

humor • stories • experiences

Life & Deaf

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THANK YOU & CREDITS

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Inspiration for this Topic:

M.J. Bienvenu and the Deaf Community

INTRODUCTION

There is an old joke within the Deaf community: "A Deaf couple on a road trip stop for the night at a motel. The wife sends the husband out for food, but when he returns to the darkened building, he can't remember which is his room. He thinks for a while, and then with a sudden burst of inspiration, he slams his hand on the steering wheel and sounds the horn. Lights come on in every motel room—except one. That, of course, is his room where his wife is waiting patiently for his return."¹

This joke is still a standard among the Deaf community. So much so that it was adapted for a Pepsi commercial in 2008 for a Super Bowl spot, "Bob's House":



<http://youtube.com/watch?v=ffrq6cUoE5A>.

This example illustrates a common life experience for a Deaf person and focuses on the humorous aspect of the scenario. Deaf individuals share these stories with each other and find comfort in the commonality of their experiences and or frustrations in living in a hearing world.²

¹ Eisner, Nadine. "Storytelling Club for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students." Retrieved from: <https://sites.google.com/site/deme5678/home> (2008).

² Sutton-Spence, Rachel, and Donna Jo Napoli. "Deaf jokes and sign language humor." (2012): 311-337.

The word "deaf" can have multiple meanings. To most, deafness relates to a person's inability to hear. Medically speaking, deafness refers to the severity and the cause of a hearing loss for an individual. The cultural use of the word Deaf with an uppercase "D" refers to an individual's classification and participation in a community where the primary method of communication is American Sign Language (ASL). Within the context of this thesis project, I will refer to Deaf individuals as those belonging to the Deaf community.

BACKGROUND

When I was ten years old, I was with my father at a nearby mall and was mesmerized by an exhibit on display from the Montgomery County Association for Hearing Impaired Children (MCAHIC). It was just a monitor encased with a puppet show type of structure, and on it, they were showing a specific episode of Sesame Street where Linda the Librarian (played by Deaf American actress Linda Bove) was teaching the alphabet in sign language to children on the show. My father let me stay there and continue to watch while he went into an adjacent store. And when he returned, I still didn't want to leave. My parents continued to shop for quite a while and let me sit there and watch that segment again and again. After that experience, my parents enrolled me in an introductory class through MCAHIC. I was the only child among a class of adults, most of which were hearing parents of deaf children who wanted to learn the basics of sign language to communicate on some level with their kids outside of attempting to get them to communicate orally.

My interest in sign persisted and continued to be an extracurricular study through my adolescence, along with art as my other passion. Because this geographical area offers many programs to Deaf and hearing-impaired people due to proximity to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., and the many funded programs in Montgomery County, I was exposed to many opportunities to take other sign language classes and attend social events where I could interact with Deaf people. I grew to have many friends in the Deaf community. I became advanced in American Sign Language and went on to get my undergraduate degree from the University of Maryland in Hearing and Speech Sciences. But my true interest lay in Deaf Education and Deaf Culture Studies as well as fine art. And I always envisioned that my future would somehow lead me to teach art to Deaf students.

Rarely do our youthful aspirations and expectations become realized. While getting my BA from Maryland, I was lucky enough to get a job as a Graphics Coordinator at local consultant firm. Soon after starting, I decided that graphic design would be my career, and though I did complete my degree in Hearing and Speech Sciences, I never pursued a career that would include Deaf studies or sign language.

In researching topics for my thesis for my MFA in Integrated Design, I saw an opportunity to bring two of my many passions together: Deaf Culture and Design.

CONTEXT

As mentioned in the introduction, deafness is traditionally conceptualized as a medical problem or disability, but not to Deaf people, nor to those within the Deaf community. In the U.S., approximately 500,000 deaf people take immense pride in being Deaf—Deaf with an uppercase “D”—and categorize themselves as members of an ethno-linguistic minority. This population is relatively small, but it is also diverse. What binds this community together is the intense desire to belong to a group of people with shared culture, language, and experiences.³ Deaf people find comfort in relating and interacting within a group that experiences the world around them in the same way, as a Deaf person in a hearing world. Members of the Deaf community view deafness as a difference in human experience and not as a disability.⁴

Deaf individuals consider sign language, in this case, ASL, as the most important aspect of their identity as part of the Deaf community. So much so that the community can also include non-Deaf individuals such as hard-of-hearing, hearing-impaired and hearing people. It is the shared use of the signed language ASL that is key. And others that are considered part of the Deaf community such as physicians, educators, and hearing relatives agree that the deafness of an individual shouldn't always solicit a perception of a deficit or disability, that those who use sign language as their mode of communication due to deafness or any degree of hearing loss belong to a cultural and linguistic minority. IF we use a visual-based model for deafness, this allows us to acknowledge Deaf culture and the use of sign language as merely a different sensory orientation as it relates to communication.⁵

3 Knoors, Harry, and Marc Marschark. *Teaching deaf learners: Psychological and developmental foundations*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

4 Hamill, Alexis C., and Catherine H. Stein. "Culture and empowerment in the Deaf community: An analysis of internet weblogs." *Journal of community & applied social psychology* 21.5 (2011): 388-406.

5 Musselman, C. (1994). *Teaching Effective Communication to Parents of Deaf Children: The Role of Visual Information*. IV Simposiade Logopedia. Madrid, Spain. Feb. 14-16.

The foundation of ASL began in 1817 when Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a minister from Hartford, Connecticut, was inspired by his neighbor's deaf child, Alice Cogswell. Gallaudet was adamant to find an effective way to teach and communicate with the deaf. He traveled to Europe where there was already a history of deaf education, where he met Abbe de l'Epee, the founder of the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes, but more importantly, he met one of the Institute's Deaf instructors, Laurent Clerc. Clerc traveled back to America with Gallaudet and helped him in establishing the first American School for the Deaf in Hartford. Before 1817, there isn't much documented information on deaf people or how they communicated.⁶ But we can assume that as immigrants brought other languages from other countries, there were diverse versions of signed languages used. Predominantly, deaf children are born to hearing parents where there is no transference of any existing signs, so in many cases, it is assumed that the individuals and their families created their own signs to communicate.

ASL is a visual and gestural language that has no vocal component. It is important to realize that ASL is a complete, grammatically complex language and that to perpetuate Deaf culture, the Deaf community passes on its values, traditions, and folklore by communicating in ASL.⁷

Before the technological advances of the past 20 years, Deaf people shared their culture and language through face-to-face interactions with other members of the Deaf community. But now, Deaf people can interact with each other, as well as the hearing world around them, on a global level through the internet and social media.⁸ And with video as a platform, Deaf people can now for the first time use sign language, in many cases their native language, to communicate with others within the Deaf community

⁶ Valli, Clayton, and Ceil Lucas. *Linguistics of American sign language: An introduction*. Gallaudet University Press, 2000.

⁷ McKee, Michael, et al. "Engaging the deaf American Sign Language community: lessons from a community-based participatory research center." *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action* 6.3 (2012): 321.

⁸ Hibbard, Ellen S., and Deb I. Fels. "The vlogging phenomena: a deaf perspective." *The proceedings of the 13th international ACM SIGACCESS conference on Computers and accessibility*. ACM, 2011.

across the country and the world. This is a revolution for the Deaf community in how they receive and share information.⁹

To illustrate the importance of ASL and passing on the use of this language among the Deaf in their folklore and traditions, I include a quote from 1913. George W. Veditz, president of the National Association of the Deaf. He noticed, upon reflection on a movie, that ASL gives the Deaf a sense of identity. He signed, "As long as we have deaf people on Earth, we will have signs, and as long as we have our films, we can preserve our beautiful sign language in its original purity. It is our hope that we all will love and guard our beautiful sign language as the noblest gift God has given to deaf people."¹⁰

Over the past 150 years, the Deaf community has developed a rich social life and folklore. The expression and transfer of this rich history are communicated from person to person using ASL. And a common thread throughout is humor. Folklorist Simon Carmel stated in an interview, "Deaf people love to listen to stories with deaf characters or deaf culture inside them. They want to look for the similar cultural identity of deaf persons mentioned in anecdotes, jokes, riddles or personal-experience narratives."¹¹ In an analysis of internet weblogs done by the Psychology Department at Bowling Green State University, Alexis Hamill and Catherine Stein found that out of more than 400 posts by Deaf bloggers on various topics pertinent to Deaf culture, over 23% of those posts were jokes or humorous stories.¹²

These jokes and stories that are shared within the Deaf community are at the root of its culture. The content of these stories and jokes is motivated by the visual Deaf experience and expressed through the visual, linguistic medium of sign language.

9 Keating, Elizabeth, and Gene Mirus. "American sign language in virtual space: Interactions between deaf users of computer-mediated video communication and the impact of technology on language practices." *Language in Society* 32.05 (2003): 693-714.

10 Weinrib, Melinda Marcia. "A study of the minority status of independent films in the deaf community: Implications for deaf studies curriculum development." (1994).

11 Smith, Linell. "Folklorist for the deaf explores similarity in hearing-impaired cultures." *Baltimore Sun*. 7 November, 1990, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1990-11-07/features/1990311215_1_deaf-folklore-tree-falls.

12 Hamill, Alexis C., and Catherine H. Stein. "Culture and empowerment in the Deaf community: An analysis of internet weblogs." *Journal of community & applied social psychology* 21.5 (2011): 388-406.

I found the following quote from M.J. Bienvenu an appropriate connector of Deaf culture to the importance of Deaf humor. Bienvenu is an ASL teacher and presenter of various topics such as English, politics of oppression, and the bilingual-bicultural approach. She is now the Chair and Assistant Professor in Gallaudet's Department of ASL and Deaf Studies.

"Mainstream American culture teaches that 'normal' people are born with five senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. Of course, Deaf people can't hear, and this causes many people to view the Deaf as deficient and deprived. But nothing could be further from the truth. We have always had five senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and a sense of humor."¹³

—M.J. Bienvenu

¹³ Bienvenu, M. J. "Reflections of American Deaf culture in Deaf humor." Bragg, Lois (ed.) (2001): 99-103.

RESEARCH

For my thesis, the goal was to design a space for members of the Deaf community to capture their folklore through storytelling and joke telling, as well as share their experiences as Deaf individuals. In my research on this topic, I found many sites and collections of jokes and stories about the Deaf experience and Deaf culture, but most of them only in written form. This creates a unique barrier to the Deaf community in that a large number of them who read and write do so at only the 4th-grade level. Even websites that are targeted to Deaf audiences but only have content in written form require Deaf individuals to be bilingual. As native ASL users, they must also be at an adequate level of written English to access this information.¹⁴ So with this, it makes sense that most members of the Deaf community would want to receive and post information in their native sign language.

