



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NATIONAL AGENDA 2021
REFLECTING AMERICA

“Respecting Differences”
with Eric Michael Garcia

HOSTED BY

University of Delaware
Center for Political Communication
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Eric Michael Garcia

A senior D.C. correspondent at the Independent, and the author of **We’re Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation**, most of Eric Garcia’s work focuses on American politics and disability rights, and the intersection of the two. He hopes to change the dialogue around autism, and the language used to depict those with disabilities. As a person with autism Eric brings personal experience to his reporting and stresses autism is not something that needs to be cured or fixed. Instead autism is part of his identity. Rejecting the term advocacy journalism, Garcia says, “I don’t see myself as an advocate, I see myself as a journalist who covers the autism advocacy movement.” Eric worked as an editor at the *Washington Post* and *The Hill*, and was a reporter for *Roll Call*, *National Journal* and *MarketWatch*. He has written for the *Daily Beast*, *Spectrum*, *The Week*, the *New Republic*, *Salon*, and the *American Prospect*.

Transcript of Event

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Place: Mitchell Hall and Webinar
Newark, DE

[Musical interlude to 0:00:37.5]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Please welcome your host for this evening, Dr. Lindsay Hoffman.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Hello. Thank you and welcome to National Agenda 2021. This is our eleventh year of running the program and we've got audience members in the theater, but we also have quite a few people who are watching virtually. So, thank you for being here. We're here thanks to the University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication with support from the Office of the Provost, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Division for Student Life. First I want to state that I, I and our guest tonight will be six feet apart so we are, according to UD policy, we'll, we're removing our masks for the conversation so you can also understand what we're saying a little more clearly. This year's theme is as you've been seeing on intro is "Reflecting America." How is this era of historic political divides, social movements, and economic upheavals fueled by the pandemic and politics redefining who we are as Americans? We have access to more information than ever before, but it seems like we can't agree on basic facts, much less hear divergent viewpoints. How are Americans staying engaged with politics in their communities in such stressful times? We'll explore these questions this semester from journalists to activists to artists and tonight one of those journalists will be joining us. We will be inviting audience participation tonight both in the theater and online. To ask a question here in the theater you'll see we have two microphones set up. Yes, two microphones set up at the front. When I open it up for Q and A about 8:30 p.m.

simply raise your hand and I will ask for our volunteer mic marshals who are students in my class – thank you to my students who are volunteering – to lead you to the microphone and then lead you back to your seat. This is to engage, engage with the COVID protocols. To submit a question online you can type your question into the Q and A box at the bottom, assuming this is the bottom of your screen [chuckle,] bottom of your Zoom window and it may be selected during our Q and A at the end of the talk. So, tonight I'm introducing Eric Michael Garcia. He's a senior D.C. correspondent at the *Independent* and the author of the recently published We're Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation which will be available for sale, signed copies, after the event in the lobby. Most of his work is focused on American politics and disability rights as well as the intersection between the two. Garcia says he hopes to change the dialogue around autism and the language used to depict those with disabilities. He brings his personal experience as a person with autism to his reporting and stresses that autism is not something that needs to be cured or fixed but instead is part of his identity. Please join me in giving a big Blue Hen welcome to Eric Garcia.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you. Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Welcome.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you very much. Ah, can you all hear me? All right, perfect. Well, I truly appreciate – thank you to Dr. Hoffman, thank you to the entire University, thank you to the students who I spoke with earlier today, and thank you to everybody watching in the theater today and at home. It is a true honor and pleasure and privilege. And I actually had taken kind of a double take

when I got off the Amtrak today and I saw, oh, it's named after President Biden.

[Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes.

ERIC GARCIA: I can't really leave Washington even when I want to.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes, this is the home of Joe Biden for sure. I also want to thank the many folks joining us online tonight. I looked – we have people from Massachusetts, to Florida, to Ohio – hello, to my mother-in-law – and all over the country. Thank you for being here. So, let's talk first about your book.

ERIC GARCIA: Sure.

DR. HOFFMAN: We're Not Broken.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, congratulations on getting the book published.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: First of all, you use the terms neuroatypical and neurotypical –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – throughout the book. Can you help our audience understand what those terms mean as well as your thoughts around how we describe autistic people in terms of high and low functioning? So kind of, a little bit of a premise of your book.

ERIC GARCIA: Sure. Definitely. So, for those who don't know for the uninitiated, neurotypicals are essentially people who – it's not just non-autistic people; it is people with, whose brains function in the way that we have often considered normal which is to say people without conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and other, and Tourette's syndrome, dyspraxia and other

conditions. So, neurotypical essentially means that. Neuroatypical means that these are the types of ways that people's brains function that have, have for too often not been considered normal or have, have often, who's brain types have often been considered deviations from the norm. And one of the most, I mean, the term neurodiversity is often used to talk about the concept of accepting autistic people but really neurodiversity is for all neuro, neuroatypical types whether its autism, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, dyspraxia – which I also have; I also have ADHD – and it also applies to people with dyscalculia and ah –

DR. HOFFMAN: Can you describe what those, dyspraxia and the, the other one –

ERIC GARCIA: Describe dyspraxia is for motor skills and dyscalculia I believe is for, for numbers, difficult and well as dyslexia is. So, these, so these are, these are the types of neurotypes and basically neurodiversity argues that instead of trying to change these neuro, these neurotypes, rather what should happen is we should be more adaptable, we should be accepting of them and accommodating toward them. In terms of functioning and functioning labels, how many people in here, in the audience have heard of the concepts of high functioning and low functioning autism?

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, that's just about everybody in the room.

ERIC GARCIA: Basically, yeah. So, a lot of people who are probably here watching, how many of your guys probably – I'm going to ask a question, ask another question, how many of you would consider me high functioning? All right, so –

DR. HOFFMAN: We've just gotten to know you.

ERIC GARCIA: Yes, they've just gotten to know me –

DR. HOFFMAN: Give them a chance.

ERIC GARCIA: Some of the people, some of the people in the, have also been in your class who we spoke to –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – earlier so they might know why I'm not a fan of the term. But the reason why I'm not a fan of the terms high functioning and low functioning is that for a lot of people you might think of me as high functioning. I am speaking on stage today, today. I, ah, I'm speaking. I have a job. But I think that that doesn't, that isn't the whole of myself. To call someone high functioning is to erase the legitimate difficulties that they have or the legitimate challenges that they have I think a lot of times a lot of people think of autistic people like myself, and they think, oh, well your autism helps you. But, it also, what people don't realize is that it also, I still am really sensitive to, to noise and overwhelming light and sound. Often times I still can be completely overwhelmed. I can still have difficulty reading social cues. I can have a lot of trouble info dumping. So tonight, if I info dump a little too much please stop me. And a lot of times we have difficulty with other, with, a lot of times I still, and often times I still stim and that's my way of coping and dealing with sensory processing around the world.

DR. HOFFMAN: And can you describe that term too?

ERIC GARCIA: Stim is –

DR. HOFFMAN: Stimming?

ERIC GARCIA: – a self-stimulatory behavior which is basically stimulating yourself. So usually if you see me playing with my shoelaces tonight – I have my keys in my pocket but I'm trying not to jingle too much. But like, I'm, it's just a way for me to deal with sensory processing because even when I'm in a

adaptable environment I still need to soothe myself and being in a place with bright lights [Chuckle.]sometimes it can be a little overwhelming. Right now, it's fine but, but, but I, I, I tend to think that that's not a good, I don't think it's a really good description and conversely I think a lot of people when they say, oh, well, you're nothing like my child; my child is extremely low functioning. That sets the bar a little too low for, its sets the expectations extremely low for autistic people. And often times what it does is that creates and incentive for us not to give them their full rights. It's an incentive to put them in institutions. It's an incentive to administer pretty draconian treatments like using shock therapy on autistic people or it's an argument for paying them below the minimum wage.

DR. HOFFMAN: Which shock therapy from your book up until 2020 was still considered a normal treatment?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah and the –

DR. HOFFMAN: – for autism?

ERIC GARCIA: – in a, in a district court just recently, I believe, I believe it was a district court just found that the FDA's ruling that using shock therapy on autism, shock therapy for autistic people can still be administered. So, it's still an ongoing legal dispute just because the FDA put a ruling on it doesn't mean that it's still not over. But I think that what it does is that it's used as a rationale to do some pretty horrible things for autistic, against autistic people. And also, what it does is it sets the expectations so low. Imagine what, imagine being told your whole life that you're low functioning and it sets the expectation so low that it, it basically creates its incentive to not allocate a lot of resources or not put a lot of faith in you, or not even, even if you can't become a computer programmer or things like that it says we're not going to spend that much money on your

education or your housing or your home care or any of that. So, I simply prefer the terms high support needs and low support needs because whereas functioning labels like high functioning and low functioning are based on what, on how neurotypical people see autistic people, terms like high support needs and low support needs are based on what autistic people need.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay, so it's less about how they're functioning, more about what they need.

ERIC GARCIA: But more about, because functioning labels tend to be – you don't know how someone can function –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: Just because someone can't speak doesn't mean that they can't live a good life. Just because they can't speak doesn't mean that they can't have, can't go to school. Or just because they can't speak doesn't mean that they can't be loving and caring and kind and a good person. And similarly, just because someone can speak doesn't mean that they don't have, that they don't need a home care aid when they go home. Just because someone can't hold a job doesn't mean that they don't deal with, don't, that they don't occasionally have meltdowns. So, these terms like functioning labels really serve, don't really describe; they really, they really flatten the experience to autistic people.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, one thing you write about in your book is that the anti-vaccine movement has infected politics.

