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It's about more than reproduction: a visual ethnography about Jennifer Sedbrook

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Who is Jennifer Sedbrook?:

Jennifer Sedbrook has been an advocate for women's reproductive rights since her undergraduate years, and has established or been an influential leader in many women's healthcare organizations and is currently serving on the state board for Planned Parenthood of Illinois (PPIL). She stresses Planned Parenthood as a vital resource for the whole community, not just women. She strives to normalize discourse on women's health, and fights for the availability of affordable women's health services in the community (**Figure 1**). Current Conservative politics stigmatizes Planned Parenthood, and women's healthcare, endangering the availability of a standardized medical care that is critically needed (Abbasi, 2019).



Figure 1. Sedbrook emphasized that the greatest challenge she has faced as an advocate is communication. Making the community aware of the services and championing the voices of those who are often overlooked or ignored, are things she tries to make essential in anything she does. Making the "average person" be heard can be challenging, but it is an essential aspect in advocating and it leads to more inclusion, better services, and education. Photo by author and Sedbrook

In two recent op eds in *The Pantagraph*, Sedbrook explains that there are fundamental differences between men's and women's health, each requiring specific services that can be unattainable because of unavailability in the area and/or personal financial challenges (Sedbrook, 2019a; Sedbrook, 2019b). As a patient at Planned Parenthood, she realized the importance of the services and safe space it created. Planned Parenthood offered her and approximately 2.5 million others [annually] (Lawrence & Ness, 2017), efficient and affordable health care, and candid advice about sexual and reproductive health by healthcare professionals in an open and respectful environment. While family planning is important and is a basic decision women should be able to make for themselves, she wants to express that Planned Parenthood is more than just reproductive services. The clinic caters to the basic health needs of women from cancer screenings to gynecological check-ups, provides services for men, and has begun to offer services for the Trans Community. This inclusiveness and availability is what Sedbrook argues that makes Planned Parenthood an essential community resource. She loved what Planned Parenthood offered, and it inspired her to join the women's health movement with the support of other "fearless women" she met along the way (**Figure**

2). Now she works to educate others in the same fashion through the establishment of other organizations, such as Women Empowered and Women's Heart Health Ambassadors that became other community resources to provide a supportive space for women, educate others, and fund other services.



Figure 2. As Sedbrook explains, "Connecting with other women is important. Together, you can always make a difference." Sedbrook is honest about the challenges of advocating for women's health, but also recognizes the successes she has had. Sedbrook has lived a life championing the voices, bodies, and health of women and acknowledges the power of being supported by like-minded, strong women who "aren't afraid" to do and say what needs to be done. Photo by author and Sedbrook

Misconceptions and Realizations:

Being a woman, I was no stranger to Planned Parenthood or the socio-political strife over women's health and reproductive autonomy, but I overlooked the vastness of women's health that was being neglected. I initially was focused on Planned Parenthood and reproductive rights with

the introduction of the Heartbeat Bill being enforced in my home state of Georgia in May of 2019, so my collaboration with Sedbrook drastically expanded my understanding of women's health issues beyond reproduction. Currently, most research and discourse on women's health centers on abortion and reproductive rights due to the rising social and political tension between progressives and conservatives. Conservative sentiment argues against Planned Parenthood as a service that performs abortions and distributes birth control and contraceptions which are services that many Conservatives also interpret as encouraging premarital or underaged sex, even though teen pregnancy rates have dropped approximately 37% between 1991 and 2009 and continue to decline (Pazol, et al., 2011). What is ignored in these protests is that abortion serves as only 3% of the services offered by Planned Parenthood, while the rest is largely overlooked. Planned Parenthood is affordable healthcare for men and women, women can get gynecological exams and tests, men and women can get breast exams beyond general mammograms, tests for STDs and HIV, and many other services that can be unaffordable, unavailable at a specific location or too time-intensive due to the referral process (Abassi, 2019; Lawrence & Ness, 2017). Sedbrook also taught me about the wide community for whom Planned Parenthood provides services. I had always heavily

associated Planned Parenthood as a women-centric healthcare clinic but came to learn that men can also use some of the resources, and that Planned Parenthood provides hormone therapy for those in the trans community.

