i get you

Understanding mental illness through personal stories
Erica Fearon, Marisa Kwiatkowski, Colin Gaffney, and Thorn Hall

Problem & Solution

People with mental health challenges encounter two common struggles. The first is understanding their own experience and how it relates to their illness. Is their experience of their illness "normal" compared to others with the same condition? How do others cope with this illness? In addition to understanding their own experiences and learning to cope with their illness each day, they also face the difficult task of helping their loved ones understand what they are going through. Yet how can they educate their loves ones while they themselves do not fully understand their own illness? i get you helps with both of these tasks through providing a platform for those with mental illnesses to share personal stories so that anyone and everyone can learn from viewing these stories. We hope that users find sharing their own stories therapeutic. We also hope that users of all backgrounds find viewing stories helps them better understand and sympathize with the experiences of others. Our platform, i get you, facilitates this two-sided interaction, allowing users to share, view, and react to stories about many serious mental health topics.

Task & Interface Scenarios

Simple Task - React to stories

We found that during low-fi and medium-fi prototyping, we got consistent feedback that users wanted a way to respond to the stories they were viewing. This was not initially a feature as we did not want to distract from the stories themselves, which are the main focus. However, we did eventually decide to implement user reactions and feedback because we heard from test users that they wanted to be able to see what emotions people had after viewing their story. Furthermore, our users voiced that reading certain stories brought up their similar personal experiences, and our users found value in adding these thoughts as comments to the story.

Users can react in two forms, by tapping an emoji button, or by posting a comment. The emojis are supposed to allow quick reactions as well as provide an aggregate for total user reactions to a story through the numbers posted below each emoji which tally the total number of users who reacted using that emoji. Users can also post a comment at the bottom of the page as well as view all comments posted by other users.
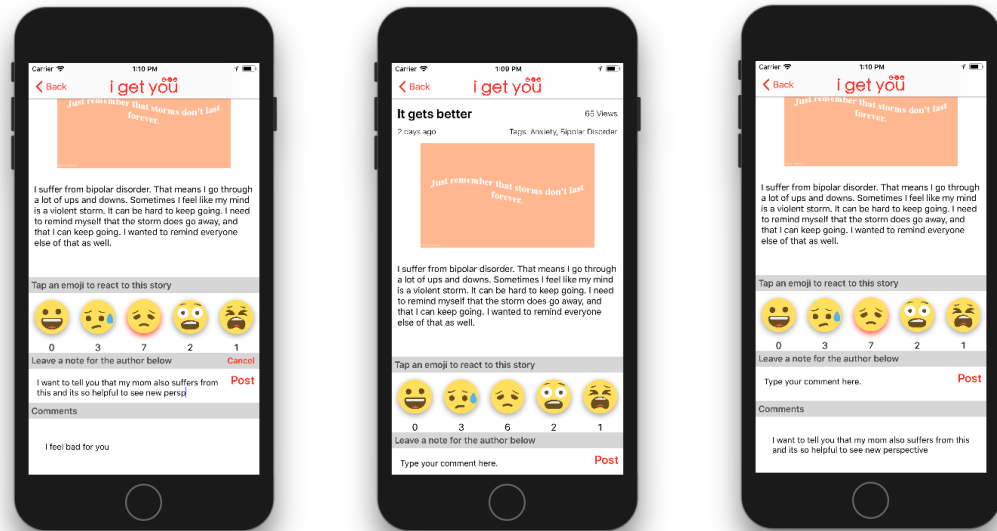
Intermediate Task - View stories

