Deaf Communication Awareness

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Deaf Communication Awareness

By Emily Grace Cruz Amponin
A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design

School of Design
College of Art and Design
Rochester Institute of Technology
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Thesis Approval

Deaf Communication Awareness

Thesis Title
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Fine Arts
The School of Design I Visual Communication Design
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Abstract
Whenever a Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person or a group of deaf people converse with people who aren’t deaf, they know various communication approaches such as writing notes on paper or phones, basic gestures, talking clearly, or lip reading if they grew up with an oral method. A Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person may have hearing devices: hearing aids or cochlear implants, or they have none of these hearing devices. The Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people are trying and willing to communicate with their relatives, employees, customers, classmates, or instructors.

However, people do not look at a Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person or a group of deaf people – they glance away and become distracted by their surroundings while conversing in a noisy or quiet ambiance. A Deaf person still needs to look at a person or people’s faces to read lips or facial expressions while conversing. Some people would talk fast or not speak clearly, not having gestures while not looking at a Deaf person. People don’t realize the created communication barriers are the experiences deaf people face daily. They would assume a deaf person is an expert at reading lips. [1] “Some deaf people can read lips (although studies have found that only 30 percent to 45 percent of what is said is generally understood), while others benefit from communicating via pro-tactile ASL.” Still, deaf people struggle to communicate with people.

Keywords
communication, design, visual, typography, deaf, hard-of-hearing, awareness
Dedication

To my *pamïlya* and friends,
Salamat/Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement to pursue my dreams. You were supportive and encouraging when you were told I had a vision and a dream of teaching a class. You were smiling whenever I talked or learned about projects at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). You witnessed me growing and sharing my accomplishments.

To Ernest Roszkowski,
Thank you for being my mentor and for the opportunity to work with you as your mentee for Graphic Design & Typography II during the fall semester of 2022. You were willing to teach me whatever I had to know as an adjunct faculty at Visual Communication Studies (VCS) in NTID.

To professors at Visual Communication Design (VCD)- Jason Arena, Mike Strobert, Anne Jordan, Daniel DeLuna, Joyce Hertzson, Joel Rosen, Alicia Ross, Adam Smith, and Deborah Beardslee,
I am grateful for your guidance and support at VCD. You saw the potential in my projects or assignments, and I will not forget your encouragement to push myself further while working on projects. Without your guidance, support, and feedback towards my projects or myself, I would not have been able to be where I am today!
The Problem Statement
The D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people had to work harder, such as lip reading, asking to repeat, and assuming which words people were saying while conversing with people. People need to understand and be made aware of the experience and how difficult it is for D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people to deal with daily communication barriers. They do not realize the dialogues they say to the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing people, such as "I'll tell you later,"; "Can you read my lips"; "Nothing. Not important"; "Do you understand" and not repeating what they say could hurt the deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people could feel they're not belonging in a conversation or do not have enough attention while conversing.

Solution Statement
To help the people to understand the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people's experiences by showing the designs of typography portraits with dialogues that a Deaf person had been saying or "hearing" often. Encouraging people to be aware and understand the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people's communication struggles is to create typography portraits with dialogues from a deaf person's perspective. The dialogues are the common responses that any deaf person says while conversing with people: asking to look at a deaf person, needing a repetition of a conversation, a deaf person rejecting to read lips, and wanting to know after being informed to be told later. Each typography portrait has the typeface, Arial Black. Arial Black had the boldness and straightforwardness that could capture people's attention. The typography portraits added hats and hairstyles to show personalities while the colors were used in negative emotion psychology: yellow as Aggression and Irritability then, red as Aggression and Frustration, black as Depressing and Negativity, and white as Emptiness and Barriers. In addition, a Deaf Point-of-View video was possibly the strongest aspect to have people aware.
Deaf Communication Awareness: Critical Analysis and Summary

People meet D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people for the first time or a few times. Some of them are willing to try to interact with D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people, while some hearing people may not be willing to due to several reasons such as nervousness, do not see the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing as equity, not being ready, or training, and more. At the same time, the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people grew up learning how to interact with people who aren't deaf and not familiar with sign language. Several D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people grew up with different communication methods: sign language, oral, or sim-com. Our ears are deaf, and we depend on visual communication.

D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people know many approaches to communication, for example, a) writing notes on paper or phones, b) basic gestures, c) using video-phone relay, and d) lip reading. To help people know what they must know about communication with the D/deaf and hard of hearing by showing or telling the Dos and Don'ts.

