



**MARCH 18-22, 2024**  
**SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

# It Is Not That Simple: Neurodivergent Intersectionality Microtalks

Monica Fan (She/They)

Sara M.E. Ventura (She/Her)

Brandii Hooker (she/her)

Adam Clewes-Boyne (He/Him)

Nathalie Mathe, PhD. (She/Her)

Aquamarine Schutter (They/Them)

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# The never ending quest to understand myself

Monica Fan (She/They)  
Game Designer @ Pipeworks  
@DesignerMonicat



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# My Autism Story

**1995**

Age 2

Autism diagnosis



**2021**

Age 28

Talk about my  
autism

# WHY?

## Didn't know it mattered.





**CPTSD**

**ADHD**

**Mental Illness**

**Chinese but  
bad at math**

**Pansexual**

**First Gen  
Immigrant**

**Autistic**

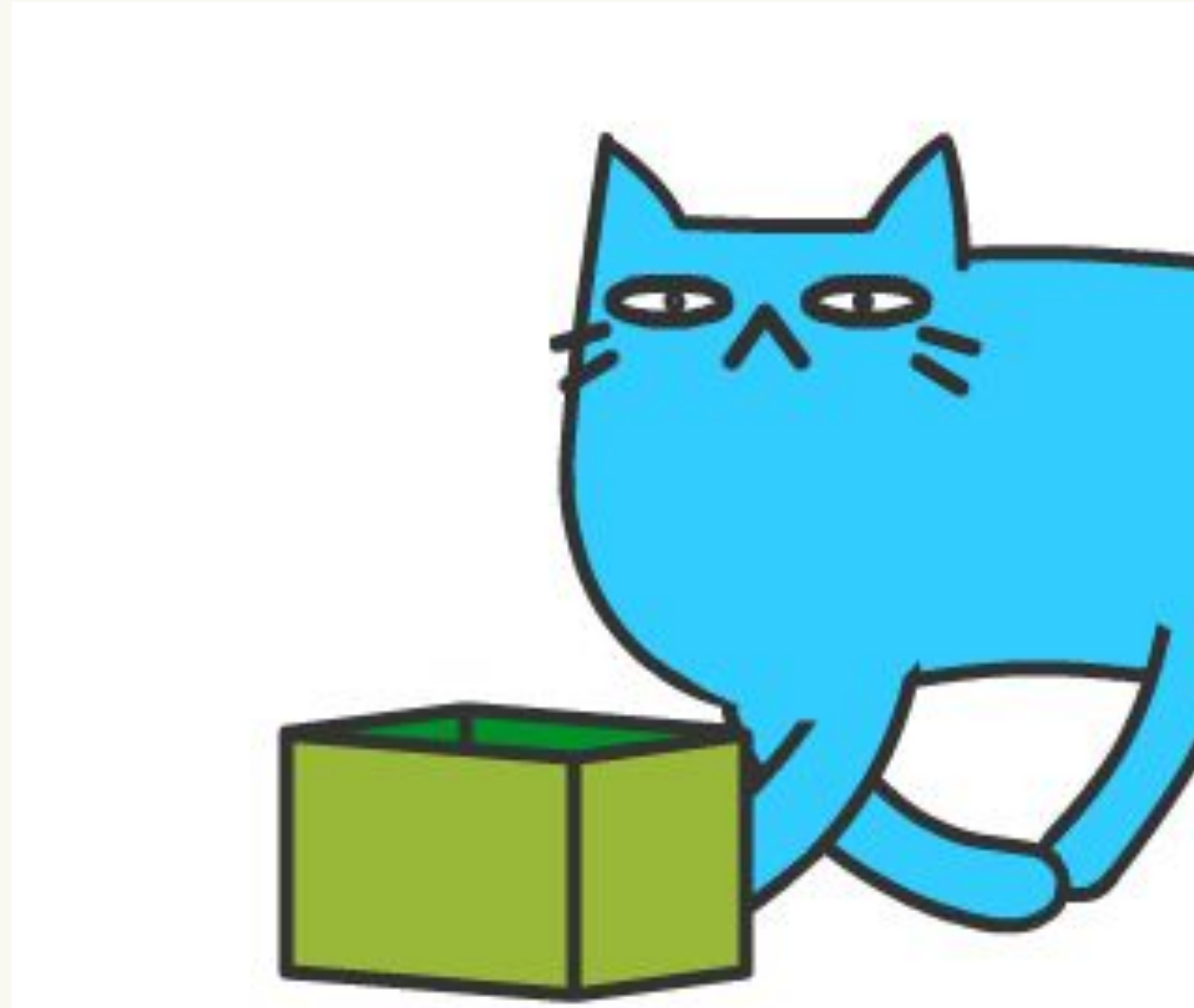
**Gender Queer**

**Physical  
Disabilities**

**SA Survivor**



# But...







**CELEBRATE  
NEURODIVERSITY**





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Brandii Hooker  
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@yoobrandii



Adam Clewes-Boyne  
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@chaosandcode



Nathalie Mathe, PhD.  
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@NativeVR



Aquamarine Schutter  
(They/Them)  
@otterboros

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# Next Up...

Sara M.E. Ventura  
(She/Her)  
@SvennaCirclet

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# Juggling the Masks

Sara M.E. Ventura (She/Her)

Senior Producer @ Zynga

@SvennaCirclet

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/saraventura/>

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# Introduction

**Sara M.E. Ventura**

10 yrs games industry XP: journalism, marketing, production, game writing

@**SvennaCirclet** everywhere.

**\*NOT a medical professional\***

Speaking on personal neurodiverse experiences in the games industry and life.



**XBOX**



UNIVERSITY of  
WASHINGTON



**UBISOFT**



AND MORE

# Masks?



# What is Masking?

## **Mask (verb)**

- to hide or conceal (something, such as one's motives or feelings)
- to cover (something) for protection

*To conform to societal norms*

Other similar terms: “Code switching, covering, social camouflaging, or assimilating.”

Everyone masks, not just neurodiverse people.



# Why Do People Mask?

- Safety
- Routine
- To be understood
- Social acceptance

# How I Decide Which Mask

- 1) Analyze the person I'm talking to
- 2) Decide which mask to use
- 3) Do my best to stay on this rollercoaster

OR

**Just go the 'roulette improv' route**





# Different Folks, Different Masks

Hypothetical Example

**Home** □ Anything goes (The most authentic 3D me)

**Work** □ 4 masks to choose from

**Extended Family** □ 2 masks ""

**Childhood Friends** □ 3 masks ""

**Acquaintances** -> □ 4 masks ""



# Impacts of Frequent Masking

- Silence
- Burnout
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Isolation
- Masking requires more “spoons”
- Imposter syndrome about one’s true identity



# What Can We Do?

- . Acknowledge feelings.
- . Return to a conversational “north star” or social script
- . Communicate needs or ask for a break
- . Set buffers before and after meetings/events
- . Establish boundaries now and in the future
- . Know that it’s okay to drop the mask/s



# Thank you!



Contact Info and Resources



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# Next Up

Brandii Hooker (she/her)

Founder of Brown Girl

Gamer Code, Community

Manager @ Gamefam

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# **GAME MODE:**

# **NEURODIVERGENCE**

Brandii Hooker (she/her)

Founder of Brown Girl Gamer Code,  
Community Manager @ Gamefam



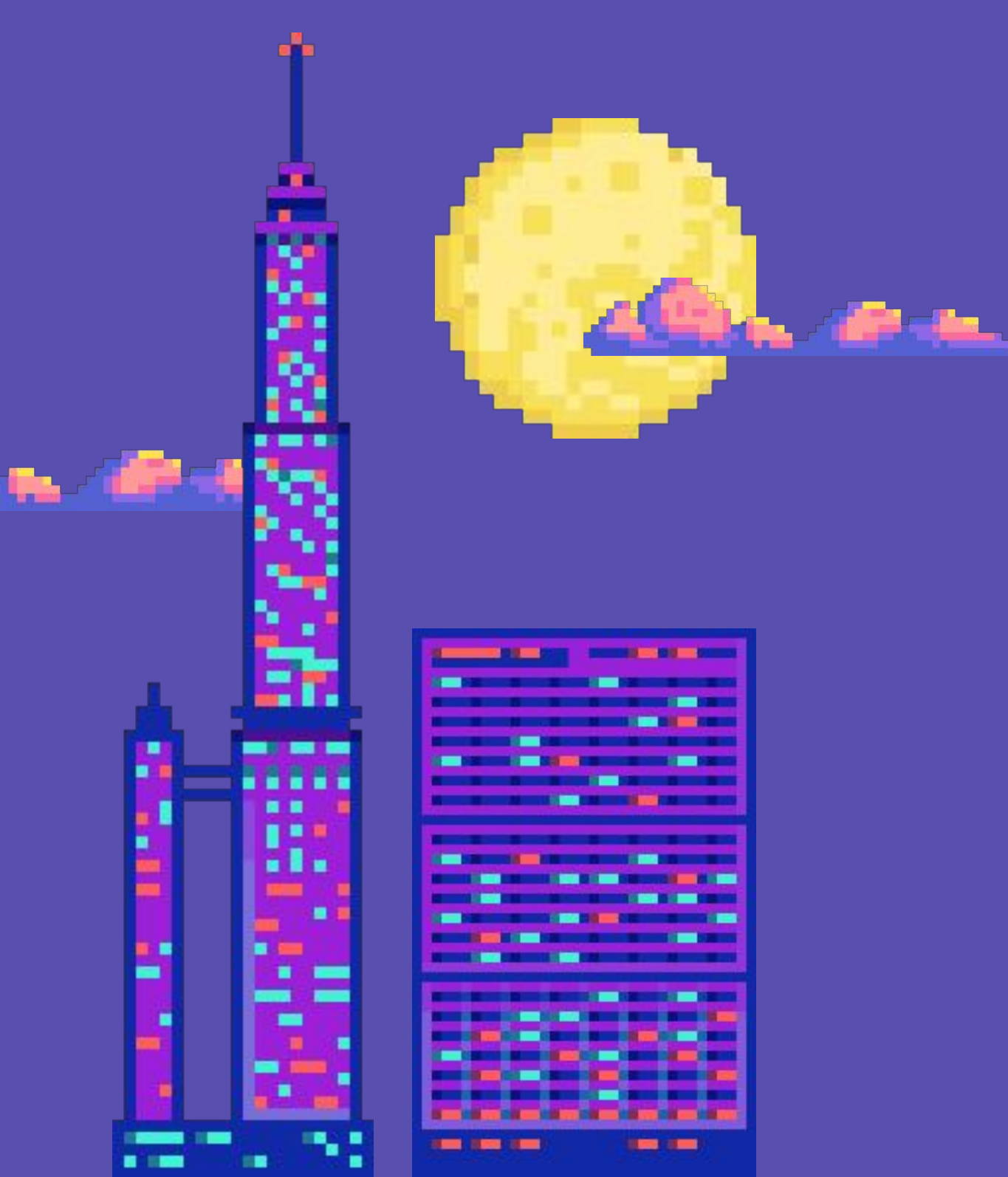
# GAME MODE:

NEURODIVERGENCE

LET'S START!

BRANDII HOOKER  
(SHE/HER)





# KEEP IN MIND



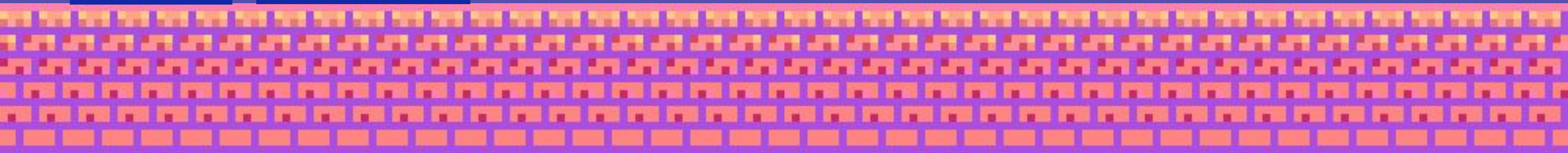
Points expressed reflect my  
lived experiences



I do not represent the experience  
of all neurodivergent Black  
women, though many can relate



Be Kind





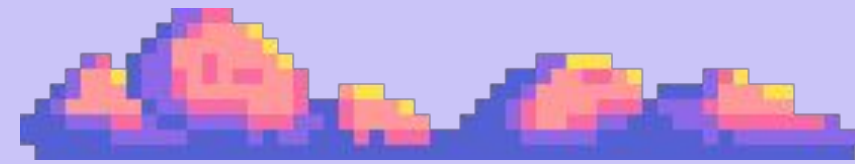


# HI! I'M BRANDII (YOOBRANDII).

- CAREER
  - FOUNDER OF BROWN GIRL GAMER CODE
  - COMMUNITY MANAGER
  - INTERVIEWER / HOST

- BACKGROUND
  - HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT AFFAIRS
  - CRISIS MANAGEMENT
  - COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

- PERSONAL
  - GAMING SINCE 6 YEARS OLD
  - HUGE HORROR FAN
  - ADHD / GENERAL ANXIETY

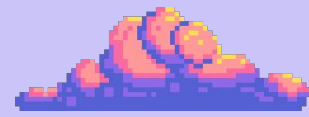


# MY ADHD JOURNEY

CONTINUE







# HOW IT STARTED

## • CHILDHOOD

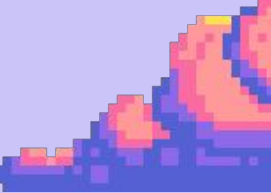
- Easily distracted, very talkative, outbursts and interruptions, which often resulted in punishment at school
- Hyperfixation, difficult to break focus
- Procrastination on “boring” tasks



# HOW ITS GOING

## • ADULTHOOD

- Therapy is where I discovered the possibility of having ADHD, along with being in community with other Black women who had a late diagnosis.
- Coping with Executive functioning: knowing what to do vs. doing it
- Understanding family history
- Brain fog and learning to mask
- Motivated by deadlines





# ADHD AND INTERSECTIONALITY





# BLACK WOMEN & NEURODIVERGENCE

ADHD doesn't discriminate but unfortunately, we live in a world that does...

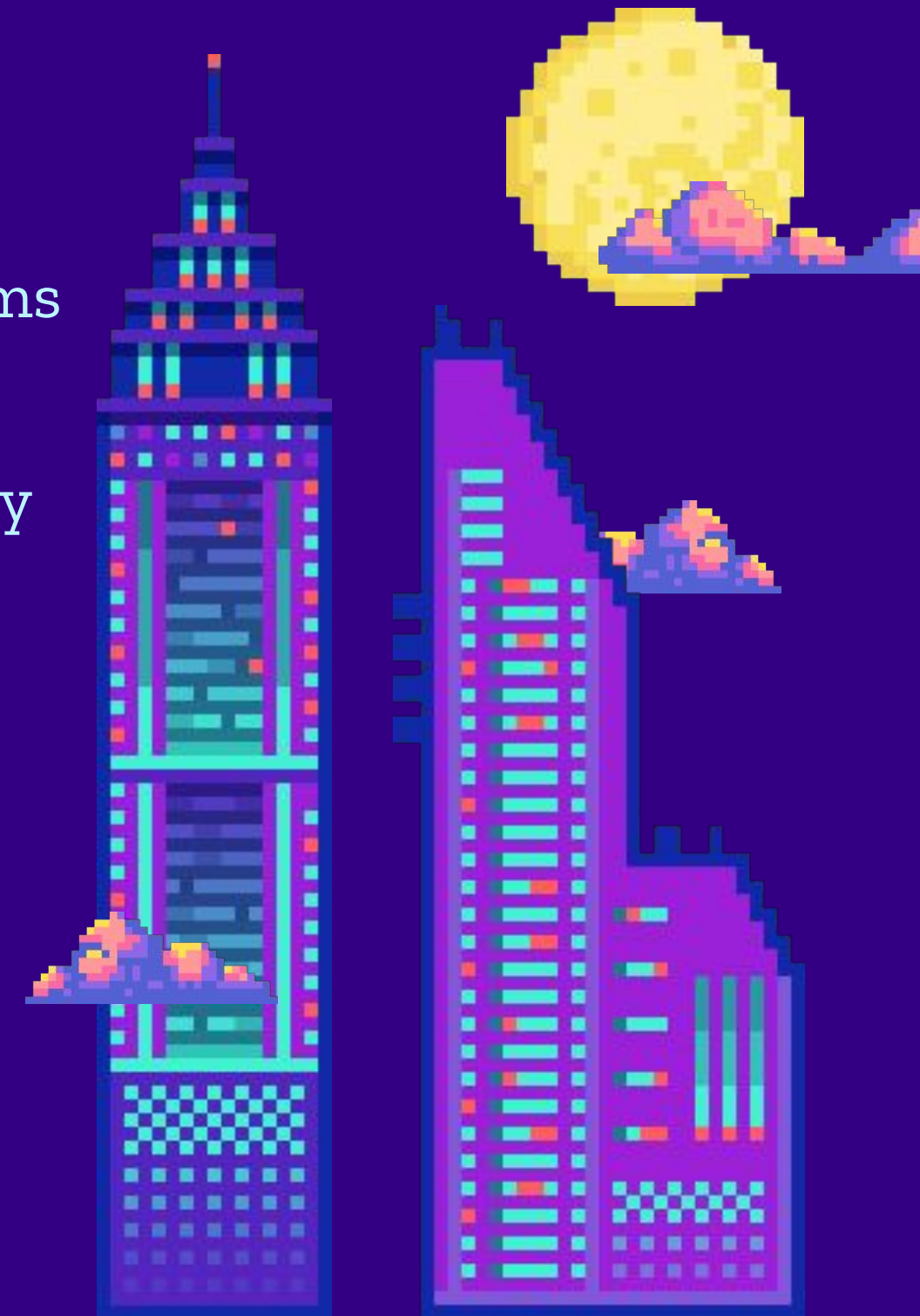
- Due to racial and gendered stereotypes
  - Boys are more likely to receive proper diagnosis
  - White kids are more likely than Black kids to receive proper diagnosis
  - Delays in Black girls and women diagnosis and treatment can lead to other issues like anxiety, self-doubt, depression, and low self-esteem
- Symptoms showing up differently
  - ADHD symptoms in Black girls and women are interpreted as negative behaviors and often lead to punishment or being reprimanded at work
    - Distracted easily = lack of care / concern, misbehaving
    - Impulsivity = acting out, carelessness, and irresponsible
    - Brain fog = spaced out, apathetic
    - Procrastination = lazy, lack of motivation





# BLACK WOMEN & NEURODIVERGENCE

- Black women are less likely to receive diagnosis
  - Cultural and social stigmas
  - Lack of understanding in healthcare in regards to ADHD symptoms in people who are not white and male
  - Distrust in medical providers by Black women
  - Lack of resources and education on ADHD in the Black community
- Struggling in Silence - The Superwoman Schema
  - Black women are socialized to provide strength, nurturing, and support to others, often to our own detriment
  - Assumed to be incredibly tough and unable to feel pain or tolerate high amounts of pain (especially by health care providers, our symptoms are often ignored.)
  - Not afforded the opportunity to express weakness or show vulnerability, or ask for help.
  - This causes a delay in seeking treatment





