Analysis

TikTok has become a great platform to bring together all sorts of public and private communities. One of these communities is the Deaf Community containing people from all over the world who speak all different types of sign language such as American, Spanish, and British Sign Language. However, with this easy accessibility, it has also opened a gateway for hearing people not a part of this community to insert themselves. This has been demonstrated through people trying to teach sign language to their audience on TikTok and also attempting to interpret songs in the language. As a result, fake sign language has spread across the app rapidly and is causing people uneducated about the Deaf Community and language to learn from people who are not qualified in this discipline. This analysis will utilize an intertextual analysis of three different videos that focus on members of the Deaf community's response to hearing people teaching and interpreting ASL incorrectly on TikTok. To successfully complete this analysis, I will be answering the following questions:

- How do the affordances of TikTok, such as duetting, and commenting, assist the Deaf Community in critiquing and responding to what they believe are misconceptions of ASL?

- How do people teaching ASL in these videos claim the authority to be teaching it correctly?

- What type of power and identity needs to be established when determining who can teach ASL and how?

Based on these questions, I argue sign language, specifically ASL, is heavily misconstrued through public media, particularly TikTok, by the hearing community causing an abundance of misinformation surrounding the language and culture. The discourse of fake sign

language of TikTok is mostly escalated through videos of hearing people attempting to teach certain signs and interpreting song lyrics in sign language incorrectly. Each video is only a small depiction of the larger discourse pertaining to misleading content about sign language that is on social media. The following intertextual videos analysis will address these two different classifications of fake sign language. The first video is formatted in a duetted style and discusses the use of teaching sign language incorrectly. The second video also uses a duetted format but specifically addresses the usage of false interpretation of song lyrics. The third and final video also includes the use of teaching ASL incorrectly but instead of a singular member of the Deaf community responding to it, a plethora of members in the comment section address their frustration textually. Each of these videos are a demonstration of misinformation, disinformation or both. Although I do not believe these creators hold any intention of purposefully spreading false information about sign language, I do believe the creators being criticized in research object #2 and #3 are practicing partners of disinformation. These two creators mentioned in this analysis are young, predicted to be in high school, and interested in receiving recognition and attention for their videos, which is why neither of them have taken their videos down from their videos that address and mention ASL .

The first research object of my analysis that will be discussed is a duetted TikTok video from user @purplelady9302 responding to a video from @sallymickinney0. At the time of this analysis, the duetted video has 58 likes and 21 comments. In the original video from Sally Mickinney, which is now deleted, Sally, a hearing individual, is attempting to teach her viewers how to sign "computer" and "laptop" in American Sign Language (ASL). Sally is speaking in English and explains how to sign the words by first demonstrating the two signs and then explaining how to place your hands and arms to communicate the sign "correctly." Her rendition of signing the word "computer" includes one hand flat at a 180 degree angle and the other hand is signing the letter "C" in ASL while also moving in a large circular motion above the flat hand. @purplelady9302, who is a Deaf creator, duets this video, wearing a purple shirt of course, with a frustrated look on her face. As Sally exhibits the initial movement of how to sign "computer," @purplelady9302 begins to shake her head in disagreement and eventually signs the word "no" and "wrong" in ASL to explain that Sally's way of signing these words are incorrect.

@purplelady9302 finger spells the word "computer" then goes on to show her viewers how to sign it correctly in ASL. For the word "computer," instead of moving one hand in a large circular motion, @purplelady9302 does a small circle above the flat hand. She then mimics Sally by doing a large circular motion with one hand and a dramatic face. When Sally shows how to sign the word "laptop," she puts one hand flat with her palm facing down and the other hand on top while moving upwards and towards the camera. @purplelady9302 finger spells the words "laptop" then explains this way of signing the word is incorrect because the flat hand is supposed to be palm up. When signing the word laptop with the palm down, @purplelady9302 makes a face and shakes her head to express that it is incorrect.

