

# Mary Rohlich

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Carolina Groppa, Mary Rohlich



Carolina Groppa 00:00

It's been a minute since i've recorded actually, couple months. So i'm just getting back into it. So this will actually come out next year and I'll cut this part out, but just so you know, i'm rebranding the show it's currently called Life with Caca which is sort of speaking to the messy parts of the producing journey of our lives. It's fun and it's sort of kitschy but i've decided that I want to really lean in more to conversations with producers and so the show is now going to be called Angle on Producers. So top of next year i'm doing a cool event with Women In Film and it'll be part of the rebrand so you'll be a part of that sort of pivot chapter two of the show.



Mary Rohlich 00:43

Okay! I like that.



Carolina Groppa 00:45

Well this is so exciting. I'm so excited to talk to you. It's taken us a minute to get here.



Mary Rohlich 00:51

I know , I know. I feel like when we started talking about this I had a completely different

job, so yes it has been a minute.



Carolina Groppa 00:59

It has. It's so funny. And then Sarah Anthony who has been a guest on the show, I saw her recently, she's like you should reach out to Mary again because she's got a new thing she's doing and maybe it's a better time. And I was like yeah why not. So here we are thank you for finding the time it's the end of the year when we're recording this, this will come out next year, but i'm so grateful to you for taking this hour to share a bit of you and your story with me and the listeners.



Mary Rohlich 01:26

I'm so happy to be here thank you for dealing with my schedule. It's a giant pain.



Carolina Groppa 01:32

This project , this podcast has been such a labor of love but I know how crazy busy producers are so it's like i'm a masochist because I was like, oh yeah let me try to talk to these insanely busy producers and people that I respect and admire who are like crushing it. But that's why when I get to have your hour i'm just so grateful. So that said i'd love for you to just take us to the beginning. I know that if we google you there's many articles where you've already sort of talked about your path into finding that producing was something one could do for a living, so take us to the beginning of that.



Mary Rohlich 02:10

Yeah. I mean I think originally, just as a person who grew up loving movies and watching movies, I didn't really know what anybody did. I just kind of knew like the director, writer, and actor, the sort of the big ones. I kind of paid attention to producer names but never really knew what that was and even i think every day i'm learning about that. I just love movies and when i had access to my first film set which happened to be in high school, it was in the Cider House Rules set, they were filming in massachusetts.



Carolina Groppa 02:54

Is that where you're from ?



Mary Rohlich 02:55

I grew up in Iowa originally but then my family relocated to Northampton Massachusetts in the middle of high school which was not a fun time to move. But that actually was part of what led to this all, you know I was the new girl in school and didn't have any friends at first and so when there was a new girl at my high school I immediately befriended her and she happened to be in town with her father who was Oliver Stapleton who's a cinematographer who was shooting the Cider House Rules. So that was my first access to a set.



Carolina Groppa 03:30

That's crazy that she obviously had to start school there because the production was going to be so long that the family have to just uproot and move there, right?



Mary Rohlich 03:39

Actually it was that she decided to come and sort of take some time off school and just come to the US with her dad and go to school kind of for fun.



Mary Rohlich 03:48

Oh she was going to school for fun?



Mary Rohlich 03:51

It was just like, you know, why not hang out in the states for a little bit? Nice low stakes school. It might have been in between, I think they have a different system there, so it might have been between.



Mary Rohlich 04:04

So going to set was fun but the weirdly cooler part was seeing a production office because that part of it, which is just a building with doors and people sitting at desks working, felt so crazy to me that that's part of what filmmaking was. Now obviously like I'm sitting in a production office right now, but at the time I didn't think about all the stuff that happens off set. So that was my first sort of look at something that felt like, wait there's all these jobs. There's like the producer and the production office coordinator, and the PA. So that was my very first sort of window into it. Which felt like it was possible, you know? But then after that going into college studying film.



Carolina Groppa 05:01

Where'd you go?



Mary Rohlich 05:03

I went to University of Wisconsin in Madison. And there, it's a lot of film theory studies and film criticism. And we had to make movies. So I really didn't feel comfortable writing scripts, and I didn't really feel comfortable working with actors. And so I made documentaries. And I loved that. And so when I came out to LA, I sort of stumbled into development, working at MGM, and being in development and assisting an executive there. Then eventually over to Columbia Pictures as an assistant, and then being on all those phone calls, listening to the other end of the phone, and all the producers that were calling my boss, and really wanting to be on that side, and sort of wanting to get a little bit more in that window. And so that's how I gradually moved over there.



Carolina Groppa 06:05

I read in one of the other interviews you did, you were talking about how sort of being an assistant was your grad school, right, because you get to be on the inside sort of eavesdropping fly on the wall with all these conversations of all types of levels. And I find in my own path, that has been the most valuable lessons you can't really be taught, you just have to be there in the circumstance, in real time, as it's happening to learn through osmosis and be a sponge. And so as someone who didn't go up the assistant path, it seems like a lot of the people who successfully survived it, and got out, that's really what they say, that the window into all of those conversations is what really prepares you for the real world.



