

ATRP Student Interview Guide

Introduction: *Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences and perspectives as a college student. My name is X, and I am the study coordinator currently helping with this research study. Before we begin, I'd like to ask you a few questions.*

- 1) Are you at least 18 years old?**
- 2) Are you currently attending a community college or HBCU (historically black college or university)?**
- 3) Do you have an autism diagnosis, or do you identify as autistic?**

If participants indicate NO on any of the above: *Thank you so much for your time today. To be eligible to participate in the study, all participants are required to be at least 18, attending a community college or HBCU, and have an autism diagnosis/identify as autistic, so it looks like you are not eligible. We appreciate your time and willingness to participate.*

If participants indicate YES to all of the above: *Great! We can go ahead and proceed with the interview. Before we begin, I'd like to let you know that we want this interview to be as comfortable for you as possible. I will share my screen so that you can see each question and the response choices as I ask them. In addition, you are welcome to take as many breaks as you'd like and move in whatever way is comfortable. If a question is stressful or uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip it. Please let me know if there is anything else we can do to make this interview as enjoyable as possible. This interview will take approximately one hour.*

Section 1: Ice Breakers

I'd like to begin by asking you some general questions about your college experience.

- What year are you in school?
 - What is your current or planned major?
 - What is something about college that has surprised you so far?
 - Tell me about what your academic experience has been like.
 - What is your experience with your classes?
 - **Prompts:**
 - Class planning/enrollment
 - Classroom setting experiences
 - Navigating deadlines/assignments
 - What are your interactions like with professors or faculty members?
 - Can you remember a specific challenge you had in a course or in an interaction with a professor?
 - What happened and how did you handle it?
 - Can you describe one of your academic accomplishments in college that you are proud of?
 - What are your long-term career goals?
 - **Prompt:** When you think about your future career and work life, how does autism factor in?
 - Have you ever asked a professor or staff member for career counseling or advice on your career trajectory?
 - If so, what was their response/reaction?
 - What advice did they provide, if any?
 - How did this situation make you feel?
 - What, if any, campus academic resources have been helpful to you?
 - Are there any academic services that you wish were available to you? Please tell me about them.
 - Do you feel that all aspects of your identity are accepted at your college? Please explain why.
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Section 2: Self Advocacy Capacities

These next few questions ask about self-advocacy.

Have you heard the term self-advocacy?

- o **If YES:** What does it mean to you?
 - Do you consider yourself to be a self-advocate? Why or why not?
- o **If NO:** Move to next question.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

(1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree.)

1. I know my own strengths. (Knowledge of self)
 2. I know what resources are available for autistic individuals at my institution including the legal and institutional protections that are available to me. (Knowledge of rights)
 3. I am skilled at communicating one-on-one with others. (Communication skills)
 4. I am a skilled leader. (Leadership skills)
 5. I am able to stand up for myself or ask for accommodations when needed. (Confidence/self-worth)
 6. I am at ease (OK) with 'Autism' as an aspect of my identity.
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Section 3: Psychosocial health and well-being¹

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

(1: Very strongly disagree; 2) Strongly disagree; 3) Disagree; 4) Neither agree nor disagree; 5) Agree; 6) Strongly agree; 7) Very strongly agree.)

1. There are special people in my life who are around when I am in need.
 2. There are special people in my life with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
 3. My family really tries to help me.
 4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.
 5. I have special people in my life who are a real source of comfort to me.
 6. My friends really try to help me.
 7. My friends are understanding of autism.
 8. My friends are respectful of my racial and/or ethnic identity.
 9. There are people in my life who I can be myself around.
 10. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.
 11. I can talk about my problems with my family.
 12. There are special people in my life who care about my feelings.
 13. My family is willing to help me make decisions.
 14. I can talk about my problems with my friends.
- *Tell me about your support systems.*
 - **Prompt:** Who do you turn to when you need support in your life?
 - *Tell me about your social life in college.*
 - **Prompt:** Do you have peers or friends you enjoy spending time with? Can you tell me about them?
 - **Prompt:** What might be missing from your social life?

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then tell me the number at the end of the statement that indicates HOW YOU GENERALLY FEEL. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe how you generally feel. [show questions and responses individually.]