During our needfinding, we noticed a distinct lack of resources helping people to understand what mental illness feels like, and we also heard from several people that listening to their friends or family describe personal experiences helped them get new insight and perspective into these illnesses. Thus, we wanted users to be able to view stories shared by those with mental illnesses.
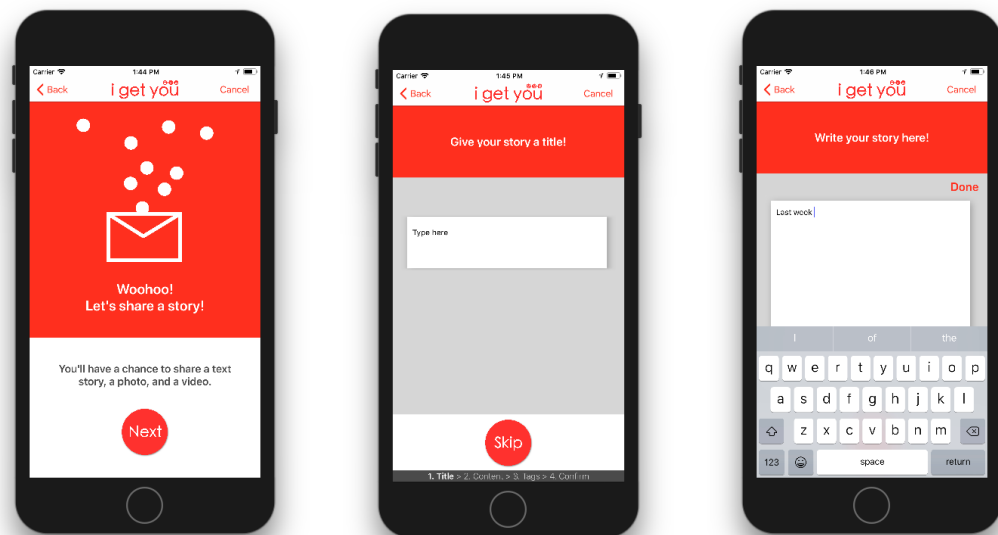
In this task, users can browse through stories in a screen that we call the Story Gallery. This is a feed of stories sorted by the date and time posted. Users can filter this list based off of tags we provide where each tag is a different mental illness or condition. Upon clicking on a story in the gallery, users are taken to the Story View, a page where they can view more information about the story including the additional media formats the author included.
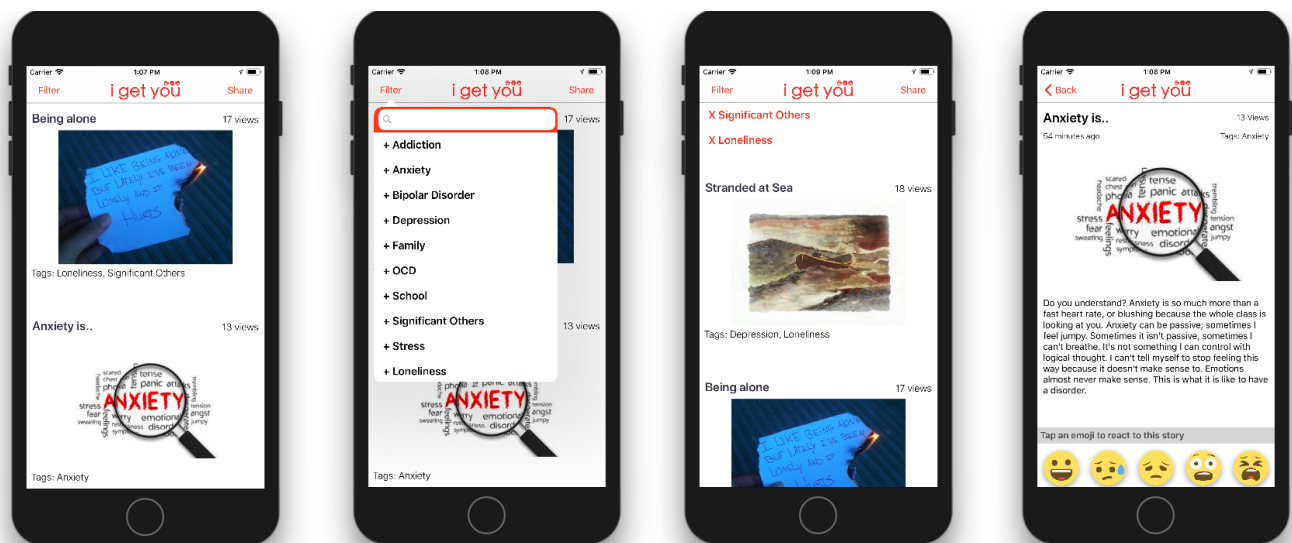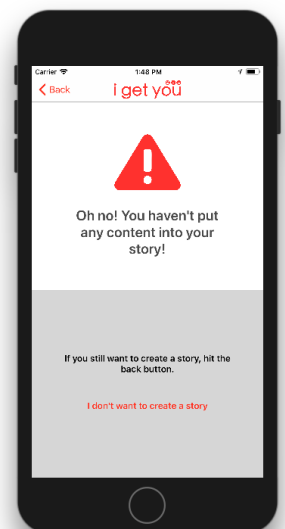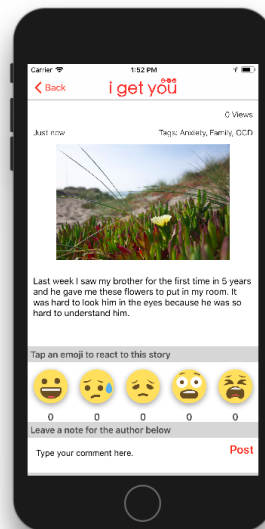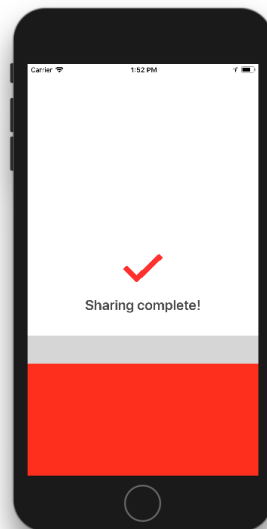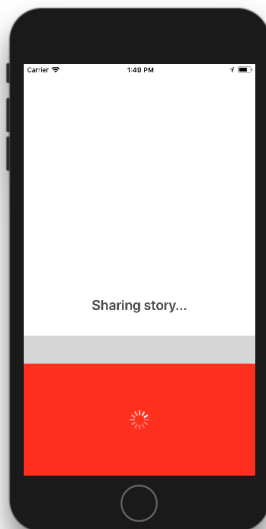
Complex Task - Share a story

Our most complex task is guiding users through the process of sharing their personal stories. This task is central to our entire app, because without shared stories, users cannot learn from our app. Thus, it is important that the sharing process provides users with enough flexibility to fit their desires with different types of media and allows them to express their own uniqueness. We aimed to make the sharing screens friendly and welcoming because we know that sharing about something as personal as mental illness can be tough.