Mary Rohlich 06:53

Oh, yeah. And I feel, I mean, I give so much, , My boss at Columbia Pictures, Rachel O'Connor, is now still one of my closest friends. She was in my wedding. I've always seen her as a mentor on multiple levels. So on one hand, just being able to see how she does notes, how she talks to writers, how she talks to directors, how she gets information from an agent about something or whatever it is, like navigating all of that stuff. But also just having a voice and standing up for herself , especially a woman being somebody who would be talking on the phone, and somebody might try to interrupt them, or somebody might, you know, and she just would keep talking and have her voice and she was very steady and solid and confident. And that was something I learned, you know, that was something I could see happen and learn and pick up on. Because I think even for myself,

like having those moments of, do I have a voice here? Do I have a seat at this table? Is always something that I navigate and having someone to look at and say, oh, wow, that's how you do it with confidence and class.



Carolina Groppa 08:02

Do you feel like as you have climbed up in your career, that you ever actually feel like you get a seat at the table? Or is there always like a new table? That's a little bigger or different shape?



Mary Rohlich 08:18

I will say, look, I do think the table keeps changing. But in my experience as I realized what tables I want to sit at, if we're going to keep with this metaphor, The ones I'm choosing I do feel like I have a place and I feel really, that there's a lot of trust there. And you can feel that difference. I think once you're sort of, for me, having that experience of saying no to something, or saying I don't think that's the right place for me or yeah, I see why that might be interesting, but I don't know if that feels right. And that's been one of the hardest lessons is saying no to things and how much you can kind of gain from that.



Carolina Groppa 09:03

That's a good point. I know we're sort of skipping around but I am curious. It takes so much tact to know how to say no, how to say no tastefully, and how to know when something's a no for you. I'm curious if that's something that came easily for you or if there was a period that you really struggled with that?



Mary Rohlich 09:27

Yeah, no, it does not come easily. And it's a constant question and struggle. And sometimes, you know, I will say one of the things I've realized is, I'm grateful for all the jobs I didn't get because they lead to different opportunities. So sometimes it's being told no. I'm being told no. And I think that has been a good, almost like, in some ways. They're both lessons, right? I think I'm learning when something feels right or doing something for the right reason and making a conscious choice. For me that's been a big thing. Knowing if even this leads to this or doesn't lead to that, I know that I've made the best decision I could in the moment and try not to look too far ahead and try not to look too far behind either and kind of just be okay with that.



Carolina Groppa 10:23

I find that so tricky because as producers like innately we are constantly looking forward and always having to be in the future in some way. That i find that the ultimate challenge has, at least for me, been to then strike that balance of being in the present and enjoying the present not just in all aspects of my life but sometimes even with the work where you could be so focused on the next thing that you're not really enjoying or participating on the thing that is happening today that took you five years to get to the today. So i don't know is that something that you've also....



Mary Rohlich 11:01

Yeah. It's hard, i think it's a balance. I know exactly what you're talking about because sometimes i'm so caught up in the moment that I start to get anxious about...wait what's tomorrow, you know. I need to look at the bigger picture sometimes and I get hyper focused. But yeah I do think that enjoying it is something as a good reminder, I try to do that a lot because I think it's easy to get caught up in it. Having a kid a few years ago that changed things for me. Of all the things that take me away I want to feel really great about those reasons and making again like those choices saying no to certain things because it doesn't feel right, i think is really important and knowing that other things will happen.



Carolina Groppa 11:54

It's just trusting in that. I know i'm a naturally very anxious person which is what makes me really good at what i do, like i said is also the very thing that destroys me. In my 20s I definitely struggled very much with that anxiety because as an immigrant, as a person who's just always had to be on that hustle, you just feel like you could never slow down and you feel like you can never take your foot off the gas. How do you prioritize other areas of your life like motherhood, or whatever it is, if you just want to travel, if you just want to... i don't know whatever it is that you want to do, whatever that looks like for balance in your life. It's been an interesting journey now that i'm in my 30s to feel more like i've arrived a bit, so there's a little less anxiety. But there's always that thing of like, yeah you did this, good for you but the industry's like what's next what are you doing next and you're just like oh my god.



Mary Rohlich 12:46

At my college graduation Jerry Zucker spoke because he's from wisconsin and he gave this speech about how he missed his college graduation because he was so just like, going

to Hollywood, that was the destination. In the speech he talked about how, and i was sitting there days away from driving to LA so it was so just exactly what i needed to hear, but one of the things he said is that there is no "there, there" and that has been something that has just stuck with me the whole time because it's true there is no "there, there." The second you get there, there's another there, right? So i think that reminder has been really, I mean like I said I think about it all the time. I used to have friends who are like, where do you see yourself in 10 years or where do we want to be in 10 years in our career? And I'm like I can't do that because 10 years ago I never would have thought I'd be here. So why even try to put that on it or put that pressure on it because it just feels like it takes away from being open to a path that you might not know.



Carolina Groppa 13:35

And it's a path riddled with so much uncertainty. I admire people who can do those 10 year plans, five year plans and actually execute them. Because no one i know, that i've even interviewed on this show, has had any resemblance of a path like that. It's all been like, doors open, they walked in the door, and then they look back and they built a career based on all these various doors that they could not have predicted would have opened for them.