# HOW VIDEO GAMES HELP ME COPE

IM SORRY

I ONLY PLAY FOR SPORT



# HEALING THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

- FINDING COMMUNITY

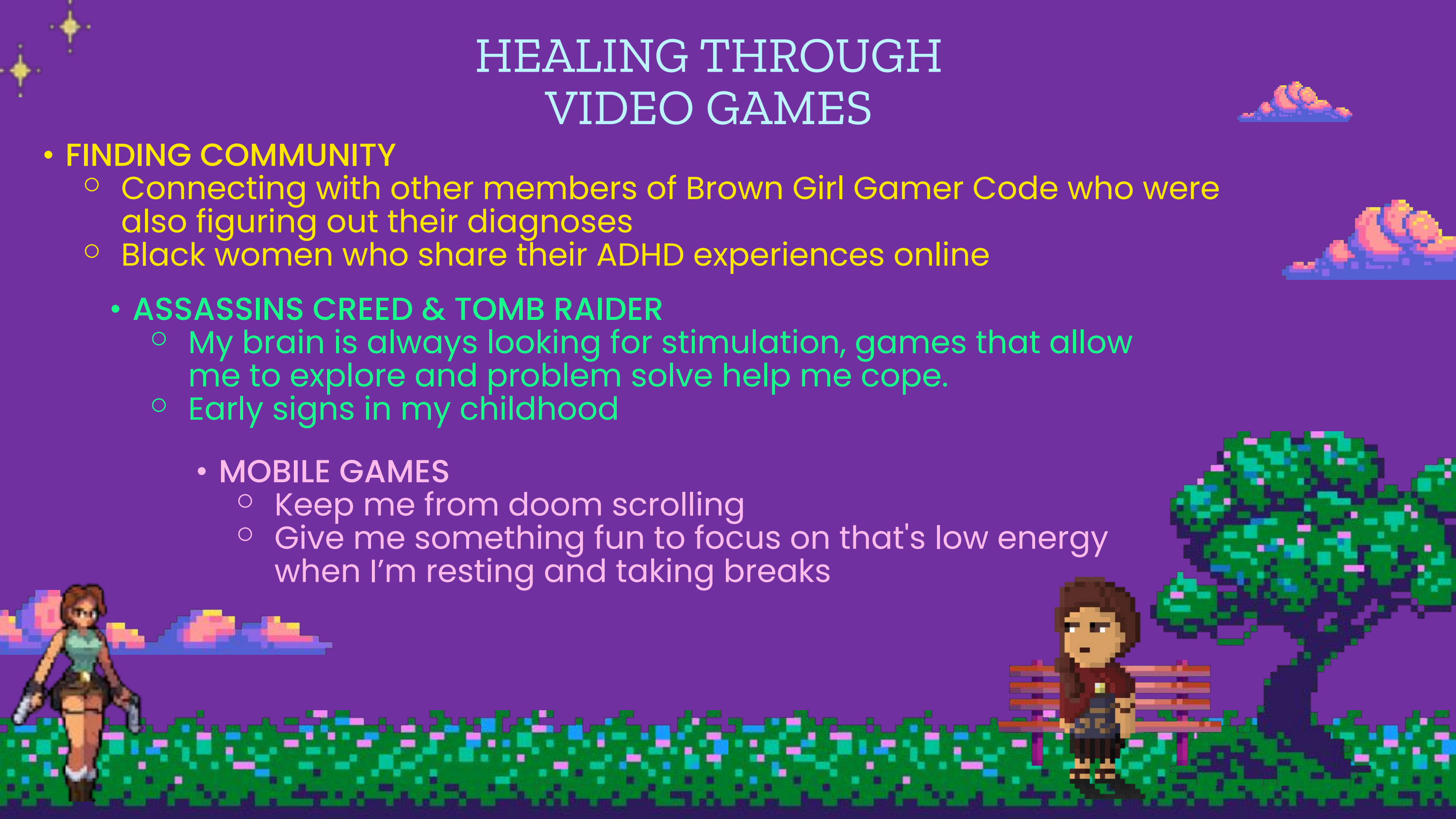
- Connecting with other members of Brown Girl Gamer Code who were also figuring out their diagnoses
- Black women who share their ADHD experiences online

- ASSASSINS CREED & TOMB RAIDER

- My brain is always looking for stimulation, games that allow me to explore and problem solve help me cope.
- Early signs in my childhood

- MOBILE GAMES

- Keep me from doom scrolling
- Give me something fun to focus on that's low energy when I'm resting and taking breaks







# HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **CHECK YOUR BIASES, LISTEN TO BLACK WOMEN**

- Check in with people on your team, especially if under your supervision
- Offer accommodations
- Practice empathy
- Make space, ask questions instead of assuming the worst

- **Check out these creators**

- @blkgirllostkeys
- @adulthoodadhd

- **Articles**

- <https://www.additudemag.com/neurodivergent-black-women-adhd-neurodiversity-movement/>
- <https://www.getinflow.io/post/black-women-and-adhd>



The background is a pixel art illustration of a night city scene. On the left, a tall sign reads 'FREE BIRTHDAY' in a pixelated font. In the center, a cake sits on a stand. To the right, a character with a crown and a long dress stands. The sky is dark blue with yellow stars and orange clouds. The foreground is a grid of blue and orange squares.

# THANK YOU FOR PLAYING

PLAY AGAIN



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# Next Up

Adam Clewes-Boyne (He/Him)  
Co Founder - BetaJester/Playing  
Attention  
@chaosandcode

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# Hidden From You: The Intersections You've Forgotten

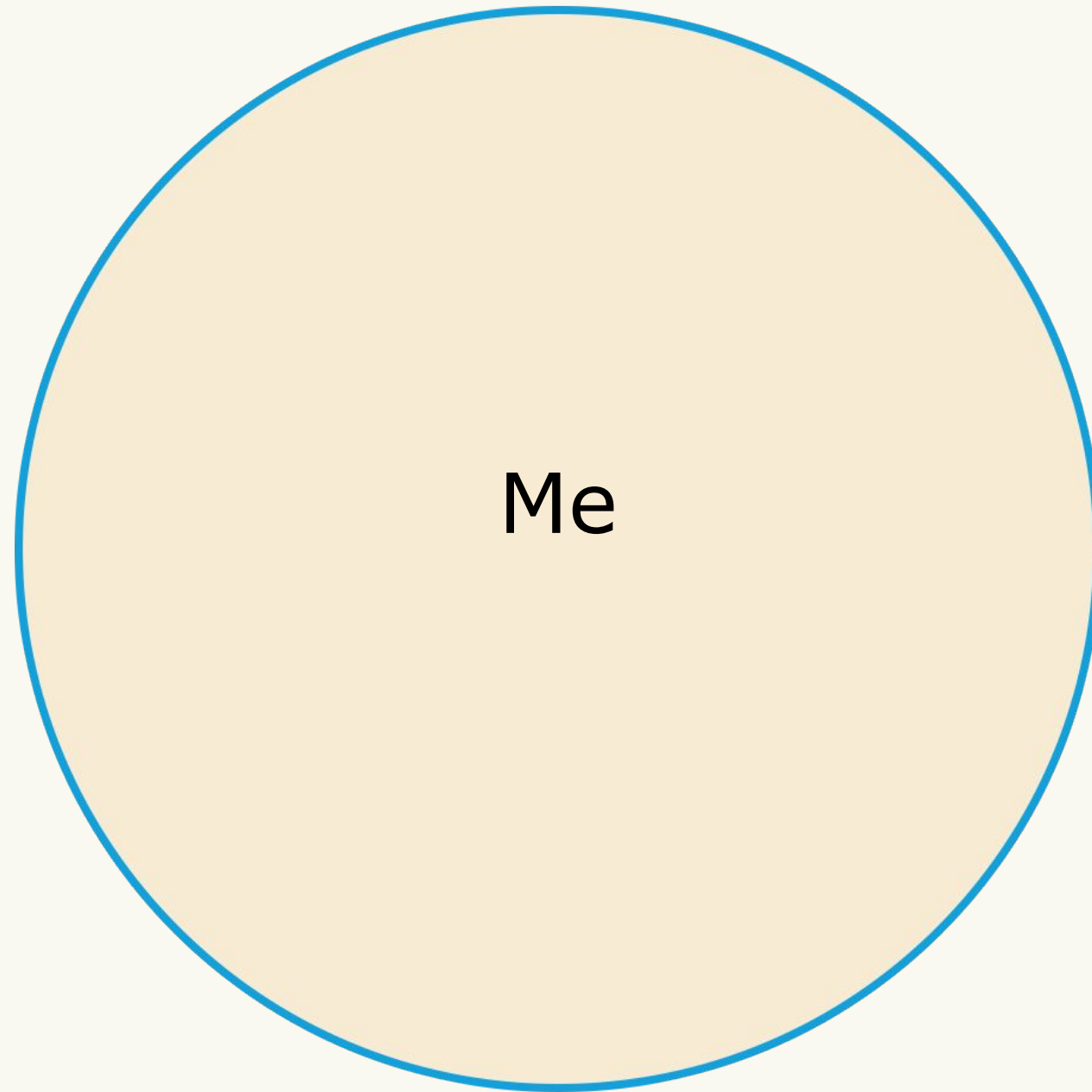
Adam Clewes-Boyne (He/Him)