1. I feel that difficulties are piling up so that I cannot overcome them.
2. I worry too much over something that really doesn't matter.
3. Some unimportant thoughts run through my mind and bother me.
4. I take disappointments so keenly that I can't put them out of my mind.
5. I get in a state of tension or turmoil as I think over my recent concerns and interests.
6. I can't stop thinking or worrying about the same problem.

¹ We will request The Social Responsiveness Scale-A (SRS-A; [Constantino and Gruber, 2012](#)): a self-report measure of autism symptoms consisting of five subscales: Social Awareness, Social Cognition, Social Communication, Social Motivation, and Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviors. We will submit items to the IRB when available.

What have been three main sources of your stress in college and why were they stressful?

Section 4: Minority Stress Assessment²

These next few questions ask about some experiences you might have in your everyday life. In your day-to-day life, how often do any of the following things happen to you?

Response categories: Almost everyday; At least once a week; A few times a month; A few times a year; Less than once a year; Never

1. You are not treated with courtesy.
2. You are not treated with respect.
3. You receive poor service at restaurants.
4. People act as if they think you are not smart.
5. People act as if they are afraid of you.
6. People act as if they think you are dishonest.
7. People act as if they're better than you are.
8. People ignore or avoid you.
9. You are called names or insulted.
10. You are threatened or harassed.
11. People assume that you are intoxicated or under the influence even when you are sober.
12. People talk to you like you are a baby or small child.
13. You have difficulty finding respectful medical care when you need it.
14. People ask you uncomfortable or invasive questions.
15. People don't believe that you are autistic, even when you tell them.

How difficult has it been to:

- (a) Find spaces that accept all aspects of your identity?
- (b) Access an autism diagnosis?
- (c) Receive accommodations at your college?

Prompt: If answered more than never for any of the above, ask about why they think they might have experienced [X].

- *Oftentimes in our society, people experience stigma. This might mean that you have been treated differently because you have or identify as having autism. Have you ever felt a sense of stigma in college because of your autism?*
 - **If YES:** Please give me an example.
 - **If NO:** Move to next question.
- *Have you ever felt a sense of stigma in college because of your racial or ethnic identity?*
 - **If YES:** Please give me an example.
 - **If NO:** Move to next question.

Section 5: Flourishing & Psychological Distress²

For these next questions, please respond to the following items using these response options:

every day, almost every day, about 2 or 3 times a week, about once a week, once or twice, or never

1. How often in the past month did you feel...
 - a. Happy?
 - b. Interested in life?
 - c. Satisfied with your life?
 - d. Engaged in an interest or hobby that was meaningful for you?
 - e. Joy or relaxation from pleasant sensory input (a favourite song, food, fidget, etc.)?
2. How often during the past month did you feel...
 - a. That you had something important to contribute to society? (social contribution)
 - b. That you belonged to a community (like a social group, your neighborhood, your city, your school)? (social integration)
 - c. That our society is becoming a better place for people like you? (social growth)
 - d. That people are basically good? (social acceptance)
 - e. That the way our society works makes sense to you? (social coherence)
 - f. That people wanted to spend time with you (self-acceptance)
 - g. That you liked most of your personality? (self-acceptance)
 - h. Good at managing the responsibilities of daily life? (environmental mastery)
 - i. That you had warm and trusting relationships? (positive relationships with others)
 - j. That you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person? (personal growth)
 - k. Confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions? (autonomy)
 - l. That your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it? (purpose in life)
3. How well do the following strengths describe you?
 - a. Ability to think “outside the box”, unique perspective
 - b. Loyalty to friends and loved ones
 - c. Honesty
 - d. Intensity of enthusiasm when discussing favorite topics
 - e. Intense sense of right and wrong
 - f. Willingness to stand up for your convictions, even when it is not popular
 - g. Attention to detail
 - h. Willingness to question social rules and expectations
 - i. Direct and straightforward communication
 - j. Close connection to animals
 - k. Non-hierarchical thinking (i.e. not treating people better or worse because of their status or job title)
 - l. Not interested in fame or money for its own sake

² The Mental Health Continuum Short Form will be used to assess flourishing.

The following questions are about how you have been feeling during the past 30 days. Please respond using the following options: all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, a little of the time, or none of the time [show items individually and ask for response number]

About how often during the past 30 days did you feel:

- a. Nervous?
- b. Hopeless?
- c. Restless or fidgety?
- d. So depressed that nothing could cheer you up?
- e. That everything was an effort?
- f. Worthless?