Mary Rohlich 14:28

Which by the way is producing in a nutshell too. Because you have this idea of okay we're gonna sell this here, we're gonna do this thing right, get this person, they're available on this date, and we're gonna shoot it here... it never works out that way. I don't believe we're shooting anything or anything is real until it's done with post production, you know what i mean? Because there is so many things that can just happen in the middle of it so the second you say something it almost just jinxes it or something.



Carolina Groppa 14:57

True. Okay so you mentioned where you were 10 years ago, i don't know the timeline here, so after you were an assistant and then you connected with Seth Gordon which sounds like it was really a pivot for you in sort of finding your footing as a producer, was that about 10 years ago?



Mary Rohlich 15:14

Yes. I think so. I have no sense of time right now 2020 has been kind of been.....



Carolina Groppa 15:21

Yeah....



Mary Rohlich 15:22

10 years ago. Yeah I mean that was about when I was... well no i'd been working with Seth for a few years then. So we'd done a couple movies together and we're probably around the time where we started dipping our toe into TV in a big way. It was kind of funny because again, you know, today tv and film are so one in the same in a lot of ways but back when i started it was, are you in film or are you in tv? There wasn't a lot of crossover. So when Seth and I started working on TV and you know really getting into that, that was around 10 years ago. I remember going to dinner with a couple of my girlfriends Gillian and Annie who are both awesome producers now and I remember being like, guys I gotta learn how to do TV, I need someone who's gonna teach me how to do TV. Because you just have to kind of jump in and figure it out. Yeah that was probably about 10 years ago.



Carolina Groppa 16:18

So how did you do that because you obviously have produced Docs, Features and Television and now, like you mentioned, it's a little easier to sort of cross lanes. I feel like i've been one of the fortunate producers who can kind of do all the things. Sometimes i'll do a commercial for good measure because why not, i like the sprint of it. But back then it was so much harder, to your point. So how did you manage to stay in all those lanes and learn the television side so you can jump in the deep end of the pool?



Mary Rohlich 16:48

I did what I think anybody should do if they don't know something. Go to somebody who knows something and ask them all the questions. I did that and I remember going to our agent at the time, I was like, please tell me about TV, and so we sat down and we talked about it all. It seems kind of silly now to think about but it really was a different system and how do I do this and what's the cycle of the pitch season and when are Upfront's and what are upfront's, like all the things that I think now are no big deal to know. But i think at the time again like i was in such a feature world. So yeah i talked to people and i asked questions and i also just jumped in and tried to figure it out so it was all in the same.



Carolina Groppa 17:36



Will you speak to how you personally navigate that because one of the questions i get a lot it's, we hear this, like oh you just ask someone you just reach out to people but i think the act of reaching out tastefully, respectfully, when you don't know someone somewhere, is really overlooked and how to do that properly and not be like a weirdo especially nowadays that everybody's so readily available on the internet. I feel like 10 years ago is a lot harder to get contact info for some people, but anyone can google someone and find their email address. So if you're cold calling, cold emailing, cold reaching out to someone because you want to learn, how would you recommend, someone who is listening, doing that so that they get the respect and time of day of the person receiving the message?

M

Mary Rohlich 18:24

Look I mean i think it's being really genuine and i think being respectful. Those are the things I think. Because i've received those emails and for me it's almost always about just if I in the moment have the time to respond and remember. Then I almost always do a lot of times i just forget and i'm busy and my email inbox is horrifying to some people. So you know, but i think just being understanding that you are taking someone's time. So I think just knowing that working around their schedule if they're willing to have a conversation with you. I also think that if you can do your homework and know who that person is and what they've done and also if you kind of know what you're reaching for too because sometimes talking to the president of a company may not be as helpful as talking to the junior executive at the company. So I think just knowing who you're reaching out to and what you're asking of them is a first. Do your homework before you reach out I would say and then be really flexible and understanding how long it might take to get on the phone. Like our scheduling might have taken about a year or so. I mean just knowing that stuff was really helpful for me. I love talking to people. One of the things, again coming from the midwest and not really knowing anybody it was really helpful to just ask people what is development, what does someone do, what is the path? You know. Things that you just have to kind of navigate. Now there's a lot of information out online and stuff. When i first moved out here i started this group called Hollywood Badgers because i wanted to help people from wisconsin, where i went to school, navigate how to work in hollywood and i would go back there and talk to students and say ask me whatever you want and just kind of talk about it because again it's hard to know what you don't know and it's hard to ask questions if you don't want to seem like you don't know.



Carolina Groppa 20:44

We should definitely make sure we share this episode with them. I read somewhere that it's was some book, one great book, i don't know somebody who's really smarter than me,

he said no matter what you do never forget what your first time was like. Like no matter what you do, don't forget that you too were the first person at the table for the first time and you didn't know. But that quote is like keep the excitement always for being new to something, understanding you may not have all the answers but also have kindness towards the people that are stepping in and it's their first time because you too were there once. Now you have all the info but at one point you didn't and it's important to just have that compassion towards others who are reaching out and how scary it is sometimes to email someone that you admire, whose work you've seen and think oh my gosh, like you get so nervous. So I think that's yeah what you said is exactly right.



