

The 5%

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Abstract

The 5% is a film reflection of the true stories of Deaf individuals. As I went through the process of making, I realized I did not want my film to be educational but embedded in real life situations. My intent is to leave the audience with thoughts and questions after watching the film, making them ask us (Deaf individuals) more about our experiences. As the story unfolds, three characters face different situations. One character is facing his mother disagreeing with his new method of communication while another character is up against a boss who doesn't want to hire her. The last character in the film is a girl who has a Deaf parent who wants her to be with a Deaf boyfriend but she ends up dating a hearing person. The intent of these stories is to show simple, small situations that end with a small closure but leave room for more thoughts for the audiences. The concept of this film is showing that we are all human, we share similar situations, for example the job-interview; a lot of us are struggling to find work in the hearing world, but some of us are lucky. There are situations that are somewhat similar among Deaf people. The title, *The 5%* is the average of how many deaf people who exist in this world. we are a minority and our situation is not recognized well enough. We should not be divided as we have similar experiences but of course, there is diversity in the lives of deaf people. I believe we shouldn't divide each other based on how we interact and navigate life in a predominantly hearing world.

Scholars, researchers and fellow filmmakers who wish to view my thesis film *The 5%* can contact me at gradfilm@yorku.ca. Please explain your interest, and confirm that it is for personal/private research purposes only, and that you will respect my copyright and not screen my film publicly in any manner.

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Introduction



Rosie (1)



Megan (2)



John (3)

Image 1: From *The 5%* - Rosie, a Deaf young woman, who is dating a hearing boyfriend.

Image 2: From *The 5%* - Megan, who is struggling getting a job and dealing with an interview.

Image 3: From *The 5%* - John, who is just starting learning sign language and has tension with his mother.

If you can talk with your hands, and listen with your eyes, then you will realize that I'm just like you all. I'm just like you.

- Chad Harper, Takun J, & Trade

The 5% is a film reflection of the true stories of Deaf individuals. These lived moments show the lived experience of Deaf people navigating life in a predominantly hearing world, capturing interactions between the Deaf and Hearing people. *The 5%* explores three different “day in the life” stories within one narrative. The three main Deaf characters, Rosie, John and Megan, represent different individuals from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. Each scenario illustrates some of the challenges that Deaf people experience when interacting in the hearing world. I experiment with the sound(s) I/they hear, visual cues that Deaf and hard of hearing people rely on as part of our communication, and interaction—navigating the world through our ‘eyes and hands.’

Rosie who is profoundly Deaf, is silent from her point of view (POV). She does not wear any devices or use oral speaking skills. Rosie's story might not be obvious at first but she subtly hints at what is going with her life. Her parents might have had to live through the ban of Sign Language and had bad experiences with the hearing world. Rosie knows it and is struggling between two different worlds. The second character/persona, Megan, speaks and uses ASL-- navigating through both modes of communication. Conversely, the third persona/character, John has been raised in an oral environment. John was taught to speak and never knew of ASL, or the Deaf community until later in life. Once he started learning ASL, tensions between him and his hearing mother began to occur, similar to the story *In Far from the Tree* Andrew Solomon tells of Rory and Bob. One character is facing his mother disagreeing with his new method of communication while another character is up against a boss who doesn't want to hire her. The last character in the film is a girl who has a Deaf parent who wants her to be with a Deaf boyfriend but she ends up dating a hearing person. The intent of these stories is to show small situations that end with a small closure but leave room for more thoughts from the audience from many perspectives. The concept of this film is showing that we are all human, we share similar situations, for example the job interview; a lot of us are struggling to find work in the hearing world, but some of us are lucky. There are situations that are somewhat similar between Deaf people. We should not be divided as we have similar experiences but of course, it is not the same for everyone. I believe we should not be divided by how we navigate our lives in a predominantly hearing world.

As I went through the process of making, I realized I did not want my film to be educational but part of the every day. My intent is to leave the audience with thoughts and questions after

watching the film, making them wonder more about the Deaf experience(s). Would this film impact the audience and what they perceive about D/deaf persons? The real question posited is if a hybrid docu-fiction portrays the complexity of D/deaf experiences? How does the visual language of deafness translate as a cinematic project? How can the different perspectives of D/deaf and hearing characters be conveyed by image and sound?"

Background as a Filmmaker



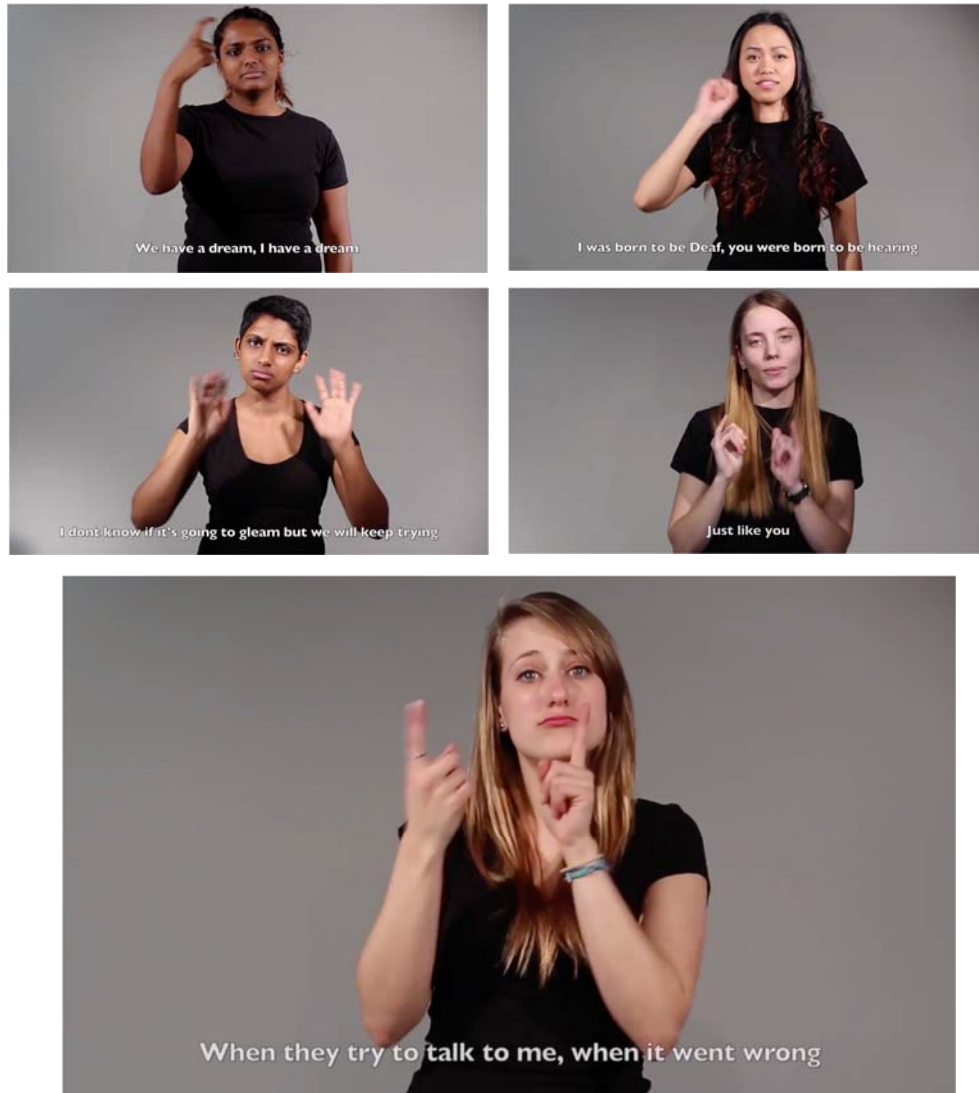
Ashley (4)

