[00:00:00]

Music: “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

Carrie Poppy: Hello! Welcome to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, the show where we don't just report on fringe science, spirituality, claims of the paranormal. No way! We take part ourselves.

Ross Blocher: Yup! When they make the claims, we show up, so you don't have to. I'm Ross Blocher.

Carrie Poppy: And I'm Carrie Poppy. And today we are talking about the Autism Quotient Test. It’s hard to say.

Ross Blocher: Okay! We've heard of IQ, EQ, but this is AQ.

Carrie Poppy: AQ, Autism Quotient Test.

Ross Blocher: I’ve heard of *GQ*. I think I've run out of Qs.

Carrie Poppy: PQ? I feel like I've heard that.

Ross Blocher: You mind your Ps and Qs.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah! That's what it is.

Ross Blocher: Subscribe to *GQ*. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Yep. I think I'm out. But the Autism Quotient Test claims to be a way to screen yourself for autism before needing to take a clinical assessment, see if you're even a candidate. Should you even go in and get assessed? Should you bother?

Ross Blocher: Interesting. I mean, that makes sense that you would want some hopefully reliable way to just kind of understand am I in the ballpark? Could this apply to me? Or is it maybe something else in my life that I feel I need to be aware of?

Carrie Poppy: Yes. So, there's something called the basic autistic phenotype, which is the idea that there are different kinds of phenotypes that show up in the genetic pool. They’re somewhat reliable across cultures and generations.

Ross Blocher: So, a phenotype is essentially the end result, the body that gets built from the genes.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Yeah. The genes, plus some environment, some experience, but yeah. So, in the psych literature, there is reference to the basic autistic phenotype, which would include parents of kids with autism where the parent themselves maybe doesn't quite qualify for the clinical diagnosis. So, this kind of has like the kind of mind that makes sense for the parent of an autistic kid.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Checks some of those boxes without necessarily falling within the designation.

Carrie Poppy: The clinical range. Yep. So, that's where they started researching this was looking at the basic autistic phenotype. And then this guy, Simon Baron-Cohen—not Sacha.

Ross Blocher: That sounds a lot like Sacha Baron Cohen.

Carrie Poppy: Though he is his cousin!

Ross Blocher: Amazing.

Carrie Poppy: He and his research team developed this thing, the AQ, that is very good at ruling out—no, let's see. Very good at ruling in—how should I say this? It's very good at not giving you a false positive, but it's very poor at not giving you a false negative.

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: I love how many negatives got stacked there. It made sense to me, but I'm sure many people are hitting the little 15 second rewind button right now.

Come again, Carrie?

Carrie Poppy: Okay, okay! So, if you score quite high on the AQ, odds are really good that if you went in for an autism assessment, you would pass the clinical threshold.

Ross Blocher: And as I recall, you were telling me if you have a low score, and it doesn't appear that you have a noticeable AQ level, that may be a false negative—like, 20% chance?

Carrie Poppy: 20% roughly. And now, with all of these new diagnoses especially of women and nonbinary people, it's suspected that a lot of that 20% is people who are high masking, high camouflaging. So, people who have autism, but in order to sort of fit into their social environment have just adapted and adopted these other ways of being.

Ross Blocher: I feel I've been hearing that more lately, that women are often not diagnosed, or that their autism kind of shows itself in different ways. And so, they get skipped.

(Carrie confirms.)

Okay. And I feel like autism generally has become—I don't even know how to phrase this, but like more acceptable, like that there's less stigma attached to it now.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. I mean, it seems that way to me too. There are ways to frame the story in other ways as well. I've certainly seen lots of hate toward autistic people online. There's all that like anti-cringe culture stuff that I think really plays against autistic people. But yeah, I think by and large, that's true. I think that—I don't know what you'd say, but I feel like if someone comes out as autistic, it's like generally—I don't know, there's a sense that like, oh, we should embrace and protect that person and bring service to that person. At least in my community, I'm glad to say.

Ross Blocher: And it seems like the other word that we encounter the most alongside autism is spectrum. That there's a range of ways that it is expressed, and I'm kind of hard pressed trying to think of something that would be a definition of autism. I think more just in terms of qualities that are kind of dialed up or down in an individual, like sensitivity to stimuli, social anxiety, fixation on certain things like numbers or math or whatever the interest may be.

Carrie Poppy: Special interests they call that. Yep.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Can you give it kind of a more precise definition?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Okay.

[00:05:00]

So, my understanding is that autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. And so, that means that your central nervous system is involved, but also the way you behave and the way you relate to your environment, as you were just describing. But at the center of the puzzle, hypothetically, is the central nervous system getting wired slightly differently from the norm. And how does that happen? There's, you know, a lot of discussion about that. It's very clear that it's highly, highly heritable. But, you know, exactly how much, what percentage, you can argue about that quite a bit.

Ross Blocher: Okay. And I also tend to hear about it within the—that spectrum as kind of a range—its impact on your life, I guess.

(Carrie agrees.)

Where—I don't know if I'm understanding the term correctly, but when I hear high functioning autism, I hear someone who's able to get through life as it's built for neurotypical people fairly easily. Whereas you have this other end of the spectrum where you just have a hard time existing. You need services.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Need full time care. I think you're probably describing types one through three autism. So, at least here in the US, in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, which is the book that psychologists use to get funding for their patients, it describes three types of autism in there. So, type one is needs some support. So, maybe it's you have sensory

abnormalities. We should make sure headphones are available for you. Quiet spaces are available for you. We warn you if there's going to be flashing lights. We don't make you sit in a loud room for 45 minutes. We try to limit it to 10 minutes, because we know that about you. You know, that's where like usually the type one stuff falls. And then type two is I need quite a bit of daily support. More than average, go ahead and give me funding so that like my family can maybe work a little less, so that they can help care for me, et cetera.

Ross Blocher: I might need someone who's kind of dedicated, maybe not full time, but at least in certain situations or at school, to help me process things the way I need to. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Yep. And then type three is needs full time care.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Like, someone who's nonverbal or has major tics or, you know, whatever it may be.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I'm not sure about the—like, where people usually draw the lines there.

Ross Blocher: And with any lines, we love drawing them as humans. Of course, there's always people who then fall riiight smack dab on the middle of that line.

Carrie Poppy: Totally. Yeah. And the *DSM* is only about getting people funding. And that's what—in the US, that's what diagnoses are. They're about like saying, "You're roughly close to this disorder. We want to get you help. This is the best we've got. We've kind of taxonomized you. Let's go with that."

Ross Blocher: Boy, the stakes sound high then. Because if your kid's in school, and they need help taking tests and focusing, that test result could be the difference between whether they do or don't get the help they need.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. That's true. Yeah, so a screener becomes a great idea, I would think. Why not? Now, had you ever heard of the AQ before?

Ross Blocher: No, I haven't heard that term.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. My friend, Katie, posted about the AQ maybe a year or so ago on their Instagram page, just on their birthday, saying like, "I'm 34, and my AQ is 36!" or something like that. *(Chuckles.)*

And I was like what does that mean?

Ross Blocher: I'm almost as old as my AQ!

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, that was their way of coming out as autistic, which they saw themselves as at that point, and I think then still do. So, I read up on it then. And I'll be honest, at first, my thought was like, "We can't—what? We're going to diagnose autism on the internet. We can't—no." I don't know, I had this very knee jerk like "no, no, no!" But—

Ross Blocher: There’s no series of check boxes or self-assessment that I can fill out and get a reliable, meaningful number out of it.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. It gave me an out of control feeling.

(They chuckle.)

But then I started reading about it, and I was like,” Oh. Well, there's statistical validity here, so, you know, at least people can figure out if they score really high, you know, whether they want to follow up on that or not.” So, okay, should we—we took the tests. Doo we want to talk about our scores?

Ross Blocher: Yeah. So, you directed me to Embrace-Autism.com. And I see it mentions that it's awarded top 50 autism blogs. It lists its founders and researchers, Dr. Natalie Engelbrecht, MSc, ND, RP.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. So, I think she—I think Natalie Engelbrecht might be a naturopath. I believe that’s right.

Ross Blocher: *(Chuckling.)* Yeah, I saw that, and I thought, “Well, that doesn't—” On the Bayesian assessment of how seriously I take her, learning that she's a naturopath does bring that down a bit.

Carrie Poppy: Don’t love it. No, I totally agree. I sent you this site in particular only because you can click through the AQ, and it's accurately translated onto the site.

Ross Blocher: Okay, I remember when we were doing the Myers-Briggs personality types, there were a variety of websites.

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And we went with the one that let you kind of visually go through. And I kind of see what you're saying. So, this AQ assessment exists in many forms. You can take it at different places. This is just a particularly interactive website.

Carrie Poppy: Exactly. This lets you take it basically in quiz form instead of going to a PDF, filling it out, doing some math, and finding out your score.

Ross Blocher: And we should mention the other name listed after Natalie, and that is Eva Silvertant.

Carrie Poppy: Cool.

Ross Blocher: B.DES. These are a lot of letters that I don't know what to do with.

(Carrie giggles.)

But they have a number of them. So, the first one you had me take was the autism quotient. 50 statements. And then I did end up, just mere hour ago, took the RADS-R80 statement test. That's supposed to be a little better at catching people who are not caught by the Autism Quotient Test.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, I see. Okay. The high maskers and so on. Okay. So, I don't know a ton about the RADS-R. I've mostly researched the AQ. The AQ seems to be the most scientific of the assessments as they stand today, meaning it's been through more trials, not meaning the others have failed those trials.

Ross Blocher: And this website, Embrace Autism—the folks who, I assume, created this site give their kind of personal assessments of it, saying, "The Autism Spectrum Quotient, AQ, is probably the most commonly used screening tool for autism. However, some of the items are a bit dated, in which case we provided corrections and supplementation to aid you in taking the test."

Carrie Poppy: Mm-hm. Yeah, when I was looking at it, I kept thinking—I had to remind myself that like, oh, but I'm interested in the arts as well. Because there would be questions that made my brain think of science and math, but then if I framed them in terms of arts, they did apply to me. Anyway, anyway.

Ross Blocher: Interesting. Yeah. Anytime you take these self-assessments, I definitely get locked in that state of, "Well, I mean—"

Carrie Poppy: Compared to?!

Ross Blocher: "My friends would say this about me, but my coworkers would say that about me… In certain situations, I feel this way about this, and in others I don't." I got to say, I know we'll talk about the RADS test later, but that one—the phrasing of it really bothered me with the "never applies" or "it applies now and when I was under 16" or "it applies just now" or "it applies just when I was under 16".

Carrie Poppy: Oh, okay, there's no like rarely or—yeah.

Ross Blocher: Yeah! And that drove me crazy! But we'll talk about that later.

Carrie Poppy: Yes! I hate that. I hate that. This is sideways, but one of the classic mental health assessments that they now use at Kaiser, because it's just like so classically validated, but it has that same thing going on where it's like, "Do you feel sad every single day or never?"

(They laugh and Carrie makes a strangled, frustrated sound.)

Ross Blocher: Those are not the options! I feel sad every Tuesday!

Carrie Poppy: It’s not quite that bad, but I feel that way—yeah, exactly! I'll be like, well, a little versus like all the time?! Well, no, it's just like often. *(Laughs.)* I get really caught up in it.

Ross Blocher: That makes me want to give it a DQ for disqualified.

Carrie Poppy: Exactly. Or Dairy Queen.

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Yeah! That's right.

Carrie Poppy: Okay, so a typical score on the AQ, a neurotypical score, is 11 to 21. And this is out of 50.

Ross Blocher: Okay. So, you're answering 50 questions on a scale of definitely agree to slightly agree to slightly disagree to definitely disagree.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. And 0 to 10 is so unusual that—I don't know. *(Chuckles.)* I heard at least one researcher say that it might be a signal of deception, that someone's trying to cover their autism so much that they're not admitting to any autistic traits.

Ross Blocher: Oh, interesting! Oh, wow. So—interesting. I'm going to out my boss. She got an eight.

Carrie Poppy: OHHH! Tracy! Tracy!?

Ross Blocher: What are you doing? Are you prevaricating?

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Could be. Or could not be. 22 to 25 is just higher than average. 26 to 31 is where you start to hit that borderline range where people start to recommend an assessment. And then 32 is the very likely to be autistic. That's where you're at a 98% likelihood of passing the clinical threshold if you went in for the really classic test they—the two-day neurological exams.