Mary Rohlich 21:47

I do, I remember that. Like I said I know my mentors and I still have them. I think it's important to remember. I hope that never goes away because I think it's nice to be able to reach out to somebody and colleagues and say i'm going through this thing and have you ever been through this thing, i don't know what to do here. Every experience is different, there's always something new that comes off. I definitely think that's nice.



Carolina Groppa 22:20

I think sense of community is so important and i think as someone who has most of my career has been as a sort of indie freelance producer i definitely have felt a lack of that sense of community because every you know you kind of work in this like little pod and time and space with people and you form a little family for those months but then most people kind of move on to the next thing and you maybe hold on to one person. I've always felt this gap in having that sense of like community with people I could call and It's honestly part of why I wanted to start this show, is to create a sense of community. A place where maybe if I'm listening I can't necessarily be talking to you but i can, through this conversation, get some of the questions I have answered or be reminded that i'm not alone in this journey no matter where I am on my path. I feel like that's such an important part of it that you don't really read about in the books, the producing books, the making it in hollywood books is the mental health and the lifestyle stamina that is required to sustain a career in this business regardless of what discipline you're in. I would say especially as a producer because you're juggling so many balls, you're working with creatives, you're playing these different roles to different people at different times and oftentimes, I always wonder, how producers keep that up for themselves because it requires so much especially people who have been doing it for so much longer than I have. So on that note, i'm curious with the challenges of it, especially certain creatives can be depleting of your energy, what do you do to recharge your soul and fill your personal well, so that you can show up and be the best version of you to your collaborators?



Mary Rohlich 24:10

That is a constantly evolving, changing thing that I have to always remind myself of. I think it really does change. These past seven months have been getting outside and exercising, you know, doing something that's on my own and preferably outside. Like running, which I'd never thought I would run but time has brought me to that. Before that I was journaling, sometimes it's just holding my kid and you know just like being together for a little bit. It really is something I have to always remind myself of because like these past couple of weeks have been really stressful at work .....oh, therapy. I started doing therapy. I think that's a good one. And my therapist was like, What are you doing to take care of yourself? And I said nothing. Really bad answer.



Mary Rohlich 25:18

A bad answer. I would agree. N



Mary Rohlich 25:20

When you don't have a lot of time, it feels like there's not enough hours in the day, it's hard to say, Well, I'm going to take an hour for myself when I feel like I need to be doing something else. I've not been sleeping very well. I remember I went on a walk with the showrunner I'm working with right now, and I was like, I have finally slept for the first time last night. Well, I woke up at one and I read a script, but I slept other than that. What is my now normal? Like, okay, sleep is still waking up in the middle of night and reading. But it's really hard. It's really hard. But I think I also do believe and remind myself that there's an up and down. There will come a time right now, I've always known is going to be really hard. But knowing that there will be times when it's a little more calm. And yeah, being kind to yourself is really good.



Carolina Groppa 25:26

What's making it so hard right now?



Mary Rohlich 25:47

Well, I have been an independent producer for several years. And I've mostly been doing this show called Atypical.



Carolina Groppa 26:32

Yes, which I want to get to.



Mary Rohlich 26:34

So we started the fourth season, which is our final season.



Carolina Groppa 26:38

Congrats!



Mary Rohlich 26:39

Thank you! We started the writers room on March 16 2020, a rough day to start. But then a few months later, I started a new job with Priyanka Chopra. And I'm currently doing both, like full time jobs. So production supposed to start on Atypical in about a month. And so the combination of those two things are just very intense.



Carolina Groppa 27:09

Got it. Yeah, that makes absolute sense. Which is also a perfect segue, as head of TV and Film for Purple Pebble Pictures, which is Priyanka's company. How has that transition been like for you to go from freelance independent, and now being within a company? And also, what is that job responsibility? How is that different from what you've done so far?



Mary Rohlich 27:36

So before independently producing I was with Seth Gordon for about 10 years. And so that transition to independent producing was actually very drastic, because it was, very, very, intense and busy and big, to I want to be quiet and do like, and by quiet, I mean, you're producing TV, a TV show is still not, it's still intense, but it was fewer things, you know, and kind of less responsibility on the whole. So then transitioning to Priyanka, and working with her, was ramping up a lot very quickly. But I felt ready for it because again, I had kind of a few years of, again, not quiet, you're still producing a show, but it's still felt, you know, less crazy. And I felt really ready for something new. I've been feeling that a little bit, for about a year. And kind of, you know, again, like back to that, picking the tables that you want to be at. When I met with her, it just felt right. This feels like the kind of, you know, person, the kind of company the kind of vision that I want to be a part of. The

responsibilities are a lot, you know, we have TV, we have film, we want to do a doc series and everything in between, and really kind of getting those projects, developed, sold, and then into production at some point, hopefully. High volume.



Carolina Groppa 29:23

It's still a pretty small company. So in terms of the support that you have, are you also essentially development then? Everything that comes through the pipeline, I would assume goes through you. You're vetting it before you bring it to Priyanka to discuss is that, right? That's a lot.



