



CASE STUDY

ACROSS THE LINE

Across the Line (AcrossTheLineVR.com) is an immersive virtual reality experience that puts the audience on the scene as anti-abortion extremists try to intimidate patients who seek sexual and reproductive health care. Using documentary 360° video footage and computer generated imaging (CGI), paired with a montage of real audio recording of actual protesters, viewers gain an intimate knowledge of the harassment outside and compassion inside health centers across the country. The film is a powerful hybrid documentary-fiction depiction of the gauntlet that many abortion providers, health center staff, and patients must walk on a typical day in America.

The project is currently shown on the HTC Vive walk-around virtual reality headset, Gear VR, and Google Cardboard. The experience consists of three scenes. We begin inside the health center, finding ourselves in an exam room with a young woman and a compassionate doctor. The scene fades as we travel back in time to follow the patient and her friend as they drive up to a health center lined with protesters holding graphic signs and shouting. The final scene uses computer-generated graphics. The viewer becomes the

patient and must navigate a group of intimidating protesters shouting highly offensive remarks aimed at shaming and stigmatizing her. The audio montage, captured from protesters across the country, anchors the viewers' experience in the reality of what thousands of people across the country face during anti-abortion protests outside of health centers.

Launch date: January 2016

Funders: *Across the Line* received funding from a variety of individuals who donated to the Planned Parenthood national organization and/or the local affiliates of Planned Parenthood Wisconsin and Planned Parenthood Greater Ohio. *Across the Line* also received funding from the Fledgling Fund for the evaluation component, and from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation to help complete the earliest version of the film for the Sundance premiere. The *Across the Line* team worked very closely with funders to craft engagement strategy, and received funds earmarked for evaluation and for collaborations with nonprofit partners.

Across the Line reflects a unique situation. Planned Parenthood wore two hats—working closely with the extraordinary artists who created the film and securing funding from other organizations. The artists and Planned Parenthood had—and continue to have—regular meetings; they collaborate on screenings, events and workshops, and develop engagement strategy together. Given the broad and diverse networks of each organization, this collaboration has yielded positive results. 371 Productions is an award-winning, socially engaged documentary filmmaking company and has broad connections in the film and social justice communities. Emblematic Group is perhaps the best-known company producing award-winning immersive journalism using virtual reality and has broad connections in virtual reality as well as social justice. Planned Parenthood, along with its network of 58 affiliates serving all 50 states, has extensive connections in health care, sex education, and advocacy.

Production team:

- Produced by: Emblematic Group, 371 Productions, and Custom Reality Services in association with Planned Parenthood Federation of America
- Nonny de la Peña, Brad Lichtenstein, and Jeff Fitzsimmons, Writers and Directors
- Dawn Laguens, Molly Eagan, Caren Spruch, Michael Licht, and James Pallot, Executive Producers
- Julie Young and Morgan Elise Johnson, Producers

Festivals:

- Sundance Film Festival (premiere), January 2016
- South By Southwest (SXSW), March 2016
- Ashland Independent Film Festival, April 2016
- Cleveland International Film Festival, April 2016
- Chicago Feminist Film Festival, April 2016
- Tribeca Film Festival, April 2016
- International Documentary Association, April 2016
- Hot Docs Film Festival, May 2016
- Sheffield Documentary Fest, June 2016
- Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, July 2016
- Milwaukee International Film Festival, September 2016

TARGETS

Engagement goals: By putting the audience in the shoes of someone who is trying to access a safe and legal abortion, virtual reality offers a new and immersive experience that can help people better understand what thousands of women face when they seek health care. In order to ensure that abortion remains safe and legal for future generations, the team sought to replace misinformation with the facts and start having honest conversations about abortion in America today.

Honest portrayals of sexual and reproductive health topics in film and television are still

extremely rare, and that's part of a much bigger lack of honest depictions of women's health and sexuality. *Across the Line* is part of ongoing efforts by Planned Parenthood and other sexual and reproductive health organizations to reduce stigma and change the conversation around safe and legal abortion. The team behind *Across the Line* sought to increase awareness of harassment and the potential violence that patients, their loved ones, and staff experience trying to access and provide abortion in the United States.