One of the biggest misconceptions about sign language is that the language is solely spoken with hands. Since most signs are translated through hand use and placement, it is not uncommon to believe that explaining and conversing in sign language requires no use of other body parts. However, facial expressions and body language are a vital part of communicating in sign language because they are more evocative of reactions in real-life social situations (Gu et. al). For example, in ASL, raising your eyebrows indicates asking open-ended questions while keeping a neutral face infers making a statement or fact (Gu et.al). When @purplelady9302 is explaining that the way Sally signs "computer" and "laptop" is incorrect, she makes sure to exaggerate the hand motions and make a dismayed face. The purpose of using these facial expressions and hand gestures is because @purplelady9302 cannot verbally explain that the signs are false since she only speaks ASL. It is clear that @purplelady9302 is interpellating information about these signs to all communities, not just the Deaf Community. to convey her message not only to the Deaf Community, but also the hearing community and Sally who is not fluent in ASL.

The Deaf community is not oblivious to misinformation being spread about their language. Studies have discovered that even ASL instructors have struggled passing ASL assessments to confirm their teaching eligibility (Buchanan et.al). Thus, Deaf individuals have consistently become victims to fake sign language in multiple situations so it is not uncommon for members to be adamant about stopping unqualified individuals teaching sign language on social media. For example, when news outlets have revealed crucial information for the public to know, they have failed to either have a correct interpreter relaying the information or are only provided closed-captions of whomever is distributing the news (Nowak). As a result, information pertaining to Deaf individuals can be slow to receive information.

Although Sally is not teaching ASL correctly, this "sign language tutorial" video carries a more accurate representation of misinformation rather than disinformation. Her intentions of teaching sign language do not seem malicious. When looking throughout her page, this is not her only post that includes sign language tutoring. Her arrangement of content from about two years ago, during 2022, was specifically formatted to teach one or two signs in ASL per video. However, her content switched abruptly from this style of content to a variety of styles. Sally received a lot of backlash from the Deaf community, such as @purplelady9302, regarding her sign language tutorials because most of the way she signed words were considered incorrect. Sally did not post on TikTok for about a year and when she did start posting again, none of the videos were about ASL tutorials. Since she switched up her style of videos a little less than a year ago, and so suddenly, it is speculated the retaliation from the Deaf community encouraged her to step away from doing sign language tutorials. Users like @purplelady9302 were able to hinder a user from misinforming the public about sign language by first responding to her videos

and showing correct way to sign words and then having her stop posting ASL tutorials on TikTok.

Research Object #2
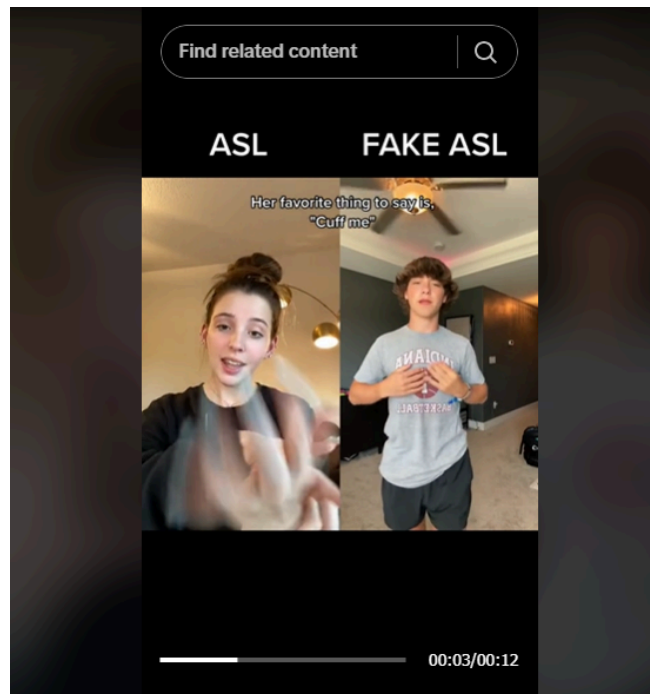
The second video of analysis is another duetted video, but from two different creators. While it does hold the same popular formula of a Deaf Creator duetting with a hearing creator who is signing ASL incorrectly, instead of the video being a hearing person attempting to teach a sign in ASL, this video focuses on ASL song interpreting. On April 20, 2023, Elizabeth Harris (@lizzytharris) duetted a video posted by Drake Russell (@wrldrake) who is striving to interpret the song "SLUT ME OUT" by NLE Choppa in ASL. At the time of this analysis, Harris's video has 349.5k likes, 1633 comments, and 3.6 million views while Russell's video has 199.3k likes, 2946 comments, and 1.5 million views. Harris establishes that her way of interpreting is correct by having "ASL" written above her section of the video and "FAKE ASL" above Russell's half. The purpose of creating this divide is to interpellate an audience that caters to the Deaf and

