Goldfox interview

KA: So as I think I said in the intro call this should take around an hour at around the midway point we'll probably take a five minute break, although it's completely up to you. Some of our participants like to just continue on because they feel like they're in the flow of answering questions. Um so we'll kind of once we get to that halfway point we'll check in and see how you're feeling

Goldfox: Great

KA: But the first few questions they're a little bit broad um so feel free to interpret it however you want. It's kind of just a bit of an icebreaker question to get you into the feeling of answering these interview questions. Um but I'd like to know a little bit about you and that can include your likes and dislikes hobbies all of that kind of stuff

Goldfox: Ok ((pause)) Er what were the what are the questions?

KA: So um (.) let's say what would you like me to get to know about you?

Goldfox: Uh well I'm not sure (.) well like (.) what would you need to know?

KA: Um I mean this is just more of as I said getting you into the flow of interviews. So anything that

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: I guess anything that that makes you happy that's quite a nice way to start

Goldfox: I real- I like (.) I guess hobbies I like playing video games and I like bouldering

KA: Ohh cool I've been doing a little bit of bouldering recently but I'm ((overlaps)) really not very good

Goldfox: ((overlaps)) Oh have you? ((end overlap))

KA: ((laughs)) I suck

Goldfox: Everyone starts somewhere. What's you what's your favourite terrain type?

KA: Um so I've only ((exhales)) I've done it once or twice outside at I think in a place called Portland

Goldfox: Oh outside?

KA: But then mostly I've just done um where have I been? I've been to Vauxwall in London. That was where I

Goldfox: So I go to the I go to the [REMOVED] that's nearer to my house

KA: Ah

Goldfox: But by terrain type I mean like slab overhang cave or that thing that kind of stuff. What's your favourite?

KA: Oh (.) I'm real- I know my least favourite is like overhang because I feel like that's so like you need to be real- I think you need to be really really strong for that and kind of like be able to pull your body in right?

Goldfox: Yeah it takes a lot of core strength to it. My favourite type is slab

KA: Yeah yeah I think maybe also too but I definitely need to like do more of it. A lot of my friends are super into like all types all types of climbing and like with belay and everything and I wanna I wanna be able to go on like trips with them but I need to build up some strength first ((laughs)) um

Goldfox: Well on like the slab walls and stuff you don't need as much strength as overhang and stuff like it's a lot slab's a lot less strength focused and more technique focused

KA: Yeah it's still quite um I think it's almost the mental strength thing as well because I get a bit scared even when it's just you know it's not so high off the ground but it's still feels when I'm climbing up like I'm really high up

Goldfox: Oh especially I get that as well especially for like dyno moves and stuff where you're jumping up to a hold I mean especially when you're high up on the wall that's very stressful

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Well not stressful it's just scary because if you fall you're gonna fall the whole way down

KA: Mm how long have you been bouldering for?

Goldfox: Five months now

KA: Wow I mean that's you I feel like that's really quick to be like (.) doing dyno moves and everything. How often do you do you go?

Goldfox: Uh once a week

KA: OK Wow

Goldfox: I've only ever missed it once

KA: You must be really naturally talented to like ((overlap)) pick it up so quickly

Goldfox: ((overlap)) I'mma ((end overlap)) I'm quite a natural climber. The highest grade I've done so far is a V6 but that was a lot of work

KA: That's really that's so impressive yeah. I mean I ((stutters)) I really don't go very often at all and I think I the most I've done is like a ((exhales)) maybe like a V3 or a V4 with my friends telling me where to put my hands and legs and I mean I've not been doing it regularly but I've been doing it since like for a few years now so yeah

Goldfox: That's still impressive though I feel like V3 and V4 are the grades where it's like someone who's never climbed before wouldn't be able to climb V3 and V4 on their first session. I go to that like that grade area

KA: Yeah yeah definitely definitely. Um there is there's no way I could have done a V3 or V4 in my first- I think the first time I stuck to actually cause there's V0 isn't there

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah I feel like that Was what I did my entire first time um (.) cool. Um so yeah that's really lovely. I do (.) I do gymnastics a little bit that's my kind of sport but I'm again I'm not great at it but I like doing it. It's (.) it's fun um ((laughs))

Goldfox: I'm not very good at gymnastics and stuff. I'm not very flexible

KA: Yeah I am flexible. I think what I lack in strength I like to think I make up for in flexibility ((laughs)). Um cool. So moving on a little um to talk more about your experiences of autism and I guess your journey with getting a diagnosis for that. Um would you mind telling me a little bit about sort of you know how old you are when you received the diagnosis and (.) kind of the effect this had for you?

Goldfox: It was it last year I was either thirteen or fourteen when I got it and

KA: Mm

Goldfox: I got it done privately so it was quite quick to get done almost

KA: Mm

Goldfox: ((coughs)) But it didn't really change much for me because I guess it changed stuff in the sense that like school and stuff I can just say hey look I'm autistic I need stuff to (.) you know what I mean like the extra time in exams and like time to stand out the classroom if I need to. But other than that it didn't really change much because like (.) I get it like I still had autism before I was diagnosed so I'm not I'm still the same person as I was after it

KA: Mm

Goldfox: Like I just know it now

KA: Yeah yeah definitely. Um we do tend to see actually with a lot of participants for (.) for my study um a lot of people have actually received a diagnosis quite late and I think it's sort of as more and more awareness has been raised about autism um

Goldfox: ((coughs))

KA: It's kind of (.) uh clinicians are like realising they've probably missed a lot of people who could have received a diagnosis younger. Um but yeah and what about your experience with anxiety? Is that something that you've again kind of felt your entire life or was there a time when that became more prominent for you?