Mary Rohlich 29:46

Yeah. But I love it. I love working with somebody who I really respect and admire and trust. I feel that security and sort of knowing we are aligned in so many ways. The other thing is, I love that she's somebody who loves to read content and has thoughts on it and watches stuff. So it's just easy in some ways to have those conversations and to feel like we're on the right path and make decisions. The culture of how we work is very aligned. So coming from the independent producing world where I got to sit at home on my couch and work and do it on my own schedule, is not that different, right? As long as you're getting the work done, do it how you feel comfortable doing it. So if it's sitting on the floor, you're sitting on the floor doing it. It's not that corporate feeling at all, so in that sense, it was very easy to transition. Because it was the same sort of culture in general.



Mary Rohlich 30:58

Myself. Yeah, exactly.



Carolina Groppa 31:00

Same company culture you had for your company of one.



Carolina Groppa 31:00

I think as someone who's always been very curious about going in house and going in house sounds like that, what does that even mean anymore? Because like, in house, I'm still in my own house. I've been freelancing for so long on the indie grind for so long that I'm always so curious on that transition. And a lot of my fellow cohorts who came up with me, a lot of them are in that place where they are transitioning and going in house and

like, going Netflix, going wherever, you know. It's just so fascinating to me the differences whether you're going to a much bigger player, like those guys, or you are running a smaller company, a talent led company, the differences of it. I had the good fortune of speaking with Michelle Purple, I don't know if you know her, but she is Jessica Biels producing partner. And one of the things we talked a lot about is, at the time, when Jessica Biel launched her company, which was, I think it was over 10 years ago, I forget. But it was at a time when the industry really looked down upon actor production companies, because everybody thought that it was a vanity community. And it's just so interesting how I think, thanks to you know, women like Reese Witherspoon, who really put their money where their mouth is with, getting female led content out there and amplifying female voices. I feel like in the past five years, there's been this incredible sort of uprising of all these women who, yes, are famous actresses who people recognize, but that actually are getting to put on this producer hat. And actually make a dent in the conversation. Because I think at the end of the day, we tell stories, we're so lucky to get to do what we do. But stories impacts change. They change how we perceive culture and others. And it's such an important social responsibility, I think, to get to be a storyteller. So to have women popping up all over, from all kinds of backgrounds, getting to have this opportunity. I don't know, it just it's not really a question. It's just such an exciting time, pandemic aside. What a wonderful time to be a woman and to be in this business. And it just makes me really inspired. Just like even chatting with you, you know?

M

Mary Rohlich 33:13

I completely feel the same way. And again, like, 10 years ago, would I have ever thought I would be here, you know, the answer would be absolutely no. And even when we were starting conversations, I didn't know much about who she was as a person. So I think that really trusting those feelings and those connections and how, again, like, at the end of the day, we're all people who want to tell stories, right. And I think, with her in particular, many people know this, but if you start looking, she's been producing for forever. So I think having that really strong point of view, and drive, and all of the things that I align with, has been really great. And it's so funny, I have no sense of time, over a year ago, a year and a half ago, going on a job interview, that I was really interested in the company, maybe this could be cool, you know, again, like not really sure what I wanted to do. And I remember sitting in the lobby, like the waiting room lobby of this office building and having a total panic attack and being like, I can't work in an office like I can't do it. Just being like, this isn't the right place for me. And I think knowing what feels right and what feels good. And even though on paper, it might have been a great job, who knows, you have to trust your gut.



Carolina Groppa 34:48

It's that thing like your gut is always speaking to you, but some people just take a little longer to start to listen and trust that it's guiding you to the right place. Just trusting this invisible force that you have to say no to the certain things, for the right things to appear for you. I think that's honestly why there's a lot of sort of unhappy people in our business because they sort of know they shouldn't be doing x and they sort of force it. I get sometimes you have to pay your dues, you have to work a desk for a certain amount of time, but the people that are not a part of my circle that i've encountered that are just perpetually unhappy, it's the people from what i've gleaned in conversations with them, they are just constantly going against their own gut. It's such a weird business in that sense because, like you said, there is no one path, there is no one way, so really all you have is your gut, your sense of integrity, and your inner compass to align with people who sort of vibrate at that frequency who are going to give you the right advice to sort of get where you're going.



Mary Rohlich 36:01

One of my very best friends who is now directing, 15 years ago we would do dinners together as assistants and just say, am I happy right now? Am i happy with what i'm doing right now? Because yes i'm still an assistant and my co-workers are getting that jump to CE and they're getting that promotion or they're getting that thing, but do I really want that and if so I should go for it, but am i happy right now? Am i learning something, am I getting something from this opportunity right now? If not, make a change. And I think that check in is something that has helped me a lot because it's easy to get swept up in the wait, i'm still here, i'm still only here, but am i getting something from this that's different than the last thing i did? Or you know sometimes it's credit, sometimes it's experience, sometimes it's whatever, i don't know, like it's always a little bit different and so i mean for me that's what i have to do to keep going. Somebody was asking me over christmas years ago about a work question, I was like I don't want to talk about work, and then i was like why? I love what i do but am i happy in the thing that i'm doing right now? So you know, having to kind of check yourself, I think, is really important because it's easy to get wrapped up in it. I still do it all the time.



