

INFSCI 0410 Human Centered Systems Dr. Robert Perkowski

Sizzle

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Table of Contents

Title Page.....	Page 1
Table of Contents.....	Page 2
Introduction/Problem Space.....	Page 3
Team Dynamics.....	Page 7
Lo-Fi Prototypes.....	Page 8
Hi-Fi Prototypes.....	Page 8
Evaluation.....	Page 16
Attribution.....	Page 16
Closing Section.....	Page 17

I. Introduction/Problem Space

Introduction to Product

Our product, Sizzle, is an app that allows users the ability to post their complaints for other users to view and interact with. By creating a dedicated community designed for sharing complaints, we hope that users feel heard and validated, while also taking the pressure off their close friends or family who may be drowning in complaints they cannot relate to. Users are given the ability to “add fuel to the fire” (a fire icon, the equivalent of “liking” or “upvoting”) or “put out” (a water icon, the equivalent of “disliking” or “downvoting”) every post, pushing popular complaints up in the rankings, allowing more students to relate and interact with more relevant complaints. Posts that stir up the most controversy will be moved to the Hot Takes tab, which allows users to interact with interesting complaints they may or may not agree with.

Target Audience

Our target audience is college students, and for the scope of this project, particularly students at the University of Pittsburgh. While other people could download and use Sizzle, the content is location-based and would likely be filled with college-related complaints including classes, professors, specific locations or food, etc.

We also thought this would be a good demographic for our app because of social isolation and distress that comes from college, particularly in a world with COVID-19. In a cross-sectional survey provided to all students at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in June 2020, almost two-thirds of the students reported clinically significant depressive symptoms, and students who were self-isolating were more likely to report those depressive symptoms (Giovenco). While the study was self-reported, we believe it does provide valuable insight into our target audience’s needs and the problem space.

Problem Space, Purpose, and Research References

Being in college can be isolating, challenging, and exhausting. Students may find themselves in classes with no one they know, pursuing majors not populated by their friends, or even with few close friends at all. This can make it hard for students to find someone to turn to when they need to vent or complain in order to get some much-needed validation and stress relief.

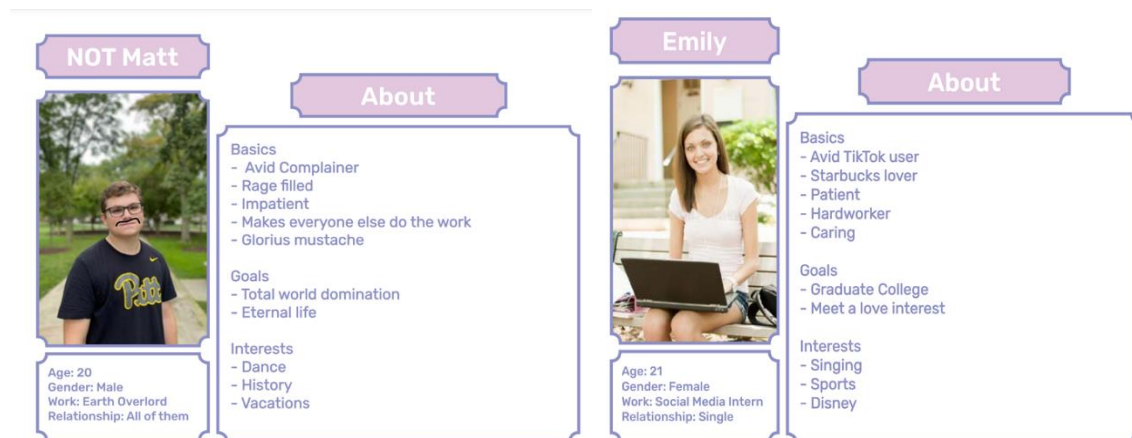
The article “Social isolation and psychological distress among southern U.S. college students in the era of COVID-19” comes from a study conducted by Danielle Giovenco and her colleagues. The study investigated the effects of social isolation on psychological distress. An online survey was conducted that looked at 4,356 college students and found that when under psychological distress it is best for a student to reach out to peers and not remain socially isolated. When socially isolated the effects of psychological distress worsen.

Giovenco, Danielle et al. "Social isolation and psychological distress among southern U.S. college students in the era of COVID-19." *PloS one* vol. 17,12 e0279485. 30 Dec. 2022, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0279485

Data Gathering Techniques

We utilized several data gathering techniques to inform our design, including personas, qualitative user feedback, and quantitative feedback.