ERIC GARCIA: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: Can you describe the history of the false association between vaccines and autism?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. I mean, I think this, this has been something that's

been in, you know, been around since like around the 1990's but it really took shape in 1998. There had been studies about that potentially [indiscernible] to you for a while. But Andrew Wakefield in 1998, he was a British physician and I believe at the Royal Free Hospital in London put out a study in the *Lancet* saying that there was a connection between autism and – he basically; in the actual study he didn't really say it, but during his press conferences he talked about this idea of leaky gut syndrome which said that the MMR vaccines, the measles, mumps Rubella vaccine, causes chemicals to leak out of the intestines, go into the brain stem and [snap fingers] autism. Now, the thing of it was is that – and he was very careful that his actual peer reviewed study but it turns out that later on he was lying and he, you know, he was researching children; he was being paid by lawyers who were suing the vaccine companies. I believe that was what happened. And he, and, and basically he lost his medical license and plenty if people disputed his research studies and eventually the, the *Lancet* study was retracted in 2010. But that, understand, that was in 1998 when it came out and then it happened in 2010. In the intervening years it became this meme and it, and it took, you know, how many people are familiar with Jenny McCarthy and her whole BS campaign about vaccines and autism? She got it from Andrew Wakefield; her and Jim Carey. And of course, she, you know, discussed it on Oprah Winfrey which gave it an even bigger platform. Because had she not; had she just been a normal celebrity who put out crank theories – kind of your Kyrie Irving's a flat earther but we don't take Kyrie Irving much seriously. But Oprah Winfrey put it on daytime television, and it scared the hell out of plenty of parents. And then on top of that what happened is it wasn't just pop culture that was starting to do it, it was also our policy makers. So, in 2000 Andrew

Wakefield testified before Congress about the link between vaccines and autism and it got the, and plenty of Democrats and Republicans, you know, asked him about the link and there were only a few people who said that, that this was a very, very dangerous game that we're playing, and it might lead to fewer vaccination rates. But, so, of course we found out that that was not true. We found out that Andrew Wakefield, you know, like I said he was being paid by, you know, lawyers who were suing so he obviously had financial incentive. But, like, think about that. That was for 12 years this entered the zeitgeist. Now there were people in, in between, you know, intervening, disputing it but that was, you still had that imprimatur, and it took root in our, in the, in the body politic in both the United Kingdom and the United States. And I don't think you would have the current hesitancy about vaccines with COVID-19 had there not been that initial moral panic –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – about autism and vaccines in the 1990's and the 2000's. You know, I often say that that the, the autism panic of the 1990's and the 2000's is to the COVID vaccine pandemic what the hobbit is to the Lord of the Rings. So, um, I don't know have people, you read The Lord of the Rings or watched Lord of the Rings? But you, you know, you, one leads to the other and there wouldn't have been those seeds sown of doubt. But I think more than that there's another reason why I have a bone to pick with antivaxxers. Yes, they're public health threats but more than that they're essentially arguing that it is better to be dead from measles than it is to be autistic. And that's the message that they're sending.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: And its saying that autism is essentially a, it's worse than a death sentence.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: And that is rooted in the, that, that's rooted in this idea that autism is a malady. That it's something to be avoided in that if you vaccinate your kid and they get autism you failed as a parent. Or you failed as a doctor or a pediatrician or a practitioner.

DR. HOFFMAN: Even though that link is –

ERIC GARCIA: Is –

DR. HOFFMAN: – false.

ERIC GARCIA: – totally false but it created that, it sowed that seed and we, and we, you know, know you can't cut down that tree because the roots just there, you know?

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I'm curious, is the anti-vax movement a problem for more individualistic countries like the U.S.A. compared to other nations? Do we see these kind of patterns worldwide?

ERIC GARCIA: I, I can't speak too much for that, but I know that there is a, you know, countries like Israel have done better with vaccinations. There's, there's some difficulties with accessing the vaccine in places like Canada. But, but I, and of course places like Brazil's Bolsonaro – I think, believe Bolsonaro is, you know, not that too keen on vaccines in Brazil. But, but I can't speak too much to that. But I think that the United States it's really interesting because on one end are individualistic, are, our image is rugged individual, ruggedly individual prevents us from adopting ideas like herd immunity. But on the other end it oddly enough almost kind of helps autistic people in other ways because

it's why in places like Texas or the place is pass supported decision making as an alternative to guardianship. Which is to say that instead of having a guardian, disabled people can have a consortium of people like their families or loved ones who help them make decisions but ultimately they make the decision. So oddly enough, and then also its one of the reasons why we are probably better in home care than a few other developed nations for, for disabled people because, because of our image as ruggedly individual sometimes it means that we don't spend a lot of money on public health or just or, or accommodations or making places adaptable or accessible or spending enough on social welfare. On the other end sometimes, it makes us I think more willing to focus on things like home care or focus on things like individualist, you know, individual rights or individual people with disabilities.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let's lighten the mood a little bit. This is a tweet that you posted back in July –

ERIC GARCIA: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Um, [Chuckle.]as far as I can tell you haven't yet made The New York Times best seller list –

ERIC GARCIA: No.

DR. HOFFMAN: – but if you do what tattoo will you get?

ERIC GARCIA: Oh, okay –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: – sorry, I, I promised with my mom we were going to do, we're going to get matching neurodiversity tattoos with the infinity symbol and a rainbow because that the symbol –

DR. HOFFMAN: That's the symbol –

ERIC GARCIA: – that’s the official symbol I think of the neurodiversity and so possibly doing that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Fascinating.

ERIC GARCIA: Or I, I, I, I’ve half joked, anybody know the, the right-wing cartoonist Ben Garrison? Like, I see some hands; like he draws, he drew this one really outrageous cartoon about autism being like a tiger and with like syringe claws. So, I’ve half joked that like I’d want to get an autism tiger tattoo just like, kind of like how the Democrat Andrew Jackson was called a jackass and then gave the donkey the part, the mascot of the Democratic Party. I kind of want autistic people to, to, to adopt the –

DR. HOFFMAN: Embrace the tattoo, or –

ERIC GARCIA: – yeah –

DR. HOFFMAN: – embrace the tiger?

ERIC GARCIA: – embrace the tiger, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] Well, so, I also bring in students’ questions from my class. You, you talked to my class earlier today –

ERIC GARCIA: They’re good students.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and over dinner. Jordan wants to know; in what ways do you believe being on the spectrum has aided you in your career? You had an article that preceded this book in 2015 in *The Atlantic Magazine*, and you mentioned your obsessive nature regarding politics helping to start your career as an intern. In what ways does it help you today?

ERIC GARCIA: Absolutely it helps. So like, I mean, I think it’s, it’s interesting because I don’t think that it’s, it, it, it’s not like I’m better than any other journalist. It’s just that being autistic means that I’m better at some things that journalists do

and I, and I have deficiencies that I need to work on that other journalists might be more adept at. So, some other journalists might be more adept at, you know, having those after work cocktails with, you know, you know, inside sources on Capitol Hill or the White House or something like that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Having the Roll-a-Dex.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, having the Roll-a-Dex and people that they call regularly. But I think that sometimes my obsessive, and I, and I think that sometimes, you know, I'm still kind of a bag of nerves before I pick up the phone. And I need to like have like 30 minutes to unwind after I get off the phone with someone before I can pick up the phone next time. And that's just, and that's okay. But in the same respect, I think that that kind of obsessive nature is why sometimes when I'm bored on a Friday night what do I do? I go through FEC spreadsheets because there's stories in there about like who's giving money to who, and how, how much money are some people raising. Also, I think that sometimes or I think that because social cues and social niceties are kind of a foreign language to me as an autistic person I don't have a lot of regard when I see social niceties being used as a shield for BSing or giving me a straight answer. So, sometimes I'll be, I'll be, you know, a, really, really blunt and direct and I won't relent until I actually get a question. Sometimes that gets me in trouble. Like I think in 2016 I accidentally followed a U.S. Senator into the men's room. I didn't realize that you weren't supposed to do that. Then later, you know, you know, I think we all saw that earlier this week with Kristin Sinema –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – but like, you know, but like I didn't realize that on the Capitol they're like, they said look if you do this again you're going to lose your

Capitol press pass. But, and I was mortified after that. But, but like, you know, I learned okay, you can't follow someone in the men's room but like I still try to. You know, but like if someone, but at the same time I think that, you know, and by the way, it's like I still, that spirit is still, not wanting to relent until I get an actual answer persists and that's why I think I'm kind of driven and also why I can be really obsessive when it comes down to, you know, looking for, looking at trends that other people did. Like so for example, last year I was arguing I think ever since Bernie Sanders won Nevada that Joe Biden was going to be, was underperforming with Latinos and I kept on saying that, I kept on saying that, I kept on saying that. Then what would happen on election night? Trump vastly improved with Latino voters in south Florida and south Texas but not just south Florida and south Texas, he improved with the, with Puerto Ricans in Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia. He improved with Mexican Americans in Compton. He improved in, you know, basically even places like the Bronx and Queens he improved the Latino voters. So, sometimes, you know, being obsessive about that. Sometimes I get it wrong; other times though but like I can be a dog with a chew toy and just like completely just zero in on something until, you know, until it gets the national attention and then I'm like, see I was right about that.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]well, I do want to come back to the Latino voters because that's –

ERIC GARCIA: Absolutely.

