GALLAUDET
UNIVERSITY

THE HONORS PROGRAM

Sensual Cultures:
Exploring Sensory Orientation

An Honors Capstone Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with University Honors

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A Gallaudet University Honors Program Project

Gallaudet University's Honors Program culminates in a "capstone" or final project that must meet professional standards, including making an original contribution. I appreciate the opportunity and resources provided by the Honors Program to develop my own product, this app, which was something I had previously only dreamed about. In particular, I want to thank Mr. Geoffrey Whitebread and Dr. Shirley Shultz Myers.

Most of all, the two people that made this project happen are the members of my capstone committee. If it weren't for them, you won't be browsing this very app. From Deaf Studies is Dr. Benjamin Bahan (for the content) and from Visual Language Visual Learning (VL2) at Gallaudet University is Ms. Melissa Malzkuhn (for the design).

A Motion Lab Project

I originally wanted my project to be a virtual website tour showing the everyday life of a Deaf woman college's life. I decided to meet with Motion Lab, which is a space where creative literature meets experimental media to create new knowledge. Projects aim to explore visual narratives within a bilingual interface, converging digital and physical spaces. I left with a completely different vision of the project. The theme changed from one woman's life at Gallaudet University to life of people on H Street, a hot spot near Gallaudet where interactions between Deaf and Hearing people are common. (I thank members of the motion lab: Zilvinas Paludnevicius, Michelle McAuliffe, Robert Sirvage and Bridget Klein.)

Places and People in this App

All the scenes were reenactment of real life scenes at real locations. I thank the following businesses on H Street that allowed filming:

H & Pizza
Sahra Lounge
Biergarten Haus

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Abstract

We use our senses every day, consciously or unconsciously, always fluidly, based on our cultural needs and preferences. These sensory orientations shape and are shaped by what a given culture defines as acceptable. For this reason, different sensory orientations result in different strengths and areas of emphasis and de-emphasis. Becoming aware of different sensory orientations and their associated cultures allows us to realize what we are missing in our own sensory orientations that inform our cultural habits. Familiarity with various sensory orientations may cultivate greater cultural acceptance as well. To analyze and illustrate such differences, an educational app for iPads was created with the software, Adobe InDesign CS6 and Digital Publishing Suite. Interested audiences can download the app for free on their iPads. The app displays how cultures use senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. The cultures of Deaf and hearing people in relation to sensory orientation (aside from other cultural differences among Deaf and hearing people) are the focus. This focus allows the app to illustrates vividly two modalities of human languages in the world, an audio-vocal mode and a visual-tactile mode. When humans speak they use audio-vocal gestures, and when they sign they use visual-tactile gestures. Interactions among people using different modalities further illustrate cultural differences resulting from differing sensory orientations. The app includes videos of real-life situations on "H Street NE," a street near Gallaudet University where interactions between hearing and Deaf people are common, as are the misunderstandings arising from the two specific cultural practices. One goal of showing people these different cultural practices along with brief explanations of them in this engaging, hip format is to reduce misunderstandings and increase enjoyment of our diverse public life.

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Introduction

Senses and Culture

We live our daily life using our senses. Senses "are registered in our consciousness, or in the case of repression, the unconscious knowledge, of our physical experiences" (Stewart & Howes 2005). When the term "senses" is used, people tend to refer to the five main senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting); however, some cultures define senses differently. For example, Guerts considers balance and speaking to be senses as well (Guerts, 2002). In addition to variations in cultural definitions, there are variations in human acuities. Some individuals may be predisposed towards one sense and use that disposition to develop talent, build a career, and/or get recognition for having this acuity (Hankin & Krieger, 1996). Regardless of individual proclivities, overall senses develop as we adapt to our needs, habits, and cultural preferences.

Padden (1980) defines culture as a set of learned behaviors of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behavior and traditions. Throughout history, cultural identity has shaped ideas about how one behaves, what one likes, and how one interacts with others. This knowledge is transferred primarily through the senses. One learns what tastes good and bad through historical interactions with cultural peers, and so on. Oftentimes the cross-cultural differences in sensory interpretations create conflicts because of strong beliefs of what is right, wrong, good, bad, ugly, and beautiful. According to a well-known researcher who studies this area, Edward T. Hall (1966), " . . . people from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, inhabit different sensory worlds," thus indicating the strong

role of cultural organizations of sensory experiences, a field now called sensual culture (Howes, 2005).

The ways senses can shape culture can be defined by the following areas: episteme, emplacement, and intersensoriality (Valente, Bahan, and Bauman 2010). For episteme, every culture has their own norms, beliefs, and systems of meaning on interpreting sensory experiences (Howes, 2005; Hall, 1966) What sounds good in one culture does not necessarily sound good in another. As for emplacement, all cultures develop space for individuals who may be predisposed towards one sense and demonstrate talent, and develop a career using certain culturally developed senses such as chef, wine taster, and perfumist (Hankin in Keiger 1996). Cultures can influence and shape senses as much as the other way around.

My project focuses mainly on the intersensorial role of visual and tactile senses and their interplay in the Deaf community as well as among hearing people generally. The app explores the range of ways each group uses and interprets their sensory experiences.

Theory of Language and Sensory Orientation

The mechanism of human communication relies on the senses to send and receive information. In fact it has been established that there are two modalities of human languages in the world, and they operate on an audio-vocal mode and a visual-tactile mode. When humans speak they use visual-tactile gestures and when they sign they use audio-vocal gestures (Bahan 2010, Petitto & Marentette, 1991; Petitto, 2000; Stokoe, 2001). The two different modalities set off an intersensorial orientation that is culturally constructed and defined.

Thus, it becomes possible that differences in sensory orientations between individuals between two different cultures may lead to misunderstanding. As Bahan states, "Acceptable sights and sounds are grounded in how a culture mediates the meaning attached to visual and auditory ways of knowing and being" (Bahan 2010). Thus, modalities lead to the construction of cultural values and beliefs about how to interpret and use sensory experiences. However, cultural acceptance may depend upon familiarity with various sensory orientations, precisely because these sensory orientations shape and are shaped by what the culture defines as acceptable. As a prime example, when Deaf culture uses sensory orientation in a different way, it might be taken as a "wrong" where the action is considered disrespectful to other cultures when the issue is not wrongdoing but cross-cultural misunderstanding. Such misunderstandings occur with the audio-vocal and visual-tactile modes.

Audio-Vocal Orientation

Discussing specifically audio-vocal orientation, there are culturally-defined ranges of acceptability for a variety of actions. This acceptability may be impacted, in part, by alternative evaluations imposed upon people of different cultures. The reduction or application of these standards is based on the "other" individual's ability to approximate one's culturally-defined sensory orientation. That is, it is not inherent in both to find a middle ground, but rather the burden is placed on the individual in the non-majority culture to respond to differences in sensory orientation. For instance, "When a person talks, there are also evaluations of vocal qualities. In American culture, for example, certain voices are found to be irritating to a lot of people, specifically nasal, high pitched and loud voices" (Karpf, 2006). Members of Deaf culture may be judged

based on their speech (commonly known as "Deaf Speech"), which is scaled differently by the hearing individual than if the hearing individual were speaking to someone within his/her own culture. Where talking with someone else within his/her own culture, there is a range from bad to good speech. But when applying this different standard to "Deaf Speech," the excellence of the "good speech" still doesn't approximate the maximum range of how hearing people talk. In other words, it's considered something like a Deaf accent so that it can be accepted in the views of people of other cultures who privilege Deaf speech only as long the person speaking is Deaf; otherwise, for hearing people, such speech is not acceptable—only accents from other spoken languages.

Visual-Tactile Orientation

The Visual-Tactile orientation begins with gestures. Deaf people have been known to pick up gestures used in their immediate audio-vocal community and develop the system into home signs; increased contacts with other deaf individuals allowed the evolution of languages that Deaf people use today, such as, in the United States, American Sign Language (Bahan 2010). This range of acceptable levels of visual-tactile orientation is common among Deaf culture. The visual-tactile orientation is not limited to the gestures, or the signs used, but also involves anything visual and physical, including eye movement, finger movement, or facial expression. Each of these behaviors can be understood to have their own meanings. For example, according to Bahan (1996),

> … eyes may be used within verb phrases to express agreement. For instance, in the sentence, "John loves Mary," I could replace these words with "POINT-RIGHT LOVE POINT-LEFT." Suppose I say "POINT-RIGHT LOVE." This leaves the listener wondering who John loves. If the speaker does not point to the

> other person, then that information must be replaced somehow. In this case, the eyes can help replace the dropped pointing. I can sign, "POINT-RIGHT LOVE" and glance to the left with my eyes. This glance now has the same function as pointing, and allows the grammatical process to continue".

Other work has documented a visual-tactile orientation as important to turn-taking. Baker and Padden (1978) state that turn-taking is regulated by eye gaze. For instance, when two people are having a conversation they are looking at one another. When a third party wants to join in he will get into the visual periphery of the two people conversing and lift his hands into the sightline of the first and second party to signal desire for turn.

In Deaf culture, the visual-tactile mode is something we use to communicate everyday. For instance, Deaf people frequently bang the table to get somebody's attention across the table. This is in no way considered impolite within Deaf culture. However, that is considered as disrespectful to the people who can hear and have no knowledge of Deaf culture. This banging behavior is interpreted as being angry, impolite and disrespectful because hearing people use their audio-vocal oriented values to frame deaf people.

Description of Sensory Orientations in the Deaf Community

A unique sensory orientation among Deaf people results in the development of unique cultural beliefs, norms and values that differ from values of other cultures, primarily those of audio-vocal cultures. As with hearing orientation, a Deaf senory orientation may be modified by cultural contexts of various Deaf peoples in the world, but a discernible, generalizable difference exists between the audio-vocal and visual-tactile modes. According to Bahan, "All cultures set a range of what is acceptable and

what is considered excess for noises like grunting, snorting, hollering and laughing" (Bahan 2010). Only when cultural practices contrast do issues arise.

