it did not fit the stereotype of a women’s issue. “That false division between a ‘women’s issue’ and all other issues means that it is difficult for any of us to have a complete picture of our national landscape,” Winter wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Her story of rejection shows that editors sometimes close doors even before discussing with a reporter if they do not see what they like in a story idea. However, it is still unclear if editors behave similarly toward their staff members.

Media coverage of abortion

Whether previous research on gatekeeping and autonomy applies to all news topics is still unclear. Do journalists value autonomy when covering the abortion issue as much as when covering other assignments? Abortion has been a hot and controversial topic, especially in spring 2019, when the nine states, including Missouri, passed bans on early abortion. In abortion discussions, what often appears is *Roe v. Wade*.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the Constitution protects women's right to have an abortion. Pollock et al. (1978) conducted a quantitative study to analyze 209 newspaper articles published from January 23 to February 22, 1973, the first month after the *Roe v. Wade* decision. The newspapers they chose were *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*. Since the researchers wanted to see if locations can influence the portrayals of the abortion issue, they chose the five newspapers to make their research range national. The researchers also coded the tone of the 209 stories as legitimizing, delegitimizing, or balanced/neutral. Legitimizing stories say that abortion is legal and moral, while delegitimizing ones suggest that abortion is illegal and immoral. News stories in the balanced/neutral category introduced the ideas of people who support abortion and those who do not (545-546). They found that abortion stories often reflect the demographics of the area that a news outlet covers. For example, the *Chicago Tribune*, located where the Catholic population was larger than any other area covered in the research, published a higher proportion of stories categorized as delegitimizing. However, in Washington, where the Catholic population was not large, but the poverty level was the largest of all, the tone of stories from the *Washington Post* was often legitimizing (547-548).

Boyle and Armstrong (2009) did a content analysis of 168 American newspaper articles on abortion protests written between 1960 and 2006 that covers before and after the *Roe v. Wade*. The four newspapers analyzed were the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. The researchers found that the more deviant a protest was, the more critical the tone of the news report. They defined an abortion protest with high deviance as one aiming at breaking the current system

through civil disobedience and violence (169). They defined less deviant protests as ones with non-violence, such as peaceful marches and sit-ins (169).

Overall, Boyle and Armstrong found that the critical tone in news reports on protests brought by those who support abortions turned to be favorable after the *Roe v. Wade*. The researchers suggested that the critical coverage of those who protest against abortion shows media bias and could result in perpetuating stereotypes that all activists who are against abortion participate in violence (180).

In addition to examining the tone of abortion-related stories, some scholars have looked at abortion reporting from other perspectives. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) said some editors in American newsrooms in the 1990s worried if it would be appropriate for female journalists to cover abortion because they thought women might not be able to be as objective as men when covering abortion (75). The researchers said the idea of a female being unable to be objective about abortion became less dominating as American newsrooms that were once white male-dominated became more diverse in terms of sex, race, and sexuality. Shoemaker and Reese argued that adapting to this change is a new challenge for American journalists (75).

Having passed more than 40 years since *Roe v. Wade*, the discussions on how journalists should cover abortion are still ongoing. Sisson et al. (2017) interviewed 20 writers working for news outlets and 11 freelance writers in 2016 (396). The 31 journalists have various backgrounds in terms of industries they have worked for (newspaper, TV, magazine, etc.) and types of media (local, national, or international). The researchers found that the journalists still face challenges in abortion reporting, which relate to maintaining neutrality, finding new angles, dealing with editors who don't

understand abortion issues, and facing harassment. One journalist, for example, said a reader who got angry about a news story on abortion tweeted the journalist's home address (398). As for neutrality, the research found that not all journalists share the same understanding of the definition of neutrality. Of the 20 interviewees who said neutrality is essential in abortion reporting, nine believed that a news story would be neutral if they put comments from both sides and never include interpretations based on their own opinions (397). However, the rest of the eleven said what journalists should do is to find out the truth by obtaining information from both sides. One participant said just quoting two opposite comments in a story is the same as telling lies to the public (397).

Of the research sources I have referred to for this literature review, Sisson et al. (2017) is the most relatable to the central theme of this research, seeing how journalists went through abortion reporting in Missouri in spring 2019. While the researchers looked at the challenges of abortion reporting in general, by interviewing reporters, this research will focus on abortion coverage in Missouri around May 2019, from perspectives of editors, not only that of reporters.

Abortion in Missouri

Although researchers have looked at abortion reporting in the U.S., there is little research focusing on Missouri. However, it does not mean that the Missouri abortion issue is insignificant. National Public Radio reported in 2018 that the number of clinics that practice abortion in Missouri is decreasing from the five clinics Missouri had in 2008 (Ingber, 2018). Since October 2018, the only place where women can have an abortion is at the Planned Parenthood clinic in St. Louis, according to the *Columbia Missourian* (Knappenberger, 2018). It indicates that Missouri residents who are not in St. Louis need

to either go to St. Louis or travel to another state to have an abortion. The trend of restricting abortion relates to President Donald Trump's intention. A report from *CNBC* said Trump has expressed his willingness to overturn *Roe v. Wade* since his presidential campaign in 2016 (Mangan, 2016). At the Missouri Senate, Republicans have more power than Democrats: 24 of 34 seats at the Missouri Senate are for Republicans as of January 2020, according to an article from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Erickson, 2020).

In May 2019, Missouri Governor Mike Parson, from the Republican Party, signed the law that has banned abortions after the eighth week of pregnancy in Missouri except in cases of medical emergencies. The number of abortion procedures conducted in Missouri in 2018 was 2,910, according to Tessa Longbons from the Charlotte Lozier Institute. The data also revealed that 6,125 Missouri residents had an abortion in the same year, which means 3,215 people in Missouri went to another state to have the procedure.

Missouri abortion issue also relates to the state's racial issues and the state's less developed health care system, compared to other states. The Charlotte Lozier Institute said 49 percent of the 6,125 Missouri women who had an abortion in 2018 (3,001.25) were white, and 38 percent (2,327.5) consisted of black women. However, of the 2,910 women who had an abortion in Missouri, 47 percent of them (1,367.7) were black, and it was 42 percent (1,222.2) for white women. These numbers suggest that white people are more likely to afford being able to go out of Missouri to receive an abortion.

The issue of disparities within Missouri is often a focus of stories from the *Columbia Missourian*. An article published on May 20, 2018, said Missouri has disparities based on location, in addition to those based on race. The article said children from a low-income family in Boone County, Missouri, would make 6 percent (\$1,470)

less money than others in the county at the age of 26. The article also said, “If the same children were to grow up in Howard County, they’d be making 11 percent - or \$2,850 - more than their peers at age 26” (Allison, 2018). The story added that the gap would be larger if the children are black.

As for health care, Missouri ranks 41st of the 50 states in the ranking of the best state health care in 2018 based on access, quality, and the overall health of the population, published by the *U.S. News & World Report*. The data also show that in Missouri, the rate of children’s access to dentists is lower than any other states, except North Dakota. Furthermore, Missouri is in the 39th of the 50 states for hospital quality.

The data about the numbers related to abortion and the situation of health care suggest that women seeking an abortion, and even those who have decided to raise a child, might have a hard time in Missouri. Considering that people often obtain information from mass media, it is meaningful to see how Missouri newspaper journalists covered abortion in 2019 when a law made it hard to have an abortion in Missouri.

Research Goals

This research will examine how journalists covered abortion in Missouri around May 2019, managed relationships between reporters and editors, and tried to achieve the best abortion reporting for them. There is no previous research that specifically looks at the abortion coverage in Missouri in 2019. Therefore, this research is an interview-based case study that shows how Missouri newspaper journalists tried to pursue journalistic norms during their abortion reporting process in spring 2019.

Research Questions

Previous researchers like Tanikawa (2016) and Banaszynski (2002) have conducted research focusing on reporters and editors. Banaszynski (2002) said the optimal relationship is one where a reporter and an editor complement each other to build a supportive relationship. However, it is unclear if Missouri newspaper journalists covered abortion in spring 2019 based on the cooperative relationship.

RQ1: How did Missouri newspaper journalists cover abortion in spring 2019?

The literature review introduced autonomy as a journalistic norm in theory. The second research question is to find what journalistic norms in practice are by interviewing journalists. This research focuses on norms in abortion reporting believed by journalists who either reported or edited abortion stories in Missouri in spring 2019. Figuring out if there are shared beliefs about abortion reporting among journalists will be a starting point of further research on how journalists should cover abortion.

RQ2: What is an optimal approach to abortion reporting for Missouri journalists?

The third question helps develop the answers to question two about the optimal approach to abortion reporting. Sisson et al. (2017) said covering abortion is often a challenge for journalists. It can also be challenging for journalists to cover abortion as they wish. Therefore, the third question will help reveal obstacles that journalists covering abortion are likely to face. Clarifying the abortion reporting challenges would help the discussion on how journalists should cover abortion moving forward.

RQ3: What challenges did Missouri journalists have when covering abortion?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research Methods

The following three questions are the core of this case study on abortion reporting in Missouri around May 2019.

RQ1: How did Missouri newspaper journalists cover abortion in spring 2019?

RQ2: What is an optimal approach to abortion reporting for Missouri journalists?

RQ3: What challenges did Missouri journalists have when covering abortion?