Co Founder - BetaJester/Playing Attention  
@chaosandcode

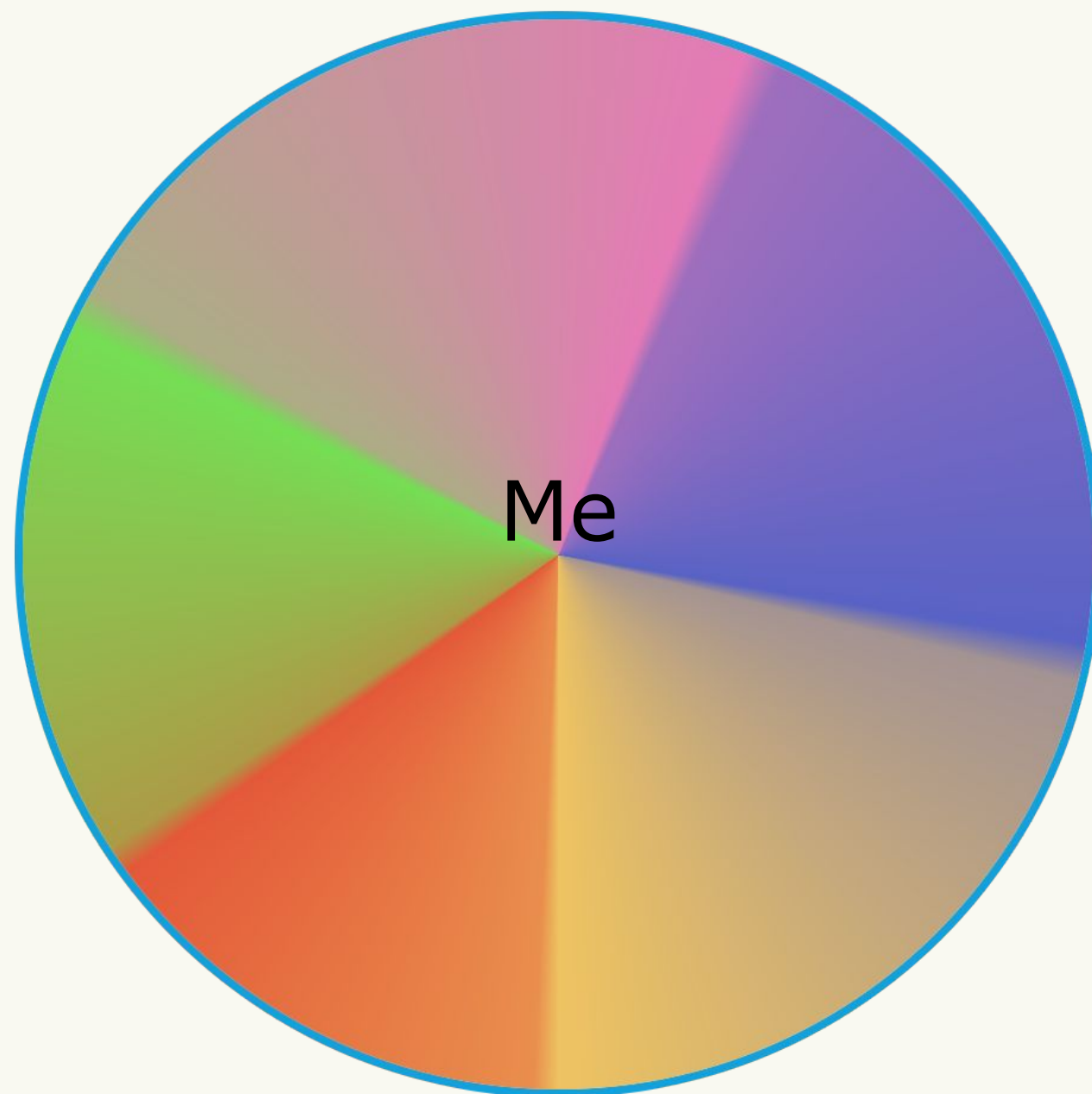
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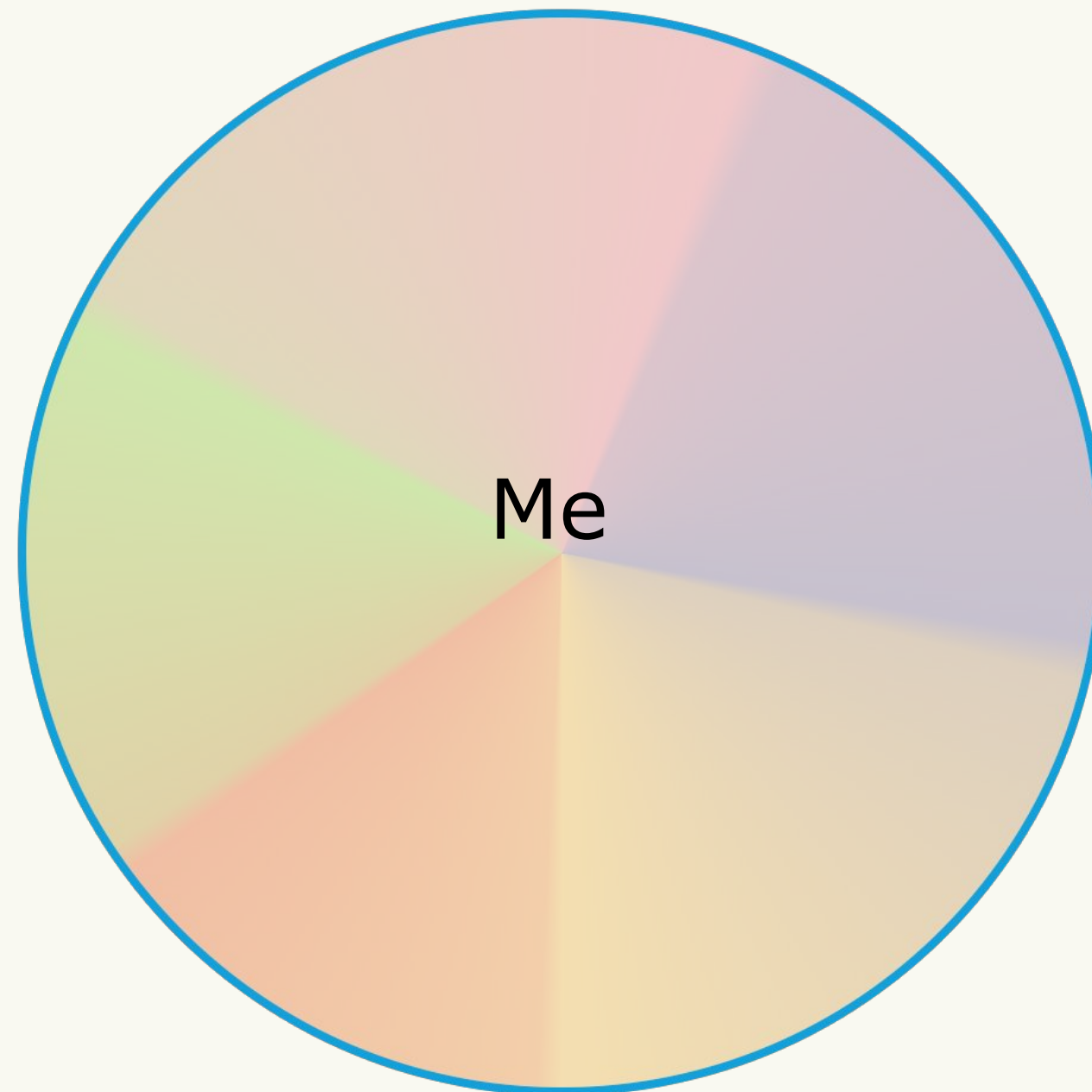
# Who Am I



