Interview Transcript: Gabriel

(Interviewer) Okay, let's try this again. Alright, what is your name?

(Interview Subject) My name is Gabriel

(Interviewer) What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of autism?

(Interview Subject) Oh, that's a good question. I think the first thing that comes to mind is probably hyperfixation. I think most of the interactions that I've had with, I have a few autistic friends, and for me, like, the only time that I ever, like, register, like, oh, this person, this is a person with autism is like when they're talking about one of their very special interests, which I know is like a thing like a symptom of autism is hyper fixation. Um, and so I think that's kind of the symptom I most closely associated with it.

(Interviewer) Okay. Cool. Do you, do you do you identify as autistic?

(Interview Subject) I do not, no.

(Interviewer) I know many people identify with certain autistic traits. Have you ever had that happen?

(Interview Subject) It's been suggested to me by a lot of people that I should probably take a test, but I think that with a lot of, a lot of kinds of disabilities or, you know, mental conditions, I think almost everyone has some of the symptoms of some of them. Right? So that's, you know, that's fair.

(Interviewer) All right. So on the subject of autism, do you feel as though anything is widely misunderstood?

(Interview Subject) Yeah, I think it is kind of similar to, I think a lot of disabilities and particular developmental disabilities. There's a kind of like dehumanization, but like in a, in a very, um, like medicalized sense. Uh, you know, it's like the idea that people can't understand or don't, you know, know what's going on or don't don't experience the full range, of human life, you know, and it's like that. That's a big one. Um, I guess also like, and this is widely not that, but another thing that I think is widely misunderstood about autism is that, um, autism and Down Syndrome are not the same thing. I think a lot of people think that.

(Interviewer) Sweet. Personally, what would you like to know more about autism?

(Interview Subject) Oh, man, that's a good question. I got to chew on that one for a minute.

(Interviewer) Think about that, we come back to it later.

(Interview Subject) Yeah, for sure, for sure. I'll finish a set of questions and then we'll we'll come back to that one.

(Interviewer) So what do you think autistic people experience when they experience sensory processing issues? How can that be conveyed to someone who is neurotypical?

(Interview Subject) I mean, the way I imagine that feeling is. You know. Similar to the emotions that I think we all, we all experience except, you know, maybe more intense or what, you know, might be considered by society as inappropriately intense for a situation. You know, it might be, you know, it might be, I should say it might be considered, you know, normal to be overwhelmed in a crowd of, you know, 8000 people. Uh, but, you know, to have that same feeling in a crowd of five people might be a little less, uh, might be frowned upon by society, I suppose. Right?

(Interviewer) Right.

(Interview Subject) Okay. Cool.

(Interviewer) So from your own experiences interacting with autistic people, as it seems like you've had quite a bit of experience, how would you say that they act differently in social situations?

(Interview Subject) Uh, I mean, there's, you know, the I think the well-known, you know, aversion to eye contact. Again, like, like I mentioned earlier, kind of having a few things that you could talk about for hours upon hours, um, in intense detail, uh, and, uh, I think it's a, it's a terrible, you know, horribly unspecific term, but, you know, general social awkwardness. Uh, although who among us? Right. Who among us does not have some degree of social awkwardness?
That is fair. All right. So do you want to go back to the question that we missed?
Think I got an answer for that one. The one we, we tabled for a minute. Yeah. Um, I think that I would like to hear, from the perspective of people with autism, what they feel is unique about their experience. Because I've seen a lot of advocacy groups that do not include autistic people, in a lot of ways, I'm thinking particularly of of a couple.

(Interviewer) I know we can name a few!

(Interview Subject) Yeah! Yeah…You know we'll like put forward kind of a very particular idea of what it, what people with autism are like. And I think it would be interesting, to see more of from that perspective, maybe in the form of art, maybe in the form of writing or, you know, whatever. Just like what is it like to live like that?

(Interviewer) Yeah, yeah! I think you bring up a great point. All right. So now I'll talk a little bit more about our project and what we're doing. We are making a serious game for awareness. A serious game is anything that is gamified education, or gamified awareness campaigns. And it's what we're trying to do is essentially what you're saying. We're trying to show experiences, autistic experiences, through the use of games and storytelling. We plan on having a web app that introduces some sort of stress mechanic, and you can choose between a bunch of different characters. Each of these characters has different symptoms of ASD and different levels that come with that. You are playing this character and trying to survive their day-to-day experience. Our idea is to get real experiences from autistic people and to have that story be about them, with the end goal being to raise awareness. So that's kind of our general project.

(Interview Subject) That sounds awesome.

(Interviewer) Yeah, I'm super excited about it. But what do you think are important features in a game, when its end goal, is to raise awareness about something like autism?