hearing community. Specifically, it addresses members of the hearing community who are unfamiliar with ASL and can differentiate what is correct ASL and incorrect ASL. Below her video duetting Russell, her caption states "this is what happens when someone sees a hearing person that's not fluent in sign make an 'ASL' video for clout and copy them thinking it's ASL." She then goes on to clarify to not send hate to Russell's video or account since he was not the original creator of this interpretation and was simply copying the movements of the person who first coined the "interpretation." Since Harris speaks ASL in her day to day life and is a notable Deaf activist on social media, she is always trying to further enhance her audience's knowledge about sign language and Deaf culture. One way to accomplish this is by restraining users of TikTok from learning ASL from creators who lack experience to use and teach the language correctly. Harris creates a lot of videos about Deaf education and even has a playlist at the top of her account titled "Deaf Ed." Although most of her videos do not include duetting creators that are interpreting songs incorrectly, she still advocates for her community in other ways.

When looking at Russell's version of interpreting the song, his performance lacks a lot of details that make an ASL interpretation of a song successful. To start, his lip syncing, also known as mouthing, is difficult to read and understand since he is standing far from the camera. Typically, sign language interpreters mouth every lyric in a song or only mouthing key lyrics (Fisher). When interpreting a song in ASL it is considered a form of art. The interpreter has to "transform a song into an embodied-visual rendition for d/Deaf audiences" and decide which sign they are going to use and how they are going to use them in the interpretation (Fisher para. 2). In one part of the song, the title of the lyrics are repeated three times in a row. When Russell signs this part of the song, he repeats the same movements three times and includes signs that are very literal to the words. When signing to the lyrics "slut me out," Russell holds one hand in a

fist motion and the other hand is moving in a way as if he is pulling something out of the first hand.

On the contrary, Harris's version of signing the song is much more fluid and flows together, similar to if a song was being sung. During the part of the song when the title is repeated, instead of repeating the same sign three times in row, she signs the three words three different ways, adding more complexity and creativity to her version of signing. Creativity is a vital part of sign language interpretation and enacts not adhering to the standard guidelines of interpretation but rather aiming to enhance the viewers experience (Tamayo). Harris applies this creativity by adding captions to the video and mouthing the lyrics efficiently.

Similar to the previous research object, this type of video is also a demonstration of misinforming the public about ASL. One of the reasons for this conclusion is because in the comments of Harris's video, the creator reveals that Drake was not the first person to do this type of interpretation of the song. Since Drake was repeating the same type of ASL interpretation from another creator, he was continuing to spread misinformation about the language and how a song should be interpreted correctly. However, on the other hand, Drake is also enhancing the spread of disinformation by not responding to Harris or any other creators that have expressed distress about his song interpretation. Due to all the responses, visually and textually, from the Deaf Community, it would be expected for a user to remove a video that appropriates their culture and language. However, Drake is choosing to keep his false interpretation on his page for other reasons that may pertain to his likes and views. Drake's false interpretation video is his most viewed and liked video on his account. If Drake were to take this video down, his total like count, which can be seen at the top of his page next to his follower count, would decrease. Something interesting to note is that at the top of his page, Drake has two playlists titled

"Friends" and "Viral." Even though this video of him doing a false interpretation is his most viewed video, it is not located under his "Viral" playlist. The reasoning for this can be understood that Drake understands his sign language video is problematic but still wants to maintain a high overall like count on his page.

Research Object #3: ASL for Teens or ASL Teaching?