With the unique visual-tactile sensory orientation of the Deaf Community come many different examples of using the senses, which are often unconscious. The word, unconscious, refers to something that is acculturated and imprinted in our behavior and interaction that we just do without thinking. For instance, Deaf people usually share sensory reaches in their walks with one other, and as the speaker speaks, the listener would unconsciously points out obstacles in front of the speaker such as, big rock, pole, or just somebody in front of the speaker. That is something deaf people do naturally, just because they know they cannot hear the possibility upcoming noise (that might be an obstacle) or spot something because they require sustained and more intense eye contact than hearing people usually require for conversation. Those using audio-vocal orientation on the other hand carry their conversations for the most part while maintaining a gaze in front of them, thus not necessitating a shared sensory reach with one another while walking. It is usually hard for members of other cultures to understand things deaf people do in their culture without this kind of instruction.

Touching another person is also is common in the Deaf community. It is known that a hearing person usually feels uncomfortable the first time s/he is welcomed into the Deaf culture when it comes to touching. For instance, we would go out of our way to give/receive a hug when we see each other even if we saw each other a few days ago because that is the way we greet each other. Also, to get each other's attention, rather than calling out a name, we most often would tap the shoulder of the person whose attention we want. When people from other cultures witness some of the "touch"

practices we have, they may misjudge. For instance, a Deaf coach might hug a player on the coach's team if they are close family friends, or simply feel bonded at the moment. While others uneducated about Deaf ways might consider such hugging as "crossing" the line, those who are Deaf or educated about Deaf ways know it is just a way the Deaf community shows their appreciation and displays respect.

The concept of "sound" is challenging for many deaf people. As previously mentioned, acceptance plays a big role in the cultural preferences of what we know and do. A personal anecdote illustrates differences around sound. I had a hearing teacher when I was in middle school, and I always loved playing around on the chalkboard drawing pictures and such. As I was doodling, my other hand naturally scratched the blackboard and that drove my teacher insane and told me to stop. Again, I naturally forgot what a nuisance it was to her and continued to do that, and every time I did that, she found me disrespectful. I did not understand her orientation, and she did not understand mine. For another example, I was always told that laughs of Deaf people are often "too loud, too weird, or disgusting"—at least according to the acceptable range of laughers in the hearing world. However, that is not because we were born with such laughing, but because we cannot hear ourselves, we wouldn't know the difference and where to cut off when we reach an unacceptable decibel. An amusing example of exploiting differences comes from Lorne Farovitch, now a senior at Gallaudet University, who tells how he fought with his hearing siblings; instead of being physical, he would just scream constantly until it pissed them off enough, and it pissed them off more that they were aware that he could not hear if they tried to yell back at him.

Another, sometimes amusing, area of sound involves body discharges. People from hearing-oriented cultures do not realize that we do not know the sounds of them, in other words, how disgusting they are. Discharging without an effort to suppress sound might seem disrespectful when it was not the intention to disrespect.

On the other hand Deaf people will utilize the tactile aspect of sound and use sound as our sensory orientation in our daily life in several different ways. One example is with stereos: the volume on the bass is turned up high, so the vibrations are stronger. This is different from when the volume may be raised in another hearing-oriented culture for a focus on words or the music. As for our pagers, we usually set them to full vibration to use them the way hearing people use "sound alarm" except that we would "feel" the vibration signaling a message has popped up on the pager.

The Deaf community uses our senses according to how useful they can be. A visual-tactile might play the biggest role here, but other senses are still being used, too. But the contrast and number of cultural differences based on sight and touch versus sound make these the most obvious choices for an educational app.

The App Developer

I'm Lauren Benedict, a senior at Gallaudet University, and a proud profoundly Deaf woman. I grew up in a fourth generation Deaf family, went to private Deaf schools my whole life, and interacted with only Deaf people when I was much younger.
Was I sheltered? I see it as a haven where I was supported and provided tools to navigate the larger world that has been less than welcoming at times. I always loved how I grew up because I appreciated the supportive, nurturing environment around me, and I realized

very early on that my typical surroundings differed from the world we encountered any time we went out in public.

As I got older, I began to experience the "real world" where nobody knew my language. The biggest barrier I've had to face was the reality that most of the people I met everyday—and still meet—feel sorry for me. Originally I despised being on the receiving end of such pity. Either they would try to help me in the most basic ways, therefore assuming I am not independent, or they would run away as if they feared I might turn them Deaf! After some time passed, I realized they reacted the way they did because most of them were uneducated about Deaf people, and I was probably the first Deaf person they met. The erroneous reactions I received weren't completely their fault. Instead of cultivating hatred, I shifted to an educational method of handling these situations, which ended up benefitting me as well as them.

What exactly do I mean by an educational method?

This app you will be viewing! The whole purpose of this app is to explain the differences between hearing and Deaf people that tend to cause misunderstandings. The misunderstandings that happen so often can be attributed to differences in sensory orientation. Once the majority audience understands the differences in sensory orientation between Deaf and hearing people, they will be able to accept such differences and be better educated for future encounters with Deaf people.

Developing an app to facilitate cross-sensory orientation familiarity

In today's world, there are numerous mediums through which knowledge can be shared. These include more traditional mediums such as lectures, textbooks or websites, but also include newer ways of sharing knowledge such as podcasts, electronic scholarly

journals and databases, and mobile applications. To engage learners interested in Deaf culture in a different way—that is, in a way that is more direct and engaging than a textbook or a website--I developed an "app" for the iPads.

The inspiration for this idea comes from "Audism Unveiled," a documentary made by a group of Deaf people who discussed issues regarding "audism," meaning, "… a negative or oppressive attitude towards deaf people by either deaf or hearing people and organizations, and a failure to accommodate them" (Burke 2011). The issue was discussed for many years, but as the film was made and then went public; it attracted much more attention regarding the issue. This increased awareness eventually led to action of various kinds. Most might first think of political action, but the arts and technology have played a role as well. In the final analysis, the documentary film was a success due to the medium it used to attract viewers. Knowledge was shared in a film, instead, of in older, traditional ways such as print media, both scholarly and popular. In the same way, I hope to facilitate greater awareness among the general public about legitimate cultural differences through this app.

This app visually communicates the effects of a sensory orientation more reliant on the visual senses to an interested learner who does not share the same orientation but is able to access in a meaningful way the effects of a visual sensory orientation through use of their own visual sense. This app will be more effective than the documentary because the app will compel users to utilize the visual modality to understand what happens and that, in turn, will stimulate a greater impact on a hearing audience who has less knowledge regarding the Deaf community. If desired, users can click on brief text to expand their understanding of what they are experiencing. The experiential aspect makes

long explanation unnecessary, and, in turn, the brevity is part of the appeal of this approach.

Principles of Apps and Educational Application for iPad Apps

Apps can be used for variety reasons, entertainment, news, and educational. This project will be used for an educational purpose, because, research shows that apps are a unique tool that is able to capture a users' attention with greater efficiency that other educational tools:

> …iPads increased learning opportunities in her situation, with my own students. The four key principles about integration - Involvement, Preparation, Application and Development; are universal in the introduction of all technology and learning. (Autumn, 2011)

Autumn claims that apps have a significant educational benefit and that benefit may be more fully realized among students by appealing to a variety of learning styles; she bases her claim on her success with her students. Autumn is among the first to report on her use of apps. Apps are a new technology whose applications are just being realized; the research on these platforms, therefore, is limited.

Model App

I investigated several possibilities for my app. One is an application for iPads and iPhones called "History of Rock" which discusses how rock music evolved, and the set up of the app is exactly what I wanted to set up for my own virtual tour of deaf and hearing sensory orientations. For instance, the app has three separate layouts set up: the header, body, and footer. The header had a date line that allowed the audience to click on dates to learn the history of hard rock; but in my situation, I originally thought it to be the

names of categories where my app will discuss sensory orientations. The categories would be similar to the dates, as a header, for the audience to choose which depth of sensory orientation they would want to focus in. The body part would be the main focus of the app, to display fully what we are seeing in Deaf culture. It would be the "main" screen for the audience to comprehend the big picture of cultural differences between Deaf and hearing people. Recall the example of using the tactile sense of attention-getting where Deaf people would bang on the table; that practice would be displayed in the main screen to justify the category of visual-tactile sensory orientation; similar examples might be found under that header. Last of all, the footer in the *History of Rock* works as a "description" of the main screen, and I considered this area significant in my app, especially when the audience might be hearing and wouldn't be aware of a Deaf cultural practice without some explanation. The footer would provide guidance to ensure their understanding of the main screen. It would function as "captions" with explanations of the main screen.

After experimentation, I kept the original inspiration of *History of Rock* app, but I changed the way it displays; instead of using the layout as breakdowns to explain things; I set everything in categories. The app starts with a cover photo (containing instructions on how to use the app), then continues with:

- Introduction of culture and senses
- Samples of cultural organizations of the five senses
- A transition to our primary focus of comparing cultures (Deaf and hearing)
- Real-life examples (videos) of these differences between Deaf and hearing sensory orientations and cultural practices based on them

- Conclusion
- About page
- Behind the Scenes

The software, Digital Publishing Suite, allows us to scroll down the articles, so that we are able to jump to an article we want. This flexibility in design left me very satisfied.

The other thing I decided to include in the app was about Gallaudet University and Motion Lab. For Gallaudet, I used the primary logo and set up a click-on straight to Gallaudet University's website so the audience could easily click and understand the Deaf Culture element I was referring to the whole time. The Motion Lab involves a few people, two of whom became my committee. Together, we defined this lab as: "A space where creative literature meets experimental media to create new knowledge. Projects aim to explore visual narratives within a bilingual interface, converging digital and physical spaces."

Technology

The technical aspect of this project was the most complicated part of the whole Capstone procedure, because my project required installing and learning so much equipment and software in order to make the app of professional quality.

I originally wanted to use the software under Apple, called X Code, specifically X Code 4.3.1 for Lion on my Macbook Pro. However, after some research, I switched from the idea of X Code to Adobe Digital Publishing Suite plug ins along with Adobe InDesign CS6, both of which which worked much better, especially because I am more comfortable with the Adobe InDesign CS6. I have taken several courses at Gallaudet University, and even during high school, at the Maryland School for the Deaf, that

required using this software. Nevertheless, most of my knowledge about the needed technology was self-taught.

