

TRANSCRIPT OF HABLEMOS AUTISMO EPISODE #3:

THE AUTISTIC WOMAN

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Hello, my name is Tony Hernández Pumarejo and welcome to a new episode of the podcast "Hablemos Autismo"; The podcast which is for our autism community and autistic community, and I thank you for being with me today on this new episode of my podcast and today I have the honor and privilege of interviewing a person, a friend who has been a fighter for our community and is and she is and she is Spanish and she is from Spain. Her name is Sara.

Sara is an enterprising woman; she is a fighter and she is autistic. She was diagnosed at age 41 and her story is one of many inspirations. It is a story, which many autistic people live in this world and she is sharing it through her testimony and through the work she does for our Community. She runs the blog called "Mujer y Autista", where she talks about her experience with the aim of eliminating stigmas or stereotypes. And to be able to help other people who are in the same situation she faced throughout her life.

So today I have the honor and privilege of interviewing Sara today! Sara, thank you very much for being with me today in this episode of Let's Talk Autism, from Spain.

Sara Codina:

Hello, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity and see each other again.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Same yes, yes. It's not the first time we've met, as the first time, if I'm not mistaken, I interviewed you on TV. Today we are going to have a little more time. So, I want our audience to know more about your story because it's a very unique and special story.

You're a woman, you're an autistic person, I ask you, Sara, when was the time in your life that you felt like you were different or that there was something different in your life? When was that moment?

Sara Codina:

I think that moment was from the beginning, that I remember since I was a child, right? And then it's a thing (Autism), that is, neurodevelopmental condition, that you carry all your life. Then, I noticed that it was different for as long as I can remember, practically always. I've always noticed that there was something about me that was like different. Because he didn't fit that no, that he wasn't like the others, that he didn't do things like everyone else, nor did he have the same interests. They were, it's hard to explain when you feel there's something, but no, you don't know what this something is called or how to explain it.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

And it is a common story because there are many people, because today we talk about autism, there is more information. We are more in what is acceptance, but it was not always like that. You were diagnosed at the age of 41, that is or when we spoke, when you were a child, because at that time what was talked about autism was almost nothing. Or there was more talk of a disability in different languages as an example to call people retarded, we are talking about the 80s and 90s at that time.

And going in that line, Sara, how was your childhood? That is, you can go a little bit in detail about how you grew up in this process and you can talk about some of your hobbies, tell us a little bit.

Sara Codina:

My childhood was apparently normal and when I say normal, I mean, very similar to the rest of boys or girls, no, of my environment and I say apparently because of course, one of the things that has not made me go unnoticed of those diagnostic criteria is that I have always known how to mask. I've always known, then, trying to fit in. So, of course, I always tried to play the same thing as others, even if I wasn't interested or liked, I tried to be interested in those topics or simulate it, but I really don't know.

For example, if there was a time when girls my age liked to go see clothes, go for a walk, that is, it was to see clothes, go shopping, because this does not interest me and I never like it, then I, because I liked things like making business plans. Sure, this isn't a kid's thing. Or I preferred to play alone.

But I played with other children, but to me the symbolic game, playing, I don't know, I didn't doll dads, moms, no, I didn't like it, it also made me feel very forced, like ridiculous. So for me, for example, I created scenarios, not with legos or with such construction games. I liked the cars, funnily enough, but no, neither, it's not a very thing. But he said, I created scenarios, but then I didn't. No, he did not see the one who has to develop that symbolic game, but rather imagine the story and that's it, and create the scenario. And friends. Well, no, when I saw that they played with each other or, for example, I never argued with other children, I did not fight.

I said yes, because to avoid confrontation no, never, especially since I was a child. I don't, the clashes blocked me and continue to block me. No, I didn't know. How to take away. It's not good, I also had since I was a child I read a lot, I could still read, I don't know how many times in a row the same book. And I wasn't bored or watched the same movie many times.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Interesting that you mention the movies, because I too, you know as an autistic person, as I saw, for example, Star Wars is one of the movies that I watched over and over and

over again, over and over again. And I didn't get tired. Like other hobbies, it is one of the skills we have.

Of repetitive behavior or repetitive hobbies. Sometimes, I have to, in my case this I see things from the past as a "hobby", it is a thing that I do repetitively, without thinking about it.