This research is a qualitative study based on interviews with journalists. The research goal is to understand how newspaper reporters and editors in Missouri covered the abortion issue in spring 2019 when state lawmakers passed a ban on abortion after the eighth week of pregnancy. Silverman (2010) said the aim of qualitative research is not to reach an answer or truth on which most people agree, but to analyze a single case deeply. In his words, qualitative research is “exploratory rather than definitive” (37).

I used semi-structured interview methods. Since this research focuses on journalists’ daily job, semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to talk about a day of work as they wanted. Harrell and Bradley (2009) said researchers use a semi-structured interview when they want to have a thorough understanding of the answers they get and delve deep into the research theme. The researchers said another benefit of the semi-structured interview is that a researcher can be flexible enough to explain questions or ask follow-up questions. The flexibility does not exist in a structured interview. Fontana and Frey (1994) clearly said, a structured interview “overlooks or inadequately assesses the emotional dimension” (364).

The interview questions for reporters were not so different from ones for editors to gather samples and compare answers with one another. The detailed explanation of the interview and information about the interviewees are in the *Interview* section.

RQ1 relates to a reporter-editor relationship, which means interviewing reporters is insufficient without having an editors' perspective. For reporters, I asked, "How did your abortion reporting usually start?" This question let the interviewees talk about how they had done the first step of news reporting with their editors. Another question, "Could you describe an ideal editor for you?" also helped me seek the answer for RQ1. For editors, I asked a question, "What were the criteria you used when assigning your reporters to abortion stories?" Then, I directed an interview to let the editors talk about how they had discussed abortion reporting with their reporters. Asking editors, "What would you do if a reporter is more passionate about abortion than other reporters?" allowed the editors to share what they think about the balance between having an opinion and writing a publishable news story. The goal of pursuing RQ1 was to discover the reasons behind editorial decisions journalists made related to abortion reporting.

RQ2 asks the reporters and editors to describe the most optimal approach to abortion reporting they believe. In the interviews, a question, "What does an abortion story need to have?" let the interviewees reveal their ideas toward abortion reporting. I also asked follow-up questions as merited.

RQ3 is also for both reporters and editors. Following the interviewees' answers to RQ2, I asked them a question, "What challenges did you have when you were covering abortion?" This question opened up an opportunity for the interviewees to reflect on their reporting or editing experience.

I brought my notebook and a recorder for every interview. I tried to explain to the interviewees what my research is about as succinctly as possible so that they can be comfortable. I transcribed the recording and notes I had taken during the interviews and coded the data by categorizing an interviewee's answers into one of the three research questions. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explained that coding connects obtained data to a research concept, which makes the data available for the research. Basit (2003) said what qualitative research often focuses on is what or why people think a certain way, which is almost impossible to measure in quantitative research, a method based on numbers. Basit also noted that coding is essential to make sense of information obtained in qualitative research. She said coding allows qualitative researchers to "communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data" (152). More recently, Pierre and Jackson (2014) called data "brute" and said coding makes it meaningful (716).

From my interview notes and recordings, I clarified what the interviewees think about the topics shown in my research questions: a reporter-editor relationship when covering abortion, a necessary component of abortion reporting, and an obstacle to writing a news story about abortion. I compared answers from an interviewee to those from another to find a pattern or contrast. Johnson and Weller (2002) stressed the importance of learning from previous interviews to have a plan for another one.

Interviews

In January 2020, I did an online search to find the interviewees who either reported or edited abortion stories for a newspaper in Missouri in spring 2019. I listed up the names of journalists who wrote or edited abortion stories I found online. Furthermore,

I asked some interviewees to introduce me to other journalists who would also be willing to take an interview. An invitation to an interview was sent to the journalists via email between January 6 and February 18, 2020. Of the 35 journalists who received the email invitation, four female journalists and five male journalists agreed to take the interview, 12 declined to participate, and I have not heard from the rest of the 14 journalists. The interviews were conducted from February 3 to 28, 2020. Seven of the nine interviews were via phone, and the other two were in-person interviews. Each interview took about 30 minutes. A table that lists the interviewees' information is at the end of this section. The transcripts of all the nine interviews are in the *Appendices* section.

Although I asked questions such as, "When do you think life starts?" none of the interviewees were willing to share their personal opinions about abortion. They said those who write a news story should not express their personal opinions because news stories always need to be objective. Some of the journalists said they would talk about their opinions about abortion if they were a columnist who writes about one's own opinions.

There is a diversity in the profile of the nine journalists. As of May 2019, six of the nine were reporters, and the other three were editors. Of the six reporters, Reporters B and C encountered a career change between May 2019 and February 2020. Reporter B was promoted to a managing editor. Reporter C left the newspaper business and became an editor for a medical journal. Reporter F wrote abortion stories for a newspaper and appeared on TV aired by its partner company in 2019. All three editors have more than 15 years of experience as a newspaper journalist. This study looks at the 2019 abortion reporting in Missouri statewide because every interviewee was in Columbia, Joplin, Kansas City, Springfield, or St. Joseph in May 2019.

	Gender	Location	Description (As of February 2020)
Reporter A	Male	Springfield	He graduated from a college in 2016. His editor is Editor A.
Reporter B	Female	Joplin	She was a reporter in spring 2019, and her editor was Editor B. She is a managing editor as of February 2020.
Reporter C	Male	Kansas City	He left the newspaper business and became a medical journal editor in fall 2019. His colleague in spring 2019 was Reporter D.
Reporter D	Female	Kansas City	She graduated from a college in 2015 and was once a reporter in Illinois. Her colleague in spring 2019 was Reporter C.
Reporter E	Female	Columbia	She was in a college newspaper in 2019. She started her reporting internship in Kansas City in January 2020.
Reporter F	Female	St. Joseph	She graduated from a college in 2017. She is a reporter for a newspaper and TV.
Editor A	Male	Springfield	He has been a journalist for more than 15 years. One of his reporters is Reporter A.
Editor B	Male	Joplin	He is an executive editor with more than 30 years of experience in journalism. Managing editor in his newsroom is Reporter B.
Editor C	Male	Columbia	He also reported about abortion in 2019. He has been a journalist for more than 30 years.

Table 1: Information on the interviewees

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

RQ1: How did Missouri newspaper journalists cover abortion in spring 2019?

No one said that there was a fight between a reporter and an editor about how they should cover abortion. Instead, four of the nine said discussions were and should be collaborative. Reporters were often the ones who pitched a story and joined a discussion on how to do the abortion reporting in the best way, with an editor, or sometimes, with other reporters, too. The reporters being interviewed said they were active members in a discussion. Reporter F even said, “Reporters are paid and independent people. So, if there are editors who are micromanaging the newsroom and telling you that you need to interview this person, and you need to write from this angle, then you're just going to lose some quality.” Reporter E said, “If I feel my editor trusts me, I will be able to come up with good ideas and produce good stories.” However, it seems that respecting a reporter’s will does not always mean just letting reporters do what they want. Reporter A said an editor must be knowledgeable enough to point errors of the content and the format so that a reporter and an editor can cooperate to produce an accurate news story.

Few interviewees remembered a disagreement about abortion reporting. However, Reporter E said there was an argument because some journalists said they should interview people who are either agree or disagree with abortion rights while the others said they should contact people in the middle. Reporter E also said the editor led the discussion well enough to let the discussion members compromise and reach a consensus. One of the things on which most journalists in the interviews reached a consensus in their newsrooms was that abortion stories must have all perspectives. Editor B said, “We

wanted the anti-abortion groups. We wanted Planned Parenthood. We wanted to talk to people in our community about this issue as well.”

Most journalists in this research said newspaper readers in Missouri are passionate about abortion, specifically speaking; the readers often have her or his own opinions. Reporter D, who had covered abortion in Illinois before becoming a newspaper reporter in Missouri, said she needed to have “a completely different mindset,” whether writing about abortion in Missouri or Illinois. She said, through abortion reporting in the two states, she came to think that people in Missouri are more knowledgeable about abortion than those in Illinois, even though being knowledgeable does not necessarily mean having accurate understandings of abortion. She explained that people in Missouri often stated their idea as if it were the only valid idea. Therefore, she said she tried not to believe in what her news sources said and tried to do fact-check with other sources, such as researchers. However, in Illinois, she felt that the people were less passionate about the abortion issue, and she tried to explain why the issue was controversial when she asked people in Illinois about abortion and when she was writing a news story there.

Reporter B said Missouri residents who read her newspaper are “very vocal.” She said the readers posted their opinions on Facebook whenever her newsroom ran abortion stories. Regarding Missouri newspaper readers’ beliefs about abortion, Reporter B is the only one who said most readers are conservative and do not approve of abortion. The interviewees who worked for all the other newsrooms in 2019 said the readers tend to discuss and (only sometimes) fight with other people in a comment section on Facebook. The *Abortion in Missouri* section said Republicans are more powerful in the Missouri

Senate. However, the number of abortion supporters and those who are anti-abortion seems to be more balanced in the demographics of newspaper readers in Missouri.

As for feedback from readers, most interviewees said they got comments on Facebook. They said almost all the comments are about the abortion issue itself and not about the way they covered it. Some journalists said they would not reply to those comments unless someone points out inaccurate information in a story. However, Reporter B said she responded to all the questions posted in a comment section, such as “Why did you cover this issue in this way?”, “Why didn't you talk to this group or this person?” and “Why did you include this information?” Reporter B said, “We want to be very transparent about how we do our job.”