DR. HOFFMAN: – something that you had written about. But, I, I wanted to say something you described in your book the first time you saw an autistic person in the news –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – in 2007. Can you describe what that experience was like for you?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. I think I can describe it and I can talk about like a positive experience and a negative experience which I talk about in the book. The first time I saw an autistic person on the news was when Sanjay Gupta was interviewing the late Mel Baggs who died in 2020, I believe. May their memory be blessing, and God rest their soul. But I remember it was fascinating because again to the point about low functioning and low functioning, Mel Baggs was a non-speaking autistic person and someone who many people thought was low functioning. But what was funny is I remember I watched their interview with Dr. Sanjay Gupta on CNN and I just couldn't look away and I remember my mom saying could you please change the channel? It reminds me a lot of the bad experiences like when you were being bullied. But like, I was like, it wasn't that I didn't want to change the channel. It's just that I couldn't because I was just like, I couldn't look away because it was like finally I was seeing somebody who looked like me and again, people think that I'm very different from a "low functioning" autistic person but here was this gap, you know, across the country we look very different in a lot of ways but for, for the first time in my life I saw somebody who moved in the world the way that I did. And, and, and reacted and responded to people the way that I did. It had the same kind of reaction that people did with, reacted the same way to people that I did. And it was a totally surreal experience and was something that I had never seen portrayed in real life before. And, you know, and, and that was on CNN. And then conversely I think –

DR. HOFFMAN: You almost described it as like as if you'd been foreign language –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, exactly.

DR. HOFFMAN: – [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: Like, yeah –

DR. HOFFMAN: – someone who speaks in the same language?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, it was like I, it was like I'd, I'd been living in, like I'd been an immigrant in my, in a foreign country my whole life and then finally I was seeing somebody speak the mother tongue. And when Mel Baggs died I finally watched their video in my language which I'd never watched. And I was overcome with emotions watching their video. I recommend if you don't read my book please watch Mel Baggs' "In My Language." And then conversely, I think that, you know, a negative experience I think it waws either that same night or the night after Larry King interviewed Jenny McCarthy. So, right there and right then on the same network within 24 hours there was – this is in 2007 – you had a very –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – very positive portrayal, an empowering portrayal of autism and you had a very negative and very toxic and very poisonous and, and false, really, false portrayal of autism within a span of 24 hours. Or it was about 48 hours; I don't even remember. But like, this was in 2007. So, it showed, you know, in hindsight I think that it, it kind of was a testament to the fact that I'm a journalist now that like even when I was a teenager I understood the power of media because I remember when I first, after I saw that I asked my mom, I was like, was I vaccinated when you guys thought I was autistic. She said, what are

you talking about? Because she'd never heard of that. So, that's an example of how media can be constructive and destructive.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, you talk about representations in, in media and you mentioned in the book and in the classroom today the show "Atypical" that is on Netflix. I don't know if anyone has seen this show? And you argued that those portrayals have severe consequences for autistic people. Can you talk a little bit about that?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. I think that for example one of the biggest examples is that the main character Sam in it is not portrayed by an autistic actor. So, already then you're getting a secondhand idea of what an autism looks like. It's not somebody who's autistic and you know, in the year of Our Lord 2021 we should probably – it's not the year of Dustin Hoffman in "Rain Man" which came out in 1988. Like, you can cast autistic people. And on top of that, I think that a lot of times it excused some of Sam's poor behavior toward women as oh well, he's autistic. Like when he locked his girlfriend in a closet. Like that's just, that's just being rude toward women. That's just being kind of abusive toward women. But I use it as oh ha, ha, ha, he's –

DR. HOFFMAN: So, it's kind of vilifying autism as –

ERIC GARCIA: Or its almost excusing bad behavior and –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – I think that like as I, as I frequently said when Asperger syndrome before, before the [indiscernible] changed and now it's you know Asperger Syndrome is under autism spectrum disorder. And I used to say Asperger Syndrome only has one "s", it's up to you to add the second one. But I, I think that, you know it, it leads it to, you know, excusing bad behavior or

almost, or, or creating a model – okay, this is acceptable behavior because their autistic and then of course that being in the real world obviously that’s not how the real world works. Also, I think that it’s just, it’s a very, very flat portrayal. Like I didn’t see myself in the portrayal of autism. And that, and, and it should be about someone who’s like me, a “high functioning” or they would call high functioning version. It’s only, this, the second season got better. They cast some autistic people in his, like, support group or whatever so that was fine. And they included some autistic people of color. But, I just don’t like the idea. I think we’ve had; I understand that there are autistic white people and autistic males but I think for so long that the template has been of autistic white males who can’t get a girlfriend. And the autistic experience is so much larger than that, and so much richer than that and we overlook a lot of other autistic people. There are other great portrayals of autism in movies like the show, like a Pixar short “Loop,” you know, are fantastic but, but that, it doesn’t do it for me. No.

DR. HOFFMAN: That’s a really interesting perspective. I’m going to jump to another tweet. I’m a little bit of a, a, a Twitter stalker.

ERIC GARCIA: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: So, here’s a tweet of yours from the summer with an interaction with Matt Gaetz. First of all, tell us what it’s, what is it like to be on the ground with politicians as an autistic person, you know, who, someone who might be interacting with you in an, in an aggressive way or in, giving you social cues that are, are like leave me alone, don’t talk to me. What is that like?

ERIC GARCIA: Ah, yes. So I mean sometimes it’s one of those things where you might not always read the cues. So I was, I think in my article in *National Journal* I talk about the time when I shadowed over the dais in a

committee hearing. I, I, I asked Orin Hatch a question because I didn't realize you couldn't yell over the dais to ask a question. So sometimes that happens and then like security guard said, look if you do that again you're going to get arrested or –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: – or something, or you'll get thrown out or I forget what. But then like, so, like I got little shook up and I had to like [sigh] okay, decompress. Okay, it's going to be okay. Other times I think that like when you are seeing so many people – especially when I was a young reporter and I was seeing a lot of these people who I had seen on TV I thought that oh, these guys are invincible, they're not going to want to take my questions, they're not going to want to listen to me so I shouldn't even bother or I would just get overwhelmed and would freeze up and I, and I would just forget what I was, what I was going to ask. But then I think now I have less of a regard or now it's kind of like, okay, I'm here to do a job and these are the people who I'm here to question and ask. And sometimes it's like, you know. But like, so, this is the context for this is up for a long time after, for a few months after the masks, after vaccinations started rolling out masks man, the mask mandate on the House of Representatives was repealed which you no longer had to wear a mask and if you wore mask, and if, because for a while if you wore a mask, didn't wear a mask on the hill you would – on the House floor – you'd get fined. So, I, I saw Matt Gaetz come out the day that they brought back, like the week they, Nancy Pelosi brought back the mask mandate and he was not wearing a mask. So I asked, so I was like, what do you think about the mask mandate coming back? I saw, because I saw him walking out of the House out of the metal detectors that were put in place after the

January 6th riot, and I, I was like what do you think about this mask mandate? He says, I'm against it. And I was like, so I just asked him, I said are you vaccinated? And then he just looks at me – no he doesn't even look at me and he's like, that's a very nosey question. And this was the week after I had asked him about the Jan 6th Commission select committee and I, I, and I said Eric Garcia of the *Independent*, and he says you guys aren't a legitimate news organization. And like for someone like Matt Gaetz at some point you realize okay, this is K-fabe, this is for those of you who aren't fans of WWUS wrestling Kayfabe is like show play. Like –

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you, I did not know [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: [Laughter.] Um, you, you, you know, this is like, this is like he's doing it for kabuki theater, he's doing it to be histrionic but then like when, but so like, in that case when you're with Matt Gaetz it's like, look, no, that's not a nosey question. Asking if you're vaccinated when you're going unmasked on the House floor, you're a public servant, you have to set an example especially in a state like Florida where at the times hospitalization rates were skyrocketing. He's a Republican politician and Republicans listen to you. So, it's important to, for you to answer that question. So –

DR. HOFFMAN: I'm going to alert the booth back there. I'm having [indiscernible] but the remote doesn't seem to be working so I'd like to move to the next slide. I don't know if you can do that from back there? And I actually want to ask you to move to the next slide. Thank you. So, this was I thought a really interesting tweet about what happened on January 6th –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – at, at the Capitol and that you were in the dining hall or –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – at [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, I was in the basement; it's in the basement of the House.

DR. HOFFMAN: The basement –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – of the House. And you hear other police officers coming up and thanking that officer who testified –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – famously before Congress several months ago. If I can ask you, where were you on January 6th and what was your interpretation of what happened –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. So –

DR. HOFFMAN: – that day?

ERIC GARCIA: – the interesting thing to me was that I was a;, so I was, so I live, so I live pretty, I live pretty far from the Capitol. I live near the White House [indiscernible] which is like on the other side. Washington, D.C. for those that don't know it's divided into southeast, northeast, southwest, and northwest. So, the Capitol's on the southeast and the northeast side of, of D.C. I live in the northwest side, right? But I used to live in southeast for a long, I used to live in northeast for a long time. So, what's interesting is I was staying at this hotel where a lot of Trump protest, where a lot of people who would join the Stop the Steal rally were going to be. And like, on that Monday – I believe it was a Monday, yeah – I went to go get, I went to go grocery shopping and I see that they were staying at this hotel and some of them were smoking cigarettes and I

see some of them have like MAGA equipment and things like that. And I was, and, you know, there had been some, there had been confrontations with police a few times because even – Jan 6 for those who don't remember, that wasn't the only time that they'd come to D.C. They had like set fire to a church the time before or like there had been some confrontations on my street corner, you know, like. So, like when I saw them and like when I went grocery shopping I kind of clutched my bag like, like oddly enough I, I felt like I clutched my bag. So, then I thought to myself wait, am I being that kind of same condescending kind of Beltway type that I hate who like clutches his bags in the same way that white women might clutch their bag, clutch their purse when they see me as a big Mexican dude? I was like, I probably shouldn't be that judgmental. Ah, and then you know, and, and you know these guys they had like Trump hats and, or Trump shirts. They were smoking cigarettes and they were like middle aged and, you know, white. And then later on like when I, the next day when I saw the, the riot on the Hill and at first like I was sort of them pushing in and I remember thinking this isn't going to be good. And then like I saw that, and I was instantly, incidentally enough I was on deadline for another piece and like I, I think I told my editor, like I still had to finish that piece but like I incidentally told my editor I was like we're kind of having an insurrection here, ah, and then like I remember just being horrified. They put a curfew in place and like I was tempted to go down to the Capitol and like just report but at the time I was a freelancer so I couldn't get somebody to commission and things like that. But I was tempted to go out there and write something, and you know, just talk to the rioters or be there but then they put a curfew in place, and I wasn't screwing with that. And so, but then what's interesting is that the day of the riot my dad texted me and he said –