I experimented with different models of iPad such as first generation, second generation, third (retina) generation and mini-iPad by downloading an app called, "Adobe Content Viewer," which allowed me to see what the app would display before it sending it for publication. Publishing costs $395.00, for a one-time fee; it allows me to continue working on the app for a year after and to "update" as often as I would like to, which would show up on the downloaded app by clicking on "update" link as it pops up in users' iPads.

In addition to teaching myself this app development software, I received some additional training in using cameras, video editing, and design software from the Gallaudet University TV Department. I particularly appreciated assistance with sound-dependent scenes. Two technicians came with me on my first shooting session, with a specialist in sounds ensuring I got everything that I wanted in place. They contributed to the high quality results I hope are evident in the app.

Melissa Malkzhun who became one of my capstone committee members was key in designing the app. She had some experience using Digital Publishing Suite (DPS), but was learning as well, so after I learned the basic ways from her to get myself started, we ended up teaching each other things from DPS.

Originally, I developed a storyboard of my app to focus on the "professional" look (just like the History of Rock app), but it evolved into something completely different. I came to the realization that my writing in the app basically "kids" the hearing people about their lack of knowledge in the Deaf Culture just like they "kid" us, thinking

Deaf people cannot do anything; so I decided to change my design of app to a look that fit the context. For example, all of my “instructions” on the interactive screens are in my own handwriting by using the Bamboo Tablet (the equipment that allows me to write on the tablet and then to appear on the computer by using Adobe Photoshop CS6) to suggest that I am talking to the hearing people in the most “basic” way, like they are in kindergarten. I also used www.dafont.com to download more fonts of my preferences rather than using the fonts most of us already have seen, and they were all the fonts that matched my context of “telling” hearing people what they don’t know that they should already know. The more I get myself into the context, the more I enjoyed designing the app while “cracking up” as I work on it. Fortunately beta testers laughed, too.

Assessment

Focus Groups and Various Individuals

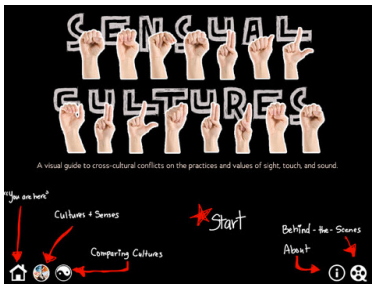
Periodic Test Groups and Individuals from Gallaudet. During development of the app, I met with random Gallaudet people who were either students, staff or a faculty to review the app. We sometimes met in groups and sometimes individually. These "test" audiences ranged from profoundly Deaf ASL users to hearing English speakers. I sought feedback from the very beginning, as early as the completion of raw footage, without any descriptions or app set up. I wanted to see if the videos could speak for themselves without adding any description to them. Responses helped me narrow which videos were significant, which needed to be edited, and which, if the message didn't get across the way I wanted it to and could not be repaired via editing, to be re-filmed. These "test" audiences provided excellent feedback on various aspects: content, film making, handmade art, and overall design.

H Street Business Owners. I originally wanted to set up a focus group filled with H Street business owners. I even had three specific locations in mind which are H & Pizza, Biergarten Haus, and Sahra. They were the businesses that had given me the approval of doing several scenes in their businesses in exchange for advertizing their names in the app. To date, I have not been able to get responses.

However, the "go-to" blog for the H Street neighborhood demonstrated some public notice of the app:

Thursday, May 23, 2013

Interesting New iPad App: Sensual Cultures



A screenshot from the app

A Twitter follower sent me a link to this intriguing new iPad application Sensual Cultures aimed at hearing people who would like to know more about their Deaf neighbors, and how to interact with them positively. The app was made by a Gallaudet graduate.

The creator describes it thus:

A visual guide to cross-cultural conflicts on how cultures value sight, touch, and sound with the focus on Deaf and hearing people! Sensual Cultures come loaded with case studies (videos) showing the conflicts in "real-time" on H Street NE, an artsy corner in Washington DC. (Well, if you've just met a deaf person… this app is for you!)

http://frozentropics.blogspot.com/2013/05/interesting-new-ipad-app-sensual.html

Accessed July 9, 2013

Random Hearing People. Random hearing people that either have only met a Deaf person once or a very few times or have never met a Deaf person were my personal favorites since they are really the primary target audience of this app. Whenever I met someone who seemed interested in learning more about the Deaf Culture, I let them take a look a the app, and then I would ask them for feedback, particularly what things they understood and what they didn't. Their feedback will be instrumental for the 2.0 version of the app.

Presentations

Besides showing the app itself, I have presented the whole project and showed the app to two graduate classes at Gallaudet and one middle school promotion ceremony at the Maryland School for the Deaf. All three took place in June of 2013. Their feedback was overwhelming positive, including some new ideas for version 2.0 possibly.

One of the GU graduate courses was part of the ASL/SLT program. The course was filled with ASL Professors from different Universities across the country and a suggestion came up, which was for me to contact ASL Professors for all of the ASL courses in America to make the app a course requirement. Students could download the app to learn about Deaf Culture in real-life situations for effective learning. Although a language carries a culture, explicit cultural knowledge is not always available just by learning the language. This app helps fill in gaps in understanding of the cultural contexts of ASL. Dr. Benjamin Bahan will assist me in distributing this letter.

Interactivity of the App as a means to gather feedback

Being an Apple Developer allows me to see the ratings and whereabouts for the app, itself by entering iTunesConnect.com To date, about fifteen comments have been

made, and, to my delight, all have been positive. This means is admittedly passive—dependent on who happens to log in and comment.

To encourage more comments in a proactive way, I have printed the app icon on post cards so that viewers remember and easily spot the app in the iTunes/App Store. This is the icon on the front of the poster:

:

In addition, on the back, I have printed the web site people can access to make comments:

The first batch of these post cards is almost gone, so that the second batch needs to be ordered again soon. When I order the second batch, I will make adjustments on the back postcards. The website threw a lot of people off, thinking the whole project was a website project rather than an app. Instead, I would make the website smaller and add some kind of line such as "to give feedback and find out more information, go to www.sensualcultures.tumblr.com" rather than leave the website without any explanation for its purpose. I also would move it to the bottom in place of the "Available App" to make it more visible. These changes resulted from suggestions I received from these various groups and individuals listed above.

Next Step

All feedback will inform the development of a 2.0 version of the iPad app. My aim is to begin development around six months after the publication of 1.0. Moreover, I plan to develop an iPhone app with a simpler more compressed form suitable for iPhone viewing. Once 2.0 of the iPad version and the 1.0 of the iPhone come out, I will begin the cycle of assessments once again. Look for later versions!

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Sensual Cultures: The App

Note to reader: The content below is what you see on the app, here presented as a series of screen shots. The writing that accompanies the images is hard to read via screenshots, however, so these written parts will be inserted below the appropriate screens they accompany.

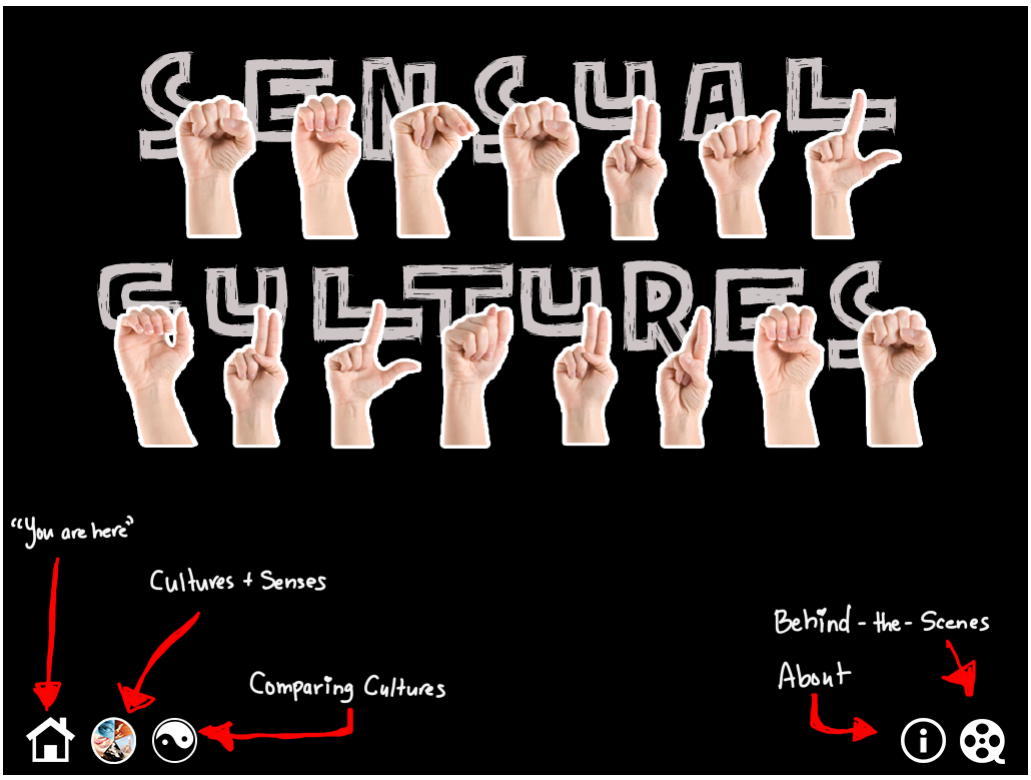
The enclosed DVD contains the videos from the app as a record of the app. [For the Honors Council review, separate mp3 videos are available—a necessary format until the app gets published.] On the DVD, these videos will play as you tap on the screenshot of "tap to play video."