ASL Storytelling is a traditional form of folklore passed down through generations of Deaf individuals, again until recent years in face-to-face fashion. This form of folklore includes jokes, sign play, and various forms of storytelling.¹⁵ I found that the Deaf community only posts this visual form of folklore via sign language in unique video posts on Facebook, YouTube, and other specialized Deaf-centric web sites, most of which are not titled or organized by this topic area specifically. Outside of folklore video collections maintained by educational institutions like Gallaudet University or other organizations, I could not find any one platform that allows Deaf users to specifically post stories, jokes, and folklore in their own language, ASL, via video. And where I found sites specifically dedicated to Deaf humor or storytelling in written form, they were very visually busy, just listing joke after joke. They were not categorized, nor were

¹⁴ Hibbard, Ellen S., and Deb I. Fels. "The vlogging phenomena: a deaf perspective." The proceedings of the 13th international ACM SIGACCESS conference on Computers and accessibility. ACM, 2011.

¹⁵ Bahan, Ben. "Interview with Ben Bahan: Storytelling." Sorensen VRS.
http://www.sorensenvrs.com/dhm_march_2015_interview_with_ben_bahan#sthash.HBF8zWQL.dpuf. (2015)

there any explanations on how they related to sign language or to Deaf culture. And as the Deaf are so visual, these sites don't consider the visual user experience at all.

In the appendices of this thesis, you will find a preliminary survey that establishes that there is an actual desire for members of this community to access a space where they can share this subject matter.

APPROACH

In my thesis project, I hope to bring together my admiration and knowledge of Deaf culture and folklore with my digital and interactive design expertise to establish a platform for the Deaf community to share and express this distinct part of its culture in its own visual language, ASL.

I have created LifeandDeaf.com, a responsive website as well as a related app (prototype) for the Deaf community to view and post videos in American Sign Language. They can communicate and share stories, anecdotes, and jokes that directly relate to Deaf culture and the Deaf experience, as well as comment on videos posted by other members. I paid attention to the user experience and the visual focus of the audience, as well as to 508 accessibility requirements. I worked with a web developer to create the site and have used a WordPress theme as a foundation for the functionality with various customization based on my designs.

I followed the Section 508 compliance requirements as related to the 1988 amended Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act sets forth to promote the rights of people with various disabilities. It assures them access to software and websites put out by government agencies and public educational institutes. In my full-time job as a designer for a government contractor, I must adhere to strict interpretations of these laws put out by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. But for this Thesis project, which is not for a government entity and not for educational use beyond its creation as part of my thesis project, I followed the recently updated recommendations from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).¹⁶ By following these recommendations, I am a designer addressing aspects such as but not limited to color contrast, type styles, type size, text alternatives for non-text content, and very important for this project, captions for video. WCAG has put out recent updates to their WCAG 2.1 Guidelines that aren't as strict, and though they won't be active until April 2017,

¹⁶ Web Accessibility Initiative. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag>. Accessed 2017.

WCAG is allowing designers and developers to start applying them. In the simplest form, there are numerous guidelines that fall under four main principles that web designers and developers should follow to assure that their digital content is accessible. Those principles are the following:

Perceivable

- Provide text alternatives for non-text content.
- Provide captions and other alternatives for multimedia.
- Create content that can be presented in different ways, including by assistive technologies, without losing meaning.
- Make it easier for users to see and hear content.

Operable

- Make all functionality available from a keyboard.
- Give users enough time to read and use the content.
- Do not use content that causes seizures.
- Help users navigate and find content.

Understandable

- Make text readable and understandable.
- Make content appear and operate in predictable ways.
- Help users avoid and correct mistakes.

Robust

- Maximize compatibility with current and future user tools.¹⁷

Users will log in to the site by using other login information, such as from Facebook or their personal email accounts. Users will be able to post videos that they have captured as well as view the library of submissions. They will be able to like and comment on specific submissions within the site and be able to share selected videos via other social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook.

17 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. "W3C First Public Working Draft". 28 February 2017, <https://www.w3.org/TR/2017/WD-WCAG21-20170228/>

Those visiting LifeandDeaf.com will be able to view videos and submit videos by categories. The categories of submissions will be Jokes, Stories, and Experiences. While exploring these categories within the context of Deaf culture, I found that Deaf humor is rich with history and nuance, and there will be a large variety of posts across these categories.

Visual Humor

In my research about Deaf humor, jokes, and storytelling, I concluded that all of these forms of folklore use visual humor. They all show how the Deaf community sees the world around it. Usually, that's from the perspective of a Deaf person in a hearing world. All these forms use the visual nature of sign language to make their jokes and stories funnier. Even in relaying an experience that may not be purely for amusement, the Deaf person will rely on exaggerated facial expressions, mocking gestures, and large body movements to express their emotions and to make their point clear to the viewer. From my experience and through my research I realized that Deaf people find many visual things funny where they might be lost on hearing people. M.J. Bienvenu gave a lecture at Gallaudet University about Deaf humor as part of Deaf culture in which she described her experience coordinating an event for a large group of hearing ASL users. In a lesson on visual humor, she showed them a horror film with the sound off. For the first time, these hearing people could see from the Deaf audience's perspective these actors and their exaggerated expressions and movements. Without the benefit of sound to hear the tone in their voices, other audio effects, or the context for these facial expressions, these hearing people too found them hilariously funny to watch.¹⁸

It's easy to see that because of this visual aspect to Deaf humor, much of it cannot be understood by the hearing. Another reason for this is that many jokes and stories in Deaf culture rely on the knowledge of sign language. And many deaf jokes in ASL cannot be translated into English. These jokes are tied to the specific signs used in the joke, which won't translate meaning if told in English. For instance, there is a joke that is

¹⁸ Bienvenu, Martina J. "Reflections of deaf culture in deaf humor." *The deaf way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture*. 1994.

very popular among the Deaf community, and it's often the first joke that is told to represent Deaf humor, mainly due to its dependence on sign language.

A deaf man comes up to a railroad crossing. The railroad "guards" are down. So, he waits for a bit. Soon it becomes apparent that they are not going to come up, so he gets out of his car and goes to a little railroad building next to the road. He knocks on the door. A man opens the door. The deaf man points to his ear and shakes his head to show that he is deaf. The other man gets a pen and paper and writes down "What can I do for you?" The deaf man writes back: "Please but."

This joke is based on word play and completely reliant on knowing the sign for 'but.' Here are a series of images that illustrate that the sign for 'but' involves your hands positioned mid body, pointing your first fingers towards each other, then raising your arms so that your hands and fingers raise up to an open body position. This motion mimics the arms at a train crossing raising up to let cars go over the train tracks.¹⁹



Deaf Experience Humor

Many Deaf jokes rely on word/sign play, and a sometimes-deep knowledge of ASL and its linguistic nuances. But within Deaf culture, there are sub-categories of humor that are related to the Deaf experience.

¹⁹ Rutherford, Susan D. "Funny in Deaf. Not in Hearing." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 96, no. 381, 1983, pp. 310–322., www.jstor.org/stable/540947.

Can't Hear Humor

Deafness isn't measured by the level of one's hearing loss. It's far more important for the Deaf person to be deeply immersed in the Deaf community. Sharing and relating to each other's experiences as Deaf people through ASL and Deaf humor is what perpetuates Deaf culture. Many of the stories that do this are simply about finding the humor in not being able to hear. A popular cartoonist²⁰ posted such stories weekly online from 2010 to 2016. Below is one of his cartoons on this topic.



"That Deaf Guy" by Matt and Kay Daigle

Convenience of Deafness

Deaf people do face tremendous challenges in the hearing world. They can get frustrated and feel isolated due to barriers to communication with hearing people around them. Having these issues in common with other Deaf people in their community, they become even more attached to that community and proud of their Deaf culture. In the face of these barriers and frustrations, there are many stories or jokes that revolve around the theme that Deafness is not a deficit but something to be proud of that allows the Deaf person to have an advantage in some way.²¹ An example of this kind of humor where the Deaf person wins in the story because of their Deafness is the video "Bob's House," which appears at the beginning of the Introduction of this thesis.

20 Daigle, Matt and Kay. That Deaf Guy. 12 April, 2015. <http://www.thatdeafguy.com/?p=658> (2017).

21 Bienvu, M. J. "Reflections of American Deaf culture in Deaf humor." Bragg, Lois (ed.) (2001): 99-103.

Linguistic Perspective

Like the examples of jokes in this thesis, many Deaf jokes rely on ASL and the accurate and inaccurate production of signs. An example of this is in using the sign for “understand.” The sign is displayed by the signer holding their hand up by their forehead with their palm facing their head, fingers down in a fist position, and raising up their index finger. A play on this sign has the signer doing this sign with their pinky instead, to illustrate “little understand,” or that they only understand a little bit or not really. Deaf people find humor in these plays on signs.²²



Many Deaf jokes are lexically based, the humor embedded in some twist on the linguistics of the punchline. Irony can also be used to emphasize the humor in the face of sometimes-serious subject matter within the Deaf community. Here is an example of a joke that uses a linguistic play on the signs, while commenting on Deaf culture's inherent opposition to Oralism, which is the ban of sign language among educators throughout history.²³

A huge giant is stalking through a small village of wee people, who are scattering through the streets, trying to escape the ugly creature. The giant notices one particularly beautiful blonde woman scampering down the cobblestone street. He stretches out his clumsy arm and sweeps her up, then stares in wonder at the slight, shivering figure in his palm. “You are so beautiful,” he exclaims. The young woman looks up in fear. “I would never hurt you,” he signs, “I love you! We should get

²² Sutton-Spence, Rachel. “The role of sign language narratives in developing identity for deaf children.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 47.3 (2010): 265-305.

²³ Ladd, Paddy. *Understanding deaf culture: In search of deafhood*. Multilingual Matters, 2003.

MARRIED.” Producing the sign for “marry,” he crushes her. The giant then laments, “See, Oralism is better.”

This joke is, of course, visual and is dramatized particularly to be funny, but it's also linguistically funny because it plays with the sign for “marry.” The sign for marrying has the signer clasp their two hands together tightly to show the bond of two people in marriage.



This being signed while the girl is in the giant's hand causes the Giant from the story to kill the girl inadvertently. He then laments in the end that Oralism is better, making this joke even funnier among Deaf people because of the irony.