DR. HOFFMAN: And your dad's a conservative –

ERIC GARCIA: My dad's a Republican. My dad is a Trump voting, you know, Fox News-loving, you know, right wing Republican and I love him very much. But he texted me, he's like, mijo be safe. Mijo for those who don't know in Spanish is "my son." And then like within like and I said, Dad, I'm home, I'm going to be okay, I promised I'll be okay. Then within 24 hours my dad sent me like a meme online saying that this was like Antifa or like this was meant to discredit the President. And I got really, I, I love my father more than I love anybody, you know, he's the reason that, the, the way I got into politics was watching Fox News with my dad and watching conservative talk radio with my dad which I'm sure he sometimes wonders what the hell happened with me.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: But, but, you know, I got really cross with him and I said, Dad, no these people were across the street from me. These weren't liberals pretending to be Trump supporters; this wasn't a [indiscernible] and things like that. I was like, these people came to my city and they, they raided my city. And like, I remember being really shook up about it and like it wasn't until like I called my mom that like I started laughing like just because I was so nervous and then she says, I understand why you're laughing because if you don't laugh you'll cry. I'm like, yeah, it really, really; I'm, you know, because like I'd been a reporter, I wasn't a Hill reporter, Hill reporter that day but like seeing those corridors and things like that I'd, I'd been through those, those, those halls and sometimes when I go through those halls on the Hill now I like, oh yeah, this is where I've, where I've seen, you know, where I saw all that footage. And if you, you know, I didn't, and that wasn't on the tweet there. But I, but I, and I

didn't tweet about it but like a few days later I saw Officer Eugene Goodman – for those who; I don't know if you remember, he was the one who told Mitt Romney like go the other way and he like showed the rioters the other way. He directed the rioters to another way which saved members of Congress' lives and like, you know, I just, I didn't say anything, I just said look I really, I'd like, we were in an elevator, and I just said thank you very much for what you did. I just didn't want to; I didn't want to make a big deal because he's a cop and he's trying to do his job just like I'm trying to do my job. And I'm sure he doesn't want the accolades that much, he doesn't want to be, you know, stick out like a sore thumb. But like I just told him, I said, look, just thank you for, for doing that, you know? And I told my mom and she just like he's so brave and just she was happy that he's still on the force.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, so we share something in, in common which is having parents who one parent is on one –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – side ideologically one parent is on the other side ideologically. How do you manage to maintain a good relationship with both parents even in, like, and we both joked that they're of course divorced –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] But, how do you manage to maintain a kind of a, a good sense of civil dialogue, a sense of relationship even if you disagree with maybe one of your parents?

ERIC GARCIA: Ah, you know, I mean, my dad when I took him to visit Washington, D.C. when he came to visit me in 2011, 2019 like we were walking to the Capitol and we passed by CNN's building and he was like, fake news fake

news. And you know, like, he was joking about that. Like I, I, I remember he said something about CNN's fake news, it might have been when we were there or it might have been afterward but like he said CNN's fake news, you know. And then like when I got my job with the *Washington Post* he said, well, you know they make things up about our President, mijo. Ah, you know, and, and, and I and I was, and I remember thinking ah, not really, no. Like you, you, you know, but, but, you know, I think that what I've come to recognize is that my dad's a Republican, he's conservative, and like for those who don't, who are surprised at like a Mexican American man could vote for Donald Trump, don't be surprised. Like, Latinos have been voting for Republicans for, for decades. You know, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, the second George Bush and Donald Trump. Like they, like, Democrats need to learn how to do better with that. But, and not take Latino voters for granted. But, but you know I think the thing that we do is we, he, is that I think that especially as he's seen me work as a journalist and especially after he read that piece that I wrote about him and wrote about Latino men, I, I think that he's recognized that I do my homework, I do my due diligence, and I think that because I grew up in a conservative environment – my mom was a Republican, or voted, or was very conservative until the, the Iraq War and she, when she became a Democrat. She voted for Obama. I think that because I grew up in that kind of conservative Christian household I, they recognized that like I'm not coming from a point of ignorance or that I'm not, you know, coming from a place of malice and like I understand these communities. And I think with my dad I've come to recognize that even if he may think that like my job is a bunch of hoey, he recognized that I do hard work and that I come from an honest place and that you know, if you read in my writing about him I

don't really challenge him on anything. I don't say like oh well that Dad, that's not true. I listen to him, and I let him say his stuff because I recognize as a Republican, as, as my dad, he's important to listen to but also about half of our country voted for Donald Trump so I need to understand who these voters are. You know, my dad isn't, you, you, you know because for every one of those guys who broke into the Capitol there are plenty of others who didn't break into the Capitol but who still voted for Donald Trump because of the tax cuts, or because of the judges, or things like and it's important to understand them just as it's important to understand the guys who rioted on, on January 6th. The same respect I think it's also important because like I think sometimes I can get too stuck in the Beltway –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – or like, because like. I only know like a few people, like I can count on one hand the amount of Republicans I know who voted for Donald Trump. The funny thing is when I get drinks with a member, with like a Republican consultant they tell me, hey, I didn't vote for Trump. And then I see on Twitter or on CNN or whatever I see them defending Trump and I'm just like you jellyfish.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

ERIC GARCIA: You know, but like, you know, I, I, I almost don't, I respect the people who stood with Trump day one or who were like, yeah, trust my guy, you know, I like that we're going to build the wall and we're going to make America great again and I, I respect that because like at least you have a belief. But if you're just doing it, if you didn't vote for him and you're just doing this because you want a job then you don't care about anything you just care about

your own social status and you paid a price. But like, but, but, you know, like, I, but you, I, again I think I only know like three or four actual Republicans I know who voted for Donald Trump, like personally.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: But like, you know, I, I think that so many times the only conservatives you see on like MSNBC or CNN are those never Trump conservatives –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – but they represent only like ten percent of all Republicans, and they all live in northern Virginia. So it's important for me to talk with my dad and say like, hey dad, what do you think of, you know; just, just like two weeks ago I texted him and was like what do you think of Tim Scott because I'd interviewed Tim Scott a few times who is a, the only black Republican senator – he's from South Carolina – and I think he has a bright future in the GOP but, but like I was like what do you think of him and he's like I like him. And I said yeah, I've interviewed him. And like other times I've asked; but then also I've been like hey dad, what do you think of Nikki Haley who was Trump's ambassador to the U.N., and it's kind of been wishy washy on Trump and then he says, like, oh she's a traitor, she's just as bad as Liz Cheney. Ah, so it's important for me to do that. And then similarly, the thing with my mom, my mom's a Democrat. And what's funny is that I should have known that Joe Biden was going to be the nominee because I think that a lot of people in the press or like we were very disconnected because I thought for a long time oh Joe Biden's old news, there's going to be a lot of other candidates who are running. But my mom liked Joe Biden from the beginning. Then she like Kamal Harris a little bit. Then she liked

Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg for a little bit. She went back and forth like but and like if you remember in like the summer of 2019 a lot of people were saying Elizabeth Warren might be the nominee and things like that. But, like, my mom never really warmed up to her. She's said I, she's all right but she's like but nobody on "The View" likes her – that's what my mom watch, watches a lot –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – of times. And like people make, make fun of "The View" but like a lot of women watch it and Obama was the first president to go on daytime television and he chose that show. So like a lot of people watch it. But like, and I should have in hindsight; and then come Super Tuesday she made the decision, you know I voted for Joe Biden because Harris had already dropped out. Pete had already dropped out and Amy Klobuchar had. And then incidentally enough but a lot my younger cousins who are also Latino they were all, almost all of them were for Bernie Sanders whereas like a lot of the people in my family who are Democrats who were over 40 they were all in on Joe Biden. And that should have told me that Biden was going to be the nominee. You know, more than my esteemed, I'm, you know, a sophisticated political reporter. Sometimes, that's, sometimes that's the better, sometimes you know, talk to your, talk to your, if you think you're too disconnected about Democratic or Republican politics talk to your mom, talk to your dad, like –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – or talk to you know normal – I think that sometimes we focus too much on the diners in Iowa and not enough on the barbershops in Columbia South Carolina or the, the Pentecostal Iglesias' in, Iglesias in, in southern California or the –

DR. HOFFMAN: Or Chester County Pennsylvania.

ERIC GARCIA: Or, or Chester County, Pennsylvania or somewhere like that.