Goldfox: Well I've always been a an anxious person because I'm guessing the autism's part of it but I also moved countries (.) or like kinda (.) so I went from England to Singapore then back to England and I was there for a year and a half so I had to meet a lot of new people like multiple times. So I just changed I didn't go to the same school when I came back because after and then I became very nervous because I spent a lot of time not around people cause I didn't know many people so uh. But yeah I've always felt- I think it's definitely gotten worse now because I'm older and I'm more aware of what's going on around me

KA: Mm

Goldfox: So like you know ((pause)) cause like when you're like a lot younger you don't really notice people and you know you're not really seeing people being rude or something around you. Now that I'm older I'm more aware of my surroundings you know out in public and stuff where I feel like I'm being like judged by people. But obviously I'm not but still

KA: Hmm yeah that makes a lot of sense and especially sort of your teenage years and more so at secondary school I feel like work gets a bit more complex the social environment gets a bit more complex so a lot of the time we do see this emer- well not emergence but I guess (.) um anxiety becomes a more prominent thing. Um and (.) with um the anxiety and also the autism you touched on a point there that I'd like to focus in a bit more on and that is that you said talking about the kind of overlap between anxiety and autism um and for some people they say actually (.) it's completely the same thing like there is (.) all of my anxiety stems from my autism and then for other participants I've had the complete opposite and some of them have said well actually I find my autism kind of helps me uh and gives me strategies for reducing my anxiety. Um so in terms of you do you see your autism and anxiety as kind of the same thing do they (.) exacerbate each other a bit you know?

Goldfox: Well it (.) it err I don't know how to word it but I think it definitely is connected

KA: Mm

Goldfox: Like if I wasn't autistic I wouldn't be as anxious about stuff. But I also think just being autistic makes me more anxious because of like (.) people can tell your autistic and public and even if they don't know it directly they're still gonna look at you and they think of you weirdly and so it kind of like when you're in public you're kind of thinking everyone around me knows I'm autistic and they're probably judging me for it because people judge disabled people all the time and so like (.) I'm kind of aware of that

KA: Mm I'm really sorry-

Goldfox: It's partially like (.) just (.) people judging you for being autistic and also partially autism amplifying it and making you more aware

((pause))

KA: Yeah yeah um and it's yeah it's so horrible to hear so much of the time that a lot of the anxieties that emerge are kind of just because we live in a society that is very unaccepting. And hopefully that is something that can change over time um. But yeah I imagine it must be very very difficult um a difficult thing to experience. Um and in terms of how anxiety manifests for you um would you be able to describe to me how anxiety feels?

Goldfox: Um ((pause)) well ((pause)) I can try

KA: Mmhm

Goldfox: It's like ((pause)) uh (.) and it's what do you mean like feeling like physically feeling or like well what do you mean?

KA: Um yes so this is uh you've kind of read my mind and this was going to be my next prompt with this. So yeah there are loads of different ways that anxiety can feel to an individual and a lot of the time we split these up into four different sections. So you have the physical you have the emotions you have the thoughts and you have the behaviours. And that's actually

something that we kind of steal from CBT or cognitive behavioural therapy because that's kind of how they like to split anxiety up. Um (.) but or different people different ones of those are more or less important. So for some people the physical is really like you know that's really how they identify anxiety. For others it's you know the thoughts. And then for others it's kind of a mix of all of those different things. Um so for you is there something that's kind of especially important out of those or is it all of them at once?

Goldfox: Uh I think it's like (.) just a ((pause)) for me it's mainly a stress thing I feel very stressed

KA: Mm

Goldfox: And physically it just feels a bit like I don't know numb. I think that's the best way to describe it cause you know like (.) it's like a (.) yeah yeah I think you know what I mean you know what numb is

KA: Yeah yeah interesting interesting. And is that kind of (.) you know if you were looking to see whether you were anxious or not in a certain situation it would be that kind of level of stress that you're paying attention to and that numbness and that would give you an indication you know ah I'm feeling anxious right now?

Goldfox: Yeah cause yeah

KA: OK yeah. And then does that sometimes change a bit depending on how intense the anxiety is? So is it you know is it (.) always numb? Or does it get (.) does that change as you get more and more anxious or?

Goldfox: I'll get like gradually worse

KA: 'Kay yeah

Goldfox: It's not like a you don't instantly feel like a and suddenly you're completely anxious. It's like a like a slow thing that happens

KA: Mm yeah ((pause)) yeah. And do you find that if you kind of recognise it in time you're able to deescalate your anxiety a bit? Or do you think it's kind of a bit inevitable sometimes that it gets heightened?

