

Capstone Project Proposal

My capstone project is a short film, “Face Value: The Hidden Struggle of Gambling Addiction in AAPI Families,” that brings to light the struggle of gambling addiction in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) families. This story is deeply personal as my uncle’s addiction fractured our extended family in quiet, painful ways. Through the lens of Disability Studies, I now see his experience not simply as a personal struggle, but as an outcome of systemic neglect, cultural stigma, and the lack of accessible mental health care for immigrants and people of color. The film will explore how this addiction intersects with mental illness, cultural silence, and the suffocating pressure and stigma of gambling. Through a personal story and cultural critique, the film will explore how addiction creeps up on a person in the least expected way, why it is not acknowledged, and how healing can occur.

The film begins with the depiction of an AAPI family, either with the parents’ secret addiction to gambling or with a younger person as a way to deal with gambling. As the story unwinds, the movie touches on cultural pressures, saving face, not wanting to burden other people, and linking addiction with higher chances for failure in other areas of life. The third act is about healing: seeking therapy, breaking the silence, and repairing relationships. Ultimately, the goal of the film is to highlight how gambling can be an invisible disability for many, affecting individuals and families, especially when it’s buried beneath expectations to “keep it together”.

This project advances Disability Studies by reframing gambling addiction as a mental health disability, and one with a powerful cultural and stigmatizing influence. This work refutes mainstream narratives that address addiction through a lens of moral deficiency. Particularly, the documentary highlights how AAPI addiction is downplayed or ignored and hence prevented from being seen, diagnosed, or addressed. By bringing voices to these communities, this work expands the conversations around invisible disability, mental health, and cultural stigma, moving towards more inclusive and empathetic explanations of addiction.