

Reflections

A Quiet House That Speaks Volumes: A Reflection of *A Quiet Place*

By: Dolphia Butler

Director John Krasinski's *A Quiet Place* (2018) is a science fiction horror film that portrays the lives of a family of five—and then four, and then back to five again—living in crumbling New York. From the start of the film, the audience quickly learns how important is it for the family of two parents, Lee and Evelyn Abbott, and three children, Regan, Marcus, and Beau, to remain silent. If even a minute sound is made, humans are snatched away by the aliens who have invaded America. The aliens then replace humans with extraterrestrial beings. Unfortunately, the youngest child, Beau, ignores the rules of silence and is immediately taken away by the aliens. By the end of the film, the family remains intact—for the most part—because of Regan's invisible power, her deafness. Thus, this reflection piece focuses on the positive and realistic representations of Deaf culture in Krasinski's science fiction horror film.

Not much verbal dialogue takes place in the film. Instead, the Abbotts communicate through American Sign Language (ASL), a visual language that requires the use of hands, fingers, facial expressions, and gestures to make meaning. Because the oldest child Regan is deaf, the Abbotts effortlessly use ASL, the native language of deaf people, to converse with each other. Although the rest of Regan's family is hearing, they abstain from using Signed Exact English (SEE)—a sign system that uses English's vocabulary and grammar to make meaning. SEE is a language that hearing people use when conversing with deaf people. However, ASL and SEE are two different languages that do not mirror one another. According to Padden and Humphries (2006), "Signs from ASL are often thought to be direct representations of spoken words, but in fact they are independent of English. Although signs and their translations may have overlapping meanings, signs are not simply codes for English words" (p. 394).

Though the Abbotts sign in ASL, the closed caption

feature for the film was in Standard Written English (SWE) and tended to be more elongated than the actual signed dialogue. In addition, Beal-Alvarez and Cannon (2014) say that closed caption could be prey to "information [being] rapidly here and gone without the option of speed control or printed output for later reference" (p. 501). If deaf persons are watching the film, they would have to read the caption on the television and watch the action at the same time, especially in scenes when the Abbotts are not signing, to understand the film's plot. Thus, watching the film and reading closed caption simultaneously could be problematic for deaf viewers.

In *A Quiet Place*, Regan experiences feelings of alienation within her hearing family. She becomes angry when she has to remain with her mother while her father and Marcus venture into the woods together. In another scene, she bickers with Marcus about their father and his lack of love for Regan because she is different. The film portrays Regan as an outsider, which Baynton (2006) says that "the metaphors of deafness—of isolation and foreignness, of animality, of darkness and silence—are projections reflecting the needs and standards of the dominant culture, not the experiences of most deaf people" (p. 46). Although she spends some time alone in several scenes of the film and can be viewed either as an independent and brave character or an isolated character, Regan becomes overly introspective about her life. Baynton says that deaf people "could resist the meanings that hearing people attached to deafness, adopt them and put them to new uses, or create their own" (p. 47). Regan spends her time alone reflecting and uses her cultural space—her deafness—to do so. She sits in solitude and in silence while contemplating about Beau, her father, her pregnant mother, and Marcus, the only surviving hearing child in the family. Finally, the film remarkably pays homage to Deaf culture when Regan expresses her annoyance with her father's attempts

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at building a hearing aid device that would allow her to hear. Edwards (2006) states, “When the Deaf community turns to technology, it seeks technology to enable the living of a richer Deaf life. But when hearing people offer technologies to deaf people, they have generally promoted medical technologies to eliminate deaf life” (p. 404). She rejects the idea of “curing” her deafness and prefers to use ASL as her primary mode of communication. Ironically, she still wears a hearing aid. It is as if she hopes that one day, she will be able to hear. Nevertheless, at the end of the film, it is Regan’s hearing aid, and the ones her father builds, that keeps them alive. Because she blames herself for Beau’s death, she determines to redeem herself by becoming the hero. Her hearing aids incapacitate the aliens. As a result, Regan does not “overcome” her deafness, she embraces it. Her family embraces it. Overall, this act of embracing, by both the hearing and deaf community, is the epitome of Deaf culture.

References

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