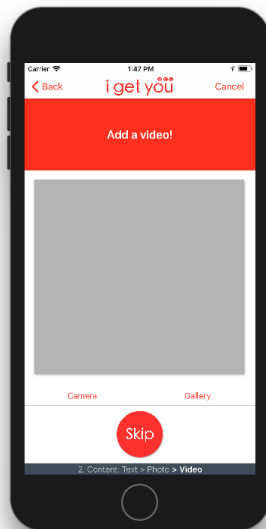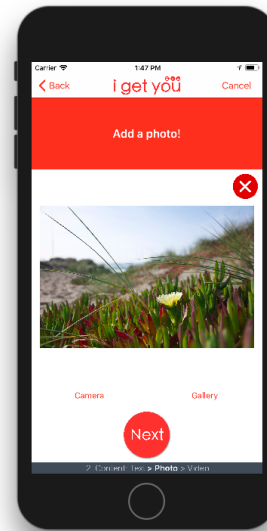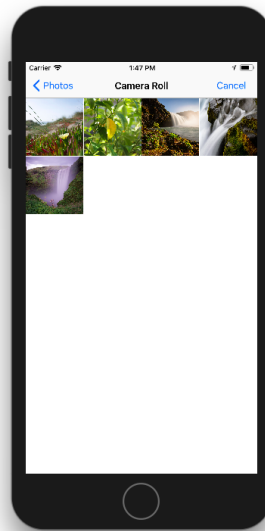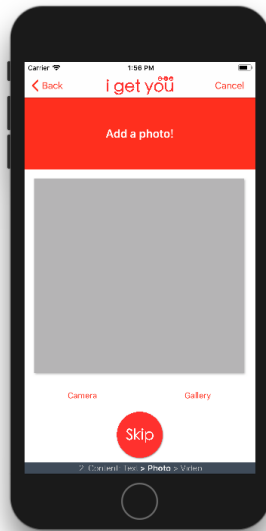Users can start the sharing process by clicking the "Share" button on the top right of the Story Gallery. At any point in the uploading process, the user can click cancel to go back to the gallery without posting the story, or use the back button to freely make changes to previous fields. Users are first guided through title selection and each different media option (text, photo, and video) to document their stories. On each of these screens they can add in text or the specific media, or can choose to skip this step and continue on. On the text screen they type in a longer text story that they would like to include, and on the photo and video uploading screens, they have the option to choose from their camera roll, or to take a photo or a video in the app. After selecting the media, they can use the red x button to remove the image and retry, allowing for more freedom and fewer constraints through the uploading process. After uploading media, they are taken to the tags screen where they can choose up to 3 tags for their story (but must choose at least 1 in order to continue. And then they are taken to the final sharing screen where they can make the final decision to post or cancel their story. Finally, when the user chooses to post a story, they are directed to the upload loading screen that shows success when the post is uploaded to the database. They are then transported back the gallery where they can see their new post added at the top. As an edge case, if the user doesn't add in at least one of text, photo, or video, they don't have a complete story and are instead taken to an error screen letting them know that they must add one in order for their story to be posted.

Screen 1 (Add a photo!):
Back · i get yoü · Cancel
Add a photo!
Camera · Gallery
Skip
2. Content: Text > Photo > Video

Screen 2 (Camera Roll):
Photos · Camera Roll · Cancel

Screen 3 (Add a photo! with image):
Back · i get yoü · Cancel
Add a photo!
Camera · Gallery
Next
2. Content: Text > Photo > Video

Screen 4 (Add a video!):
Back · i get yoü · Cancel
Add a video!
Camera · Gallery
Skip
2. Content: Text > Photo > Video

Screen 5 (Add some tags):
Back · i get yoü · Cancel
Add some tags to your story!
Minimum of 1, maximum of 3
search for tags · Cancel
Applied Tags
X Anxiety
X Family
X OCD
Available Tags
+ Addiction
+ Bipolar Disorder
+ Depression
+ School
+ Significant Others
Next
1. Title > 2. Content > 3. Tags > 4. Confirm

Screen 6 (Almost done!):
Back · i get yoü
Almost done!
Click the button below to post your story. You'll be able to view it in the Story Gallery and see how others react.
Share my story!
I don't want to share anymore
1. Title > 2. Content > 3. Tags > 4. Confirm

Screen 7:
Sharing story...

Screen 8:
Sharing complete!

