

Analysis: The Lasting Impact of CODA

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ASL Interpretation

It's been over a week since deaf actor Troy Kotsur, the film "CODA," and its director won Oscars on March 27. Here is an analysis of the lasting impact of this film on deaf people and the Deaf community. Here are four things.

The first is that "CODA" is the first American film to be released to theaters with burned in subtitles. "CODA" and its purchaser Apple TV+ chose to subtitle everything.

[Full screen images showing a scene of Frank Rossi explaining why God made farts smell, so deaf people could enjoy them too]

The result is a true step in accessibility and equity for deaf audiences, and a higher standard for future films to follow, especially those that involve deaf characters using ASL. We may see more films in the future with burned in subtitles.

The second lasting impact is the AP Stylebook updating its guidance on using the "deaf" and "Deaf" terms. The AP Stylebook, one of the top guides for

journalists around the world, said the timing for the guidance was because of the “CODA” film and because the “Deaf community is in the news.”

[Full screen image showing AP Stylebook tweet explaining that “The uppercase is acceptable, if used by the person or group, in descriptions such as the cultural Deaf community, Deaf education, Deaf culture, etc.” and “We have extensive additions and updates to our guidance... We are sharing this entry earlier because the Deaf community is in the news as the Oscars approach” with an image of an article about Troy Kotsur’s road to making history at the Oscars.”]

This change from AP is a big deal and is here to stay for future news stories involving deaf people. It’s going to be a long-term impact.

The third lasting impact is that a film with three deaf lead characters who use ASL is an Oscar “Best Picture” winner. Marlee Matlin retweeted an image that showed “CODA” engraved as the 2021 season “Best Picture” winner outside of Dolby Theater in Hollywood.

7.9 [Full screen image showing a retweet by Marlee Matlin saying, “I love it!!!” In response to a tweet by Matt Dentler showing “CODA” being engraved outside of Dolby Theatre.]

This engraving, not far from Marlee Matlin’s star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, will always be living proof that ASL gives deaf people success.

The fourth lasting impact is Troy Kotsur’s Oscar win and his many awards prior to that for best supporting actor. The Oscar win itself is historic, making Kotsur the second deaf person to win the award. In an interview Kotsur did with

“Variety,” he said he’s getting many script offers and that it’s a new beginning for him.

Siân Heder told “Variety” that she is creating stories for him and wants to push “creative people, showrunners, writers, directors” to be inspired and create roles for him. It won’t be a surprise to see a ripple effect in Hollywood and in television with deaf roles.

[Video clip of Kotsur’s interview from Variety showing Kotsur explain how he’s getting many offers now and how nice it is compared with the past]

That’s my analysis of the four lasting impacts from “CODA.” Burned in subtitles, the AP Stylebook guidance, the film being enshrined in Hollywood history, and more deaf roles for Kotsur and other deaf people. It’s a big step for all of us.

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