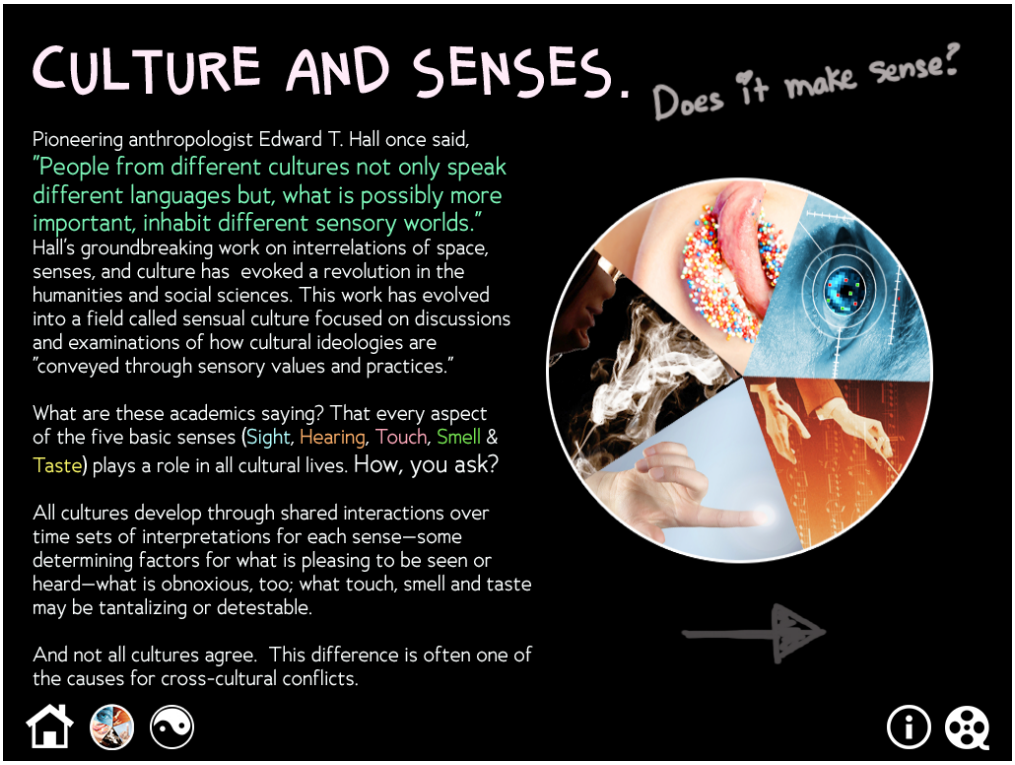
Most of these videos have movement which the screenshots are not able to capture; to see the full app, download "Sensual Culture" on your iPad from the App Store for free [Council: you can do that once it is published]. (Projected Publication Date: Late April-Early May 2013.)

Contents presented with screen shots and accompanying text:

- Cover Screen
- Introduction of Culture and Senses
- Samples of Cultural Organizations of the Five Senses
- Transition to Comparing Cultures (Deaf and hearing)
- Real-life Examples (videos) of Deaf-Hearing Cultural Differences
- Conclusion
- About page
- Behind the Scenes

Cover Screen





Introduction of Culture and Senses

Pioneering anthropologist Edward T. Hall once said, "People from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, **inhabit different sensory worlds**." [1] Hall's groundbreaking work on interrelations of space, senses, and culture has evoked a revolution in the humanities and social sciences. This work has evolved into a field called sensual culture focused on discussions and examinations of how cultural ideologies are "conveyed through sensory values and practices."[2]

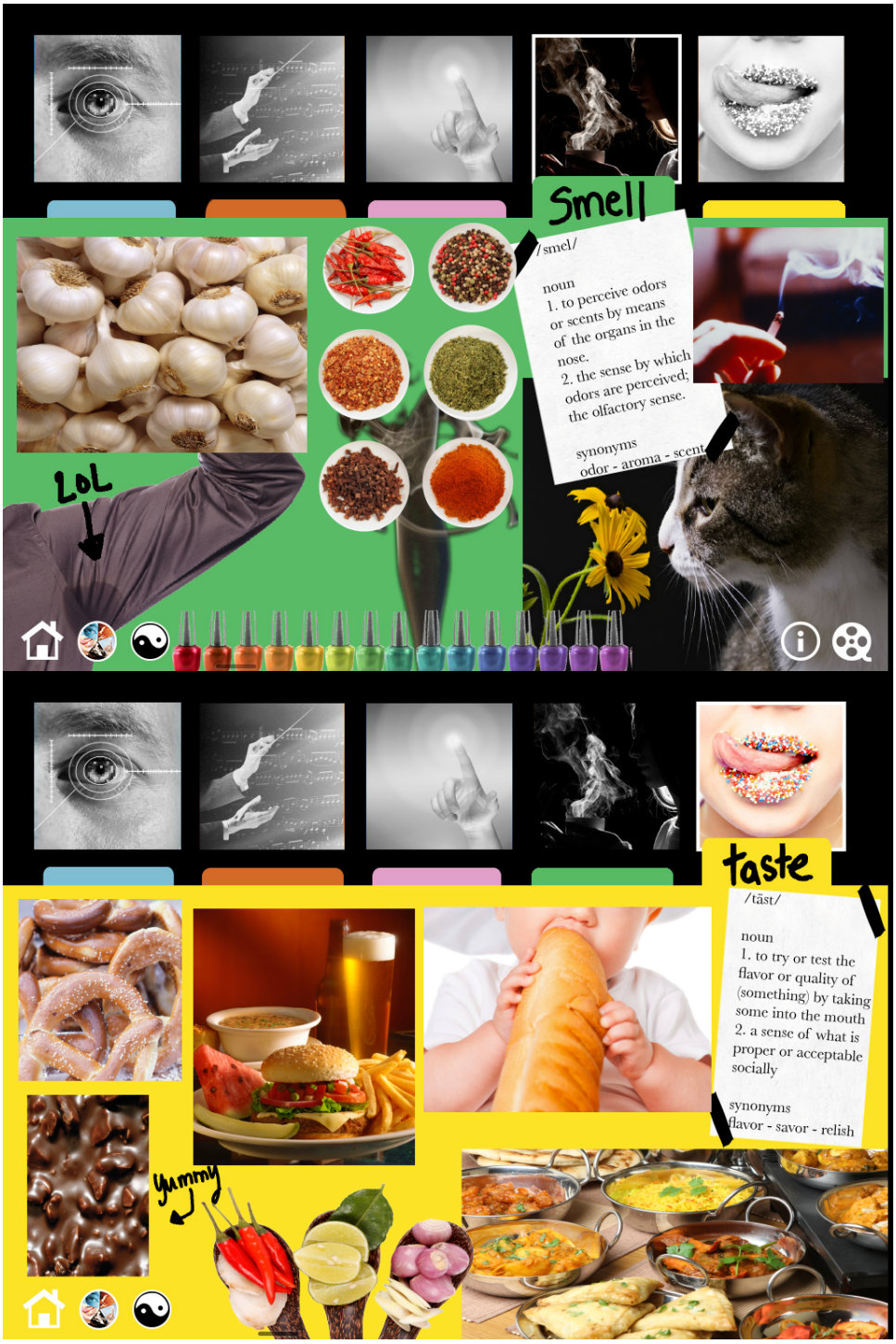
What are these academics saying? That every aspect of the five basic senses (Sight, Hearing, Touch, Smell, and Taste) plays a role in all cultural lives. How, you ask?

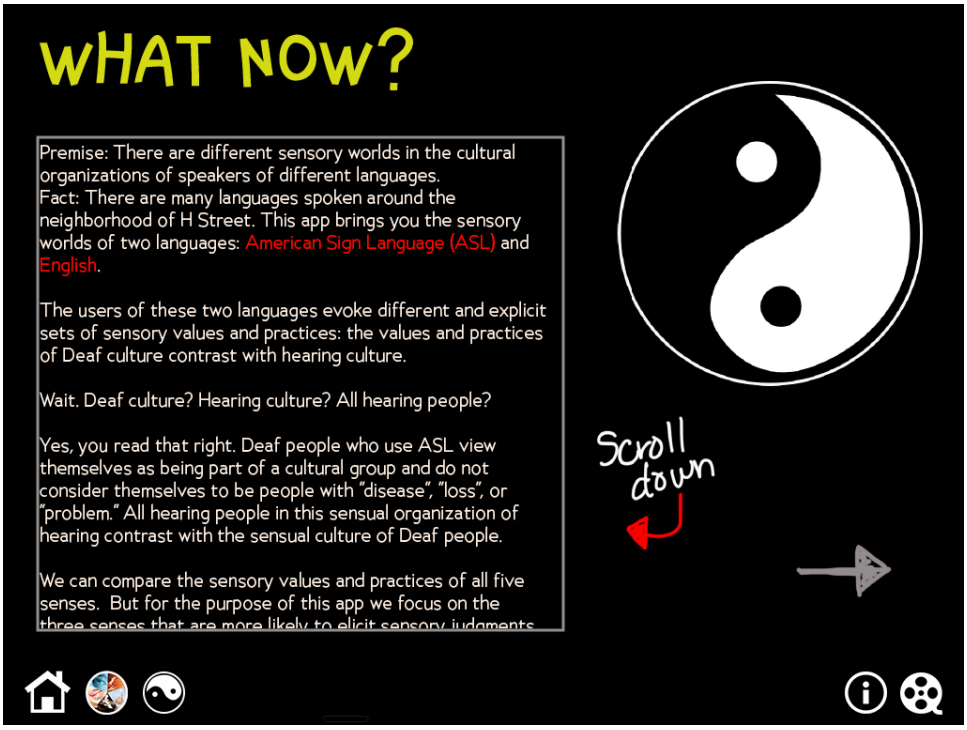
All cultures develop through shared interactions over time sets of interpretations for each sense—some determining factors for what is pleasing to be seen or heard—what is obnoxious, too; what touch, smell and taste may be tantalizing or detestable.

And not all cultures agree. This difference is often one of the causes for cross-cultural conflicts.

Samples of Cultural Organizations of the Five Senses: One Screen Per Sense

hearing
/heer-ing/
noun
1. the process, function, or power of perceiving sound
2. the range within which sounds may be heard; earshot
synonyms
audition - ear - listening
touch
/tuhch/
verb
1. come so close to (an object) as to be or come into contact with it.
2. to bring a bodily part into contact with especially so as to perceive through the tactile sense
synonyms
feel - handle - affect


Smell
/smel/
noun
1. to perceive odors or scents by means of the organs in the nose.
2. the sense by which odors are perceived; the olfactory sense.
synonyms
odor - aroma - scent
LoL
taste
/tāst/
noun
1. to try or test the flavor or quality of (something) by taking some into the mouth
2. a sense of what is proper or acceptable socially
synonyms
flavor - savor - relish
Yummy



Comparing Two Cultures: Deaf and Hearing

Premise: There are different sensory worlds in the cultural organizations of speakers of different languages. Fact: There are many languages spoken around the neighborhood of H Street. This app brings you the sensory worlds of two languages: American Sign Language (ASL) and English.