Image 4: Ashley is one of the portraits, a photography series from my thesis at OCADU called *To Hear With My Eyes & Speak With My Hands*.

As a Deaf filmmaker, I began my research on sign language and capturing the beauty of the language during my undergraduate thesis year at the Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCADU), through both photography and video installations. My Master's in Film Studies at York University extends this research, by incorporating sign language in *The 5%*, a short hybrid-drama film that takes the viewer through a journey into three experiences shared by Deaf people. *The 5%* continues to develop themes I explored in, "*To Hear With My Eyes & Speak With My Hands*", a video-installation project I completed as a thesis project at OCADU. The installation is based on an ASL poem that I wrote and directed called *Just Like You Do*. The video is a candid and simple explanation of a deaf person's experiences, as told by a group of Deaf young women. As a deaf¹ person growing up, I experienced challenges in communication, such as not being able to follow group conversations by reading all the lips. I have different experiences when I use either my voice or sign. The responses from hearing people are usually positive. Perception is key in these situations, as the hearing person's perception can lead to 'mis'-perceptions. Some people accommodate my communication methods, and others are perplexed by 'my accent' or by my hand gestures. These experiences

¹ I use capital D when referring to Deaf communities, and small car 'd' when referring to myself. This is a political choice and a choice about identity. Deaf refers to "Deaf power," and is used by people who are very involved and identified with deaf culture. I identify with both hearing and Deaf worlds, rather than Deaf power discourses, so I say small "d" deaf.

motivate me to make photo installations and films that explore the complex relationships between hearing and D/deaf people.



**“They never try again, we might be Deaf but we don’t bite.
We are a human being.”**

Image 5: Screen shot/video clip images of the poem *Just like You Do*, part of my thesis at OCADU called *To Hear With My Eyes & Speak With My Hands*.

The poem reflects my experiences and those of other deaf friends, when we find ourselves in hearing-centered environments. The poem addresses the misconceptions and preconceived

notions that affect the interactions between the Deaf and hearing worlds. I wanted to stress that while our methods of communication may be different, Deaf and hearing people live their lives in the same manner.

I am also working on a related project that is a spin-off of my process in creating *The 5%*. This short auto-ethnographic cinema verite, titled *Roommate*, documents the daily lives of my roommate and myself, talking to each other. This initial film is was useful to explore the frame work for *the 5%*, and work out how to portray a realistic story. Similarly, another short film I created, titled, *Dinner*, follows my own personal experience of having dinner with family. In the scenes, I get left out of many conversations; however, I find closeness in a close friend and my mother, who provide a more inclusive dinner experience because they sign with me. It is not easy to be part of a group that may not share the same language, values, and experiences; therefore, there are times when I, like other Deaf people, feel isolated. This film was good to explore filming myself and showing my experiences, that way I could feel and see how to put my actors in *the 5%*. I also filmed my Deaf friends while visiting Michigan, travelling to California, and visiting an alumni reunion at Gallaudet University, a predominantly, historically Deaf university in Washington D.C. I filmed my friends naturally socializing—observing their relationship and my interaction with them. There was so much footage captured of our relationships and interactions. At Gallaudet, I filmed community interactions highlighting the rich and strong Deaf Culture that persists on campus, and scenes of Deaf people sharing in their university experiences. I witnessed a bond, a cultural kinship that epitomizes the strong relationships that Deaf people share. Each of these films are beginning to work out the themes I am addressing in the MFA Thesis. They provide me with various narratives to consider in my film, and ground

The 5% in real life experiences, including the relationships among deaf people, and between deaf and hearing worlds, and beauty that I witnessed at Gallaudet—the strength and unity that exists in the Deaf community. *The 5%* is inspired by all of these complex negotiations.

Research Process

When I began this project, I wanted to make a documentary about deaf-hearing relationships, but I didn't want to make a conventional documentary. My thinking here was influenced by the film, *Road to Guantanamo*, about three British-Pakistani/Bangladeshi men who travel to Pakistan in 2001, directed by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross. The narrative of the story was presented through actual interviews, flashbacks and dramatized vignettes of the subjects' experiences. I am also interested in representing the lived experience in a dramatic form. I want to show the deaf person's experience(s) as reenactments of true stories—that are visually impactful and recount the experiences without interviewing the actual people who lived the experiences. Thus, I chose to create a hybrid drama, based on the experiences of real people. The following section outlines my research methodology, which involved interviewing 20 members of Deaf and hard of hearing communities, a video of them engaging in their daily lives, analyzing D/deaf cultural production in film and theatre, and which evolved from my collaborative experiences. I used this material as the basis for my dramatic script.

I. Interviews

My generation may very well be the last generation of the once large signing and culturally Deaf community because of medical interventions like cochlear implants and movements to 'normalize' and integrate Deaf children. There is a risk that American Sign Language (ASL) and the distinct Deaf community are becoming extinct. I wanted to interview members of my own friends and community, in order to show the experiences of D/deaf people living at this juncture and capture the rich history and inherent beauty in the Deaf world. The film documents the

experiences that generate struggles and miscommunication. The film is an archive for/of the community, the language and culture.