Yeah, we, you know, or, or, you know, those are the swing voters and those are the, those are the primary voters that we should be focusing on. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I like the way you put it earlier today is it's, you know, you think of your dad sometimes as like a, a focus group of one.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: And it's, it's a way to be curious about people who you might disagree with but also just come in with an intellectual curiosity like I want to know why you think that way.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: And it can be really fascinating.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, because like I remember I was thinking of my, because for the longest time I said like I remember for a while thinking that because I know that Tom Cotton, Senator Tom Cotton is thinking about running for President, and I thought, you know he's, he checks all the right boxes but he doesn't seem charismatic enough to me. So, I asked my dad what do you think of Tom Cotton? He said, I'll tell you what, mijo, I think the best president we have in our lifetime one day might be Tom Cotton. You know, and I was like, oh, I hadn't thought that you know ah, I was like, that kind of checks it off for me. I guess the, I guess he really appeals to a lot of conservative voters and the same deal with Ron DeSantis.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: I need to ask my dad, I, I'll ask him sometime soon, what he thinks of, does he think Trump should run again in 2024? But like, but, but, I

mean, that was really important and that showed me that hey, maybe my preconceived notions about Tom Cotton were wrong and maybe I'm sleeping on him. And the same way you know I, I, I mean I've talked to my mom, and she's been really impressed with Senator Raphael Warnock, and she's been really impressed with a lot of, you know, with, she's been kind of disappointed with Kamala Harris. But she's still and she kind of wants Joe Biden to do better on things like immigration and the people at the border because she thinks that you know they haven't been adequately treated. So, you know it, it's important to talk to these people. It's important to talk to people outside the Beltway and it's important to talk to people, for you guys it's, its, you know, its important for you guys to get outside the community and get outside the university bubble and talk with people who maybe aren't the same with, who have been maybe not the same as you. If not to come to an agreement but at least understand that we live in this country together –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – and we're kind of doomed if we don't live together [Chuckle.] you know, and we're, we're living in a very, very divided time. I don't think, I think probably it's divided at times in the 1960's and it's important for us to talk with each other.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I have so many more topics I want to talk to you about but before we move on I think I do want to bring up you had an article that you wrote for the *Daily Beast* called What it Feels Like to be an Autistic Person of Color in the Eyes of the Police?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: And you talked about what it was like to see the 2016

shooting of Charles Kinsey who was black and was a behavioral aide of a Latino autistic man who had wandered away from the home he was being, where he was being cared for. Fortunately Kinsey survived. So, you, you [indiscernible] when you heard the cop say they hadn't meant to shoot the black man but the autistic one.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. Yeah, that was because the person whose name Arnaldo Rios Soto (sp?) – there's a great podcast by Audrey Quinn about that whole shooting and I think it's called "Aftereffect's" (sic) and like just look up Audrey Quinn podcast –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – and you'll find it – and, you know, it was disturbing because if you remember this was during I think this was when Black Lives Matter was getting into the public consciousness and the idea that police could shoot unarmed black men was really becoming – this was on video if you remember –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: And that's not to say that this didn't, which is to say that this has happened multiple times before, but it just wasn't on video. But like I think that the fact that they, the police thought it would be acceptable or that they would get off if they said oh, we were aiming for the autistic guy, and say, almost and it was almost like saying you know instead of the black guy as if that was a reasonable excuse or that was a reasonable justification for opening fire. That showed me that to a lot of police it showed that, it shows, it said to me that police aren't equipped to handle autistic people and it showed that autistic people of color might be more susceptible and more vulnerable. Because I had known

what it's like to be Latino in America for a long time, you know, ever since I was born if you can't ignore, you can't ignore my skin color, you know. But, but I hadn't thought about how police will see your skin color or they'll see your temperament, they'll see all these things but you can't, I don't have a name tag that says autistic and nor do I want one. I want to be able to live freely and more freely and all autistic people want to live freely and move freely. But, that isn't the first thing a lot of people see when they see that, that police see when they first see you. They just see you know a, a large Latino male just like they did with Arnaldo Rios. He was sitting in the middle of the street, and he was with a toy truck. But people thought he had a gun. And, the, the, Mr. Kinsey was saying, he was yelling to the police in the video, he only has a toy truck. Like and he was trying to soothe Arnaldo and Arnaldo Rios has struggled immensely since then. He's cycled through [indiscernible] a few places and you know he's; he's been traumatized as anyone would be –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – and it shows I think the ways that police are, are not equipped to handle dealing with autistic people. And personally, and this wasn't even a knock on police. I just personally think this is too big of an order for police and this is not what, and I think that it's asking too much of our police officers to have them deal with people having mental breakdowns or have, or who are developmentally disabled because that's not what police are there to be. They're there to protect and to serve. They're not equipped to handle people with developmental disabilities even if they go through some kind of mandatory training, that's not why they got onto the force. And, you know, I have friends in law enforcement, you know, I was in Boy Scouts so some of my friends joined

law enforcement and I know police to be good people and you know my scout masters, some of them were police officers. You know, so, I think that it, it's too big of an order and I think that we should, you know, more than having police, teaching police how to deal with autistic people we should find ways so that that's not the first resort we have is calling police because nobody is served by that. People are ill-served by having to handle someone with a developmental disability and if people who are developmentally disabled often times can and have wound up dead or at least traumatized after these incidents. So, it doesn't do anybody any good.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I am skipping ahead here, I do want to talk about Latino voters –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and so, particularly you had an article about in the *Washington Post* “Why Do Latino Men Shift Towards Trump in 2020?” but you also identified how Latino women –

ERIC GARCIA: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: – differed from Latino men. So, can you kind of give us a, a summary of what that argument was about and sort of what to expect maybe in this upcoming midterm election and Presidential election?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. So, what I should first preface with saying is that since that article came out there's been more research from a group I interviewed Equis Research and Stephanie Valencia (sp?) who is a democratic, it's a democratic group that focuses largely on Latinos and what it showed was that while more Latino men voted for Trump there was a bigger shift among Latinas. So, what it, but what [indiscernible] Lopez who is a professor at Berkley found

was that plenty of Latinas understood Trump's sexist remark, remarks that he, they thought if as sexist as women. They took it as women not as Latinas. So, that might have resonated with them more. So, while there may have been a bigger shift of women moving, Latinas moving left to right there were still more Latino men who voted for Trump. But I think that it shows that, but I think one of the things that that Equis study showed was that it showed that Trump didn't focus that much on immigration, he focused mostly on the economy, he focused largely on reopening businesses. These were things that resonated with Latino men. A lot of them lost their jobs in the service industry or lost their or I should say specifically, and when I talk about Latino men oftentimes what I'm, oftentimes its non-college educated Latino men who are starting to vote in many ways like non-college educated white men. Trump improved with these voters whereas college educated Latinos oftentimes vote like college educated whites which is to say they vote for Democrats. But I think that what you're seeing is you're starting to see educational polarization. I think that over time you're going to start seeing more and more non-college educated men and women start to vote more like non-college educated whites which is to say to vote more, they vote more Republican. That was the bigger divide in 2016 than even income levels was education levels. And I think that Democrats for the longest time I think that they banked on the idea that oh well we can count on Latinos to vote for us because Trump is a racist, I mean that's what they say, you know, they think that Trump is a racist, Latinos who know this they're never going to nominate someone like a Marco Rubio who's a Latino or things like that. They're going to vote for someone like Donald Trump. But what that, and we're going to let Trump do our work for us. But that's really political malpractice. You can't

just expect people to vote for him because as we saw plenty of Latinos in south Florida, in Texas and elsewhere, you know, voted for Trump, liked his message, liked his message about law enforcement, liked his message about oil – if you work in the oil fields of Texas – liked his message about police and were turned off about arguments about defunding the police. So, there are, so, there are plenty of Latinos who find that argument very compelling and Democrats need to find, you know, maybe they don't need to give up their values but they, and they probably shouldn't, but they do need to find a way to better communicate those values. So, like I was talking with, it, it didn't make that final piece but one, a city counselor in Philadelphia who is Puertorriquena she said that like Joe Biden and Kamala Harris' plan on Puerto Rico is fantastic. She was a democratic city councilwoman. But she said, but nobody knew about it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: And meanwhile Trump made inroads with Puerto Rican voters in Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia and the neighbors, the neighborhoods of Philadelphia. So, Democrats need to recognize that Latinos – I, I've said for a long time, I've said for the past few months that I think that Latino voters are going to be a lot for Republicans what white people are for Democrats which is white vote, Democrats have not won a majority of white voters since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. But what they've learned is that they can pick off enough white voters, like maybe a quarter or you know a third or something like that and they can make the difference. It used to be that they used to pick off white working-class rural voters. Now they're focusing mostly on college educated whites who live in suburbs or who live in cities and that usually makes a difference as in the case of Joe Biden and Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock. And I think in the

same way Republicans are going to, Republicans are learning they may not necessarily need to win you know a majority of Latino voters but if they win a majority of say non-college educated white men, or non-college educated Latino white men, Hispanic white men or non-college educated or like a half of non-college educated Hispanic women they could, that could very easily make the difference in a place like Texas where Democrats want to be competitive, it can make a difference in places like Georgia or North Carolina or Nevada in senate races and gubernatorial races and even in presidential races if they play their cards right.

DR. HOFFMAN: Fascinating. Let's, before we move it to questions, and we go to questions in a few minutes, I'm curious, a question from one of my students, Neroli (sp?) talks about in pursuing your career as a journalist in Washington did you ever feel that you were discriminated against or disregarded because of your autism? And what would be your advice to those who are thinking about pursuing a similar career who have autism?

ERIC GARCIA: Okay. Good question. So, like it's funny because I didn't disclose that I was autistic in the beginning of my career. I didn't want people to see me as the autistic reporter. I wanted to be judged on my merits. I didn't, and I worried that, you know, putting that, checking that box when I was applying for jobs would, you know, put me at a disadvantage. So, I just didn't talk about it. And then the times when I did talk about it in job interviews I never got a callback or things like that, or like when I put it on job applications, you know, even when I was applying for part time jobs in high school and college I never got a call back. So, I was just kind of like, okay, screw it, I'm not going to talk about it. You know, or I'm not going to bring it up because it's –

DR. HOFFMAN: So, bringing it up was a barrier to getting [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: Bringing, so –

DR. HOFFMAN: – [indiscernible] back up?