And interesting as you, so you thought, the truth that you know I thought it was, that it was different from when you were a child and fill, yes it is one thing that we have to talk about more. Well, we talk about Autism, many times we talk about disability, disability, disability, but we have to..... There is a unique creativity that every person, regardless of level, every autistic person has a creativity and we have to focus on that. Do you agree with that?

Sara Codina:

Of course, no, and that I also myself 2 years ago (well 3 years) what I was diagnosed, I was asked, how do you imagine an autistic person? No. And I myself had a very different vision than I have today, that is, I imagined myself a boy, not a girl or a woman anymore, not even jokingly. I imagined, well, a person with intellectual disabilities or with high abilities, that is, as two extremes, not very, very intelligent men or obsessed with a subject that was learned, because directories by heart ... I read directories to distract myself, but I didn't learn them.

But of course, I saw as extremes that does not mean that they are not, but of course, that spectrum there was a part that we stayed there as invisible that not. We were not detected because it was not not related to no, these traits as we presented them differently or in another way, because we were not related to being autistic, and we are and also of course, there is always a lot of talk about the difficulties. Andor I always say, okay?

I mean, but since I know I'm autistic I've discovered that I have capabilities because I thought I was broken.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Yes, exactly.

Sara Codina:

I believed that my way of being, of functioning, that there was something defective, that did not allow me to be like others. This is a huge mistake, so the nice thing has been to understand that no. I don't have to be like others or like the vast majority, so I can be like me. And that's okay, what happens is different. It's like a different operating system, because the rest of the world is better, most are Android. I am IOS (iPhone), so as much as I try to put myself in those Android applications that will not work, we better all live with our systems, right?

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Accurate and interesting.

Sara Codina:

With my way of, hehehe.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Your analogy is interesting about computer and phone systems, it's very interesting and going, I mean, a little bit further back in your life.

This, you mentioned before your interaction with the other children this, were you or suffered or went through what is bullying, school or social rejection?

Sara Codina:

At school I thought not, and I still think. Or I think not, I have forgotten many stages of when I was little or especially adolescence, I have forgotten. Physically, no. But, I don't know, I was a child who tried to like it. I mean, like getting along with everybody.

I was always the girl who got along with everyone, but I wasn't almost anyone's close friend either. Yes, I had good friends, I admit that and I still have, but it is true that for me school was like good, I spend the day another day, another day. Well, it was there.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Ok

Sara Codina:

It was, I mean, I don't think so. Then if at work, but at school. I don't think so, but I'm not sure because sometimes I don't quite understand double meanings either. The ironies and it is true that in many moments they laughed at me for being a little, because as naïve or this fool who does not know, is and may laugh, but it is that. Maybe I didn't find out.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

And I ask you, did this have an impact on your mental health? Because one of the challenges that an autistic person has is mental health.

Sara Codina:

Not having a diagnosis, it destroyed me before. Because of course, me. When sometimes they also do not tell you that when you can look normal, not to look like you, that is, they almost force you. To develop that ability to be like others and that the only thing it does is break you, destroy you, that is, it leaves you without mental health, it leaves you and physically, because I spent the day sick, I as I know, I automated everything, always had flu, lowered defenses. Of course, because my body was like...

For, because, in the end you accumulate anxiety because you force yourself to socialize more than necessary, you force yourself to do many things that clear the body.

I remember that as a teenager I already had levels of anxiety, but horrible, skyrocketing. Then depression almost appears, because of course, you live with in a way that you do not understand yourself, you do not understand The World, The World does not understand you, you never know how to go, what do you want, that is, what do you really want and what do you think others want from you? Because I prioritized what I thought others expected of me, which sometimes wasn't even, but I rode like my own.

Well, I had some goals that I set and they were horrible, now I think about it and I say it was horrible because I didn't. I didn't respect myself, I went, Oh, I want to be like the majority, I want to be like them and that kills you, I mean.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

I can relate to that too, that I felt like I was out of this world, like an alien sometimes and that. I had to enter the group to enter society and but in reality society does not, it is not so today. Me, honestly. It is better to be different and unique than to be in the majority. That's how I see it too.

Sara Codina:

Yes, but hey, in the end that's also what there is, right?

But I remember that we go, but I know that in the end it is like we are born and we are not forced to all, whether you are autistic or not, to how to function in a way, to be in a way, as if there is a right way and everything that comes out of there is as not, different and the different is scary. So, it's like rejection, rejection, you say, why?