I conducted 20 semi-structured video interviews with students from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), and members of the Toronto Deaf Community. I asked questions about how they learned sign language, and what their communication experiences are like—reflecting on the best and most challenging moments in their lives/any barriers that they have encountered. The following are some of the questions and considerations that I posed: How did you learn the language? Do you think Sign Language will become extinct or marginalized? I presented the hypothesis that if there were a potential cure, and if they could hear again would they want to? My questions sought to elicit their feelings and perspectives about choice, and their lived experiences. I also filmed my subjects navigating their daily lives. For example, I filmed a student working on his homework, his interactions with his roommate, and his long-distance interactions with his parents. Throughout the process, I began to gather more stories and document new experiences.

II. Critical Reflection and Fluid Process

As I filmed my subjects, I continually reflected and responded to what was emerging, and my concepts for the film changed. The interviews and videography influenced these decisions, producing a plethora of notes and ideas. I decided to include reenactments of the stories, together with the interviews to consolidate my intent for the film, like *Road to Guantanamo (1)*. However, as the work and ideas unfolded, the visual considerations changed. I found that the interviews didn't really say much about the person. Further, I considered deaf peoples' preference for visual communication. Watching a person talking is not that interesting for deaf audiences, nor for me. As a Deaf person, I absorb information

visually and I like narratives based on true stories rather than a portrait documentary approach. I decided to shift to the reenactment storylines, and use the material from interviews and the daily videos as research for script development and aesthetic choices.

III. Deaf Community Experiences

The 5% responds to and contributes to a small, vibrant and growing movement of D/deaf cultural production, and also addresses a gap in terms of artistic representations of deaf culture by deaf artists. The majority of 'Deaf' films that I have seen are educational documentaries. One such example is the PBS documentary directed by two hearing filmmakers, Lawrence Hott and Diane Garey, titled *Through Deaf Eyes* (2007). The film discusses 200 years of deaf culture, Deaf history, speech therapy and showed curious hearing people how deaf children were taught and raised. The targeted audience is hearing, and the film's goal is to education them. In contrast, Deaf filmmakers, like Chantal Deguire, bring their own lived experience and concerns to inform work that engages Deaf culture, rather than observing it from a distance. *InVisible REvolution*, by Deguire, is a documentary about a Deaf mother's fight for the survival of her culture. Deguire and her son struggle through the closing of Deaf schools, Deaf programs, and the lack of Sign Language across Canada. This film is still in the process of making and is not yet released. Chantal Deguire created a wonderful educational documentary, from an activist insider perspective. I am fortunate to be on her team, and have learned much from her project.

Deaf filmmakers work in a diverse variety of genres. One can find comedic ASL films, dramas and popular Hollywood television shows, such as Lizzy Weiss's *Switched at Birth*, which is a good example of a narrative story of a Deaf person's life, relationships, and friendships. Bryan Elsley and James Brittain's mainstream fictional television show, *Skins*, inspired my film as well. While this is not a Deaf film, and none of the characters are Deaf, the videography contains beautiful visuals, and powerful storylines for each character. *Skins* is formatted by cutting back and forth between the lives and narratives

of eight different characters, weaving together their different scenarios and experiences, and tying them together as the series plot. Watching this series influenced my decision to format my film in a similar manner, cutting back and forth between three separate characters and scenarios to tell a larger story about deaf/hearing relationships; however, in my film the characters are not connected to one another.

My work is influenced by these works. I want to connect to both hearing and deaf audiences, using an artistic narrative approach that responds to the need for more artistic cultural representations by D/deaf creators. My intent is to be able to tell stories about Deaf Culture that provoke analysis and consideration of the Deaf experience, and that shows the everyday, normal reality for deaf people. *The 5%* shows that Deaf people are diverse, with unique lives and experiences; however, they share cultural similarities.

IV. Collaborative Artist Experiences

In all of my filmmaking experience, it is very clear that filmmaking is inherently collaborative. During the process of conducting my interviews, research, and writing the script, I became involved in a few projects that really helped with my research experiences, and informed both my working process, the development of the script, and aesthetic decisions. As I mentioned, I learned a tremendous amount from Chantal Deguire, as a crew member of her documentary, *InVisible REvolution*. Another key collaborator is Elizabeth Morris, who plays Megan, in *The 5%*. For her Master's in Inclusive Design at OCAD University, Morris worked on an Inclusive Design project/prototype that makes theatre experiences inclusive for Deaf people and their friends and/or family members. I was part of her research team, and we travelled to New York City to see the play *Spring Awakening* (2015). I assisted her in filming interviews with the cast and director. We met with David (DJ) Kurs, the Art Director of the Deaf West Theatre, and interviewed the actors from the play, learning how Deaf and hearing actors interact in rehearsals

and on stage. The relationships between the actors, and their respective performances were seamless; contributing to the huge success of the Broadway Play. This experience inspired me in my film process, as I realize the importance of establishing an artistically integral film that honors the relationships between the Deaf and hearing characters. I also worked on a film project called *Step into My World* with Nichola Di Capua, a Deaf filmmaker. I was hired as the Director of Photography and was the Cinematographer. The intent of the film was to create a social experiment on the interaction between hearing and Deaf people in the Deaf community. It was an interesting experience to see the reactions of hearing people navigating in a predominantly Deaf signing environment. The hearing individual was unaware that they were immersed in a Deaf environment and tried to assimilate into the conversation, without knowing any sign language at all—he improvised in order to feel more included.

My collaborative style was deeply informed by my discussions with theatre artist director David (DJ) Kurs of Deaf West Theatre. He shared a lot of information about access and the inclusion of both hearing and Deaf collaborators. He provided a synopsis of how Deaf actors were provided with spotlights and hearing actors were subtly lit, and both actors were close to each other on stage. He also explained that the hearing actors of the Deaf West Theatre would always be allies of the Deaf community. One example is Troy Koustor an American actor who acted in the long-running television series, *Sue Thomas FBI* and *Criminal Minds*, for example. At the conference, he discussed one of his stories about how he got the role because a hearing friend of his was auditioning for a Deaf role, and realized it is unethical to have a hearing person play a Deaf character; therefore, he recommended that Troy should replace him for the audition—and Troy won the role! He also explained that the interactions between hearing and Deaf actors were met

with some struggles until a solution was to have interpreters standing to the side providing him with the cues. For example, for a driving scene, the interpreter sat in the back seat in order to give him the cues. This experience highlights how there are always strategies/accommodations when Deaf and hearing actors work together—making communication accessible. DJ and I had an interesting discussion about considerations of the various methods of communication, and how language and understanding are viewed within the Deaf context. I was interested in discussing how to navigate around the relationship between language, identity, and how to define what is considered ‘Deaf’ or ‘not deaf enough’. These dichotomies and relationships intrigue me. He mentioned that sign language coaches like to show the variety in sign language, and communication amongst the Deaf community; therefore, he encouraged me to include the different scenarios and experiences in my film. This was immensely helpful for me as someone directing both hearing and deaf cast and crew members.