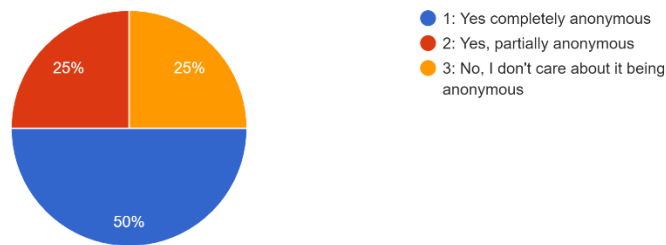
We began by creating two user personas and assigning them to two of our internal groupmates, as this was when our product was still in its infancy. Our actual personas were a little playful and silly, but coming up with the interview questions made us really think about what we wanted our app to be. We came up with questions like: Would you want non-Pitt students on the app? How do you feel about offering a complaint on a social media platform? How do you feel about anonymity (or lack thereof)? These were useful to stimulate our thinking surrounding the proposed product. Below are the two user personas we created.



We then had the opportunity to interview peers outside of our group. Interacting with our groups was particularly useful because it gave us insight we could not see, as we were becoming too close to the product. We formalized the interview questions from our in-group interview and created a google form to receive some more quantifiable values. We got a decent spread across the answers, that if we were to iterate again in the future, it might be useful to have just a few more people to see where the trends fell. However, we were glad to see that our interviewees were willing and excited to share a complaint via an app. We've included a few snapshots from our Google form survey below.

Would you feel more comfortable if the app was anonymous, either completely or partially?

4 responses



Originally, we planned on the app not being anonymous. However, because 75% of the respondents felt more comfortable with at least partial anonymity, we decided to make the entire app anonymous to please a larger portion of our target audience.

Do you have any final suggestions for what you want to see in the app that you think would make you more inclined to use it/would be fun?

3 responses

A page for top complaints

Some sort of Pitt-disses-esque compilation would be so fun .

something like the twitter gif search, but better and with more meme content?

We also valued the suggestions that respondents offered. We took the “page for top complaints” suggestion and the “some sort of Pitt-disses-esque compilation would be so fun” suggestion and combined them into the “Hot Takes” tab previously mentioned.

Slides

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OrHQedotHnHxBd9y1sd2eKwaSRRP0D53-oIV9ki8zPo/edit?usp=sharing>

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-BD7d5dHBg>

Competitive Product Analysis

Yik Yak: An app where people also value anonymity when criticizing or complaining. It also has a similar upvote/downvote system to Sizzle, as does Reddit. Yik Yak was pulled from app stores in 2017 due to harassment and bullying issues, which we worried about with Sizzle. However, Yik Yak made a successful return in 2021 that still allowed users to post

anonymously. It is different from Sizzle because it is not exclusively for complaining or venting, and also Yik Yak is currently trying to force migration to Sidechat, which markets itself as a private college community where students can have specialized “sidechats.” At the University of Pittsburgh, it has not become very popular and also serves a different goal than Sizzle.

Twitter: Twitter is not exclusive to complaints, although they do often come up. Sizzle differs in its primary goal as a location-based venting app, and also in other features. Sizzle will not have Twitter’s low character limit, threads, or non-anonymous profiles.

BitterWorld: The closest product to our app currently on the IOS App Store seems to be BitterWorld. It only has 7 reviews, but the concept is similar to our product. You share complaints and rate your experience via a skull and crossbones rating system, and then you can also react and comment on other posts. However, it differs because the user has to share audio, video, or a photo with their complaint. It is also not anonymous, and the reviews complain much of the content is not in their chosen language and has a lot of spam.

Constraints and Problems

While we want to allow our users to vent and have their personal experiences and feelings validated, it is also important to us that Sizzle does not become a place that harbors hate speech, harassment, and flat-out bullying. With the surge in the power of Artificial Intelligence, we’d like to use AI to moderate Sizzle in an automated way. Then, if users think their post or comment has been removed unfairly, they can submit a request to have a human moderator review the request. Same could be done for spam posting.

We also only had a few weeks, so there was no way to continue iterating and testing every new idea. If time permitted, we’d like to have done more user testing with our hi-fidelity prototypes, as our original prototypes on Google Slides were not as appealing as we wanted them to be, and we believe it impacted the users’ experiences in a way they could not overlook.

Other Problem Spaces

Pitt Student Health Portal: We still believe that major updates to the Pitt Student Health Portal are needed. However, because of the sensitive information and basic utility required of a medical system, we decided we didn’t have any major innovations in mind and room to explore new, fun design ideas.