Screen 9 (Story view):
Back · i get yoü
0 Views
Just now · Tags: Anxiety, Family, OCD
Last week I saw my brother for the first time in 5 years and he gave me these flowers to put in my room. It was hard to look him in the eyes because he was so hard to understand him.
Tap an emoji to react to this story
0   0   0   0   0
Leave a note for the author below
Type your comment here. · Post

Screen 10 (Error):
Back · i get yoü
Oh no! You haven't put any content into your story!
If you still want to create a story, hit the back button.
I don't want to create a story

Design Evolution: Major changes

Searching for tags/categories

The way we categorize our stories has changed significantly throughout each iteration of our design. In our low-fi prototype we displayed bubbles on a screen in an effort not to display "just another list." However, users told us that this was confusing, which made us switch to a traditional list in the medium-fi prototype. However, at this stage we were still using two buttons, one called "Filter" and one called "Other Topics" which had very similar functionality and which were confusing to users. Thus, in our final hi-fi prototype we decided to roll all filtering functionality into a much cleaner search bar on the Story Gallery page so that users are not confused and do not have to leave the main page (no fragmented tasks).
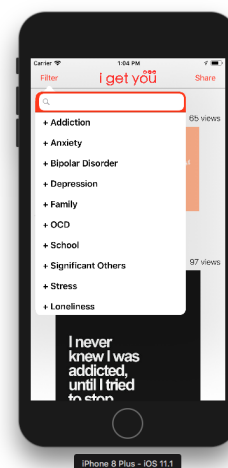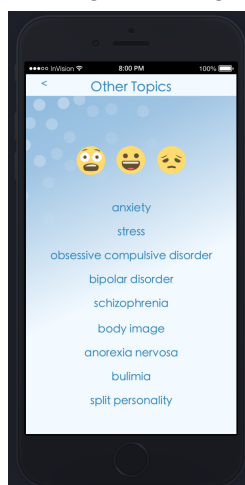

Sharing Process

We initially envisioned the app as only allowing a user to share one media format per story. During our low-fi prototype presentation, a few people expressed the desire to share stories in multiple formats, and we thought this was a good idea as well because a central value of our app is giving users the freedom to express themselves. Thus, we amended this for the medium-fi prototype and kept it for the hi-fi prototype, just with a bit of visual tweaking.

Furthermore, after receiving more feedback it became apparent that our sharing process was too rigid. Originally, we had the user select what formats they wanted to share, which from there would take them to different screens based off of what they had selected. If the user wanted to redo anything, it would be really tedious to go back and reselect everything, so we made steps skippable and more easily retractable.
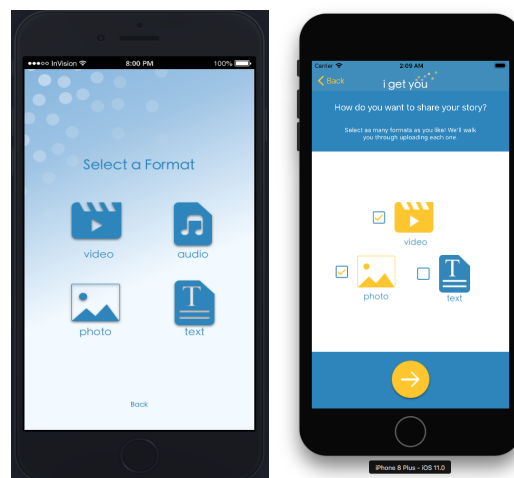
On the photo sharing screen, we added in the option to select a photo from the gallery or to take a photo with the camera, The design wasn't immediately apparent to us and this change was made in the final stages of the app.
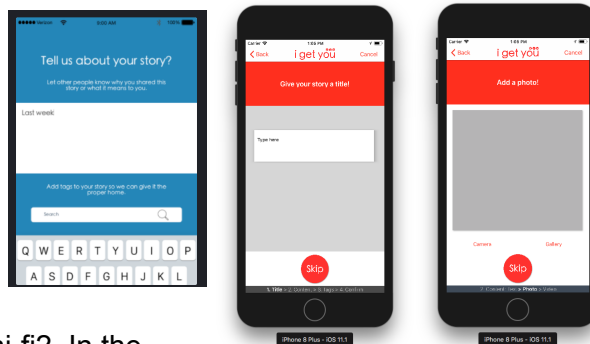
Story Gallery