Deaf Worlds: Identity and Context

The 5% is a film about three D/deaf characters told from the perspective of a deaf filmmaker. But what does it mean to say deaf, or Deaf, or hard of hearing? What does it mean to identify with D/deaf communities, and how does this project speak to D/deaf culture, politics, and artistic discourses? Deaf enough versus ‘not Deaf enough’ is a conversation that has been going around a lot in my community. I don’t agree with the concept of defining who is ‘Deaf enough’ and who is not ‘Deaf enough’. I believe we are all Deaf, and should not be divided. There are a variety of definitions that make someone ‘Deaf enough’ or ‘not Deaf enough’ but generally, Deaf ‘enough’ is defined as a person who is strong in Deaf cultural practices and uses Sign Language. Some argue that to be Deaf enough you can only use Sign Language and not speak. A person who is not ‘Deaf enough’ can mean a person who is not culturally Deaf or a person who speaks. I strongly disagree with this because everyone approaches the world differently. Even their experiences growing up and how they have been raised is also different. How can a person decide who is Deaf enough and is based on how they communicate? There are distinctive labels which are Deaf, hard of hearing, oral and have hearing loss; however, we also have labels given to us by hearing people and doctors. One such example is ‘hearing impaired’ which most of us in the Deaf community dislike because it implies that we are broken.

In *The 5%* I use the terms hearing impaired or Deaf, terms that have complex meanings that are embedded in D/deaf history, culture and literature, as well as educational and medical models of deafness. To begin, I looked at common dictionary definitions. The Apple dictionary linked to my computer, for example, defines hard of hearing as: “*hard of hearing* | ˌhɑːd əv ˈhɪərɪŋ | *not*

able to hear well.” Whereas Merriam-Webster defines hard of hearing as “relating to or having a defective but functional sense of hearing.” I was surprised to find the definition of hard of hearing as ‘not able to hear well’. This is a medical model of deafness. The medical model proposes interventions which pathologies ‘a cure’ for deafness; consequently, not considering that the Deaf community regards itself as a group with shared cultural characteristics, traditions, and histories. Medical interventions and ‘innovations’ have generated a movement attempting to ‘normalize’ and integrate deaf children: leading to forced closures of deaf schools, and children being streamed into hearing schools. This medical model is redefining deafness solely as an impairment, and neglecting the cultural importance of the language, history, and community that represents the Deaf and Hard of Hearing world. The term hard of hearing has been interpreted differently in the Deaf community. Some Deaf people interpret ‘hard of hearing’ as a Deaf person who can speak, while others interpret this as a Deaf person who can hear more than profoundly Deaf people. Some people called me hard of hearing while others called me Deaf. It was a bit confusing for me but I ended up using deaf (with a small ‘d’). I don’t identify as ‘big D’ Deaf because I don’t feel right taking on this identity when I am not fully immersed in the Deaf culture.

If you look up “Deaf” in the Apple dictionary there is only one definition: “*deaf* | *def* | *adjective*. *lacking the power of hearing or having impaired hearing: I'm a bit deaf so you'll have to speak up* | *deaf children. unwilling or unable to hear or pay attention to something: she is deaf to all advice.*’ Using the term ‘hearing impaired’ in the Deaf community is construed as negative and oppressive. This definition reflects audism, a term for deaf oppression. Bauman defines audism as *1. The notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of*

one who hears. 2. A system of advantage based on hearing ability. 3. A metaphysical orientation that links human identity with speech. (245).

Audism is often associated with the movement for oralism - that is lip reading and oral vocalization, championed by Alexander Graham Bell, whose wife was deaf. The Alexander Graham Bell Association (AG Bell) held a conference What is the date of the conference? hosted intentionally without involving Deaf people. Hearing participants made educational decisions on behalf of Deaf people; their decisions limited the rights of Deaf children. Alexander Graham Bell believed Deaf children should perfect their speaking skills and followed the medical model that Deaf children should be 'fixed', without access to other options, such as Deaf community and Sign Language. The Alexander Graham Bell Association states that there are provisions for: "A Limitless world for all to hear and talk"; therefore, emphasizing audism. In 2018, AG Bell and LEAD-K collaborated on a project related to language acquisition. LEAD-K is an organization that encourages sign language and Language Equality & Acquisition for Deaf children where they develop their language. LEAD-K has been trying to pass Congressional Bills, but AG Bell stops them every time! There is a lot of tension between them, with BG Bell blocking the bills, which means LEAD-K were not able to do a statistic on language deprived; however, one California's bill has been passed. They were able to do the statistics on the language deprived or delayed in education. With this statistic AG Bell decide to collaborate with LEAD-K. This is the reason the collaboration was approved, which means children up to 5 years old will be provided access to all languages which includes Sign Language and speaking skills;

therefore, children will be accommodated based on the child's communication needs and method that is suitable.²

Deaf communities define deafness as a "colonized, ethnic, linguistic minority" although as Lennard Davis writes, this is still incomplete. "It has removed the biological stigma of deafness; for the most part the deaf are no longer viewed as 'handicapped' or 'disabled'. Deaf people get to be a sociological group, a community." (3) Yet, as Davis continues the definition is divisive, because it doesn't capture the complexity of deaf experience, including people who are hard of hearing but don't use sign, or people educated orally who don't know ASL, or who have a cochlear implant (4). It's not fair to say someone is not "deaf enough" based on their parents' choices. Davis writes:

The concept "deaf world" or "deaf culture" (indicated by ASL signs) is compelling for many deaf people. It does not have any associations with biological deficiency or race. The problem with the terms is that they are too general and too elastic. If you start defining what you mean by either, you immediately fall back into categorical generalizations of the kind we have been discussing. Who is deaf? Who belongs in the "deaf world"? How do you get into it? Who are the gatekeepers? What makes "deaf culture" different from any other culture? If one were to substitute "white world," "black world," "Jewish world," or "non-Jewish world" for "deaf world," would one be happy to celebrate and analyze the meaning of those terms? What if we said "ASL-users-only world," or "40-percent- to 100-percent-hearing-loss world"?