Please read each statement below and choose the answer that best fits your experiences during social interactions. Please use the following response options:

Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Somewhat Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Somewhat Agree; Agree; Strongly Agree

1. When I am interacting with someone, I deliberately copy their body language or facial expressions.
2. I monitor my body language or facial expressions so that I appear relaxed.
3. I rarely feel the need to put on an act in order to get through a social situation.
4. I have developed a script to follow in social situations.
5. I will repeat phrases that I have heard others say in the exact same way that I first heard them.
6. I adjust my body language or facial expressions so that I appear interested in the person I am interacting with.
7. In social situations, I feel like I'm "performing" rather than being myself.
8. In my own social interactions, I use behaviors that I have learned from watching other people interacting.
9. I always think about the impression I make on other people.
10. I need the support of other people in order to socialize.
11. I practice my facial expressions and body language to make sure they look natural.
12. I don't feel the need to make eye contact with other people if I don't want to.
13. I have to force myself to interact with people when I am in social situations.
14. I have tried to improve my understanding of social skills by watching other people.
15. I monitor my body language or facial expressions so that I appear interested in the person I am interacting with.
16. When in social situations, I try to find ways to avoid interacting with others.
17. I have researched the rules of social interactions to improve my own social skills.
18. I am always aware of the impression I make on other people.
19. I feel free to be myself when I am with other people.
20. I learn how people use their bodies and faces to interact by watching television or films, or by reading fiction.
21. I adjust my body language or facial expressions so that I appear relaxed.
22. When talking to other people, I feel like the conversation flows naturally.
23. I have spent time learning social skills from television shows and films, and try to use these in my interactions.
24. In social interactions, I do not pay attention to what my face or body are doing.
25. In social situations, I feel like I am pretending to be "normal".

Section 6: Educational Success

The following are the kind of statements people use to describe themselves. Read each one carefully and decide the extent to which each statement applies to you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond to all items using the following response options: Strongly Agree; Agree; Slightly Agree; Neutral; Slightly Disagree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree.

1. I am confident that I can achieve good exam results if I really put my mind to it.
 2. If I don't understand an academic problem, I persevere until I do.
 3. When I hear of others who have failed their exams, this makes me all the more determined to succeed.
 4. I am confident that I will be adequately prepared for the exams by the time they come around.
 5. I tend to put off trying to master difficult academic problems whenever they arise.
 6. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to come to terms with many of the issues in my academic curriculum.
 7. I am convinced that I will eventually master those items on my academic course which I do not currently understand.
 8. I expect to give a good account of myself in my end-of-semester exams.
 9. I fear that I may do poorly in my end-of-semester exams.
 10. I have no serious doubts about my own ability to perform successfully in my exam.
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Section 7: Needs assessment

Please indicate your perceived importance of receiving guidance on the following skills using a 5-point scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important):

1. Maintaining friendships (social skills)
2. Disclosing one's diagnosis (self-advocacy skills)
3. Coping with change (self-regulation skills)
4. Coping with stress or emotional distress (emotional-regulation skills)
5. Developing interview skills (job skills)
6. Meeting educational goals (academic skills)
7. Finding community with other autistic or neurodivergent people
8. Learning how to "unmask" or stop hiding autistic traits
9. Learning about accessibility resources or accommodations on campus
10. Daily living skills (how to get groceries, fill a car with gas, etc.)
11. Dating or romantic relationships
12. Healthy boundaries in relationships
13. Substance use

Qualitative: Is there anything you would like to receive guidance on that was not mentioned above?

Section 8: Demographics and participant characteristics

Please select as many of the following types of relationships as you have had with autistic people:

- yourself
- your child
- your parent
- your sibling
- your spouse or partner
- your extended family member
- your friend
- your coworker
- your professor
- your fellow student
- your acquaintance
- other (please specify)

Which of the following do you use to describe your gender?

- Man (1)
- Woman (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Different identity (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)

Please indicate your race. White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern or Northern African, Other identity not included here, Prefer Not to Answer

Please indicate your ethnicity: Hispanic, Non-Hispanic, Prefer Not to Answer