Ross Blocher: Okay. That's where those false positives are few and far between.

(Carrie agrees.)

I like that. Already, it gives me increased confidence in the assessment, knowing that it's referring me to more thorough assessments.

Carrie Poppy: Definitely. Okay. Do you want to do a one, two, three, and then we say our scores at the same time?

Ross Blocher: Sure. Let me just make sure I know my score. Yes, I do. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Okay, ready?

Ross & Carrie: One, two three.

Ross Blocher: 14.

Carrie Poppy: 39!

Ross Blocher: Whoa! Whoa! 39? Oh my goodness, so you're in the range.

Carrie Poppy: 14?! Are you kidding me?!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, it was lower than I expected!

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* Are you kidding me, Ross?

Ross Blocher: I'm not kidding! *(Laughing.)* That's what I got!

Carrie Poppy: You got a 14?!

Ross Blocher: Well, and I was interested in taking the test, because I thought—

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"Well, obviously I have a fascination with numbers." And you know, there are other things that I feel about—*(laughing).*

Carrie Poppy: I need a glass of water.

Ross Blocher: I thought you already poured yourself a glass of water.

Carrie Poppy: *(Off mic.)* Maybe a nice slice of pie? *(Thumping.)*

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Carrie is stumbling around, befuddled and thirsty. I mean, I tried to answer as honestly as I could!

Carrie Poppy: It's just—I didn't expect it! Because I got a 39, and I just thought, "Well, there you go. It must be—me and Ross, we're going to be like—"

Ross Blocher: We're similar and—

Carrie Poppy: Oh yeah, we're going to both find out. This is how we both find out.

But no! It turns out this is how we find out about <u>just me</u>!

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Now, I will say your score is higher than I was expecting, and higher than anyone else in my life that I've had take this so far.

Carrie Poppy: Whoa! Really?!

Ross Blocher: So far the highest was one of my other coworkers. Chris got a 23.

Carrie Poppy: That was the highest? Of your friends.

Ross Blocher: Well, it was a very small sample of people. I didn't like have everybody take it.

(Carrie "huh"s dramatically.)

And my son had an autism diagnosis in school that went on his IEP. I was never so sure about that assessment. I had him take this, and he got a 16. He has a learning disability, and he has like—you know, certain behaviors where he'll get excited, and he'll like shake his hands in front of him. And there were certain things that made us think like, okay, well, maybe there's some validity to that. But—

Carrie Poppy: But maybe he meets that basic autistic phenotype profile—and maybe you do too, but you're not like reaching that. I don't know. I don't know. HUH!

Ross Blocher: So, there was part of me that was thinking, oh, this will be really interesting! Because, you know, I think people think of me as someone who's kind of obsessed with numbers and various—

Carrie Poppy: Totally! You memorized pi!

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Yeah! That would qualify. So, anyways, yeah. I was kind of surprised at how low I was.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. B-b-b-b-b-but you log all of your gas! Not his farts. That's something I would do.

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Right. I keep lists of things I'm interested in. That was—

Carrie Poppy: Yeah! Not enough, huh?

Ross Blocher: When I was taking the other assessment, it was asking about that. I was like definitely I keep lists. Like, I've got all these things on my phone that I collect. My wife was

using the gas card over the weekend. I was like, “Please send me which gas station you were at and what it costs and the price per gallon.”

(Carrie laughs.)

My dad started me on that. And now like with each car, I keep those like—so, you know, yeah. I was kind of surprised I was as low as that. But wow, 39. You are in the range, right?

(Carrie blows a raspberry.)

Yeah, well in there.

Carrie Poppy: I’m in the 98% likely to pass the clinical threshold range. What do you make of that?

Ross Blocher: Like, you've had—you're open talking about this, right? You've had an assessment for ADHD?

Carrie Poppy: I have, yeah.

Ross Blocher: That's one I'm really curious about, because I'll see like our friend, Jarrett, posting certain things about the ADHD brain. Things like, you know, I'll sit around all day freaking out about a small thing I have to do, and then I'll do it and realize that it took me five minutes. Like, I’ll be like, oh, I feel that sometimes. And other things he'll point out, and I'll be like, “Oh, I should get checked for ADHD at some point.”

Carrie Poppy: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I mean, the thing is, of course, with all of the disorders—should we call them that—is that the idea is the person suffering. And by the point that they are, let's taxonomize them, so that we can get the treatment appropriate to that suffering.

Ross Blocher: That’s a very good point. Because I feel like the baseline for me is I'm never too interested in any of those assessments for me, just because I feel like I'm able to make my way through life okay. You know.

Carrie Poppy: Mm-hm, mm-hm. You just haven't hit that crisis point. Fair.

Ross Blocher: Right, right. So, anyways. Okay. Wow. So, we have very different results. Yeah. How do we break this down?

Carrie Poppy: Okay. Well, okay. Well, I have hit crisis points before, Ross. *(Chuckling.)* Can I tell you about one?

Ross Blocher: Sure. Any you want to share.

Carrie Poppy: So, last summer—do you remember I like got really depressed and sad, and you had to cover for me for like a month? *(Chuckles.)*

(Ross confirms.)

Yeah. And I had depression, but I was like, “It's worse than that. I don't know what this is.” But like, I couldn't put my finger on it. And you really had to cover for me in the show, and the listeners don't know about this. Not really.

Ross Blocher: Well, and what you told me was—like, you had a real self-awareness about this. Like, “I'm not in a good place. I need time.” And you gave me a very specific amount of time too, which was intriguing.

(Carrie laughs.)

Like, “I need 37.5 days” or something like that. And I thought, okay. Well, there's more to that.

Carrie Poppy: That sounds like me! Okay. *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: But I'm not one to be like, “Give me more info than you've given me.” ‘Cause I figured you gave me the info you were comfortable giving me. And so, I waited those days, and then you're like, “Yep, I'm ready to function again.”

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Everything is fine now!

Ross Blocher: So, yeah. How much do you want to unpack that?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah. Well, there's some measure of self-awareness and some measure of self-delusion there. *(Laughs.)* But I think I was probably counting up the average amount of time that it takes people to get through depressive episodes.

Ross Blocher: Well, and you told me later, you'd been talking with professionals about this, and you were getting the help that you needed.

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And that's all I needed to know.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, fair. So, at that point—probably when I was telling you about it, I was going to Kaiser where, you know, my health insurance is. And they were like, “Fuck, we don't know, dude.” *(Laughs.)*

(Ross “wow”s.)

“Like, you seem like on the threshold of a mood disorder, but not really. And you like never lose contact with reality, and you sleep fine. And like, you're just sort of like on the threshold of something, but what is it? We don't know. We don't know, man.” And they like couldn't give me an answer.

And finally, I became so forlorn that Drew stepped in and said, “I think you're autistic.”

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow! And that's kind of where his understanding of what he was seeing in you and his knowledge of autism led him to say, “This might be worth investigating.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. He had been keeping this secret for a couple of years that he thought I had autism.

Ross Blocher: Okay. “Oh, maybe she's autistic. Oh, that seems to match up. That seems—well, that maybe doesn't.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, what he first noticed—and I've talked to you about it—is my sound sensitivity.

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Sound sensitivity, maybe sometimes light sensitivity as well? Especially when you have migraines, of course. But I mean, isn’t everybody?

Carrie Poppy: You may recall I'm a bit more tactile sensitive. If you remember our Wim Hof investigation, my reaction versus yours.

Ross Blocher: Right. To the cold water. Yeah.

(They chuckle.)

That's funny. I was just telling you the other day about this other program I'm trying to sign us up for that involves extreme temperatures.

Carrie Poppy: I know, I know, I know! And I saw it, I was like, “I'll have to talk to him about this.” *(Laughs.)* But so, yeah. So, Drew said this, and I was like—this was my very first thought, Ross. I thought, “I <u>wish</u>. I'd be as smart as Ross.”

(Ross “oh!”s)

That was the very first thing I thought, because I was like, “I mean, like Ross is <u>obviously</u> autistic.”

(Ross laughs.)

“But I fucking wish! I could be just as smart! And then I would sit around, and everyone would be like, ‘Ross is the smart one, Carrie’s the funny one!’”

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Well, thank you!

Carrie Poppy: And that's a bonkers reaction!

(They laugh.)

But like, so then I went up, and I took the AQ, and I was like 39?!

Ross Blocher: Wow!

Carrie Poppy: BABE! I think I'm autistic! And he came in, and he was like, "Yeah." So, I started—

Ross Blocher: And it was his suggestion that got you down that road. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Uh-huh. I started taking like all these different metrics, and I was like, "Shit! Do I have autism?" So, I started making a spreadsheet, Ross.

(Ross laughs.)

And it's called Do I Have Autism?. It has—

Ross Blocher: Question one. Do you make spreadsheets?

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* It has—my Do I Have Autism? spreadsheet has 82 rows.

Ross Blocher: Granted, I make a lot of spreadsheets, but—not enough!

Carrie Poppy: Not enough, apparently! So, I went through a looot of autism studies—probably about 100—and looked at all of my co-occurring factors. And it turned out I had a bajillion! I was born with a heart condition that made me at risk of it.

(Ross "oh!"s.)

The mental health diseases in my family put me at risk of it.

Ross Blocher: And all of these are just multiplier effects or slightly—like, +3 to the possibility, +2. I don't know. I'm thinking in like D20 terms or something. Like, if you have like +3 to integrity or something like that, yeah.

(They laugh.)

But all of them were giving just like a slightly raised chance that you might be someone with autism.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You need a cluster, as they say. But then I started taking all these tests. And my Aspie score was 97th percentile.

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow! Oh my goodness!

Carrie Poppy: My RADS-R—the autistic mean is 133, and my score was 164. The systemizing quotient, the average neurotypical is 51.7. Mine was 94.

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow!

Carrie Poppy: Repetitive behaviors, average autistic score 36. Mine is 43.

Ross Blocher: And—I'm sorry, what assessment was this that you were going on that you were getting these numbers from?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, these are all different ones. This is just in my spreadsheet. *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: Oh, oh, I see! That you're—okay, you were combing the internet to find—okay.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, just everything that was validated or even close that I could find. And I came up with—*(counting)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7—8 things that were at least partially validated. And—

Ross Blocher: Where any two of them might be sufficient.

Carrie Poppy: Or one with the AQ.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Wow!

Carrie Poppy: And on seven of eight I was very above the threshold.

Ross Blocher: Now, this is a lateral move here, but just this kind of logic is reminding me a little bit of how we talk about cults, where there's no one thing where you're like, "Aha! You did this! You're a cult now!" It's this series of check boxes. And well, you're expressing control over your followers in this way and this way. And okay, you don't care how they dress, but you do monitor how they're accessing information on the internet. And you get enough of those check boxes, and you're like I think you're a cult now.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and you start to look at this spreadsheet, and you go, "Is Carrie a cult now?"

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Yeah, right. Okay. Lateral move back to where we were. *(Chuckling.)* A cult does not apply, but I like the idea that Carrie is a cult now. Wow!

Carrie Poppy: No, but yeah. I mean, I did start to ask myself, "Now, hang on, hang on."

[00:25:00]

Ross Blocher: Yeah. Well, okay. And I'm hearing all of this with you, listener, for the first time.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, you don't know any of this.

Ross Blocher: And so, then I feel like the next question is like, okay, well, how does this change how I think about myself?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, well, I—okay, so there is a big movement towards self-diagnosis on the internet. And I admit to feeling ambivalent about it. I don't love the language used in it. The language that's often used is, "Self-diagnosis is valid."

And I've got to say, "Valid has a scientific meaning. I can't use that framing, I'm sorry." *(Chuckles.)*

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I feel like I respect the effort, the approach, and everyone's intelligence that's involved. But I feel like one always needs to keep a bit of humility alongside it, where I'll go to the doctor and be like, "Hey, I read, five articles about this thing, and I feel like we're talking about this, but I'm ready for you to shoot that down." Or maybe I'll get the second opinion, and you both shot me down? Okay, alright. Well, then. Thanks.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, and the devil's advocate to that is that autistic people generally have been to a lot of mental health professionals. A lot of people are under informed about autism and how it plays into mental health. So, a lot of these people are just like, you know, <u>really</u> frustrated by the time they hit the expert who finally says like, "Okay, okay, I'll give you the assessment."

So, you know, there's a lot of realities going on there. It's also very expensive to get an assessment. The cheapest ones I could find were like $2,000.