The Deaf community is multi-dimensional: we are hard of hearing, Deaf, deafened, and oral.

These are distinct sub-groups that may create separations within the community. But we all share a common relationship through deafness.

There are multi-dimensional complexities of meaning in Deaf culture which influence *The 5%*.

to show each group such as the ASL user, Deaf and oral and both. I think it is important to show

2 <https://www.agbell.org/Resources/Articles-Documents/View/AG-Bell-and-LEAD-K-Reach-Historic-Agreement>

that “Deaf” people are not the same. One label doesn’t mean each person communicates or faces the role in the same way. In *Far from the Tree*, Andrew Solomon tells a story that frames some of the contradictions that emerge even within the same families around the meaning of deafness and hearing. He tells the story about a boy (Rory) who became deaf at 3, and was the second child ever to receive a cochlear implant (CI). A cochlear implant (CI) is a device that assists the Deaf and hard-of-hearing person to hear. When a person gets a CI, they get an implant that consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and an internal portion that is under the skin. The external part of the CI consists of a microphone that picks up sound, and a speech processor that filters the sound and sends it through a thin cable to an external device called a transmitter. The transmitter, a coil held in position by a magnet placed behind the external ear, transmits the processed sound signals to an internal device, which is a receiver/transmitter, secured to the bone behind the ear that converts the sound signals to electronic impulses. These impulses are then transmitted by cable to electrodes in the cochlear or inner ear that send them through the auditory nerve to the brain which recognizes the signals as sound. Generally, when a child is diagnosed as Deaf today, they will be given a cochlear implant as early as four months of age at a doctor’s recommendation. The cochlear implant is a highly controversial medical ‘solution’s for deafness within the deaf community. A cochlear implant is regarded by some as a threat to our existence as a community/culture. I posit that the implant might not be the best option; however, the real problem exists in the medical model, and doctors failing to provide enough information about deafness, the culture, sign language, and the rich cultural experience of deafness.

In Rory's case, his parents worked to assimilate him to the hearing world. He played on a hearing baseball team, and was raised in oralism (speech and lip reading). At the around eight years of age, he joined a deaf baseball team and started to sign, although he was raised to always communicate orally. Eventually, he went to Gallaudet, and later married a deaf woman. At this point, he turned off the cochlear implant and completely focused on the Deaf and signing world: *"He turned off his implant and has never used it again; he said that with it he felt like "a duck in a world of chickens" "the deaf world became his home" (99).* Rory and his father (Bob) understood each other, as Rory knew that his parent had made the decision:

"Bob said of his own decision, "I did what I thought was right. It was not some big philosophical discussion between deaf and hearing, because I had no clue about that" Rory understands why his parents made their decision and bob understands why his son reversed it. I realize when he was in an oral environment that he would only get 90%." (100)

Being introduced to the Deaf community later in life does happen a lot to a Deaf person who has never been exposed to Sign Language because of doctors and family intervention. Deaf-born children born today often get a cochlear implant and speech therapy, avoiding Sign Language because hearing parents are being presented with this medical model that purports that Deafness can be 'cured'. Most parents are unaware of Sign Language or support systems from the community. The doctor wants to 'fix/heal' the child, which instinctively suggests to the parents that their child will be perfect, fixed and hearing—just like them! But what they do not realize is they are not giving their child opportunities and choices.

Sign language might be at risk of becoming extinct. For example, Latin is considered archaic and limited—it could be considered extinct. Latin is now only used in science terms and in churches and in teachings at universities. Many Indigenous languages are becoming extinct because the

number of speakers is decreasing, and because of the complicated history between dominant cultures and native populations. There are approximately 114 sign languages used around the world. One sign language from eastern Canada called Maritime Sign Language (MSL) is already severely endangered. MSL came from British Sign Language (BSL), the citizens are British and some of them were educated in England, returning to Canada to Deaf schools with BSL that evolved into MSL. In Ontario, the Deaf generally attended American schools for the Deaf where they learned American Sign Language (ASL), which was used and brought back to Ontario. American Sign Language originated from the Island of Martha's Vineyard where there was a very large Deaf community. Montreal uses Langue des Signes Quebecoise (LSQ) that was brought to Canada from the French Langue des Signes Francaise (LSF). In the Deaf community it is crucial to preserve sign language, as it is culturally important.

As a Deaf person I have grown up facing challenges and am part of a dwindling Deaf culture, one that is still struggling to be recognized. One of the biggest challenges faced by the Deaf and hard of hearing community is the loss of potential signers because of medical interventions. Currently, there is a desire by hearing parents to "repair" Deaf children through medical solutions, such as the cochlear implant. Consequently, their child is separated from the Deaf community but "repaired" through the surgery. Doctors tend to suggest a cochlear implant to parents at a very early age, without mentioning other choices such as sign language and information about Deaf culture. It's natural that parents would want their child to be the same as them, to deny the difference, to fix the disability. The subjects in my work might be the last generation of the once large Deaf community. Medical interventions have led to Deaf schools closing and children being streamed into the hearing schools. Society is exposing the latest

generation of Deaf individuals to a non-signing world. As a Deaf person in a hearing group, where there is often no access to the language and no understanding of the dialogue, the future of sign language is uncertain. As a hearing viewer or non-signer, you would not know the movements and expressions that enrich the meaning of the language. With my work, I am documenting the generation of people in my community, exploring issues of language and culture to the non-signing world. I value Deaf culture and aim to represent the uniqueness of the individual subjects by address their strong expression and 'voice'. I want the non-signer to empathize with the Deaf person's position, to realize Deaf experiences and different forms of expression.

Development of the Stories & Scenarios

The scenarios in *The 5%* were derived from my interviews, my own life experiences and collaborations, as well as background research. I initially created four stories and wrote a draft of the script. I further developed this with the support of two Deaf friends and we embraced the process as a team. We identified contextual gaps within the script, and reached out to filmmaker Nathan Hughes-Berry to contribute to the script. I decided on going forward with three storylines.