# Who Am I

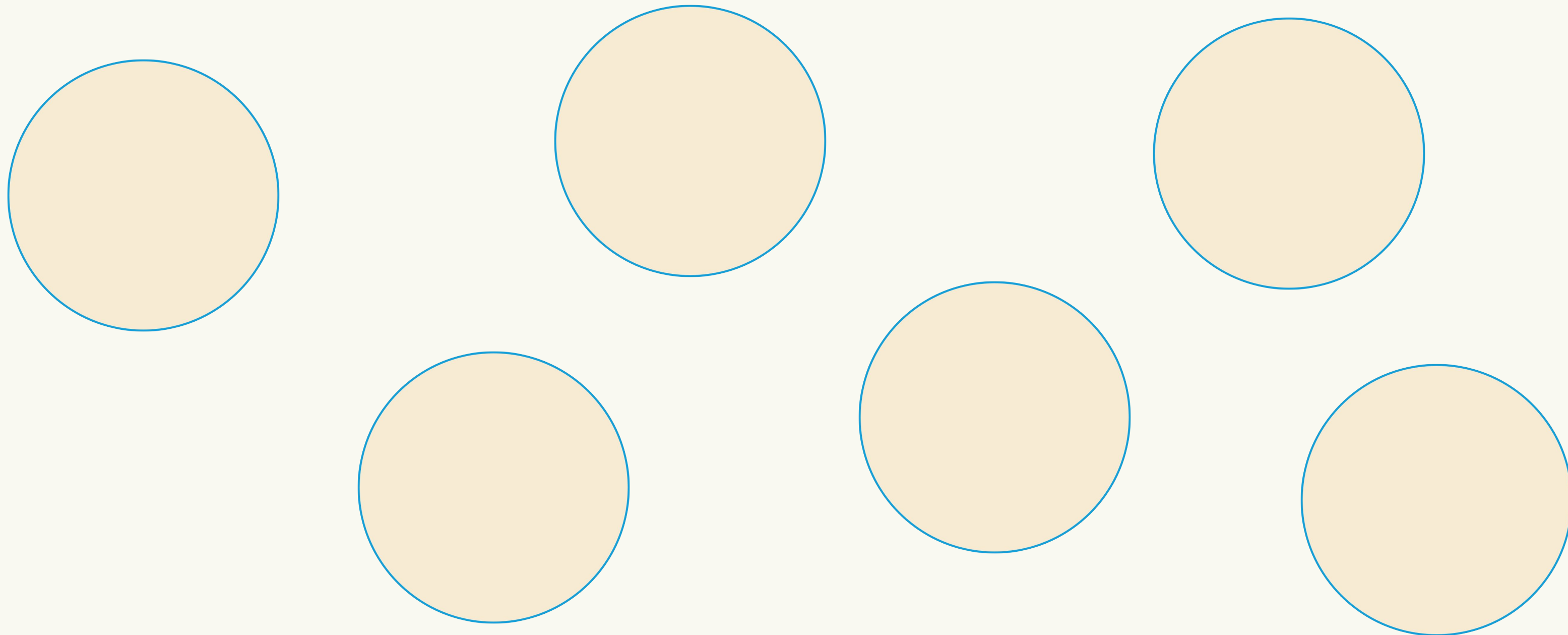


# Hidden From Me

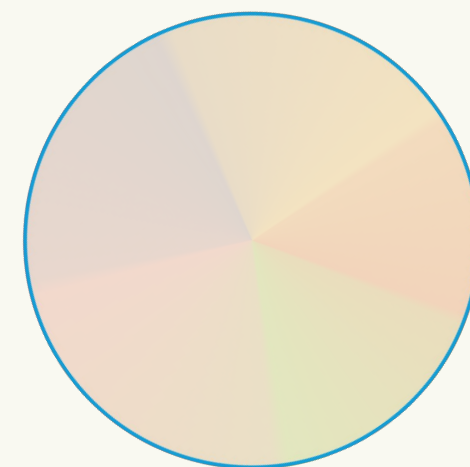
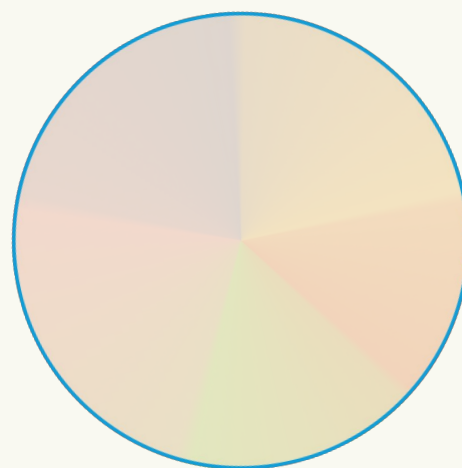
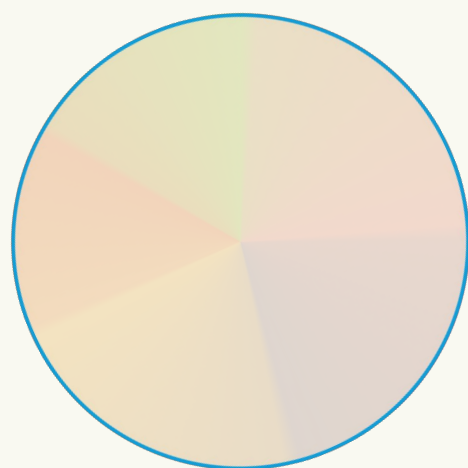
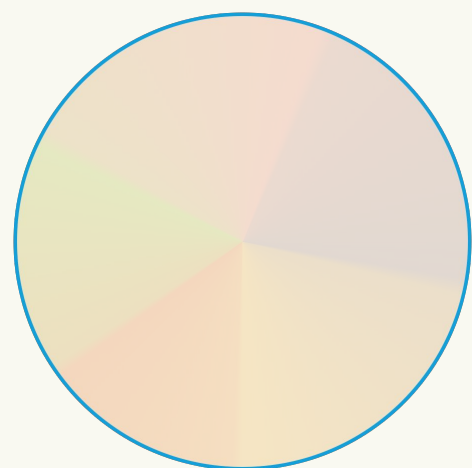




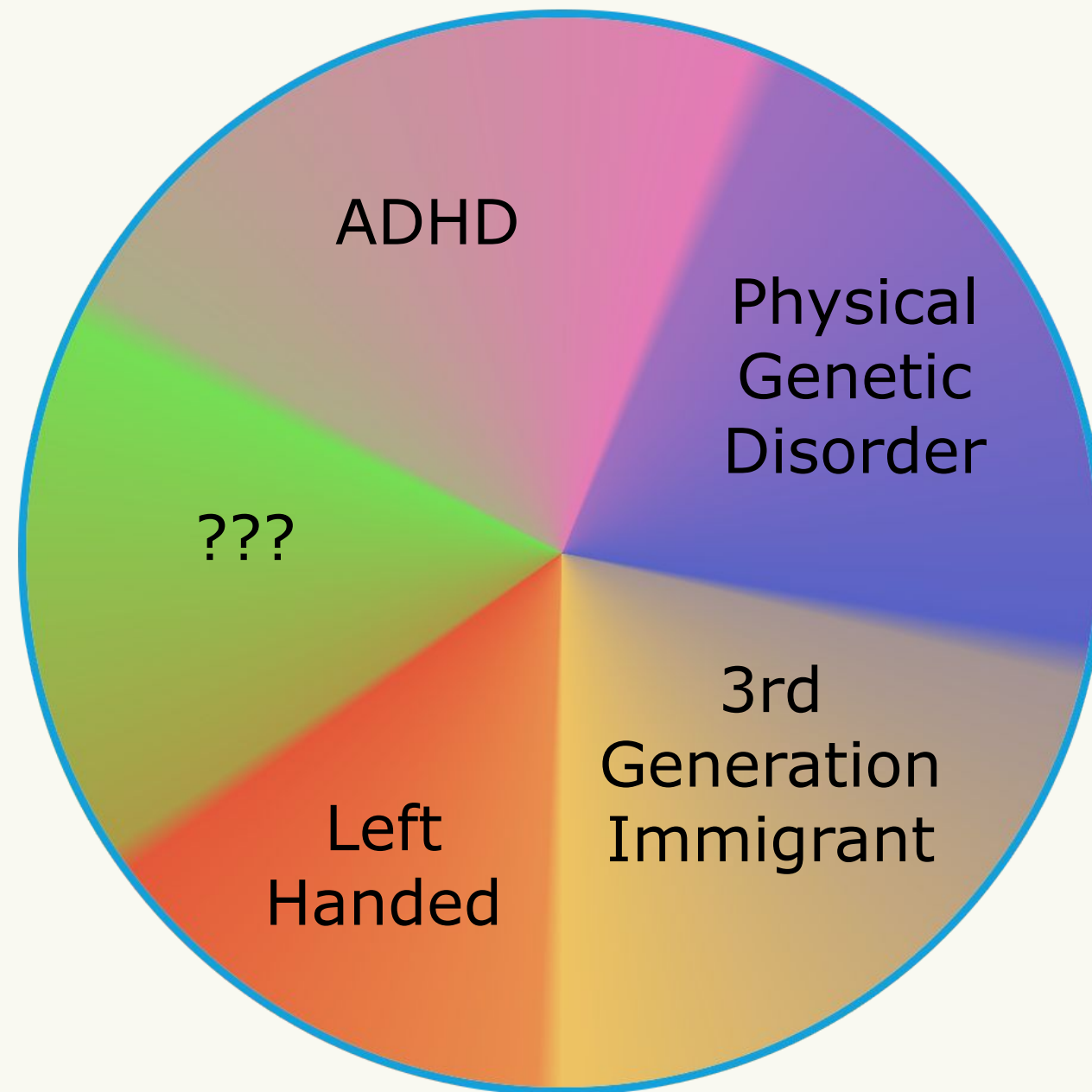
# Hidden From You



# Hidden From You



# Who Am I

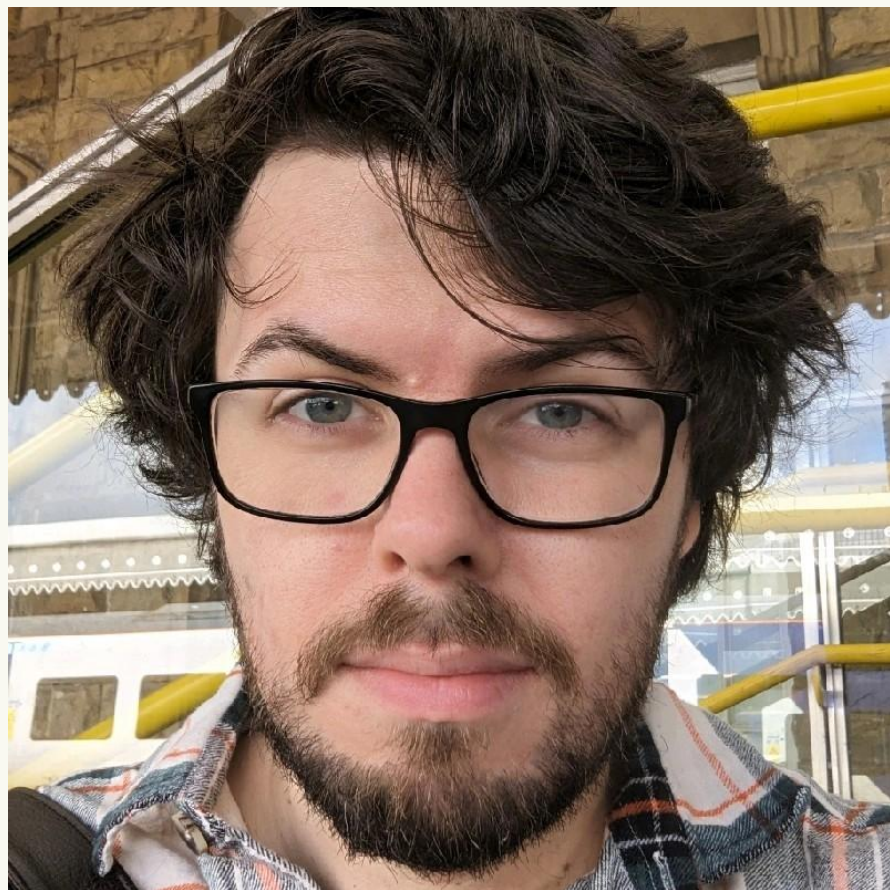




# Who Are You



# Who Am I



Adam Clewes-Boyne (He/Him)  
@chaosandcode



Playing Attention  
@ADHDInGames



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# Next Up

Nathalie Mathe, PhD. (She/Her)  
VR Creator @NativeVR  
Professor @Northeastern University

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# Leadership is a Combat Sport!