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow! Oh my goodness.

Carrie Poppy: So, some people are just pushed out of the system if we say you <u>must</u> be formally diagnosed.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, right! Yeah, you can't just be highly interested in the results. You have to be committed, economically, to that result. Yeah, that's a lot! Wow.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, I asked—

Ross Blocher: Well, how helpful then to have something that at least gives you the ballpark.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah, definitely. So, I was like, "Well, now I wanna know!" *(Laughs.)* I want to know! Because I have a lot of heroes who are autistic or who I kind of like *(mumbling)* suspect are autistic. Like James Randi. Come on.

Ross Blocher: Oh, interesting. Okay, I could see that.

Carrie Poppy: I'm like, come on. Could anyone be more Asperger's than James Randi?

(They chuckle.)

He's dead. We can say it now.

Ross Blocher: Now, I think of one friend in particular I know who willingly and readily brands himself as Aspie, and that's just kind of his way of navigating the world. He'll just let people know like, "I'm Aspie; this is why I'm gonna behave this way." You know, it kind of gets the—

Carrie Poppy: Uh-huh. Or might come off this way.

Ross Blocher: That's just sort of how he starts the conversation of letting people know what to expect out of their future interactions. And, you know, he uses it well.

Carrie Poppy: Did that help you when he said that to you?

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I mean, we were already friends. And I feel like I do have a lot of friends on the spectrum, but you just mentioned Asperger's, and we haven't really talked about that. Can you talk about how that fits within this spectrum?

Carrie Poppy: Yes. So. Asperger's in the US is basically synonymous with ASD1, Autism Spectrum Disorder 1. So, needs some support, but probably could live independently but for a few adjustments they need from the culture. That's probably where I'd place mentally James Randi, Carl Sagan, Virginia Woolf. *(Chuckles.)* Some people I admire who I do think of as like lone wolves. You know, Virginia Woolf famously needed a room of her own, a quiet room of her own to write her novels. And she wanted $500 a month, and she didn't want the culture to argue about it. This is what she needed. That all sounds very autistic to me.

So, I was like, okay, okay, okay! And I wanted it to explain the suffering I was going through. I was like, <u>please</u>, something.

Ross Blocher: The suffering that comes with some of the more positive aspects, such as fixation on things that gives you an advantage of knowledge in those things.

Carrie Poppy: Totally. Yeah. You know, and I'm starting to like look over at my 400-book trauma library that's chronologized by year and go, "Oh! Uh-oh! Ohhh!"

Ross Blocher: But—right, these superpowers also come with liabilities as well. Yeah.

Carrie Poppy: Potentially. If we're on to something. But you know, maybe I'm in the 2%. And if I were, I would be one of the shiny 2%-ers. I'd be one of the people who had been sort of rewarded for acting like an autistic person. So, maybe I would score that way.

Ross Blocher: It's funny, this conversation is reminding me of a good friend that at one point said to me like, "You seem to have social skills," but you could tell she was trying to like work out like, "Well, I think of you as autistic, but you get along with people. You seem to like people a lot."

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Yes, yes! This is what everyone said to me when I started mentioning it. And I didn't mention it to you, 'cause I knew we were going to talk about this. And I kept thinking like I don't want to sully his score. Like, it's going to affect his score if he knows how I scored, and I don't want to do that. But every person I talked to was like, "Does Ross know? Does Ross—Ross cannot be the last to know."

(They laugh.)

I got this message like four times, and I was like—and I kept saying like, "Trust me, Ross will want to be the last to know. I promise you he will not want me to spoil a scientific experiment. That would be a major sin in our friendship."

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* I do not feel ill served.

Carrie Poppy: Okay, good. Okay, so.

[00:30:00]

I go to C.A. Meyersburg, my friend who teaches at Harvard. I tell her the whole story I just told you. And I say, "The thing is, C.A., if I go to any dinky therapist down the road, and they tell me I have autism, I'm gonna fucking outthink them. I'm gonna convince myself that they're nuts, and I do not in fact have autism, and they have jumped on some bandwagon! And in fact, I should probably start looking into and maybe write an article about." And I said, "C.A., how do I avoid this? I would like to—*(laughs)* I would like to go to the—"

Ross Blocher: I like this awareness of "I see myself spiraling out of control. Please save me from myself." Okay, that's healthy.

Carrie Poppy: Yep! And I thought the price tag will only climb, because I'll go to therapist one. And, clearly, they're going to say, "You have autism." And then I'm going to have to go to therapist two, and I'm going to have to climb up to this expert. "So, C.A., who's the expert?"

And she said, "Carrie, you're in luck. The best clinical program in the United States for what you need is UCLA." So, I went to UCLA.

Ross Blocher: Okay! Nearby.

Carrie Poppy: In January. And I got—no, I'm sorry, February. And Drew and my mom and I had two days' worth of tests and interviews.

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow! Okay, you did the full menu.

Carrie Poppy: Yep, the entire interview history and all of the tests. I had to take IQ tests. I had to play with blocks. I had to have like a long conversation with a stranger about—

Ross Blocher: Wow! Oh, I want to know about these blocks, but I know it's a diversion. So, I'm going to let you keep going.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Okay. I had to read—oh, I should make you do this! I had to read a story with no pictures and tell the story along to the pictures. Oh my goodness. Just hours and hours of this stuff. It was fun, but at times I cried. It was all very intense.

Ross Blocher: Wow. Oh my goodness.

Carrie Poppy: I know!

Ross Blocher: I mean, this is cool though! And I mean, apart from whatever costs came with it, I'm glad that you got to do this.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Yes. Oh, thank you. Yes. I'll tell you the cost at the end.

So, I go through all this testing. They don't tell you right away the results. They tape everything. They videotape everything, and they take it to a panel of experts.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Wait, can I stop and sidebar for a second?

(Carrie confirms.)

I'm just curious, 'cause we were talking about how for women autism is underdiagnosed. What do you think 20 years ago or however far back we need to go—what do you think people would have said was at cause? Would there be an alternate assessment of "this is what we think is affecting Carrie?" Would they just have gone straight to depression, or—?

Carrie Poppy: Oh! Oh, I think I understand what you're saying. So, you're kind of assuming that the expansion of the diagnostic categories has allowed for people like me.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, whereas before you might have been labeled something different.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. So, I guess theoretically, if we're <u>assuming</u> that I have autism—*(mumbling)* which it seems like you're skipping ahead and doing.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, sorry.

Carrie Poppy: It’s okay, we'll see. *(Laughs.)* I think—

Ross Blocher: For someone who does test as having autism as a woman, I'm just curious like was there like a common other assessment?

Carrie Poppy: Oh! I see, I see. Well, there are many women who feel they got misdiagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Which I haven't received that diagnosis. ADHD is a common co-occurring condition. OCD is a common co-occurring condition. Suicidal depression is a common co-occurring condition. In fact, most autistic kids have thought of suicide before age 10.

Ross Blocher: Oh no. Wow.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Really common. Yeah. So, there's a bunch of co-occurring conditions. So, probably what would have happened is just it would have been spotted for being like a sad kid or something like that that wouldn't give you the full picture.

Ross Blocher: Got it. Okay. Sorry. End sidebar.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, that's alright. Okay. So, as I'm waiting for the results, I go to see my GP. Were we talking about my migraines?

Ross Blocher: Your general practitioner. I feel like in other countries they call it something different.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, right. Yeah, my standard doctor, my family doctor. And he's at Kaiser, and I've seen him for 10 years, and they've been 10 great years. But this particular checkup, I told him that I was getting assessed for ASD. And he said, “Well, if you have it, you're clearly not disabled by it.”

Ross Blocher: Okay. Just like, “From my interactions with you, I feel confident saying that you don't need accommodations.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. You don't need any help. And I had never had this feeling in front of a doctor before. I was just like, “Oh, you don't see me. Oh, you don’t see me!”

Ross Blocher: Ohhh, man. Yeah. And he thought—

Carrie Poppy: Oh my god! And I just—ten years in, oh my god!

Ross Blocher: This is a he? He thought he was probably like, I don't know, saying something supportive like, “Ohh, look how well you're doing! From my—”

Carrie Poppy: Yes, yes. “You come off normal to me.” Yeah, yeah.

Ross Blocher: But that actually said something very different to you.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, ‘cause this is the person I know behind closed doors, the person who I come to and go like, “I've had 100 migraines this year.”

You know, that guy is like, “BLEH! I don't know! You look good!”

(They chuckle.)

No! So, I—

[00:35:00]

This is the only time I think I've done this. I switched my doctor and asked for an ASD literate doctor. And then my assessment rolled in.

Ross Blocher: Okay.

Carrie Poppy: And… I have autism!

Ross Blocher: Okay!

Carrie Poppy: I have type 1 autism.

Ross Blocher: Type 1, okay.

Carrie Poppy: I'm in the 99th percentile for verbal intelligence, but the 66th for spatial intelligence. Which—

Ross Blocher: Oh, interesting. Maps. Which I can see, but you can't.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Kind of! That's right. Like, which—

Ross Blocher: Joke, people.

Carrie Poppy: It's part of why Ross will have to fill in the gaps whenever we're talking about how something looked or even how a person looked, and I just won't recall. It’s—

Ross Blocher: But verbally, you’re on it.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, it's actually like not being stored in the same way as it is for you.

Ross Blocher: Oh! Fascinating. We were talking about a totally different set of results recently, and you were giving me some numbers. And I was saying, “You're a person of extremes, Carrie.”

Carrie Poppy: Yup! That's right, and that's common for autism I now know. It's the disorder that kind of explains having a bunch of weird shit going on. *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: You are not lukewarm. Jesus will not spit you out of his mouth. You are either hot or cold.

Carrie Poppy: But I wanted to bring Drew in to talk a little about it too. Is that okay?

Ross Blocher: Absolutely.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah? *(Off mic.)* Hey, babe! Hey, sweetie!

Drew Spears: Oh, hi. How's it going?

Carrie Poppy: Good, how are you? *(On mic.)* Okay. He's grabbing a water. He may clink-clink. But what are you thinking right now?

Ross Blocher: I mean, I guess my first grounding thought is always like, "Well, you're always Carrie." So, I mean, that doesn't change anything. But I don't know anybody like Carrie.

(Carrie "aw"s.)

So, I feel like this is just like—okay, well, this is part of the puzzle piece that is the mystery of Carrie.

Carrie Poppy: There's that. I'm so grateful that Drew was the person to point it out to me for 100 reasons. But—

Ross Blocher: Yeah, now that we have Drew approaching the table.

Carrie Poppy: But yeah, one of them is because he could reflect to me that like—he has a physical disability, and he could reflect to me that like, "Nope, this disables you. I see the suffering. You don't need to equivocate about this."

Ross Blocher: So, we've learned, Drew, that you had an inkling of this, that you were kind of working on this theory over time. Were you concerned with what Carrie's reaction would be?

Drew Spears: Oh, god yeah. Absolutely. It's not like I was like, "I have an inkling!" and then like was looking for more and more and was like hiding it for years. I don't know if you quite said that earlier, but it was just was just kind of like—well, first of all, there was the sensory stuff. Like, Carrie had very strong opinions on how like the inside of her sweaters would pill up.

Ross Blocher: Oh, wow. Now, that's interesting. That wouldn't have been a cause for questioning for me until I took one of these assessments. I think you learned something from these assessments in that it kept talking about tactile opinions.

(Drew agrees.)

Demands from certain foods and from clothes.

Drew Spears: It wouldn't be for me either. I think that your kind of like "what is a cult" comparison is apt. Because it's very much like one of those things doesn't mean anything. But I mean, that was kind of the first thing, and like noise sensitivity was very big and a real like discomfort with set and setting in a way that like I personally couldn't relate to. For example, overhead lighting versus, you know, lighting from lamps and things like that. And you know, in a way that—you know, there's that kind of meme about like cozy women, but like that's not really what Carrie—like, Carrie was like, "This is unpleasant, to be around overhead lighting."

So, like those are a few things, you know. Clearly also, you know, intense interests and focus in esoteric areas.

Ross Blocher: *(Giggles.)* Welcome to our show!

Drew Spears: Yeah. Welcome to your show. Welcome to the trauma library. Welcome to, you know, the *Dick Van Dyke Show* and *Mary Tyler Moore*. And—

Ross Blocher: We all have hobbies and interests, but this is of a different character, you feel.