Goldfox: I think (.) I think it's neither of those. When I'm consciously aware that I'm anxious it gets worse because I know when I anxiously start like doing things like you know like bouncing your leg or like (.) like you said just stuff like fidgeting and you notice that you're doing that and no one else is and then you're you've like sat on the bus stuff and everyone is being completely still and you're fidgeting everyone's you think everyone's thinking you're weird which makes it worse so you do it more which makes it worse and like it gets worse one you recognise it

KA: Yeah yeah definitely. Um and we sometimes call something like that like a positive or negative feedback loop and it's where you start doing something and as you say it actually makes the anxiety worse which makes you do the thing more which makes the anxiety worse and you can kind of think of it a bit like a snowball effect right? Like a little snowball goes down a hill and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Ok yeah that's interesting to hear. Um (.) and focusing back a bit more on the physical sensation side of it because you described numbness there which I think is quite interesting. Is that sort of (.) more of like a mental

numbness or in terms of like the sensations that you're feeling body wise is that also quite numb?

Goldfox: I'm not sure it's like a (.) it's like a when you're like if you're numb like wherever you're numb like feels a bit heavy because you're holding up and you can't tell that you're doing that so like (.) it's like a feeling your arms and legs get really heavy and that's that feeling. But I think it's (.) well I think that nothing's making you numb so I guess it's a mental thing that you're thinking is happening and it's like a placebo effect

KA: Yeah yeah that's really interesting. Um and I'm going to ask you just about a couple of like physical sensations that sometimes people feel when they're anxious other people don't feel at all when they're anxious. Um and I was wondering if you could we can go through them and you can tell me if you experience them. So one is like your heart beating a lot faster. Is that something that you feel like you can feel when you're becoming anxious?

Goldfox: Um I dunno I don't think so I feel like my heart beats I know it doesn't but it feels like it's beating slower when I'm anxious because I'm more like (.) focused and aware so like you know

KA: Interesting OK yeah (.) ah um and

Goldfox: I think I think I found like a better way to describe it it feels like I'm it feels like I'm trying to not exist when I'm anxious cause like my body going numb (.) like feeling- it's like I'm trying to stop existing so I can't be in that situation anymore. That's what it (.) feels like

KA: OK OK

Goldfox: I feel that's a really bad way of describing it but like

KA: No I understand what you mean though. And it's yeah sounds quite scary ((pause)) yeah (.) it's yeah it's always very interesting hearing how all of our participants describe experiences of anxiety because I think it's something that everyone has their own things in their head about what anxiety is. But then if you listen to people you know there's been so much variation um in what people have told me like across our studies so yeah definitely super interesting. Um and have you ever experienced yourself either meltdowns or shutdowns?

Goldfox: What do you mean?

KA: Um so typically these would be used I guess specifically among um like autistic individuals and whereas a meltdown can kind of be described as like ((exhales)) when I guess the external environment gets a bit too intense or normally something specific has triggered it um it can cause kind of like an extreme outburst of emotion um and (.) sometimes by people who are like not as aware about um (.) you know autism and how autistic traits manifest they can perceive it as like maybe like a temper tantrum or something. But actually what it is more is just (.) the mind is so overwhelmed that it's you know trying to do some extreme action to remedy that. And then a shutdown is kind of the complete opposite of that but caused by similar things. When things become so overwhelming that instead of this huge like outburst of emotion is with a meltdown the person just sort of like a computer shuts down. So reduced activity

Golfdox: Yeah

KA: Not really responding to things

Goldfox: That’s yeah what I meant when I was talking about the feeling like I just try to stop existing I mentioned

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: When I get really anxious I mean that’s kind of what I meant it’s like (.) you know receding into my mind and not like (.) cutting out and going around me. Like that’s kind of what I mean

KA: Yeah yeah. Wow that’s interesting. And is it like any kind of anxiety if it gets bad enough can kind of push you to that point or are there more specific triggers that you find?

Goldfox: I think the most thing is when I'm in big crowds of people and there's noise going on and or like or even in quiet crowds like on bus- buses and stuff it can be quiet being in big crowds is a ((inaudible)) cause of it

KA: Yeah OK so is it kind of I guess like a social pressure thing if you’re surrounded by lots of people?

Goldfox: I think so yeah because when you're around lots of people it's a lot easier to notice that you're doing things differently from like everyone else

KA: Mm yeah

Goldfox: And so it’s very (.) you know ((pause))

KA: Yeah that makes sense especially yeah as you said before given you a lot of the time your worries centre around you know can the people around me sort of notice I’m autistic are they going to act differently you know with me because of that? Um yeah ((pause)) um and I guess another thing sort of related to that um do you sometimes experience something so we would call it sensory hypersensitivity um or hyposensitivity and it just means you know um does the sensory world around you if it's quite intense sometimes cause you anxiety? So some examples could be if lights were really bright or flickering or if it's really noisy

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: For me it's noise mainly like in like classes and stuff when the lesson first starts and everyone's talking to each other (.) that's very (.) very stressful. I hate that. So everyone's talking really loudly to each other

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: And ((pause)) lights yeah but it’s like flashing lights and that's kinda normal for like you know you know like strip lights where they flash they're really bright white and then off and then on again

KA: Oh yeah

Goldfox: That’s well I think that's same for everyone

KA: Yeah that is horrible ((laughs)) its really nasty. Um (.) yeah (.) um ((pause)) OK that's interesting. Um we're going to move on now to talk a bit about emotions more broadly than just anxiety but anxiety might come up again sometimes. Um and there's something a term I'm going to maybe introduce you to maybe you've heard it before and that term is alexithymia and yeah have you heard ((overlap)) of that before?