During the process of the writing, my intent was not to provide a happy ending, answers/solutions for the audience. My intentions are for the audience to have a visceral and immersive experience of what it is like to navigate life from a Deaf perspective. My intent is to have the audience observe, analyze the situation, and possibly consider a solution or response to the scenarios; therefore, the audience questions the situations, and experiences of the Deaf community. The film is not meant to simply educate, it is intended to generate pause and reconcile some of the realities of the Deaf experience.

I. Title

The original title, *Undivided* was inspired by what I learned from attending a workshop on art grants and the presenter asked participants to write a brief one-line explanation about their respective projects. One of the facilitators asked me why I wrote the labels ‘Deaf and hard of hearing’, and not just ‘Deaf’. I explained I want to be inclusive and that these are distinctions that are used in the community; however, I began to question the attachment to labels that may divide people. We are part of a community, and we should not exclude anyone—we all share

similar experiences. We are *undivided*; hence the title of my film. However, I completed the film and changed the title to *The 5%* because it's a story of small situations and the three people in it. 5% is the average of number of deaf people in the world.³ So I thought *The 5%* is good title for this film. The title, *Undivided* will be used at a later time for another purpose . The numbers show that we are a minority group, and our situation is addressed properly.

II. Character Development

For my initial explorations and research, I conducted film interviews with various Deaf individuals. From the explorations, I created stories for three different characters. The first character Megan is both oral and an ASL user. She has been exposed to both methods of communication. Rosie's character is a profoundly Deaf ASL user. She has integrated herself into the Deaf community and is part of a culturally Deaf family. The last character, John, who is hard of hearing was unaware of sign language until later in life because his family believed in medical interventions. This film tells the stories of different individuals, highlighting what kind of device they wear or do not wear—hearing aids or implants, or no devices at all. There are some who have no assistive devices. The stories and viewpoints are infinitely diverse.

Megan

Megan is a deaf woman who is looking for an office job. In her scenario, she is travelling to the job interview with her friend Alice, who is there for support. At the interview, she tries to

³ “Over 5% of the world's population – or 466 million people – has disabling hearing loss (432 million adults and 34 million children). It is estimated that by 2050 over 900 million people – or one in every ten people – will have disabling hearing loss.” WHO 2019.

understand the employer, and read the employer's lips. Megan wants to impress the boss and prove to him that she can speak a little and gestures with the potential employer. When I interviewed members of the deaf community, I discovered that the most common struggles relate to employment. The character of Megan is very motivated to start her career and life. The film scenario highlights the barriers in her employment interview. Megan does not mention that she is deaf on her resume, likely because if she does include it there may be rejection or hesitation in hiring a Deaf employee. I came up with Megan's character when I was working as The Director of Photography and the cinematographer for *Step into My World* a film by Nicola Di Capua. Through this experience I was struck by the reactions and improvisations of hearing people navigating a Deaf signing environment. The interaction was serendipitous as it became a catalyst for Megan's storyline. Megan's story also reflects solidarity and friendship within the deaf community, as her friend Alice accompanies Megan to her job interview as an act of support and friendship—a cultural bond.

Rosie

Rosie's character is profoundly Deaf and uses sign language—she is culturally Deaf. I want to show her point of view—silently! The plot of the story is subtle, in the scenario, her parents are background characters who metaphorically represent the Deaf cultural community. Many older Deaf adults were discriminated against by hearing people. There were many barriers and experiences of bullying and abuse. The older generation experienced oppression and marginalization which has created doubt and mistrust of the hearing world. As for Rosie, she learned from her parents that they feel uncomfortable and mistrust hearing people; therefore, leading to her own doubts. Rosie has lived different experiences when interacting with hearing

people; however, she is conflicted by her parents' experiences, identity, and beliefs. Rosie is betwixt and between a world that she realizes has been changing, and struggles with her parents doubts of the hearing world. Rosie has a hearing boyfriend. He is learning ASL and really likes Rosie. They have been together for quite some time and he wants to meet her parents. Rosie knows that might be a problem because she does not think her parents like the idea of her dating a hearing person. She procrastinates—and is hesitant of him meeting her parents. She finally admits to her parents that she is dating a hearing person. I decided to allow the audience to interpret the outcome for themselves by leaving the conclusion to the scene unresolved—do they accept a hearing person into their lives? I want to show the Deaf perspective: from different modes of communication and cultural connections. Rosie uses sign language and is culturally Deaf.

John

John has been raised in a hearing and oral environment. He discovered sign language later in his life; therefore, he wants to learn sign language to become involved in both worlds. In the scenario, he and his mother experience conflicts because he wants to learn ASL. They argue in the car, and experience awkward moments when John brings an interpreter with him in the car. His mother has never met an interpreter before and does not understand the role of the interpreter. She neglects the interpreter and becomes confused about with whom she is talking. She does not feel comfortable and wants her son to herself—and thinks she is doing the best thing for her child, sometimes neglecting what her son wants. John's mother does not realize the benefits of knowing sign language and having access to this method of communication. John is frustrated with being excluded and having to assimilate in a hearing environment. John wants his

mother to empathize and communicate with him on his terms; having her communicate with her own son through an interpreter. His mother struggles to understand her son's experience.

III. Vision

The themes of *The 5%* relate to language, individuality, empowerment and unity. The visual cues and shot styles evolved into different results. My shot style, before I started shooting the film, followed similar stylistic inspirations seen in *Be Somebody*, a film directed by Joshua Caldwell. I appreciate the pacing, the colour of the film and how it was shot. Though inspiring, I made my own stylistic choices instead. The goal of my palette is light and fading colour to keep a neutral and natural feel to the shots. There are a few shots I want to have some heavy tension indicated through colour. Many of my shots are close ups, using camera movements rather than wide shots. I used a variety of shots with many takes. The close ups made the scenes more personal and visually powerful. The movement creates a 'raw' and unexpected feeling. Some of shots were improvisational and serendipitous—avoiding the still shots, and conventional shot-reverse-shot structures.

When editing the video and showing others the process of the work, I realized that *The 5%* has subtleties that a deaf person would understand but not the hearing audience. I wanted to have the hearing audience watch this film but realized they would not enjoy it if they didn't have a little bit of background history. I was trying to come up with an idea where I could show some text or voice over that could give some hints to the context. I ended up with the idea of inner thoughts as text on the screen and thought it worked well. The voice over is the hearing world, so I'm trying to do the opposite in the deaf world and deaf vision. I believe and might be a new style on a deaf

film. Inner thoughts really helped bring out some subtle information for hearing audiences as well it still not giving the full context and history because I want the audience to ask question or look it up afterward, that the goal of *The 5%*.