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

That's a topic that I'd like to talk to you, at another time. It's deepening it in terms of how to adjust to the expectations of a society, because we do, we have to do this, we have to do that, it's a very interesting topic.

Sara Codina:

Yes, they are a rhythm that I cannot follow I tell you, I cannot.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Exactly, and Sara, I wanted to ask you, in terms of your life, what impact did your family have on this process? Did you have brothers or do you have brothers or sisters or your father? What was that process like?

Sara Codina:

In my environment, my children, for example, I have two children of 14 years, preadolescent, for them, nothing changed.

As it is, that is, no, and they were also the first to know. And my environment in general? Well, I think everyone, I was the first to need some time to assimilate and to understand what was happening here. So, then I think it has been positive in my environment and sometimes it is not like that and in general it has been positive because I think I have been able to understand things, but they have also been able to understand why I did certain things. Why I behaved in some ways. I didn't have certain reactions and I think that's positive because I have that freedom now. To say things that they can understand me and I can understand them, this for me is a big step.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Yes. That is, taking especially when you were a child, that is, through your childhood, then adolescence, did you feel that your family, be it your parents, your siblings, or your family, did not understand you, did not understand your way of being?

Sara Codina:

No, I think they do, because they at the end of the day for them, that is, me, as I am normal, that is, I am what I am. But well, I guess sometimes, well, no, when you, when you socialized a lot and sometimes I need to isolate myself that I didn't know how to explain why these things happened to me either. Of course for them, because maybe he was also like Jolín, he does not want to come to the meal, maybe he has been upset by something. No, let's not say, it's something else, totally different. It's like understanding little things from day to day or why, because with the noises and sometimes I got into a, in a collapse that is an absent directly, because when there is a lot of bustles, a lot of noise.

So I think for them we are going too. I think it's important, right? And there were little things, because maybe they could think or Sara is already with her nonsense or she is now with her or she is already like escaping from and no, she really had a why.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

That is, you took and what I was going to ask you now is at the moment of being officially diagnosed autistic, that was that one day you decided. Hey? Look, I'm going to search, I'm going to me, I have questions, do I want to confirm or how was the process just before I received a diagnosis?

Sara Codina:

Normally or most of the people I know is usually because they are, they have children who are diagnosed and said, but I am the same as my son, my case is not, in my case I had been looking for a long time, looking for those answers because, and I am also very stubborn. And I was there, I looked and then they gave me more diagnoses: ADHD, social phobia, agoraphobia. That is, many things were coming out and in the end, already in a moment of almost desperation that a psychiatrist I say please, then he looked. We were all talking, we studied, we left as a review of the whole journey of my

life, all the tests everything, and he said, hey, get tested! That maybe you're autistic. That one, but it was because I casually say casually because there is still much to do.

This person knew autism, that is, the autism spectrum, and he knew how this most invisible part in terms of diagnosis, no and now, when I keep quiet, I have no idea. So it was just before the pandemic. And after the pandemic, when I started to be tested, I started researching what we like so much about investigating and searching. I had no doubt, I mean, I started reading other women and I said wow! I mean, this is it.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

That was, it confirmed what you already knew, that was a confirmation.

Sara Codina:

Yes, then it was already confirmed, the psychologist confirmed the diagnosis to me. Well, he said, "Look Sara, yes." And there yes to the wolf, as I say. The period of this, of euphoria, liberation, being able to leave a backpack that weighed a lot. But of course, then comes the mourning, then comes a process, no, a process of seeing everything that has happened, everything that you have forced yourself to do what has happened, which was not your fault.

How to unlearn 40 years? Many things to learn in another way, right? Always respecting YOU, understanding that you can be you and that you can even love yourself, history. I think for many of us it's like, wow!

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

This is nice, what you say, because there are many, you know, many people, are diagnosed or even never receive an adult diagnosis and passing, look at this, I knew there was something inside me different and now I get my answer, but I can't go back to when I was a kid, I can't go back when I was a teenager. You know? It's, it's a thing that makes you think and brings you different emotions, frustration. But then, you get to the point that looks, that is, not everyone and it must be said, everyone is different; Every autistic person is different, not everyone processes it the same. You process it in a different way. I process things differently. There are people who go into a depression, and others say they feel relieved and are happy, you know?