Goldfox: ((overlap)) Isn't that where you ((end overlap)) isn't that where you can't tell if you're hungry or not?

KA: Ooh that could be part of it yeah definitely. So in general alexithymia is (.) a difficulty identifying or describing emotions

Goldfox: Oh

KA: Um yeah so I think it comes from like lexi which is like word or something in Latin and then I don't know maybe thymia means emotions um but it's a bit of an interesting one um because researchers used to think that it was just autism like it was just one of the traits of autism

Goldfox: Ah

KA: And then recently people have been like actually no like a lot of people um who are autistic do experience it but it's not either unique to autism and actually not every autistic person does experience it um (.) so- but yeah the reason I'm asking about it in this interview is because you know in our lab we do look at quite a lot um I guess being able to split apart the effects of autism and the effects of alexithymia and also seeing how things might be different in those who experience both versus only one of the things versus none of the things. Um so to give you a few examples someone who is alexithymic something big might happen and they can feel that there are certain physiological changes in their body they can tell that they're feeling something but they actually can't work out if they should be happy and excited or a bit worried and nervous. Um so is that kind of something that you've ever experienced?

Goldfox: Sorry my phone just fell over

KA: Oh no worries

Goldfox: Uhh (.) I I don't really I don't think so

KA: OK yeah

Goldfox: Have to get it in the right spot now

KA: ((laughs))

Goldfox: There ((pause)) OK (.) Yeah I don't think (.) no I don't think like that

KA: Yeah. Do you tend to be quite good at I guess knowing how you're feeling in a given situation?

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah OK. And then there are some for some people who are still alexithymic but perhaps to a lesser degree it might be more that let's say um (.) something happens that's a bit more complex and there are aspects to it that are good and then aspects to it that are all so bad so

sometimes they might be feeling a mix of different emotions. They might be feeling excited but also worried at the same time. And it's in those circumstances that it's quite hard for them to split apart these different feelings and if someone asked them you know how are you feeling? They might be like I don't I don't actually know because it's a you know it's a it's a mix of a lot of things. So what about that? Is that something that you've experienced or?

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah that kind of lesser degree. And of course this (.) it's not you know (.) a lot of people also experienced this you know especially when a situation is very very complex it can be hard for most people to tell. But maybe if you can I don't want to put you on the spot but there are there any examples of times when you've been a bit muddled with how you've felt with more complex emotions?

Goldfox: Yes uh this Thursday (.)

KA: Mmhm?

Goldfox: Last Thursday I had a drama exam because my actually I cause I do drama and the first drama GCSE you do is really early in the year and (.) cause that's (.) well it was very stressful I guess it was also (.) other stuff as well because it wasn't like you know entirely stressful it was (.) kinda stressful kinda good to get it over with like

KA: Mm

Goldfox: Cause like I could acknowledge it was stressful acknowledge it was good to get over with and I was happy to be done with it. But like (.) it's not like a like a separate thing. It's not like the it's I'm stressed and excited. It's like the one thing not two different things the same time. I dunno how to- but I think (.) cause like it's not like a it's not like I was stressed as a unique thing and then happy about it as a unique thing they were the same (.) feeling

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Just (.) like a (.) I don't know

KA: That's-

Goldfox: Is that what you mean? I don't know if that's-

KA: ((overlap)) Yeah kinda

Goldfox: ((overlap)) what you mean ((end overlap)) But it feels. So I don't think I understand don't I think you can really separate or for me at least I don't think you can really separate like the emotions around something into distinct unique emotions. Because it's just I dunno like

KA: Mm ((pause)) yeah. I think it's something that's I mean yeah it's kind of why I research it because it's really interesting cause it's so different um (.) with different people and I think it's why these things are quite hard to talk about because it for a lot of people trying to think about a different way of thinking about emotions is like trying to think of a colour that they don't know exists you know um

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: It's very different to imagine anything other than the way that your brain perceives emotions. Um but I guess kind of a related question um (.) and this kind of links back to kind of what I researched with like the bodily signals. Do you find that there are certain distinct ways that certain emotions feel physically that you can kind of recognise?

((pause))

Goldfox: Uh (.) oh I do- I'm not sure. I guess I'd have to I don't think I pay like active attention to it if I do

KA: Mm OK yeah

Goldfox: It would be It would be something I subconsciously recognise and not actively

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: But it might but I'm just not like a (.) I mean I guess no as an answer because I feel like if like if something was happening I'd be aware of it so like (.) probably not (.)

KA: Mm

Goldfox: But I haven't noticed there's nothing so

KA: Yeah yeah no that's interesting in and of itself because the amount of attention we pay to these signals is (.) just as important as whether we can or can't feel them. So if it's something that you don't find yourself hugely aware of but then you're also completely correct in saying that a lot of this stuff can happen (.) below the surface as it were and we can be processing it but not consciously ((pause)) Um cool (.) Um ((pause)) And I think we're kind of just around the halfway point now. Um so would you like to take a short break or would you prefer just to carry on?