Nathalie Mathe, PhD. (She/Her)  
VR Creator @NativeVR  
Professor @Northeastern University  
Co-chair @IGDA ND SIG

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/nathaliemathe/>



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An abstract painting of a face, rendered in a highly expressive, textured style. The face is composed of various colors including blue, orange, pink, purple, and green, with thick, visible brushstrokes. The eyes are dark and hollow, and the overall composition is dynamic and colorful.

# Who am I?

Multi-cultural  
Female  
Neurodivergent  
Tech Leader  
Artist  
Adventurer  
for 30 years



# Who am I?

**Multi-cultural**

**Female**

**Neurodivergent**

**Tech Leader**

**Artist**

**Adventurer**

**for 30 years**

NASA AI Researcher (USA)

Animation & Visual Effects Lead  
Artist (France, UK, Canada)

VR Director-Producer (USA)

University Professor (USA)

PhD in CS, MA in Media Arts, MS in  
Physics, BS in Math, BS in Physics  
+++

Extreme Sports, Airplane Pilot,  
Scuba diver, Skydiver



# What was the hidden cost?

Artist Jarek Kubicki <https://kubicki.info>

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# What was the hidden cost?

Migraines

Masking

Anxiety

Emotional rollercoaster

2 Burnouts

Relational struggles

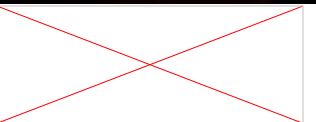
Depression

Isolation, feeling unseen

Physical Illness

# Leadership positives

Sometimes it's awesome!





# Leadership positives

Sometimes it's awesome!

Mentoring others

Making a difference

Successful Project

Team spirit – Creative flow

Supportive managers

Positive teammates relations

Good work-life balance

Feeling seen & heard

# Leadership challenges -

## Why is it a combat sport?

Political power fights



Stabbed in the back,  
spied on, rumors spread



Discrimination against  
women in tech



Denied public speaking  
opportunities

Team fired without my consent

Conflict Management



Work Overload to prove oneself  
or feel accepted

Lack of support from my  
managers



# How to become a Master ND Leader?

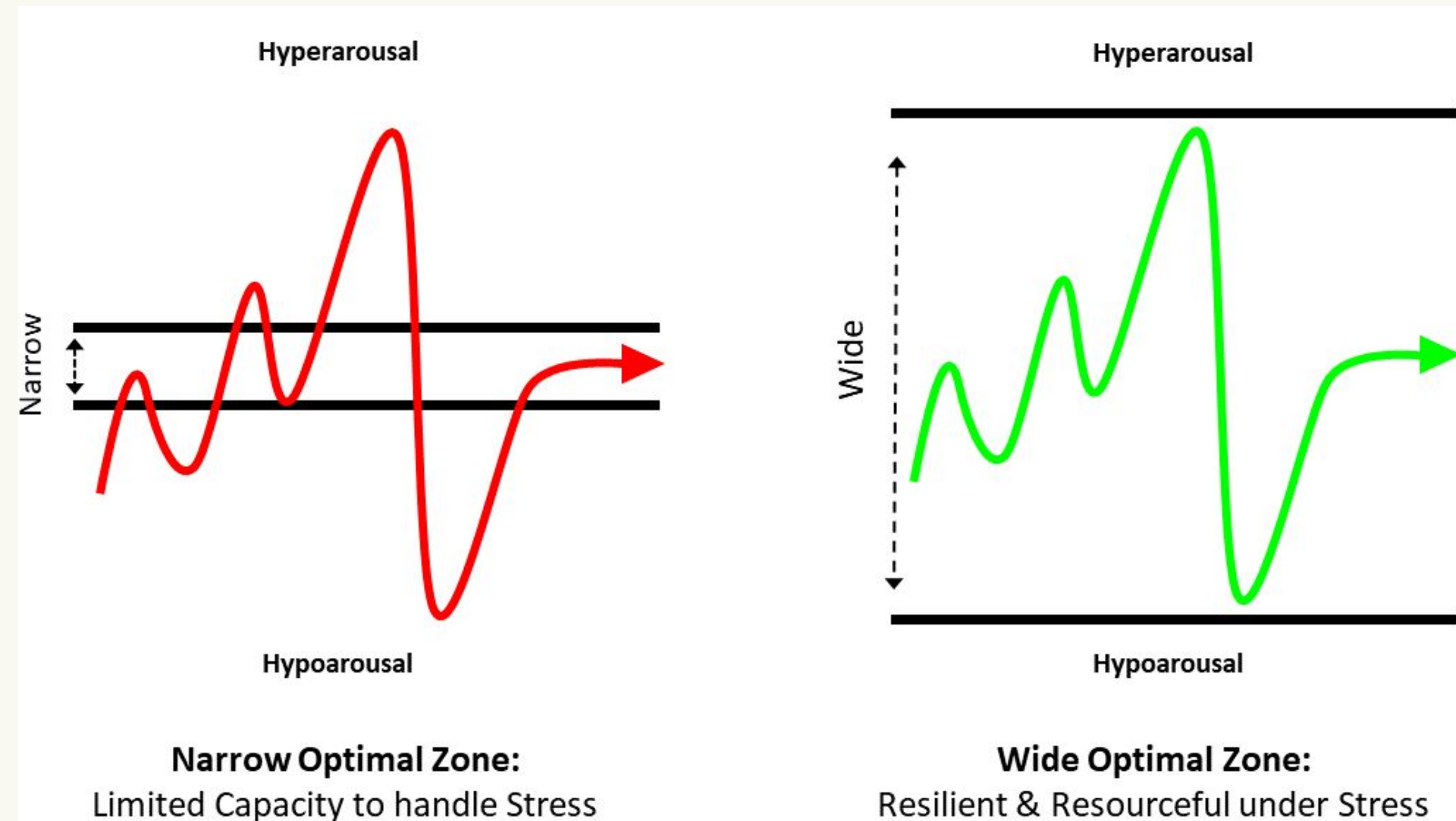
Learning to ride the big waves with grace, courage and authenticity

Malik Joyeaux. Photo: [Sean Davey](#)



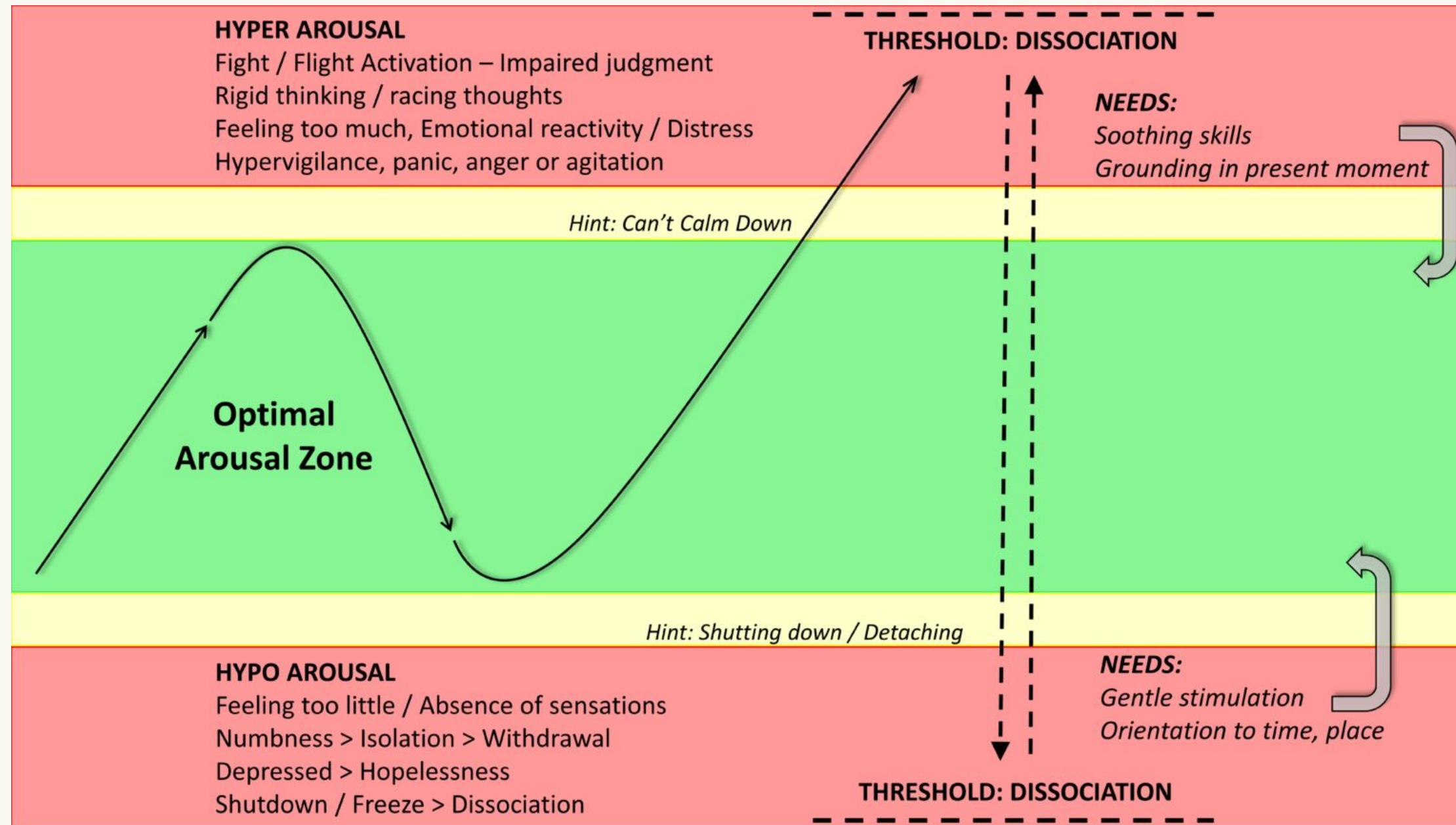
# How to become a Master ND Leader?