The users of these two languages evoke different and explicit sets of sensory values and practices: the values and practices of Deaf culture contrast with hearing culture.

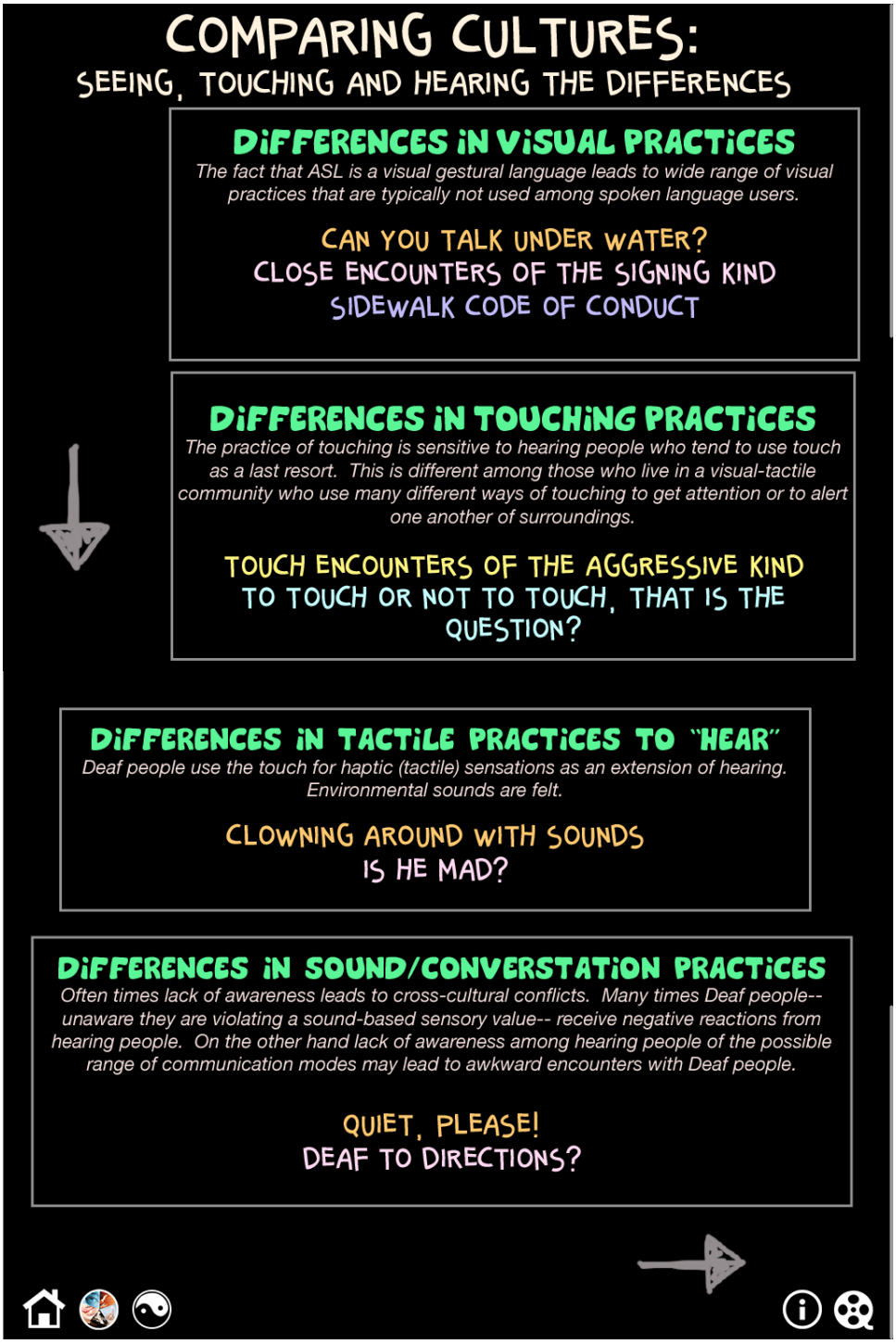
Wait. Deaf culture? Hearing culture? All hearing people?

Yes, you read that right. Deaf people who use ASL view themselves as being part of a *cultural group* and do not consider themselves to be people with "disease", "loss", or "problem." All hearing people in this sensual organization of hearing contrast with the sensual culture of Deaf people.

We can compare the sensory values and practices of all five senses. But for the purpose of this app we focus on the three senses that are more likely to elicit sensory judgments, i.e., violation of a sensory practice: the senses of Sight, Hearing, and Touch.

The differences in the uses and practices and interpretations for sight, hearing and touch between the two cultures are often the causes for sensual—or more broadly cross-cultural—conflicts. This app sets out to introduce the differences between two sensual organizations, so we all can understand and even appreciate one another better.

Note: The examples of real-life situations on the H Street NE were filmed and the videos are displayed next to the writing pieces on the app to engage the hearing audience's understanding.


COMPARING CULTURES:
SEEING, TOUCHING AND HEARING THE DIFFERENCES
DIFFERENCES IN VISUAL PRACTICES
The fact that ASL is a visual gestural language leads to wide range of visual practices that are typically not used among spoken language users.
CAN YOU TALK UNDER WATER?
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE SIGNING KIND
SIDEWALK CODE OF CONDUCT
DIFFERENCES IN TOUCHING PRACTICES
The practice of touching is sensitive to hearing people who tend to use touch as a last resort. This is different among those who live in a visual-tactile community who use many different ways of touching to get attention or to alert one another of surroundings.
TOUCH ENCOUNTERS OF THE AGGRESSIVE KIND
TO TOUCH OR NOT TO TOUCH, THAT IS THE QUESTION?
DIFFERENCES IN TACTILE PRACTICES TO "HEAR"
Deaf people use the touch for haptic (tactile) sensations as an extension of hearing. Environmental sounds are felt.
CLOWNING AROUND WITH SOUNDS
IS HE MAD?
DIFFERENCES IN SOUND/CONVERSTATION PRACTICES
Often times lack of awareness leads to cross-cultural conflicts. Many times Deaf people-- unaware they are violating a sound-based sensory value-- receive negative reactions from hearing people. On the other hand lack of awareness among hearing people of the possible range of communication modes may lead to awkward encounters with Deaf people.
QUIET, PLEASE!
DEAF TO DIRECTIONS?

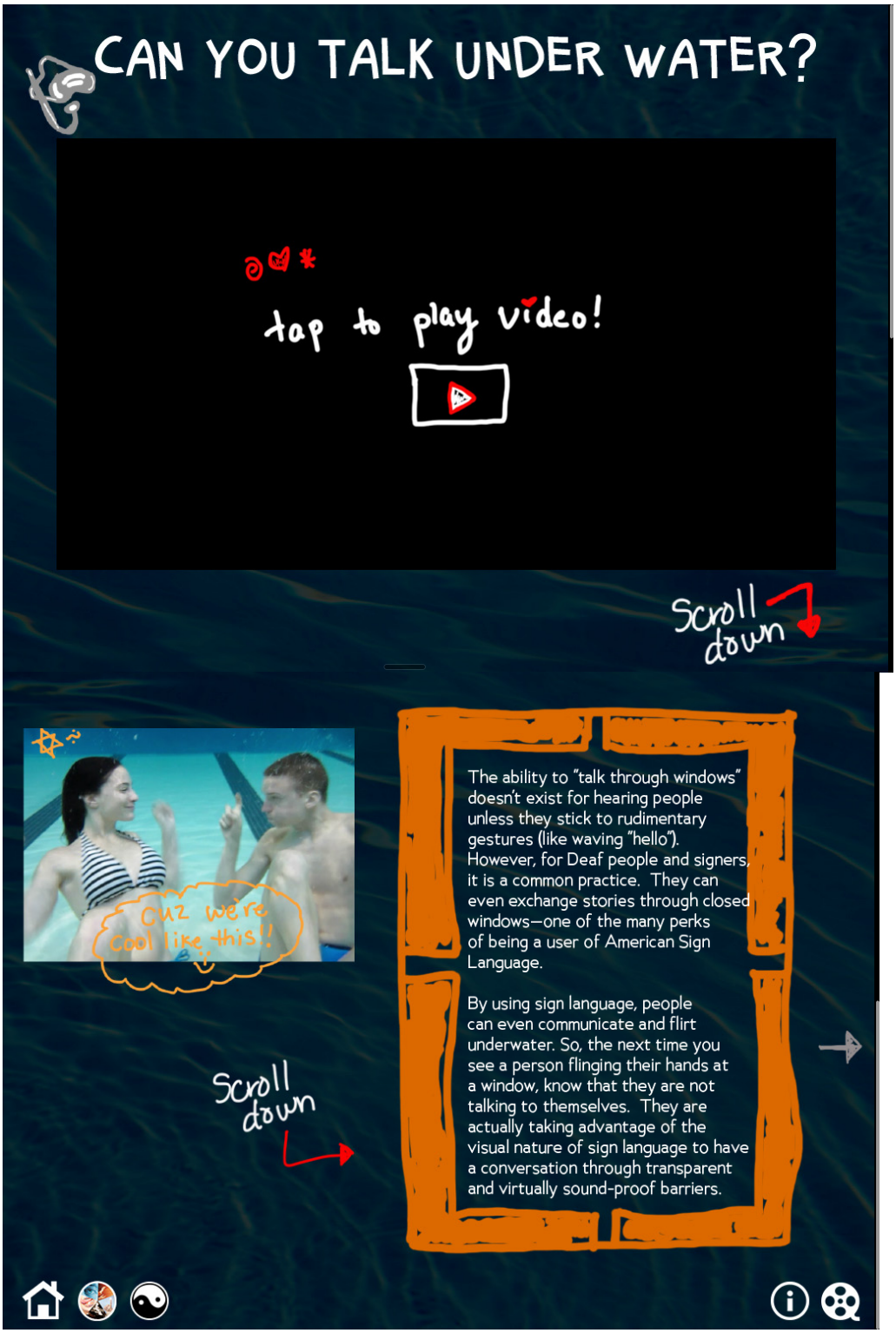
Differences in Visual Practices. The fact that ASL is a visual gestural language leads to wide range of visual practices that are typically not used among spoken language users.