Drew Spears: And you know, it's one of those things where it's like you're not necessarily putting your finger on it until—

Carrie Poppy: *(Quietly.)* That's what she said.

(Ross laughs.)

Drew Spears: Yeah. And then this kind of bigger—and I'm using a term that's used in autism communities, but what now we would probably call autistic burnout or autistic meltdown would be happening with more frequency during this very stressful time for Carrie. You know, and Carrie kind of prefaced it by being like—you know, I was able to identify like, no, this is a disability, and this is suffering.

And this has been a very—I mean, I was listening from the other room—a joyously fun and silly way of, you know, looking at this. And I'm grateful for this. I think that we can sometimes look at diagnoses and disabilities as uniquely bad or, you know, tragic or a burden, but not everything that's heavy is a burden.

[00:40:00]

And you know, I would absolutely say that so many of the things that like I fell in love with Carrie, I saw in that final autism assessment. So, I really was like, wow, I see the traits of the woman I love. But that's to say, yeah, there was a lot of suffering. And there was a lot of—

Ross Blocher: That's where you felt this could be helpful to mention and give you as an option.

Drew Spears: You know, when Carrie was like, "Is this a mood disorder?" or things like that. And you know, especially amplifying at the death of Ella, who—Carrie's relationship with Ella— I mean, you know, it's very clear to anyone who listens to this show that it was really unique even among people who love animals. But like, I think Ella allowed Carrie to hyper focus on a pet in a way that it kind of got her a little bit out of her head and a little bit out of her surroundings. You know, I don't think I could say for certain that Ella was, you know, quote/unquote a service animal, but I think she kind of served that function.

So, you know, when it was like this like "what's going on?" And you know, what is the source of this suffering? And I was just like I think it might be autism. And it was scary, because, you know, I do think there's a version of that that could feel like I am throwing it in my wife's face. There's a version of it where it's just like I was afraid I would come off like the controlling, gaslight-y spouse. It's something that, you know, people are a little casual with like using it. I think people are more self-effacing when they talk about like autistic tendencies or things like that they identify with.

But you know, it also can be kind of used—I'm avoiding the word "slur", because that seems heavy, and I don't want to like equate things with like racial connotations or like— Well, and I, growing up as someone with a physical disability, the "R" slur was thrown at me a lot. So, I wouldn't say that's one-to-one. But like, you know, "stop being autistic" or "you're acting autistic". And this is certainly something that can be used to like shut someone up or make them feel less-than. So, I didn't know how Carrie would react.

And she was like, "Oh, that's interesting, but I'll—like, if you really think that—" And I think she could also see that I was afraid to say that. And—

Ross Blocher: So, she was trying to manage <u>your</u> feelings as well in the moment. I'm watching Carrie right now for her reactions. *(Chuckles.)*

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I could just see like Drew looked so nervous that I just thought like, "Oh my gosh, this is so hard for him. I better go take this quiz." *(Laughs.)* Like—yeah, I just felt like this is important. Yeah, yeah.

Ross Blocher: Just to take it seriously enough. But you weren't expecting much to come of it.

Carrie Poppy: No, I had thought like this'll put his mind at ease.

(Ross laughs.)

I'll go and take this, and you will feel a lot better that I—don't worry, your wife's not autistic.

Ross Blocher: I gotta say, I hadn't expected it. It wasn't something I thought.

Carrie Poppy: Okay!

Drew Spears: I, during this—because it was like probably—I don't know, from like I suggest it to like you got your diagnosis, it was what? Like four months?

Carrie Poppy: Like three months.

Drew Spears: So, like we—and because, you know, Carrie mentioned like these things are expensive, and we're in a privileged position—we jumped on it fast. And we were very fortunate in that way. And you know, I kind of ruminated a lot over those three months about like, "Oh, what if it's a no, and then like I've—you know—suggested that my wife has this disability that she doesn't? Or what if it does, and it changes her life. And like, you know.

Ross Blocher: You're weighing this like game theoretic calculation of like how will this redound against me?

Drew Spears: Yeah, which is pure neurosis. Ultimately, it's been good to have this understanding. I mean, I think if we talk about like, socially as partners and spouses, things that we would fight over—whether it's, you know, me perceiving a rigidity in Carrie or like sometimes being like, "You're being stubborn, or like you're being almost litigating" in a way that I think people who are neurotypical are like, "Well, no, you only act like this if you're trying to catch someone in like a fallacy or something like that." And it took me until that diagnosis to be like, oh, no, when Carrie says that she doesn't understand something or is like trying to work through the logic of something, it's very sincere.

Which, you know, not to say that I didn't think Carrie was sincere. She's the most sincere person I know. But it's just like people who are neurotypical are just used to divining meaning and having theory of mind and trying to be like, "What is this person—? You know, what are they really trying to say?"

Ross Blocher: That's funny. You mentioned that sort of debate over how we're actually looking at a situation. Because that comes up on the podcast all the time. "I'm honestly asking this because I don't know." "Oh, really? You are?! Okay. Alright!"

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Theory of mind is interesting, because like—theory of mind is already poor even in neurotypical people. Sorry, suckers!

(They chuckle.)

But in autistic people, it is even lower. Not by a huge margin, but it is lower.

Ross Blocher: And when we say theory of mind, we're talking about just modeling other people's perceptions.

Carrie Poppy: Guessing what's going on in your head. Mind reading. Mind reading!

[00:45:00]

So, anyway, what I've learned since my diagnosis is that most of you jokers are sitting around going, "I think I know what's going on!" And I just don't do that, because it's insane! Because it's insane! Is this really what you guys are doing?! You got to spend your time better!

Drew Spears: Yeah, absolutely that's what we're doing!

(They laugh.)

Or like, you know—and this may be like classic spouse stuff, but like "Can you tell me what you're feeling? Like, oh, you're not telling me? Is this now like a part of the like 'I don't want to tell you what I'm feeling.'"

But like, Carrie once, very early on in our relationship, was like, "It's hard for me to conjure what I'm feeling. I just—" You told me that you don't think in words—which, you know, for someone who's so, you know, adept at writing and speaking, it just seemed like impossible. Because like I have like a typewriter in my brain going, "Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da." Like, I'm a hyperverbal processor. Which has for, you know, nearly 10 years been a point of consternation for us. Because I'm like someone that's like, "I need to work my feelings out right now."

And you're like, "I need to not feel this overwhelm," which we now know is like this hyper acuity of sensory details when you're getting—I wouldn't say agitated, but like, you know, when you're upset or things like that, when it's like you have to like break off. For me, it would always be like, "Well—" I mean, I think people know that like let people cool off when you need to cool off, but like I have this very attached style. Like, sitting in discomfort's very hard for me. And having the clarity of an autism assessment, like I can now really take that in stride. It's not a matter of preference, you know. It's not Carrie getting away or me getting away. It's for someone—I need to meet them where they're at. It's like trying to speak, you know, a second language.

So, I think that's been really good. And it's been like relieving, because it's like, oh, a lot of these things that like cause consternation was like a neurotypical person and someone who didn't know that they were neurodivergent trying to like have some sort of shared understanding about how to communicate our sensory stuff. I don't know, what do you feel about that?

Carrie Poppy: I think you're talking about how when we have conflicts you want to talk them out, and I want a break to go into my office. Is that right?

Drew Spears: Largely, yeah.

Carrie Poppy: Okay, yeah, yeah. Yes, this is true. Like, we just—that's what I want is like a break if we have conflict, and Drew wants to like repair actively in the moment. And this is just an autistic versus non-autistic thing. We just didn't know.

Ross Blocher: Sounds like a very common scenario for many couples probably across a variety of mental configurations. But one thing you were saying kind of stood out to me. 'Cause, you know, I wouldn't have suspected that you, Carrie, have issues with theory of mind—at least not on a fundamental level—because that's the sort of thing we talk about on the show all the time! What's going on in that person's head?

(Carrie chuckle.)

Like, why would you say that?! Or do you really believe that thing you're saying? So, I feel like we spend so much time sifting through those questions, I would just sort of assume that we both have this running as a constant subroutine in our heads, where we're modeling the thought patterns of others.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I guess—I mean, for me, it's about comparing language. So, as you've pointed out, if someone is inconsistent, I'll notice it before others. I'll notice like that thing you said in this sentence doesn't match this thing you said in that sentence eight sentences ago!

Ross Blocher: Well, and that's where I feel I'll often disagree, where I'll think, "Sure, technically, if you just look at the words, but I don't see an inconsistency there, because there's a lot of wiggle room." That would be an area where now it would make a little more sense to me if that's how you're looking at it.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. I have this like very long cognitive loop that happens. And as I'm like listening to something—I was just trying to describe this to Drew the other day. It's as if like—I don't see them, but it's as if all the words are in front of me, and then one sort of lights up. It's like pay attention to just this for a second! And then as the speaker continues, I have to just like—okay, I have to understand exactly what this one thing is. And then I finally got it, and I can move along with the speaker. But the only way to handle this is to record and keep relistening.

Ross Blocher: I was going to say, I kind of know this feeling, but you have a certain sort of delay, a gap that you can hold on to the subsequent utterances from that person. And then you've lost it. So, I'll do that sometimes, like replaying that little buffer I have in my head of the last 10 words that came out or whatever.

Carrie Poppy: A few seconds or whatever.

Drew Spears: Well, and I would say that—you know, this is something that like I think Carrie, you know, excels as a journalist and a researcher, because I think you had developed all these systems of like "Well, I can't really divine what someone's thinking. I can divine data, I can divine facts, I can divine information. I can listen back to something." And, you know, it's why you're such a prodigious note taker. You know, you do research. I mean, you

both do research before the show. You like listen back to lectures and things like that. But I think that's skill, that's masking, that's like kind of working systems that—you know, makes you a brilliant journalist. Once again, I don't want to belabor the fact that like you are—

[00:50:00]

I don't like the phrase high functioning, but there's an easy way to flatten this where it's like, oh, you know, well. It worked out for her. And it's like, yeah, but there was a lot of suffering on the way. And like, that belongs to Carrie, and I don't want to be like, "Trust us." But like, it's just like—

Carrie Poppy: You can say "trust us".

Drew Spears: Trust us. I'm 35 at this point, and it wasn't until—I was diagnosed with rubella palsy at 11 months, you know. The first appearance on the show was talking about it. But like I, since 16 to like 30/31, until I got—32 maybe, when I got my disability placard.

Carrie Poppy: And why?

Drew Spears: And why? Because I didn't think I was disabled enough to have a disability placard. I was like, "That's not for me." And maybe some of it was not wanting to. Maybe some of it was stubbornness. Maybe some of it, it was like not literally wanting to—

Ross Blocher: A little bit of pride riding on being in one category rather than another.

Drew Spears: And I have it now. And I gotta say, it's fucking great, people!

(Ross laughs.)

Carrie Poppy: Yeah! Well, we used to pay like—we would pay like $90 extra sometimes for VIP parking, so Drew could walk a shorter distance.

(Ross "wow"s.)

And then I would be like, "Babe, this is literally what it's for. This is what it's for!" It took a lot of convincing.

Drew Spears: Yes. In many ways, I have a disability that is not as bad as a lot of people or, you know, doesn't—

Ross Blocher: But you can get lost in those comparison games.

Drew Spears: Yeah, you absolutely can. And you might be losing the opportunities to make your life easier. Or if you believe in the social model of a disability, which I do, is like getting society to bend a little bit, so that you can be comfortable. You know, I always thought I was going to be someone in a relationship where it's like I was going to be the one that was

perceived as, you know, disabled and stuff like that. And to whatever extent that I've been helpful in this process, it's been a very humbling experience. It's been a very powerful experience. It's been an experience that has, you know, had highs and lows. And I have a tremendous amount of gratitude, ultimately. Because Carrie did something—I mean, shocker of shocker if you listen to the show—really brave and front-facing and like learned something big.

And I'm glad that it's not Carrie's job to be the model of an autistic person in public. It's not her job to be, you know, the ideal advocate or to speak perfectly every moment of the day. And I'm not a member of the autism community, but it's a lot of people with—

Carrie Poppy: *(Sing-song.)* That we know of!

Drew Spears: That we know of. I got a 17.

(They chuckle.)

I mean, and it's also like—who knows. I also took a genotyping test where you get a lot of like things about what—you know, your genetic disposition for. And I was on the 100th percentile for autism.

Ross Blocher: Really?