For the criteria for assigning reporters to abortion stories, the editors said the category of “abortion story” is too broad because one story about abortion can be political, and another can be medical. Editor C, who also covered the abortion issue as a reporter in 2019, said he wrote a crime story, related to abortion because his focus was on Planned Parenthood in Columbia, Missouri, where a person who is anti-abortion set a fire. The editors said they would assign a reporter based on the reporter’s experience in the focus of an abortion story, rather than on the topic of abortion itself.

However, the editors could not reach an agreement about whether or not female journalists can cover abortion. Editor B, a male, said, “I will choose a reporter who has experience in what we are trying to cover. It doesn’t matter if a person is male or female.” However, Editor A, a male, seemed to hesitate to say no to the idea that women are not eligible for doing a news story about abortion. He said, based on his experience, women tend to be more passionate about abortion than male reporters. He said, “I

wouldn't say women can't cover abortion, but I would just have to make sure that they can set those feelings aside when covering abortion." He added that the reporters he has worked with in the last several years have all been men. He said, "Although our team members are all men, we can do things professionally, and we're aware of the importance of the abortion issue to women." He told me that his team tried to have a "feminine perspective" by interviewing female politicians or women at an abortion protest and trying to have a mindset that abortion is a significant issue because men do not always have personal connections to abortion.

The interviews have revealed that journalists who are not completely sure about the validity of female journalists covering abortion are not always men. Reporter B, a female, said she has a dilemma about women reporting about abortion. Although she said male and female journalists should have an equal chance to cover abortion, she also said she did feel that she was not able to cover abortion as a journalist because she thought being a woman means being impossible to be objective about abortion while journalists should always be objective about anything they are covering. She said, "Being a journalist means stepping aside from you." Reporter B, who became a managing editor later than spring 2019, also said, "I usually want reporters of all genders to be able to cover this abortion issue. But, there's a little part of me thinking that the abortion issue will directly affect women. So, they have more at stake here." She told me that she has followed an unwritten custom that an abortion story needs to have a quote from a woman. She said in an interview that it might be the time to think about if that is true because an idea that a female source can make an abortion story objective might be a subjective idea.

RQ 2: What is an optimal approach to abortion reporting for Missouri journalists?

I asked every interviewee a question, “What does an abortion story need to have?” I have collected various answers. Four of the nine journalists said abortion stories always have to have multiple perspectives, hopefully, all sides. Reporter E said, “Journalists should try to focus on those who are in the middle, ‘gray area,’ and ask them what they think about abortion.” She also said, oftentimes, people in Missouri either strongly agree or strongly disagree with abortion, which means Missouri newspapers can miss someone in the middle. Editor B even said covering all sides is the only way to achieve objective reporting. Reporter B said an abortion story needs to have information from reliable sources. She defined reliable sources for an abortion story as experts in science and medicine who have done research to obtain science-based evidence. To make an abortion story neutral, Editor A said journalists should talk to experts who observe the abortion issue, but are not directly involved in it, such as college professors. Reporter C said every reporter covering abortion must always contact and talk to every news source with respect. The reporter said, “Don’t approach abortion with contempt about anybody’s motives.” It is against Reporter D who said she avoided believing in what her news sources said because their logic might contain something false. Reporter B said many news sources have their own agenda.

As for abortion protests, Editor A said, “The protesters try to make the opponent look as bad as possible with the choice of words.” While the journalists, especially Reporter C, seemed to aim at a peaceful abortion coverage where everyone has an equal chance and is equally respected, Editor C said an abortion story must always have conflicts. The journalist said the most important thing is to explain what the conflict

means and why it matters. He stressed that abortion news stories need to let the readers understand the issue, not just listing what is happening about abortion in Missouri.

Other journalists also agreed with the idea that an abortion story should be for the readers. Reporter A said, “An abortion story should be a tool that helps readers understand the controversial issue.” Editor B added that telling the readers what is happening is not enough. The journalist said “abortion stories need to have some context. What's the history of this particular thing we're writing about?”

Reporter D said journalists should cover abortion with knowledge of pregnancy and abortion procedures. She said this is what she regrets. She said she should have learned about abortion before talking to politicians and abortion activists. Reporter F, whose abortion stories for newspaper or TV were all about abortion protests, said visuals matter. Looking back on her coverage of abortion protests, she said, visuals allow “people who weren't there to have a glimpse of what it looked like and the context.” She also said visuals are necessary for any topics and at any time because they can convey so much more than texts. She said the only exception is when an object is something that cannot be on paper or on-air. She said she could not take pictures of many signs she saw at an abortion protest because they had slurs and images that were too graphic.

RQ 3: What challenges did Missouri journalists have when covering abortion?

As for the challenges for reporting about abortion, all the nine journalists said the abortion issue is long-lasting and polarizing. Reporter E said the abortion issue is about people's body and their lives. Editor C said the issue is not just about abortion because black women tend to have a harder time to get an abortion, and the recent trend to try to overturn *Roe v. Wade* might result in sexism. This comment correlates to the *Abortion in*

Missouri section in the Literature Review chapter. Editor C believes that abortion is not a single issue but a complex mix of long-standing social issues in Missouri. The interviewees said their readers in Missouri are not only passionate about abortion, but also, they have almost zero motivation to change their ideas. Reporter C said, “The two sides are so entrenched, they're so dug in.” Reporter B said she still isn't sure if her abortion coverage has helped her readers. She said, “Journalists have to give fair and accurate information to people who have already made up their minds about what they believe.” Reporter F also said, “I don't want to say it is pointless, but I should say that they read a news story only to double down on what they already believe about abortion.”

At the same time, four journalists said what people are saying might not always be true. Reporter B said, she thought almost anyone she was talking to may have an agenda, and they might want to promote their way of thinking and present it to the readers. She said she was telling herself that that was her job, not theirs. The reporter also said inaccurate information can spread fast and easily. Reporter F said protesters and politicians are also nervous about how journalists would portray them. She said, “People are really concerned with how they look and how they're going to sound and whether or not they're going to be taken out of context.”

As for interviewing politicians, Editor A said he told his reporters that the goal is not to ask politicians what their ideas about abortion are but to find why they support that idea. He added that politicians tend to state their opinions without addressing how they have come to believe that idea. Reporter A, one of the Editor A's reporters, said some politicians in Missouri explained their position based on research and evidence, while others seemed to say whatever was on their mind.

As for people at abortion protests, Reporter D said the protesters often asked about her personal views toward abortion. She also said, “It is never worth it to engage like that. If a journalist brings a personal opinion into a protest, the focus of a story might end up telling an opinion, rather than telling an issue itself.” Editor A said, “Journalists should be cautious about how the protesters express their opinions, rather than what they say.” Reporter B said covering all sides is essential, but it also means a journalist can face false information or something opposite to what another source says. Reporter B said, “I believe journalism exists to cut through all of that and find the facts and present the facts to people. Our job is to take comments from all sides and weed out the inaccuracy.”

It seems that the journalists had to think about how they should cover abortion. Reporter C said people in his newsroom agreed to do something different in their abortion coverage because they realized that Missourians are passionate about and interested in the abortion issue. He said, “We wanted to do something that's outside of the political parties and is maybe a little more personal, which was difficult because most people didn't want to talk about abortion on a personal level.” Reporter B said, “I think abortion reporting also benefits a lot from interviewing people who have had abortions and talking to them about why they chose abortion and how it works for them.”

Regarding the balance between journalists’ passion and their duty of writing a news story, some journalists said a mindset is a key to be objective. Reporter B said everyone has an idea and bias. She also said journalists should be aware of their bias and put themselves aside when doing a news story, especially when the topic is something controversial, such as abortion. Reporter C said journalists always should “try and think of things from the perspective of the patient.”

However, other journalists think that there are more specific things to do so that journalists can be objective. Reporter E said, “Objective reporting is not a mindset, but it's a process.” The journalist also said, “Making sure that you represent all viewpoints and pursuing every angle of the story will make your reporting objective.” Almost all the nine journalists said that a news story should not be an opinion piece. Reporter F said, “The issue in an opinion piece is that it includes judgment. It should be a reader who makes a decision.” Editor A said, “We don't want reporters to have strong personal opinions about what they're writing about.” Some interviewees said that one of the ways to be objective is to be careful about the words journalists use. Editor C said, “Journalists should never use the term ‘pro-life’ because it's a term that abortion opponents have coined for themselves. To be objective and neutral, journalists should say ‘abortion opponents’ and ‘abortion rights supporters.’”

Editor B emphasized the importance of including all the possible perspectives. He said, “If we have a reporter who is for abortion, I would tell that reporter to call someone who is anti-abortion, too.” Editors A and B said they would find that a reporter is passionate and has personal opinions about abortion if the reporter usually talks about her or his opinions in daily conversations in a newsroom. However, Editors A and B said they have not seen a reporter who explicitly expresses personal ideas about abortion. It indicates that reporters, at least those working for a newsroom of the Editors A or B, have tried not to reveal their opinions so that they can write an objective news story.

