

“Blurring the Line”

“Blurring the Line” is a short documentary film about the barriers that women with disabilities face when seeking reproductive healthcare. The film begins with interviews of four women, each of whom is asked about her experience receiving obstetrics and gynecological care. We discuss her ability to receive contraception, undergo thorough examinations (Pap smears, STI testing, pregnancy tests), and physically access an OB-GYN who understands her body.

A following interview with Dr. Lauren Clark, UCLA Professor and Shapiro Family Endowed Chair in Developmental Disability Studies, provides a critical analysis of the differences in the four women’s experiences. In our healthcare systems, identifying as a woman often carries a subtle pressure to identify as a *nondisabled* woman—a woman who is represented in reproductive medicine, can receive medical care without physical accommodations, and resembles the population majority. Such assumptions can produce systems of medicine that discriminate against those who do not fit within this definition.

This documentary delves into the relationship between these four women and the healthcare system that dictates how they receive care. It is my hope that viewers will finish the film with an understanding of reproductive rights as one that is inclusive of disabilities—“blurring the line,” as Dr. Clark says, between women both with and without them.

Impact your project will have on the field of Disability Studies

Given that 82.8% of practicing OB-GYNs in the United States do not receive training on the provision of healthcare to women with disabilities, I believe that this project is a needed resource to educate medical professionals on the populations they care for. My documentary intends to tactfully inform medical professionals on the biases that can lead to inequitable healthcare, including how these injustices may be practiced and reinforced by the medical professionals who work in these systems. Through the stories of the four women in my film, I hope that “Blurring the Lines” provides a voice for the disabled community to share their lived experiences with the people who tirelessly care for our health, bridging more communication, collaboration, and understanding between our disciplines.

How has disability studies shaped your perspective of difference? How is your capstone project related to your aspirations and how does it contribute to viable action to advance a just society?

I first watched the 2020 documentary *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* in Professor Caitlin Solone's Disability Studies 101 class. Denise Jacobson, a woman with cerebral palsy, reveals that she has recently received an appendectomy, or surgical removal of her appendix, due to severe abdominal pain. Denise, however, does not have appendicitis. In fact, she does not have an issue with her appendix at all.

Denise has gonorrhea, a condition closely associated with the discharge, unusual sores, and burning urinary sensation symptoms she had shared with her physician prior to her diagnosis and surgery. Denise's doctor had disregarded this possibility entirely based on the assumption that Denise (or, as left unstated, disabled women in general) were not the "type of person to be sexually active."

Crip Camp enabled me to understand that the "perspectives of difference" practiced by Denise's doctor can engender entire systems of inequity. Further classes in disability studies, including my 195CE internship quarters with my graduate student instructor, mads le, and my disability rights law lectures in Professor Beth Ribet's M149 course, provided the foundation I used to produce my capstone project. I intend for my documentary to guide my future career as an aspiring physician assistant (PA), where I will be able to positively influence the disabled healthcare experience.

While systems of discrimination are larger than any one individual, PAs, doctors, nurses, and other medical providers nevertheless hold the responsibility of working against such systems. It is important that the people we trust to care for our needs understand precisely what those needs may entail. Just as *Crip Camp* inspired me to pursue my minor in disability studies four years ago, I hope that "Blurring the Line" can be a form of visual media that changes the way people critically assess, practice, and envision healthcare. My capstone project is one that I want to lead my future work in disability studies (1) as an individual providing compassionate medical care and (2) from a position of influence from which I can educate others, pursue impactful change, and amplify the voices of the women who need better systems of medicine.