Crowd Meter for Recreation Facilities: Again, this is not a bad idea, and could actually prove useful to students trying to go to the gym at less busy hours. However, there is not too much to implement here, and it also relies very heavily on students actually checking in and rating the crowd, which seems unlikely if they are not incentivized to do so.

We chose our product for its unique concept and ability to be playful with ideas and theming. We also thought it would be relevant and interesting to share with our peers, and therefore our target audience.

II. Team Dynamics

We primarily worked collaboratively, so we did not assign each other specific roles. More about our specific contributions can be found in the attribution section.

To accomplish collaborative work, we used group collaboration tools like Google Slides, Google Docs, and Figma. Google Slides and Google Docs are your typical power point and word document editors but allow for easy sharing between accounts. Users can operate both at the same time as their team members. Figma is like Google Docs and Google Slides but affords users more freedom. Figma has much less constraints, so it was great to use for Hi-Fi prototyping.

There's been many aspects of the project that we disagree on, but we ultimately work it out via compromise or with a brand-new idea. If we couldn't decide between two options, we usually scrapped both ideas for something we could all agree on. Example: Heater vs. Heated. We reached a standstill on that decision, so we all decided it would be better to switch to an entirely new name that we all liked, which was Sizzle.

III. Product

List your major features of your product sorted by most important to least important.

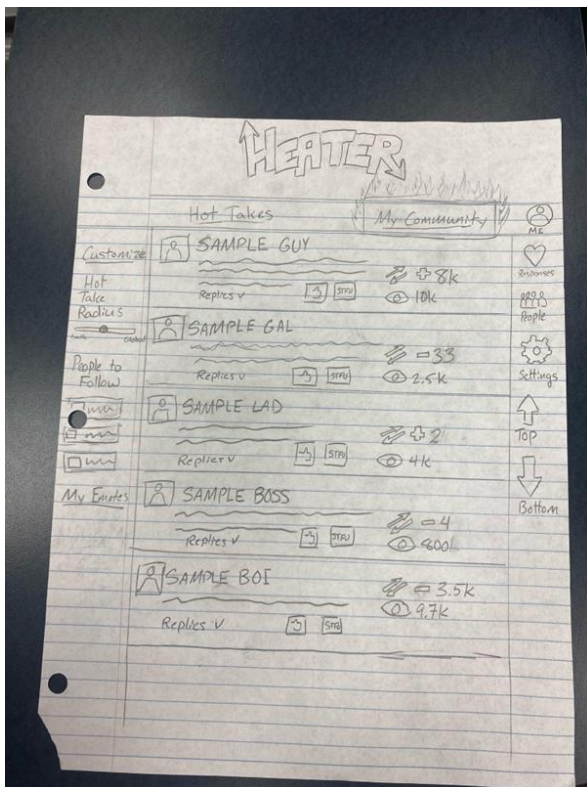
- Complaints
- Likes and Dislikes
- Community and Hot Takes sections
- Search bar
- Post tags
- Edit profile
- Sharing posts
- Saved posts
- Spam detection (AI)
- Moderating posts(AI)

Our top three features add a special value to the user because there are no apps that were created with the intention of user complaining. In addition, our like and dislike features work hand in hand. Unlike some popular social media outlets, likes and dislikes on Sizzle have much more of an influence on your post's reach. Finally, users can switch between people in their area,

OR they can view posts that are sparking massive arguments globally in the Hot Takes section. Users are given a choice of what they want to see.

Our product is related to Joy of Use and Joy of Life. For Joy of Use, we tried to make the signifiers obvious for the major features of the app to satisfy the Direct into Action and Hassle Factor principles. To avoid the Learning Delta, we modeled our app after other similar apps and are using icons that are popular for their accepted uses. For Joy of Life, life can be frustrating; our product allows users the opportunity and space to vent. This would create a shared community at Pitt where people feel like their voice is heard.

