Switched at Birth: Popping the Disabled Bubble
Switched at Birth normalizes deaf presence in media with its setting, characterization, and use of silence. This causes the audience to question what we, as a society, consider to be “normal” in mainstream media.
Overview

◉ History
◉ Context
◉ Research
◉ Analysis
  ○ Setting
  ○ Characters
  ○ Use of Silence
◉ Conclusion
History

What’s in the past?
History

- When silent films were at their peak, there was a larger deaf presence in media.
- The silent films depended heavily on movement, facial and body expression, and captions.
- As technology advanced, deaf presence in media went down.
Context

What’s happening in *Switched at Birth*?
“Uprising”

- Season 2, episode 9 of *Switched at Birth*.
- Learning that their high school was closing, students take action and host a sit in over several days.
Research

What’s being said about *Switched at Birth*?
Research

- Saljooq M. Asif’s observation of the setting being a safe space.
- Jace Lacob’s insights on deaf characters in *Switched At Birth*.
- Pierre Schmitt and his comments on American Sign Language (ASL) being an accommodation.
Analysis

Why is this episode important?
Setting

Carlton School for the Deaf

Gallaudet University
“Uprising” is centered at Carlton School for the Deaf.
This school is the only safe space for the Deaf community so far in this series, as Gallaudet University was for its students.

Gallaudet University
“In Switched at Birth, Carlton School for the Deaf effectively functions as a Deaf space where students can interact and study without the fear of harassment or punishment” (Asif, 2018)
The strong parallels between the events at Gallaudet University and Carlton School for the Deaf make the show’s issues more believable and relatable. This is because both the real-life and fictional students were experiencing similar issues.
Characters

Emmett Bledsoe portrayed by Sean Berdy

Toby Kennish portrayed by Lucas Gabriel

Daphne Vasquez portrayed by Katie Leclerc

Bay Kennish portrayed by Vanessa Marano
Characters

- There are not only deaf characters, but deaf actors.
- Emmett Bledsoe, portrayed by deaf actor Sean Berdy, is a leader in the protest.
Characters

“...the deaf characters aren't portrayed as saints, and are just as realistically flawed as their hearing counterparts, landing in trouble with parents, teachers, or even the law” (Lacob 2012).
Characters

- Why is it so different to have deaf characters portrayed by deaf actors?
- Mainstream media has made advancements in including people with disabilities but it is far from being normalized
Use of Silence
Use of Silence

“[T]he way her performance was broadcast contributes to, indeed promotes, the perception of sign language as an accommodation for a minority who have a handicap as opposed to a full-fledged language of artistic expression” (Schmitt 2017).
Use of Silence

- With the use of silence, “Uprising” invites its predominantly hearing audience to be submerged into the Deaf community's world.
- This episode normalizes silence in mainstream television.
Conclusion

Wrapping things up
Conclusion

- This is a new topic, so not much has been said about it in academic fields.
- What does this say about “normal” and what we consider to be “mainstream” entertainment?


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