The final research object discusses a video uploaded by young TikTok creator Lola (@asl_for_teens) on December 13, 2022. Instead of analyzing the Deaf Community's response through unique affordances of TikTok such as duetting, the comments on this video are dense with Deaf individuals expressing their frustration with Lola teaching ASL. At the time of this analysis, Lola's video has received 160.9k likes, 4395 comments, and 5.2 million views. She has pinned this video to the top of her page meaning when looking at her profile, this video is at the top of her account. In this research object, Lola signs in American Sign Language "TODAY SIGN WHAT" followed by the sign "flower" which she repeats twice. As she signs, Lola verbally says the words in English that match up to what she is saying in ASL.

Lola's content format calls attention to her ASL "sign of the day' videos by using multiple forms of communication. First, she is interpellating American Deaf individuals who know ASL and are curious about her "sign of the day" by signing in ASL. Similarly, she is concurrently drawing in hearing individuals that are interested in slowly learning new ASL signs daily who know English by speaking in English and providing closed-captions in English too.

When scrolling through the comment section, the top comments to show up for are users telling Lola that her signing is wrong and she needs to stop. The top comment, which has over 26.7k likes, states "Can you sign - I'm not qualified to teach sign language" from a user named @_tone26 or TonyBoy. A similar comment states "If you are hearing please do not teach sign language 😭 if you've been taking ASL for 5 years you should know why this can be harmful. Be mindful" which instills that Lola has mentioned previously on her account that she has been learning ASL for a few years. Comments from the Deaf community and sign language interpreters read a plethora of different negative and frustrated responses such as "Absolutely not. You're definitely not our Ally" from @macjaded and "That's not signed correctly" from @crazydee62. Both of these comments are examples of how members of the Deaf Community feel their language is culturally appropriated since she is teaching ASL without receiving the correct schooling and is struggling to incorporate facial expressions (Saunders).

Once scrolling through the top comments of the video, misinformation is noticeable as some users are encouraging Lola's sign language videos. Although she is relaying fake information, it seems the reason for this is because she does have verified information about how to teach sign language. Thus, making this an exemplification of misinformation. As a result, Lola is continuing to misinform other TikTok users interested in learning ASL. For instance, one user asks for clarification on how to sign the word in the comment section by stating "Does it change

something if I use my left hand instead of the right? But still go from right to left?" Other users reply back to this video telling the curious ASL learner to not learn from Lola because she "isn't deaf." Likewise, another comment asks Lola if she can do another video of her teaching the sign for "bike."

In comparison to Russell's video discussed in Research Object #2, Lola also presents forms of disinformation in comparable ways. For one, both creators have these videos still up and accessible on their accounts and are both their most viewed videos across their entire pages. One interesting contrast between their viral videos is that, as stated previously, Russell does not have this video included in his "Viral" playlist at the top of his account. However, Lola does have her viral video of her signing "flower" in ASL attached to her "1 Mill +" playlist. Clearly, Lola is very proud of the attention she received on this video even if a majority of the responses to it were negative. Similar to Russell's predicted intentions, Lola may also be keeping this video on her page to increase her like count. However, in contrast, Lola has continued to make videos that follow this same format while Russell has yet to post another video of himself interpreting a song in ASL. The only thing that Lola has changed about her content is the wording of her videos. Instead of signing and saying "Today's sign is..." Lola now says "Today I learned…" and typically does a voiceover rather than speaking the words as she signs. This wording change is an attempt to reduce the number of people claiming Lola is teaching sign language and demonstrate that she is simply showing what signs she learned that day. Theoretically, this formatting change would clarify that Lola is wanting to learn sign language and values receiving constructive criticism from the Deaf community about the signs she learns. However, many members of the Deaf community on TikTok, including Elizabeth Harris, have made videos revealing that Lola has blocked their accounts from viewing her profile and videos. Based on this

information, it can be assumed that Lola is posting for reasons other than being candidly misinformed about ASL. As stated previously, this video is pinned to her page meaning she is aware of the backlash and responses prevalent on this post but still chooses to keep it on her page and accessible to users who click on her account. Additionally, she still posts videos about signs she's learning and continues to get responses from users saying her way of signing it is incorrect.

Conclusion

      -wrap up everything and further discuss the similarities and differences between the three ROs

      -how they do misinformation and disinformation differently

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