Zap Stories

Another very popular type of joke or story in the Deaf community is a genre in which the Deaf person wins in the end or gets the last laugh in some way, usually at a hearing person's expense. This directly relates to the oppression that Deaf people have faced throughout history. As in many oppressed groups, in the Deaf community humor becomes a coping mechanism. Deaf people find a bit of enjoyment in “zapping” the sometimes ignorant and micro-aggressive acts of the hearing people around them. An example of a Zap would be when a hearing person encounters a Deaf person and assumes that all Deaf people can read lips. When the hearing person asks the Deaf person “You can you read my lips, right?” the Deaf person replies “No” and walks away. Of course, to answer the question the Deaf person could read lips, but it is

the assumption from the hearing community that the Deaf person can have frustration with.²⁴

A classic example of a Zap-style joke follows and is extremely funny in the Deaf community, for it lets them determine the winner of the story.

Three people are on a train—one is Russian, one is Cuban, and one is Deaf. The Russian is drinking from a bottle of vodka. She drinks about half the bottle, then throws it out the window. The Deaf person looks at her, surprised. "Why did you throw out a bottle that was only half-empty?" The Russian replies, "Oh, in my country we have plenty of vodka!" Meanwhile, the Cuban is smoking a rich, aromatic cigar. He smokes about half the cigar, then throws it out the window. The Deaf person is again surprised, and asks, "Why did you throw out the cigar?" He replies, "Oh, in Cuba we have plenty of cigars!" The Deaf person nods with interest. A little while later a hearing person walks down the aisle. The Deafie picks him up and tosses him out the window. The Russian and Cuban look up in amazement. The Deaf person shrugs, "Oh, we have plenty of hearing people in the world."²⁵

There are many websites that document Deaf jokes and stories that are like these examples. But for my thesis, I felt it important to illustrate these examples in ASL, so I solicited a group of ASL interpreters to video tape these jokes or close renditions of them, based on what form of the joke I found online. I then used the written joke I provided them as the transcript to add captions to the video files. On the LifeandDeaf.com site, these jokes and stories are:

- The Motel Story
- King Kong
- Three Men on a Train

24 Cancio-Bello, Erika. "The Sources of Deaf Humor: An Exploration of the Reasons Deaf Humor Differs from That of Hearing People." (2015).

25 Bienvenu, M. J. "Reflections of American Deaf culture in Deaf humor." Bragg, Lois (ed.) (2001): 99-103.

ABC and 123 Stories

Among the stories told about Deaf experiences are those that attempt to use the intersection of two languages. ABC and 123 stories use the handshapes of the English alphabet and numbers to illustrate a sequence of events. The story is reliant on the viewer knowing the ASL to understand the overall story, but the viewer also must be aware of the English constructs that inform the specific handshapes used. These stories can be simple or very elaborate while adhering to specific constraints. The general rules are:

- The handshapes must be used in succession and the correct sequence.
- Any alternatives to handshapes should be within the awareness of the audience.
- Paralinguistic devices such as role switching and use of space should be clear and deliberate.
- The story should follow a narrative and make sense.²⁶

I have included a few of these types of stories on LifeandDeaf.com. They are the following:

- ABC Story—Ready for School
- ABC Story—Making a Pizza

²⁶ Bahan, Ben. "Face-to-face tradition in the American Deaf Community." *Signing the body poetic* (2006): 21-50.

AUDIENCE(S)

The audience for this site is clearly the Deaf community. But this specific demographic is varied. Therefore, there are three audiences that will be targeted by the content on LifeandDeaf.com. Those audiences are:

Primary Audience: The Deaf community, comprising deaf and hard-of-hearing people who share a common language, that being sign language, specifically American Sign Language. These individuals also share common experiences and values. These experiences include how they interact with each other and the hearing people in their lives.

Secondary Audience: Friends and family of those in the Deaf community. These individuals are fluent in sign and have common experiences within the Deaf community and culture. This group may include sign language and deaf education teachers, students, and sign language interpreters.

Possible Audience: General public that finds its way to the site through social media or searches. The experience for this audience will lie in utilizing transcribed and captioned video submissions.

For this project, and to adhere to specific user experience needs of the predominantly Deaf audience, a large majority of the videos curated have captions included. As mentioned previously, for specific videos solicited in the jokes section of the LifeandDeaf.com site, I provided written forms of the jokes to the signers and then captioned their videos with the original transcript. I added these captions through the subtitles/captions tool on YouTube. If this site lives beyond this thesis and finds an active audience that wants to submit videos, I will post instructions for users to easily add captions to their videos before they post them to LifeandDeaf.com.

BRANDING

The preliminary name for this site was ArmsOutLoud.com, referring to the physical use of the body and play on the subject matter being predominantly humor (Laugh Out Loud). After months of exploration and conversations with both hearing and Deaf people in the Deaf community, I started to realize that it would be important for the name to include the word Deaf in some way. After some brainstorming on the purpose of this project, I decided on The Deafinite Story. I felt this met the recommendation to incorporate the word Deaf while tying it to the goal of storytelling. But with a few more comments from Deaf friends, it became evident that The Definite Story was too ambiguous. Thinking on it more and playing with the words again, I came up with Life & Deaf. It lays immediate attention on the word "Deaf," due to its proximity to the common phrase "life and death," which gives it a catchy appeal. And I feel that this is a better representation of the content of the site, as humor and storytelling are the center of how members of the Deaf community share their perceptions of the world.²⁷



In creating branding and materials with this new name for the website LifeandDeaf.com, I applied a convention I have seen in abundance online: the use of ASL alphabet handshapes incorporated into the names of companies and organizations either run by

²⁷ Biennu, Martina J. "Reflections of deaf culture in deaf humor." *The deaf way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture*. 1994.

Deaf people or with the Deaf as their target audience. Though this device is overdone in the branding of Deaf-related companies, it is important for them to self-identify with these organizations, and this allows that at a much faster pace than within the content and messaging alone. Therefore, I also incorporated the "L" and "D" in ASL handshapes as part of the logo to be immediately recognized by Deaf signers. These handshapes, along with "Deaf" used in the name of the site, will communicate to the Deaf community that this site is for and about them. The tagline that accompanies the logo, "Humor, Stories, Experiences" will give the target audience further insight into the content they can expect to find.

Included in the appendices, you will find the branding guidelines I developed and the application across various marketing and outreach documents, such as letterhead, business cards, and various materials that have and can be distributed to perspective contributors to the site.

CONSTRAINTS

In the beginning stages of this project, in efforts to test the concept, I reached out to friends of mine in the Deaf community to see if there was interest in a space to share Deaf jokes and stories in ASL. Luckily at that time, I was able to survey a few people and illustrate the need for this concept. Though I have an extensive background and education in Deaf culture and can sign rather well, I know enough to realize that there is a prevalent distrust of hearing people leading efforts that directly impact the Deaf community. For this reason, I made concerted efforts to work closely with Deaf organizations and universities, as well as contacts of my own within the Deaf community. I created a Facebook profile for this project. I posted a welcome letter and a video in ASL explaining the concept and goals of this thesis project. I requested to post on several Deaf organization pages and asked friends within the Deaf community to spread the word about the Facebook page as well as the project. Outside of a few likes from friends, I received no video posts or comments from the Deaf community. In the end stages of my attempts to gather video submissions, I ended up reaching out to a family member located in Illinois that is part of an ASL interpreter's certification program. He was able to get classmates to submit specific videos in ASL based the on written jokes I supplied them. Outside of these few examples, all other video was curated by me from YouTube based on searches of Deaf humor as jokes and stories. As well, based on titles of videos on YouTube, I was able to curate examples of videos in ASL that share more general life experiences of Deaf people.

All the videos that I selected to use as part of this project are for example only. They were selected as illustrations of the types of videos that could be solicited if this were to become a long-term web site. Each of the videos selected were posted on YouTube under Standard YouTube License, which is the default selection. The Standard YouTube License requires written consent of YouTube or the respective licensors of the content. Therefore, for each video I selected to use from YouTube, I sent an email requesting the creator's permission. I also relied upon the best practices for fair use as it pertains to

using licensed online material for educational purposes. According to the Center for Media and Social Impact at American University, which has compiled information on best practices for fair use, the use of videos within my thesis project do adhere to several principles they describe, including using copyrighted material for illustration or example, reposting to preserve an experience or cultural phenomenon, and recirculating a work for purposes of launching a discussion.²⁸

²⁸ Jaszi, Peter A., and Patricia Aufderheide. "Code of best practices in fair use for online video." (2008).

COMPONENTS

Branding

- Design logo and branding to carry through all products
 - Business cards
 - Tips and guidelines for video submissions
 - Facebook page and related social media materials

Website

- Users can join or log in with email account or with Facebook
- Users can post and view videos in three categories
 - Jokes
 - Stories
 - Experiences
- Users can view and post comments to video content
- Users can share video content

Videos

- Collect numerous videos from YouTube based on category and subject matter
- Curate specific examples of videos based on content needed
- Transcribe and create captions for captured or collected original video

App

- Design an app prototype using InVision to show proposed functionality
- Users can join or log in with email account or with Facebook
- Users can post and view videos in three categories
 - Jokes
 - Stories
 - Experiences

- Users can view and post comments to video content
- Users can share video content

Possible Ongoing Efforts

- Facebook page promoting and featuring video submissions
- YouTube channel for LifeandDeaf.com to be an outlet for videos curated and posted
- Use Google Analytics and SEO to assure first-page placement in Google search for specific keywords
- Reach out to Deaf organizations to promote the site
 - <http://www.alldeaf.com/>
 - <http://www.deaftv.com/>
 - <http://deafnation.com/>
 - Deaf Professional Arts Network: <http://d-pan.com/>
 - Gallaudet University: <http://videocatalog.gallaudet.edu/>
 - <http://www.listentoourstories.com/>
 - National Theatre of the Deaf: <http://www.ntd.org/>
- Request posts/ads on relevant Deaf community sites, social media platforms, etc.

