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<p style="text-align:center"><u>Prospectus</u></p>

Introduction

When trying to thoroughly understand the growth of the Deaf Community and ASL on TikTok, it is important to recognize the different theories and concepts that surround this discourse. Specifically, within this discussion across social media, it is crucial to determine who is allowed to teach ASL and who knows what is the right way and wrong way to sign words. To achieve this goal, I ask 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?

To answer these questions thoroughly, the Deaf community's responses will be analyzed by their reaction to three TikTok videos from three different hearing creators. Two of the research objects (RO) include analyzing Deaf creators duetting the videos while the third video solely focuses on the comment section of a hearing creator's video. The videos from the hearing users being responded to are claimed to have disrespected the Deaf community and ASL through the use of teaching or interpreting fake or false ASL.

The discourse of the Deaf Community on social media has been an interesting area of study for many years due to its myriad of benefits and drawbacks. At first, communicative apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, etc. did not cater to the Deaf Community (Yeratziotis et.al). But as online media began to develop, so did access for Deaf users. Now, social media has made it immeasurably easy for Deaf individuals to communicate with "government services, services, businesses, workmates and friends" ("Looking across the Hearing Line?: Exploring Young Deaf People's Use of Web 2.0 para. 19). Similarly, it has afforded Deaf individuals to participate in meetings via video link with the help of video conference interpreting (Napier et.al) and, most importantly, allow Deaf individuals to create social media accounts and share their experiences and identity as a Deaf person (Crom Saunders). However, it has also opened a gateway on social media of false sign language performed by hearing influencers, particularly ASL, to spread and constitute culture appropriation (Crom Saunders).

Although there is a lot of fake ASL that flows through social media, I do not believe the specific hearing creators being analyzed in this paper upload TikTok videos about ASL with the intent of spreading disinformation about the language. Instead, I argue that even though these creators are aware they are unqualified to teach and interpret ASL, it is still a tactic to receive views and a following. These user's end goal of gaining "clout" and attention has a detrimental effect on the Deaf community as their content misinforms their followers about Deaf culture and signs that hold no meaning. Their lack of knowledge is reflected by disregarding comments and responses from the Deaf Community about content that offends their language and culture. Instead of the users perceiving these situations as learning experiences, the large sum of TikTok stitches, duets, and comments received is understood as their platform growing expeditiously. By

spreading false information regarding this already oppressed community, it is harder for the hearing community to connect and understand Deaf culture.

Literature Review

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Deception across Social Media

As social media continues to grow globally, fake information concerning different matters is becoming a common issue across all mediums and is being weaponized to support performative arguments (Diez-Gracia et.al). Theories of misinformation, disinformation, and deception all analyze fake information from different perspectives. When putting these theories in conversation with Deaf culture and ASL on TikTok, we can understand the fake information spread by hearing people in a new context. Before continuing, it is important to note there is limited scholarly research addressing the interrelationship between Deaf culture with misinformation, disinformation, and deception theory on social media. But, that does not diminish the need for these concepts to be critically engaged when considering the ROs of this study.

The dichotomy between the theory of misinformation versus disinformation is an appealing conversation when considering the unqualified hearing TikTok users teaching ASL on the app. Studies analyzing both theories in the context of social media has been a common research object for many years across academia. However, multiple articles define misinformation and disinformation differently to fit the narrative of their paper. While both definitions confront the act of "fake and inaccurate information" (Lamar et.al 35), for the purpose of this paper, misinformation functions as the relaying of false information unintentionally while disinformation is typically created to intentionally deceive (Wu et.al, Lamar et.al). Misinformation can be recognized in various situations such as urban legends,

unverified information, and rumors. Individuals spreading misinformation aim to "undermine the faith of people in previously trusted sources of information such as the mainstream media" (Lamar et. al 37). This theory can be applied to Deaf Culture and ASL in social media because ill-equipped TikTok users teaching ASL can falsely teach a sign by using sloppy hand gestures and lacking facial expression, two very important features to communicate sign language effectively (Saunders).

On the other hand, disinformation is predominantly identified in the media as "fake news" and is not as easy to recognize or differentiate from "the genuine portrayal of a controversial perspective" (Bastick 1). Disinformation is theorized to alter attitudes about specific topics and nudge users toward predictable behaviors (Yeung, Bastick). For instance, one broad example that can be associated with this theory, in the context of social media, is the discussion of conspiracy theories spread to influence users across multiple online media platforms behaviors and attitudes toward political, economical,and social issues.