IV. Lo-Fi Prototype



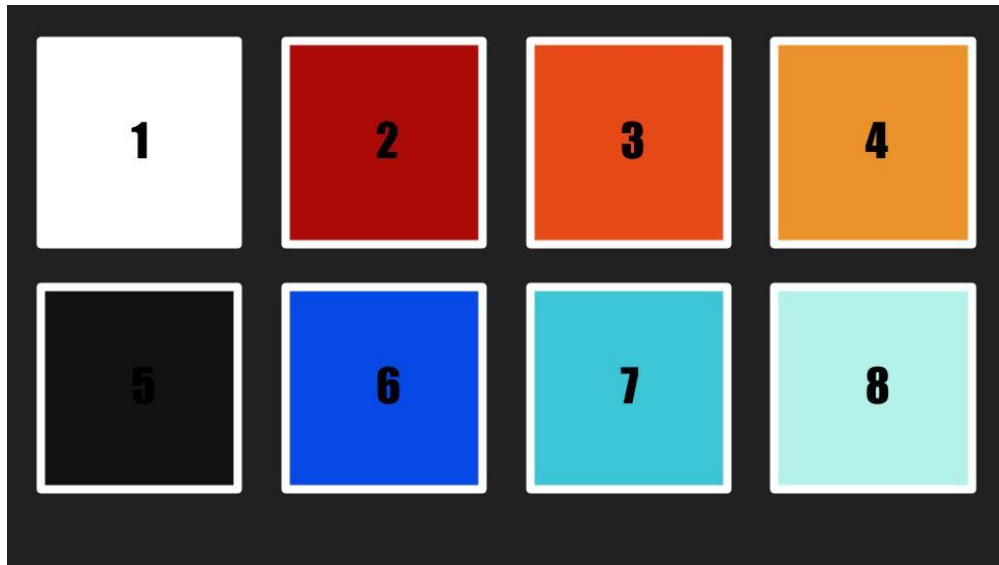
During our first iteration, we spent the class completing the lo-fi prototype, deciding to name the app Heater. This process itself generated discussion about our basic product amongst our team. Towards the end, some of our group members asked members of other groups if they would use our product and if they thought the UI was inviting and looked like something they would want to use.

They agreed that this prototype felt cluttered, likely due to the two sidebars and all the information in the middle of the screen. We agreed to simplify this for future iterations by putting this information elsewhere in different clickable icons.

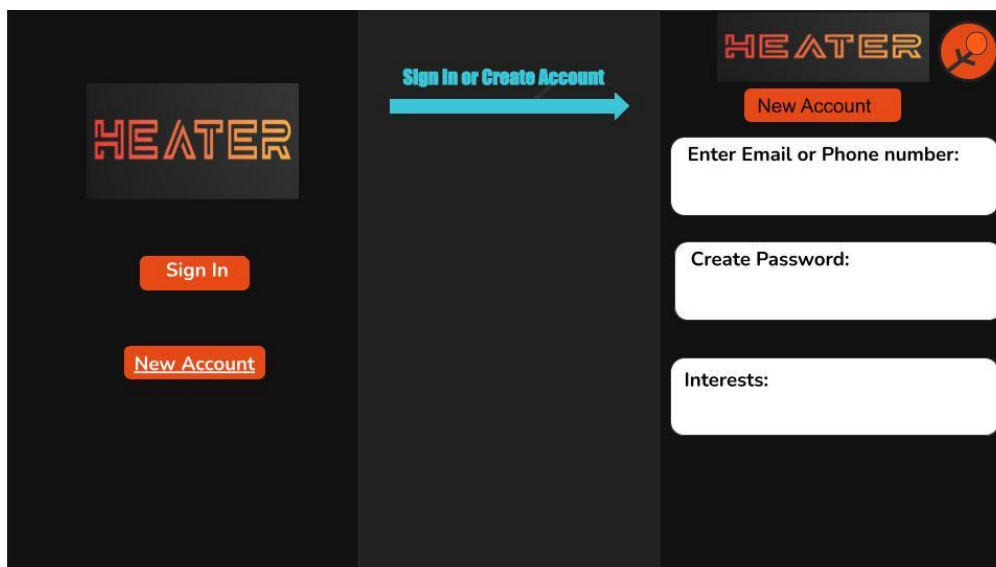
We decided to draw the lo-fi prototypes on a piece of paper. This led to discussions on finding a better tool for our hi-fi prototypes. We used PowerPoint when doing the hi-fi prototype. However, we ultimately switched to Figma moving forward.