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APPENDIX A: BRANDING

Logo

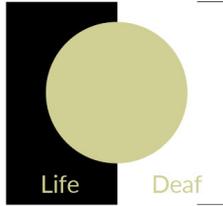


Color Palette

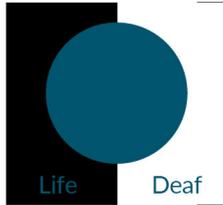
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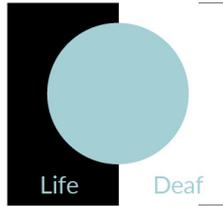
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 on black: 6.8:1



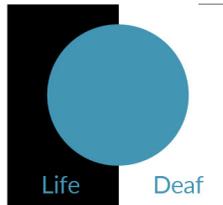
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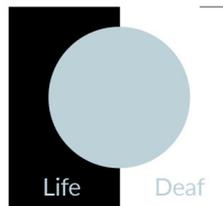
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 R:0 G:86 B:112
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 on white: 8.19:1
 on black: 2.57:1



C:35 M:5 Y:15 K:0
 R:164 G:208 B:213
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 508 ratios:
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 on black: 12.56:1

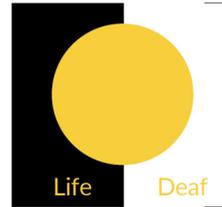


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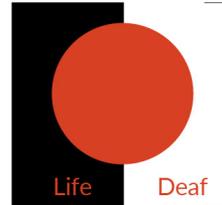


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 #BDD0D9
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 on black: 13.19:1

Secondary Color Palette



PANTONE 129
 C:0 M:11 Y:78 K:0
 R:243 G:208 B:62
 #F3D03E
 508 ratios:
 on white: 1.51:1
 on black: 13.9:1



PANTONE 7597
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 R:209 G:65 B:36
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 on black: 4.49:1

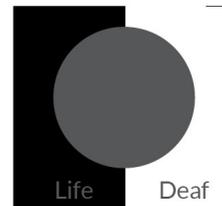


C:32 M:66 Y:0 K:49
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 on black: 2.13:1

Neutral Color Palette



PANTONE 410
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 R:116 G:102 B:97
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 508 ratios:
 on white: 5.5:1
 on black: 3.82:1



PANTONE 425
 C:48 M:29 Y:26 K:76
 R:84 G:88 B:90
 #54585A
 508 ratios:
 on white: 7.19:1
 on black: 2.92:1

508 compliance

For AA compliance, text should have a ratio of at least 4.5:1 (text larger than 18 pt, at least 3:1).

For AAA compliance, text should have a ratio of at least 7:1 (text larger than 18 pt, at least 4.5:1).*

*http://snook.ca/technical/colour_contrast/colour.html

Fonts

Avenir is the primary typeface used for web and print.

Aa

Light

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Medium

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Black

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Lato is the secondary san serif typeface used for web and print.

Aa

Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Bold

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Georgia is the primary serif typeface used for web and print.

Aa

Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

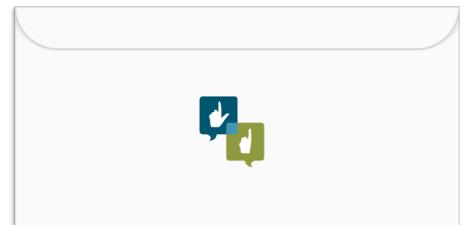
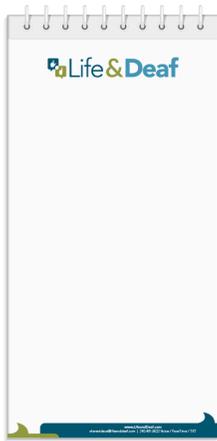
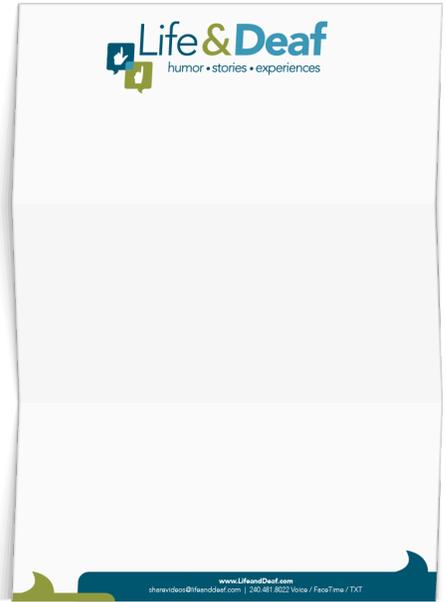
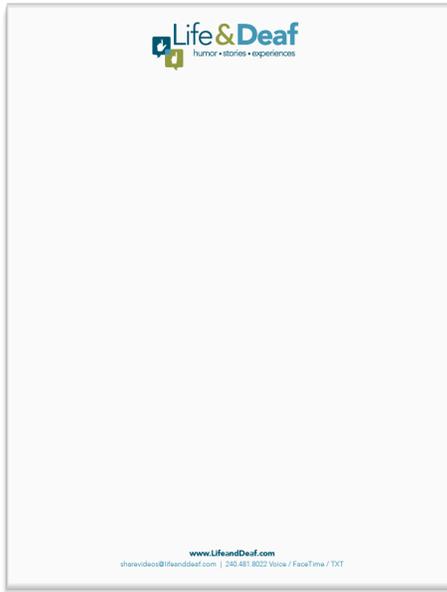
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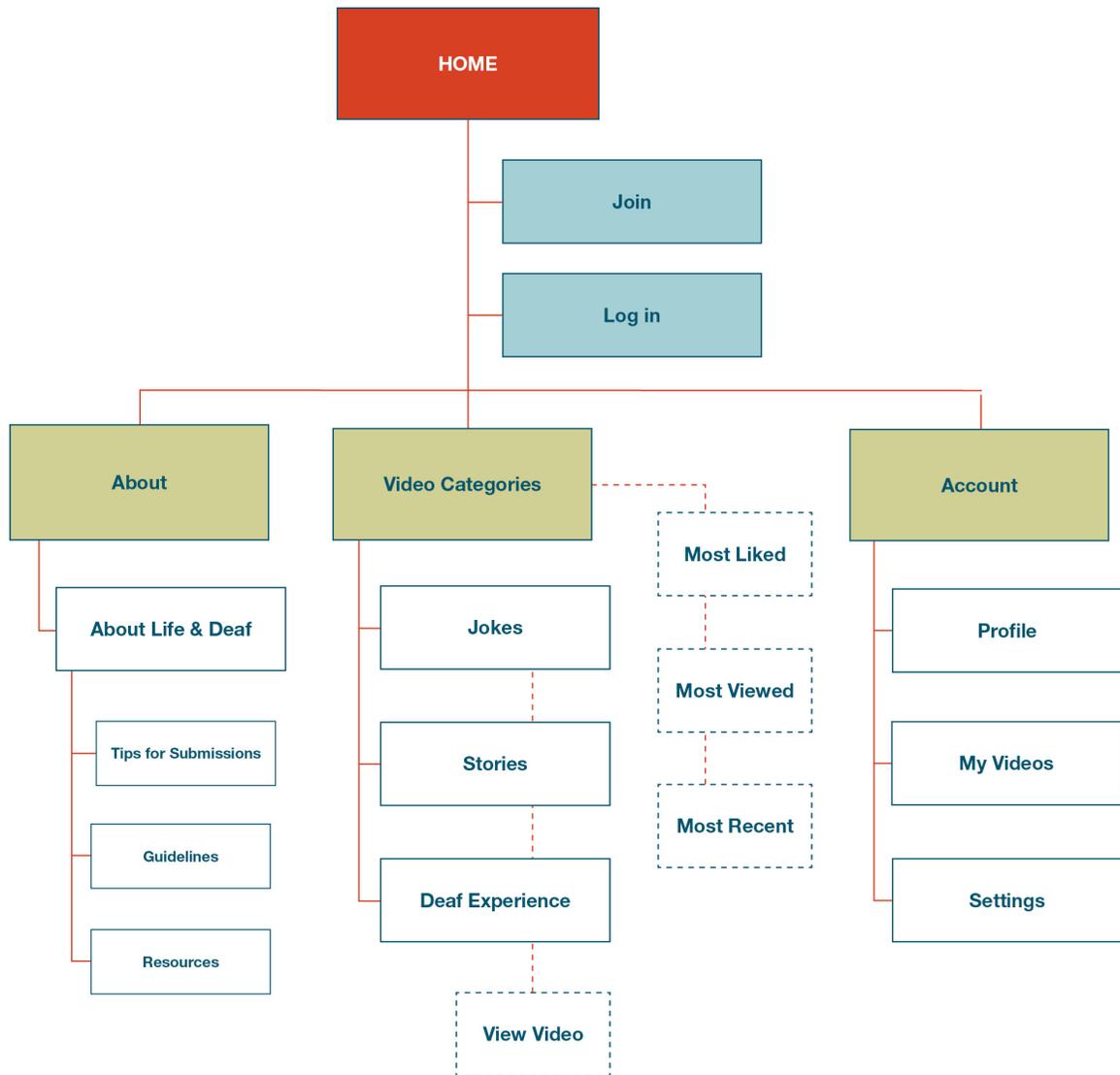
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1234567890-=!@#\$%^&*()_+