The last theory to discuss is deception theory. Similar to disinformation, deception theory applies to the action of intentionally trying to mislead an individual or group from the correct information (Burgoon and Levine). Since the focus of this paper is understanding relationships between the Deaf and hearing community online, I will solely focus on interpersonal deception theory (IDT). IDT is defined as the goal to "describe deception from the viewpoint of interpersonal communication in the presence of dynamic interaction between the sender and receiver." (Abdulqader et.al 128630). Deceivers applying the interpersonal deception theory tend to engage in strategic behavioral changes to gain credibility from their receivers (Abdulqader et.al Buller et.al). Unlike disinformation which is spreading false information, the goal of IDT is

to establish an authority of trust and worthiness from those listening. On social media, IDT can be noticed when users who are spreading false news begin to gain a following and support

Ableism and Cultural Appropriation against the Deaf community

For many years, instead of being considered a minority group that carries its own linguistics and cultural patterns, the Deaf community was viewed down upon and considered a disabled group. This notion was emphasized by ableist, prejudice, and social attitudes that deny the Deaf community access to business and public aspects of life. For the American Deaf community, knowing ASL is not a linguistic right and Deaf individuals are rather encouraged to learn how to speak and understand written and spoken English (Scoggins and Crom Saunders). As a result, cochlear implants are heavily advertised as a way to cure hearing loss and teach English rather than Deaf people learning ASL or "broken English" (Crom Saunders). These oppressive actions have become common within the American Deaf community as they have had recurring issues of not only ableism but also racism, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. (Crom Saunders). Ableism is defined as "the invisible and shared norm, beliefs, and practices, against which all bodies function differently" (Russo and Grasso p. 69).

A concerning trend that has gained traction surrounding ASL on social media refers to hearing people misrepresenting sign language and Deaf culture. Now, it is important to address that the Deaf community is very welcoming of the hearing community learning sign language and wanting to become immersed in their subculture. This cross-cultural connection is a great approach to breaking down barriers between the two communities and creating more accessibility for Deaf people in their everyday life. However, the issue that is growing is hearing people attempting to teach and interpret sign language on social media when they are not fluent. Sign language interpreting is a profession that not only takes years of schooling, but is also a

form of artistic expression for the Deaf community. For example, sign language interpreters who present at national sporting events, such as the SuperBowl, take their profession seriously by developing "strategies of coordination and synchronization so that their interpretation aligns with the action on the stage" (Schmitt 136). Without the correct qualifications and knowledge of sign language and Deaf culture, signing can be sloppy and hard to understand (Crom Saunders). In an attempt to preserve the language, it is common for the Deaf community to critique hearing users signing incorrectly or express their frustration with the fake interpreting. But instead of hearing individuals learning sign language and applying constructive criticism, Deaf accounts are typically blocked from accessing their social media accounts (Saunders).

Based on the media, it can be perceived that people who do not have an intimate connection with sign language and Deaf culture but still upload videos on social media teaching it incorrectly on view ASL interpreting and teaching as inconsequential. It can also be argued that such users are attempting to achieve a type of power over hearing people completely unaware of what it means to be Deaf. Since these creators have the advantage of communicating with the hearing community, it can be harder for Deaf people to connect with a wider audience since a majority of people link identity and authority with audible speech (Saunders).

Methodology

Prior studies have successfully addressed the limitations of fake ASL teaching and interpreting being spread across the media. However, to the author's knowledge, no significant research has been completed that analyzes fake ASL on TikTok. Since this issue is rather recent, considering TikTok has only been around for about eight years, the goal of this analysis is to address how the evolution of fake and false ASL is becoming more easily accessible. However, it

is also increasingly easier for members of the Deaf community to confront the cultural appropriation of their language.

All TikTok videos of focus engage in some form of fake ASL, either through disinformation or misinformation. To conduct a clear and thorough intertextual analysis of inaccurate and fake information about ASL spreading across TikTok, responses from the Deaf community will be examined through the creation of three TikTok videos. More specifically, instead of focusing on the hearing user's videos attempting to teach and interpret ASL, the analysis will strictly focus on the unique usage of TikTok's communicate affordances employed by the Deaf community. Each video in question is from a different hearing user. Two videos will utilize the duetting feature provided by TikTok while the third video will strictly focus on the comment section. The first duet video is from @purplelady9302 responding to hearing creator Sally Mckinney (@sallymckinney0) falsely demonstrating how to sign "computer" and "laptop" in ASL. The second video is from another Deaf creator Elizabeth Harris (@lizzytharris) duetting a video from Drake Russell (@wrldrake) attempting to interpret a popular song. Elizabeth's duet shows the correct way to interpret a popular song on TikTok. Lastly, the third object is from a young creator named Lola (@asl_for_teens) showing how to sign the word "flower." The content of analysis will entail going through the comments on this video, as many members of the Deaf and hearing community expressed anger and frustration with her teaching ASL without any form of certification.

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