Goldfox: Um I'm OK with just carrying on

KA: Yeah cool. This sounds good to me. Um cool so the next questions that we'll look at are all around interoception and it kind of leads on nicely from what we were just saying. So as I said at the beginning in our intro call interoception is our ability to feel and interpret signals that come from inside our body

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: and theoretically this has been linked to both our experience of emotions so the alexithymia that we were just talking about but it's also linked to a lot of different mental health conditions and anxiety especially is (.) really theorectically linked to interoception. Um (.) so again some examples of these signals that we might feel that we'll go through are like how our how fast our heart is beating how hungry we are and if we need to use the bathroom. So I'm going to talk about the heartbeat one first of all because it's the one that is kind of linked to anxiety the most and I know we spoke about this a little bit at the beginning when I was asking you about you know when you're anxious can you feel that your heart beats. Um so more generally with this heartbeat stuff for some people they can feel their heart beating all the time like if they thought about it, they could feel it in their chest for other people they can't feel it at all. Now for me I don't feel it day-to-day. Even if someone asked me like can you feel your heart beating now even if I focused really hard I there's I can't feel anything. If I

could like touch my pu- like my wrist or my neck and get my pulse. But if I didn't touch anything if I was just using my mind I wouldn't be able to feel it. But if I do a run or if I'm really scared about something if I see like a really big spider then I can feel my heart beating. Um so how is it for you you know do you feel it most of the time and?

Goldfox: I think to me it's like basically the exact same thing as what you described but naturally it's not there I can't feel it even if I focus on it but after like lots of physical exercise like a run or some bouldering I will feel it beating and if I like (.) like if a horror movie has like a jumpscare or something I'll feel for a bit

KA: Mm

Goldfox: My heart will spike up really quickly ((pause))

KA: Yeah yeah so there are definitely times that you're kind of yeah more or less aware. And do you think it's been like that for you kind of your entire life? Has it always been that you don't really feel it except in certain situations?

Goldfox: Uh yeah. But I also want to mention I think it's just cause it cause it's like a well I can kind of feel when it changes when I'm just like like if I'm kind of like bouldering or something once I'm into like the rhythm and I'm constantly putting in the same amount of effort I will stop feeling it like I only feel it at the start

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Where I'm it's starting getting faster. Once it's hit the level where I'm working at and if it was ((inaudible)) properly I will stop feeling it but then just get used to it

KA: Yeah that makes a lot of sense. It's that change where your brain is like almost like sends an alert to your brain right like something's different than it was before. Yeah (.) but yeah across as I sort of said like across different ages and stuff has it has that been the same for you?

Goldfox: I think so

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: I don't have very amazing memory. So I don't really remember if like it was a long time ago. I also wasn't very active for like most of my life so I wouldn't really have anything to know about and (.) yeah

KA: OK yeah yeah. Well it's really nice then that you found bouldering recently because yeah

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: It's a nice really nice way to stay active um

Goldfox: Very glad about it

KA: Yeah. And um (.) when you can feel I guess this change in your heart (.) this is going to sound a bit strange but how does it feel to you? Is it just neutral and you're like OK my heart's like picking up a bit or can that sometimes be quite stressful for you?

Goldfox: Well I get stressed but I'd say it's a manageable stress. It's like a OK this is happening but it's fine

KA: Mm

Goldfox: It's not like a huge problem if it's beating faster it's like a (.) well I guess it's like stressful cause it's like a something you're feeling that uh you're not used to feeling it's like a like a you know (.) like a thing. So it feels like you're (.) you know (.) you can feel it and you can hear it kind of like I say hear you can kinda kind of hear it it's like a vibration like it's something that's happening around you but it's something you can just say OK this is happening but it's fine

KA: Mm ok yeah yeah so quite (.) neutral if not a little bit maybe like uncomfortable sometimes is that what you're?

Goldfox: Yeah like it's a it's not like a you know feeling my heartbeats gonna make me go full shut down like but it's definitely something that I can notice and it is (.) it's stressful but I think that's not severe- severely stressful I guess it's just there

KA: Yeah yeah and do you think that might be a bit different so say for example (.) let's compare two scenarios and one is when your heart increases a bit because you've just done exercise and then the other one is like your heart increase heart rate increasing a bit because you're just about to do a speech in front of your class um

Goldfox: Mm

KA: Do you obviously probably I can't assume but if you're anything like me doing a speech in front of your class would be something that you'd expect to be a bit anxiety inducing. Um might it-

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: be in that scenario then it's a bit more (.) panic inducing to feel your heart rate increasing or is it still kind of neutral across both?

