

00:05

Autism is something that many people know about. For example, some people think that autistic people are fair-skinned males that speak in monotone and constantly go on and on about the same topic. Some people think that autistic people do not know right from wrong, avoid attention and usually say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Some people think that autistic people are socially awkward and lack humor and empathy.

00:43

Now if you agree with what I just said, I'm sorry to tell you, but you do not have the right impression of autism. How do I know? Because I have autism. I do have my own obsessions with things like electronics and public transit, but that does not define me. Each of us are different and unique in our own way.

01:12

However, there is not a lot of information out there on what an autistic life actually looks like, so people often resort to stereotypes. And we see these often in the media. Some of the more common stereotypes in the media include being socially awkward, lacking empathy and even being a supergenius.

01:39

And the lack of knowledge on autism doesn't stop there either. Did you know that some people are trying to find a cure for autism? That's because they see it as a negative thing, as a disease. Many people are challenging the idea and to us, we think autism is not a disease. It's just another way of thinking and looking at the world. Our brains function differently from most people's brains. Think of it like comparing an Xbox and a PlayStation. They're both highly capable consoles with different programming. But if you put your Xbox game in a PlayStation, it won't work, because the PlayStation communicates differently.

02:28

When I look in the mirror, I see someone who thinks differently. Oh, and I also see nice hair.

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(Laughter)

02:36

(Applause)

02:42

But the question is, am I really diseased if I just think differently? The main problem with living autistic in today's society is that the world just isn't built for us. There's so many ways that we can get overwhelmed. For example, the thing that makes me overwhelmed all the time is loud noises, which means I never crank up my music really loud and I usually am not a fan of large parties. But other people on the spectrum might get overwhelmed with things like bright lights or strong smells or gooey textures that all have the potential to create anxiety. Think about all of the social gatherings you've been to in the past. Was there loud music playing? Were there really bright lights? Were there lots of different food smells going on at the same time? Were there lots of conversations happening all at once? Those things may not have bothered you guys, but for someone with autism, they can be quite overwhelming.

04:01

So in those situations, we do something called stimming, which is like a repetitive motion or a noise or some other random fidgeting that may or may not seem normal. Some people will flap their arms or make a noise or spin. Ya, it's basically our way of zoning out. It can often feel necessary for us to stim. However, it's often frowned upon, and we're forced to hide it. When we're forced to hide our autistic traits like this, it's called masking. And some people mask better than others. I mask so well sometimes that people don't even know I'm autistic until I give them the big reveal. (Laughs)

04:59

But at the end of the day, it gets really stressful. Even something like doing my homework at night becomes very tiring. Some people think, because of our ability to mask, that this is the cure to autism. However, all it really does is makes us ashamed of showing our true selves.

05:27

Another common stereotype that is often associated with autism is that autistic people lack empathy. And again, this is not true. I actually have lots of empathy. I'm just not really good at showing it. Whenever a friend is trying to tell me some of the struggles that they're going through, I often don't know how to express my reply. And that is why I don't show as much empathy as my nonautistic friends do.

06:00

Emotional expression, however much or however little, is difficult for me. And that is because I am bursting inside with every single emotion one feels at all times. Though of course, I cannot express it that way. Otherwise, let's say, happiness, for example, would come out as a huge burst of gleeful wheezing, hand flapping and loud vocal "woohoos."

06:29

(Laughter)

06:31

Whereas you may just smile.

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(Laughter)

06:37

Whether it be receiving an awesome birthday gift or listening to a tragic story on the news, I cannot really express my reply without bursting, so once again, I have to mask it in order to appear normal. My inner feelings are unlimited, but my mind only lets me express extremes or nothing.

07:07

So my ... I am not great with my emotions, and I communicate differently, and because of that, I was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This diagnosis helps me and my friends and family to know how my mind works. And in the world, approximately one percent of the population is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. And this number is growing. However, we are still a big minority. And there's still lots of people that do not see us as equals to other people.

07:51

This is my family. And in my family, there is one other person who is also autistic. My mother. Yes, adult women can also be autistic. My dad and my brother are both nonautistic. Sometimes it can be a bit difficult for us to communicate with each other, however. Sometimes I'll say

something like, "Oh, Toronto's Union Station, right?" thinking that I can help them to remember certain aspects of it. When they get confused, I often have to elaborate myself on that. And we often have to say things in a number of different ways so that everyone understands. However, despite all that, we all love each other and respect each other as equals.

08:51

In his book "NeuroTribes," author Steve Silberman states that autism and other mental conditions should be seen as naturally human, naturally part of a human spectrum and not as defects. And this is something that I agree to completely. If autism was seen as part of a natural human spectrum, then the world could be designed to work better for autistic people. I am not ashamed of my autism. And I may not think like you, or act like you, but I am still human and I am not diseased.

09:37

Thank you.

09:38

(Applause)