Target location: The filmmakers recorded video and audio, including anti-abortion protest activity, in many United States locations. The target location is viewers in the United States, where *Across the Line* depicts the impact of protest activity on patients accessing abortion and the courageous providers and staff who have to cross those protest lines every day in the United States.

Target audience: The team identified several target audiences. Broadly, they are engaging audiences wherever they can be visible (film festivals, events, conferences, etc.) to help reduce stigma around abortion, even if the audience is supportive of reproductive rights. This is especially necessary after the discredited video smear campaign that targeted Planned Parenthood health centers and staff and motivated heated protests at health centers. Specifically, the team seeks out opportunities to reach individuals with moderate views on abortion who have been unexposed to the harassment many women face trying to access sexual and reproductive healthcare. Another specifically targeted audience is women in the Southern US who may not be strong supporters of abortion, but are offended by the bullying and harassment captured in this project. Finally, the team is also using the film to help other documentary filmmakers and journalists learn how to make virtual reality content and use it as a tool for social change.

Events that opened up the project to new user groups: In July 2015, well into production, Planned Parenthood came under attack after a

now-discredited group, the Center for Medical Progress, released videos claiming Planned Parenthood was selling fetal tissue. These video releases led to a heavy increase in anti-abortion protests and heightened levels of harassment.

Planned Parenthood has never sold fetal tissue or facilitated fetal tissue donation in order to make a profit. To date, officials in 12 states have concluded investigations into claims that Planned Parenthood profited from fetal tissue donation, and each one has cleared Planned Parenthood of wrongdoing. Another eight states have declined to even investigate, citing a lack of any evidence to suggest wrongdoing. Lastly, a grand jury in Texas not only cleared Planned Parenthood of all wrongdoing but indicted the people behind these videos with felony charges for their participation in this smear campaign.

In January 2016, Planned Parenthood filed a federal lawsuit against the Center for Medical Progress and the individuals behind the smear campaign. The lawsuit charges that anti-abortion extremists engaged in an elaborate, illegal conspiracy to falsely accuse Planned Parenthood of improper activity in an effort to block women's access to safe and legal abortion. The goals of this lawsuit are to hold the people behind this fraud accountable, to again make clear that the accusations about Planned Parenthood are untrue.

In November 2015, an armed shooter opened fire in a Planned Parenthood health center in Colorado Springs, killing three people and wounding many others. He made it clear that he was motivated in part by the discredited sting videos. Unfortunately, one of the lessons learned from the awful tragedy is that words matter, and hateful rhetoric fuels violence. There has been an alarming increase in hateful rhetoric and extremist campaigns against abortion providers and patients since the release of smear videos by opponents of Planned Parenthood's services, and that environment breeds acts of violence.

In March 2016, the Supreme Court took up *Whole Women's Health vs. Hellerstedt*, a case challenging the targeted restrictions against abortion providers (TRAP) passed in Texas HB2. A woman's very right to access safe, legal abortion in the United States is at stake in this case; it's the most important abortion case heard in decades. In March 2016, Donald Trump said out loud what anti-abortion groups and politicians like John Kasich and Ted Cruz have been putting into practice: women and health care providers are being punished for having or providing safe, legal abortion. Politicians who have long opposed access to safe, legal abortion—and even oppose access to birth control—have used the false claims in these videos to fuel their efforts to pass extreme restrictions on access to reproductive health care. The Republican Party's leadership has been waging a full-out assault on access to reproductive health care.

These events in 2015 and 2016, as well as multiple Congressional investigations and frequent mention of abortion generally and Planned Parenthood specifically, further raised these issues with the general public.

USER ENGAGEMENT

Platforms: *Across the Line* is a virtual reality film available in a fully immersive walk-around setting using the HTC Vive, as well as the Samsung Gear VR and Google Cardboard. It is on the Vrideo site, and soon will be an app in the iOs and Android stores, as well as on VRSE and possibly the New York Times. Instructions for viewing *Across the Line* on cardboard (less immersive version) can be found at AcrossTheLineVR.com.