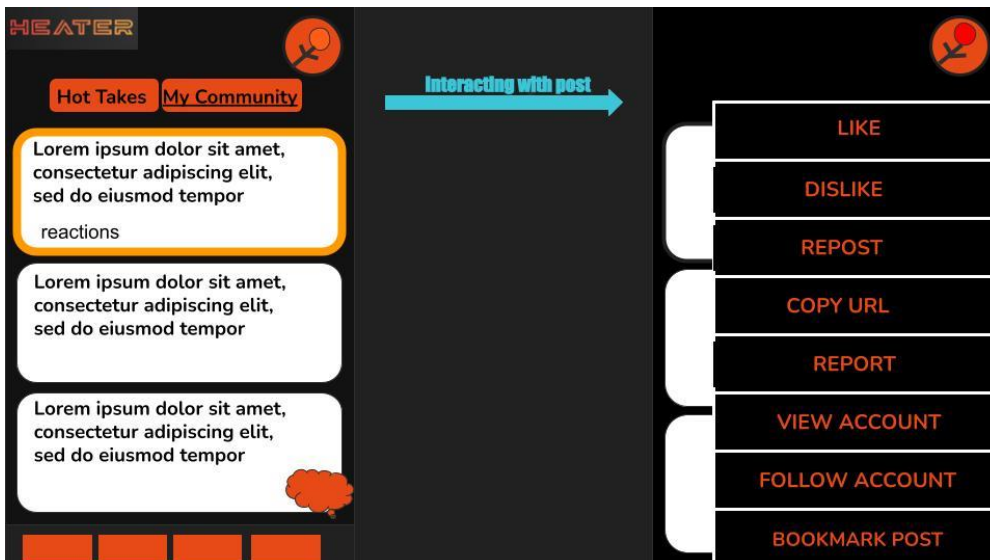
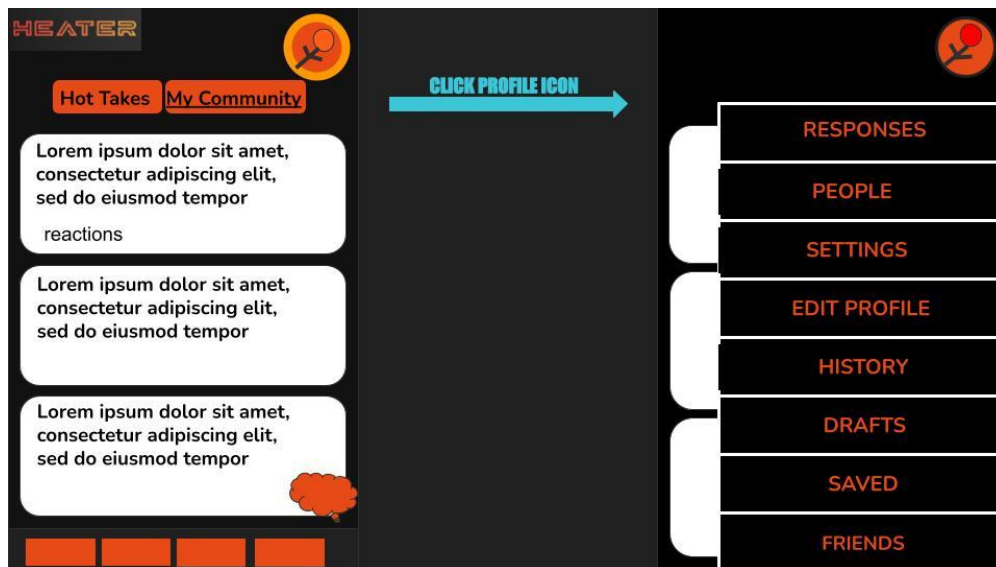
V. Hi-Fi Prototypes

We originally designed our hi-fi prototypes in Google slides, before moving over to Figma for easier designing and for an overall better design.



Deciding on the color scheme was fun. This made us have discussions on what colors we could associate with venting and a heat theme, while also focusing on making it aesthetically pleasing. We decided on reds and oranges for our primary colors, and blues as our secondary colors.





Creating the “interacting with post” screenshot prompted us to add a share feature and a report feature.