Carolina Groppa 37:35

I mean when you do get wrapped up in it, what are your ways of navigating out of it? Asking for a friend... i'm the friend.



Mary Rohlich 37:49

It just depends on the thing, right? When I have a tough situation just try to talk about it. Get real with it. Whatever it is figure it out, navigate it or if it's something that's really bad then get out of it. Change it. It's been a while since i've had that sort of thing fortunately, so it's you know, been pretty good. I think the other thing is, there's always navigating people and personalities and unhappy people in life and in this industry and I think being really conscious about who you work with, if you can, is really important.



Carolina Groppa 38:47

What brings you joy? What makes you happy besides work?



Mary Rohlich 38:53

Besides work? It's such a weird time to ask that question. 2020 happiness. Joy is having a loaf of bread. It's really different today than it was a year ago. It's honestly the little things. It's time with my kid and having that family time and quiet and alone time. It is a weird year because i think for me i feel like part of my superpower of this quarantine is that i am an introvert so i've been kind of okay.



Carolina Groppa 39:42

It's interesting because i've been fortunate enough to do a lot of these conversations during the pandemic, all the way up to when it started. Definitely for us who have the privilege of having a roof over our heads and having a safety net financially and still having a job, it's really created space, I think to reevaluate what is important. What our priorities are in terms of how we're filling our lives. But also the kind of work that we're doing, the kind of people we're surrounding ourselves with. There feels like this big energetic shift, and that's why there's been, I feel like so many, even within agencies and managers, so many people, leaving the business and just really being like, Whoa, is this what I want to be doing? Is this the thing that brings me happiness? And so I was just curious if the pandemic or how the pandemic has perhaps shifted or just solidified any of that for you?



Mary Rohlich 40:47

Yeah, I mean, I think it has, you know, because, in that sense, I remember feeling in the beginning of the pandemic, where we didn't have childcare, and I was still working, juggling those things was hard. But I felt like when would I ever have had this much time



with my daughter? Because I work a lot. And so there were times when I would see her for an hour in the morning, and maybe an hour a night, you know, there were times when I would only see her once, because I would be home too late. And now kind of starting to get more busy and being away more, and like, today, I was leaving before she woke up, and I'm like, I want to get home in time to see her. Again, I feel more than ever, that hole. And that prioritizing. Because when I had her, you know, I didn't know how to be a mom, to be a parent. And that was really hard. I didn't feel like I was good at it. And I didn't know what I was doing. And so it was easy to go back to work. And of course, it was hard in the sense of like, I wanted to be around, but I know how to do my job, right? I know how to produce. It's like, oh, yes, let's have somebody help me with this thing called raising a child, I don't know what to do there. And now I feel more confident. And I feel like I'm learning and figuring it out. And you know, like producing, asking other people how to do it. That balance is something I want to keep, or try to keep, as best I can.



Carolina Groppa 42:51

Yeah, yeah. It's tricky. As a woman who aspires to have a family, I don't currently have one, I feel very much, just hearing you talk, that's definitely always the anxiety of like, Oh, my God, like, how do you structure your life to create that sense of balance, so you can be with your child and actually be there to see it grow up and help raise the baby that you created? So it's not just another one of your producing projects you're juggling among are doing.



Mary Rohlich 43:23

Here's one thing I will say about the pandemic. And I don't know if you've felt this on your end at all. But the fact that people do have families has become part of our work now. Because you'll be in a meeting and somebody will be like, I gotta go deal with my kid right now. Or my kid will jump on my lap when I'm in the middle of a zoom, or I have to leave because she has to go to the bathroom, and I was seeing that happen on the other end of my meetings, too. And I think there was this sort of like, Oh, yeah, people have kids, we know about that, but as long as it doesn't interfere with work. But now that people were home, it was suddenly like, no, you can't avoid that. And so there was a little bit of, at least on my end, where I felt like oh, yeah, you get it now, right? You can't just hide your kids away in a closet. And I think being someone at work who recognizes that people have families as important too. Even with one of my friends, who is a director, she's going back to work, she just had a baby, going back to work. You should tell people that you need XYZ, because of that, and it's okay to ask for that. It's okay to do that. And you should because, I would fight for you to have that.



Carolina Groppa 44:49

I'm optimistic that this is one of the upsides of the pandemic and like exactly what you're saying people getting to really remove that veil of like the work and the life. It's like, no, for this year, you have to have it all in one place. It helps remind us, Oh, right, I'm not a robot. We're all humans. And we have lives outside of an office, and really, hopefully helps make that shift of how do we incorporate our families into our work. It isn't so separate. I know exactly, with production, for example, that's been such a conversation of like, why is it that sets can't offer childcare for crew who works these crazy hours and have some type of trailer, where you just drop off your kid, and you can still see your kid at lunch if you want to, and really find ways creatively incorporate that. Because I think if there's any industry that can figure that out more quickly than others, it's ours, because we're constantly solving and finding solutions for things. So I really hope that becomes a priority for everybody when we have to go back and people are like, No, but I miss this. I miss actually seeing my kid more than twice a day for a couple of hours, you know? So I hope that can happen, at least that's what I feel optimistic about, and selfishly want that to happen. So that I can be a part of that, you know, when I have a family as well.



