

HEARING DIFFERENTLY

Episode 3: “Misconceptions about Deafness”

Opening sounds: “Abracadabra”- Silent Partner (loud at first and then fades out)

Background music: “Deliberate Thought” – Kevin MacLeod

Hi everyone, welcome to the third episode of “Hearing Differently”! I’m your host Karina Cotran! Last week, we talked about lip reading and how to those with severe to profound hearing, it’s an ability that improves our communication skills when our aids can’t help us.

Now today I will be talking about misconceptions people have about deafness. Imagine you meet a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, what is the first question or assumption that pops into your head?

If I was in that position...me as a profoundly deaf person meeting another person who has some degree of deafness, the first question that would pop into my head is: *‘how much can you hear?’* The reason I would ask that is because every person with hearing loss has it to a different degree, not everyone is the same. It’s similar to the concept of allergies. For example, a peanut allergy...not everyone has a peanut allergy, but some people do. And those that do have a peanut allergy have different ways it might affect them based on the severeness of their allergy. It’s the same concept with hearing loss.

Now keep in mind that first question or assumption that popped into your head.

SEGWAY: “Columns of Water” – Alexandre Navarro

Topic 1

Your question or assumption may be one of the main misconceptions that people have about Deafness. I have found some misconceptions online and decided to lay some out of you.

Most of these misconceptions have been thrown at me as well!

This one has been asked of me multiple times.

“If you’re deaf, how come you don’t know sign language?”

This is a common and understandable misconception. I know some deaf and hard of hearing people that do know sign language, either because their parents taught them or they took the initiative to learn it on their own. I don’t know sign language. I’ve had a lot of moments at work where I’ll be wearing my hair up, so my Cochlear would be showing, and a customer might come up to me and start signing to me automatically. I

always have to sort of cut them off and explain to them I don't know it. Some of them are surprised, saying "but you're deaf! How can you not know sign language?"

I always feel a little sad or helpless because I realize that knowing sign language can make me a part of a bigger community. The fact is, I have hearing parents, and a hearing family, and I was opted for the cochlear implant surgery from the moment they found out I had hearing loss. My parents wanted me to be a part of the hearing world and raised me up for it. As a result, I never knew sign language. But, I do want to take classes in the future because I would love to learn it and communicate with those who don't have aids.

Another misconception, and albeit a confusing one is:

"If you're deaf, can you drive?"

I don't know why people think that I can't drive. Deafness affects my ears not my eyes. Think about it, do you take a hearing test when you do your driving test? No. Usually this is asked because, "What if you can't hear the sirens or noises of police, fire trucks or ambulances?" Well, if our ears don't work, we use our eyes and the mirrors in the car at our disposal. We might not hear it but we can see it!

I was driving the other day, and usually with my cochlear implant I could hear the sirens but for whatever reason, the sirens were muffled and I couldn't hear them immediately. If it weren't for me checking my front mirror constantly, I would have completely missed the police car behind me. Usually, I'm more hyperaware in the car with my sight because I know I can't depend on my hearing. Besides, think about this way...say you're in the car behind the wheel, and your favourite song comes on the radio, you turn the volume up and that's the only thing you can hear right now. And you're driving and jamming out to that song. A police car with its lights on is right behind you and the sirens are blaring, but you can't hear them, or see them because you're not looking into your mirrors...and you get pulled over. Hearing or not, you use your sight when you drive...it's the main sense out of the five that you are using.

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Topic 2

A third misconception, and one that by far makes no logical sense is:

"If you're deaf, can you read braille?"

Okay, provided that I'm not deaf and blind...just deaf, again I still have my sight. Okay without my glasses I would be screwed ha-ha...but I can read print...I can definitely say I have no idea how to read braille.

With that being said, here is a question for my listeners. Imagine what I look like. Am I blonde? Brunette? Brown eyes? Green eyes? Okay, I'm sure whatever image you conjured up in your head is a picture of your every day run of the mill human being. Which leads me to this assumption, and by far the most ridiculous one.

“You don’t look deaf”

I was at work (again), organizing shoeboxes and I’m looking for the right size box to put the shoe in, when a customer taps me on the shoulder. I get startled and stand up.

He says, “I’ve been asking for your help for the past couple of minutes.”

So then I reply back saying, “Oh sorry sir, I’m hard of hearing, I didn’t hear you. What do you need help with?”

And he just says, “Oh you don’t look deaf!”

I remember looking at him with the most exasperated face. How does one...look deaf exactly? It’s not the most visible disability. Am I supposed to have an antennae growing out of my ears or something? Being deaf doesn’t affect the way I look, maybe the way I speak, but not how I look ha-ha.

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Topic 3

Now, this isn’t necessarily a misconception, but a valid curiosity. Because I am profoundly deaf, the second I shut my Cochlear Implant off, I can’t hear anything. So a question some people ask is, “do you ever turn off your hearing aids and pretend you can’t hear something?”

My answer to that is no. Sometimes I’ll joke about it, like oh if my parents are yelling at me, boom I can shut off my hearing aid or if I’m at a bar and someone is trying to hit on me, and they aren’t doing it particularly nicely, I just pretend I can’t hear them. But I never actually go through with it. The reason why is because I value my hearing too much. I like being able to hear, even if it’s the most annoying sound in the world. I’ve always had the choice to hear, and I don’t want to take it for granted when someone out there can’t have the same opportunity as me- if they want it.

Now, here is the last misconception. That:

“Hearing aids and cochlear implants can help you hear normally”

This is not true. Technology so far cannot mimic true perfect hearing. It transmits sounds through a little machine. Depending on the severity of the hearing loss, hearing aids and cochlear implants *help* the person hear well than being without them, but it does not *cure* hearing. If you put me and you (if you have perfect hearing) in a noisy coffee shop, and somebody comes up to us and says something like,

“Hey, I heard they made a new latte and it’s coming out next week”.

Chances are you'll hear what the person said on the first try, and I'll have to ask them to repeat themselves while focusing on their lips to lip-read, because I won't catch every word they said. There's too much background noise.

Now, with this fact that the Cochlear Implant is not a true representation of perfect hearing, on the next podcast, we will be talking about how and how *much* I can hear with my Cochlear Implant, and the limits that the cochlear has compared to regular hearing.

Well, that's it for today! If you have any questions or concerns or want to share your experiences with us, please comment below! Thanks for listening! Bye for now.