There was also a difference in how often journalists should publish abortion stories. Some said they ran an abortion-related story whenever they got new information on the abortion issue. Reporter C, who published abortion stories almost every single

time, said his abortion news stories actually did not attract the readers' attention very much. Reporter D, who worked for the same newsroom as Reporter C, said, "Everything you publish is not going to be for tomorrow's paper anymore. It's going to be in the next 10 minutes." Reporter C said the readers might have been in a "reader fatigue" and they lost interests in the issue itself because of their exposure to similar and repeated news stories. He said publishing a news story so often was a newsroom's policy.

This comment suggests that a newsroom's policy sometimes overpowers a journalist's opinion. A newsroom's decision might keep a journalist from thinking about one's own opinions because journalists would think that corporate decisions are authoritative and cannot be questioned. Editor A is the one who is strongly against the idea of providing updates every single time about an issue. He said, "If we run too frequently about a specific topic, readers stop reading those stories because they think there is nothing new in a story, and too many similar stories can overwhelm the readers." He even said, "We intentionally avoided running abortion stories to some extent." Instead, he said his newsroom often ran a news story like "Here are five things you need to know about the abortion issue in Missouri," so that the article can attract readers and give them an overview of what is happening and why it is important. He said he received letters and emails that thanked him for the summarized and explanatory news format.

Editor A also said he had published a story whenever there was an update about what he was following when he started his career in journalism in 2004. However, he said it does not work anymore because of the development of the Internet. "People now want one story that will give them a broad overview. They don't want to read a small story every day anymore."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The interviews with nine journalists have clarified what journalists mostly agree upon and what they tend to have different ideas. At the beginning of the news-making process, the journalists seemed to value discussions in a newsroom, and the reporters thought they should be influential in the discussions. Furthermore, reporters usually do not want their editor to be someone who dominates the newsroom. It is against Picard (2015)'s statement that recent journalists are a part of a big corporation and do journalism with little of their own motivations. The atmosphere of trying to respect anyone in a newsroom resonates with Banaszynski (2002)'s idea that editors and reporters should be collaborative, rather than being an editor who is authoritative enough to control reporters and tell them what to do. It also reflects Deluliis (2015)'s idea that an editor is not the only one who plays the role of an editor. However, as Reporter C published a story whenever there was an update because of the newsroom policy, which did not result in a large number of the readers, a newsroom's policy sometimes can get prioritized over a journalist's ideas and motivations. Lauk and Harro-Loit (2017) said an autonomy at the organizational level tends to overpower the one at the individual level. The interviews have shown that what the researchers had pointed out did appear in a newsroom in the midst of Missouri abortion reporting in spring 2019.

In 1996, Shoemaker and Reese said some journalists at that time had thought women probably could not be as objective as men toward abortion issues. The interviews revealed that some journalists in 2020, such as Editor A, also think that being a female can be a challenge covering abortion while others, such as Editor B, said sex does not

matter for a journalist's eligibility to cover abortion at all. Winter (2019) criticized that male journalists sometimes consider abortion as a "women's issue." However, this research has found that female journalists can also have an idea that men and women might not be equal in abortion reporting, as Reporter B, female, said, "The abortion issue will directly affect women. So, they have more at stake here." She also said she has been following an unwritten rule that an abortion story needs to have a quote from a woman.

As for the ways that journalists keep objectivity in their news stories, the interview answers suggest that objectivity might not be something that naturally comes from a journalist's mind. Before publishing their stories, the reporters who participated in this study had reviewed their writing to make sure that their articles cover all sides and are free from biased words. White (1950) once said gatekeepers influence what stories would be in paper and how those events would be described in a newspaper article. Having passed 70 years from White's research, this study has found that newspaper journalists who covered abortion in 2019 were gatekeepers of their own news stories to ensure that their articles are objective. The journalists' willingness to be objective is so firm that no one wanted to tell me about their ideas in terms of abortion because they said their job is to write a news story that needs to be objective. Editors A and B said they have not seen a reporter who expresses personal opinions about abortion in a newsroom throughout their more than 15 years of career in journalism.

In relation to Sisson et al. (2017)'s discussion on neutrality in journalism, the interviewees seemed to have an idea that a story with only one perspective about abortion or that uses terms like "pro-life" and "pro-choice" is not a good one because it is opinionated. Most journalists said, "all sides," rather than "both sides." The journalists

seem to value inclusivity in a news story. However, there seems to be a slight difference if they should just include all perspectives or need to verify all the comments referring to information based on scientific evidence. Although the interviewees said journalists should respect all the voices equally, the interviews have revealed that some journalists think that every source has one's own agenda and wants to push forward the idea even if it is against scientific evidence. Reporter D said people at an abortion protest tried to have her write about their ideas as the absolute truth. She also said, "It is never worth it to engage like that." It could be possible that journalists tend to see something backed up with science as more credible compared with a human source. In other words, journalists, at least those who participated in this research, think that paying respect to all the perspectives does not necessarily mean believing that all the comments are true.

All the nine interviewees said that a news story should not be opinionated. At the same time, most journalists said they think it is natural for journalists to have a personal opinion. It is the same as Kovach and Rosenstiel's research in 2014, saying that doing good journalism does not mean journalists must not have their opinions. To avoid letting personal opinions interfere with news stories, some said trying to stay away from one's own bias is essential. Others said things like, covering all sides and being careful with word choice to avoid using opinionated terms, such as "pro-life," are crucial.

Reporter D said journalists should be ready to cover abortion with knowledge of pregnancy, abortion, and the history of the abortion issue that Editor B called context. Editor C said an abortion story should explain the issue to the readers, not only telling what is happening. Reporter C said people working on an abortion story should look at

the issue from the perspective of abortion patients. There was also an idea that photos, videos, and graphics are significant because they convey more emotion than texts.

The interview answers also suggested an idea about the frequency of publishing an abortion story. Editor A said running a story at any time only results in losing the readers. The editor stated that reporters should summarize what has happened in the last several days or in a week so that they can provide explanatory and comprehensive abortion stories. Reporter C, who published an article whenever he got something new about abortion, said it did not result in a large number of readers. Therefore, Editor A's statement that questions the "new is the best" belief seems to have validity.

Regarding the news audience in Missouri, it turned out that journalists think newsreaders in Missouri tend to be passionate enough to have strong opinions about abortion. Reporter D said that that is not usual in other states in which she had worked before. Editor C said the abortion issue entails other social problems like racism. The literature review in this research also said abortion relates to racial disparities and the opportunity gap by introducing Longbons (2018) and Allison (2018). The difference between the research sources cited for the Literature Review and the journalists' impression is about what people think about abortion. Although Erickson (2020) said Republicans, known for supporting the strict abortion law, are in the majority at the Missouri Senate, the interviews found out that the imbalance does not always apply to the demographics of newspaper readers.

For the challenges that can be an obstacle for writing an abortion story, every interviewee said the abortion issue is so controversial that a person on one side seems never to accept ideas on the other side. In spring 2019, that polarization did make

journalists struggle and think about how they should cover abortion. Reporter B said, “Journalists have to give fair and accurate information to people who have already made up their minds about what they believe.” Reporter F said, “I don't want to say it is pointless, but I should say that they read a news story only to double down on what they already believe about abortion.”

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) said people tend to read articles they like and ignore stories that go against their ideas. Some of the interviewees also felt that some newspaper readers in Missouri in 2019 read abortion stories just to make sure what they believe was right. In other words, the readers were not likely to change their opinions by reading news stories about abortion.

As for feedback regarding abortion coverage, the journalists said they would appreciate if their readers express their opinions on the Facebook comment section tied to their stories. The interviewees regard a comment section as a place where people share their views with minimum restrictions rather than a place where journalists closely monitor to decide the future direction of their reporting. It goes against the finding of Yang (2015), who found that people at a magazine she observed see a social media platform as a source for newsroom decisions.

Conclusion

Although the nine interviews revealed how journalists in Missouri covered abortion in spring 2019, to some extent, this research has some limitations. First, the voice from nine journalists seems to be not enough to write a textbook on abortion reporting. Furthermore, this research only focuses on newspaper journalists covering the abortion issue in Missouri around May 2019. The narrow focus means that this study did

not look at how Missouri newspapers covered abortion before 2019, how TV and radio stations in Missouri reported the abortion issues in 2019, and how the national and international media reported on Missouri's new abortion law in 2019. Another limitation is that this research mainly focused on what journalists think about abortion, and the study has very little about how newspaper readers in Missouri reacted the abortion coverage in the spring of 2019.

Despite the limitations, this research has clarified points that journalists have not yet reached a consensus. It includes the legitimacy for female journalists to cover abortion, the trust toward people journalists talk to, and the frequency of publishing an abortion story. These specific topics about abortion reporting will help boost research on how journalists should cover abortion, an issue that people have been discussing for years. As the journalists being interviewed said, there seem to be no signs that the abortion issue will settle. However, as for the ways to produce a news story about abortion, there is at least room for discussing how journalists should do it better.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Transcript of an interview with Reporter A

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

I'm a State Capitol Reporter. So, usually, when things come up in the Capitol, Jefferson City, I let my editor know what is happening in the Capitol and what I am writing about that topic. It's rare that my editor has some strenuous objection. I haven't even got a rejection. But my editor sometimes tells me to pause because he thinks it is too early to publish a story, and he believes I need to have more details. When we discuss, the key is if it is relevant to readers. I think my editor knows more about our readers' preferences than me.