The story gallery underwent a lot of formatting changes from medium to hi-fi1 and hi-fi2. In the medium-fi, users felt that there wasn't enough visual cue delimiting space between posts and blue text was not good, we we changed that. In hifi2, we removed a lot of color, copying a lot of Instagram's paradigms in their news feed page. We sized images and videos more dynamically as well, creating an overall more pleasing design.
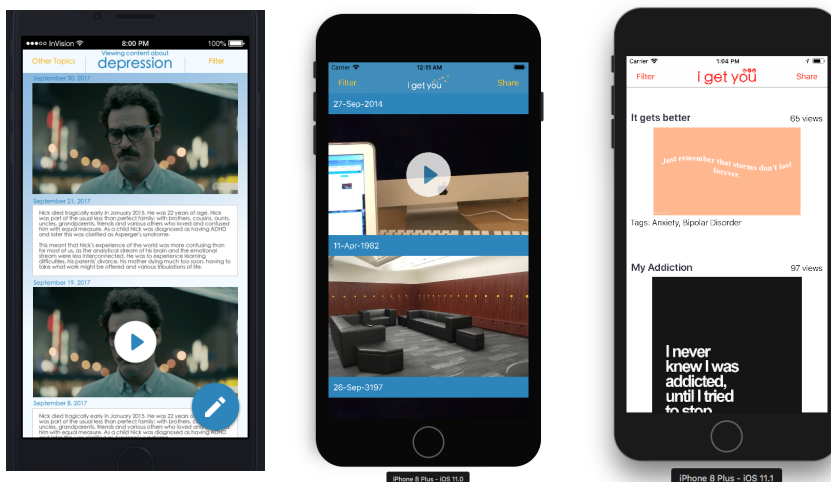
Reacting to stories

Our low-fi prototype initially only allowed users to react with an emoji as we didn't want to allow users free reign to add a comment because of all the potential abuses that could come out of that. However, several users told us they felt the emojis were limited, so we added in some pre-populated responses that users could select and add to each story in our medium-fi prototype. Users still told us that they didn't like how limiting these responses were, so we finally just implemented a comments section to give users full freedom.

We increased the number of emojis from low-fi to medium-fi, but users felt like this time we had too many, so we downsized that number in the hi-fi.
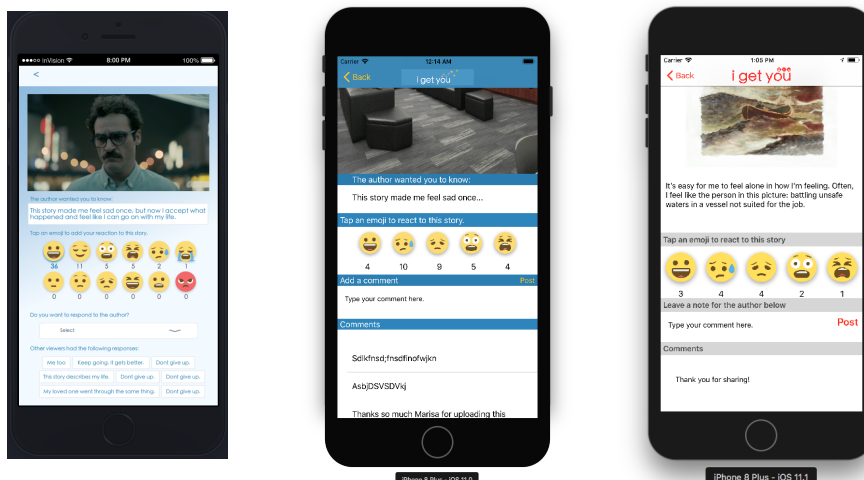
In the story view page, before we changed to blue, we made our design more intuitive with coloring and spacing from the first iteration of hifi to the second iteration of hifi. We also made the post button and emojis bigger.

Our Color Scheme
No one on our team has experience with graphic design, and thus we struggled with choosing and applying a color scheme that made our app easy to use. This can be best illustrated through our main story feed, which went through three notable iterations of color scheme which you can see below. The colors heavily influenced our other UI decisions, and as we cut pared down our color scheme more and more, we were able to simplify our UI as well. This turned out to make our app more more usable and user friendly.
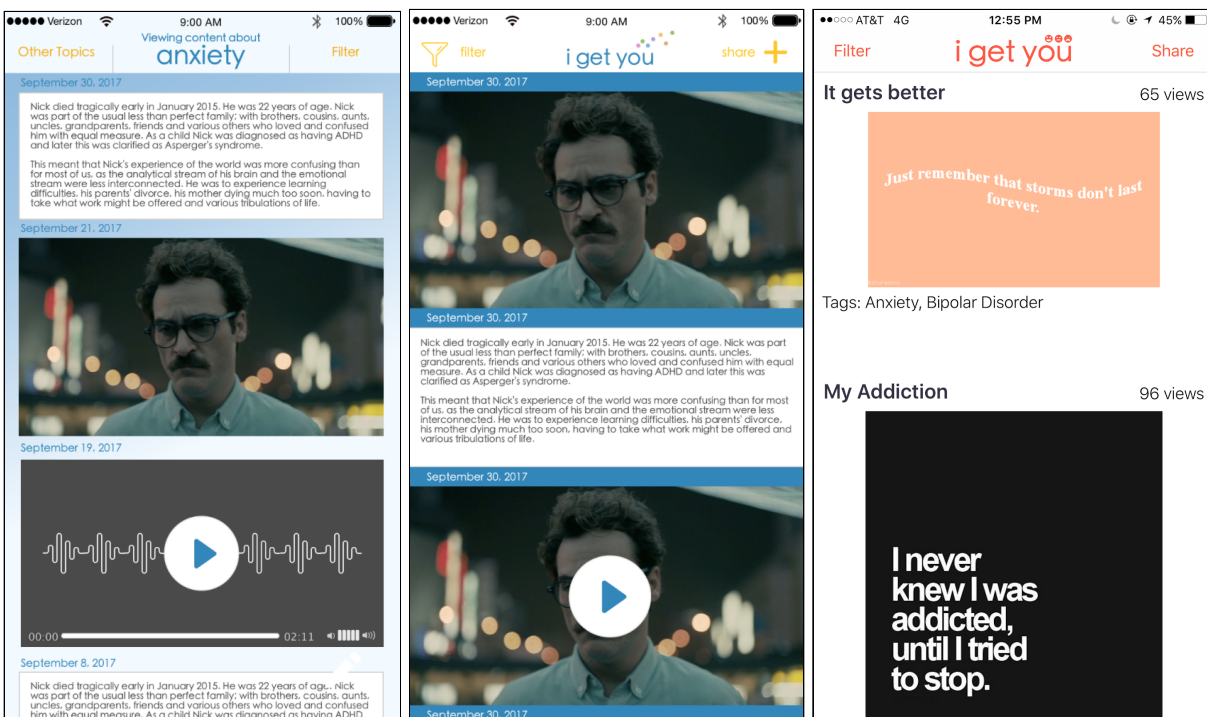
# Major Usability Problems Addressed