Collateral

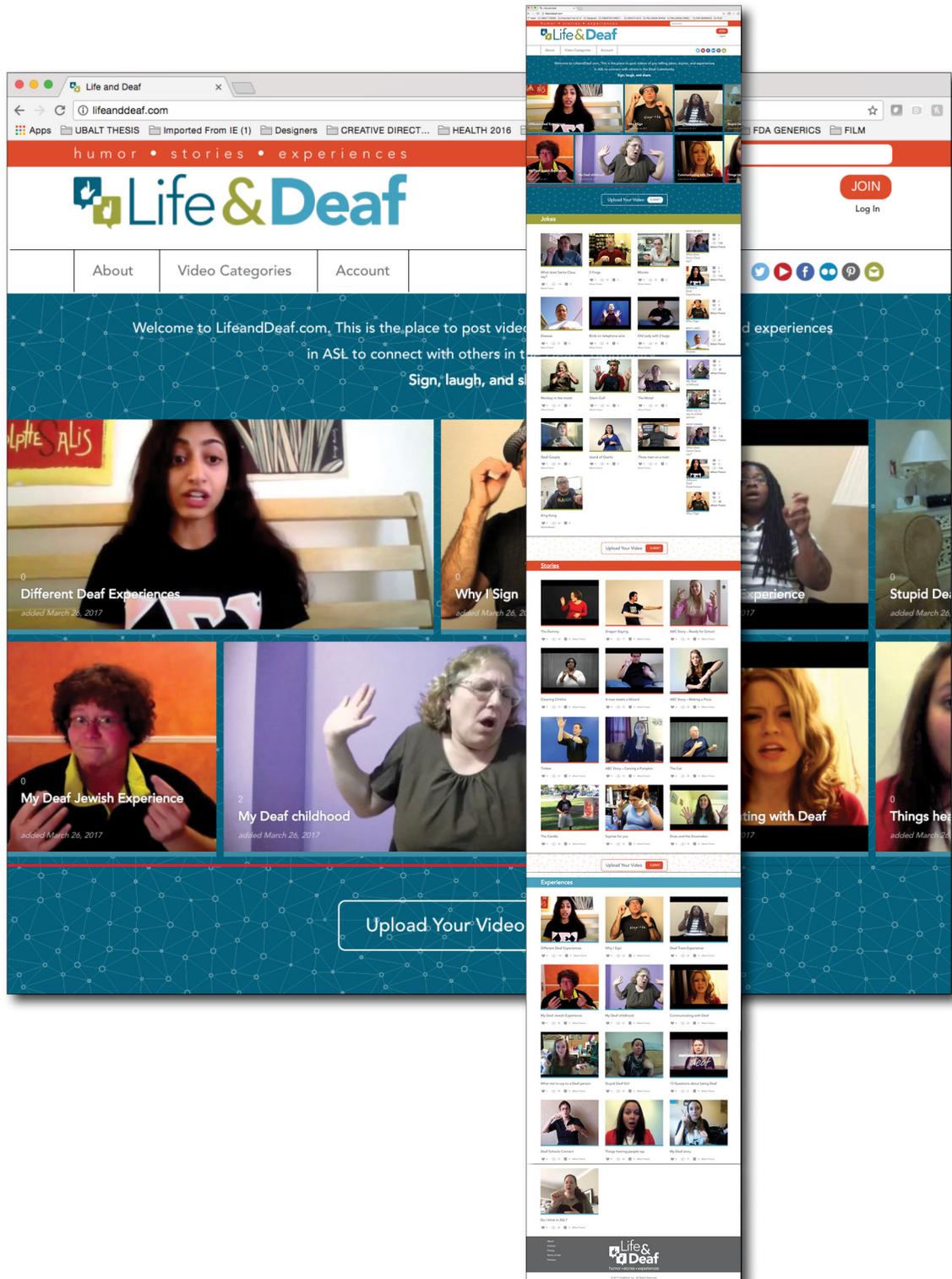


APPENDIX B: SITE MAP

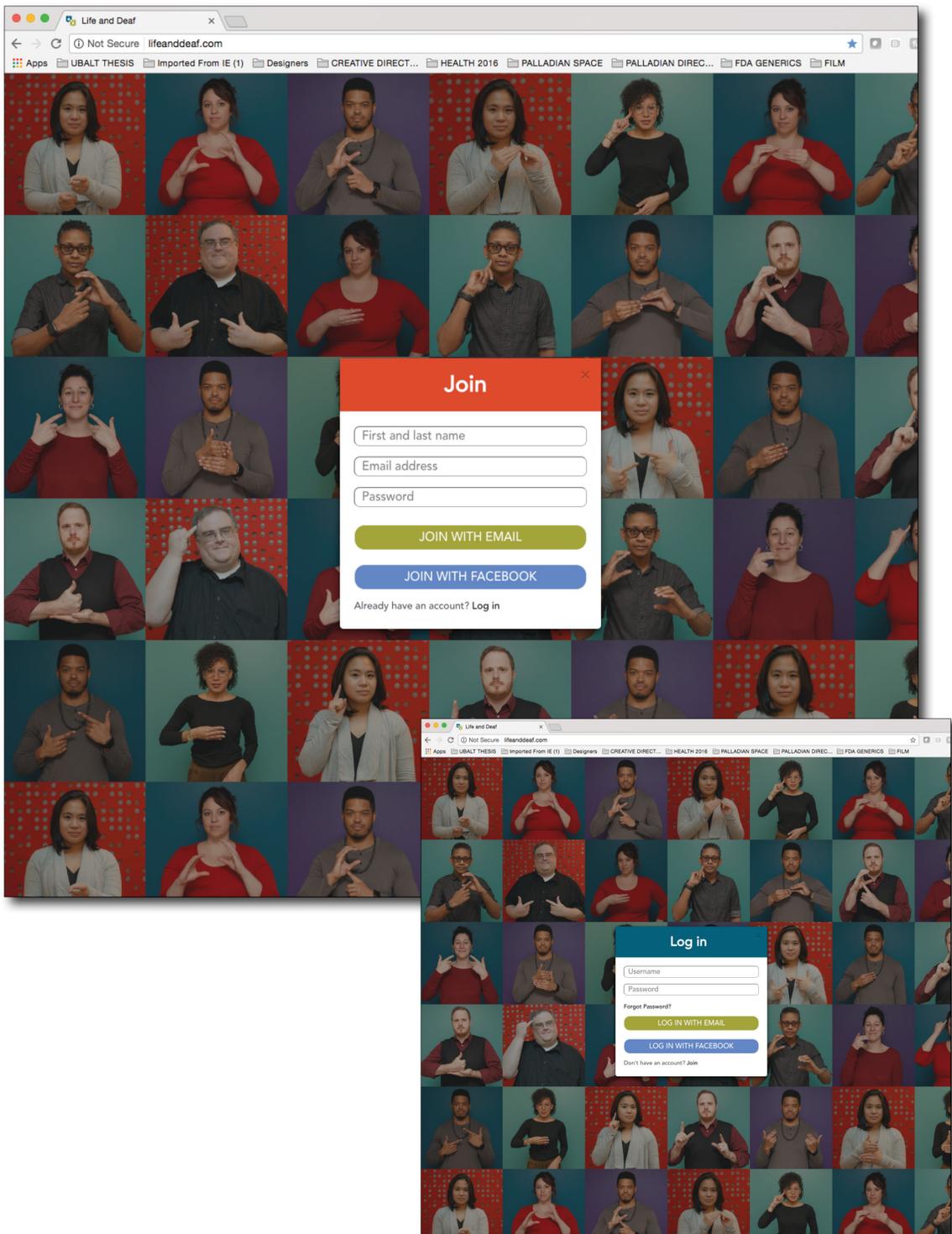


APPENDIX C: WEBSITE

Homepage



Join/Log in Page



About Page

humor • stories • experiences

some text...

Life&Deaf

JOIN
Log In

About Video Categories Account

Upload Your Video SUBMIT

Mainstream American culture teaches that "normal" people are born with five senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. Of course, Deaf people can't hear, and this causes many people to view the Deaf as deficient and deprived. But nothing could be further from the truth? We have always had five senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and a sense of humor.

— M.J. Bienvenue

The above quote is from a lecture by M.J. Bienvenue, a legendary ASL teacher and presenter (on topics including English, the politics of oppression, and the Bilingual-Bicultural approach), she is now Chair and Assistant Professor in Gallaudet's Department of ASL and Deaf Studies.

About Life&Deaf.com

Launched in 2017, LifeandDeaf.com brings together the vast Deaf Community to share jokes, stories, as well as personal experiences via video in our natural visual language, American Sign Language (ASL).Humor and storytelling are important to community and culture, but especially so for the Deaf.

Storytelling in ASL is how we connect with others as well as to our past, while humor strengthens our social bonds and allows us to react, adapt, and respond to the world around us. Life&Deaf.com is the place that brings humor and storytelling together to be shared via ASL.So join Life&Deaf.com to share jokes and stories, both old and new, as well as your experiences as a Deaf person. Record and upload a video today.

[Sign, laugh, and share.](#)

Tips for Video Submissions

Submissions should be original content recorded and uploaded from the viewer/user.

- Hold the phone in landscape position – long, not tall.
- If possible, please have someone else hold the phone. If filming yourself, please use a device to hold the phone, or prop it so that it is secure and that all of your upper body is visible.
- Record at the highest quality setting using the back camera. Do not record in selfie mode.
- Keep the video zoomed all the way out, sit closer instead.
- Before starting and after finishing, record for a few seconds as a buffer.
- Shoot video in a well lit area. Don't shoot with a window behind you or with harsh lights directly above you.
- Avoid contrasting clothing, accessories, and environments that can be distracting.
- If voicing your recording in addition to ASL, please record in a quiet area.
- Please try to record your video all in one take.

Guidelines of Account Use

Upload only videos you created yourself.

You cannot upload certain types of content:

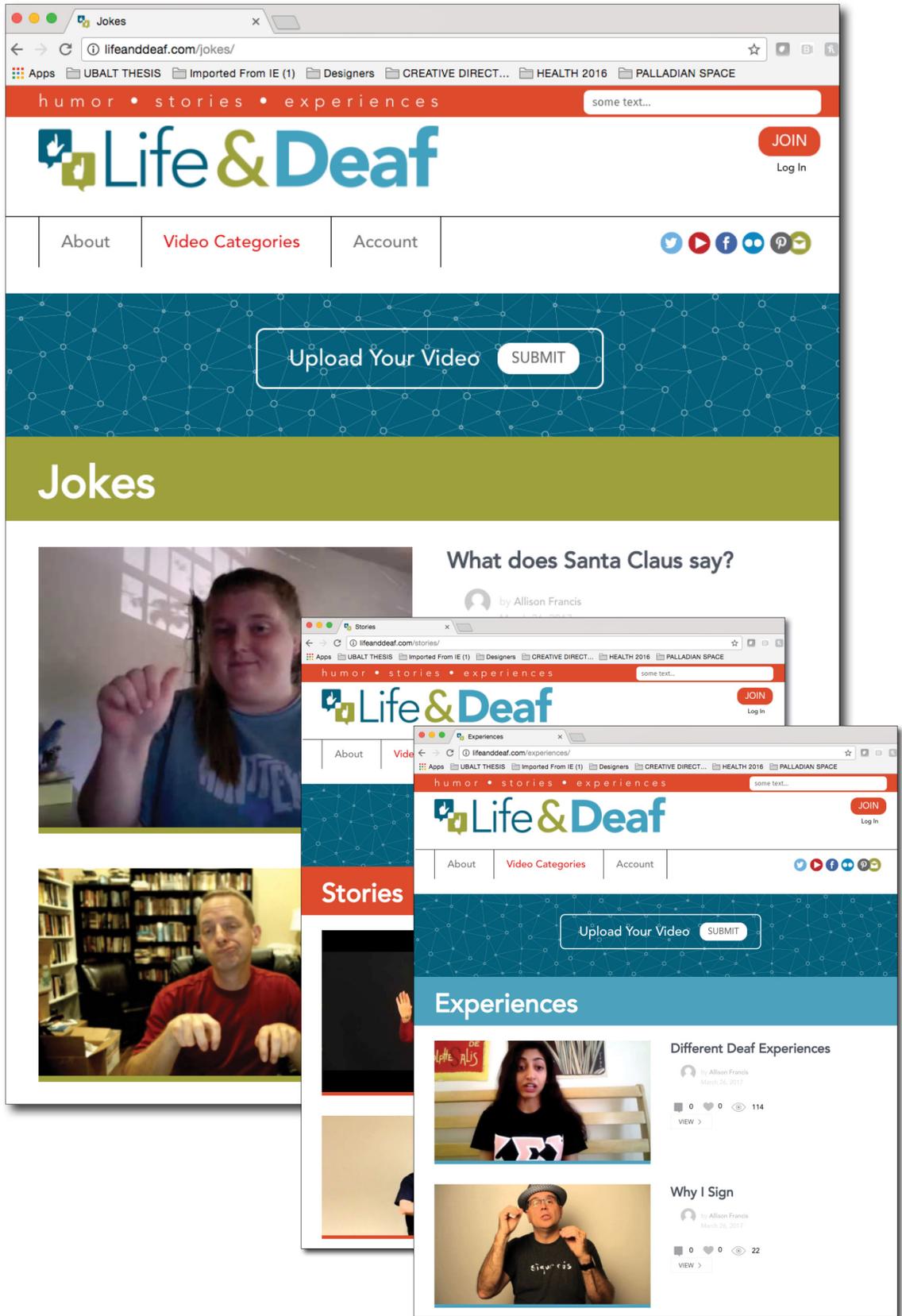
- No posting material pulled from other sources.
- No sexually explicit material or pornography.
- No videos that violate someone's privacy, or include defamatory or discriminatory speech.
- No videos that depict or promote violence of any kind

Violations of any of these terms may lead to the removal of your videos and/or your account.