Users: Virtual reality films are experienced individually, not via large screens and theaters with seat capacity. *Across the Line* has had approximately 3000 views since launching at Sundance in January.

Social media:

- Facebook: [facebook.com/PlannedParenthood](https://www.facebook.com/PlannedParenthood) (The project does not currently have its own Facebook site, however *Across the Line* has been promoted on Facebook from the personal sites of the artists, the executive producers, and the cast, and has received thousands of likes.)
- Twitter: twitter.com/PPFA (Similarly, the project does not have a specific Twitter account, but has mentions on both #AcrossTheLine and #AcrossTheLineVR. Please note that because there is another Canadian film released called *Across the Line*, there are mixed tweets under the #AcrossTheLine hashtag.)
- Tumblr: plannedparenthood.tumblr.com

Efforts to reach particular demographic groups:

Virtual reality equipment like the Samsung Gear and HTC Vive are still quite inaccessible to the general public. To have the desired impact, the team knew they would have to find a way to bring VR to a much broader viewing audience. The creators worked to make the film viewable on the Google Cardboard, a very low cost and widely available VR viewer. Planned Parenthood produced a large number of branded cardboards that are being distributed at large events and in kits for local screening.

The team partnered with the film *Trapped*, the award-winning documentary by Dawn Porter about the effects of TRAP laws on clinicians and medical professionals who provide abortions. *Across the Line* Google cardboards have been distributed at *Trapped* screenings across the country. Organizers also launched a “street team” model at SXSW to bring the VR experience outside the confines of the exhibition and onto the streets of Austin. Planned Parenthood volunteers took hundreds of general festival-goers through the *Across the Line* experience on Samsung Gear VRs. This was a successful test of a street canvassing model they plan to use for future engagements.

CHANGES IN AWARENESS/BEHAVIOR

Goals: For much of the public, the image of protest activity in front of health centers tends to be described as “little old ladies with rosaries” and other more peaceful descriptors. The team wanted to raise awareness that at many health centers, there is aggressive bullying of patients, their loved ones, and the facility staff. Previous focus group research has shown that even for those neutral or opposed to abortion, viewing a 2D film of harassment outside of health centers led to a stronger empathy and anti-bullying frame.

What happened: Initial observations from qualitative interviews conducted at Sundance, summarized by research partners at the Sea Change Program, reveal:

- *Across the Line* is a “powerful” and “impactful” opportunity to experience a different perspective and “walk in the shoes” of a woman seeking an abortion.
- Viewers are drawn to *Across the Line* for the opportunity to see a new perspective and experience a new technology.
- Viewers have a range of reactions to *Across the Line*, including wanting to take political action, to attack harassers, and to tell their friends to watch the film.
- Audience members had diverse emotional responses to *Across the Line*, ranging from anger to surprise to sadness.
- Overall, men expressed more surprise, anger, and emotional impact than women.
- When asked to describe *Across the Line* to a friend, respondents were very similar in their responses: “it’s a must-see that puts you in the shoes of a woman seeking an abortion, which may change your attitudes towards and emotions about abortion.”

Evaluation strategy: The team partnered with two organizations: the Sea Change Program dedicated to reducing abortion stigma, and the Stanford VR lab, which is able to test VR impact. Those two partners created both a quantitative tablet-based

survey and open-ended qualitative questions for interviewing viewers. Questions focus on both the impact of VR as a medium and the subject of attitudes on abortion. At Sundance, the team conducted qualitative interviews. At South by Southwest and the Cleveland International Film Festival, it gathered more than 300 quantitative surveys. Viewers were randomized to take part in the survey pre- and post-viewing.

The research is currently in progress to analyze data from the first phase of the project. If the team is able to secure funding, phase II research will center around behavior change, including but not limited to support for proactive health center entrance protective legislation, as well as donating to and/or volunteering with local abortion providers. These behavior change areas are hypotheses based on emerging qualitative interview data about actions the film inspires in viewers.