Differences in Touching Practices. The practice of touching is sensitive to hearing people who tend to use touch as a last resort. This is different among those who live in a visual-tactile community who use many different ways of touching to get attention or to alert one another of surroundings.

Differences in Tactile Practices to "Hear." Deaf people use the touch for haptic (tactile) sensations as an extension of hearing. Environmental sounds are felt.

Differences in Sound/Conversation Practices. Often times lack of awareness leads to cross-cultural conflicts. Many times Deaf people--unaware they are violating a sound-based sensory value-- receive negative reactions from hearing people. On the other hand lack of awareness among hearing people of the possible range of communication modes may lead to awkward encounters with Deaf people.

Real-life Examples (videos) of Deaf-Hearing Cultural Differences



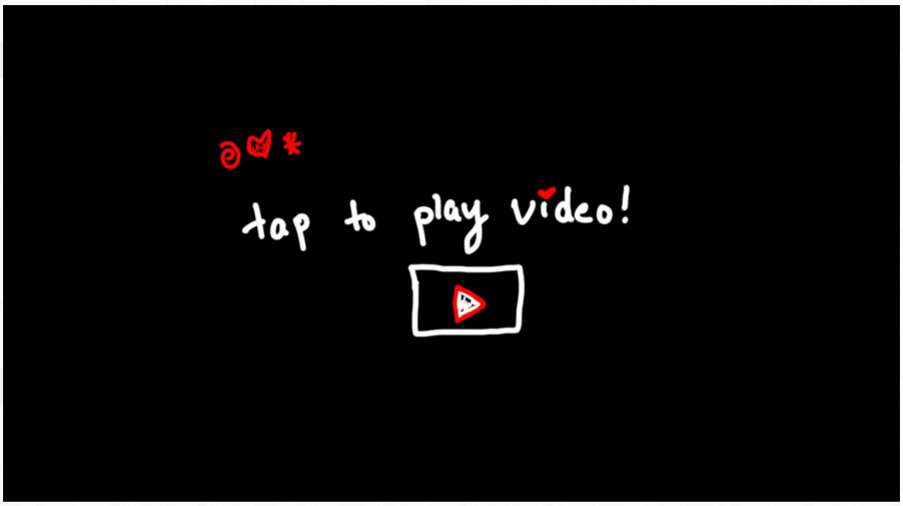
Title: "Can You Talk Under Water?"

The ability to "talk through windows" doesn't exist for hearing people unless they stick to rudimentary gestures (like waving "hello"). However, for Deaf people and signers, it is a common practice. They can even exchange stories through closed windows—one of the many perks of being a user of American Sign Language.

By using sign language, people can even communicate and flirt underwater. So, the next time you see a person flinging their hands at a window, know that they are not talking to themselves. They are actually taking advantage of the visual nature of sign language to have a conversation through transparent and virtually sound-proof barriers.

This is just one of many neat benefits of signing. Hearing people, you better learn to sign before going snorkeling.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE SIGNING KIND



Scroll down

Have you ever had a conversation with someone across a long counter in a noisy bar? Compare the clips of two friends chatting while waiting for their friend to join them. In situation #1: Two Deaf friends are chatting when they notice their friend at the other end of the bar; instantly they engage in a quick and clear exchange. The case cannot be said to be the same for situation #2. The third friend cannot hear what the friends across the bar are saying without physically moving over to chat with the couple.

Another gnarly benefit of signing is that you can have conversations in a very noisy environment. If the bartender knew how to sign you might be able to order Strawberry Margarita on the rocks from way across the bar.

Title: "Close Encounters of the Signing Kind"

Have you ever had a conversation with someone across a long counter in a noisy bar? Compare the clips of two friends chatting while waiting for their friend to join them. *In situation one:* Two Deaf friends are chatting when they notice their friend at the other end of the bar; instantly they engage in a quick and clear exchange. The case cannot be said to be the same for *situation two*. The third friend cannot hear what the friends across the bar are saying without physically moving over to chat with the couple.

Another gnarly benefit of signing is that you can have conversations in a very noisy environment. If the bartender knew how to sign you might be able to order Strawberry Margarita on the rocks from way across the bar.

SIDEWALK CODE OF CONDUCT

tap to play video!

Scroll down

Ouch!!
Ouch!!
Ouch!!

Oops, what went wrong? Ahh, you see Deaf people need their eyes to talk to one another. What happens when two signers chat as they stroll down the sidewalk? They take care of each other. It is an unwritten rule. In this take the Deaf man is chatting with a hearing person (a beginning ASL student, perhaps). As they approach a recycling bin the hearing person does not warn the Deaf person, who is watching his signing, and as result the Deaf man walks straight into the recycling bin. This one is not too bad; seriously, there have been situations of walking into trees, poles and what not. The Deaf man's reaction (use of "what the..." gesture—w hen a much more obscene gesture could have occurred) indicates he faults (rightly so) the hearing man for not notifying him of this obstacle. He failed the unwritten code of signers taking care of one another when conversing while walking.

Scroll down

Title: "Sidewalk Code of Conduct"

First clip

Oops, what went wrong? Ahh, you see Deaf people need their eyes to talk to one another. What happens when two signers chat as they stroll down the sidewalk? They take care of each other. It is an unwritten rule. In this take the Deaf man is chatting with a hearing person (a beginning ASL student, perhaps). As they approach a recycling bin the hearing person does not warn the Deaf person, who is watching his signing, and as result the Deaf man walks straight into the recycling bin. This one is not too bad; seriously, there have been situations of walking into trees, poles and what not. The Deaf man's reaction (use of "what the…" gesture—w hen a much more obscene gesture could have occurred) indicates he faults (rightly so) the hearing man for not notifying him of this

obstacle. He failed the unwritten code of signers taking care of one another when conversing while walking.

Second clip

In this clip we see examples how the code of taking care of each other is kept. Deaf people develop a talent for scanning each other's periphery while chatting. When an obstacle appears they alert each other without the conversation missing a beat. And no explanation is needed when one pulls the talker out of the way. It is a given code of conduct.

TOUCH ENCOUNTERS OF THE AGGRESSIVE KIND

tap to play video!

scroll down

scroll down

The use of touch among hearing people in these conditions is minimal, and there are hang-ups about being touched by strangers even if it is to get the attention of others.

In situation one a Deaf person encounters a hearing person who is blocking her way down the aisle. This Deaf person pauses momentarily, hoping she will be noticed, but when that does not work, she reaches out—as she normally does among Deaf people—and gently touches the hearing woman to let her know of her presence and desire to pass through. The hearing woman is startled by the touch and reacts as though the Deaf girl has invaded her privacy. In her mind (really, in her cultural frame), the Deaf girl has crossed over an invisible cultural boundary related to touching and being touched by a complete stranger.

In situation two, the Deaf woman is

Title: "Touch Encounters of the Aggressive Kind"

The use of touch among hearing people in these conditions is minimal, and there are hang-ups about being touched by strangers even if it is to get the attention of others.

In situation one a Deaf person encounters a hearing person who is blocking her way down the aisle. This Deaf person pauses momentarily, hoping she will be noticed, but when that does not work, she reaches out—as she normally does among Deaf people—and gently touches the hearing woman to let her know of her presence and desire to pass through. The hearing woman is startled by the touch and reacts as though the Deaf girl has invaded her privacy. In her mind (really, in her cultural frame), the Deaf girl has crossed over an invisible cultural boundary related to touching and being touched by a complete stranger.

In situation two, the Deaf woman is inadvertently blocking a hearing woman's way. After calling out "excuse me" twice, the hearing woman automatically assumes this woman is being rude for "ignoring" her. Unbeknownst to her, of course, the person is simply Deaf; never considering this possibility, she reacts angrily, aggressively shoving her aside to make her way down the aisle. Apparently the only kind of touch that can happen between hearing strangers, with the possible exception of bar pick-ups—is the aggressive kind.

TO TOUCH OR NOT TO TOUCH, THAT'S THE QUESTION.

tap to play video!

Scroll down

see the difference! Eh

How would you navigate your way through a group of Deaf people? You may wonder, "Do I touch them?" "Do I crawl under their visual radar?" Actually. it is simpler than you may think.

Compare the two clips of a group of Deaf people at a convenience store discussing which birthday card to select. In clip one a Deaf person taps the shoulder of one person in the group to notify the group of her presence and intent to pass through. The Deaf person who gets tapped moves, and, kinesthetically, everyone else in the group knows to move and make room for her to pass.