Before commenting on our heuristic feedback, we would like to point to our two Medium-Fi prototypes, the second of which was released two days after others students were told to evaluate our app. Thus, some of our evaluators gave feedback based upon our first version and some upon the second. We have attempted to match up the correct Medium-Fi version with the correct feedback.

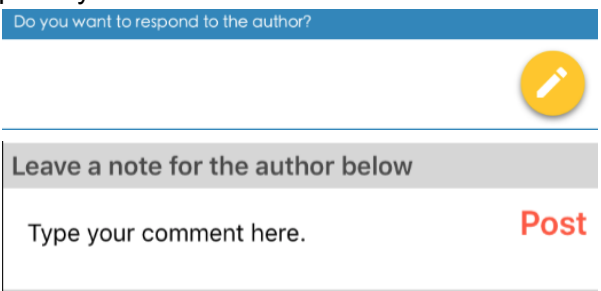We only received one piece of heuristic feedback rated a 3 or higher. It is copied below.

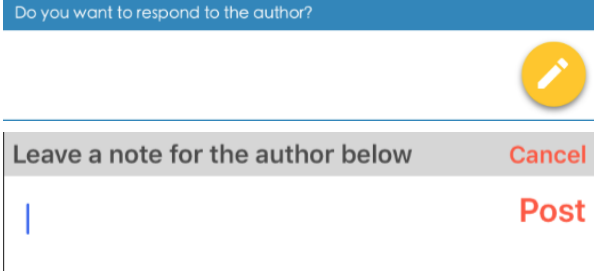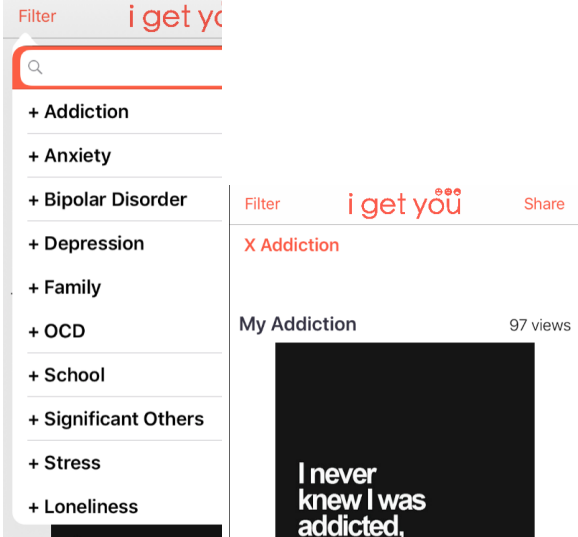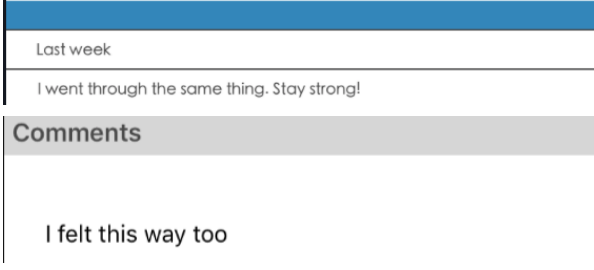*#7: H8 - Minimalist Design / Severity 3 / Found by C*
Home screen: We just now noticed that there are four different dates on the feed separating image stories from text stories. At first glance, I thought that there were only two items on the feed: two stories each accompanied by a picture. The blue dates are easy to miss against the blue background; Fix: better contrast between these two colors will allow for the dates to pop out more and better serve their purpose as dividers between items on the feed.