ERIC GARCIA: – so – yeah, so usually like I, oh, you know, actually I don't know. It might have been, it might not have been because we, we don't know. Maybe I might not have been qualified for it, I don't know. But it, it, it ingrained in my mind it's more trouble than it's worth, so I just thought okay I'm not going to do it, you know. It probably; I'm; most likely it wasn't but it became a placebo thing. But it wasn't until, you know, I wrote that, it, it wasn't until I disclosed it when I was having trouble with a piece when I was working at *MarketWatch* that I disclosed it to a copyeditor and he's like okay, we're going to work together and do that. And but then later on when I, of course when I wrote that piece for *National Journal* now I can't really hide and that's the first thing you, you know, now when you google me you're going to see this book, you know? But now it's kind of one of those things where it's like has it probably cost me some job opportunities? Probably. But, I would never know because the people who are not willing to hire autistic person aren't, they're not calling me. Whereas the people who are willing to hire an autistic person or at least that's not deciding factor or the determining factor to like check my name off they're at least willing to, you know. That's, they're going to find that when they google my name or they're going to find that when they see my writing and my past clips or things like that. And I'm sometimes including those clips when I'm applying for jobs. So, like that's just something, so like, I can't say whether it's been a benefit or a detriment because I just really don't know. You know, even when I didn't get those jobs in the past it might have very well been about autism, it might very

well not, have not have been. As far as the question about being autistic, about being autistic and being in the media. I think that first off there's a question about whether you want to disclose. Like I can't really begrudge people who would or wouldn't want to disclose. I see both sides of it. But one of the things I would say is that if you want to disclose if you're applying for a job, like, take a look at the leadership. Are there people of color there? Are, is the place wheelchair accessible?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: Is the, you know, you know, are there women in leadership? Are there people of color in leadership? Are there, you know, is the, is the, because the staff writers and the staff editors and all of them, they might be diverse but if the leadership is overwhelmingly white and male or just overwhelmingly white then it might not necessarily be a place where you feel safe and secure disclosing. The, as far as what I would say to a young reporter is I would say a young reporter who wants to get into this business I would just say you know, start finding a way to write every day. Find a beat that you, you know, what, as I often tell young autistic people who want to get into the business, a beat is essentially a, you know, a myopic interest or you know, a lot of people call autistic peoples interest a, a special interest, I call them a focus interest. But like a beat is basically a focus interest that pays you.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: So, like, focus, it's like if you care a lot about, if you're an autistic reporter and, and you're, or you feel that there's a gap you know I don't know in whatever beat, energy – let's just use that as an example – you know, write about it and write about it in a way there, that, you know there's you know

that, that nobody else does whether it's having a sub stack, having a blog, tweeting regularly, you know, or, you know and in the same, or you know freelancing for your local newspaper or being a stringer, or cold calling or cold pitching editors and just saying hey I have this idea and just starting somewhere as like, just as I, you know would say to everybody else, to any other student [indiscernible] like start somewhere. Try to write every day. And I would say the other thing is this is a tough business, so I always tell any journalist and anybody who here wants to study journalism, it's a tough job. I've been in places that have gotten, that were a print magazine that shutdown. I've seen layoffs. I've, you know, I've, you know, left where, I've left a job you know in the past you know, it's a tough job. So, you always have to ask yourself every morning and you have to ask yourself do I love the news part of the news business to deal with the business part of the news business? And the answer is yes then, you know, fine. And then if the answer is no there are things that pay you way more than journalism –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – that'll make you much happier and you'll see your family more. So, you know, go do those things.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well, I'm going to ask Sarah and Trey to – my two students who are going to help with our; we're calling mic marshals to –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – come up to these two microphones. Sarah, it looks like you're closer to this one. Trey, you're closer to that one. But as you're coming up I, I wanted to ask another question. This is a series of tweets that you said I made the mistake of reading a Facebook comments from my NPR interview; one

parent said that my message maybe fine for high functioning autistic people but somehow kids just stim or make, do these simulating activities and make noises or throw plates all day as if it's a bad thing. So, what has been the reaction to your book from the larger autistic community?

ERIC GARCIA: I think the autistic community as a whole appreciates it. I may not be able to, I wasn't able to cover all the ground I wanted to cover so that means that, that certainly means I didn't cover all the ground they wanted to cover. But I think autistic people as a whole have liked it. Even most parent, you know, like you talk about this like never read the comments.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

ERIC GARCIA: Just like don't read the comments especially on Facebook, you know, which is just a cesspool. But I mean, yeah, there are, you know, you know in the same respect even when parents have had negative reactions or have said that oh you erased my kid. I think I've had the obligation to say that I didn't erase, if you actually read my book I actually profiled non-speaking autistic people and I talk about how they can live fulfilling lives and one of the ways that parents can, can best assist their kids and best assist them to ensure they have a good life and I refer them to a lot of people who probably have a better, who are probably on better, better authorities about it. So, there are some people who haven't liked it but a lot, but I think mostly the reaction has been pretty well, it's been pretty well received. I mean, I think that, but I, obviously it's going to illicit strong emotions from people – they say, oh, well you didn't discuss self-injurious behavior; well, I kind of did; I say that like you know we focus so much on stopping self-injurious behavior, but we don't think about why autistic people do that. Or, or what triggers it? And that again focuses on us trying to cure the

symptom and not the cause of it. But, yeah, I mean, it's; I expected there to be some pushback and some supreme dislike because it's a very heated issue but, but for the most part, you know, it's been fine. You know?

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I'm looking forward to seeing that tattoo so I'm hoping [Chuckle.]I'm hoping that the book does well. So, that said, we are going to get some questions in so for our online audience let's get some questions in the online queue. I'll be notified when those come up. And Steve if you want to go ahead and switch to that question slide. We do have a Zoom question.

ERIC GARCIA: Sure.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, do you want to go ahead and put that up, Steve, and I'll ask that one first and then we can go to the inhouse audience.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah –

DR. HOFFMAN: The anticipation –

ERIC GARCIA: [Indiscernible.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, here it is. Oops, it went away. I have a family member –

ERIC GARCIA: On the spectrum. What can I best do as support as they –

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay, it was, I have a family member who is on the spectrum.

ERIC GARCIA: A family member on the spectrum.

DR. HOFFMAN: What is the best way –

ERIC GARCIA: Best way –

DR. HOFFMAN: – I can support them –

ERIC GARCIA: – I can support them as they –

DR. HOFFMAN: – as they struggle making academic career choices while

[Chuckle.]– the anticipation –

ERIC GARCIA: [Hands drumming on legs.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] While in college –

ERIC GARCIA: While in college – oh.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: Good question. Really good question. I think the best thing; I think it's really difficult isn't it because I mean it seems like, you know, there are places with good, you know, disability services are really touch and go depending on the school you go to. I've always said, you know, I, my services I got at community college before I went to UNC were just as good if not better than the services I got at UNC. And I probably got pretty good services at UNC, but the community college services I got were [cluck] amazing at Chaffey College back in California. But I think the other thing to do is to help the, is to put them in contact with their guidance counselor. Put them in contact with, and then have their guidance counselor or have the disability services provider or whatever it might be at, at the college to contact and work with the faculty only if they want to. Some students don't to disclose but if the student wants to disclose that they're autistic and get accommodations do it in a way that doesn't embarrass them or make them feel ostracized in the larger classroom and work with them in a way so that they can best struggle and succeed. This is so they can best succeed in, you know, and get past the struggles and difficulties. But the other thing that's important to remember is that a lot of autistic students say that their biggest challenges aren't, isn't the academic side of it, it's the social part of college. And there's a big reason why suicidal ideation among autistic students

is higher than even, you know – you know, a lot of neurotypical students deal with suicide ideation but it's a, even, it's an even bigger and more prevalent problem for autistic people. But making sure that they have a community. Making sure they have a, a support system. So, I think that one of the big things, a big mistake a lot of autistic students have – because I, and I say this because I made this mistake – is that they think that, oh, well, I can't ask for disability services because by virtue of me being in college I can't be that disabled. Well, no, those services exist because you're disabled and because we've accepted the idea in the law and it's the law and it's your right that, that yes, we should ensure that disabled people can go to college and succeed and that's your right to do it. And you're not taking away from other people when you're asking for this. You're not taking away from another disabled student. You're getting your, what you deserve. And I think instilling in them that, that they deserve to have these services is, is, is an incredibly important thing. And then also, making sure that they – you obviously can't force them to make friends or join groups but suggesting, ensuring that they do have some kind of support circle is really important because college can be incredibly isolating even if you're neurotypical and even more so if you're autistic.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and I should point out that the University of Delaware does have a center for disability studies –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and a spectrum scholars' program.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: I don't know if Maryellen is, is still here, who runs this spectrum scholars' program. So, there are universities that are really stepping

up and, and –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – helping students on the –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – on the spectrum.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, I remember the first university I visited was the, the one university I visited somebody suggested I go to Marshall University in West Virginia and again showing how condescending and how, how, you know, ignorant I was, I was like I'm not going to West Virginia for anything, you know. And then like, I realized, A) it's a beautiful state; B) it's one of the first states that really prioritized autism and disability education –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – and it really taught me a lot when I visited there. And, you know, I write about it in the book. So.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's great. All right. I think we're ready to take some questions from inhouse. Would anyone like to ask a question? Let's go way back here, come over here to this microphone please?

ERIC GARCIA: I feel like Sean Spicer.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

ERIC GARCIA: This is the biggest crowd period –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

ERIC GARCIA: – for a book author.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. We're in the middle of a pandemic –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

ERIC GARCIA: No, I, I, I, yeah.

AUDIENCE: Hi.