Simple enough? Apparently not. In the second clip we see a hearing person approach the group, unsure what to do, and so he ends up standing there in an awkward pause. A simple tap on the shoulder would have solved his problem, but he has refrained from doing this perhaps due to hearing society's cultural taboo

Scroll down

Title: To touch or not to touch, that's the question

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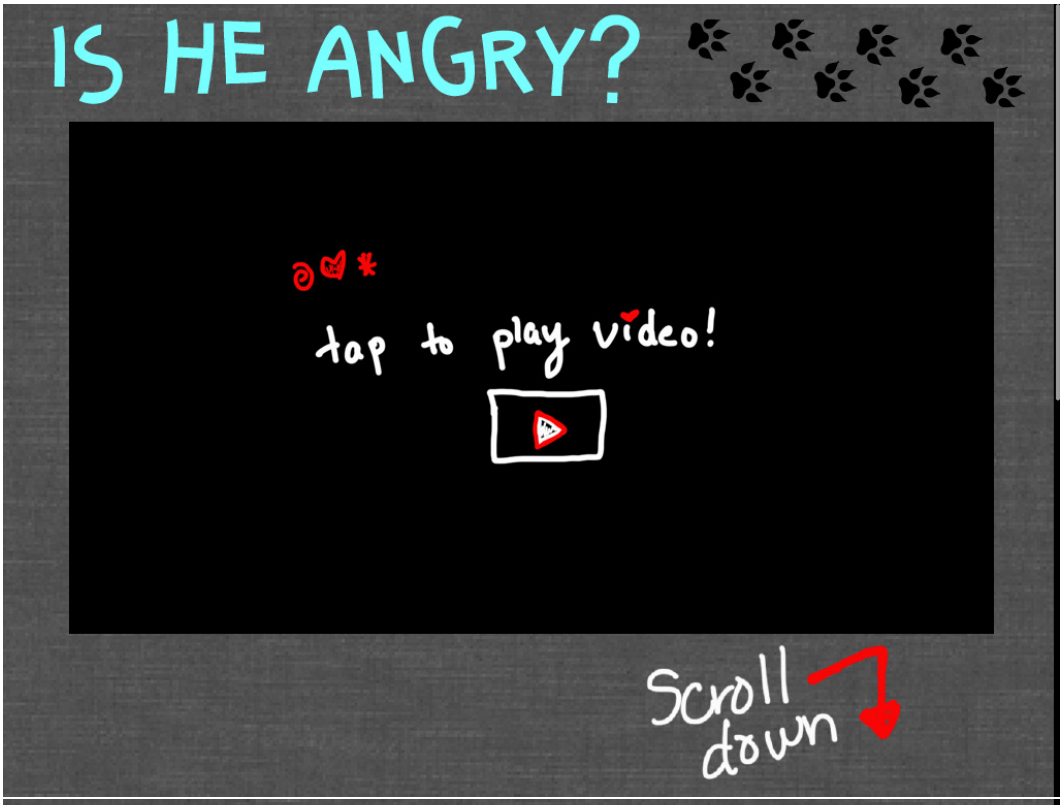
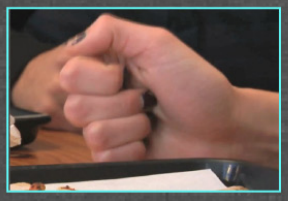
Come on, Deaf people aren't a pack of hungry wolves ready to jump at anyone that approaches. To avoid awkwardness, when you need to pass through an area blocked by a Deaf person, just gently tap the Deaf person's shoulder to you're your presence known along with your intention of walking through. This simple move makes everything a lot easier, and (I swear!) we really don't bite, sometimes.

In the video, the Deaf woman "hears" the helicopter, but she didn't hear it. How is that possible? You may wonder. What's really happening? She feels the vibration of the helicopter on the surface of the balloon she is holding. People detect sounds in two ways: one by ears and the other by vibration through the skin. This Deaf woman feels some vibration on the balloon but is not sure where it is coming from; she looks around and notices the clown looking up. The clown's reaction to sound cues her to look up to locate the source of the noise. To hear and to feel are two separate senses, but feeling is a Deaf person's means of hearing. Just because we react to a sound doesn't mean we actually heard it—we're still Deaf.

Title: "Clowning Around With Sounds"

In the video, the Deaf woman "hears" the helicopter, but she didn't hear it. How is that possible? You may wonder. What's really happening? She *feels* the vibration of the helicopter on the surface of the balloon she is holding. People detect sounds in two ways: one by ears and the other by vibration through the skin. This Deaf woman feels some vibration on the balloon but is not sure where it is coming from; she looks around and notices the clown looking up. The clown's reaction to sound cues her to look up to locate the source of the noise. To hear and to feel are two separate senses, but feeling is a Deaf person's means of hearing. Just because we react to a sound doesn't mean we actually heard it—we're *still* Deaf.





In the table next to her, a hearing woman hears and sees loud banging, animated hands flying followed by even louder banging and more animated hands flying. "They gotta be mad about something," she thinks to herself, using her culture's sensory behavior context to interpret the chain of action next to her.

What's actually happening? This group of college students are discussing a hot topic of the day and use tactile means (banging on table) rather than vocal—raising one's voice—to get the attention of others and chime in their point of view.

The two hearing people nearby see this banging on tables as a hostile act. Adding to their confusion, they see hands flying every which way, not in punches but animatedly. Maybe they're not mad. Maybe they are untamed animals.

Now imagine: Wouldn't it be funny to see the Deaf guy next to the hearing woman turn to her and say, "Aarf, aarf!"

Title: Is He Angry?

In the table next to her, a hearing woman hears and sees loud banging, animated hands flying followed by even louder banging and more animated hands flying. "They gotta be mad about something," she thinks to herself, using her culture's sensory behavior context to interpret the chain of action next to her.

What's actually happening? This group of college students are discussing a hot topic of the day and use tactile means (banging on table) rather than vocal—raising one's voice—to get the attention of others and chime in their point of view.

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Now imagine: Wouldn't it be funny to see the Deaf guy next to the hearing woman turn to her and say, "Aarf, aarf!"

QUIET, PLEASE!

tap to play video!

Scroll down

What is laughter? Is it a joyful sound or is it a noise? And if "laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face," as ____ says, then why is there "winter" in this hearing woman's face.

It appears that among hearing people there is a correlation between the quietness of a place and the magnitude of one's laughter. The quieter the place, the quieter one's laughter shall be.

But, when you're Deaf, the hearing person's environmental correlation disappears and a new one takes it place; the funnier the conversation, the louder the laughter gets. Here, we see two Deaf women chatting, laughing and having the time of their lives in a hookah joint. Their laughter transforms the quietness of the environment. The startled hearing woman next to them is not intrigued as a

Scroll down

Title: "Quiet, please!"

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This is one of many examples in cross-sensual/cultural conflict. Unlike hearing people, laughter to Deaf people is not a controlled entity based on the level of sound in the environment but a natural byproduct of joy and humor. So if you find yourself in a similar situation, just be jealous of their freedom and the good joke you just missed.

DEAF TO DIRECTIONS?
tap to play video!
Scroll down
Where is the Union Station?
One Deaf person asked me, "Did you ever notice that out of all people standing around a hearing person often seems to choose a Deaf person to ask for directions?" Many Deaf people share this observation and have hypothesized that they are selected because they are visually oriented and use their eyes a lot to scan the world around them. Lost people tend to look around for those who are willing to "help," and when they get another person's gaze, this is read as an invitation and an opportunity to ask for help. The visually attuned Deaf person is likely the one to notice the lost person first. Voila.
The clips show results of two different situations. In the first situation the hearing woman learns she has asked a
Scroll down

Title: "Deaf to Directions?"

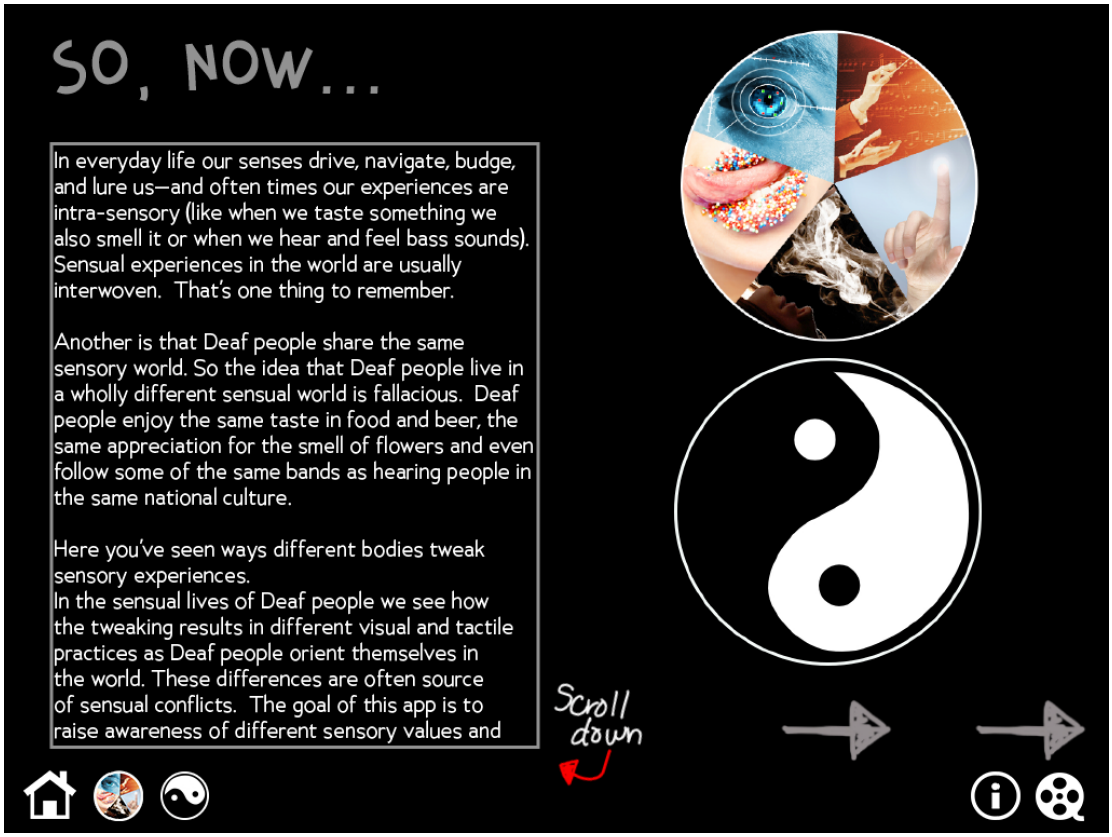
One Deaf person asked me, "Did you ever notice that out of all people standing around a hearing person often seems to choose a Deaf person to ask for directions?" Many Deaf people share this observation and have hypothesized that they are selected because they are visually oriented and use their eyes a lot to scan the world around them. Lost people tend to look around for those who are willing to "help," and when they get another person's gaze, this is read as an invitation and an opportunity to ask for help. The visually attuned Deaf person is likely the one to notice the lost person first. Voila.

The clips show results of two different situations. In the first situation the hearing woman learns she has asked a Deaf woman for directions. Although the Deaf woman gestures that she is Deaf *and* that she is willing to help, the hearing woman pulls back, excuses herself, and then asks someone else for directions. News flash: this experience of being "dismissed" as if one has cooties or some catching disease is degrading.

