

CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

(1) Background

Progression in medical technology, treatment and knowledge during the 20th century has served to legitimize physician authority. As a result, the medical model has become the dominant lens through which society views disability. The medical profession both reflects cultural traditions about disability and impacts attitudes about disabled individuals. Though medicine provides many benefits for people with disabilities, deficit-driven language impacts attitudes about disability and affects the identity building of disabled individuals. In my paper, I will be specifically exploring how medical vernacular shapes the relations between people with autism and the medical profession and affects how both individuals with autism and their families construct the autistic identity. I will also be exploring how the opinions and authority of the medical field permeate all parts of life for an autistic child, especially when it comes to political, educational and social settings. In other words, I will explore how medical vernacular shapes the patient-physician relationship and contributes to the patient's sociopolitical world (both identity building and how they navigate through society).

(2) Thesis

The attitudes and vernacular utilized by medical professionals reflects a societal bias that that, through social and political means, reinforces the culture of discrimination against individuals with autism. This leads to bias in the clinical environment which ultimately negatively impacts the self-construction of autistic identity.

(3) Scope includes:

- Sociological studies which suggest that, when a child has been identified as having ASD (or being at risk for ASD), doctors tend to ask leading questions that favor the diagnosis of disability and the recognition of negative behaviors
- Research that analyzes
- Analysis of the deficit-driven language used by medical professionals, which emphasizes the weaknesses of autistic individuals instead of recognizing their strengths.
- Education: discuss how medical professionals are given limited education on disability studies and the implications of this on patient care and cultural competence
- Literature such as *The Myth of Mental Illness* and *Back to Normal: Why Ordinary Childhood Behavior Is Mistaken for ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, and Autism Spectrum Disorder* that suggest that, due to the professionalization of the medical field, doctors may over-diagnose and medicalize patients in order to increase their own

statuses; shows how, just as the medical profession impacts public perceptions, public/social life also affects the medical field

- Analysis of language in policies and laws that relate to autism. I plan to show how the language of government agencies mirrors that of the medical field in order to demonstrate how pervasive the medical model is.
- I want to analyze how the physician's office acts as a gateway to further services for a child with autism. Therefore, the medical field plays a very significant role in how parents and patients learn how to view themselves and their relationship to the world. I will be analyzing how medical vernacular impacts this worldview.