Do you like the way it works?

Yes. I mean, I'd be happy to have direction. When we disagree, which rarely happens, I'm not happy, but I know my editor makes an editorial decision, he does not do his things based on his preference. I would say my editor does not often interfere with my reporting because there's so much going on at once, and my editor is overseeing other reporters too. So, it would be impossible for him to take all the responsibility. It would be impossible for him to tell me what to do about everything.

Could you describe an ideal editor for you?

Well, it's hard to say, but I think editors should be able to provide a different perspective from the one from a reporter. More specifically, editors need to be able to see a big picture.

What did you keep in mind when interviewing politicians?

I tried to get a sense of where they were at the abortion issue and what their strong beliefs are.

What's the value of getting voice from politicians rather than quoting written statements?

Getting voice from politicians is essential because they're the ones making the policy that can affect our readers' lives.

Did the politicians explain their ideas about abortion well?

I think they explained their ideas and positions as best as they could. But I say that some of them explain their ideas based on research or evidence while others were just saying their opinions.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion protests?

When covering protests, I tried to make sure that my story has backgrounds, I mean, why are they protesting? I think a story that only tells “an abortion protest happened” is insufficient.

Have you got feedback from your readers about your abortion coverage in 2019?

We got some via Facebook and Twitter.

Can the feedback from the readers change your way of reporting?

I don't think I would change my reporting because of those comments. But, I do think comments sometimes give me new perspectives that let me learn something new. So, it is possible that new ideas influence my reporting decisions. Generally, though, most feedback about abortion stories I got was just people's opinions. And I'm happy to hear those opinions because I can realize that our news site has become a platform where people share their opinions.

Were you interested in or passionate about the abortion issue when you covered it?

I think I was interested in the issue. But, the main reason I covered it was because the abortion issue is important for people around the state. So many people care about it, and we, journalists, should be neutral when reporting such a controversial issue.

What makes abortion reporting neutral?

It's actually so difficult to achieve neutral reporting. At the first stage of reporting, I always asked myself, “What do I want to do here?” And, the answer is often basic. I just want to inform people about what is going on. I'm at the Capitol even though there could be so many people who wish to be there, but they could not. I always think newspaper journalists should tell their readers what is going on, not what they are thinking. They should also share a new perspective on an issue with the readers. To introduce a new perspective, a journalist sometimes needs to do research and talk with experts.

What do you mean by experts?

Experts are those who know all kinds of opinions about an issue and can explain those ideas.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

Especially in spring 2019, the focus was on a bill, which means what a politician says mattered a lot. So, understanding politicians' ideas accurately and telling them to the readers were my priorities.

What does an abortion story need to have?

I guess an abortion story should be easy to understand, and it should let people know what they need to know. So, I think a long abortion story that has “everything” isn’t a good one. An abortion story should be a tool that helps readers understand the controversial issue.

Appendix B: Transcript of an interview with Reporter B

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

I would say it was a mix of my story idea and my editor's assignment. As a reporter, the abortion issue was certainly a story that I wanted to write for our readers because I recognize that it was an important story for our readers to know about. And also, a lot of the abortion coverage at the time was focused on Planned Parenthood. And we do have a Planned Parenthood here in town. It does not offer abortion services. But it is located here in town. So, I think our readers are very interested in knowing about what's going on with them. So, yes, from a reporting standpoint, it was a story that I wanted to cover. And then I worked with my editor at the time to make sure that we report it in a fair way.

How can a journalist covering abortion be fair?

It feels like a very hard thing to do some time, especially if you're journalists like me, who has a personal opinion on this subject. And, I think it's something I had to remind myself every day, especially when I was reporting on this, I have a personal opinion in this, but I have to set that aside to be able to write the story with being fair. For us, being fair means making sure that people with different viewpoints are all represented in a story. So, we interviewed state lawmakers who were proposing certain abortion legislation and interviewed people in the local area. We also, of course, interviewed or at least made sure that there was a statement included from abortion providers, making sure that their voice is in our news stories.

How would you teach your reporters to stay away from their personal opinions?

I think it's just a matter of reminding them about that. I mean, I recognize that everyone has biases. That's just who we are as humans, depending on how we grew up or our past experiences. We all have gone through our stories with certain biases, whether it's an abortion story or really any kind of story. But I think it's just worth reminding reporters, especially when they're writing a story like the abortion issue that's so politically charged and it is so personal, the reporters have to be aware of their own biases, and really make sure that they are staying true to what journalism requires of them, rather than letting their biases get in the way.

Can a journalist's gender influence your reporter selection for abortion coverage?

I feel like I would assign the story based on who I think is the most capable reporter for a complicated subject regardless of a reporter's sex. But, when I was a reporter, I felt like I had a better understanding of the abortion issue than male journalists because I am a woman. Then, I did feel that I had to step aside from being myself and just be a journalist. So, being a journalist means stepping aside from you. But, it's sometimes really hard to set myself aside and focus on the journalism part.

So, I want to say that I wouldn't assign the story based on the reporters' gender. But I haven't been in that situation before. If I'm in that situation, it will definitely be something that makes me think about that.

Why does it seem so hard that male and female journalists cover abortion equally?

I think it's hard because abortion is an issue that directly affects primarily one group of people in this country. Women and transgendered men, I mean, people who have uteruses can get pregnant. I usually want reporters of all genders to be able to cover this abortion issue. But, there's a little part of me thinking that the abortion issue will directly affect women. So, they have more at stake here. We always make sure that every abortion story has a quote from a woman. I think it's time to think about if that is really the right thing.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion?

I think my biggest challenge was making sure that I was treating this story as a journalist and not being myself. I was making sure that I was getting voices represented and covering different sides of the issue and researching the issue instead of letting people know about my opinions.

Did your editor help you overcome those challenges?

Yes. My editor was and still is very good about making sure that different voices are represented and making sure that the story is fair. My editor was very cognizant of that.

Could you describe an ideal editor for you?

I think an ideal news editor is available to help reporters and sometimes guide the reporters so that they can go through issues that can come up during reporting. I also think a good news editor has skills in news judgment so that they can recognize what our readers need to know or want to know.

What did you keep in mind when interviewing politicians or experts?

I always kept in mind that they had an agenda. Regardless of the political party, I think politicians have an agenda when they're proposing legislation. And I think some of the groups who advocate on behalf of something or against something, also have an agenda. So, I was telling myself that almost anyone I'm talking to has an agenda. They want to promote their way of thinking and trying to cut through all of that and present it to the readers. But that was my job, not theirs.

I also think there was a lot of misinformation that is easy to spread around. So, when I was interviewing sources, I tried to make sure if I have a reliable source of information where I could double-check the things. I think that was important and necessary to give my readers fact-based information.

What do you mean by being reliable?

I often talked with experts in science and medicine. They often have done a lot of research, and they often have science-based evidence. So, I often brought that reliable information to the interviews with politicians or activists to ask them what they think about that information that can sometimes go against their agenda.

What do you want your reporters to keep in mind when they cover abortion protests?

I think I would tell my reporters to go talk to the protesters and get their point of view. And I would also tell them to make sure that they include the other side, I mean, people who support what the protesters are protesting. So, I will just say, "Cover both sides."

Have you got feedback from your readers about your abortion coverage?

Yes. I believe that a majority of our readers are conservative on this issue and do not approve of abortion. So, we definitely heard from our readers when we wrote stories or had stories in our paper about abortion. We got letters to the editor, we got guest columns that went on our opinion page as well. So, definitely, our readers did let us know their thoughts on this issue. When we posted abortion stories on Facebook, they certainly respond in comments and let us know their thoughts on abortion. We have some very vocal readers.

Did they criticize your coverage?

I don't know if I remember correctly, I think most of them don't necessarily criticize our coverage. Most comments are opinions like "Abortion is wrong for these reasons." I would say it was more about the issue rather than our coverage of it.

Did you often send a reply to those comments?

As a news organization, we will respond if there are questions like "Why did you cover this issue in this way?", "Why didn't you talk to this group or this person?" or "Why did you include this information?" We do respond to that kind of feedback because we want to be very transparent about how we do our job. But, most feedback says their opinions on abortion, and why they believe and what they believe. In that case, we don't necessarily respond to that. They're free to write letters to the editor and use our Facebook page as that public forum to say their opinions, but we don't necessarily respond to those kinds of comments.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

For abortion reporting, it has to do with the issue that is so polarizing, and people are very passionate about it. And I think most people either strongly agree or strongly disagree. It means journalists need to provide information for a very divided base of readers who don't agree on anything about the other side. So, maybe that's why it feels so

hard to cover. Journalists have to give fair and accurate information to people who have already made up their minds about what they believe.

What does an abortion story need to have?

I think abortion reporting should include voice from experts, reliable sources of information. I think abortion reporting also benefits a lot from interviewing people who have had abortions and talking to them about why they chose abortion and how it works for them.

What lessons did you learn when you covered abortion?

I learned that abortion is a complicated issue. I learned that everyone has an opinion on it. I also learned that this kind of coverage is very important for the readers. It is crucial for the readers to understand what's going on in the state of Missouri right now, and it is also necessary to let people share their opinions. So, my abortion reporting just reinforced me about how important it is for journalism to exist. All different sides are trying to push an agenda, and sometimes they use false information to do it, and I believe journalism exists to cut through all of that and find the facts and present the facts to people. Our job is to take comments from all sides and weed out the inaccuracy.