Goldfox: My heartrate (.) I guess it depends my heart rate doesn't always increase when I get like stressed if I'm speaking in front of people most of the time it's a like you know like I mentioned it's like a shut down thing

KA: Right

Goldfox: So I just start like my body feels heavy and numb it's the same type of anxiety and that stuff but there's a bunch of people

KA: Mm

Goldfox: So it's like a it's not like a rapid heartbeat things it's a uh (.) a shutdown thing where I'm like less aware of it or it's happening slower I guess or it feels like it's happening slower at least. But (.) if it does sometimes it will start beating faster because it's like stressful and (.) depending like if it was like a graded thing like my drama exam I was stressed about that in this case because it was graded so I guess that made my heartbeat really fast and that was (.) not that bad (.) cause it was like quiet

KA: Mm OK yeah

Goldfox: Oh my god ((pause)) Sorry a spider just ran across my floor

KA: ((inhale)) oh my gosh (.) that would be- how are you with spi-

Goldfox: Sit on my chair

KA: Yeah how are you with spiders? Because I mean I think I've already said in this like very short phone call how much I hate spiders which should give you a good indication of my feelings towards spiders

Goldfox: I absolutely hate spiders

KA: Mmhm

Goldfox: And I always just kill them like I just hate them so much

KA: Yeah ((laughs)) I'm a vegetarian as well and it doesn't matter. I'm a vegetarian but I will kill every spider that gets close to me ((laughs))

Goldfox: Oh it was a big one as well urgh

KA: They're getting bigger I swear I'm not like going crazy about it I swear like they keep coming in my house every year

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: And I'm like, stay away from me ((laughs)) Um OK hopefully that hopefully he or she or it or whatever has gone somewhere gone somewhere away

Goldfox: Yeah I've noticed now actually my heart is beating cause I was feeling my heartbeat earlier when you mentioned feeling it

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: And it's slower now that I saw the spider

KA: Oh wow OK that's interesting

Goldfox: But it's gone back to normal now but it was slower after I saw it

KA: Huh ok interesting. It is interesting that yeah you've kind of picked up on that change um ((pause)) Feel free to also like if you want to take a couple of minutes and move if that would make you feel more comfortable. Whatever-

Goldfox: No it's fine I'll just sit like on my chair my legs off the ground

KA: Yeah that sounds like a that's definitely what I would do ((laughs)) Ok um (.) so we've had the heartbeat um another signal that I mentioned before is either how hungry we are or how full we are. Um do you think it is that something that you're quite good at being able to tell?

Goldfox: Um well I can tell when I'm really hungry and I can tell when I'm really full but I can't really do it in between. Like I can feel when I'm really hungry cause my stomach feels (.) feels to be empty and like painful. And I can tell when I'm really full because I feel like I'm going to be sick. But between that I can't like (.) tell how (.) almost like I dunno like if you asked on a scale of like one to ten how you know hungry are you from one being hungry and ten being full I couldn't give you a number unless I was at one or ten

KA: OK and does that make it difficult sometimes to I guess make sure you're eating enough or to know when you need to eat?

Goldfox: Uh well it used to but I've started exercising and stuff I've been tracking how like what like loosely tracking the amount of calories in the food I'm eating. I'm able to tell that I'm eating enough in a day by just like the numbers rather than feeling

KA: OK right yeah. But if you say you were- like if you weren't tracking it um would it do you think it would be quite difficult?

Goldfox: Yeah I used to be (.) I guess I still really am but I've got like a really low body fat percentage because I just would never eat enough because I wouldn't go out and eat I'd only eat when I was feeling really hungry or when I walked past like a snack cupboard it was like huh I feel like having something right now. Like uh like I don't have an impulse feeling like there's a snack there I might have one. Like it's not something I have to (.) I dunno I don't really feel the feeling of hungry just cause I like the taste of food. But now yeah (.) you know

KA: Mm (.) yeah that's super. I actually um I think I might have mentioned before as well as looking at that overlap with anxiety and autism I also look at kind of the overlap between eating behaviours and autism cause there does look to be like quite a quite a big link with those things um. And yeah for example um a lot of my participants discuss this as you describe like it's kind of tricky to tell (.) exactly when you're hungry or when you're full sometimes

Goldfox: Mm

KA: Um (.) and they might find themselves under eating. Um do you have I guess beyond (.) beyond just the whether you're hungry or full are there any other difficulties you have with eating? Um you know would you-

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah do you want to talk about that?

Goldfox: Like I only I only eat (.) I think most people with autism have this but I'm really picky with the food I eat I'll only eat food I think taste nice and is very simple with nice ((inaudible)) flavours like I've eaten like chicken goujons for the pa- like every day for the past week because I like them

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Got some right next to me right now actually

KA: Ahh well feel free to snack away. Um and is it

Goldfox: I'll just wait it's fine

KA: As you say with like the it's the you know the taste and stuff would you describe that as like quite a sensory thing for you as well like?

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah (.) And are the-

Goldfox: I find the like the things I don’t like the taste of I find it really like sickening to eat

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Like foods that I just foods that I just don't like the taste of make me feel like I want to be sick because it just tastes urgh

KA: Yeah yeah and I think it's tough sometimes because a lot of the time people who are not autistic themselves don't quite realise how like really horrible like they think you're just being picky and it's like no

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: It's a lot more extreme

Goldfox: It’s (.) it’s cause it’s hard to explain to someone who's never gone through it how it feels to (.) feel it. Like (.) especially with well I make I make like my food myself most of the time now cause I’m really just put stuff in the oven but back when my mum was making food for me most of the time when I was younger having to explain to her that I really just do not want to eat some of the stuff she puts on my plate is very difficult because (.) she didn’t understand and I didn’t have didn’t understand why I wouldn’t eat ((inaudible)) and it was very very stressful but it’s not like that anymore

KA: Yeah yeah OK OK. Um (.) and ((pause)) in terms of the feelings themselves of like hunger and fullness I know you mentioned there you're only really feeling them once they get to the extreme right? So presumably is that quite a (.) negative sensation when it happens or again is it just like with heartbeat just kind of neutral?