Drew Spears: And I thought like, oh, I beat the case. But then the next—the very next thing was like, "Likelihood of enjoying computers for leisure time," and I was in the 99th percentile on that. And I was like, well, I can't beat that allegation. That's just empirically true.

(Ross chuckles.)

I love my screen time. So, I don't know.

Ross Blocher: This is reminding me that I haven't accessed those results yet, which we will be talking about in the future on this show.

Drew Spears: I don't think it's Carrie's job to be an advocate or be the like model of someone with autism. But I also think that, you know, there's a great opportunity here to show that you can live a life joyous and happy and proud and also be like, "These are the ways that I need things to be amendable for me." And you know, If you love this show, and if you love Carrie, you love her autism.

(Carrie "aw"s.)

You do.

Carrie Poppy: Thank you, sweetie!

Drew Spears: I love you, hon.

Carrie Poppy: I love you.

Ross Blocher: Well, I did not know this was where the conversation was going tonight.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* Yeah. I did—oh, I did try—and this is new for me. I tried hinting. Did you pick up on my hints?

Ross Blocher: Well, clearly I did not.

Carrie Poppy: I'm not a hinter at all! *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: I know we were going to record about something different for this episode. And you were like, "Well, let's go ahead and do the autism quotient thing." Like, alright! I took my test!

Carrie Poppy: Okay. No, I just kept mentioning autism to you, just to try to get it into your—*(laughs)*.

Ross Blocher: Well, geez, the things that we talk about!

Carrie Poppy: Autism again, autism again. But no, I guess it didn't work. Well, listen, I'm new to hinting! I didn't know that I wasn't doing it! And now I know about it!

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Oh, that's weird. It arrived at the lab, but they haven't done the testing yet. Does it take a while?

Carrie Poppy: It did take a while.

Ross Blocher: Alright. Well, then we don't know what my genetic predisposition to autism is.

Carrie Poppy: Mine was 75th percentile. I have eight autism alleles.

Ross Blocher: Lower than Drew's.

(Carrie confirms.)

Interesting. Well, should we talk about the questions that are in this assessment? I think people might be curious, if they haven't already gone to the website.

Carrie Poppy: Sure. But you know, before you talk about that—you know, there's a book called *All Cats Have Asperger's Syndrome*?

Ross Blocher: Oh, is there? I've kind of heard that joke and repeated it, just judging by my own cat that—*(chuckles)*.

Carrie Poppy: Sensory overwhelm, wanting their own space, all that. Sure! Do you feel that you need to keep her space clean and tidy for her?

Ross Blocher: I think she prefers that. Yeah.

[00:55:00]

When our old litter box would get overrun, you could see that sifting process of like, "I can't work with this! What am I supposed to do?"

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>
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>
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>
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>
> *(Music fades out.)*

Carrie Poppy: So, I did write to the creator of the AQ.

[01:00:00]

He's in the UK. He wrote back to me.

Ross Blocher: The other Baron Cohen.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, Simon Baron-Cohen from—

Ross Blocher: Oh, he wrote you back!

Carrie Poppy: Yep, from Trinity College, Cambridge. So, I wrote to him, I said, “Hey, we're gonna be talking about your AQ. Can I send you some questions?” He said yes. I wrote him back with questions. Now we are recording this podcast before his next reply. So, everyone hang on to your hats.

Ross Blocher: Oh, I see. We'll have to share those responses.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. We'll follow up. So, if you go and look up the AQ test online, one of the things you'll quickly discover is that some people don't like it. *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: They don't like the test?

Carrie Poppy: The test itself.

Ross Blocher: Okay. And what is usually the flavor of their complaint?

Carrie Poppy: Usually it's that the test misses high masking or high camouflaging autistic women. But they did study it. Once this complaint was put out there, people started trying to control for gender and see if the AQ test still works. And it does appear that it is the camouflaging itself that is the mechanism by which the confusion happens. It's not gender itself. It's that women are probably encouraged to camouflage, and so get really good at it. So, can you—

Ross Blocher: It makes sense.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Can you blame the test for that? I say no. Some people say, “Well, then the test makers should go back to the drawing board and figure out the problem and work around the problem.” Eh, maybe. And the other thing that I kept seeing was the note that women's special interests are often more related to socializing, communication, the arts. And men's are more often—whether this is socialized or not—more often tend to be the STEM/tech end of it. So, if you're a guy taking the AQ and those are your hobbies, you're more likely to just immediately be like, “Oh, that's me!” Cop to it. Whereas—

Ross Blocher: You’ve already been introduced to the idea of this might be you.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, exactly. You see Legos, you go, “Oh, yeah, that's me.” Whereas if like your personal obsession is the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, maybe that doesn't occur to you the second you're looking at the AQ test.

Ross Blocher: Right. But if you've been watching *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*, then you would. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, exactly. So, the other complaint is that Simon Baron-Cohen, the creator—the primary creator—describes autism in masculine terms often. And he is this—

bless him, but you know, he's this sort of like older British man who's very *(adopting a posh affect and English accent)* proper and reminds me a bit of Richard Dawkins, and so he says everything in simple and dramatic terms!

(Returning to her usual voice.) When he says this thing, that autism is like the extreme end of the male brain, what he's getting at—and probably clumsily—is that elevated testosterone is associated with autism risk. So, if your pregnant parent has more testosterone during your pregnancy, you're more likely to end up autistic.

Ross Blocher: Okay. What is the general occurrence of autism in the population?

Carrie Poppy: This is like a point of huge debate, especially since they updated the *DSM* to change Asperger's to ASD1. The least conservative estimate I've heard is like 1 in 40 births.

Ross Blocher: Oh, okay.

Carrie Poppy: And the most conservative is usually more around like 1 in 100 to 1 in 200. Yeah. Is that—what do you think? That's higher or—?

Ross Blocher: It sounds lower than I was expecting. And I'm sure due to diagnosis, recognition, those numbers have gone up over time. And I've certainly heard like the anti-vaccine crowd and all of its noise that it generates talking about increased levels of autism. And I'm thinking, well, come on, testing!

The broader point is that there are trends in diagnosis.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, totally. Yes. And often it's just like a clinician had someone suffering in front of them and got as close as they possibly could to a marker.

Ross Blocher: To get them some help. Yep. 'Cause, as I think you've already stated pretty well, all of this is just a shorthand to getting people attention, assistance where needed.

Carrie Poppy: Yep. Totally. But yeah, what stood out to you about the test itself when you took it?

Ross Blocher: Maybe we should just walk through these 50 questions.

Carrie Poppy: All 50?

Ross Blocher: Or I don't know, highlight some. Because I think people will be kind of curious. Like, wow. Well, obviously there's a lot of power in these questions. What kind of things are they asking about?

And again, you can agree or disagree to different degrees, slightly or definitely. So, they ask, for example, whether you prefer to do things with others than on your own. And I'm just going to read the questions now, so I'm not trying to like change pronouns on the fly.

“I prefer to do things the same way over and over again.”

“If I try to imagine something, I find it very easy to create a picture in my mind.”

Carrie Poppy: *(Chuckling under her breath.)* No…

Ross Blocher: “I frequently get so strongly absorbed in one thing that I lose sight of other things.” As I'm reading these, I should be working down my own results, because I'm now curious what I said. Okay, I slightly disagreed on that one.

“I often notice small sounds when others do not.”

[01:05:00]

Carrie Poppy: 100%. 130%.

Ross Blocher: I slightly disagreed.

(Carrie “oof”s.)

Because people will point out sounds to me, and I'll be like, “Oh, that's right! Good point.”

Carrie Poppy: Oh man, I had to quit AV club in fifth grade because of the sounds of just like things being plugged in.

Ross Blocher: Oh, really? Oh, interesting. Okay, I think I've seen that elsewhere—like a question about being sensitive to the sound of electronics.

Carrie Poppy: Uh-huh. I threw up at Nerd Melt once just ‘cause they turned the neon sign on.

Ross Blocher: Oh my goodness! Okay!

(They chuckle.)

Wow, in retrospect, everything seems so clear!

(Carrie agrees with a laugh.)

“I usually notice car number plates or similar strings of information.” That was a definite agree for me.

(Carrie agrees.)

And you know what? I think that's what may have prompted that conversation with a friend. ‘Cause I just happened to know her license plate number. And I was like, “It's not a weird—I'm not singling you out. I just happen to memorize license plate numbers sometimes.”

Carrie Poppy: *(Cackles.)* I don't know more about you. I know more about your license plate.

Ross Blocher: And I remember I told you about this, and you're like, “Well, what's my license plate number?” And I said your license plate number. And you're like, “Okay, checks out.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, there you go. See, I fact check.

Ross Blocher: “Other people frequently tell me that what I've said is impolite, even though I think it is polite.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I don't feel that people tell me I'm impolite.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Yeah, I feel like that deeply impacts me if someone tells me that I'm being impolite, to the point where like I will remember and count on two hands the times it's happened in my life. So, I just don't feel like it's a common thing.

“When I'm reading a story, I can easily imagine what the characters might look like.”

Carrie Poppy: Why would you bother?

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* They're just words on a page. Who cares what they are?

Carrie Poppy: No, I mean, really. Why would you bother? Why would someone spend time on this? *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: That’s funny. Well, this is a feature of the podcast, that I'm usually going to be the one who's detailing what somebody looks like. Because I feel that the listener will be like me and want to have a mental image. But I still—

Carrie Poppy: Oh my god. I tried to read this book called *NeuroTribes* that's about autism, and they were like, *(nasally)* “And so-and-so has brown hair, and he's riding on a boat.” And I was like, oh my god, KILL me!

Ross Blocher: Know your audience!

Carrie Poppy: Exactly.

Ross Blocher: That's funny. I only said slightly agree to that one, because I can sometimes like read a book and then realize part way through like I haven't given this person a mental picture.

“I am fascinated by dates.”

I definitely agreed with that one.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. The truth happens in order.

Ross Blocher: So, as I was answering this, I thought, “Oh, might be up there!”

“In a social group, I can easily keep track of several different people's conversations.”

Carrie Poppy: No, why would you do that? You're not going to pay anyone any good attention if you do that.

Ross Blocher: It's so funny. I've done this to Cara a few times, where we'll be out somewhere or like we're on a plane or we're at a restaurant and like there's someone having a quiet conversation somewhere. I know she's listening to it. So, I'll be talking with her, but I'll be monitoring the conversation, because I know she's monitoring the conversation.

(Carrie laughs.)

She's going to have thoughts about the conversation. And when I reveal that to her or make a comment on her or what I think she wants to say about it, she'll be like, “How dare you?!”

(They laugh.)

Carrie Poppy: This is like sometimes Drew gets this sneaky look on his face when he's just looked at his phone, because he got news that a man he doesn't like behaved badly. So, I'll just see this little shit eating grin on his face, and I’ll be like—

Ross Blocher: And you’ll be like, “Joe Rogan put his foot in it again, right?”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I'll be like, “Was there a man who behaved badly?”

And he'll be like, “Yyyeah.” But not always. Not always.

Ross Blocher: That's so funny.

“I find social situations easy.”

Carrie Poppy: Easy. See, this is what really tripped me up when I was doing my assessment. I was like I have a lot of friends. *(Laughs.)* Is this a problem? I have so many friends.

And they were like, “Yeah, uh, okay, okay.” And I feel like I'm rewarded for my communication all the time. Like, I'm told all the time that I'm a great communicator and that

I have all these friends and that I'm so nice. And so, I was just like I don't know how to process this.

Ross Blocher: You found an easy pathway to say, “Not a problem”?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. But then the UCLA people pointed out to me that, yeah, like I've hyper focused on communication! I like center it in my world and go like, “Yes, a conversation! Let's record it! Let's—oh, let's prepare everything. I will need to know everything about the subject matter.” And then, you know, if I'm out of my element and not talking about my special interests, and like I'm just like at a party, and I'm like, “What do you do?” Then it's a whole different math. And so, I do find those environments—oh, man, like when we go to a podcast thing, and it's like I have to give a talk for an hour, but then I have to mill for 25 minutes, I'm like, “Oh my god, let me leave.”

Ross Blocher: Yeah. And I think that's something we've kind of discovered recently that, you know, if I have a friend who wants to meet Carrie, that's very uncomfortable for Carrie.

Carrie Poppy: That’s very nice. *(Laughs.)* That’s very nice for them.

Ross Blocher: Okay. Well, alright. Well, that—you know, it helps me make sense of that a little more now. So, that’s something.