Resources



Video Categories Pages



Account Page

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the account page for Life & Deaf. The browser's address bar shows the URL `lifeanddeaf.com/account/`. The page features a navigation bar with the site's logo, a search bar, and a 'JOIN' button. Below the navigation bar are tabs for 'About', 'Video Categories', and 'Account'. The main content area is titled 'Account' and contains several sections: 'Name' with a text input field; 'Email address' with a text input field and a note that it's for logging in without Facebook; 'Password' with a masked input field, a 'forgot password?' link, and a 'RESET' button; 'Profile pic' with a placeholder image of a woman and an 'UPLOAD' button; 'Bio' with a text input field; and 'Location' with a text input field containing 'Silver Spring, MD'. Below this is a 'My videos' section with a link to view all submitted videos and a 'Notifications' section with five rows of notification preferences, each with 'yes' and 'no' radio buttons. The footer includes a list of links (About, Contact, Privacy, Terms of Use, Partners), the Life & Deaf logo and tagline, and a copyright notice for 2017.

Account

Not Secure lifeanddeaf.com/account/

UBALT THESIS Imported From IE (1) Designers CREATIVE DIRECT... HEALTH 2016 PALLADIAN SPACE PALLADIAN DIREC... FDA GENERICS FILM

humor • stories • experiences

some text...

Life & Deaf

JOIN
Log In

About Video Categories Account

Account

Name:
You don't have to use your real name

Name

Email address:
This is what you log in with if you're not using Facebook.

Email@address.com

Password:

forgot password? RESET

Profile pic
500px x 500px will work best. JPG/GIF/PNG please.



UPLOAD

Bio:
A little bit of info about you

Location:
Tell people where you are posting from.

Silver Spring, MD

My videos

View all the videos that you've submitted to Life&Deaf.com.

Notifications
Choose when you want to be notified

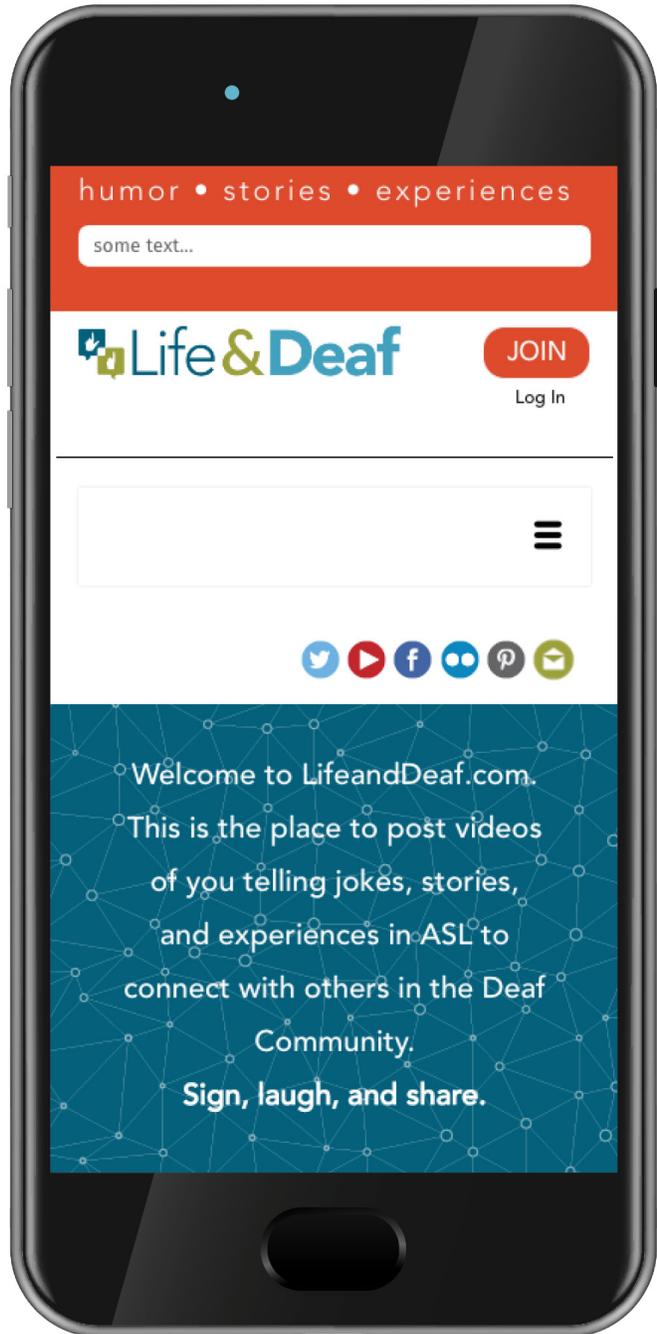
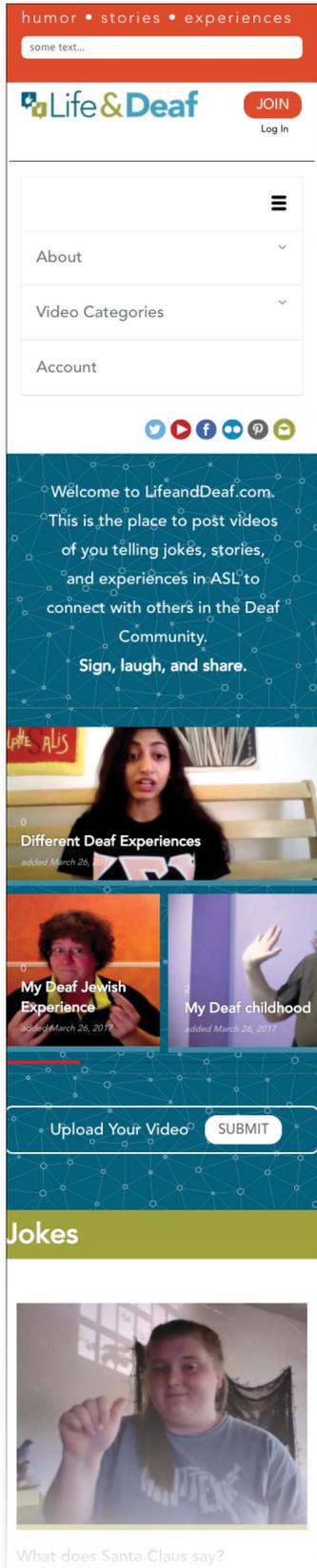
My video has been posted	<input checked="" type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> No
There is a comment left to one of my videos	<input checked="" type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> No
Someone likes one of my videos	<input checked="" type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> No
Someone has shared one of my videos	<input checked="" type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> No
Moderator or video owner has removed one of my videos	<input checked="" type="radio"/> yes <input type="radio"/> No

About
Contact
Privacy
Terms of Use
Partners

Life & Deaf
humor • stories • experiences

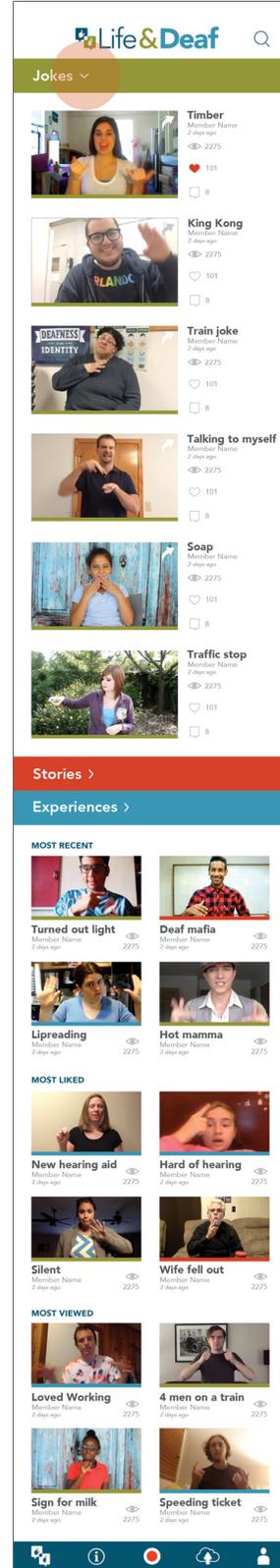
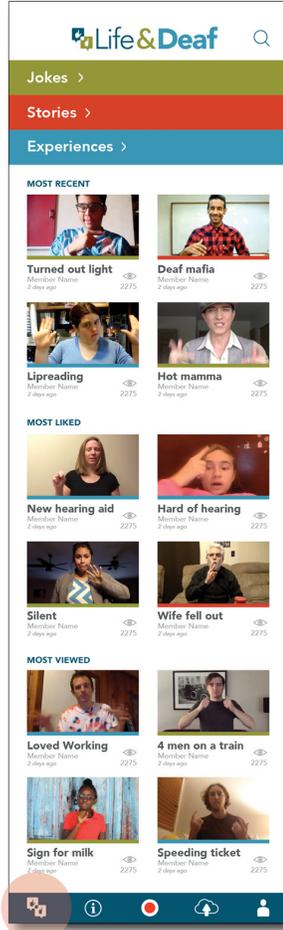
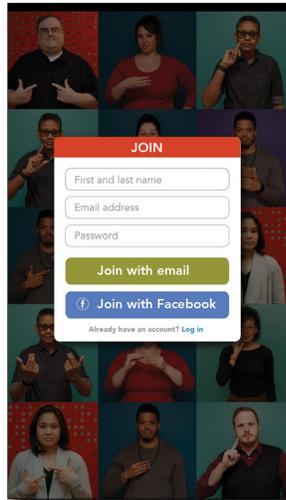
© 2017 Life&Deaf, Inc., All Rights Reserved.