In “Close-up: Contemporary deaf filmmakers” Karen Christie, Patricia Durr and Dorothy Wilkens outline the aesthetics of Deaf Cinema. Deaf communities are highly visual, and as a deaf filmmaker my aesthetic choices are also informed by the visual language of deafness. The shaking camera, for example, is a favourite device for filmmakers. I employ a version of the shaky camera in *The 5%*, to create a sense of connection and reality. In my use the camera doesn’t precisely shake, the camera movement is a flow across close-cropped bodies. This visual connection and closeness with close up and visual of hand, body, and faces creates the sense that the viewer is part of the film. It was interesting how Christie et al talked about the deaf filmmaker showing the device such as Hearing aids, CI and how they feel some freedom without it, the way they shoot to express and show the emotion by the concept of break free from technology. The film they mention:

“In the dream sequence, the ear molds are slowly pulled from her ears in a visual moment expressing freedom. Throughout the film, the filmmaker draws extreme close ups of the girl, with a focus on her large eyes”.

I knew that there are a lot of deaf artists who like to emphasize the importance of hands, eyes and ears to represent themselves. In my film I don’t have any of those types of close ups that but I do show a variety of devices in the film. For example, one character has a cochlear implant while another character has hearing aids, and one doesn’t have any device. Deaf people have their own choices of what device, or none, that they want to have. Though my characters may not express emotion by use/showing devices but more of the sound itself are like point of view of what she/he hears and their body language and what they are thinking.

An example of my deaf aesthetic is when the character of Megan says ‘bless you’ when the employer sneezes, to demonstrate that sign language is visual, relying on body language for cued communication; therefore, proving to the employer that there are no limitations to hiring a Deaf employee. Body language is powerful—we as Deaf people learn to observe body language in order to decipher what is being ‘said’. Megan observes James’ body language: she knows that he is talking about her and that he is trying to figure a resolution to the situation. Notwithstanding hearing loss, Deaf people are capable individuals who fulfill employment requirements when they are qualified. Pierce T. Hamilton at the University of Rochester writes that there is evidence that “Deaf individuals use their vision more adeptly, even saying that Deaf motorists can smell burning rubber faster and feel vibrations more than hearing people, altering them to potential dangers”.⁴

This article mentions Deaf Gaze. There is a deaf gaze in *The 5%* by filming and shooting with my own eyes and how my vision sees things on the small LCD screen. The deaf gaze not only comes from me—it includes the deaf actors and audiences.

IV. Sound Treatment

I experimented with the sound(s) I/they hear, and visual cues that we rely on as part of our communication, and interaction—navigating the world through our ‘eyes and hands’. The intent of the film is to have the non-signer experience the barriers to communication that exist

⁴ <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=10065&context=theses>)

much like those that Deaf people may experience when navigating the predominantly Hearing world.

I saw a film called, *Sound of Metal* directed by Darius Marder at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). It was an amazing film where they talk about losing hearing and discovering the silence, and sign language. I like it because they did not push or give an impression that the Cochlear implant and deafness is one dimensional, bad or good, *Sound of Metal*, shows the reality of a cochlear implant. CI does work but at the same time it can be a struggle, so they show its reality and that CI is not always perfect. I like this genre of film because it does not impose an opinion on the audience; however, the main reason why I refer to this film is the sound techniques. Sound techniques in the film illustrate how the protagonist hears with the CI on and off. They start off with clear noise to muffled sound where he is starting to lose his hearing, and then to silence. In those silent moments he was angry and making decisions about the CI, he even learned ASL, but his emotions and dream is what influences his decision. At the end of the film, the clear noise is back again but with some of the odd robotic noise of the CI, and when he's in a large group of people, we could hear what he hears, the sound which is hard to understand and too loud for his CI. This is what I was looking for in my film, I want to show three different varieties of sound responses for each respective character.

The intent of the sound is that each person hears differently, or not at all. For example, Rosie does not wear any hearing device so her point of view is completely silent. Megan wears hearing aids, so she does have some residual hearing, for example, some Deaf people can hear people talking; however, voices are muffled, and the words are inaudible. As for John, he has better

hearing because he grew up orally, with a cochlear implant; however, it is not easy for him to follow all aspects of conversations as the cochlear implant does not guarantee audibility.

Consequently, he started to learn and use sign language. I want to include some music, point of view sound effects, and hearing points of view as well. If I made my film silent, I know it would not be that interesting for a hearing audience, which is why I want to make sure I have some sounds. I hired a sound designer to do the sound, since I'm not the best at coordinating these effects. Explaining what I 'hear' is difficult to interpret; however, I look forward to the results as I am working collaboratively with a sound designer.

Production

I. Casting

As I started casting the characters, I knew it was important to have a variety of ethnicities in my film. The Deaf community has members of every race, gender and sexuality. Even though each person is different, we still connected because of our Deafness, Deaf culture and community. As I mentioned there is also variety of hearing skills, Deaf, CI and orally, I want my film to show the various ways that the hearing audience throw away their stereotypes of the Deaf.

I required a few hearing actors, and John Greyson suggested I connect with potential actors on *Mandy.com*. It was an amazing experience. I hired two actors for segment one, who were motivated and eager to participate in my project. During breaks, they joined the Deaf crew and asked some questions about the Deaf community. Tyson and Julian are great actors, they picked up a few phrases in Sign, and the chemistry with them is light and simple. It was easy to get along with them as we shot, and with Nathan's help, I think that's what gave a feeling of relief to the actors, and made me feel relief as well. I've had challenges working with actors and telling them what to do or direct them. Teaming up with Nathan really helped me overcome this.

Another fun experience for me was that I had to hire one actor for Rosie's character where they would have an intimate scene. I had to make sure Victoria Soo Lum, who plays Rosie, had good chemistry with the male role. I hosted auditions with Victoria present in order to run through the scripts and include her in the process. We had one choice but he could not fit in the schedule, so

we went with Paul Oruck who plays Greg. He was sweet and different from the other two actors. Paul learned some signs for the role, and I thought it worked great because his character is kind of clumsy but trying his best. Paul was able to easily improvise the nervous/clumsy role.