But that's there, in terms of diagnosis, what I'd like to talk about with that, with you later, at another time, at another time, in terms of whether or not to seek a diagnosis, the impact of the diagnosis. That would be good, because it is a challenge that happens a lot and that we have to talk about it more.

Sara Codina:

Yes, and I always say it, when someone wants to start the process, I say yes, but you have to be prepared because it's a process of a lot of introspection. It is not a "take a paper and even not", that is, it is a process that you realize many things and they are

things as you say that will not return. You won't be a girl again. In fact, my book Start with the phrase, with a phrase that kind of sums up the book. That is, the dedication of my books is that it came out the last day before publishing, it was: "to the girl who was, but never was".

Well, in the end, I dedicated it to that girl who was, but never was. And also a little, because I do not want there to be more girls or boys who are and are not and cannot be them. And I think that's why he always fought hard in the right to have a diagnosis and to know it.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

It is shocking, that message that you have in the book and that is a reflection of your life, what you have gone through is very important, very important and I ask you, now, Sara, this now ...

From your perspective, not just as an autistic, but as a woman, as a mother, this, one of the challenges that you talk about is in terms of the percentage of women identified as autistic than men. This, there is talk of different reasons, stereotype that there is more favoritism to men or resources, you know different reasons. Based on your experience, not only personal, but the work you have done in the community from your perspective as a woman, as a person, autistic, what are some of the reasons which right now, that is, there are more men diagnosed autistic than women? There has been progress of women being diagnosed, but still more men are being diagnosed.

From your perspective. What are some of those reasons?

Sara Codina:

I think, the main problem was no, that there is a gender bias in the diagnostic criteria, they were very focused on boys, that equal child with more support needs. So of course, this already from the outset, already leaves you out for being a woman and I saw it in the same process. I saw questions I thought...

To me, the trains or the wheels of I don't know, which are like very technical, I don't go with me. I say this no, no, you can't get it right. So the really is like very focused on a type of person or that leaves us out and on the other hand, I also quite linked to this. As a woman, I been educated for 40 years ago now, I was raised to be a caregiver; To be more sociable or I was expected to be social for the simple fact of being a woman, it does not matter, to be neurotypical.

Then, do not disturb. To be discreet, not to complain, no, you miss something, because it does not matter. The important thing is that others are well and I think that has hurt a lot in the sense that if a woman already normally masks. That is, then or masked. But, when an autistic woman, who does not know it, masks a lot. And of course, for a professional it must be very complicated, not because you have that ability to hide oddities, because you want to be like others. Of course, you make it more difficult for

the family and professionals, but it is true that there are always like those little things that someone who knows, what he is going to and who is now updated, will see it, what will he realize right? For the little some specific profiles and also because we do not show the same traits in the same way in general. Many women, well, no, we do not have or have not had disruptive behaviors, we have not had, we are not explosive, but rather like me we are implosive and everything goes inside, all steam inside, until one day you do pa!

Yes, because the body already tells you STOP!

So, well, I think it's a bit this, from my point of view, that I'm not professional, I'm a user.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

And you believe this, another question I wanted to ask you based on your experience, do you think autistic women have greater challenges than autistic men?

Sara Codina:

I don't know, what I know is that she is exposed to more dangers, more violence, above all. Because the fact is precisely this not of appearing to be like others, of wanting to fit in, of wanting to like, of not knowing how to set limits, because this happens when you want to like and also no, you do not read those between the lines, you do not see those double meanings, those ironies, all that is dangerous, you do not know how to detect sometimes the intentions of others.

Well, this you put together and from there comes "bullying", mistreatment, abuse of everything and really maybe the time, of course, normal, that is, you go as lost and the only thing you want is your goal, is to be like others, that they do not get angry with me, that they like it, that all danger there is no self-esteem, there is insecurity, many insecurities. Yes, I think that in this sense there is like this part that yes, which makes us very vulnerable in many areas. Then, well, of course, it will also have its negative side, because it is very explosive, right? Well, the same to keep a job, I don't know.

Now I speak like this, without thinking that I am very good at it. But, women I think that later to see, you are still autistic and you will always be. But at least, you can have some tools, right? You can like protect yourself a little, learn to set limits, protect yourself, have good strategies that if you are not going crazy and that is not.

