

## **Teleneuro: Results and Findings from a Neurodivergent TTRPG Design Workshop**

**Abstract:** In the Fall of 2024, I ran a Neurodivergent Tabletop Roleplaying Game (TTRPG) Design Workshop, bringing together Neurodivergent Scholars, Activists, and Game Designers in a story-telling and community-building initiative. The purpose of the workshop was to observe instances of TTRPG design done by and for neurodivergent individuals with a heavy emphasis on allowing anyone playing the game to tell their neurodivergent story. In this presentation, I display the TTRPG media artefact resulting from the workshop as my object text and explain the thematic design choices that went into the neurodivergent representation. I supplement this work by drawing from an array of disability media theorist such as Christa Mullis, Kathleen C. Sitter et al., Kara Stone, Adrienne E. Raw, and Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick.

The research question I use to focus my work is: How can we approach TTRPG design to respectfully include and acknowledge the diverse experiences of neurodivergence while still being critical of disabling politics and social injustice in the real world? This will be approached from two angles: 1) navigation of the social and physical environments illustrated through the game mechanics; and 2) relatable neurodivergent themes within the narrative.

Concerning game mechanics, the TTRPG design will have neurodivergent-informed methods of taking action and navigating the world for the players' characters. I observe instances where mechanics that represent neurodiversity within the player characters thematically exemplify neurodivergent values and understandings of the world. By observing the mechanics available to the player, I develop an understanding of how neurodivergent stories are and are not approached by the workshop participants.

Concerning narratives, the neurodivergence of the characters play into the story that is made and interpreted entirely by the players. Therefore, the framing of the story provided by the game system sets a precedent of what the players' expectations might be. For example, the dark fantasy genre of TTRPGs tends to implicate tragedy so depictions of characters with neurodivergence are not afforded a positive setting to frame themselves in. Within the narrative, we can observe how neurodivergent stories is framed and depicted by the workshop participants.

**Bio:** Giuseppe Femia holds an English PhD Candidate from the University of Waterloo. He previously completed a double major for his Bachelor of Arts, in English, Rhetoric, Media, and Professional Communication & Honours Arts and Business, as well as a Master of Arts, in Rhetoric and Communication Design, both at Waterloo.

Giuseppe's current research in game studies, media studies, queer studies, disability studies, and performance studies observes different types of gaming media and the appeal it has to its audience. He previously presented his work on queer reparative play and Dungeons & Dragons at the Transformative Play Initiative Seminar in Visby, Sweden, and then had it published as a peer-reviewed article in the International Journal of Role-Playing.

Giuseppe is now partnering up with other scholars researching the intersection of disability studies and game studies to broaden the horizons of the growing field.