Carrie Poppy: Good. Yeah, I mean, you know, I've met—I meet these people, but it just takes a while. But yeah, I just—it is the most stressful part of it. And I always think of that Tennessee thing we went to, Pod Con, where we had a meet and greet. And I don't know if you remember this, but afterward I was like, “How was that for you?”

[01:10:00]

And you were like, “Eh, it was okay. I don't know if I'd do it twice, because of the setup. But like, it was nice. We got to meet everybody!”

And I was like, *(wheezes)* “I’m gonna tear my hair out. I need to go to my hotel room. I'm losing my mind.”

Ross Blocher: I feel like that was kind of a thread that I saw in these questions and the other assessment as well, that I do get energy from being around other people. I do like meeting new people. I don't like small talk. So, I want to get a conversation out of that as fast as I can.

Carrie Poppy: Okay, yep, me too.

Ross Blocher: But I like everybody I meet, and I want to find that thing we can share.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, me too. I like everybody I meet. That was a thing that I like didn't know how to—it's just like a weird thing.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, how to reconcile.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. I just—I like it. It's just so much energy. It's just all of my—

Ross Blocher: It takes so much outta you.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. It's like choosing to roller skate every day. It's like you might really enjoy it, but like you're gonna have to put a cap on that, you know?

Ross Blocher: *(Chuckles.)* Okay.

"I tend to notice details that others do not." I said definitely agree on that.

(Carrie agrees.)

"I would rather go to a library than a party." I slightly disagreed on that.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, what?!

Ross Blocher: I love libraries! But I like parties too.

Carrie Poppy: Well, yeah, the books are there.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, well the books will still be there.

Carrie Poppy: Everyone's talking at the party, and at the library, they're all quiet.

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* "I find making up stories easy." I slightly disagreed on that one.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I slightly disagreed.

Ross Blocher: "I find myself drawn more strongly to people than to things."

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I don't know what that means.

Ross Blocher: I slightly agreed. Yeah, I think I probably have that same sort of like, "Well, I guess I do bend towards people?"

Carrie Poppy: What's a thing?

Ross Blocher: "I tend to have very strong interests, which I get upset about if I can't pursue."

(Carrie agrees.)

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I actually said slightly agree, because I thought I do sense in myself—like, if I don't get to read for a certain amount of time, I will get upset. And I need to change my life so that I have time to read, and other things need to just wait.

"I enjoy social chit chat." I slightly agreed with that.

Carrie Poppy: Eh, I don't know what social chit chat is, but it sounds bad.

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* "When I talk, it isn't always easy for others to get a word in edgewise."

(Beat.)

Carrie Poppy: *(Chuckles.)* Pregnant pause. I don't <u>think</u> I have this particular problem.

Ross Blocher: We're on a podcast right now where dead air is nothing. So, I would ask people not to judge my speaking patterns by that. I feel like I'm very attentive in a conversation to people getting equity. And like in the book club, that's my job. Like, "So-and-so, we haven't heard from you in a while." Anyways, I feel like I'm attentive to that. But you know, I realize in the context of a podcast that I'm talking way more than I would in another situation.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah, no. I monitor it. You know, like I'm constantly like, "Oh, I've talked for two minutes. This person needs to talk for roughly two minutes." But that's a masking habit. It is a masking habit.

Ross Blocher: That could be—right. Yeah, yeah, as soon as you said that. Which I would believe if someone told me that that was just me masking, where I was kind of monitoring the flow of conversation. But I don't get a lot of people telling me like, "When do I get to talk?"

"I am fascinated by numbers." *(Chuckles.)* Definitely agree.

Carrie Poppy: Interesting. Yeah, see, I would say no. I don't care about numbers. But I care about dates, which are numbers, so I…

Ross Blocher: But for their non-number qualities.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, it's about getting the story in order.

Ross Blocher: Number 20, "When I'm reading a story, I find it difficult to work out the character's intentions."

Carrie Poppy: What is your answer to this? I was just talking to Claire about this today.

Ross Blocher: Oh! Slightly disagree.

Carrie Poppy: That you find it difficult?

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I'm slightly disagree.

Carrie Poppy: I was like, “Why would someone do this?”

Ross Blocher: Why would someone—?

Carrie Poppy: Like, try to figure out the motivations of a fake person.

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Well, that's funny. Because in saying, “Why would someone do this?”, you're asking a question about a fake person's intentions.

Carrie Poppy: Right. The test taker, who is me.

(Ross laughs.)

Why would I do this?

Ross Blocher: What was the conversation with Claire about this?

Carrie Poppy: Claire does this. She reads—listen to this, Ross! She reads fiction. She thinks about why the characters are doing things and what they'll do next! Do you do this?

Ross Blocher: You know what? I tend to eschew fiction. I'm not really that drawn to fiction. I read some, but I would say usually I feel like it's kind of a waste of my time. Like, okay, I'm just dwelling in someone's fictional world that they have full control over.

(Carrie cheers in agreement.)

How is this useful in my life?

Carrie Poppy: Yes! This is what I was telling Claire!

Ross Blocher: Okay. And yet there are plenty of fiction works that I love. I was really into sci-fi/fantasy growing up. So, you know.

Carrie Poppy: But I just—I don't understand. It’s a waste of time.

Ross Blocher: For me, it's like—

Carrie Poppy: Not fiction, but trying to figure out like why did a fake person do a fake thing that this other person made up? I'm like you're doing what?! Read the text!

Ross Blocher: I mean, I would find that exercise helpful in as much as I respect the author to have put thought into that and for it—for there to be some gold in them there hills.

Carrie Poppy: I just immediately have this feeling of like I'm contaminating my head with untrue stories. My mind isn't going to be able to tell fiction from fact. I'm putting all the stories into the same bucket, and I'm giving undue weight to some fake story just because fucking JK Rowling wrote it.

[01:15:00]

And now I'm going to believe in wizards when I'm 70.

(They laugh.)

And that's just all cluttering up my reading experience.

Ross Blocher: I do have that frustration when I'm reading a lot of the books that we read for the podcast. You know, if you're telling me about your thoughts on, you know, cats and how they can clean your soul or whatever it was—

Carrie Poppy: *(Chortles.)* That's nice.

Ross Blocher: I'm thinking—like, when I'm reading, I'm absorbing information. And now I'm absorbing actively false information. It's a frustrating thing, because I have to like, I don't know, turn off this part of me. Or at least be aware of like how is this seeping into me?

Carrie Poppy: Yes, totally.

Ross Blocher: That's a problem. Just—

Carrie Poppy: No, I feel good about it.

Ross Blocher: Professional problem. Okay. Well, that leads right into number 21.

"I don't particularly enjoy reading fiction." And I said—

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I agree. I mean, I like a lot of it, but like on balance, it's clear that nonfiction outnumbers.

Ross Blocher: Same here. Yeah. I said slightly disagree, because I do enjoy fiction, and I feel like every now and then I'll tell myself, "You haven't read fiction in a while. Read some fiction."

"I find it hard to make new friends."

Carrie Poppy: No.

Ross Blocher: Definitely disagree here.

“I notice patterns and things all the time.”

Carrie Poppy: Very much so.

Ross Blocher: Definitely agree here. Okay, look at this! We’re—similar answers.

Carrie Poppy: I know! But you’re 14!

Ross Blocher: “I would rather go to the theatre than a museum.”

Carrie Poppy: That's hard for me.

Ross Blocher: I didn't like that one, because I love theaters and museums.

Carrie Poppy: I like the environment of a museum better. I like the product of a theatre more.

Ross Blocher: Okay, I said slightly agree.

“It does not upset me if my daily routine is disturbed.”

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* I know that is false for me.

Ross Blocher: Here we go, this might be a point of departure. I said slightly agree. It does not upset me if my daily routine is disturbed.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, wow. Yeah. When Drew and I were on a cruise a few months ago, I was out of my mind, because I like couldn't—I like needed to get back to work. I was just—I don't know. I was so anxious. And so, finally Drew was like, “This is your—”

Ross Blocher: This is no longer relaxing.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Well, he was like, “This is your story on the love boat, babe. If you were on the love boat, you would be the person who needs to learn that you don't have to force relaxation. You can go back to your cabin. You can work on work for two hours. It's no big deal. That's you! That's you on the love boat.”

(Ross “aw”s.)

And that made me feel better. And I went back and worked.

Ross Blocher: Well done, Drew.

Carrie Poppy: See?! He's the best!

Drew Spears: *(Distantly, off mic.)* Thank you!

Ross Blocher: "I frequently find that I don't know how to keep a conversation going."

Carrie Poppy: Nope, not a problem! Keep doing it. Keep doing it for hours. You just talk about whatever you feel like, just whatever comes in your head, and they will keep going.

Ross Blocher: "I find it easy to read between the lines when someone is talking to me."

Carrie Poppy: I wouldn't do that. That's rude.

(Ross laughs.)

I would not assume what someone is saying that wasn't in the words! That's rude.

Ross Blocher: Okay!

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* People should say the words they mean. And then this won't be a problem at all!

Ross Blocher: Alright! "I usually concentrate more on the whole picture rather than small details."

Carrie Poppy: Mmm. No, I wish that I had that talent, but I don't.

Ross Blocher: I slightly disagree. I feel like I bounce back and forth, 'cause that's what you do, right? Perspective.

Carrie Poppy: It's hard for me to zoom out. I have to force it.

Ross Blocher: Okay. "I am not very good at remembering phone numbers." Definitely disagree, I said.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, right. I'm average at it.

Ross Blocher: "I don't usually notice small changes in a situation or a person's appearance."

Carrie Poppy: I heard that this was actually taken out of the modern AQ, just so you know. So, maybe that wasn't updated there.

Ross Blocher: And yet it's here. I mean, I just took this… within the last month.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I wonder if they didn't take it off—maybe they didn't take it off yet. But—and maybe I'm wrong. But I remember it just because I don't notice those things. And I guess like it was supposed to be that autistic people are more likely to notice them. But I don't notice them.

Ross Blocher: Ohhh, okay. I slightly disagreed, because some things get past me. Interesting. I didn't have Cara take this, but I'll shave, and I've had like a big, long beard, and it'll take her three days to notice.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, yeah! You're telling—you're saying a few Cara stories that make me like, mmm, we got to get Cara to take this test. Maybe Cara's my autistic friend. God damn it, somebody.

(They chuckle.)

Ross Blocher: Cara doesn't enjoy this sort of thing. And she doesn't like me talking about her, you know, in detail on the podcast.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, okay. Fair, fair, fair.

Ross Blocher: "I know how to tell if someone listening to me is getting bored."

(Carrie agrees.)

Yeah. I said slightly agree. I feel like I agree. Like, I don't know why I didn't say definitely agree. 'Cause I feel like I'm hypersensitive to the onset of boredom.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. I get nervous. I'm like, "Uh-oh! Uh-oh, I've done it now!"

Ross Blocher: Yeah, "Oh, better—I better get out of this person's Kool Aid or say something interesting, stat! I'm losing the audience!" *(Laughs.)*

Number 32, "I find it easy to do more than one thing at once."

Carrie Poppy: Oh, what?! Who? Who finds that easy?

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* I slightly agreed. Because, I mean, I do it. If anybody does it, I do it. But yeah, it's not efficient. Nobody should.

"When I talk on the phone, I'm not sure when it's my turn to speak." Disagree.

Carrie Poppy: I guess I kind of feel that way. A little. I mean, on Zoom anyway. But there's that lag where you're like are they done? I don't want to be the person who—oh, and they is the second—oh!

I get a lot of that.

Ross Blocher: Okay.

[01:20:00]

I'll definitely do the, "I'm going to start ramping up, because I feel you're ramping down—oh! You're not! Oh, stop. You were saying?"

"I enjoy doing things spontaneously."

Carrie Poppy: I think I do. I think I do.

Ross Blocher: Okay! I believe that about you.

"I am often the last to understand the point of a joke."

Carrie Poppy: It's funny, I was talking to a friend about this who also suspects that he has autism and is also in comedy. We both felt that this may have been true of us at some point, like as children, but then we hyperfocused on comedy. And now it's like—

Ross Blocher: Second nature.

Carrie Poppy: That just doesn't happen. Oh, it happens, but it's not often.

Ross Blocher: I know the format of a joke. Therefore, I can already kind of see where you're going with this.

Carrie Poppy: I see where this is headed.