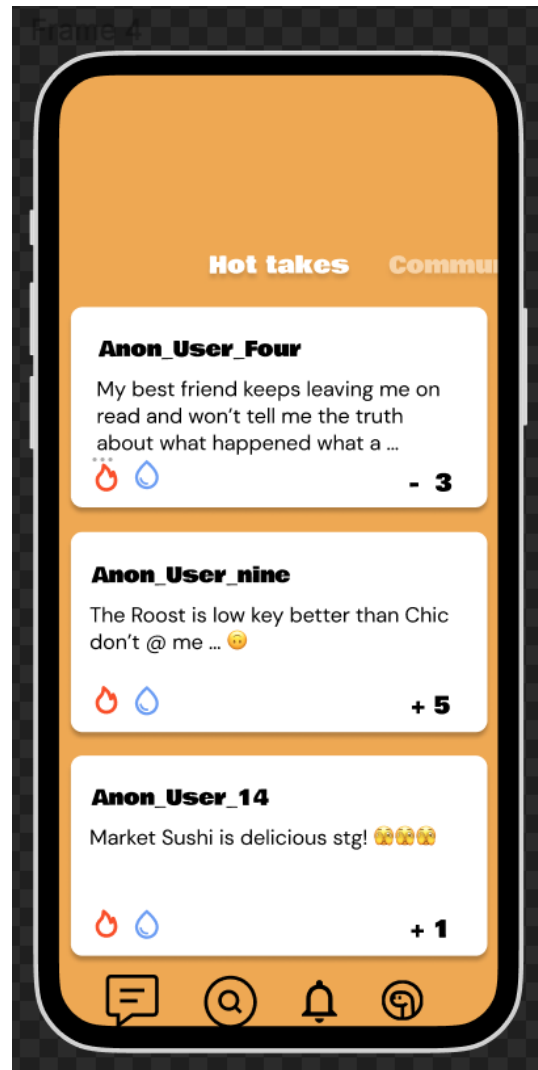
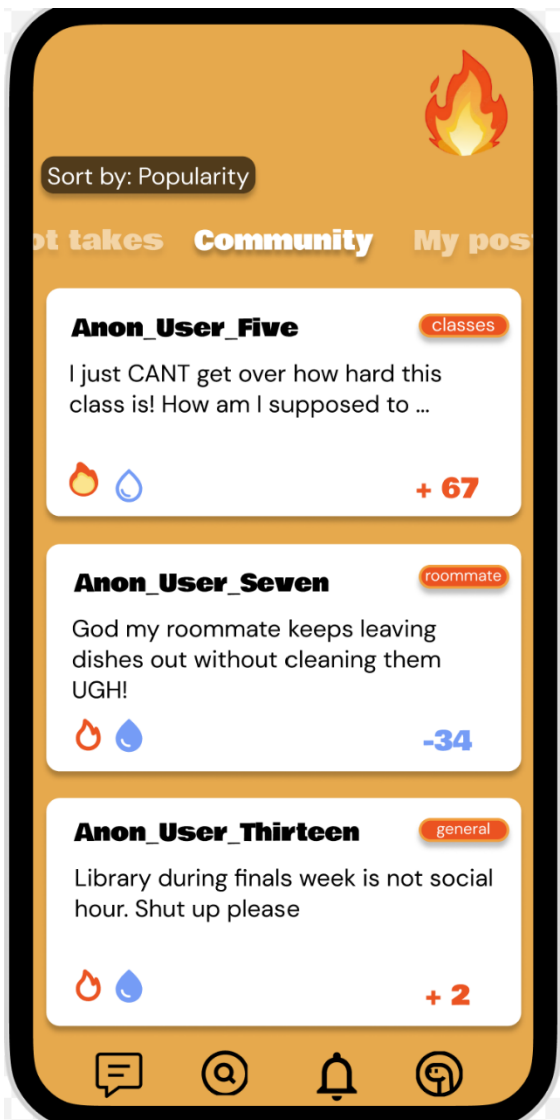
Using PowerPoint to create these, we felt it wasn’t enough to create what we really were imagining. That’s when we tried another tool. We used Figma to create our final high-fi prototypes. Figma allowed us to get a lot more detailed with our work. We now had access to all sorts of new fonts, tools and other features to enhance the visualization of our work. Of course, as one of us got more detailed in one specific area, the rest of us always had something to either critique or applaud. The main thing we changed from the first hi-fi prototypes to the final hi-fi prototypes was the color scheme. We felt like the original was very dark and mysterious. This new prototype is warmer and inviting. We believe in the long run this will encourage more and more friendly users. Another change we made was to the name of the app. Sizzle seemed more

memorable and exciting than Heater. Besides that, just little detail changes here and there made the high-fi prototype come out well!

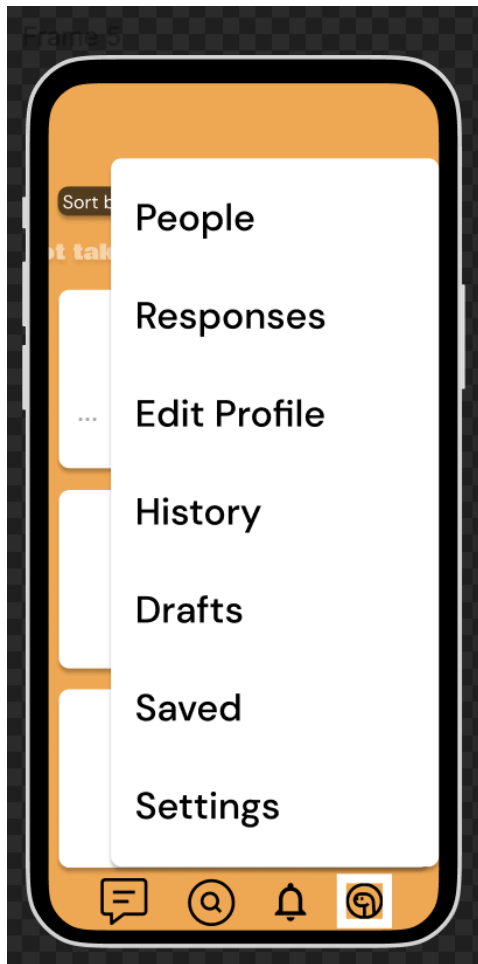


We changed the Sign In screen. Instead of having buttons that say, “sign in” and “new account” we used a person symbol and lock symbol followed by a blank space because users will know exactly what the app is telling them to do.