Collaborating With Mrs. Sedbrook:

I used visual ethnographic methods such as creating visual metaphors, photography and videography to work collaboratively with Jennifer Sedbrook to best represent her. We met a handful of times throughout the interview process: initially at the local coffee shop near Illinois State University that serves as a midpoint for us both, then at her office at Illinois State University's Alumni Office where the interview was filmed in two sessions. Our final meeting was held at Ames Library where we discussed the use of pictures in the project and how to best create visual metaphors that best portrayed her, her advocacy, and her beliefs (**figure 3**). Sedbrook shared a poster and a magazine article featuring organizations she has been involved with and discussed pictures of people who provided her with encouragement or inspiration. To create visual metaphors and rouse inspiration, we looked through past visual ethnographic essays and created lists of ideas on a white board that correlated to strong themes that appeared in her narrative. I established rapport with Jennifer Sedbrook by discussing my interest in women's health advocacy. I shared



Figure 3. Sedbrook has family, friends, and colleagues she holds near to her heart. She looked through the photos and complete a timeline of her professional career as we discussed pictures she wanted to include and patterns that emerged to create her narrative. Photo by Sedbrook, author and Jessica Bugayong.

some personal experiences about disappointing medical services and fears over the current political climate surrounding women's reproductive rights, it was clear that I had a personal interest in Sedbrook's advocacy and felt strongly about the work she has done for the community.

"Together, We Fight For All":

Sedbrook has been involved in a multitude of women's health advocacy organization and programs. Planned Parenthood (P.P.) has been an integral part of her life for many years. Her first introduction to P.P. was in college in Virginia and she gained a passion for their services and environment. While receiving her Masters degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Sedbrook worked at Marshfield Clinic that provided services to rural women (**Figure 5**). At OSF Healthcare in Bloomington, Sedbrook established two

organizations: Women's Heart Health Ambassadors (WHHA) and Women Empowered (WE) (**Figure 6**).



Figure 5. Moving so far away from home was liberating for Sedbrook and introduced her to new experiences that she feels helped establish herself as who she wanted to be as an independent woman. Photo by author and Sedbrook

Sedbrook takes great pride in WHHA as it has become a source of women's health education and it has formed lasting relationships with the women involved. With roughly 8.6 million annual deaths due to heart disease, Sedbrook and OSF recognized a critical need in women's health that wasn't handled in neutral healthcare (Manuel, Macdonald, Mandville-Anstey, Percy, Coffin, 2016). WE is a female-led "giving circle" that supports the advancement of education and health services for women through fundraising efforts. Members donate money to health and

educational services and training programs covering topics ranging from domestic abuse to mental health awareness and breast cancer screening. The organization spreads awareness of women-centric health issues and gave a voice to other women in the community through open-mic sessions. Sedbrook is proud that neighboring counties have adopted Women Empowered and centered the organization around the needs of women in their own communities. Though retired from her position at Women Empowered, Sedbrook is confident in the talents of the women who now lead the organization (**Figure 4**). As a member of the state board for Planned Parenthood of Illinois (PPII), Sedbrook acts as advisor for 17 clinics across the state, including the Bloomington clinic. As an active board member she uses her position to give a voice to the community and fight for



Figure 6. Sedbrook considers Planned Parenthood her "home" in her advocacy journey, and believes her greatest success to be the establishment of two groups that reflected important aspects of women's health that inspired her to be an advocate: Women's Heart Health Ambassadors (WHHA) and Women Empowered (WE). Photo by author and Sedbrook.

advocacy and change.



Figure 4. After Sedbrook retired as chair of Women Empowered, she was confident she was leaving the organization in good hands. She enjoyed the five-year reunion where she was able to speak with the women she has worked with over the years. She is excited to see the future of the women's health movement through the organizations she established. The picture above depicts Sedbrook (far left) handing off her role and responsibilities to Erin (center) and Kim (far right). Photo by author and Sedbrook

Research Analysis:

Sedbrook has integrated herself into women's healthcare advocacy through being a patient herself. From being a young woman that was receiving a basic healthcare service and receiving advice on sexual and reproductive care to being a woman who was diagnosed with breast cancer that wasn't detectable on the basic mammograms women receive in check-ups. Planned Parenthood means more than just healthcare to her as it had been a place of advice, education, and discretion and had healthcare professionals that made her feel safe as much as independent and in-charge of her own body. Sedbrook noticed a need in women's healthcare

that extended beyond just reproductive care, women were suffering because they were being treated primarily by men, as men, in all other areas of healthcare. Women experience illnesses differently, can have different symptoms, and often take up the role as caregiver.

Conclusion:

Jennifer Sedbrook is a woman of many ventures that has made it a goal to assist in educating the community about women's health issues that are often overlooked, advocating for health services that would provide basic healthcare needs to women and others who may be overlooked in healthcare, and providing platforms for those individuals to be heard. As a board member for Planned Parenthood of Illinois (PPIL), Sedbrook tries to combat the stereotypes and assumptions made about Planned Parenthood through communicating with the surrounding community, inquiring about new ideas or concerns, and generally being open to conversations about Planned Parenthood and women's health. Working with Sedbrook has granted me a fuller picture of women's health issues but has also shown how women work together to solve these issues, and how the surrounding community responds to this support. It has been a privilege working alongside Mrs. Sedbrook. I feel that I have gained a clear insight into advocacy involvement and further appreciation for how strong women can

accomplish anything through supporting .
each other.

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