Ross Blocher: You upset my expectations. That's great! Hah! That's even funnier!

Carrie Poppy: We did it.

Ross Blocher: Yep!

(They chuckle.)

"If there is an interruption, I can switch back to what I was doing very quickly."

Carrie Poppy: No.

Ross Blocher: I said slightly disagree. I feel interruptions, and they bother me especially—I mean, just with our pace of modern communication and like my phone going off five times a minute, and I'm trying to do things. Oh, I hate it so much.

“I am good at social chitchat.”

Carrie Poppy: See, good at, I think yes. Enjoy? It's just exhausting for me.

Ross Blocher: Mm, okay. And it could be masking, even if done well.

“People often tell me that I keep going on and on about the same thing.”

Carrie Poppy: Trauma! Like, who wants to talk about trauma? I'll call any of my friends and talk about trauma. You want to talk about trauma? You want to talk about psychology? You want to talk about the paranormal? No problem.

Ross Blocher: Okay. This might be on brand for Carrie.

“When I was young, I used to enjoy playing games involving pretending with other children.”

Carrie Poppy: Did you?

Ross Blocher: I said slightly agree. Like, I could think of instances in which I did that.

Carrie Poppy: I could think of instances, but I mostly did imaginative play on my own.

Ross Blocher: Okay. “I like to collect information about categories of things.”

Carrie Poppy: Yes. Yes.

Ross Blocher: I definitely agree. Yeah. I've got all kinds of lists that I update when, “Oh, I just encountered this. I'm going to put that on my list about blah, blah, blah, because someday I'll use this for a project.”

“I find it difficult to imagine what it would be like to be someone else.”

Carrie Poppy: This is a really interesting one. So—well, here. Let me let you answer first.

Ross Blocher: I said slightly disagree. Because for the most part, yeah, I can try other people on for size.

Carrie Poppy: So, autistic people are—you know, people often think that autistic people are deficient in empathy. And the reason for that misunderstanding is because we're deficient in a

certain subtype of empathy, cognitive empathy. So, we're actually usually a little higher in affective empathy. So, if someone actually tells us, “I feel sad,” it's like immediate like “*(Gasps.)* I know exactly what sad is! Uuh!” There's a very high affective reaction. But if we're just supposed to work it out sort of from the details—you know, Bob walked in, and his voice is down, and his eyes are on the floor. And he's saying such and such, and it's a little bit about his wife, but it's not—what's he saying exactly? That's the stuff that just like doesn't get put together into a bigger picture.

So, in that way, I can't put myself in someone else's shoes. I'm just assuming that everybody is having roughly the experience I'm having until someone says like, “FYI, over here, angerrrr!”

And then I'm like, “Ah! I see! I see!”

Ross Blocher: You said that, and you expressed it clearly in words, and now I can hit the appropriate dials. Okay.

“I like to plan any activities I participate in carefully.” I said slightly disagree. I think I usually find myself just so trying to keep up with everything in my life that I just have to be sort of in a stance where I'm okay with going with the flow. But whenever I can plan, that's great.

“I enjoy social occasions.”

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Again, this is one where I'm like, yes, but with great strain.

Ross Blocher: Okay, okay. “I find it difficult to work out people's intentions.”

Carrie Poppy: Okay. Yes. I can't say too much about this, but it has come to my attention that in fact, I am prone to certain types of manipulation. So, that is true. Yep. I would have to say that was true.

Ross Blocher: “New situations make me anxious.” *(Chuckles.)* That's funny. I said slightly disagree. I feel like for us, we get ourselves in new situations all the time.

“I enjoy meeting new people.”

Carrie Poppy: Sometimes. I mean, it depends on what—who are they?! What are they doing? What are they up to? Why am I meeting them?

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I said slightly agree. I was allowing for times where I'm not feeling like meeting new people, but usually yes.

“I am a good diplomat.”

Carrie Poppy: I think I'm a very good diplomat.

Ross Blocher: Okay! I said slightly agree. Sure.

“I am not very good at remembering people's date of birth.”

Carrie Poppy: I think I'm a little above average at it.

Ross Blocher: Okay, I slightly disagreed, because I feel like I have a lot of friends in my life who are very attuned to birthdays. And I only allow myself to focus on that for a certain range of family and friends. So, I feel like I find myself occasionally in the situation where I was like, “Oh, I feel bad that I don't know your birthday.” So.

“I find it very easy to play games with children that involve pretending.”

[01:25:00]

Carrie Poppy: No, I never know what to do. I'm like, “I'm a panda! You're a baker. I don't know.”

Ross Blocher: I said definitely agree. So, we differed on that one.

Carrie Poppy: Okay. What do you play?

Ross Blocher: I mean, it's not something I do often. But if I'm with you, and you start telling me that you're the doctor and we've got to operate stat—

Carrie Poppy: Gotta be careful on that one.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, I was gonna—that's why I immediately changed to a third party that we're operating on, thank you very much.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* Okay, smart, smart.

Ross Blocher: You know, I'll get in there with the stethoscope and be like, “Sorry, his blood has stopped. We need to act now. Nurse, bring in the paddles.” *(Laughs.)* I don't know. Like, you know, I'll just make do. I wouldn't say it's something I enjoy doing, but I can.

So, there we go. Those are the 50 questions. And maybe you listening to this have thought, “Well, I have definite thoughts on all of these.” Maybe you were already at Embrace-Autism.com and following along. But you can find out if you are kind of in the ballpark, and if you are—what was it? The threshold is like above 26, I think?

Carrie Poppy: Yes. Borderline cases are 26 to 31. 32 and up is where you hit that 98% plus likelihood.

Ross Blocher: So, there you go! And if you are up in those echelons, then—

Carrie Poppy: Welcome!

Ross Blocher: Yeah, that's a fairly good indication that you could be autistic to one degree.

Carrie Poppy: Pretty wild, right?

Ross Blocher: Yeah. That's impressive.

Carrie Poppy: I know!

Ross Blocher: And then if you're low like me, maybe it got past you, and maybe you should take their other, RADS-R, assessment. Which I did. It's 80 questions, and it's supposed to be a little better at catching people who might be really good at putting up fronts.

Carrie Poppy: Oh yeah. What'd you get on that?

Ross Blocher: So, that one is a scale of—

Carrie Poppy: I see that the neurotypical mean is 26, and the autistic mean is 133.

Ross Blocher: Okay. And the total maximum score is 240.

Carrie Poppy: I got a 164.

Ross Blocher: You got a 164. Oh, wow. I got a 22.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, wow! Okay. You're not *(inaudible)* at all. You're not masking! You're just going about your day! *(Laughs.)*

Ross Blocher: I guess so!

Carrie Poppy: Huh!

Ross Blocher: Huh.

Carrie Poppy: I'm doing a whole bunch more work!

Ross Blocher: Oh man. I feel like I let you down.

(They laugh.)

Carrie Poppy: Aw! That's really sweet. Can you go back and like just like develop more autism? And come back?

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: That's interesting. You've already told me and our podcast listening audience about obsessive compulsive disorder and ADHD. And you know, I figured like, "Oh, we understand Carrie enough." But I mean, just this conversation has kind of put into perspective some things where I've run into that situation of going, "Okay, what's going on in Carrie's mind right now?" And this helps!

Carrie Poppy: Good, good! Yeah. You know, the ADHD thing always really stymied me. I didn't talk about it too often just because I found it kind of confusing. Like, I knew that I matched certain symptoms, but then they would give advice that was quite bad for me. And I noticed that happening that I was like trying to install a bunch of surprise into my life and variety and stuff, but I was just exhausting myself. And I was like, why isn't this feeling better? Why isn't this doing what it's supposed to do for my ADHD brain? This is supposed to work.

Ross Blocher: The picture was incomplete.

Carrie Poppy: The picture was incomplete. That's right.

Ross Blocher: I guess the reason that I'm usually just not as attuned to the meanings of these terms and getting assessments is that I guess I just kind of do manage to float through life okay. And if I had sort of a crisis moment, that would be a really good time to be like, okay, well let's reflect and figure this out. On Embrace-Autism.com, there's a list of both strengths—represented by the Superman symbol—and kryptonites. So, some of the sensory strengths are visual hypersensitivity, tunnel vision—AKA focus of attention—color intensity. 85% of children saw colors with greater intensity than neurotypical children. Synesthesia.

Carrie Poppy: I had that definitely as a kid. Now, like maybe. Like, I can kind of call it to mind, but it takes some effort.

Ross Blocher: Interesting. Acute hearing.

Carrie Poppy: See, that I have problematically.

Ross Blocher: Superior auditory discrimination.

Carrie Poppy: Yep, got that.

Ross Blocher: Detecting target sounds. Okay. Heightened pitch detection. That could be handle.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, sure. Had that in choir, sure.

Ross Blocher: That could be handle? That could be handy.

Carrie Poppy: That could be Handel.

(They laugh.)

Ross Blocher: Well played.

Carrie Poppy: We did sing him in choir.

Ross Blocher: Enhanced olfactory detection.

Carrie Poppy: That is Drew! It's true. You know it's true.

Ross Blocher: There's a lot of strengths. So many strengths here. Oh my goodness. It's getting to the point where I'm just going to go quickly through them.

(Carrie playfully agrees with each strength as Ross lists them.)

Cognitive strengths, correlation with giftedness, savant syndrome, powerful memory system, encyclopedic knowledge, superior problem solving, rational decision making, hyperfocus, hyper-systemizing, pattern recognition, increased adaptive coding.

[01:30:00]

Carrie Poppy: *(Chuckling.)* I don’t know what that one is.

Ross Blocher: Lateral thinking.

Carrie Poppy: Increased adaptive coding? I have no idea if I have that.

Ross Blocher: Research found that women, in contrast with men, showed increased adaptive coding of face identity in correlation with the levels of autistic traits related to social interaction.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, have no idea what I just heard, but I'm proud.

Ross Blocher: Making them better at discriminating between many faces.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, okay. I can tell people apart. Okay. Yeah, that’s fine.

Ross Blocher: Lateral thinking. And then there's one behavioral strength that is listed here. Strong work ethic!

Carrie Poppy: Well, that's true.

Ross Blocher: Oh, here we go. Challenges. Okay. Reduced affect display. Fear response to calm chemicals.

Carrie Poppy: Oh my god, I have this so bad!

Ross Blocher: Yeah? What does that mean?

Carrie Poppy: I didn't even know it. This is why I hate the spa! So, autistic people often have this flipped pheromone response where when they smell calm chemicals from neurotypical people's sweat, they feel anxious!

Ross Blocher: I don't even know what calm chemicals are. What does that mean?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, like when—okay, so we release pheromones throughout our day that sort of, you know, socially communicate. And when you're at the spa and relaxed, if you're neurotypical, you're releasing these subtle smells that say to other neurotypical people, "We're all safe here. We can all relax." But then there are people who are just wired differently, and my nose goes, "Oh, everyone's relaxed, then you're supposed to be in charge! Like, get up! Get up! Look at the perimeter! Everybody is relaxed. Nobody is in charge here! Do something!"

Ross Blocher: I knew none of this. Okay.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, so that's—like, I hate the fucking spa, and now I understand it.

Ross Blocher: Cognitive challenges, low theory of mind, rigid or inflexible thinking.

Carrie Poppy: See, I don't think so.

(They chuckle.)

Ross Blocher: High prevalence of PTSD.

Carrie Poppy: I mean, yeah, yeah. I've had that.

Ross Blocher: Alexithymia co-occurrence?

Carrie Poppy: Mm-hm. That means having trouble labeling your own emotions. I just know I feel good or bad.

Ross Blocher: Identifying facial expressions, forgetting faces. Yeah, that seems a little at odds with that last list of strengths that we were looking at. People are complex.

Carrie Poppy: Oh yeah, it was saying that women have that strength and men don't necessarily have it.

Ross Blocher: Right, okay. Diminished adaptive coding. There we go. That's what we were talking about. Men in particular.

(Carrie "ugh!"s.)

Reduced face aftereffects and after image.

Carrie Poppy: I never used After Effects.

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Excessive daydreaming. You're a daydreamer, Carrie.

Carrie Poppy: See, I don't really think so… is that me?

Ross Blocher: You may remember from our Scientology investigation. Active resting network. The resting network of autistic people does not fire up or switch off like it does for non-autistics. A clear correlation was found between low levels of activity in the resting network during rest and difficulties in social behaviors. What does that mean?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Just like totally on or totally off. There isn't like a nice, smooth flow in the evening where my body's like, "Well, you're done with work, but it's not quite bedtime. We're all just hanging out." Whatever that state is, I just don't have it.