(Interview Subject) Well, I think a big one is, um. I'm gonna. Sorry. I'm going to make a little aside here. Uh, the recent Spider-Man game with, you know, Miles Morales, Spider-Man, uh, features, of course, a lot of black characters. And that's very, very cool. But then you look at the writing team and it's all white dudes. And that's not surprising when every single black character in the game is like, hey, man, want to go to the jazz museum? After the cookout? We can play some basketball. And it's like, and that's not that far off. There was an actual line in there that was basically, I'm going to the jazz museum after the cookout and it's like, are you serious?

(Interviewer) Yeah, Yeah.

(Interview Subject) So, including in the process the people that you're raising awareness for or if not being part of that group or having people in that group, you know, working on the project themselves. Um, I think it is super important. And, you know, if all else fails, at least making sure you understand and are capturing the diverse experience of any group is, I think, super important because especially, sorry, I was just going to say, especially with mental health conditions, you get a monolithic portrayal because you have these set of symptoms that are considered the universally applicable. This is what having that is like, so yeah.

(Interviewer) Yeah. So actually it's pretty cool. The rest of my group is questioning if they have ASD or diagnosed with ASD. And so I'm the only member of the group who is who is not!
Very nice. That's awesome to have a project that raises awareness by the people that it's raising awareness for.

(Interview Subject) We do have to be very careful with, like you said, including other autistic experiences because I know that our group members' experience is not going to be all-inclusive.

(Interviewer) So with our general design, what kind of features do you like? I'll go over what we were including, we have timed questions, we have storylines, we have timed questions, you were talking about the sensory stuff earlier, we're gonna be including like bright light, blurred lettering, the crossing out of choices, and other visual stimuli to increase the stress of the player, as well as adding mini-games in the form of like small quizzes, quick time events, stuff like that.

(Interview Subject) Oh yeah no that all sounds great!

(Interviewer) Are there any features that you would include that are not listed?

(Interview Subject) It's very important to portray the joys as well as the stresses in the mechanics.

(Interviewer) Right!

(Interview Subject) You know with the stress meter, maybe try to feature prominent things, you know, I'm a caregiver, and one of my favorite days is watching one of the residents eat her breakfast cereal because she experiences that joy, and it is clear that she experiences the joy of her favorite cereal greater than I could ever experience joy about anything. Her highs are the highest I have ever seen, and her lows are the lowest I have ever seen, but you know it's important to include both to get that holistic view.

(Interviewer) Oh, yeah we plan on having a lot of the rewarding part of the game be within the story, as it was a previous concern that the game would be largely focused on the negative trait

(Interview Subject) *Sarcastic Tone* Oh yeah it's like "Ahh look at how terrible and awful autism is!" I'm glad that it has been a conversation that has been had.

(Interviewer) It is something that we have to be careful about

(Interview Subject) That's all that jumps out to me in terms of features.

(Interviewer) Does anything else jump out to you? As good or bad?

(Interview Subject) Timed questions are a really good way of increasing player stress. Especially if they tie into resource management, like option A is the better option social, but gives you more stress while option B is the worst option social but removes stress, and you are on a timer that makes you choose quickly, that might be a very good way of communicating that stress.

(Interviewer) Definitely!

(Interview Subject) As someone who likes to stare at options on a screen for about an hour before I pick anything, throwing a time limit on a resource management event will stress me out.

(Interviewer) So in terms of this timer that you are talking about what were you thinking, 5 seconds, variable for the question?

(Interview Subject) I think the variable for the question for sure

(Interviewer) What do you think should be a maximum or minimum?

(Interview Subject) That's a good question, you don't want it to be so long that you get too long to think, but you don't want to give them not enough time to even move the mouse. I would say so long as you have time to read the question, and the answers are short, then probably 5 seconds would be a good limit.

(Interviewer) For sure!

(Interview Subject) That one might need playtesting!

(Interviewer) What do you think would be the biggest challenge in learning this website/game/application?

(Interview Subject) Hmm, honestly I'm not sure, I don't know!

(Interviewer) That's probably a good sign then!

(Interview Subject) I can see a couple of things that might be difficult to stick with, but if it's well-designed, there shouldn't be too many problems.

(Interviewer) How is this different from other education experiences about autism that you have experienced?

(Interview Subject) I think the holistic view, the whole there are stresses and joys is something that sets apart in a sense I think real awareness building. I think that a big part, and of course, the actual inclusion of people with autism on the design team is of course a big one

(Interviewer) We plan on having a couple of review steps where we talk to people with autism and see what they think about experiences in the game as well. It's a pretty delicate process. So we are trying to be very careful

(Interview Subject) That's good!

(Interviewer) So, do you have any suggestions on how you would improve what we have, add to it, any final concerns, or anything like that?

(Interview Subject) Ummm nope, not really! This sounds great!

(Interviewer) Ok! When the game is ready, would you like to be a part of it?

(Interview Subject) Absolutely!

(Interviewer) Thanks again dude for doing this!

(Interview Subject) Of course!

Note: Questions about the crediting and some nonrelated information are not included due to not being asked in an interview format. Gabriel declined to specify his last name and would like to be included in the interview credits.