One of the approaches to communicating with a D/deaf and hard of hearing is ineffective, which is lip reading. D/deaf and hard of hearing were often asked to read the non-deaf people's lips. Accordingly, the School of Public Health at Boston University participates in research on communication and accessibility for the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people in the Deaf Community. They needed to improve the health care system for the Deaf Community by collecting data from the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people.

Furthermore, the School of Public Health found "only 30 percent to 45 percent of what is said is generally understood," [1] in their research, and this result showed that Deaf people could read the lips in small numbers. In addition, this article mentioned some deaf people prefer to have ASL interpreters to communicate with. The important part is providing accommodations while conversing with the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people.

[3] One of my typography portraits has the "Can you read my lips? No " [Appendix C, Typography #3]; the lip reading and movements had various forms of the lips that looked alike. The pace of the speech could be fast, moderate, or slow. D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people have to assume which syllables, letters, or words in a phrase a person is saying based on what they can see in the speaker's mouth. For example, a person converses with a D/deaf or hard-of-hearing person, saying, "To be you!" Then a D/deaf or hard-of-hearing person reads the speaker's lips, thinking this person said "scooby-do" while trying to do the best to understand the content of a conversation. [3] Then Better Health wrote, "Lipreading cannot make up for the hearing that has been lost. It is not possible for a person to consistently understand everything that is said by lipreading alone," The lip reading has limitations, and people aren't aware that lip reading has limitations.

During IMAGINE RIT 2023, forty-one participants completed my Deaf POV survey while watching a Deaf POV. In one scene in the Deaf POV, a brother confronts a POV person and begins to converse.

A question box popped out, asking, "Are his lips clear to read? Can you read his lips?" Then the participants completed the survey, showing that 78% could not read the brother's lips. The numbers proved that lip reading isn't always clear to understand while conversing and having eye contact.

I observed several participants' reactions as they read the questions and realized they struggled to understand the lip reading.
To prevent the lipreading method, people who aren't deaf need to write papers with a pen or show text on the phone to communicate with a D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing person. They could make gestures that resemble a bit of American Sign Language.

My second typography portrait [Appendix C, Typography #2] says, “Look at me when you’re speaking!”; the two “O” letters represent a person’s eyes. Having eye contact could be generally awkward. People who aren’t D/deaf or Hard-of-Hearing can hear everything, such as conversations, voices, noises, music, and any sounds, without looking at each other. That is an advantage for them. At the same time, it is a disadvantage for the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people. On the other hand, having eye contact is normal for D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people. They had to stare at the people’s lips or facial expressions as they read.

[2] Therefore, eye contact is important and builds respect in Deaf culture. People who aren’t deaf are conversing with D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people; they should pay attention to the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people and include each other in a conversation. For that reason, the D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people would be aware or feel they are part of the conversation and know what to do in a situation instead of being left alone. Some D/deaf and Hard-of-hearing people need to be assertive professionally or emotionally and stand up for themselves to get attention.

One of the forty-one participants at IMAGINE RIT learned about deaf communication awareness and was an elementary school teacher. She had no idea that having eye contact with D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people is necessary. She wanted to inform her elementary school students to be aware of the communication between non-deaf people and D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people. So that could help her elementary school students’ future occurrence of meeting a D/deaf or a Hard-of-Hearing person to interact.

My third typography portrait [Appendix C, Typography #1] says, "What did you say? Say again." Non-deaf people converse with a D/deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person in a busy environment, family gathering, friends’ rendezvous, or meetings. A D/deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person misses less, half, or most of the conversations. They ask to repeat the dialogue or ask, "What did you say?" Because they need to know information or a recap of the conversation. Unfortunately, non–deaf people usually reply, "Never mind," or "It's not important," and "I'll tell you later." [Appendix C, Typography #4] That worsens the self-esteem of a D/deaf and Hard-of-Hearing person. [4, 5] Two authors wrote the experiences of having a Deaf relative or individual, and one statement hurts their esteems – "Never mind." It caused a D/deaf and hard-of-hearing person to feel unimportant or belonging in a conversation.