Appendix C: Transcript of an interview with Reporter C

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

I would say it was collaborative. It wasn't necessarily an editor telling me, we need a story on this. It was more like having conversations with other journalists in my newsroom. And, at that time, there was kind of two sorts of parallel stories, major kind of policy-driven stories, about abortion in Missouri. One was the legislature voting on what essentially amounted to a ban on abortion after eight weeks of pregnancy. So that was one very big and momentous issue driven by the legislative process. And then, there was a separate but related issue where the state health department was deciding whether to extend the license of the Planned Parenthood clinic in St. Louis. Since that clinic is the last one in Missouri, we thought Planned Parenthood was newsworthy. As a health care journalist, I felt like I needed to maintain a certain amount of skepticism because everyone has an agenda.

How did you discuss abortion reporting with other reporters?

I think there were probably like a half dozen of reporters. So, the state government people, the health care people, and a couple of feature writers sat down together to take a broader look at how we should be covering abortion because, at that point, it was clear that this was going to be a big story. Then, for almost two hours, we brainstormed ideas.

Were there disagreements in that discussion?

A newsroom is a place where people are gonna disagree, and they're gonna have arguments, and sometimes they get heated for the most part. However, that discussion was not particularly heated. There were maybe some areas of disagreement, but I think everybody kind of respected everybody else's thoughts, and I don't know if it was divisive or anything. I think that people were generally respectful. And we all just kind of wanted to figure out how to do something different from what we usually do. What we usually did was like, "This is happening in the legislature today. So, we need to write about it." "This is happening in court today, we need to write about that." So, at the discussion, I think we had a shared goal of trying to be more in-depth and be less kind of reactive to just the news of the day. We all agreed that the abortion issue was so important that it is worth taking a deeper look.

What lessons did you learn when you covered abortion?

We just tried to do something new. We wanted to do something that's outside of the political parties and is maybe a little more personal, which was difficult because most people didn't want to talk about abortion on a personal level.

Why did you get interested in health care?

When I was a senior at a college, I was diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, and I was in a hospital for three months. During that time, I got to be familiar with all the pros and

cons of our hospital system and our medical system in general. So, it did make me interested in thinking about the health policy like “What are some ways to make this system better or make it useful and kind to patients?”

How can health care journalists balance objectivity and the passion for health care?

My guiding principle is always to try and think of things from the perspective of the patient. They have a voice. Sometimes it is hard to hear a patient’s voice. So, for me, maintaining objectivity is to put myself in the shoes of a patient and think of what the patients want to know.

How does your newspaper experience help you do your job at a medical journal?

I was following state legislatures for a while as a newspaper reporter. I also had an idea of what some of the concerns among physicians about the health care system are and how it affects policies and people. So, I can say, thanks to my newsroom experience, I am very knowledgeable enough to write and edit medical journals, publications for doctors.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

I think the problem with the abortion reporting is that the two sides are so entrenched, they're so dug in. So, it doesn't seem like there's a lot of persuadable public. But, frankly, a lot of our abortion-related stories did not get a ton of traffic on the website. And what I want to mention is “reader fatigue.” I think a lot of people just kind of tuned it out. Now, it’s really hard to find new angles on abortion story other than the contrast between people who are for abortion and those who are against it.

What does an abortion story need to have?

It needs to have a sense of respect for people's different points of view. Every opinion matters. The key is just “Don't approach abortion with contempt about anybody's motives.” I also think creativity is needed to see the long-lasting issue with a fresh eye.

Appendix D: Transcript of an interview with Reporter D

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

It was collaborative. I would say 70% to 80% of the time, I was pitching and I was saying to my editor, “Hey, this is what we're going to write today, and this is what we're going to do.” But, at some point, we had meetings led by reporters who had experience or their feet touched on abortion-related issues. In these discussions, we talked about the past abortion stories we had published and how we could improve our reporting.

What happens if your editor disagrees with your pitch?

It's just a discussion. Usually, most of the time, they trust my judgment. We don't get into those arguments a lot, and that's mostly because I've come to understand what my editors would think newsworthy. I mean, something newsworthy is what the public would see. So, I asked myself, “What's the big story?” and “What might be kind of considered a turn of the screw?”

We're mostly in agreement, but there are times where we disagree, and I think it's just a discussion that comes out to be well. In these discussions, key questions were “Why is this issue unanswered?” and “Why does this matter? It's just a discussion, and I've never had an instance in which I pitched a story, and it was completely turned down.

Abortion is a very sensitive and highly politicized issue. So, I tried not to get into the political lens of things, even though it's very politicized. I was careful about my words to use in a story. For example, “pro-life” or “pro-choice” connote abortion advocates. So, I tried, for the most part, to stay away from these words and just tried to shoot it straight. I often discussed with my editors how we could publish an abortion story in a respectful way without biased or misleading words.

Could you describe an ideal editor for you?

An ideal editor is someone who knows about the topic. It is a problem if an editor can't spot an error or doesn't know what a reporter is talking about. Editors need to pay attention to accuracy. One misspelled word, or one misspelled name can discredit a whole story. So, it's important to be accurate. An editor should also be able to keep track of what each reporter is doing. If your editor is capable of this, it means the editor is thinking about you, and the editor has a big picture in her or his mind. It's really important to have an editor who is like an advocate for you and can relay what else is happening in the newsroom, which might affect your beat.

Why is the abortion issue so sensitive?

It's a long-lasting debate. It's either you think abortion is murder, or you think it's about a woman's liberty. So, the abortion issue is a very serious thing. It's easy for me to understand how people get passionate about that and how people get concerned about that. I completely understand why it's a sensitive issue. And, I also think it's a sensitive

issue because, for so long, people are not very open about their views about abortion, and it's a taboo subject. I think people have a lot of conflicting emotions about abortion as well and that they oftentimes can't reconcile within themselves. The abortion issue is not only about legislation but also about abortion clinics and women's rights.

A lot of Missouri women who were seeking abortion are going across the border to Illinois, and I went to an Illinois clinic, and there were just a lot of security concerns. And these clinics are actually set up so that it has maximum security. They're literally engineered in a way so that someone with a gun or something like a bomb can't get through. I had to take photos there. So, I had to be very careful because some patients who go there, they could be getting an abortion but their family doesn't know. And that could be a volatile situation for their family as well.

You've worked for several newsrooms. How does it influence your abortion reporting?

I've covered abortion in Illinois and Missouri. Writing about abortion in Illinois needs a completely different mindset than writing about abortion in Missouri. The most important thing is to listen to what people are saying about abortion and tell them to the readers even if the public comment you hear in one state is opposite to the one you hear in another state.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion?

Verification. Since abortion is a controversial issue, I tried so hard to make sure that my stories are based on facts. I was just running around and trying to keep track of where the legislation is, what's being put in, and what's being taken out of it. And abortion protests were going on around me. So, that was a really tense time. Also, last spring, abortion was an ongoing issue, which means I had to make decisions in real-time. It's usually there's no going back. Everything you publish is not going to be for tomorrow's paper anymore. It's going to be in the next 10 minutes.

How did you cover abortion protests?

I talked to the leaders of the protests to see what the intention of the protest was. There're a lot of colorful characters of protests that you have to wade through. A lot of times, people want to debate you, and they tend to want to know your personal views. And honestly, in my experience, it is never worth it to engage like that. When it comes to my personal views, I just deflect the question a lot of the times and usually turn it back to the person I'm talking to. If someone says something incorrectly, sometimes I will correct them and say, "Well, now that you know this, how do you feel about this?"

When I'm interviewing someone at a protest, I'm trying to get their perspective. And a lot of times, debating a protester is not constructive to understand more about what they think. If a journalist brings a personal opinion into a protest, the focus of a story might end up telling an opinion, rather than telling an issue itself.

How can journalists covering abortion be objective?

I think there's no such thing as an objective reporter. There's only such thing as an objective method. I have my personal opinions. But I have to maintain a sense of professionalism that will allow me to ask for questions in a respectful way to either side to view the issue to have empathy. I do think a diversity of opinions is very important. Whenever I am writing a story, I ask myself, "Is this accurate?" "Is this fair?" and "Am I truly understanding what is going on?"

What does an abortion story need to have?

I think that this is actually something that I probably learned a little too late. But, having a basic understanding is essential, like how pregnancy works, how abortion procedures work at what times, at what weeks you can do what and an understanding of the complications of abortion, as well as how that fits into the larger medical image of complication rates and how a woman's uterus works. All of that information was something that I learned through writing news stories about abortion. It was largely very helpful for me when writing about legislation, when writing about court cases and when writing about licensing issues. So, I think that's very important.

When reporting on abortion, understand the history and understand the big picture. I keep saying it because this is a state-by-state issue. So, just understanding how different states are synthesizing that legislation or what their backlash is and what their outcome is, really inform your reporting. I learned those things as I reported abortion, but I think I should've learned these before going out to cover abortion.

There's a lot of misinformation, and I'm going to be honest, there's a lot of disingenuous ways that advocates try to push their legislation. The only way that you can discern is if you have a basic understanding and basic knowledge.