Learning to ride the big waves with grace, courage and authenticity



<https://mi-psych.com.au/understanding-your-window-of-tolerance/>

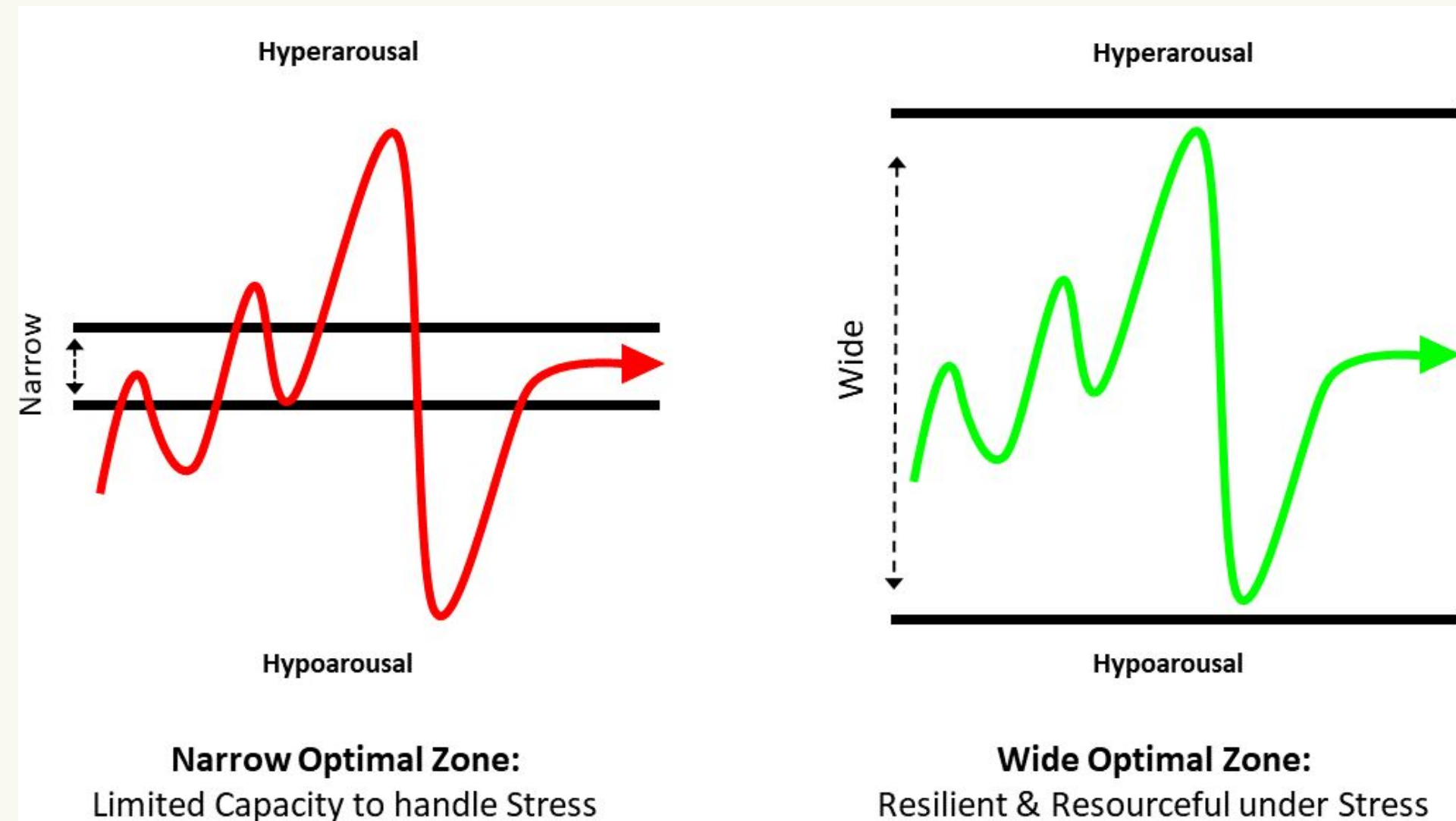
# Window of Tolerance (by Dr. Dan Siegel)



<https://mi-psych.com.au/understanding-your-window-of-tolerance/>

# How to become a Master ND Leader?

Learning to ride the big waves with grace, courage and authenticity



<https://mi-psych.com.au/understanding-your-window-of-tolerance/>



# How to become a Master ND Leader?

Learning to ride the big waves with grace, courage and authenticity

Put **your** physical, mental, emotional **health First**

Identify your unique **gifts** and their dark sides if you do not **protect them**

Learn to **Balance** all your gifts:  
emotional – intellectual – creative  
– relational – sensory – physical



A word cloud of terms associated with neurodiversity, including: movement, curiosity, complexity, justice, sensory, sensitivity, connections, high emotions, high energy, imagination, empathy, thinking, analytic, regulation, nervous system, seeking, sensation, large picture, creativity, deep learning, meaning, self-awareness, and system.

# How to become a Master ND Leader?

Learning to ride the big waves with grace, courage and authenticity

Learn practices to bring your nervous system from Fear to **Safety**

Shift your mindset from Scarcity to **Abundance & Gratitude**

Set and communicate your **Boundaries**

Identify appropriate **work cultures & people**

Develop your own **support group**

Learn to lead with **Presence, Authenticity & Vulnerability**

# My ND-friendly Organizations

## Types of Organizations:

- ❑ Flexibility, little hierarchy
- ❑ Project-based culture
- ❑ Development and needs of employees are important
- ❑ Room for productive conflicts
- ❑ Power & influence acquired through expertise & dedication (not position)
- ❑ Managers focus on output and good working conditions (not procedures)

## Safe & Stimulating Work Environment:

- ❑ High degree of individual responsibility
- ❑ Room to take initiative
- ❑ Make mistakes & learn
- ❑ Atmosphere of respect
- ❑ Positive social relations
- ❑ Constructive criticism
- ❑ Avoid routine tasks



# There is hope!

Society desperately needs neurodivergent talents right now

## Personal list of Resources:

- ❖ Befriending your Nervous System
- ❖ EFT/Tapping for anxiety
- ❖ Healing past wounds with somatic breathwork
- ❖ Non-Violent Communication
- ❖ Co-Presence & Embodied leadership
- ❖ Neuroscience of Change
- ❖ The Rainforest Mind



*Note of caution:* some practices designed by neurotypical people might need to be adapted for your neurodivergent needs, not everything is relevant or right.



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# Next Up

Aquamarine Schutter  
(They/Them)  
@otterboros

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# Neuroqueer and You!

Aquamarine Schutter

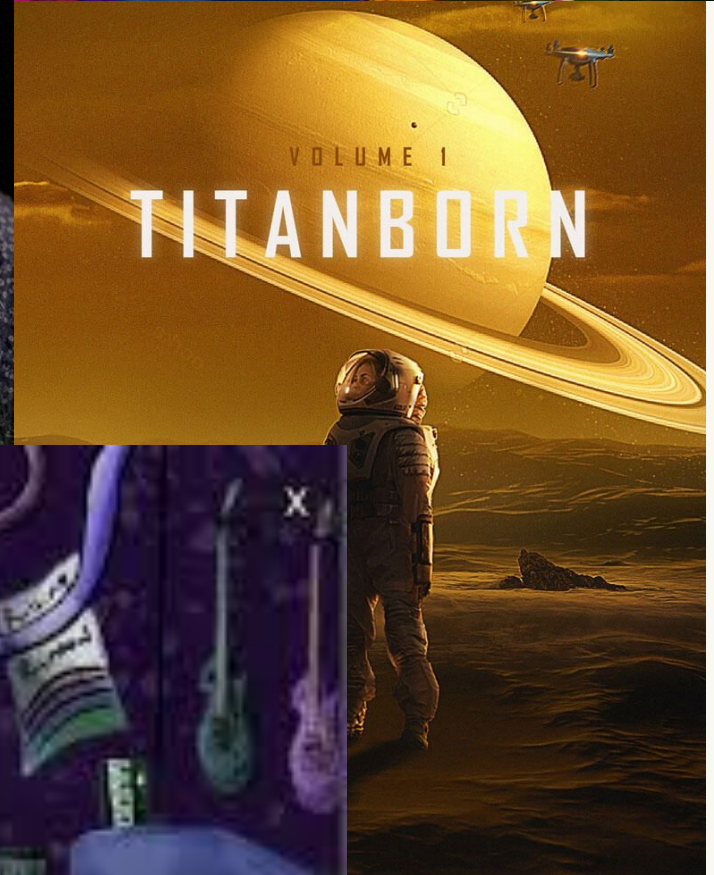


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# Who am I?

