

The Voiceless Chipotle Explosion

Body language has the ability to give enormous amounts of information about one's personality and emotional state, whether it is through gesticulations, posture, or eye contact. Many bodily movements are worldly in nature, yet can have greater impact depending on one's particular social grouping. While the hearing community relies more on tone and voice level, the deaf community must channel their mental projections through a more defined sense of body language and movements.

Last Monday, April 9th, I stumbled into the local Chipotle near campus for a pre-work burrito. As usual I was completely crippled from lack of eating a proper breakfast before attending my classes and thus in an irritated mood and not willing to sit down and observe people eating their Mexican food. The Chipotle crowd was pretty standard for this particular one, the restaurant filled with eclectic music from around the world, the Latino workers speaking Spanish behind the counter while serving White students who were on their cell phones, people scattered about in their various cliques...nothing out of the ordinary until I sat down. Right in my field of vision were two men, mid twenties, both with gauged ears, plenty of tattoos, tight jeans, one wearing a sweatshirt and the other not. The two men were in a heated argument of sorts, but what struck me was they were making no sound. They were animated atoms, waving their arms in the air as if stranded looking for a plane, grimacing, and signing like the air put 400 pounds of resistance on every finger. They were in their own world where everything was silent, each one giving the other his complete attention.

Never have I encountered body language as active as these two men outside a theatrical performance. While I thought the situation was brilliant, the two men were obviously distraught about something, of which I could only speculate. I figured it may be about a girl, some form of relationship, or they were possibly roommates who became fed up with each other and exploded. As I sat there watching their steroid induced facial expressions I could not help but wonder, what is acceptable behavior within the deaf community? For two people to shout at each other in a public setting would simply not be tolerated. Amongst other deaf people would these two men contain their rage?

The body movements I saw embodied much more precision and expression than that which would normally come from hearing-capable persons. This most likely comes from a divergence of expression created when another pathway such as hearing is introduced. Without this sense, people are forced to find other ways of projecting the same ideas. While these two men were far more animated than most, they still displayed many of the innate human argumentative motions such as short erratic twitching of the arms and head, looks of disbelief, eyebrows curled inward, and the inadvertent mimicry of the other. This speaks for how humanity is connected throughout the world while at the same time each culture contains unique properties for which they are defined.

Though I only focused on one type of human interaction there are many other different forms, which reveal similar attributes about emotional states. Similar to gesticulation, I believe humans across the world share many of the same tendencies yet one is inclined to see differentiation among particular social and geographic groups.