Appendix E: Transcript of an interview with Reporter E

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

It was kind of a collaborative effort where we would discuss, like, “I want to write something about the abortion legislation.” Then, we discussed what would be the best way to do it.

What makes an abortion story a good one?

Abortion is really tricky because it's not really one of those issues where you can find a middle ground on it. It's such a controversial and polarizing topic. So, we agreed to make sure that we represent a variety of opinions about abortion without getting too extreme on it. If we get too extreme, then that doesn't really help the reader a lot. So, we approached issues in a way that is explanatory. “Who proposed the abortion legislation?” “Why did they propose it?” After clarifying the answers, we talked to people who either agree or disagree with abortion to see why they believe their opinions are right. Although we are a local newspaper, we kept in mind that the abortion issue last year was enough to be a national story.

What happens if you encounter a disagreement about your abortion story ideas?

I think there was a bit of disagreement with people in the newsroom about the best way to cover it because some people wanted to talk to people on the opposite side of the spectrum, and I didn't think that that was entirely the best way to do it. But, we all kind of worked collaboratively, and there wasn't really a whole lot of argument.

How did you deal with the disagreement?

It was just talking with my editor and other reporters. My editor often offered an idea that let us compromise. So, my editor did a great job of letting us reach the best possible consensus.

Could you describe an ideal editor for you?

It is someone who trusts reporters. If I feel my editor trusts me, I will be able to come up with good ideas and produce good stories. Luckily, all my editors I've worked with weren't too hands-on. They trusted me and allowed me to do what I want.

What did you keep in mind when interviewing politicians about abortion?

I approached them carefully. The abortion issue is so sensitive, and everyone has an agenda.

Why is the abortion issue so sensitive?

There's no political issue like this. It is because it involves someone's health and someone's decision with their body or even their lives. The abortion issue is so polarizing, and I think not so many people are in the middle about abortion.

Have you got feedback from your readers about your abortion coverage?

I think there was some stuff on Facebook. But these comments were about the legislation, not about the way I wrote the story. So, on Facebook, they just shared their opinions.

Did you reply to those opinions?

No. I think we only need to reply to comments if they're correcting the story or asking a question to clarify my reporting.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion?

The biggest challenge was that I was so new in covering the state government and covering abortion that is controversial in nationwide. It was just a little bit nerve-racking to talk to people about abortion because it is so controversial.

How did your editor and other reporters help you overcome those challenges?

My editor was really honest with me. He said I don't need to be scared of politicians or abortion protesters because they're nervous too when I interview them. And he gave me the advice like, just treat them like they are any regular person that I would interview. And I had also talked to my friends who covered Missouri state government before. It helped me go through the abortion reporting too.

What lessons did you learn when you covered abortion?

I learned a lot about how to cover the issue that people really become black or white. I also learned how to approach issues that come with a serious controversy with a bit of empathy towards both sides to get a better understanding of the issue. The abortion reporting also taught me a lot about the way that legislation works in the statehouse.

How does your abortion reporting last year help you do your current reporting job?

That experience helps me a lot because I am familiar with a lot of the lawmakers now. Also, I'm not uncomfortable, apprehensive, or scared to ask questions to politicians anymore.

Were you interested in or passionate about the abortion issue when you covered it?

I wanted to cover it because I thought the new abortion law could overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which is a huge issue. I don't have strong personal opinions about abortion. So, that didn't really impact my reporting.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

I feel like what makes abortion reporting different is that it's hard to find a compromise with it. Republicans had included exceptions for the bill. But Democrats still would not accept the new bill. No one seems to change their ideas about abortion. It seems like they were not even willing to compromise.

I also think journalists covering abortion have to be more careful with language use. When I was interviewing someone, I did not use terms like “pro-choice” or “pro-life” at all because I didn’t want to imply that I am opinionated. In general, journalists have to be more careful when covering abortion. If journalists aren’t careful, especially about anti-abortion, it can end up being in a religious problem.

What does an abortion story need to have?

Representing all viewpoints with accuracy is essential. But it doesn’t necessarily mean representing the two extremes. I think journalists should try to focus on those who are in the middle, “gray area,” and ask them what they think about abortion.

How can journalists balance their passion for the abortion issue and their obligation to be objective?

We can't pretend that we don't have opinions at all. Objective reporting is not a mindset, but it's a process. So, making sure that you represent all the viewpoints and pursuing every angle of the story will make your reporting objective. Journalists should ask themselves what bias they have. A news story needs to be objective and truthful. It’s also important to do a fact-check with science-based evidence.

Appendix F: Transcript of an interview with Reporter F

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

I covered an abortion protest. I approached my editors and told them, “Hey, there's going to be a protest. So many people are talking about this abortion bill right now. So, I think it's something that we should cover.” And they said they thought that would be a good idea as well.

What happens if your editor disagrees with your pitch?

I would tell my editor that it is a hot topic and that people are going to read it and want to be informed about it, especially if there's a local angle of people protesting. I haven't been in a fight with my editors.

Could you describe an ideal editor for you?

It is someone who can give feedback. Reporters are paid and independent people. So, if there are editors who are micromanaging the newsroom and telling you that you need to interview this person, and you need to write from this angle, then you're just going to lose some quality.

What feedback about abortion reporting did you get from your editors?

Honestly, they didn't really give us any feedback on our stories, unless there is an issue with it.

Do you want to get feedback?

I like getting feedback, maybe, like an email or something. I don't think I need to have a sit-down meeting for every story I do, because that would be a lot of meeting.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion protests?

There really wasn't too much of a challenge. I expected that there would be some “counter-protesters” who were against people protesting. I was kind of worried that maybe there would be some who are a little aggressive. But luckily, that didn't happen. I just reported like, “there is a protest, and this is what those people have to say.”

Were the protesters willing to talk to you?

With my journalism experience, I already knew quite a few people that were there that are willing to talk to me. So, they pretty much just went along with everything I asked.

Do you have a strategy to persuade people to take your interview?

I usually tell people that I'll make sure that they don't sound stupid in my story. But for some reason, people always worried about that. I also tell them, it's only going to take a few minutes. And, especially if they're going to be on TV, I say it's only going to be for about five seconds. So, most of the time, people are really concerned with how they're

going to look and how they're going to sound and whether or not they're going to be taken out of context.

Have you got feedback from your readers or viewers about your abortion coverage?

I didn't get feedback about the way that I did it. But obviously, there were people who had opinions about whether the bill should be going through in Missouri or not. I deleted some comments with slurs and graphic images. These comments make me look bad and help spread inaccurate information. But I left all the other comments in the comment section on Facebook, and I didn't reply to them because those were people's opinions. I think it's important to have a pinned message, telling readers that "I will delete your comments if you violate the rules."

How can your newsroom improve future abortion coverage?

I think it would be a good idea to talk to more medical professionals about the issue, which is hard to do in the state of Missouri since there really is only one abortion clinic in the entire state. So, you'd have to reach out to someone in St. Louis to do that. Also, just getting some feedback from someone who's had an abortion will add personal perspectives to abortion coverage, which often ends up being political.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

I think people are stuffed in their views, and they rarely change their stance from one side to the other. I don't want to say it is pointless, but I should say that they read a news story only to double down on what they already believe about abortion.

What does an abortion story need to have?

I would say you need to try to get the point from both sides like pro-life and pro-choice, and maybe find someone in the middle too. Just try to get all the viewpoints. Every article you write, you should try to get multiple angles on it. Sometimes words are not enough. A photograph of people protesting can convey emotion. Visual matters. It allows people who weren't there to have a glimpse of what it looked like and the context. Just kind of getting the spirit of what things were like, rather than just reading a story. So, I think all journalists should be able to take photos. I mean, take pictures with an actual camera, not an iPhone. It allows you to do so much more and capture so much more.

How can journalists covering abortion be objective?

I think just getting to know more than one side. Journalists always need to get all sides and give all the background information.

What challenges did you face when you were covering abortion in general?

For the abortion issue, it's sometimes hard to get a video. Even when there's a protest, I sometimes couldn't film it because some signs had slurs.

Were you interested in or passionate about the abortion issue when you covered it?

I covered abortion mainly because it was a hot topic, and I knew that people would want to read it and want to know what is going on in the local area.

Do you think journalists should be passionate about what they are covering?

So much passion can make a news story an opinion piece, that's not good. But, journalists should have some passion about what they're doing. The issue in an opinion piece is that it includes judgment. It should be a reader who makes a decision.

What would you do if you could go back to 2019 and report an abortion protest again?

I will still cover the protest. I will try to talk with "counter-protesters," someone being against the protesters.

Appendix G: Transcript of an interview with Editor A

What were the criteria you used when assigning your reporters to abortion stories?

Primarily, we have covered the abortion issue with our state politics reporter. So, we typically covered political issues, I mean, anything that the state legislature is doing. And, since a lot of the news about Planned Parenthood and abortion have been related to the legislature or state government, someone at the Planned Parenthood has almost always been the person to cover.

Did you always have discussions with reporters before sending them to the field?

Not always, but generally. We discussed whenever my reporters alerted me that they thought there was a story that we needed to write because they found out about some action by the state or a proposed bill has been filed. We often talked about, “What is new here?” “What is the news?” and “How can we tell the story in the best way?”