Press examples:

- *Cosmopolitan*: "Experience What It's Like to Visit a Planned Parenthood Clinic Through Virtual Reality"
www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a58928/vr-planned-parenthood-abortion-protesters
- Mic: "Across the Line Uses Virtual Reality to Put Viewers in Abortion Patients' Shoes"
mic.com/articles/144312/across-the-line-uses-virtual-reality-to-put-viewers-in-abortion-patients-shoes#.cgbMOK9Ps
- Rewire: "Filmmakers Use Virtual Reality to Depict Abortion Clinic Protests"
rewire.news/article/2016/03/07/filmmakers-use-virtual-reality-depict-abortion-clinic-protests
- Broadly: "Planned Parenthood's New Virtual Reality Video Simulates Clinic Harassment"
broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/planned-parenthoods-new-virtual-reality-video-simulates-clinic-harssment
- Democracy Now!: "Wicked Jezebel Feminist! Users Witness Anti-Choice Abuse in Virtual Reality Film *Across the Line*"
www.democracynow.org/2016/1/25/across_the_line_virtual_reality_immersed

- MTV: "I Was Called A 'Whore' Just For Walking Into A Planned Parenthood":
www.mtv.com/news/2731625/planned-parenthood-virtual-reality-sundance/

Events: The team is in the early stages of planning events. Events beyond film festivals and co-screenings with the documentary *Trapped* include participation in panels and workshops. The goal is to acquire funding to create *Across the Line* event kits comprised of a Google Cardboard, instructions, and a discussion guide so that the community-based organizations (including Planned Parenthood affiliates) and donors interested in house party screenings are able to order kits at cost through the Planned Parenthood web-based merchandise marketplace.

User participation in ongoing development: A strong feedback loop for *Across the Line* viewers to participate has aided ongoing development. The open-ended qualitative interview questions have yielded considerable feedback, most of which was incorporated into the next version of the experience, released in April 2016. All of the changes implemented were the result of consistent viewer feedback.

POLITICAL IMPACT

Across the Line has great potential for political impact based on initial reactions to the film. Many viewers are shocked that protesters are allowed to personally harass patients and staff entering a facility and have expressed support for proactive legislation to expand health center entrance protections. They have also received a proposal from a well-respected canvassing and focus group organization to explore how they might use *Across the Line* as a canvassing tool at the doors prior to the election. Like preliminary conversations with Working Films, engaging with this organization is based on securing funding.

INNOVATION

Platform innovation: *Across the Line* is highly innovative—not only in that it is a virtual reality piece, but that it represents the first piece of its kind to combine scenes with 360° video and computer-generated imagery. Two different filmmakers, each with expertise in different types of filmmaking (documentary, 360°, and CGI) worked together to create this film. *Across the Line* is also one of a few virtual reality films highlighting a significant social issue.

Replication:

- *Inside their organization:* Following the incredible response to the early release of *Across the Line*, Planned Parenthood is exploring ideas for future content development using virtual reality. The impact on viewers' empathy makes virtual reality a powerful tool for health care and social change. The organization plans to apply the data and lessons learned from *Across the Line* to tackle more issues around sexual and reproductive health and justice.
- *By other producers or technologists:* The film is in its early stages of release, however the filmmakers have been invited to speak on a number of panels (South By Southwest, Cleveland International Film Festival, HotDocs, Ashland Independent Film Festival, International Documentary Association, NAMAC) about the techniques used to make the film and how this filmmaking can be made more accessible. Nonny De La Peña and her business partner, James Pallot, have spoken at a huge number of panels and workshops.

BUILDING CAPACITY

New collaborations or organizations: The *Across the Line* film helped to launch Custom Reality Services, which is now in discussion about many VR projects. Custom Reality Services was co-founded by two of the filmmakers, Brad Lichtenstein and Jeff Fitzsimmons.