Teresa Kazemir, author of Never Mind, It’s Not Important = Never Mind, You’re Not Important, wrote a rule of not saying “Never Mind” for her family, so her son won’t be left alone. [5] Her family members gave him access to understand the conversation with each other and other people. Her son decided to be part of the conversations when he became interested or not interested in it. I could relate to this experience when I took classes in college, sometimes, I stared at other people’s chatting, and my ASL interpreters asked me if I wanted to know what the conversations were about. I made a decision not to be involved in the conversations. Sometimes I wanted to join the conversation to tell other students my thoughts about the content or topics. Whenever I return home, my family members still have to include me in the conversations so I wouldn’t be left alone.
Conclusion
Deaf communication awareness will spread more in the USA. Nowadays, several people become aware of deaf communication; they prepare themselves to converse with a D/deaf or hard-of-hearing person or people at any workplace, restaurant, family and friends gathering, and more. They make eye contact with a D/deaf or hard-of-hearing person while conversing. Basic sign language, similar body gestures, or writing notes help to continue the communication. They ensure to provide accommodations that a D/deaf or hard of hearing person needs.
Clear Objectives: The environment could’ve been anywhere, such as public transportation, shopping, educational schools, organizations, or companies buildings. The demographic is various on gender and age. This project aims to encourage people to be aware of communication with D/deaf and hard-of-hearing people and encourage them to communicate in different ways.

Data and Impact: IMAGINE RIT happened on April 29, 2023, at Rochester Institute of Technology; my thesis project encouraged people to participate in my survey. Forty-one participants engaged in the survey as they watched a video of a Deaf POV with no audio, which was part of my thesis project.

95% did not understand a conversation with a sister. They share the emotions as their responses to a question of having a conversation with a sister — confused, completely lost, tough to understand, and more. [Appendix C, figure 6] A scene of a brother and a sister conversing about a brother’s work required him to work overtime, and forty-one participants couldn’t understand what was happening, resulting in no idea what the siblings talked about. [Appendix C, figure 8] It led to the next question, “What would you do?” and each participant wrote their responses. Most of their responses asked the siblings to communicate via text messages, repeat the conversation, and slow-talking. [Appendix C, figure 9]

In another scene of a brother talking to a deaf person in a Deaf POV video, forty-one participants realized the lip-reading was ineffective. They struggled to understand a brother’s lips as they stared at his lips to understand the conversation—78% as less clear to read the lip-reading. An overwhelming scene showed the siblings hurrying to get into a car and have a serious conversation. The participants had various responses: 1 as completely understood and 5 as completely lost—63% were completely lost while 7% completely understood.

The results proved that no one was aware that Deaf communication was important. It also proved the participants were left out and had negative emotions and thoughts as they watched the Deaf POV. Once they finished the Deaf POV, they talked with me as they realized that communication with the D/deaf and hard of hearing is important to be aware of.

User Involvement: Forty-one participants were involved in my Deaf POV survey, a part of my thesis project. It impacted them as they realized several parts of communication with a deaf person are important, especially eye contact, and need to be part of a conversation. It influences and adjusts their conversation styles whenever they talk with a person or group. One of the forty-one participants shared thoughts with me; he didn’t know having to repeat the statement or involve a person in a conversation was important because he thought people could hear. He understood why repeating or involving a person was important for D/deaf and hard-of-hearing people. In addition, he asked if this could apply to anyone—deaf or not. I shared my response— it could apply to anyone because everybody will lose hearing as they grow older or unexpectedly that their cochlear or hearing in their ears gets damaged.

Design Considerations: Professor Ernest Roszkowski was one of my thesis advisors involved in my thesis project most of the time; he is a hard-of-hearing person with long-time design experience. He observed my thesis project and pointed out the keys for improvement. He explained the feedback towards typography, portrait animation, and a deaf POV.

Typography portraits: Between August to December of 2022, I had gone through several concepts for typography: two different portraits, a proximity, and a lip shape. Professor Adam and Mike encouraged me to go further on the typography concepts, especially the portraits. They saw the potential in the typography portraits.
Each typography portrait has the typeface, Arial Black. Arial Black had the boldness and straightforwardness that could capture people’s attention. The typography portraits added hats and hairstyles to show personalities while the colors were used in negative emotion psychology: yellow as Aggression and Irritability then, red as Aggression and Frustration, black as Depressing and Negativity, and white as Emptiness and Barriers.

I contacted a few deaf and hard-of-hearing friends for their thoughts on color psychology and typography portraits. They gave me several statements related to communication between a deaf person and a hearing person in a deaf POV or experiences— "I'll tell you later,"; "Can you read my lips"; "Nothing? Not important,"; "Do you not understand," and more. I chose which dialogue D/deaf and hard-of-hearing people often said to match with my thesis project.