ERIC GARCIA: Hi.

AUDIENCE: I'm Nicole. You talked about a lot of really important things, but I guess something that I really envied you talked about was your relationship with your dad and how open you talk with your differences in opinions politically. And I envy that because my dad refers to me as a disappointing snowflake so I just; it was really cool to hear you talk about that. And I just was wondering from a different perspective if you have any, you told the students that they should go to their parents and speak if they want to learn more, if there is something you can suggest for parents that are not as accepting as yours are or if you had to go over a hurdle like that or something?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. I mean, I think that the thing that my dad recognized, I'm fortunate enough that my dad recognizes that like I think things through, and he recognizes because he's actually seen me be a reporter by me interviewing him. I think that he saw that like I'm not acting in bad faith. So that's not a luxury that you probably don't have as a reporter right, you're not a journalist right now yet, yet. If you want we can talk later. But like, but I, I think that the thing you say is that you could say is that, you know, Dad, you come by your beliefs honestly; I think you come by your beliefs honestly; I came by my beliefs honestly. This is how I came to these conclusions. This is why I think the way that I think, and it doesn't mean that I love you any less and I don't think that, and this doesn't mean that I think of you any less. It just means that we have severe disagreements, and these are but, but I still respect; but I also – I think also the other thing that you say is you wanted to know how did you come to believe

these things, Dad?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: Why do you believe what you believe? And I think that that might be an inroad because what you do is if you ask him why he believes what he believes then that might give you a space to say this is why I believe what I believe. And if you could say, look I know we're not going to get to – because I think a lot of times when people debate politics they expect that, to, and I think especially, you know, you know conservatives tend to think that okay well I'm going to show all these Godless liberals how immoral they are and I think a lot of liberals think that a lot, if I just show them the right facts then they'll change their mind. But I think that if you're coming from a place of not wanting them to change their mind but at least you under, them understanding why you, why you think this way and why this is important to you. That might be a better way. If you also come with them by saying why do you believe what you believe and why does this matter to you? And clearly you guys have something in common if you care that much about politics that you get, that it's become such a sticking point. And clearly there's something in common between you two. So, I think that finding out why, or at least indulging him might lead him to at least listening to you if not, if he doesn't accept you and you know, that's a whole, whole other thing. So.

AUDIENCE: Thank you so much.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: It's a great question.

ERIC GARCIA: Awesome question.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Do we have another Zoom question? Yes.

We have another Zoom question is ready and then we'll take a question from this side, Sarah, so you'll be next. All right. How can we increase voter participation among people with intellectual disabilities and or autism?

ERIC GARCIA: Oh, really good question. This last election was actually fantastic for people with disabilities because of the fact that so many autistic people who couldn't afford to leave their homes could vote from home.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um.

ERIC GARCIA: That was an incredible thing. We saw increased, I think, something like, we saw an increase in voter turnout among people with disabilities by something like six percent this last election. That may not sound like a lot but when voter participation because of all the hurdles that disabled people face to vote and how many polling places are not ADA compliant. That's a pretty big, that's pretty good thing –

DR. HOFFMAN: I hadn't thought about that in terms of how being an autistic person might keep you from going to the polls.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. Or, or any kind of disability, honestly.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah.

ERIC GARCIA: You know, if, if you, if a place is sensory overwhelming and if you're in a voting booth and that's constricting that might be bad for an autistic person. Whereas if they can vote in the comfort of their own home that, that actually can benefit. But what you've seen over time is Texas' voting law had some restrictions that a lot of people with disabilities were concerned about when it comes to, when it came to signatures – I forget the exact details of it – but a lot of disability rights activists were concerned about that. They were concerned about Georgia's voting law. So, there's, so right now I think the focus is, is a lot

of people are concerned about how these voting laws that a lot of Republican legislatures have passed are going to affect them. That's what I've see a lot of. That's why Stacey Abrams' group now has a specific disability voter outreach program. That's why you've seen a lot of voter registration groups and civil rights groups focus on disability [indiscernible] voting, voting issues. I think the most important thing to do is, is do what my mom did which is when I turned 18 she got me registered to vote. And assume that the right to vote is, again, I think a lot of times because of the high functioning and low functioning dichotomy and how harmful it is we tend to think oh well this person should be able to vote but I'm not going to register this person to vote. Regardless, you should register your kid to vote whether you think that they have that right or not. And trust them with their ballot and ask them and find a way to get them to find a way to vote. And, and I think that's the most important thing is presuming confidence. And if they don't want to vote, fine. But I think also but presuming and starting from the baseline of how do we get them registered to vote and how do we get them to vote. You know, in this last election was really – and I write about it in this book – it was really revolutionary because you had autistic self-advocates advising presidential candidates during the Democratic primary. They advised Joe Biden, they advised Elizabeth Warren, they advised Bernie Sanders, they advised Pete Buttigieg –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: They advised Corey Booker. You know, that, this was something we haven't seen before because in the past it was parent advocates, you know, advising Democratic politicians and politicians as a whole on policy. Now we're seeing autistic advocates. So, I think that's the other thing, the same

thing, your voice is being, it's telling autistic people your voice is being heard and actively being consulted so therefore your vote, your vote matters and it is counted. I think that's the other important thing. And I should say also, this is some of this isn't just something for Democrats. Republicans should care about this too because if Republican really do care about self-sufficiency they should support ending subminimal wage labor because that allows disable – even if Republicans don't like the minimum wage, even Madison Cawthorn has said there shouldn't be a federal minimum wage but he also said that, that disable, if there is going to be one they should even, they should have it. Greg Abbott has supported ending subminimum wage labor. He actually signed legislation in Texas.

DR. HOFFMAN: And explain subminimum like wage –

ERIC GARCIA: Disabled people, because of a law the Fair Labor Standards Act can be paid below minimum wage. So disabled, so Republicans have a stake in, in, in insuring autistic and disabled people can vote too. The, one of three openly autistic legislators, [indiscernible] Briscoe Cane (sp?) is a Republican legislator in Texas and he's, he's a, he's autistic. And, you know, Republicans also tend to support, you know, support a decision making instead guardianship laws. Texas was the first state to pass supported decision making as an alternative to guardianship laws which I think a lot of us have learned about during the Brittany Spears –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes.

ERIC GARCIA: – debacle. But, you, you know, it's a, it's important to remember Free Brittany is a disability rights issue.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: And it's also an issue that I think a lot of conservatives and libertarians can and should support. So.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. That's fascinating. I should mention by the way, last, last week was, last Tuesday was National Voter Registration Day and –

ERIC GARCIA: Yes, it was.

DR. HOFFMAN: – it's hard for college students in general to figure out –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, it is.

DR. HOFFMAN: – how to register to vote in their own states when they're at a college, they don't live at, at home and I think that, that this is a really important message to send that, that autistic folks need to be guided just like every other college –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – student as –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – to how to register to vote, how to know where to vote. And so, I will promote here today Turbo Vote is our method for getting students registered to vote and also getting notifications for your polling place. I just got a notification today about, you know, are you, you sure you're registered to vote? Do you know where your polling place is? And then, the University of Delaware just adopted a new platform called Issue Voter where you can identify issues that really matter to you like climate change or disability rights, and it will notify you what your legislatures are saying and doing around those issues.

ERIC GARCIA: yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: So –

ERIC GARCIA: That's cool.

DR. HOFFMAN: Just plugging what I think is some important things that the university is doing to help our students really engage.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, and, and, and to, and if I can you know piggyback off of that. You know, a lot of people say that oh, well disabled people they're too incompetent to vote. People say that about students as well. But like –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – both of them deserve to be [indiscernible] or to say nothing of disabled students. They deserve to have their voices heard as well.

DR. HOFFMAN: Absolutely.

ERIC GARCIA: And like I'm in the middle of voting, I'm in the middle of moving right now so like I'm going to need to change my registration but like I'm going to, you know, now I'm going to check out Turbo, Turbo Vote now –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

ERIC GARCIA: – in Washington, so. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Awesome. All right, well, we do have a question from over here. I see its someone in the white sweatshirt –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – sweater?

ERIC GARCIA: There you go.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

ERIC GARCIA: How're you doing?

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Georgia. I was just wondering; so, you were talking a lot about how you, how this book is like advocating for people with autism and not viewing them differently. Do you feel like you, yourself as one, are one of like, like the main speakers that talk on this issue, that are really

advocating for a like people who are autistic not to be treated differently?

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah. I mean, I don't consider myself an advocate. I consider myself a journalist. I think that's an important distinction. I think that whenever you cover, whenever a group of persons from a marginalized group starts writing about a group as a journalist immediately they're pegged as an advocate –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: – and I don't see myself as an advocate. I see myself as somebody who writes about autism and who, tries to include autistic people's voices in the conversation. Do I consider myself an expert? I mean, my dad does oddly enough but like do I consider myself one. No. Like, do I, but I do think that; but oddly enough because of my visibility of working as a professional journalist I do have the means to give a platform to autistic people and even though I, you know, I try, I, I don't believe in showing my biases but I also believe that as a journalist – I, I'm not necessarily biased towards autistic people, but because I'm autistic I know who to call and I know who to, I know how to include autistic voices anytime that there's a debate about autism. And, conversely, anytime that I feel that there's bad coverage about autism in the media as a journalist myself I feel like I can call it, I can, and I often do. If you follow me on my Twitter page you'd find that I call out bad coverage of autism in media because I feel it's incredibly important to ensure that autistic people get, get the best coverage and are included in any political discussion and any news discussion about it. Like. I mean, so I think that that's how I do it and I, and it's one of the reasons why I hate those kind of inspirational stories of oh look, the prom queen asked the autistic person to, to prom.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

ERIC GARCIA: Isn't that nice. I hate those stories with a passion. And, if I could get away with one, if I could get rid of one thing in news coverage I would get rid of those kinds of stories because they're not about making autistic; they're not about autistic people; they're about making neurotypicals feel better. But, you know, and they don't do anything to highlight the needs of autistic people. So, I, but buy, you know, do I consider myself an advocate no. But do I consider myself who tries, someone who tries to include the voices of autistic people in political debates as a journalist, yes I do.