Ross Blocher: Okay. You know what? I feel kinship with that. Yeah. "I am awake! I should be doing something productive!" Okay. Then we have a list of sensory differences that are also kryptonite. Sensory overload, meltdowns, shutdowns, hyperacusis.

Carrie Poppy: Oh, that's what I have. That's the hearing sensitivity.

Ross Blocher: And then two habitual behaviors: prone to addiction and deficit of prediction. Oh, these are social deficits, missing signaling from others.

Carrie Poppy: This is part of why prone to manipulation is an issue is like not reading that other people are sending you deception signals and stuff, and then not predicting their future behavior.

Ross Blocher: Okay, got it. Yeah, we should mention this Embrace-Autism site also has assessments for adult ADHD self-report scale. And there's six questions?! I'm really curious about this. I'll have to take this one next.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, I don't know if that's validated or not. I can't speak for anything other than the AQ. And the only reason I sent you that site is because you could click through the AQ.

Ross Blocher: Okay. They have the CATQ. They have the Aspie quiz with 121 questions, and that's it. So, there we go. Yeah. And they give their own little assessments, but yes. As

Carrie has made very clear, it is the Autism Quotient Test that actually has backing that we are willing to speak to.

So, hopefully this has been helpful to you, the listening audience. Maybe it's given you some either interest in self-assessment or just some additional understanding and sympathy for others.

Carrie Poppy: And I wanted to say, I also went on my favorite podcast that I don't make, *Too Far*, this week. And—

Ross Blocher: Now you've gone too far.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* And they—I was trying to convince the hosts that they have autism.

(Ross laughs.)

Because they put out a call for someone to come on and tell them whether they have autism. And I already listened to the show and already had a spreadsheet about whether the hosts have autism.

(Ross "wow"s.)

So, I was like no problem!

Ross Blocher: You'd customized it to them?

Carrie Poppy: Yes. Because it's my special interest.

Ross Blocher: All of this clocks.

Carrie Poppy: And I was obsessed with whether they have autism.

[01:35:00]

And so, when they said this, I was like, "No problem!" But then I had to figure out their phone number, which involved a bunch of sleuthing. But then I did! And then I ended up on the podcast. And they said I was the best guest they've ever had.

Ross Blocher: That's excellent.

Carrie Poppy: And I think I convinced everyone that Robby Hoffman is autistic and convinced everyone kind of halfway that Rachel Kaly is. So, anyway, everyone should listen to that.

Ross Blocher: Super fun. So, it's called *Too Far*. And there's a few podcasts with that name, but they are the most prominent.

Carrie Poppy: Probably—yes. *Too Far* with Robby Hoffman and Rachel Kaly. It's got a purple and black logo. Yes.

Ross Blocher: There's only one of those. Okay. Excellent. I look forward to listening to it myself. Also, we should mention and recommend the recent episode of *Where We Go Next* podcast. We were on that show and Michael Callahan, the host, did an amazing job of researching us, diving deep into our catalog and asking really insightful, meaningful questions that left both of us going, "Whooooa. What is my life?"

(Carrie laughs.)

No, it was a great conversation. So, *Where We Go Next*. At this point, it'll be one of the recent episodes. Check it out.

But that's it for this episode. And—well, thank you, Carrie. Thanks for sharing this.

Carrie Poppy: My pleasure.

Ross Blocher: What were you expecting from me?

Carrie Poppy: You personally?

Ross Blocher: Yeah.

Carrie Poppy: I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure if you—I went through in my head like, okay, if he comes in with a high score, it'll look like this. And if he comes in with a low score, it'll look like this. But I couldn't picture you coming in with a low score. I was like, "That's not gonna happen."

Ross Blocher: I was kind of surprised myself. And I thought, "Wow! I felt—I felt I was a little more autistic than this!"

(Carrie laughs.)

So, you know what? I kind of had the same reaction of like—

Carrie Poppy: How funny!

Ross Blocher: "Well, geez! I thought I was a little special."

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Oh, how funny! Oh, that's so weird.

Ross Blocher: I'm not a normie!

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* You still might not be. 20%.

Ross Blocher: Different kind of not normal.

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughing.)* Well, yeah. But also—

Ross Blocher: We'll figure out what's up with me.

Carrie Poppy: Also, there's false negatives.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, that's true.

Carrie Poppy: Big percentage on this one. So.

Ross Blocher: That's true. Maybe I'm just a really good faker!

Carrie Poppy: Maybe! Fight the fakers, as James Randi said. Noted autistic, James Randi. This is a claim I am making solely by myself, but I'm standing by it. Robby Hoffman, James Randi.

Ross Blocher: Alright. I mean, you're probably wondering how you can support us. You can do that at MaximumFun.org/join, or by leaving us a positive review.

Carrie Poppy: If you have a negative review, send it to your aunt. And remember! Simon Baron-Cohen, also known as Cousin Borat, has gotten back to us with his—

Ross Blocher: *(In the Borat voice.)* My cousin!

Carrie Poppy: *(Laughs.)* There we go. We asked him several questions, and he gave us some interesting answers. So, he calls the AQ a metric for counting autistic traits, which I thought was an interesting framing. You really could just be like, "Hey, you have 14, I have 39!"

Ross Blocher: That kind of aligns with what we were saying about a checkbox system.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Often scientists aren't willing to be that direct about it. Okay, he said that some people don't like the word disorder for autism, but then he also noted that the *DSM* here in the US requires some level of disability to qualify for assistance. So, I could—I felt like I could see him struggling even in this email to satisfy both of those urges and kind of use both languages. And I don't know, I kind of—I already relate to that problem. So, anyway. I got to see it in action on this researcher.

As far as the background of this test, he said that there was a lot of talk about the spectrum back in the year 2000, but no way to measure it. So, the AQ was published in 2001, and he

said it's been used subsequently in hundreds of research studies and is now recommended for use in screening for possible autism in the national guidelines in the UK.

Ross Blocher: Oh wow, that sounds to me like there wasn't really a solid working definition of autism just 20 years ago.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, fair. I mean, and there were a bunch of political conversations around the Asperger's issue. And then neurology was kind of smashing into psychology with its own understanding of autism and saying like, "Well, we know it as this thing in the brain!"

Ross Blocher: Oh, yeah. From a structural standpoint.

Carrie Poppy: Can we get everybody in the room and agree on what we call this, and which things count? Yes. Stumbling process. But he said, "In an ideal world, a diagnosis should be made early in childhood and lead to excellent support to ensure that autistic people end up happy and fulfilling their potential." And about self-diagnosis—I was really curious to hear if he'd be into it or not, because some scientists are, and some aren't. He said, "Self-diagnosis is absolutely fine. If the person finds it's helpful to identify as autistic, they should. Self-diagnosis may be sufficient to be able to ask your employer for reasonable accommodations in the workplace. But to qualify for support from the state or from an insurance company, you might desire to go and get that expert clinician diagnosis."

Ross Blocher: Need a higher—yeah. Mm-hm. And that seems to make a certain sense that for various applications in life, there would be a higher threshold.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, yeah. Especially when you're trying to get funding.

[01:40:00]

I think that's fair enough. He said, "Autistic people of all genders score higher than men on the AQ." So, this was kind of a concern. It's like, well, if this is kind of the if this is the far end of the male brain, are we just looking for maleness?

Ross Blocher: If this is a result of testosterone—yeah. Is it just a measure of how much testosterone in your body?

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. So, all people with an autism diagnosis will end up scoring higher on the AQ than any neurotypical man, theoretically. I'm sure we can find exceptions, but—yeah, on average.

Ross Blocher: Sure. Yeah, when you look at a bunch of plotted dots, they'll fall in something of a shape.

Carrie Poppy: Exactly. Okay. You asked about false negatives and false positives. Gotta say, this is maybe my least favorite of his answers. He said, "The test is not diagnostic, so the notion of false negative or positive isn't applicable."

Ross Blocher: *(Laughs.)* Eeh, alright. That does seem like a dodge.

Carrie Poppy: Okayyy. A little bit of a technicality. But okay. You asked what the biggest surprise was of his research. And he said, "The biggest surprise when we first published the AQ was the finding that we all have some autistic traits. Nobody scores zero. So, it's just a matter of degree of how many traits a person has." 'Cause, yeah, you should have some of these things. We're talking about creating order in your life, making lists. You know, if you have none of those things, like we start to wonder—

Ross Blocher: Are you a blob on a couch somewhere?

Carrie Poppy: Well, we do start to wonder like, okay, well then your function must be low in another way—right?—at that point. You have no structure and order to your life. Right? What's going on for you?

Ross Blocher: Maybe there's some other disorder in your life.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. He also said that "the other striking findings are that people who work in STEM—science, technology, engineering, math—score higher on average than those who don't work in stem." Which feels, I don't know, obvious to me now, but maybe it wasn't in 2000.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, it is like a self-selection bias kind of thing, or just people who tend towards the technical fields have these traits?

Carrie Poppy: Oh, I think they really are predisposed. Yeah. I mean, you know, what I really suspect is—okay, we're getting very theoretical—is that since autistic people love bottom-up processing, so taking a bunch of small bits and making it into something bigger, that speaks so easily to math and science, if you have any talent at it. And not necessarily as obviously to the arts—though you can apply that strategy, but I don't think it's as obvious how you will.

Ross Blocher: That inductive reasoning, working from the many to the synthesis. Okay, interesting.

Carrie Poppy: That's my theory. I don't know.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, seems plausible.

Carrie Poppy: But finally, I asked him if he would share his AQ. Because I don't think everyone should be so touchy about this! And he invented it!

Ross Blocher: Right. And I think usually when someone dedicates their life to something, there's usually an outside motivation—either someone in their family or something that happened to them as a child or, you know, trying to figure themselves out. So, it seems like a reasonable question.

Carrie Poppy: Thank you. Also, just like If we want to normalize these things, why not just be like, “Yeah, I got 24. Yeah, I got 32.”

Ross Blocher: Put it on your email signature. These are my preferred pronouns. This is my AQ.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah, why not? Yeah, I don't know. If I were in his position, that's the way I'd want to position it is like this is no big deal. Anyway. Do you want to guess what his AQ is?

Ross Blocher: Okay. Knowing very little about this guy, I'm just going to say 26.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. Well, he didn't answer. I don't know.

Ross Blocher: Pfff! You think he—?

Carrie Poppy: I think it's high, too.

(They chuckle.)

Ross Blocher: Did he just—? He just ignored it. Didn't address that he received that question.

Carrie Poppy: He said something very British about like referring to an above question about, I don't know, not making guesses about people or something. I don’t know, it seemed stuffy to be honest. Yeah, yeah.

Ross Blocher: An inartful dodge.

Carrie Poppy: Well, I was like, “Well! Mine's 39. Bye!”

Ross Blocher: Still nice of him to get back to you.

Carrie Poppy: Yes, totally. Then, last but not least, we asked him about when a person should go from that AQ to an assessment. Is it when they hit that 26 mark, that 32 mark? Should we wait until we're distressed? What are we looking for? And he said, “Having a high score on the AQ doesn't mean you necessarily need an autism diagnosis, since a diagnosis is only useful if the person is struggling with some part of their life.” But he agreed with those markers, 26 and 32, being like—

Ross Blocher: The threshold points.

Carrie Poppy: If you're already struggling and you reach those threshold points, why wouldn't you go ahead and explore this possible source.

Ross Blocher: Yeah, okay. Sensible.

Carrie Poppy: Yeah. And that's it!

Ross Blocher: Okay! Well, thank you, Simon Baron-Cohen.

Carrie Poppy: Yes. If you ever decide to tell me your AQ score, I'm listening.

Music: “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

Promo:

> **Jordan Morris:** You can't really know if your own show is any good.
>
> **Jesse Thorn:** So, I asked my kids about ours.

[01:45:00]

> Is *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* a good show?
>
> **Kid 1:** No! Definitely not. It's really bad.
>
> **Kid 2:** I would say out of ten, maybe like a four out of ten.
>
> **Kid 1:** It's just really boring.
>
> **Kid 2:** Yeah, zero.
>
> *(They giggle.)*
>
> **Jesse:** Subscribe to *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*.
>
> **Jordan:** A comedy show for grownups.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!