And then the fatigue that causes, that is, suicidal ideations in people, even those diagnosed too, right?, so by that rhythm that is imposed on us. But an undiagnosed person, and we did a survey, I don't remember what social network on, Twitter I believe. And it is that at 11 years, most (ages 10 to 12 years), had already had the first ideations and live with that idea in the head because the end no longer, although we enter and we honest a little and in the end, which now is not that we live, we have it normalized. Many people have that option that is there and this is not normal, this is no, it should not be normal, but unfortunately it is very common.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

That is part of the reality that we live and we have as a society to work better in that in those areas and going in those tools and brief. What tools or what steps do you recommend not only to women artists, but autistic people as such so that they can fulfill a better quality of life?

Sara Codina:

Well, I believe that the first thing, everything, listen without judging, ask before making decisions just because, before rejecting for fear of the unknown, ask and be informed. Listen. Not pretending that, also for the sake of families, right?

Also not pretending to change their children not so that they are like others, rather than focusing their energies on understanding how their child perceives the world and how you understand it to understand that way that their child has to perceive The World and from here, they look for tools to set limits, to protect themselves from, But not in changing him, because I have done this for 40 years and this does not work, that is, that destroys you. Well, you know, it destroys your mental health and it doesn't.

Trying to be like others and that was impossible because I'm not like others. Above all, listening, empathy, a lot of empathy, which they then say we don't have.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

What they always say, I think that...

Sara Codina:

And precisely I think we have too many and too many times.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Too much.

Sara Codina:

You need an empathic society, which accepts, that is, understands that what is a diverse society, that is, is of a diverse nature, whether we like it or not, with which. And how good that we have positive things that not everything is negative.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Exactly, your story has been one of inspiration, motivation not only for autistic community and autism, but for everyone. It's a story of unique overcoming and perspectives and a process and it's still a process to this day. For me that is the definition of life and you are also a writer and author I understand that you published your new book called "Neuro Divina y Punto"

Sara Codina:

"Neuro Divina y Punto: 40 years being autistic and me without knowing it"

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

How good, how good to get it out of your story in the title.

Sara Codina:

Yes, that's my story, I know I'm talking about, I mean, a life. 40 years as autistic without knowing it. How does the diagnosis come? And then, what happens is that I am also interspersed as concepts, from my point of view, never technical issues because I also want someone to read it, not who does not know about autism, because I can, well, have some concepts and understand a little that part of the spectrum.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Oh, good.

Sara Codina:

Well, this is because we are very visual, so I need to see the image.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

I thank you for sharing your book and before, your story is unique and before concluding that what has been a wonderful interview for our community, our society. Sara, what message do you have for society as an autistic, as a woman, which is what we have to do to go beyond stereotypes and encourage the acceptance of autistic people in another world.

Sara Codina:

Well, first of all, I do want to forget to thank you for this space and everything you do for the community and give visibility because then I forget.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Thank you!

Sara Codina:

It's the first thing. And then, well, a little bit of what I said before, that is, empathy, respect, active and real listening. That does not always exist and good and not go so much for an inclusion, because in the end, as I say, I do not have to be included anywhere. Why, I have become clear that I am not extraterrestrial, which also appears in the book that I believed I was extraterrestrial to this world nobody has to go doing me

favours, it belongs to me just like the rest of the world, with which I think we have to start talking about coexistence, right?

That day will no longer require adaptations. Because when we talk about coexistence it will be because we are in a society that understands that it is diverse and that not only understands it, but coexists, I think it is great that it is already playing.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

That's, what a nice message and shocking. And it is the most important thing that we have to know as a society in giving those tools for autistic people and different conditions and circumstances, a better quality of life. Sara, for those who are interested and interested. How can they contact you? Do you have your website or social media?

Sara Codina:

Yes, I have the blog of mujeryautista.com and there you can also contact me. Sometimes it takes me a little while to answer because, between work, children and everything, but I try to answer everything. But above all by blog, by social networks, also woman and autistic. And I'm on Instagram, especially Twitter. And well I do what I can.

Tony Hernandez Pumarejo:

Nice, we are going to put the information of your page and your social media and the book, also in the description of this episode, so that our audience can contact you. Sara, your story, this interview has been a great blessing, really.

It has been impactful, and I hope that this interview will be of many blessings for our community, especially for those autistic people who are going through what you went through in your life and what I went through as well. So, keep going, thank you for all you do for our community, many blessings to you and your family and I thank you so much for taking your time to be on this episode of "Hablemos Autismo." I thank you very much!

Sara Codina:

A pleasure always! Thank you!