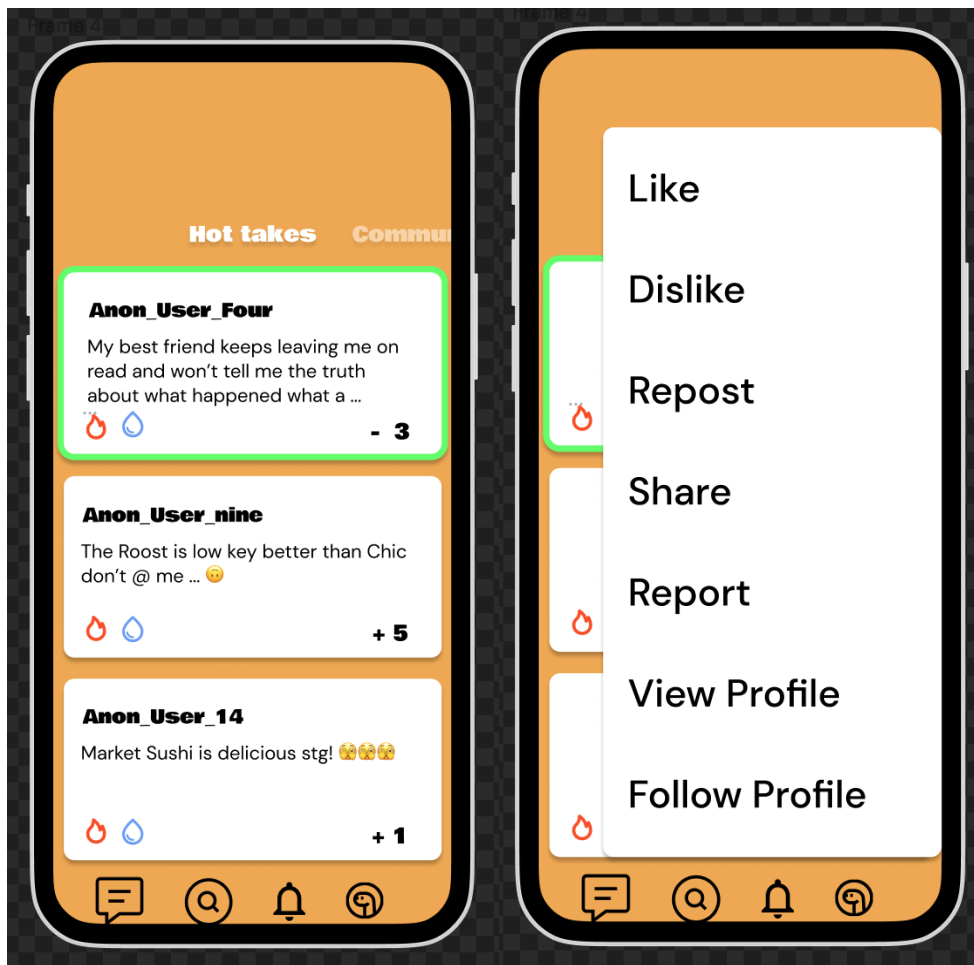
Feed:



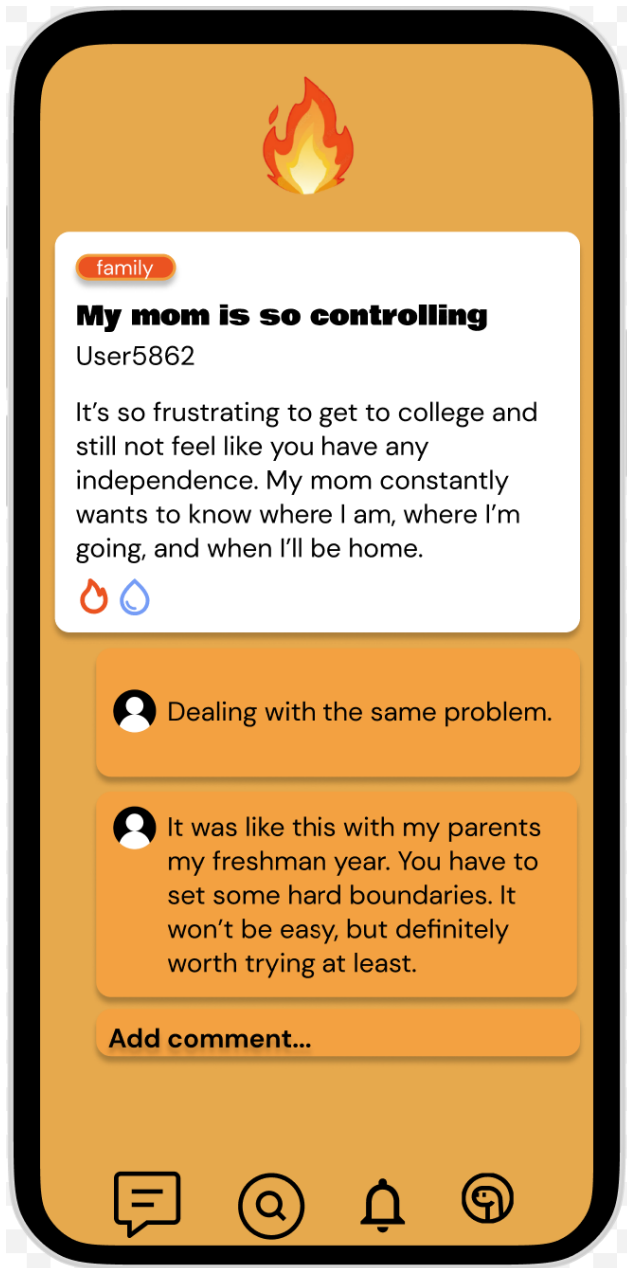
Clicking on Profile icon:



Interacting with a Hot Takes post:



Opening a post and being able to post a comment



VI. Evaluation

We took an iterative approach to designing. We started with our basic idea and getting our peers' ideas on what they thought of the overall concept, which was useful for deciding some of our main features. We then were able to present them with a lo-fi prototype and questionnaire, which allowed us to gain even more insight. And finally, we could present them with our hi-fi prototype, which allowed us to do some final tweaking of the design to better fit the needs of our target audience.

Conducting evaluations after each step helped us get to our final product. That's how we were able to make our changes along the way. These can be seen when moving from our lo-fi prototype to both of our hi-fi prototypes. The name of the app and the overall design was also changed after doing evaluations.

VIII. Attribution

Alexis: During lab time, I scribed many of the the labs. I designed interview questions, interviewed people both in-group and out-of-group, and recorded all of the answers. I also collaboratively worked on feature ideas and design implementation, both lo-fidelity and hi-fidelity. I filmed and edited the video together.

Jerek: My contribution to this project remained mostly in the aesthetics. At the beginning of our Lo-Fi prototyping stage I came up with a color scheme for our application. From there, I helped across the board but put a majority of my focus into finding icons, colors, and fonts that created a welcoming environment.

Matt: I completed parts I – III of this document. (Introduction, Team Dynamics, and Product). During labs, I was often the first to bring an idea to the table. I also created and shared this document for the team to work on. I devised the idea to have likes and dislikes tied to one another. I also designed a large portion of the first iteration of Hi-Fi prototypes.

Justin: I helped complete parts of the Lo-fi and Hi-fi prototypes. I helped come up with some of our ideas and would also provide feedback on other ideas in order to get the best product. I also created a few of the slides in the PowerPoint.

Brandon: I completed the Lo-fi prototypes, Evaluation and Closing sections of this document. As for the final project, I assisted in making the first hi-fi prototypes and the final hi-fi prototypes. I

helped make the PowerPoint. I also gave suggestions on the app features and designed a couple interview questions.

IX. Closing section

Over the last month or so, we learned the process that goes into making an app and doing so in a group setting. The challenges we faced were like what real research designers face. It was good to learn a lot of the commonly heard UX terms (lo-fi, hi-fi, user scenarios, user testing, interfaces, paradigms, etc.) that will give us more background for future conversations and work. We also learned that feedback is great when designing, even if it comes from our professor, fellow classmates, or groupmates.

It was difficult to compromise with groupmates and put something together that everyone was happy with, but we learned how to work together. Our goal was to create a product that would find its success in a setting where stress is at its highest. We wanted the target audience to be younger, but also have real life complaints or issues. So, choosing college students was the way to go. We're curious to see your thoughts on this and if it could actually be a realistic product.