

# *Switched at Birth:* Popping the **Disabled** Bubble







# Argument

*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





## Setting

---

- “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



## Setting

---

“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)



## Setting

---

- ◎ 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 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

---

- ② Why is it so different to have deaf characters portrayed by deaf actors?
- ② 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?



## Credits

- Asif, Saljooq M. "Deaf Gain Goes Prime Time: Identity, Spaces, and Marginalization in ABC Family's Switched at Birth." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 35-51,119. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2007003812?accountid=11041>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2018.3>.
- Force, Peter T. "Deaf President Now." *Encyclopedia of Special Education: A Reference for the Education of Children, Adolescents, and Adults with Disabilities and Other Exceptional Individuals*, edited by Cecil R. Reynolds, et al., Wiley, 4th edition, 2013. Credo Reference, [http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/wileyse/deaf\\_president\\_now/0?institutionId=5562](http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/wileyse/deaf_president_now/0?institutionId=5562).
- USNews.com. "Gallaudet University." *USNews.com*, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/gallaudet-university-1443>.
- Lacob, Jace. "'Switched at Birth': ABC Family's Groundbreaking Deaf/Hearing Drama." *Newsweek Web Exclusives*, Feb 14, 2012. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1373267416?accountid=11041>.
- Pradux. "Toby Kennish Fashion, Clothing + Style." *Pradux*, 2015, <https://www.pradux.com/tv/switched-at-birth/toby-kennish/photos>.
- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival



## Credits (continued)

- Schmitt, Pierre. "Representations of Sign Language, Deaf People, and Interpreters in the Arts and the Media." *Sign Language Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2017, pp. 130–147. *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1968939869?accountid=11041>.
- Schuchman, John S. "The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community's Response." *Sign Language Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2004, pp. 231–232. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26190747](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26190747).
- SheKnows. *SheKnows*, 5, January, 2015, <https://www.sheknows.com/entertainment/articles/1068487/switched-at-birth-things-people-are-really-hating-about-daphne/>
- Smith, Hilary E. "'Switched at Birth' Seasons 1–4a." Hilary Elaine Smith, [hilaryelainesmith.com/switched-at-birth-season-4a/7ycrmn8vjmrhsirhn72u0a69pgnsme](http://hilaryelainesmith.com/switched-at-birth-season-4a/7ycrmn8vjmrhsirhn72u0a69pgnsme).
- The Angst Report. "Sean Berdy as Emmett Bledsoe in Switched At Birth S01E08." *The Angst Report*, 23, August, 2012, <http://theangstreport.blogspot.com/2012/08/switched-at-birth-emmet-and-bays.html>.
- *The Hollywood Reporter*, 19, March, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/video-switched-at-birth-bay-689534>.
- Weiss, Lizzy. "Uprising." *Switched at Birth*, season 2, episode 9, ABC Family, 4 Mar. 2013.