Mary Rohlich 46:13

Yeah, I hope so, too. I do believe it's possible. I remember when I first had her, going into the writers room, and having to leave and being very public about pumping. Because I was thinking about it, like, Okay, I'm saying this in front of a lot of people who don't have kids, or don't have that or aren't used to that. And I was kind of doing it consciously because I wanted, on the next one, for them to not think that was weird, or to feel like that was, oh, should we go, take an hour to go do that. It's just familiarizing it and making it part of it. It's hard because I didn't exactly, always have that mirrored for me when I was an assistant. So making assistants feel like, you know, my assistant had two kids, so it was just, it's okay, that you have to take your kids somewhere. I'm sure that there's things beyond just family, like, I'm obviously focused on that, because I have a daughter, but there are other things that are just, that should be more, a part of at all, because we are all dealing with a lot. Mental health.



Carolina Groppa 47:40

So important. I really hope that it can create a little bit, of a healthier industry with people that are more compassionate. It's almost like there was a wedge placed in the hamster wheel. And we all just like fell off. And we're all trying to figure out that we don't have to get back on at that speed to still be as productive. So I saw this video talking about this guy who used to do this bike ride. And every time he did this bike ride, he was only able to

do it in 43 minutes, and he can never get his time down. And then one day, he did it. And he thought, Oh, for sure, I added 10 minutes to this bike ride that usually is 43 minutes, he thought it was going to be like an hour. And all he did was, he stopped to look at the birds, he appreciated the ride, actually, instead of just pedaling to get where he was going. And when he looked at his stopwatch, it only took an extra two minutes to actually stop and enjoy the ride. That for me has changed the way I do everything. Because you are still going to get where you're going. But can you just take an extra couple minutes to enjoy where you're going? And I find that a lot of people in our business, producers, especially, we are sort of fast paced individuals, and you can slow down and do it in half of your speed and it'll still be faster than most people, and enjoy what you're doing.



Mary Rohlich 49:14

It's the same thing as carving out some time for self care, right? You may think you're losing an hour, but you're actually gaining however much more productivity or groundedness or whatever that is. I think the other thing is just how productive we can be in a short amount of time and, you know, things like that.



Carolina Groppa 49:37

Which is why like, I get kind of frustrated when people want to shortchange a producer salary or producers fee because it's like, well, you're not paying me for quantifiable hours. You're paying me for the years of experience that allow me to do this one thing in 30 minutes that could have taken me three months. It's hard to explain to people especially as you're coming up and having to, as women, fight for your worth, and be like, this is why I can't work for this weekly rate and all of that nonsense.



Mary Rohlich 50:11

Completely.



Carolina Groppa 50:12

But I want to be mindful, we're at 50 minutes. And so I want to shift gears to talking about Autism In Love and Atypical, and our sort of link to autism that we both have, which is awesome. I think that's actually why Sarah connected us, we met through the doc space, and she was a big fan and supporter of Autism In Love. And obviously, Atypical now in its fourth season, you said, right?



Mary Rohlich 50:38

Yes. Fourth and final.



Carolina Groppa 50:42

So talk to me about that journey. How much did you know about Autism before this project came into your world?



Mary Rohlich 50:50

Very little. I mean very little consciously, I would say. Season one really, we did a, and we've continued throughout, but sort of doing a deep dive and research and just reading and understanding. And I think the interesting thing in my experience with autism and meeting people with autism, and recognizing that I know people with autism that maybe I didn't know had it, and things like. It's one of those wonderful communities to become a part of, in so many different ways. They say that when you meet someone with autism, you've met some ONE with autism, you know, and I think that is really true to my experience, and everybody has their own unique person who's on different ends of the spectrum. I think it's just been, like a constant learning experience and evolution over time. How about you?



Carolina Groppa 52:05

Oh, gosh, I mean, before I did Autism In Love, I actually knew nothing about autism. I had no contact with it. I didn't have a family member who was impacted by autism. I was very ignorant, honestly, about it. I didn't know how it was different from Down Syndrome like most people. Autism in Love, was almost 10 years ago, this was also quite a different time. It was really just like vaccines and Jenny McCarthy, it was like, those were the buzz words, you know and we really set out to do a project that looked at what happens to these kids, when they grow up and become adults and want to have these romantic relationships. And what does that look like for them. By definition, people on the spectrum don't know how to connect or read social cues. So how do you navigate a romantic relationship, if you can't see that your partner's upset because you said something. So it was just really fascinating, and honestly, a very serendipitous life changing project for me. It's the project that professionally changed everything, opened a lot of doors. For me it was the catapult to that next level. We premiered at Tribeca, we went on to become Emmy nominated, and it's still a project that to this day, we get people emailing us and thanking us for making it. But the bravery of the subjects that participated, to open up their hearts and their homes to have us put a camera in their homes, which is hard for most people to do, especially