Goldfox: It’s just (.) if it’s like really really bad it’s bad because you feel really tired and you can't like move around very well and stuff and I find (.)

KA: Mm

Goldfox: I find being restricted in movement very very stressful that's kind of why I like bouldering because I like basically it’s me moving in ways. But I find having my like movement restricted (.) very stressful. Or actually it depends because I like being in like corners and stuff (.) cause it feels safer but

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Like if I’m (.) not able to move around in where I am I don’t really (.) I don’t really like that I wanna get up and move around. So I fe- like when you’re really really hungry and you can't you feel tired so you can't move around as much I find that very stressful but like if I just like huh I'm really hungry right now it's something I can just deal with like the first sec- like introduction session we had the like ten minute one that had a few days or whatever day it was

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Like Wednesday (.) that was I was hungry then like my stomach was rumbling before and a bit during but it wasn't like a oh great I have to eat right now. It's like a uh I guess I’ll just eat later

KA: Gotcha

Goldfox: Well I made food but (.) by the time (.) Like I put I made food but it finished during the interview so I had to leave it for a bit and eat it after

KA: Ah OK yeah yeah yeah

Goldfox: So it wasn't like a an active

((crash))

Goldfox: Urgh I keep knocking my phone over. It wasn't like an active feeling of where I need to go eat right now it's like a oh I guess I'm guess I'm hungry should probably eat ((inaudible)) but (.) if I wasn't (.) nah I didn't I wouldn't have had to respond to that feeling of hunger I could have just ignored it and it would have went away

KA: Yeah it wasn't like urgh I'm gonna like you know ((laughs)) gonna explode if I don't eat right now type thing (.) yeah. I'm actually (.) my friends laugh at me a lot of the time for it because I get very do you know the term like hangry?

Goldfox: Oh yeah when you're (.) hungry and angry or angry because you're hangry

KA: Yeah I think yeah for some reason for me when I'm hungry it it's weird cause a lot of the time I don't quite know when I'm hungry and then it gets to a really extreme point where I've kind of like not eaten for ages and I kind hadn't cause I hadn't been thinking I was hungry. And then suddenly I'm like OK I need to eat now or I'm going to be very very grumpy with everyone around. So that's not fun for my friends ((laughs)) Um OK so looking at another signal now. Could be like for example how thirsty we are. Um (.) so what about that? Do you find it easy to tell when you're thirsty or?

Goldfox: That one (.) Thirsty is definitely the one (.) I just cannot tell at all

KA: Right

Goldfox: Like and (.) cause I thought I never I know autistic people struggle with I didn't know it was called interoception but I knew they struggled with feeling hunger and thirst. I have I just cannot tell when I'm thirsty or not I have no idea. Well I can tell physically after I think I'm thirsty right now cause my lips are quite dry and I also tell by checking the size of like the veins on my arm (.) cause ((pause)) well I don't know if it's I probably I dunno I heard this somewhere but like the veins in your arms get smaller when you're thirsty because you got less liquid floating around (.) so well I think at least

KA: Mm

Goldfox: I'm not sure but I certainly if my veins are really contracted that's when I know I need to drink water

KA: I mean it makes sense right biolog- I'm actually not for a psychologist I'm not very good at biology so I couldn't tell you whether it's true or false but it makes sense right? Surely less liquid and then yeah but

Goldfox: Less liquid less flow

KA: Yeah ((pause)) Um OK but that's interesting so it's very difficult. And then I guess does that I dunno have you found yourself like quite headachey and stuff quite often because you've just like (.) forgot to forgot to drink

Goldfox: Well yeah I'm always very headachey because I'm very like ((stutters)) I always have a headache (.) I have one right now like minor

KA: Mm

Goldfox: Cause its like it's like a (.) uh it's something that like is always there but I'd only really feel it badly if someone brings attention to it (.) sort of like I've had a headache for ages but until you mentioned it I wasn't (.) actively realising that sort of like my head's hurting. Like I can feel it now but (.) I was aware of it before. If you know what I mean?

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: It's not like a (.) like a I know this is happening but not bothering me but now it's like a I can feel it

KA: Oh no I'm so sorry I've like drawn you attention to that

Goldfox: No it's fine you remind me I should probably drink water when we're done

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: Thank you

KA: Oh well I'm glad you're it's a very optimistic view on it so I'm glad you see it like that. Um and then another one is how badly we would need to use the toilet or need to go to the bathroom. Um how do you feel with that?