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you. I hope I was helpful, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you for your question. I think we have one more, more time for one question over here. It looks like we had a hand up right here.

ERIC GARCIA: Cool. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: I hate microphones. Hi, my name is Abby. I'm a CPC intern so thanks so much for coming and doing [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you for coming.

DR. HOFFMAN: Center for Political Communication which –

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – is the organization that sponsors –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – all of this.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, so thank for coming. I'm a little anxious so forgive me.

ERIC GARCIA: It's okay.

AUDIENCE: But I was wondering, so I'm from North Carolina. I'm glad

that you went to UNC.

ERIC GARCIA: Raise up.

AUDIENCE: Yeah. So, I was just wondering like in the south there's very much like that, that kind of bless his heart community. In Washington it's so fast moving, especially some of the things I also have like a bunch of, you know, over, I probably took off every ring I have and put it back time eighty-five times just [indiscernible] –

ERIC GARCIA: It's okay.

AUDIENCE: So, I was wondering like how you feel about, like sometimes people's attitudes it's kind of like either suffer in silence or face like so much like pity in people, kind of judgment.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Like how have you kind of juggled those two things?

ERIC GARCIA: I mean, I, I, my feeling is that people are going to think about what they think about me in the way that either they're going to say, oh, he's so inspiring or they're going to, you know, say suffer in silence, to, to, to use your words. But I also think, buy I think that like, I can't really change what people on an individual level say but what I can do is I can influence how the political, how the policy discussions are just, are changed and a policy can often be a, can often then influence people's public opinion and people's own personal sentiments about it. So, you know, I can't really control how people think about me. All I can do is, you know, as soon as like I was really, I was terrified when I got the, that book in the mail because it was like, okay, there's no turning back from this now. It's like, okay, I'm about to send this thing out into the world and what if people don't like it, what if people don't, you know, but then like it's one of

those things where you can't really control that. And you can't really control how people feel. But, you just have to be, you just have to know that you did all you can and how people receive it is their, is, is a them thing, it's not a you thing.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you, Abby. I think we might have one, time for one more question. Maybe from –

ERIC GARCIA: Come on.

DR. HOFFMAN: – over on this side? Or a Zoom question, if we have any more Zoom questions. I'm not seeing any pop up here.

ERIC GARCIA: Go Pat, go all Pat Benatar on me. Hit me with your best shot.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] Or I could transition into our, our closing session here which is –

ERIC GARCIA: Oh, another Zoom question.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, another Zoom question. Gosh it's like shining like –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – flashing at me. Another Zoom question is ready. I think that social queues and empathy must be conflated somewhat in the discussion about autism. What do you think is the reason that people conflate them?

ERIC GARCIA: I think it's because a lot of neurotypicals conflate them. I think that they expect, because neurotypical, because it's a native tongue for neurotypicals so to speak, they equate the reaction of a social queue to having empathy when a lot of times we may not, it may not register with us until much later. It may take time, or we may not immediate, or we may misread it because if you have difficulty reading [indiscernible] body emotion, or body language and

things like that. So, I think that a lot of times because it's a neurotypical, because neurotypicals those things, those two things often go in tandem, they expect for, for autistic person to go in tandem for autistic people when really those two things are they're often go in tandem but they're not the same thing. So, I think they often associate them and what I would say is that oftentimes autistic people may not immediately, you may not, if, if the, if it's subtext they may not immediately get it. But it's, it's okay to, to express how you're feeling with autistic people because then we will, we do care. We want to, you know, help our friends and our loved ones and things like that. So, sometimes just being explicit and saying I'm happy or I'm sad or I'm mad or I'm stressed out and things like that, that can go a long way. And you know, autistic people do care. We want to be good friends and good family members and good partners and all that, so, you know. What we want is to do is the right thing, but it just may not come fluently to us, you know?

DR. HOFFMAN: And that's a theme throughout your book its just like listen to autistic people.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Just listen.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, just listen and there's a way to, you know, a lot of people say because like one big criticism I get from my, in my book is saying, oh, well, it's easy for me to just ask you but I'm not asking, but I can't ask my kids. Well, when your kid is having a meltdown, when, you know, an autistic person is having a meltdown that's them communicating. That's them saying that this sensory process is too much. Or, when they're stimming they're communicating that either they're happy or they're sad or they're too stressed out. They, you

know, stimming is still a form of communication so you should still listen to them even if it's not with their voice. Or, if it's not with verbal words.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah. That's fascinating. I am, I'm, I really appreciate your authenticity and –

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: – your openness. I notice in a lot of ways it was hard for you to embark on, but I think it helps our audience here in the, in the auditorium and online to really understand particularly adults who have autism. One thing we didn't really talk about that you spent some time in the book is sort of this kind of infantilization of –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, the idea that autistic people are perpetual children. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: And white children.

ERIC GARCIA: White children. White children.

DR. HOFFMAN: White boys.

ERIC GARCIA: White boys. Yeah. White heterosexual boys –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes.

ERIC GARCIA: – it's just gender boys.

DR. HOFFMAN: Right. So, it's, it's much bigger than that and –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – it affects many more people and I have read the book and I find it very inspiring. And for those of you in the audience, Eric was kind enough to sign some copies that you can purchase outside. But I do have a few things I want to wrap-up with. So, at the Center for Political Communication we are hosting our, I think this is the fifth, fourth or fifth, Voices of UD Audio Essay

Contest. So, the, the question that we're asking students to be inspired by is why is everyone so angry. And, we have prizes up to \$500.00 if you enter by December 10th. Just go to cpc.ude.edu/voices. And we've had some incredible entries in the past that are so moving and so authentic and genuine, just like the conversation we've had here tonight. And that's what we do at the CPC is to really encourage students, faculty and staff to engage in authentic genuine civil dialogue. And I think this is a great opportunity to do that. I also want to note that if you happen to see, we did this at dinner today, tonight, we had some conversations using the nonprofit organization Free Intelligent Conversation. If you see some students around the Green this, this semester or in coming semesters holding a sign that says Free Intelligent Conversation – how many of my students in the classroom right now are in that group? Raise your hands high.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah, go [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: They're going to be on campus. Look for them.

ERIC GARCIA: I, I thought it was some, I [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: – holding their signs and you'll find that sometimes those conversations can be really insightful. You can learn a lot about people. You don't need to know if they're a Republican or a Democrat, or if they're autistic or not autistic. You might just want to know what's something you learned in the past year; you know –

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – that, that makes – so, it's, they're really inspiring. I also want to alert you to our next conversation is with David Hogg who we, we've titled this program "A Generations Voice." He was a student at Parkland during

the mass shooting there on February 14th in 20 – shoot.

ERIC GARCIA: In 2018. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: 2018. Thank you.

ERIC GARCIA: Wow. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you. He's currently a student at Harvard. He's actually a student of one of our former speakers who was on this stage right where you were in 2019, John Della Volpe who is the pollster at Harvard who measures young people's opinions. David actually wrote the forward to John Della Volpe's book that just came out last week. He will be, this will be virtual, webinar only but I think it's something that I've seen a lot of our students are asking for voices like this. How do we hear from students who are advocating for, for their causes, their various causes and how do I emulate that, how do I advocate for something that I really care about? And, David is coming during the week of what's called Free Speech Week. So, we have celebrated Free Speech Week here for the last five or six years and we have three additional virtual speakers that week. Nico Perez is the manager of Free Expression and Education at PEN America; he's going to be talking about free speech on college campuses. He particularly engages with students on the dialogue around free speech. So for students in the audience who were around last week we know that there was a, a protest that took place on Delaware Avenue of people who were antagonizing students with some hateful words, some hate, arguably would be hate speech. So, this week is meant to really focus on how do we counter free speech with other types of free speech. And instead of being violent or instead of being aggressive how do we counter that successfully? So, Nico Perez is going to be a great speaker for us. Hadar Harris is the executive

director of the Student Press Law Center for those students in the audience who are with The Review, or WVUD, or STN this organization protects student journalists from criticisms about the speech that they, they put forth in their publications. And Ilana Redstone is a professor of sociology at UI Urbana-Champaign, and she just wrote a book called Unassailable Ideas which talks about free speech in higher education particularly around social media; how professors and researchers talk about their research in social media and how that might be attacked and, and evaluated. So, it's a really exciting week and I'm hoping you can join us. You can register for those at cpc.udel.edu. They're free. These three events are at 4:00. The David Hogg event is at our typical National Agenda time which is 7:30 but it will also be online. You've got to register for both of those. So, thank you so much for being here. Thank you to our guest speaker –

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you for having me.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

ERIC GARCIA: Truly an honor to be here. And thank you very much to Dr. Hoffman for inviting me. I, you've really made me feel welcome. All of you, the students who I've met so far have been creative, and curious, and desire to make a better world and the future is in good hands with you. So, thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you. So, if you do want –

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – to purchase the book, Eric would you, do you want to go out in the lobby and talk to folks for –

ERIC GARCIA: Sure, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – a minute?



ERIC GARCIA: Let's do it. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. So, we'll, we'll –

ERIC GARCIA: [Indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: – meet you guys out in the lobby if you want to purchase the book. We'll see you out there.

ERIC GARCIA: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you so much.

ERIC GARCIA: Thank you. That was –

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