The Deaf POV required a script and a storyboard to understand the scenario. I contacted my triplet siblings and a same-age cousin in the Chicago suburbs to ask if they were willing to participate in my thesis project. Thankfully, they sent me several videos that I could choose to show a deaf POV. Overall, the typography portraits and a Deaf POV were effective, and these works showed the importance of knowing deaf communication awareness.
Appendix B

References and Bibliography


Appendix A
Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation

DEAF COMMUNICATION AWARENESS

DESIGNER Emily Grace Amponin
PROGRAMS Adobe Illustrator, Adobe After Effects
COMMITTEE Mike Strobert, Adam Smith, and Ernest Roszkowski
Timeline January - April 2023

THE PROMPT
The Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people had to work harder, such as lip reading, asking to repeat, and assuming which words people were saying while conversing with people.

PROBLEM
People don't understand or aren't aware of the experience and how difficult for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people to deal with communication barriers.

SOLUTION
Design typography designs to capture people's attention. Use a point of view (POV) video to focus on communication from a deaf perspective. Encourage people to be in a deaf perspective and then try to understand the struggles while conversing.

TYPOGRAPHY PORTRAITS
Typography is shaped as faces while showing dialogues from the perspective of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people when conversing with people.
Look at me when you're speaking!

People would assume a deaf person is an expert at reading lips. Some deaf people can read lips (although studies have found that only 30 percent to 45 percent of what is said is generally understood), while others benefit from communicating via pro-tactile ASL [Boston University, 2018]. Still, deaf people struggle to communicate.
Appendix A
Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation

What did you say? Say again.

When Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people have a conversation with people, they ask this question, “What did you say?” - they need to catch which word the people say. They ask to repeat so they don’t miss the information from a conversation or want to ensure they understand.

“Never mind. Later” Tell Me.

They’re missing a lot, some, a few of information from the conversation. Importantly, they must know and feel they were part of the conversation. Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people get left out, hurt, or face barriers whenever people say:

- “Never mind”
- “We will tell you later”
- “It’s not important to know.”

TYPOGRAPHY PORTRAIT ANIMATION

Typography portrait animations behave as facial actions: eyes blinking and looking around, then mouth moving as talking.
A DEAF POINT-OF-VIEW

A deaf person interacts with siblings. But the deaf person struggles to converse with the siblings and needs to understand what's happening.

You

Isabelle! You keep looking away in back and forth. Look at me!

Audience Question

Guys, where are we going? And are we in a hurry?

Do you have any idea what the siblings are talking about?

The gray boxes represent you in a deaf person's perspective while sharing thoughts or dialogues. The red boxes represent Audience Questions to ask the viewers to answer these questions while watching the POV.
A Deaf POV Survey during IMAGINE RIT

During the IMAGINE RIT on April 29th, 41 people participated in my thesis survey as they watched my deaf POVs. The survey did not require demographics.

Men, Women, children (young to teenagers), and senior citizens got to experience and understand the emotions that the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people felt while conversing.
Appendix A
Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation

Conversation with participants

The typography and conversations with me influenced visitors and participants; they looked at me instead of looking at the ASL interpreters and not having to say, “can you tell her?” They talked to me as a normal person.

Another participant realized he missed so much information then he asked me for the actual conversation between my siblings. He wanted to think about and make sure the people he talked to got a good amount of information.

One of the 41 participants—a teacher at an elementary school told me about telling her students to be aware of communication between them and deaf people.

The Typography Portraits Stickers

After conversing with the participants about the communication and participants finishing the deaf POG or looking through the page, they took 1 to 4 stickers. Their actions showed me that they were impacted or influenced. Two of the four stickers were the strongest: Look at me and “Never Mind, Later.”

Process

Psychology Color Negative Emotions
Appendix A
Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation

Process

Psychology Color Negative Emotions

Deaf or hard-of-hearing people experience conflicting or negative emotions such as frustration, aggression, loneliness, irritability, and resentment. They get tired of facing these dialogues and being left out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Aggression and Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Empathy and Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Aggression and Irritability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Depression and Negativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early Development

In the early spring semester of 2023, I went through several experiments with typography that could represent a deaf person. The lip shape typography was getting to the point that I had imagined in my mind while it had a similar style as the typography portraits.

The typography of two people. Thank you and gibberish, was ineffective. The design wasn’t the accurate as I wanted it to have, representing a deaf person.

Two square posters of typography “What do you say? Nothing. I’ll tell you later,” and “If you speak, I can’t hear you. I speak in sign language.” Filled with actual conversation transcripts in the background weren’t working well—it was not meaningful or showing emotions. It had no empathy connection with a deaf person.