Segment one and two worked out well, until I had to find an actor to play John's mother and struggling to find someone. The first actor I wanted to hire was of Arab descent, because John's character was going to be Middle-Eastern. There were few actors available for the mother role. The main actor was not able to commit to the film, so I had to find another main actor. I switched to someone of Asian descent. It was important to me to make sure there was variety of ethnicities in my film. It was even harder to find an Asian woman to play the mother role. I got in touch with one of my classmates who knows people who are involved with Reel-Asian (a Toronto based artist-run centre) and got in touch with a woman who is not an actor but was willing to be involved. I'm really grateful she was able to come, and she did surprisingly great, better than we thought, but we did have to work and practice a little bit before.

I had no problem hiring Deaf main actors for each film, they are wonderful. Elizabeth who plays Megan is a professional actor, mostly in theatre. She had experienced having a hard time finding acting roles and a good agency. She played Megan's role really well. Victoria was willing to give more of her time for auditions to make sure she felt comfortable with the male actor. She enjoyed doing this project and we got along really well. She was able to play Rosie comfortably, even though she has hearing parents in real life. She understood Rosie's situation. Clarence (the actor who plays John) is Oral in real life, he was able to play John with no problem. His experience of speech therapy and growing up without sign language were great for the role. He learned ASL

later in life. The only difference from the narrative is that his parents like that he is learning ASL. Although at first they were not sure, they ended up supporting it.

II. Crew

Nathan and I directed together, and it was great team work! I would tell the Deaf actors what to do through Sign Language and understanding Deaf people culturally. While Nathan would direct the hearing actors. This happened during shooting which I find interesting, the collaboration between Deaf and hearing individuals. Nathan helped with the Deaf actors. It was so a cathartic experience working with Nathan, who integrated both Deaf and hearing methods in the collaborative work.

As for the crew, knowing that my Advisor suggested having a team, I hired Robin Bailey to be my production manager, Nathan Hughes-Berry as my Co-director and screenwriter Mana Bijandgoodarz, as on-set photographer. I also had some volunteers. I was happy to find a few George Brown College interpreter students who needed volunteer hours working in the Deaf community. Keeping the team small and simple worked out well since most of the shooting I had done were in small spaces. Robin and I picked up a few other roles to make things work such as lighting, set design etc. Nathan and the volunteers helped with the sound boom and other technical needs. I am grateful to have had an amazing team.

III. The Process of Filming

When I was arranging the shooting days, it was tight but we made it work. All the shooting went really well. Rosie's story took four shooting days, because the bedroom is at a different location from the kitchen in the scene. It all worked out well. I was worrying about shooting at a nightclub but I worked it out. Some of the actors were sick when we shot the kitchen as well bedroom scenes but I was glad they still showed up and got it done! The car scene was challenging because we were struggling to find an actor for it. In the end we had all the actors on set. I knew I needed to have a street without traffic, I thought of my aunt's house where she lives in a quiet neighbourhood which was perfect. The woman who plays the interpreter in the film is actually my interpreter. The speech therapist, I knew her from when I was young and she has her own space for her business, this worked out as the perfect space to film. As for the interview scenes, I have been involved with Silent Voice, an organization established in 1975 that supports Deaf people across Canada, for fourteen years as both a Camper and Counsellor. My colleagues at Silent Voice allowed me to use the space to film an interview scene. I'm grateful that they allowed us to film there. It's a great organization that has helped and supported the Deaf community for many years.

Most parts of the shooting went well, the only struggle we had was with the sound. We were able to rent a boom -stick, the technology was temperamental and would work some days and not work others. We did our best to work with what we had. The camera itself had a small microphone as well so it also worked. This might not have been the best approach but I have used this experience to learn that the sound work is a challenge for me, and next time, I will hire a professional sound person who can adjust the sound as needed.

The 5% includes the various modes of communication. My intentions are to maintain the integrity of the characters' experiences and methods of communication without having to compromise their identity. I did not hire ASL coaches, but in my next film projects, I intend to work with ASL coaches in order to evaluate their roles in film production.

Post-Production

As I start with editing, I put the video together and over the editing process was able to sit down with Nathan again to have his feedback and support on the editing. I learned more of his vision and style in editing which was a good experience for me. Working with Nathan I found that I liked his style and perspective, so I mixed his vision with my style of editing. With the Deaf vision I wanted to make sure we really kept the Deaf perspective at the core of the work.

Sometimes I would have to remind Nathan about that as an important consideration, and he was always very respectful and patient with the process and me. Another thing I learned about my process was that when there is so much footage it got harder for me to decide which footage to use. I have so many good shots I could use but had to remove some in the end. There is a long version of the work where I needed to cut some scenes to tighten it up. I found the feedback from John, Mary, Barbara and Brenda was helpful in making decisions on cutting the footage.

I wanted to use editing to transition from a story to other story in a non-linear way. I wanted to cross-cut between scenes, going back and forward between each character. It was tough to figure out the cut and open and transition orders.

Considerations of a Second Project

I considered creating a series of films for *The 5%*, or possibly doing a documentary film on Elizabeth Morris and her family. Her family is unique because her older brother is Deaf but does not sign. He uses the oral method of communication. Her older sister is hearing. Elizabeth herself is Deaf, and uses both American Sign Language and voice as her methods of communication. Elizabeth also has a younger brother who is Deaf and autistic, and he only uses sign language. In this lived experience, there are four forms of communication and language in one family, a great example of uniqueness and intersectionality. It was so fascinating to be there and meet the family. I intend to make this familial experience my next project. Because of her lived experiences and her professional acting Elizabeth assumed the role of Megan in *The 5%*, a role well suited for her. Megan is a great character for Elizabeth because she went through so many frustrations finding jobs. Some jobs she was lucky to get and other jobs she wasn't as lucky. She is an actor who gets very little opportunity in acting world because there are not many auditions held for Deaf roles or a role that would be flexible to have a Deaf actor play for.

Conclusion

The 5%, three stories, three characters and one film. *The 5%* is a film that reflection on the true stories of Deaf individuals in our society today. These lived moments show the lived experience of Deaf people navigating life in a predominantly hearing world, capturing interactions between the Deaf and Hearing people. This film is an artistic hybrid docu-fiction film a sample of lives lived. *The 5%* gives a different perspective on every D/deaf person with sound and variety person because we are not all the same. Rosie is profoundly Deaf, living in a deaf home, Megan is deaf and uses her voice, speaking a little. John grew up speaking learning sign later in life. The process of developing this project has been immensely powerful and, I had a wonderful team to work with as well as a team of supporters. I learned so much from making this film that I will embrace for the rest of my journey.

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Appendix: On-Set Photographs