I don't recall a lot of disagreements with my reporters. Discussions were more like constructive. We talked about whether or not we should do a story or how we should do a story. It was often an issue of timing. And one thing that we have found out is that if we run too frequently about a specific topic, readers stop reading those stories because they think there is nothing new in a story, and too many similar stories can overwhelm the readers. We want our readers to pay attention to our coverage. So, we intentionally avoided running abortion stories to some extent.

Instead of publishing a story every single time, we preferred pulling all the information together and put the information into a single story and explain the issues very well. We often ran a story like, “Here are five things you need to know about the abortion issue in Missouri.” It makes more sense for the readers and provides more background and context. That story is a lot better. It's been performed a lot better online too. We got feedback from other readers that they liked that way of doing it. Whenever a reporter told me that something about abortion happened, I said, “Was it big enough to justify doing a story today?”

What would you do if a reporter is more passionate about abortion than other reporters?

I haven't dealt with any reporters who were particularly passionate about it. That's something we try to avoid. We don't want reporters to have strong personal opinions about what they're writing about. So, if I had a reporter with strong feelings about abortion, I would probably not assign that reporter to write the story because the story is gonna be more opinionated.

How can journalists covering abortion be objective?

Cover both sides. There are multiple sides. So, make sure that you are giving everyone a chance to explain themselves to the best of their ability. Also, all the state politics

reporters that I have worked with over the last few years have been men. So, there's maybe less of a personal connection to the issue, compared to women.

Do you see any issues in that all the state reporters are men?

How well a reporter can write a news story is much more important than if the reporter is a man or a woman. Although our team members are all men, we can do things professionally, and we're aware of the importance of the abortion issue to women. So, last year, each of us ensured that we have a more feminine perspective on the issue.

Are you willing to let a female reporter do an abortion story?

Well, in my experiences, women tend to have stronger feelings about the abortion issue. I wouldn't say women can't cover abortion, but I would just have to make sure that they can set those feelings aside when covering abortion.

What do you want your reporters to keep in mind when they interview politicians?

I would say, "Get hidden motivations." We always try to be aware of that. When reporters interview politicians, they should also ask themselves questions like, "Is it a new development?" "Is it something that we need to immediately write a story?" or "Is it something that should be more of a roundup story in a week or two?" A politician changes their ideas when things change. So, we often wait rather than publishing every single comment we got. To find a politician's hidden ideas, talking with other politicians, experts, or even the politician's opponents is effective. Then, our story gets neutral.

How do you define being neutral in a news story?

To achieve a neutral story, journalists should look for people who are not directly involved in the arguments. College professors who study and observe the issue can be a good choice for a source that makes a story neutral.

What do you want your reporters to keep in mind when they cover abortion protests?

I know an abortion protest is a very emotional topic for a lot of people, and the motivations are often very different from the particulars of the laws that are being discussed. Journalists should be careful when covering abortion protests because the protesters try to make the opponent look as bad as possible with the choice of words. Journalists should be cautious about how the protesters express their opinions, rather than what they say.

What lessons did you learn when you covered abortion as an editor?

I think the biggest lesson was that people lose their interest in the topic if we write stories about it too frequently. We can really do more harm by writing about it too often. People stop paying attention altogether. Again, the best way we can serve our readers was to wait and then write the stories that really explain the issue and what would happen and then how significant it was.

How did the abortion reporting norm change from when you started your career?

Back in 2004, I published a story every time I got a new piece of information. But, due to the development of online news, people now want one story that will give them a broad overview. They don't want to read a small story every day anymore.

What does an abortion story need to have?

Abortion stories should help readers understand the issue. So, don't be afraid to explain the issue or a related term. We need to help translate the issue. So, we try to avoid jargon. There are a lot of loaded terms that people on one side will try to use. There're also some buzzwords and biased language. We try to avoid them. Instead, we explain what these words mean.

Appendix H: Transcript of an interview with Editor B

What were the criteria you used when assigning your reporters to abortion stories?

The reporter selection depends on the nature of the story. If it's a legislative story, it might be assigned to our reporter, who covers capital. If there's a new bill or new legislation about a medical issue, that might go to a reporter who has some familiarity with the hospitals and has worked with the medical community so that we can get their perspective on the abortion issue. But, any reporter on staff might cover abortion at any given time.

Did you often discuss with reporters, regarding abortion reporting?

We have discussed it with those who've covered abortion at various times, and we discussed it from a number of points of view. I don't think there was a major disagreement. We just agreed to make sure that we have voices from all sides of this issue. So, we wanted the anti-abortion groups. We wanted Planned Parenthood. We wanted to talk to people in our community about this issue as well. So, we just emphasized with each and every reporter that we would include voices from all the different perspectives on this abortion issue.

What would you do if a reporter is more passionate about abortion than other reporters?

All journalists are human beings. We all have opinions and passion. There's no secret about that. We all have our own viewpoints on some of these issues. We don't want their viewpoint out of the paper. Our goal is to make sure that the various viewpoints of the parties involved are represented. So, if we have a reporter who is for abortion, I would tell that reporter to call someone who is anti-abortion too.

Can a journalist's gender influence your reporter selection for abortion coverage?

No. The questions that we need an answer are like "What is the major issue in the new bill?" or "What is going on in the Capitol? I will choose a reporter who has experience in what we are trying to cover. It doesn't matter if a person is male or female. We usually send both male and female reporters to the Capitol. So, gender doesn't matter very much in our newsroom.

What lessons did you learn when you covered abortion as an editor?

Some of the lessons are that people have very strong opinions on abortion. Our job is to make sure that the opinions of all sides are represented. There was a lot of passion, a lot of intensity brought to this issue. The only way that we can make sure that we're doing this right was to make sure that all sides are covered. If we don't represent all sides, the readers would think the story is unfair. So, we try to show all the different perspectives.

Did you get criticisms about your newsroom's abortion coverage?

No. I don't think we got much pushback on that. If somebody writes a column on the editorial page, that's more likely we're going to get some resistance because it's going to be pretty much one-sided.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

There are multiple perspectives on the abortion issue. In our stories, we have to represent all the different perspectives. People are so passionate about it and so serious about it. There's sometimes no common ground or room for compromising. Also, Missouri has many cases that have gone to the Supreme Court, maybe more than any other state. So, there's no doubt that people care about abortion, especially in Missouri.

What does an abortion story need to have?

I think abortion stories need to have some context. What's the history of this particular thing we're writing about? So, what we need is to provide abortion stories with context from all sides. We also want to hear from Planned Parenthood, and from people in our community.

Do you think covering all sides is the only way to achieve objective reporting?

Yes. I think so. I don't know how you could write about it, not covering both sides.

Appendix I: Transcript of an interview with Editor C

How did your abortion reporting usually start?

Most abortion stories are driven by events. For example, there is a court case for a piece of legislation, or there is a government action by a regulator that you think the public should know about. I always tried to track legal court filing database, online database, either by having an alert sent for me or by finding it by looking at the case up and wondering, “Is there anything new?”

I think the abortion story should be collaborative. For example, when reporting about an incident that someone tried to burn the Planned Parenthood in Columbia, a police and crime reporter came in. I also think, when covering a controversial issue like abortion, people with expertise on that topic should lead the reporting. I've been writing stories about the regulation of abortion since the 1980s, and I've got a pretty good grasp of it. So, I covered lots of abortion stories last year. The core of reporting, including abortion reporting, are “What is happening” and “What do people think about that?” Abortion stories should be objective, and it should not be an opinion piece. We need to tell readers the most newsworthy thing and educate the public.

How do you teach young reporters to write an objective abortion story?

I would tell them to describe what they see without including their own opinions. One of the ways to do that is to avoid opinionated words. So, journalists should never use the term “pro-life” because it's a name that abortion opponents have coined for themselves. To be objective and neutral, journalists should say “abortion opponents” and “abortion rights supporters.”

Have you got feedback from your readers about your abortion coverage in 2019?

Yes. I mean, we got criticisms like, “Why is this a story?” or “This is not what I think.”

Did you often reply to those opinions?

Not too much. If they ask us a direct question, we will try to reply. But in most cases, we just let people share their opinions. The only exception is when they start fighting with each other in the comment thread, using language that goes beyond a constructive discussion. If that happens, we might delete the comments.

Can the feedback from readers change your way of reporting?

Well, we would if someone pointed out a serious omission in a story or we were missing something. But, for the most part, those comments are opinions.

What makes abortion reporting different from covering other controversial issues?

There has been a question of whether abortion should be legal in the United States for a long time. *Roe v. Wade* was 47 years ago. Also, abortion issue relates to the issue of race, non-whites are likely to have a harder time to get an abortion than white women, and the

issue of gender inequality, the United States Constitution isn't providing the same protection for women, as it does for men. Women couldn't even vote several decades ago. So, the abortion issue is a long-lasting and reflects many other social issues.

What does an abortion story need to have?

All abortion stories have conflict. There's a conflict between those who support abortion rights and those who oppose it. A lot of good abortion stories have elements of conflict. When the conflict is strong, then, of course, there are so many people who are willing to engage in that. Several hundreds of people participated in rallies in Missouri. So, it's a story of conflict. It's a story of people. It's a story of what it means to be involved. When telling readers about that, it is important to explain what it means to the readers.