Typography Portraits Development

The lips typography was closer to what I expected, while it had a similar style to the typography portraits. In order to make the lips effective, combine the lips’ dialogues with the typography portraits.

I experimented with the typography with sketches to visualize the dialogues from a deaf person’s perspective.

Adding the hats and hair was effective, and these aspects gave the typography portraits personalities.
Appendix A
Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation

Storyboard for the Deaf POV

I reached out to my triplet siblings in the Chicago suburbs and discussed a Deaf
POV since these two grew up and understood my struggles.

Having my brother talk while his lips were not clear to read was a good decision;
that caught the viewers’ attention to realize the lips weren’t always clear in the Deaf
POV video.

My sister understood the annoyance of seeing any person who was talking while
looking anywhere instead of having eye contact. She was willing to imitate the
action.

Thank you for viewing!

Designer
Emily Sizoo Aponnin

Let’s collaborate and reach out!
emi.aponnin@gmail.com

Portfolio
emilyaponnin.myportfolio.com/

visit Emi’s portfolio
Appendix C
Screenshots (PNG, JPG)

Typography Portrait #1
What did you say? Say again

Typography Portrait #2
Look at me when you’re speaking!

Typography Portrait #3
“Can you read my lips?” No.

Typography Portrait #4
“Never Mind. Later.” Tell me.
Appendix C
Screenshots (PNG, JPG)

Do you understand anything that the sister just said?
41 responses

- No
- Sort of
- Yes

Figure 6

How would you ask the sister to give you full attention while having conversation?
41 responses

- If you could please make eye contact with me while you speak I will be able to better understand you.
- "Hey", then tap on her shoulder.
- maybe face to face look at each other?
- Please look at me while talking and use ASL with lot of light
- Eye contact and gesture or write on note app
- eye contact and face me
- stare at her
- Tapping shoulder and pointing to my eyes
- not sure

Figure 7

Do you have any idea what the siblings are talking about?
41 responses

- Yes
- No

Figure 8

If No, then what would you do? Write a short answer.
41 responses

- I would indicate that I don’t understand.
- Please, repeat what you said. Please text what you just said.
- use phone to print words
- text each other what they are saying
- I would write down on note app to ask them what’s going on.
- shake my head and hold up my hands
- give them my phone
- Ask them to slow down
- i would try to find a way to convey that I wasn’t understanding

Figure 9
Appendix C
Screenshots (PNG, JPG)

Was the brother's lips clear to read? Can you read his lips?
41 responses

1 as less clear to read his lips. 5 as a lot clear to read his lips.
Figure 10

1 as completely understood. 5 as completely lost.
Figure 11

Describe your emotions and thoughts while watching the Deaf
POV
41 responses

I didn't experience frustration but I can imagine how frustrating it could be for a deaf person trying to understand what is being said, especially when it's important information or the people speaking are people that they care about to know what they are saying.
Relatable!
It's very interesting through this view
Frustrating that the person was not understood
Unsettling because I'm being kidnapped.
Frustrating
I feel like I'm the one who cannot join the conversation, I cannot connect to people

Were you able to understand what's going on in this situation?
41 responses

1 as completely understood. 5 as completely lost.
Figure 11

Describe your emotions and thoughts while watching the Deaf
POV
41 responses

Completely separate and uninvolved
I felt super frustrated and left out
I felt like it was hard to figure out what they were saying
Thinking how hard communication can be and that hearing people do not understand what they can do to help
It was really interesting being put in the POV of a deaf/hard of hearing person, and it definitely made me think of ways to be more inclusive while communicating with this group
Frustrated, concerned.
I was very confused and felt excluded from the conversation. Then felt like we were in an emergency when we were leaving

Figure 12
**Appendix C**  
**Screenshots (PNG, JPG)**

Describe your emotions and thoughts while watching the Deaf POV

**44 responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confused, concerned, lost, upset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>frustrated, confused, left out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was frustrating, I had no idea what was going on and they would communicate clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt like there wasn't an opportunity to respond because I had no idea what was being said but I was expected to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated and left out, as if I was a fly on the wall they would occasionally look at:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 13**

Describe your emotions and thoughts while watching the Deaf POV

**44 responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very confused and anxious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it was frustrating and confusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super confused and a little left out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion, frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt disconnected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused, a little worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confused, concerned, stressed, worried, lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was completely lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was confused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 14**