

Slide One: Hello and thank you all for joining me today. I say that like y'all had a choice in the matter. Anyway, like most of my writing, this project originates from some beef I had with some books.

Slide two: When speaking of voices in media, much of the discourse is concerned with the figurative aspect of "voice", such as who is at the table, represented, and present. There is much less published regarding the physical voices of people, which leaves much to be desired when understanding people in media.

Slide Three: When we focus on perspective, we are led to think about ideas, thoughts, concerns, and values of a particular group or person. Inquiries into perspective do not focus on the aural qualities of the voices, how they are represented in media, and how those representations affect our understanding of the people to whom those voices belong.

Slide Four: However, we do consider the aforementioned concerns when we think about the human voice. A dominant portion of scholarship on physical voices in media concerns itself with how does one reproduce the voice – how technology can appropriately recreate what someone is supposed to sound like and furthermore, how we can train those whose voices appear in media to sound like what viewers want to hear.

Slide Five: Media scholar Steph Ceraso states that listening is an embodied experience that involves more than just the aural receptors – therefore, I argue that the *production* and *presentation* of voices should also mediate these embodied experiences that extend beyond our aural receptors. Her work, like mine, is influenced by feminist scholarship – she says "What I find most valuable about feminist rhetorical scholarship is its acknowledgment that listening practices are not merely contingent upon words but are also shaped by context-specific embodied

experiences" (16). I won't continue to quote drop Steph Ceraso in this presentation since there's plenty to get to, but just know she's a boss and if you haven't read her book, *Sounding Composition*, you should.

Slide Six: One television show that demonstrates way we can considered embodied representations of sound is ABC's 2016 series, *Speechless*, a show that stars an actor and character with cerebral palsy. Although the actors is able to speak, the character is nonverbal and primarily communicates through an adaptive headgear and communication board, which is read out by other characters of the show. *Speechless* brings to the fore several issues to investigate regarding the human voice: how do different bodies and voices contradict traditional expectations of voice in media, what are the relationships between the human and nonhuman in the representation of voices in media, and how do different technology and experiences affect our understanding of the ownership of voices.

Slide Seven: *Speechless* is an American television sitcom that aired on ABC from 2016-2019. The show follows the DiMeo family as they move to a new school in order to have their eldest son integrated into a mainstream classroom after spending his formal education in schools for students with disabilities. The DiMeo family consists of Maya and Jimmy DiMeo, the pertinacious mother and lax father of the family

Slide Eight: JJ DiMeo, a nonverbal 16-year-old with Cerebral Palsy,

Slide Nine: Ray, the nerdy middle child, and Dylan, the youngest and only daughter.

Slide Ten: A major part of JJ's integration into a mainstream high school comes from the assistance of an aid who reads out the words that JJ spells through the use of an assistive headgear and alphabet board. The aid, Kenneth Clements, is symbolically adopted into the family.

Slide Eleven: Alright. Now, back to the beef I have. I love my boy Jonathan Sterne, but there are some things about audio reproduction that are not criticised and investigated like they should be.

When talking about the way that people adapt to succeeding in a given medium or practice, he says that "The modern body is the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained that obeys, responds, becomes skillful, and increases its forces. Like a machine, it is built and rebuilt operationalized, and modified." However, this does not account for the ways that the body is *not modified* but assistive technology can "quote unquote" make up for the gap in what the body can physically do in order to reach the expectations set within a specific medium. Secondly, the focus on the need to manipulate the body to fit a box rather than having the box fit the body or multiple bodies leads to hegemonic practices in how these expectations are laid out.

Secondly, when he speaks regarding sound reproduction in his book, *MP3*, he says that the first rule in sound reproduction is to not annoy the listeners. While this may seem like a common-sense statement and while people tend to agree that they don't want to be annoyed, there is an alarming issue not addressed: what is considered "annoying" and how do we come to the consensus that the particular sound or voice is annoying. I-f If I s-t-start to t-a-l- talk like h-o- how JJ s-p-e-a- speaks in the s-h-show, s-u-d-d-e-suddenly this p-r-e-s-e-n-t-a-presentation is not a-s as e-n-g-a-g-y-l-engaging. [****Talk like a valley girl, Kelly**] Then, like, we also must consider, uh, certain ways of talking that, y'know, uh...might not be as well-received as, uhm... reading from a script, maybe? [****Talk higher, Kelly**] Or maybe even the pitch and timbre of certain voices might grind some gears because they're too trebbly and not enough bass and we all know which group that targets. When we create these practices of shaping voices and sounds to accommodate what is more convenient to listen to, we exclude groups of people – and that is something I want to address in this project.

Lastly, Jonathan Sterne writes that "Sound reproduction technology presents a representation of reality" - while I agree that reproduction is a representation, I do take issue with reality in the singular, because there is no one reality. Even the same sound can be interpreted differently due to different embodied experiences. I know I said before that I wouldn't quote drop Steph Ceraso again, but I lied.

Slide Twelve: She says that, "Multimodal listening invites listeners to take "a stance of openness" by imagining how bodies different from their own might interpret or experience particular sonic situations— how a young woman walking home alone from a bar at night might

experience the sound of footsteps behind her; how a black man driving on the highway might experience the sound of police sirens; how immigrant families might experience the cheers and roars of a crowd in response to a politician's speech about building walls and travel bans; how individuals' responses to any of these examples would vary depending upon the specific space or place in which a sound occurs, or the person's intersectional embodied identity (i.e., their interconnected experience of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, etc.), or the person's past experiences with similar sounds (1). 152

Slide Thirteen: She also says that Multimodal listening is not a one-size-fits-all practice. Thus, multimodal listening pedagogy offers flexible listening strategies that account for diverse bodies instead of proposing that all listeners should (or can) listen in the same way. ... So what does this all mean? We have to consider ways of listening beyond the aural and considering beyond any given aural moment. While there are plenty (although not enough) pieces of media out there that demonstrate this, *Speechless* does so in several ways.

Slide Fourteen: First of all, JJ's communication board shows a piece of adaptive technology that does not make for "good audio production" but shows ways that technology and auxiliary objects can be used to represent JJ's voice beyond what can be physically produced from his vocal folds.

-S1E3 changing around words on the alphabet board

-S1E15 "human touch" vs computerized voice

-S1E15 sound effects instead of speaking

-S2E7 british slang when his british grandmother comes to visit

-S3E? Valentine's Day Heart board

Slide Fifteen: *Speechless* additionally makes us question the ownership and authority that JJ has over his voice. Some examples include

-S1E1 "He's Sixteen, it's about time his voice changes", ditching his first aid.

-S1E10 Kenneth singing for JJ

-S1E15 Conflict between JJ/Kenneth with volunteering for things

-S1E20 Family having to yell at themselves

-S2E2 german words for Kenneth

Slide Sixteen: I'll give y'all a break from my voice now and show you a clip that'll do the talking to help understand the visual and technological representations of JJ's voice

Slide Seventeen: So, to conclude, I want us to consider the following three things...

One, if sound recording represents and reproduces sound, how can we represent a wider range of voices?

Two, if sound fidelity is contingent on adhering to social expectations, how do we have those social expectations not become a feedback loop of hegemonic practices.

Three: If a program's worth is determined by aesthetic and public opinion, what practices can we be critical of that form these opinions?

Thank you for coming to my TED talk.