with someone on the spectrum. They're very sensitive to all of that. We just are so grateful that we got to be there and document these important moments that happen in their lives. Because that's the thing with docs, right? You don't have a production end date on someone's life. You just have to eventually stop rolling the cameras. And I feel like we got very lucky with what we were able to capture when we captured it. But yeah, I mean, it changed everything. It just taught me so much about love and what love can look like and how, like you said, you met one person with autism, you've met ONE person with autism. Similarly, every relationship is unique, whether neurotypical or atypical, everybody's got different ways of navigating what they go through. So being a part of that, and honestly, like after the film, every time we had a screening, having parents and people on the spectrum come up to us and shake our hands. I remember one time it was a father, he's a grown ass man, and he came up to me crying and shook my hand, he's like, you have given me hope that my son can one day maybe have a relationship and I didn't think that was possible. And that's the why. The why I do what I do. Yeah, for those moments and those experiences that are so special, when you really get to see that your work has impacted someone on a really deep real level and you can't force that into existence. It either happens or it happens. Oftentimes we create our work, we put it out into the world, we don't really get to see the ripple effects of that reflected back to us. And so when that happens in such a nice way it's really incredible. And so I would say it's the gift that keeps giving.

M

Mary Rohlich 55:13

I think that's been my experience too, especially as the seasons have gone on. Season one, nobody knew what the show was. And so you're making this thing in this bubble and trying your best and reaching out, we have consultants, and we have people in the community who have been a part of this show since the beginning. But season two really opened up a lot more opportunities to connect. So finding more actors who are on the spectrum and finding people who then could be on the show, and then not only have people reach out and say I identify with Sam, but also other characters within the show who are on the spectrum, who want to fulfill their dream of being an actor. So having all of those really cool opportunities kind of unfold over the years, it's amazing. And parents reaching out and connecting with parents has been really...



Carolina Groppa 56:13

Well, so now that it's the final season, what's the thing you're gonna miss the most about the show?

M

Mary Rohlich 56:21

It's such a special show. I mean, the group has worked on this from the beginning. Although a lot of things have changed throughout the years, people have come and gone. It's still very much a family. And that family keeps growing. And I think I'll miss, talking to everybody, and sharing everything. I mean, it's going to be hard this year, because we can't all hug each other when we see each other, but I think that's what it is. It's very much a family, but also one that works really well together and does care a lot about each other. Because, you know, we've always tried to do better every year, and we can always do better, but it is something where we try to make a conscious effort to. I think that working on a show that mean something is pretty nice, you know? I like that a lot. Yeah, for sure.



Carolina Groppa 57:25

I have one final question for you. But before I ask it, if there's anything that we haven't touched upon that you want to make sure you discuss, let me know. If not, that's okay. I usually ask the advice question, but I feel like it's kind of like, not pointless, but I just feel like it's such a crazy business where for every one person that does A, there's a person that does B and that works. There's not one way. So I won't ask the advice question, unless you have any advice, but what I will end on is, I won't ask you where you'll be in 10 years, but if there's a legacy that you hope to leave behind? What would you say that is?

M

Mary Rohlich 58:15

Hmm, that's a good question. I feel like I need to do some journaling and walking on that one. I care a lot about the things that I work on, I'm very proud of the things that I work on. But more importantly, I really care about my relationships with people, and I care about doing a really good job and doing that as a good person. And I think, you know, I want to be someone who people love working with, because the experience of it is way more important than what it is, in my opinion. I'm sure there are people who will disagree with that. And I hope someday to you know, to get the award for the thing that matters more than my relationships, but I don't think I will. Ultimately it's going to be about the journey and the experience and the people. And that is really important to me. So I don't know if that's my legacy, but it's just trying to be somebody who people like working with.



Carolina Groppa 59:32

Hey, I think that's my MO. I harp on the show about that. People are tired of hearing me talk about it, but I won't ever stop talking about it. The thing itself is not as important as

the journey to get to that thing. Who you're going to be during that journey is really all you have, because there's no way to control. Like you said anything can go wrong at any point in the process and there's best intentions and so yes, the thing could go on to be the one thing that gives you all the accolades or not but if you don't enjoy the path to get there then is that a life worth living?



Mary Rohlich 1:00:11

For sure. And I think also, it's being able to watch something again that you've worked on and smile because that experience was really good. Because that isn't always the case. Feeling really proud of the thing you make for sure, but also feeling really proud of that memory of the thing. That's important to me as a person. Again it's choosing to spend time on something that's where you want to be.



Carolina Groppa 1:00:43

I think we're cut from the same cloth.



Mary Rohlich 1:00:45

We'll have to do something together.



Carolina Groppa 1:00:48

I'd love that. I'd love that. Well thank you so much. I'm so grateful. It took a year but you're worth waiting for. It's always worth it. Like I said I admire you and I applaud you and everything you're doing, so I feel really grateful to spend this hour with you.



Mary Rohlich 1:01:08

Likewise. Thank you. This is a really fun way to spend time. So thank you for having me.



Carolina Groppa 1:01:14

Thank you. I'm gonna stop recording.