Mobile View

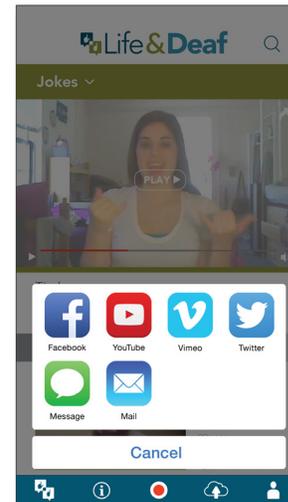
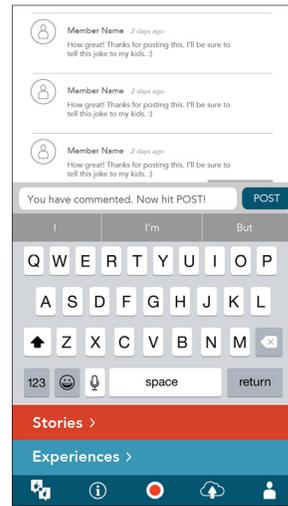
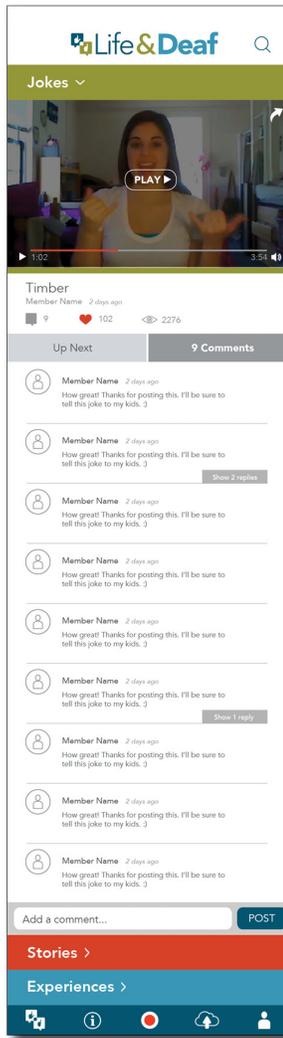
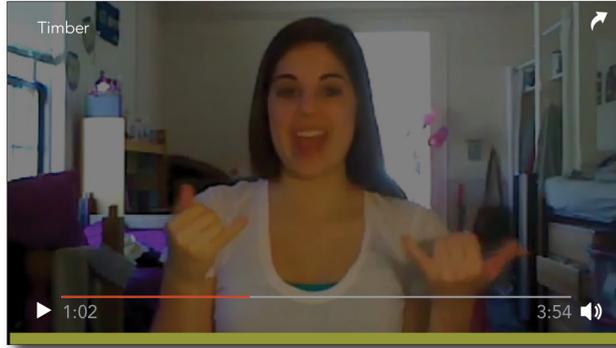
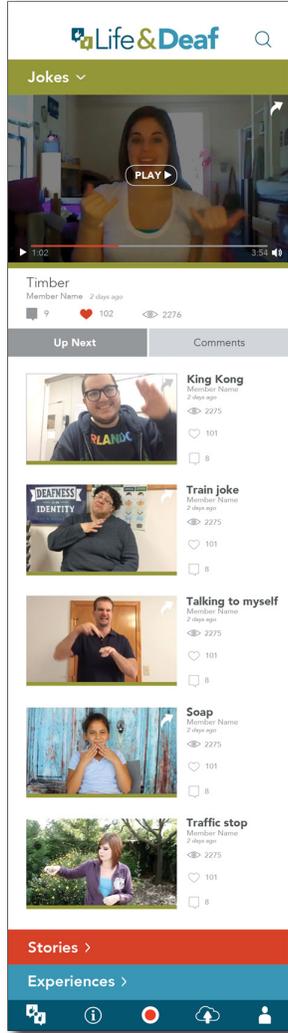


APPENDIX D: APP PROTOTYPE

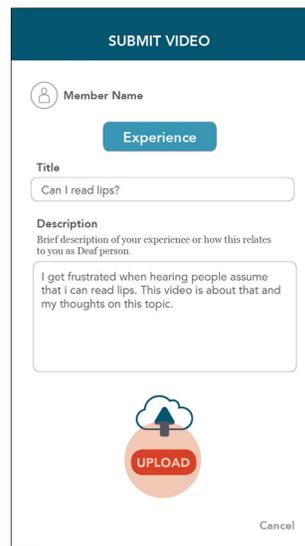
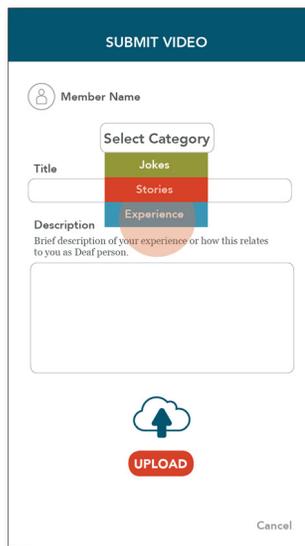
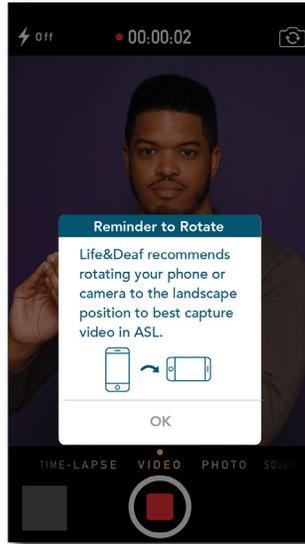
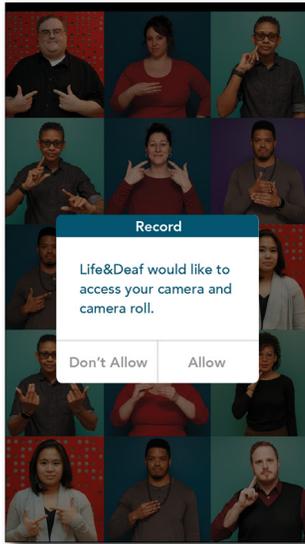
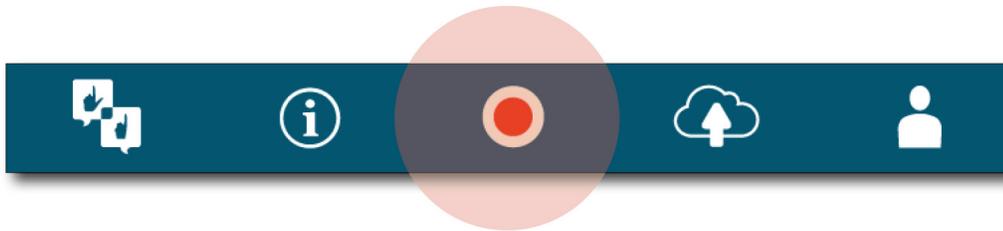
Intro Screens



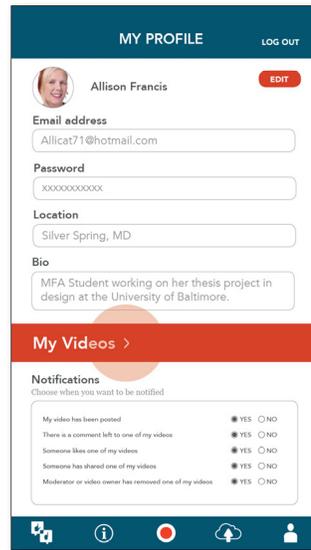
View Video



Record / Submit Video



My Profile / My Videos

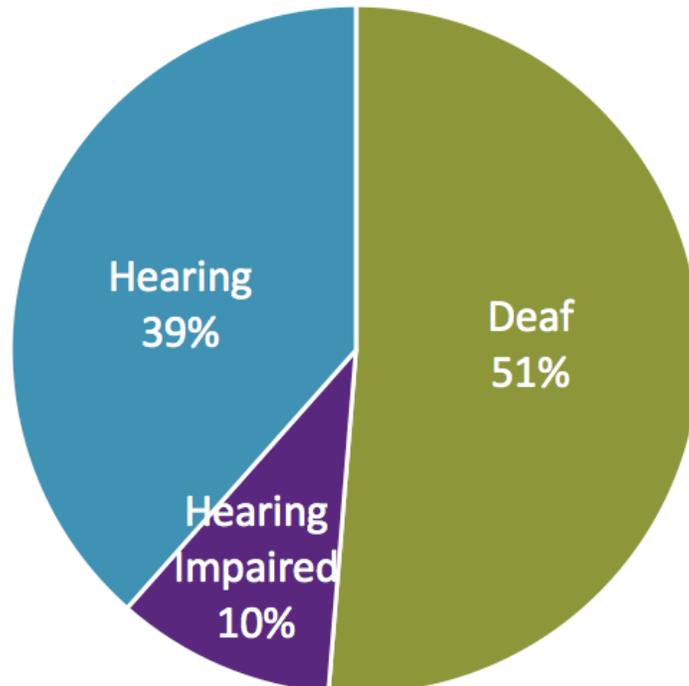


APPENDIX E: Preliminary Survey

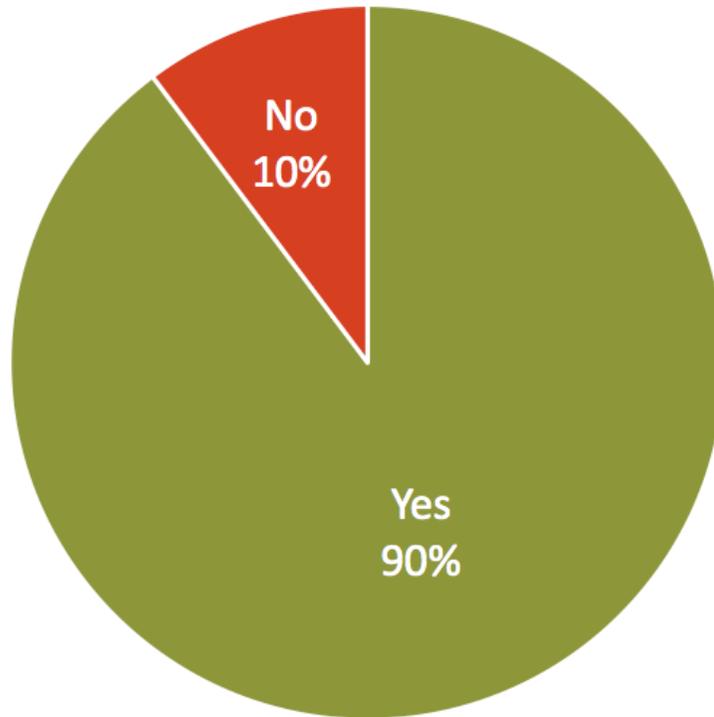
When I began my research to validate my subject matter, I created and disseminated a preliminary survey targeting the Deaf, the hard of hearing, and Deaf advocates. The survey contained ten questions. With the assistance of a Deaf friend, Makini Galloway, I disseminated the survey via posts to Facebook. I posted to Deaf organizations' Facebook pages, as well as to pages of friends and acquaintances who are either Deaf or have Deaf followers.