In the second situation after getting no reply, the hearing woman appears in the Deaf woman's visual field. When learning that the woman she has approached is Deaf she pauses for a moment; this allows the Deaf person to initiate gestural conversation where she prompts the hearing person to repeat so she could lip-read her request and be able to provide information. This exchange results in positive outcome all around.

So what to do when you encounter a Deaf person in this situation? Keep in mind that Deaf people can communicate in a variety of ways. Some of them can lip-read (not all of them, though). Some can communicate with a pen and paper or by texting on a cell phone. Or show us a map, and we can point in the right direction. Many are able to use gestures. You know getting directions this way can be far more entertaining than watching a mime trying to get out of a box.

The next time you find yourself asking a Deaf person for directions, go through with it. You'll have fun communicating and end up where you wanted to be. Everybody wins… except for the mime still trapped.



Conclusion

In everyday life our senses drive, navigate, budge, and lure us—and often times our experiences are intra-sensory (like when we taste something we also smell it or when we hear and feel bass sounds). Sensual experiences in the world are usually interwoven. That's one thing to remember.

Another is that Deaf people share the same sensory world. So the idea that Deaf people live in a wholly different sensual world is fallacious. Deaf people enjoy the same taste in food and beer, the same appreciation for the smell of flowers and even follow some of the same bands as hearing people in the same national culture.

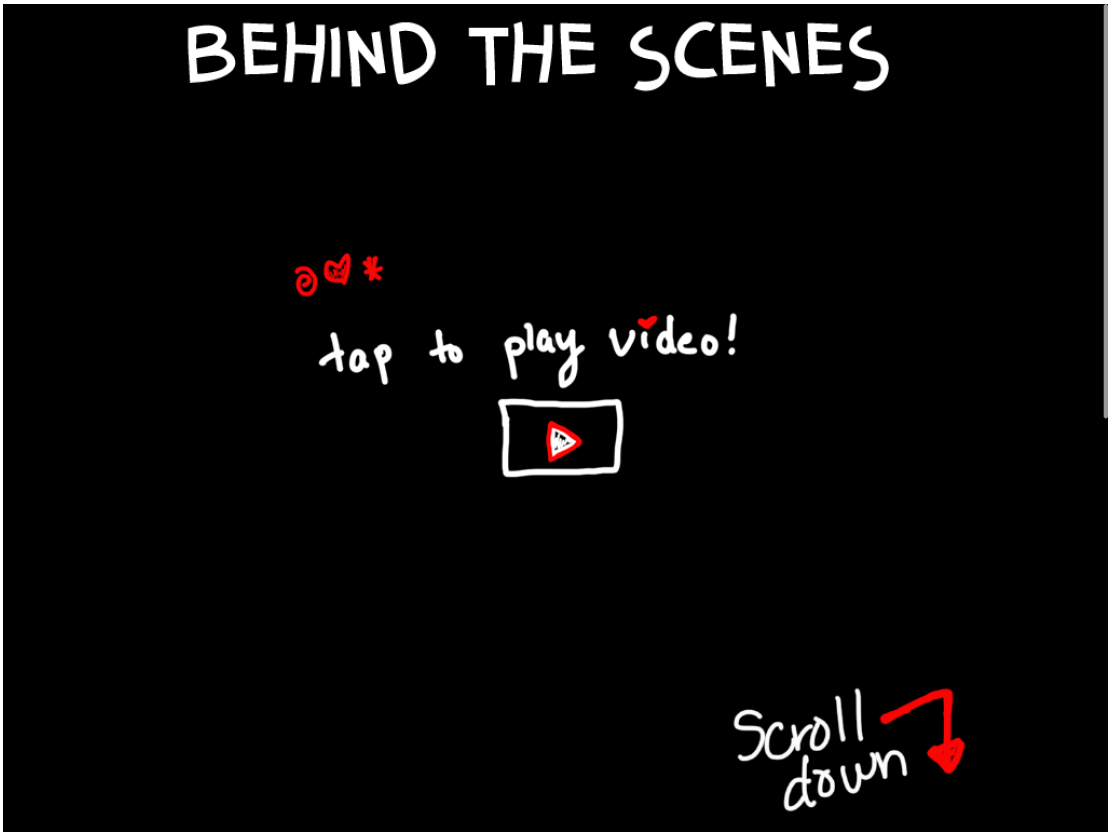
Here you've seen ways different bodies tweak sensory experiences.

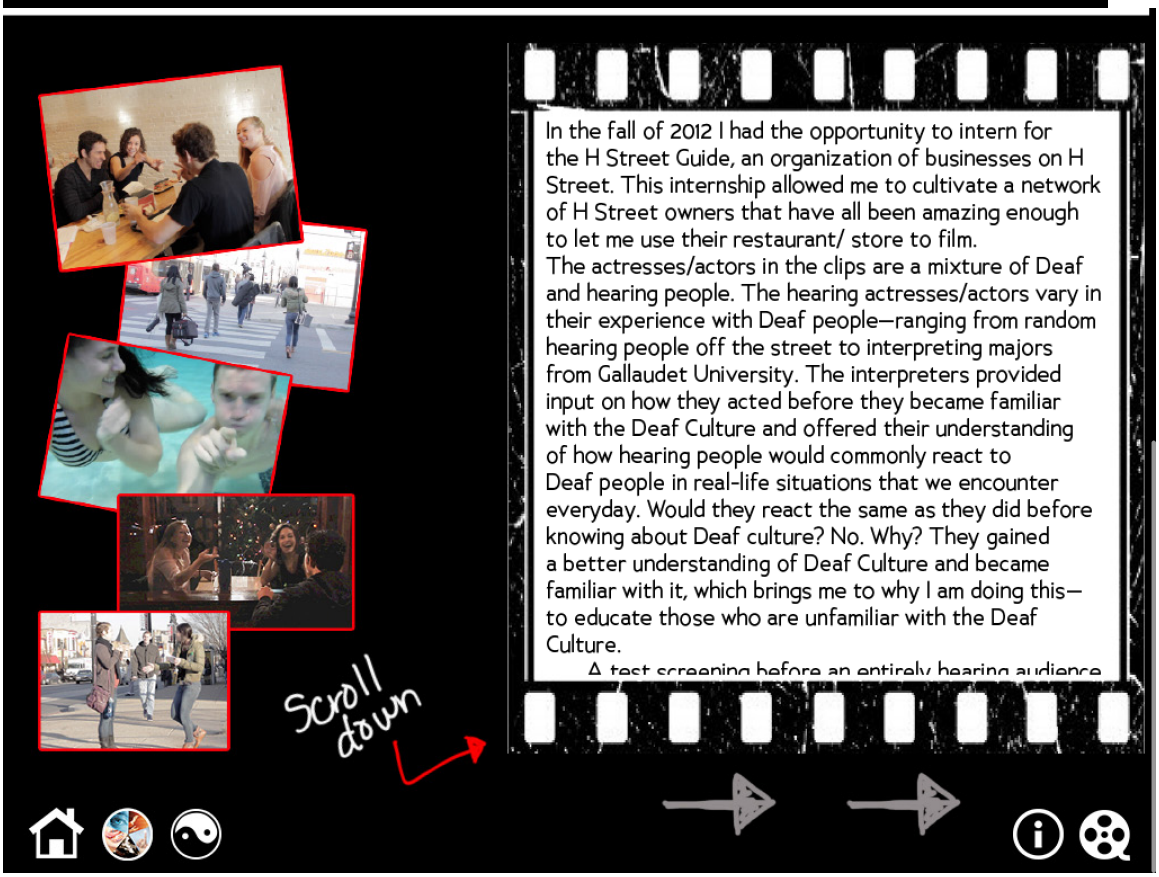
In the sensual lives of Deaf people we see how the tweaking results in different visual and tactile practices as Deaf people orient themselves in the world. These differences are often source of sensual conflicts. The goal of this app is to raise awareness of different sensory values and practices so negative ideologies, judgment and discrimination can be diminished.

We are part of the same world, yet different. Like yin-yang, the differences are balanced parts of a whole.

In the walks around the neighborhood of H Street we were able to identify several different sensory practices: 1) the differences in visual practices, 2) the difference in touching practices, 3) the difference in using tactile practices to hear sounds, and 4) the difference in sound and conversation practices. The differences presented here confirm what Edward T. Hall suggested: that people of different cultures inhabit in different sensory orientations in our shared world.

About this App


BEHIND THE SCENES
tap to play video!
Scroll down


In the fall of 2012 I had the opportunity to intern for the H Street Guide, an organization of businesses on H Street. This internship allowed me to cultivate a network of H Street owners that have all been amazing enough to let me use their restaurant/ store to film.
The actresses/actors in the clips are a mixture of Deaf and hearing people. The hearing actresses/actors vary in their experience with Deaf people—ranging from random hearing people off the street to interpreting majors from Gallaudet University. The interpreters provided input on how they acted before they became familiar with the Deaf Culture and offered their understanding of how hearing people would commonly react to Deaf people in real-life situations that we encounter everyday. Would they react the same as they did before knowing about Deaf culture? No. Why? They gained a better understanding of Deaf Culture and became familiar with it, which brings me to why I am doing this—to educate those who are unfamiliar with the Deaf Culture.
A test screening before an entirely hearing audience
Scroll down

Behind the Scenes

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A test screening before an entirely hearing audience provided excellent feedback on my first edited films. About half of the members, faculty and staff from Gallaudet University, knew about Deaf Culture while the other half, random people from H Street, did not. The reactions were exactly what I wanted. The ones who were familiar with the Culture found a lot of things amusing and were glad that the app helped them better understand the culture by articulating purposes of Deaf people's usage of senses. On the other hand, the ones who had no background knowledge about Deaf Culture reacted with complete shock at what they did not know and greatly appreciated the new understanding of the Deaf people they encountered and the opportunity for more rewarding interactions.

Behind-the-scenes evolved from the technical work of finding bloopers, re-shooting scenes, re-writing explanations, and re-designing—all for greater clarity—to a moving experience of seeing first hand the expansion of our mutual humanity in this project. I could not have asked for more.