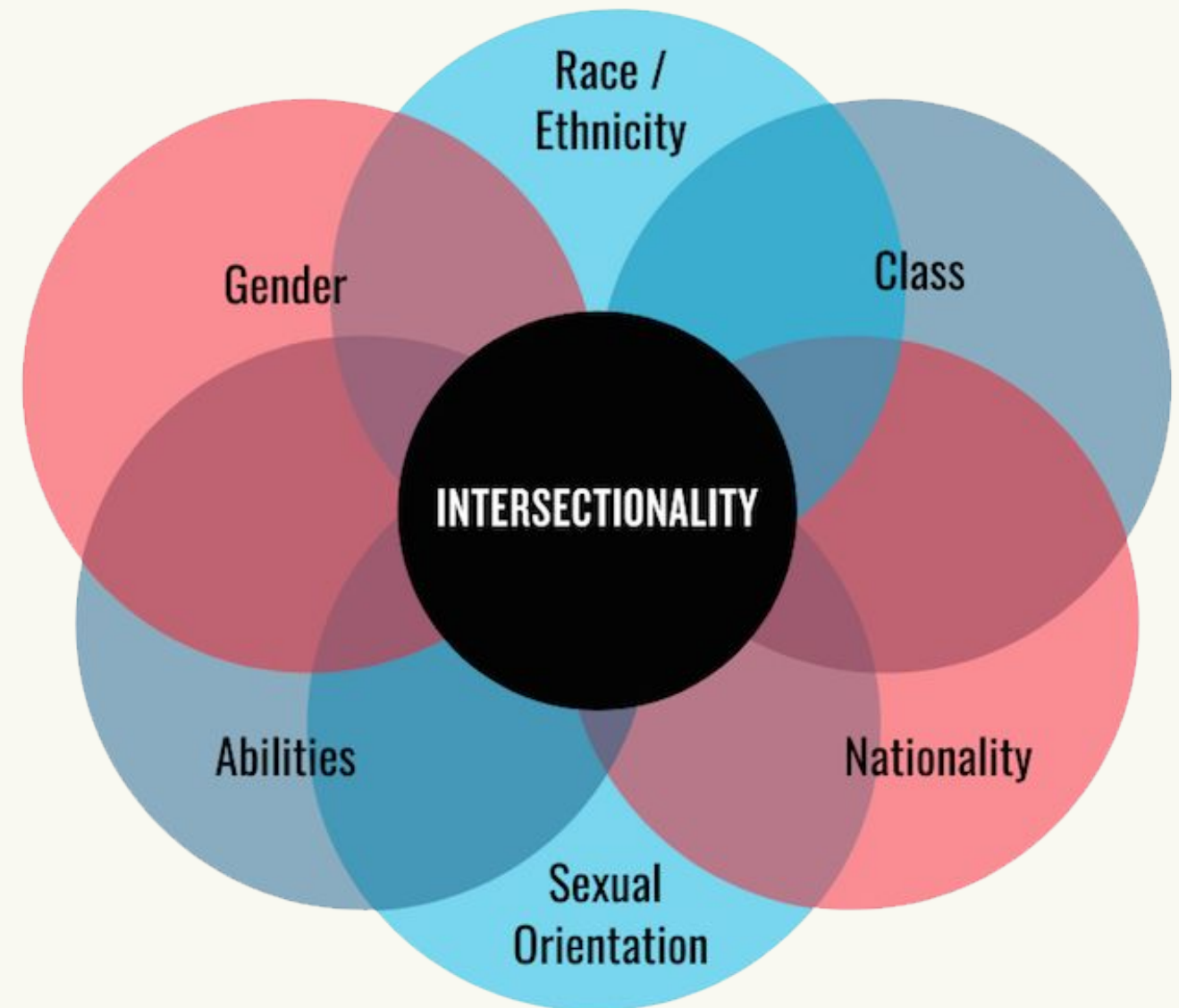
- Gameplay Programmer
- Technical Narrative Designer
- Neuroqueer

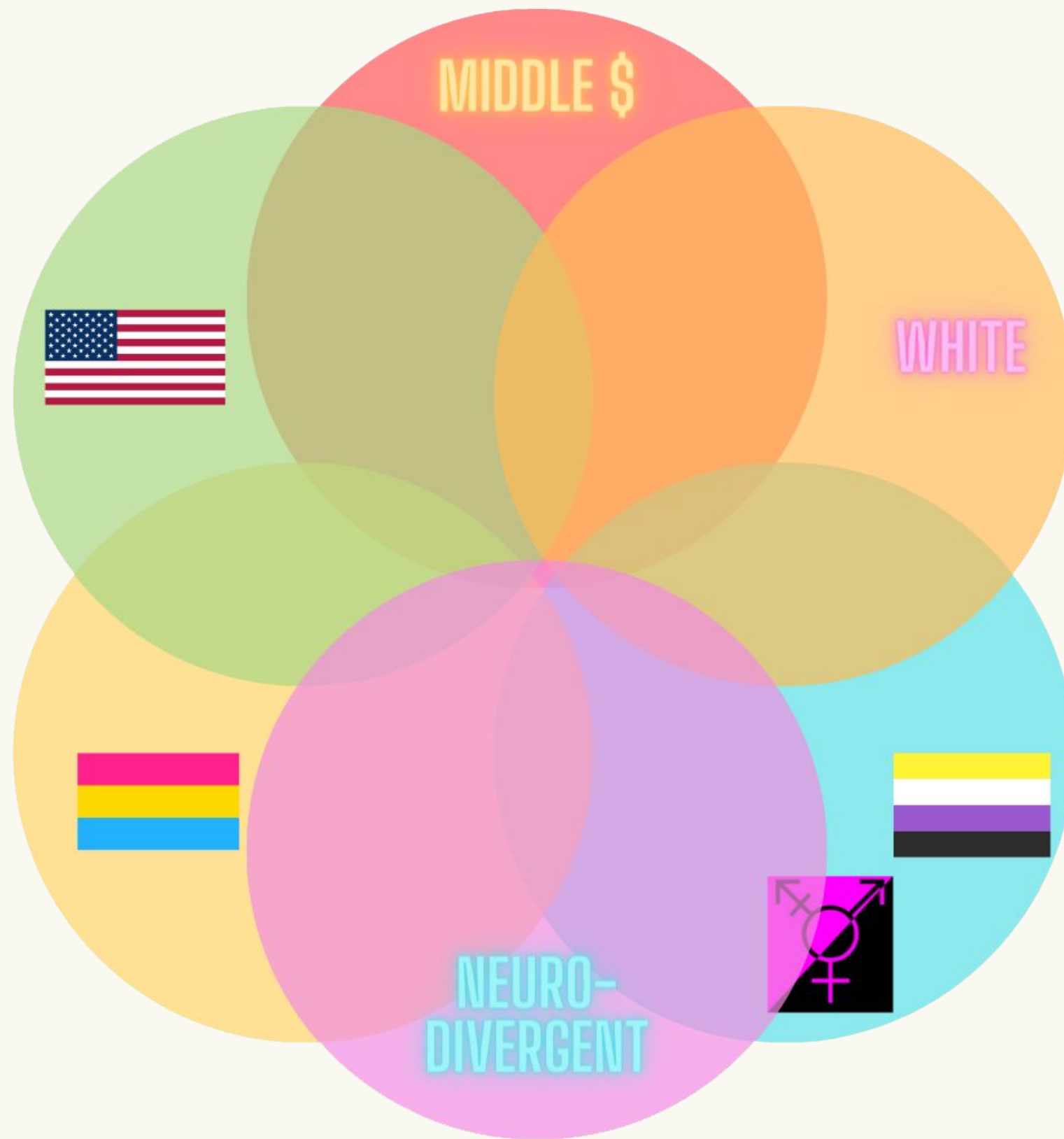




# Intersectionality

“the law seemed to forget that black women are both black and female”







**White**

**Middle to Upper  
Class**

**Male**

**Cisgender**

**Heterosexual**

**Neurotypical**



# *Management*





# **I'm a manager.**

**How can I improve the workplace  
experience of a neuroqueer  
employee?**

# Set clear expectations for your project.



# Use clear communication.

# Avoid othering.



**Mistakes happen.**

**That's ok.**

**Foster transformative, not  
punitive, justice.**

# I'm a neuroqueer worker!

## How do I navigate this environment?

**Set clear boundaries, even  
before you're hired.**



**Don't go it alone.**

**I want to see your voice in  
games!**

# Resources







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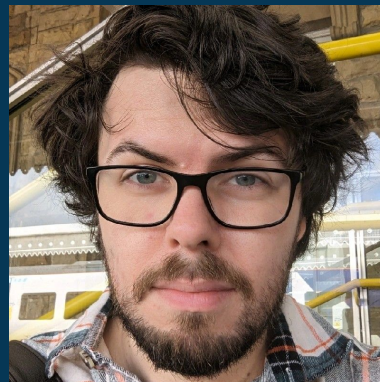
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