Supporting findings: Results conclude that approximately 68% of the surveyed individuals were Deaf or hard of hearing, and the majority of this audience would be very likely to visit a site to watch videos in ASL of Deaf humor/jokes.

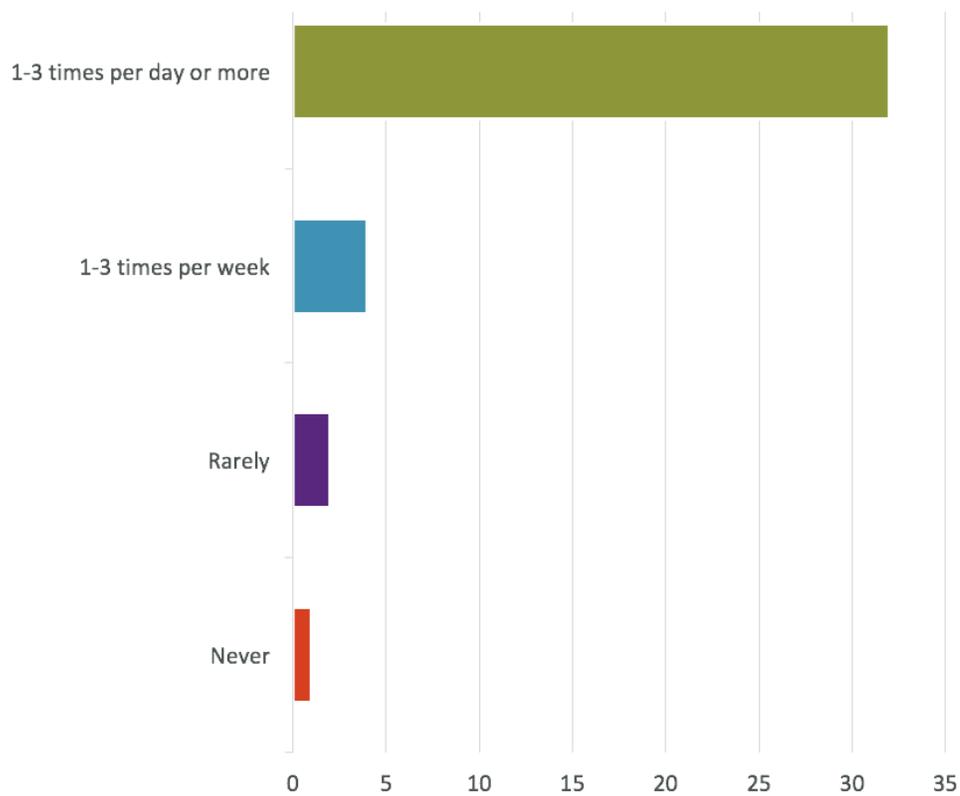
Which of these describes you?



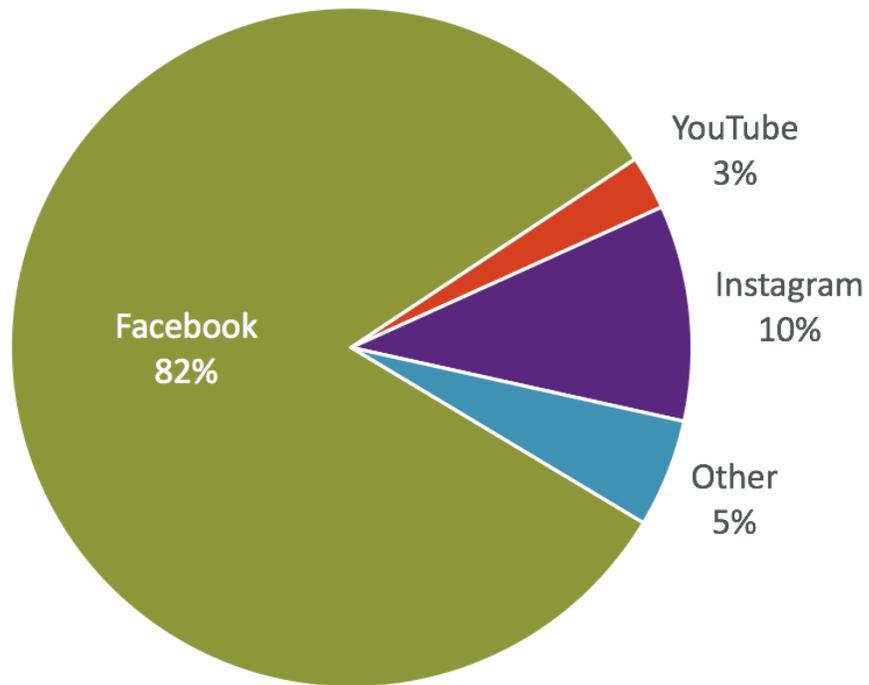
Do you use ASL?



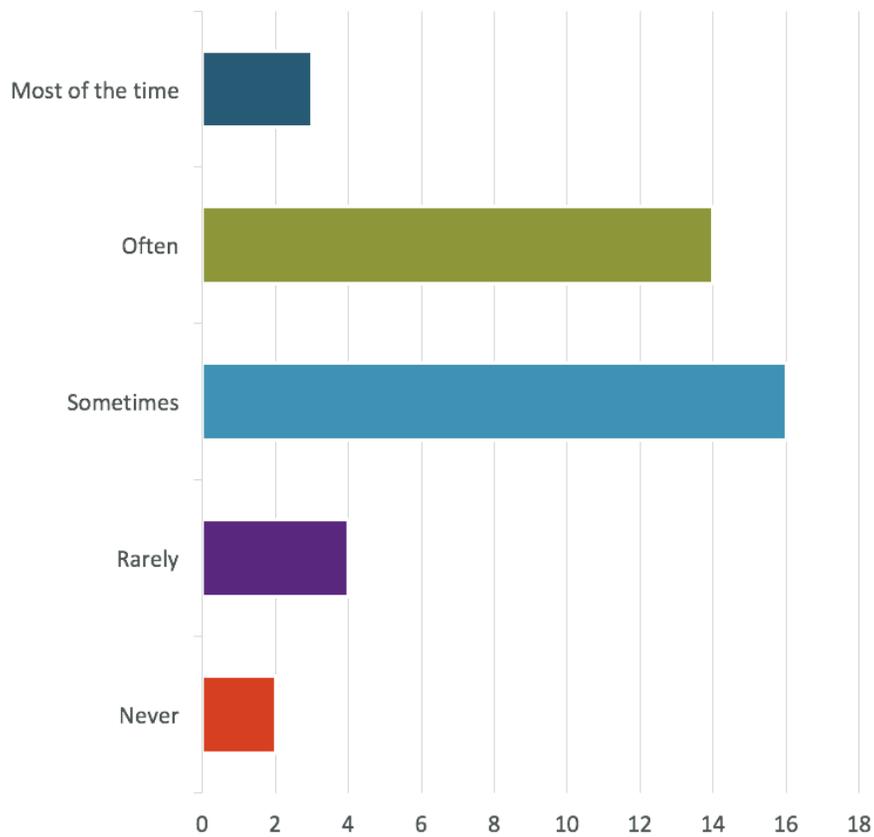
How often do you view or access social media?



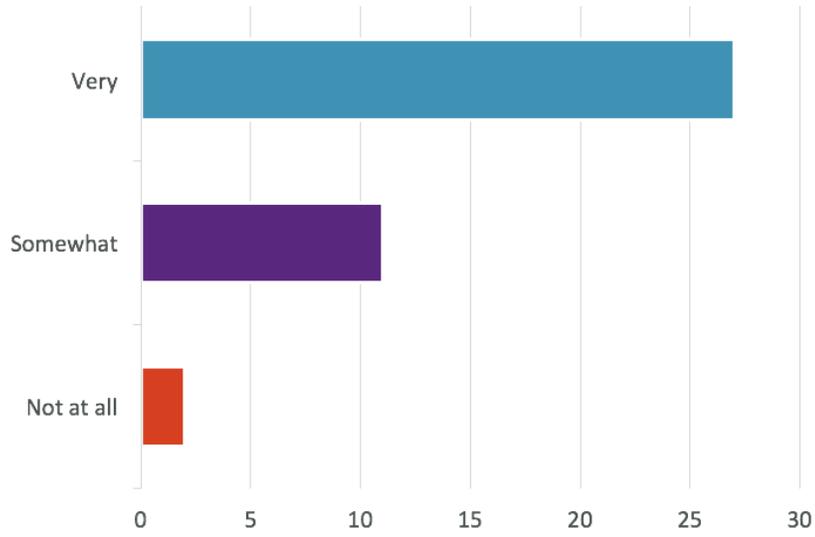
Which social media outlets do you view/use most often?



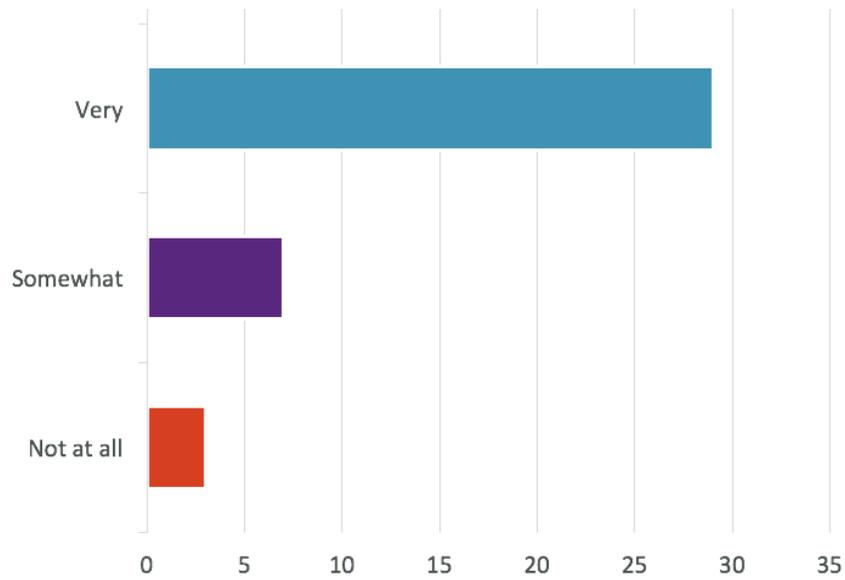
How often do you view videos that use sign language via social media?



How interested are you in seeing videos that are posted in sign language?



How interested are you in seeing videos about Deaf humor?



How likely would you be to post videos to a social media outlet about Deaf humor?