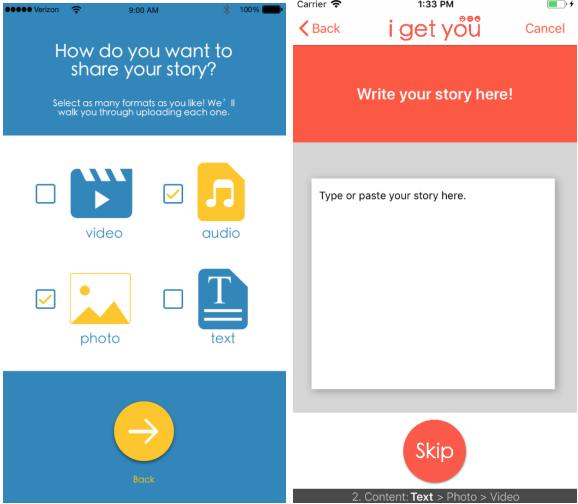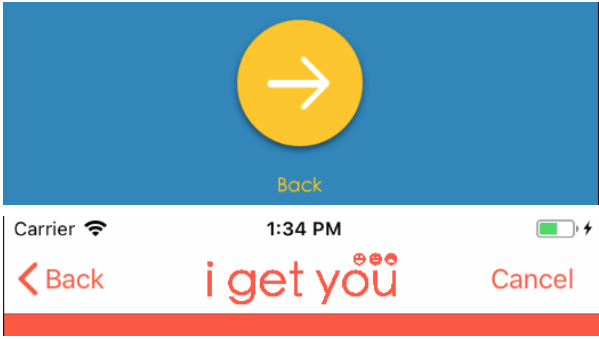
We did several things to fix this problem. First, we changed all dates in the feed to titles instead because we felt the dates didn't make people feel interested in the stories and want to view more. We also added text to show a story's number of views and tags, with the idea behind these changes again being to draw the user into a particular story. These changes, combined with the change in our color scheme and increased spacing between stories, all help to clearly separate stories on the feed. You can see the changes between our Medium-Fi and Hi-Fi below.
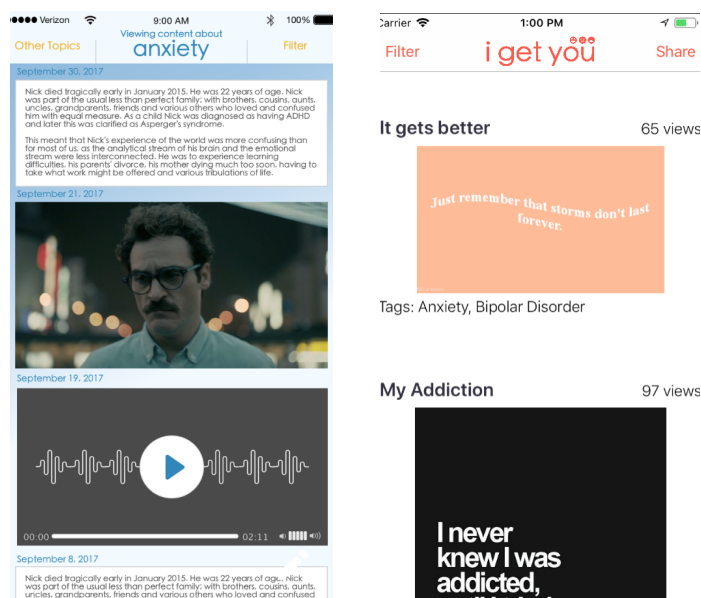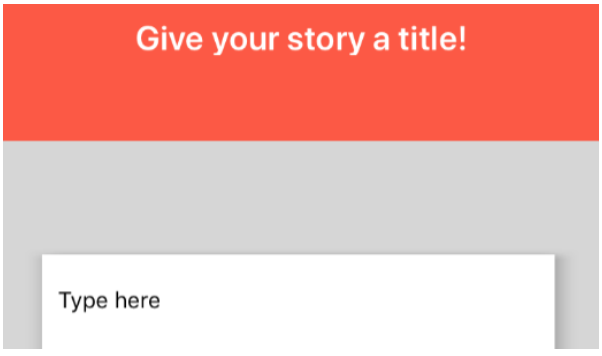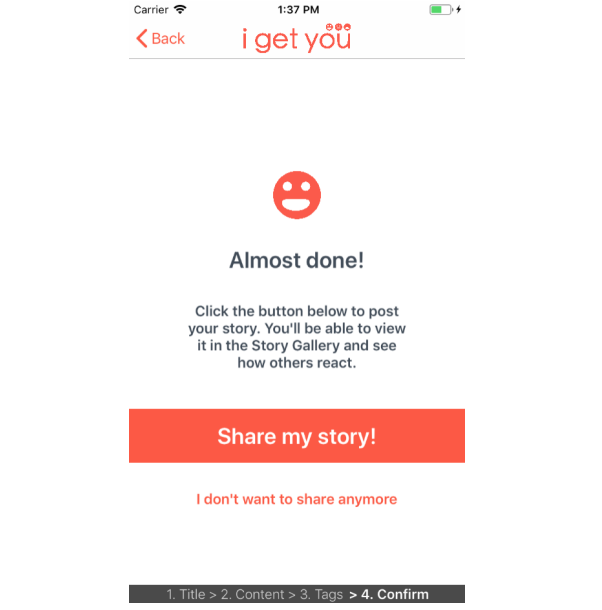
Other than this piece of feedback, we had no other feedback rated as high severity. However, we did still implement several of the low-severity heuristic fixes as time allowed. They include:

Heuristic	Stated Problem (paraphrased from our HE feedback)	Our Fix (including before and after screenshots)
#2: H8	Adding a response (ie. writing a comment): Writing icon is a bit too much white space.	Swap the pen icon for a "Post" button which posts your comment.

#4: H3	Adding a response: Can I cancel adding a comment?	Add a "Cancel" button to cancel the comment writing process.
#6: H1	Home screen (Adding filters): I'm not sure how to apply the filters. After pressing anxiety and addiction as filters, the search button looks like it will just search for more filters and pressing the filter button makes me think I will go back and not filter anything.	When you click on a filter, automatically apply it and close the Filter menu. The photo on the left shows the filter dropdown, and upon clicking "+ Addiction", I am taken to the image on the right where you can see the "X Addiction" tag at the top of of the screen.
#8: H6	Adding a response: At first I wasn't sure what the text on the bottom of the react screen was. I knew it was comments after a while, but at first glance I wasn't sure.	We added a header saying "Comments" to clearly delineate the comment section.
#9: H7	Sharing a story: What if, for example I was going to do just audio and photo, but after I put	We removed the page making users choose their formats and instead allowed them to choose their formats as they go and "Skip"

	my photo up, I decided I wanted to put a video on as well? Going all the way back seems tedious and seems like it will just destroy my progress.	formats they don't want to upload.
#10 & #11: H8 & H4	Sharing a story: Back button is a little hard to find Sharing a story: (Similar to the last violation): the "back" text is pretty close underneath the arrow	We moved the back button to the top so that it is more prominent, we made the text larger, and chose a higher contrast color.
#15: H8	Home screen: I think it's a bit repetitive to have the date at the top of every post.	This was solved by redesigning text and coloring on the main feed (see HE #7 at the top of this section).
#16: H10	Sharing a story: When I first went through the process of sharing a story and chose to share a text story (old version of the prototype), this additional step seemed redundant to me. Why would I want to include more text about a story I just wrote about? What more would I ever have to say here that I didn't say in the actual story?	We changed the "tell us about your story" text section to a "give your story a title" section to eliminate redundancy.

#18: H5	Sharing a story: The user might not realize that once they click the check box to share their stories, they cannot edit what they've written / they are not sure if that's the final step.	We added a confirmation screen which allows users to clearly choose to share, cancel sharing, or go back and edit their story.
#19: H3	Sharing a story (Undoing stories): If the user does click "share" and then changes their mind about sharing their story for any reason, there is no undo, delete or cancel button at this stage so that they have the freedom to withdraw their story.	This was fixed by adding a confirmation screen (see HE #18 above this). There is also a cancel button that allows users to cancel the sharing process at any point.

Prototype Implementation

We implemented our project using XCode to build our iOS app and Firebase as our database. We chose these technologies because we have team members who have used them before so it was easier to get started and leverage that expertise into teaching less experienced team members. In particular, using the XCode storyboard made visual design for the app much simpler than a purely programmatic implementation. Firebase also made generating dynamic story content more flexible and allowed us to rapidly stress-test the appearance and functionality of the app under various conditions. Initially, the chief challenge we faced was coordinating code changes through Github, but as we mastered this, we encountered difficulties working on the XCode storyboard concurrently, since the storyboard is encoded in XML format, and modifications to this file cannot easily be merged by Github.

Relatively few elements of our prototype were hard-coded and only minor Wizard-of-Oz techniques were employed. Most significantly, we seeded the database with an initial collection of mental health stories, given the obvious difficulty of finding real users to generate content. However, assuming a user base committed to uploading a certain volume of content, our prototype is fully functional, with no hard-coded data. All content can be dynamically uploaded and downloaded from Firebase.

Concerning future work, there are many minor usability enhancements to be made, as well as the potential for better integration with existing social media platforms. For example, progressing through a sequence of screens currently requires buttons, but the addition of a swipe-gesture recognizer would enhance the user experience. Furthermore, the option to share content to existing apps such as Facebook or Snapchat would enhance user engagement. Perhaps the most crucial feature to add would be a personal profile so that a user may more easily track the stories that she has uploaded.

Summary

Our initial vision was to design a way for friends and family to both learn about mental illness from others, and to share their own experiences, and this idea grew into i get you, a mobile app acting as a social media platform for mental health-related subjects. Key parts of our task flows evolved overtime, including making story sharing longer and more detailed and allowing users to react to stories in different ways. The final version of i get you offers a platform to enhance users' understanding for and appreciation of the intricacies of mental illness.