Goldfox: I actually think (.) that's the complete opposite of everything else cause when I need to like pee (.) I feel it really like intensely but it's not that serious. Like it's like a oh (.) I need to pee right now but I can like wait for like an hour or something before I actually need to go

KA: Oh wow OK

Goldfox: It's like a (.) uh yeah it just feels really weird being the exact opposite of everything else but like it is dunno how to

KA: Yeah honestly though if there's one thing I've kind of learned from doing these interviews is that there's kind of no weird and no not weird because-

Goldfox: Actually no

KA: Oh go on

Goldfox: I think I think it is the same as the other things because if I- I think what it is because I can't tell how thirsty I am or not I will drink like when I'm on holiday like in [REMOVED] or something it goes really hot I end up drinking more water just because I know I need to drink more. And so what ends up happening is I drink too much water so it has to get out really quickly

KA: Ahh

Goldfox: And so rather than it you know it is getting out really quickly that that's probably why because I notice it more when I'm in on holiday in hot countries because I'm drinking more

KA: Right

Goldfox: That's probably it then

KA: Cause it's yeah you don't kind of have that trust in oh I I'm going to know when I'm thirsty or not. So you kind of overshoot how much you need to drink right?

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah. This is this is not relevant but I lived in [REMOVED] for a while so it's funny you said about being on holiday on holiday there when ever anyone mentions it I'm like ah. But oh my gosh I felt like I couldn't drink enough water when I was out there I feel like I was literally drinking non-stop and I was still so sweaty the whole time

Goldfox: My ((stutters)) dad and my stepmom live in [REMOVED]

KA: Ahh

[SECTION REMOVED FOR ANONYMITY PURPOSES]

KA: Cool so just back to these questions I just kind of have one (.) last one now and that's just with uh your breathing and like you're breathing rate and is that something that you find that you're normally quite aware of or not so much?

Goldfox: Well I'm aware of it now that you mentioned it

KA: Yeah yeah

Goldfox: But normally I'm not I'm not aware of it no

KA: OK cool cool

Goldfox: And I like sometimes you can just randomly become aware of your breathing but when it's like randomly yeah but you kind of start breathing manually until you forget your breathing manually

KA: Yep

Goldfox: And then back to normal

KA: Yeah exactly ((laughs)) it's why it's always yeah ((pause)) it when I do these interviews obviously I've done quite a few now I think you're my twelfth participant and for the whole interviews and then for like a little while afterwards I'm like really aware of my breathing and like how hungry I am and needing to drink it's quite funny um. ((pause)) OK um I think (.) that's pretty much all I had in terms of my questions for you um but I just wanted to check now we've reached the end is there anything that you would like to add or anything that you think I might have missed or just anything you'd like to raise uh to my attention?

Goldfox: I'd like to mention to the anxiety and stuff I've become less anxious since I started doing bouldering. I know cause like it's a sport and now I look different as well because I'm a lot more muscular than I was before

KA: Mm

Goldfox: But I think that's helped that's helped a lot as well. I feel less anxious and stuff because I ((inaudible)) more (.) standard and also I feel better if I have a a sport that I do and that's just good for your mental health

KA: Yeah yeah. I mean yeah definitely sport is so good. I think there's so many aspects to it as well like the community vibes the having something to distract you I think as well it's

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: It's always reassuring to like prove to yourself ah this is how much my body can do and actually my body can do some really cool things um

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: I discovered I could do crunches while hanging upside down on my feet a few days ago

KA: That's incredible that's so cool ((pause)) yeah

Goldfox: Yeah the comm- that's a good thing to mention as well the community in bouldering cause it’s a I like there’s a good community in bouldering and because I’m like I like I like to say I'm quite good at it a lot of the time people will like (.) I can help people and stuff and I’m very like it’s very productive because

((crash))

Goldfox: Oh my god again sorry

KA: ((laughs)) that’s OK

Goldfox: But I like the cause I’m kind of good at it people there they like like you automatically because they see you being good at something and they care more about your skill than anything else

KA: Mm yeah well yeah it def- um and that should kind of be like (.) yeah the way always that we shouldn't be thinking about these you know how are these people different from me and how all of that it would be nice if we did just

Goldfox: Yeah

KA: Have this I guess thing that could unify above whatever differences there are and just OK we're all really passionate about the same thing that's a good common ground like

Goldfox: Like uh similar things happen in like school and stuff because I'm um very very good at like math and science and stuff

KA: Mm

Goldfox: A lot of the time people especially in math and science they like come to me for help and stuff and I think that's kind of good because they don't really care about anything else. They just kind of almost kind of like that I'm good at something. And that's nice because it means that like they if they're thinking about I'm good at something and they think positively of me

KA: Mm

Goldfox: And that kind of alleviates feeling of anxiety cause like because I know that this person doesn't think negative- negatively of me because they think I'm good at something

KA: Yeah (.) I can see that I can see that (.) um and yeah it's always nice-

Goldfox: Oh my god

KA: Oh is it back?

Goldfox: Yes

KA: Oh

Goldfox: I'm (.) just gonna sit like this

KA: Yeah. Is it one of the like I don't know what they're actually call- we call them like house spiders I think that is what-

Goldfox: Yeah it is one of those a massive house spider

KA: Ooh

Goldfox: Though it might be a different one actually cause it (.) it went from my the first one went from my door to the wall

KA: Yeah

Goldfox: And this one also went to the door from my wall so unless I just didn't notice it below me ((pause)) OK right

KA: Gosh ((laughs)) it's making my skin crawl

((pause))

KA: OK do you wanna move or are you ok for us to?

Goldfox: No I'm fine I'm fine I'm fine

KA: If you're sure I don't wanna keep you with all the spiders

Goldfox: Just tryna work out where it is so I can catch it later. I keep a plastic cup in my room so I can catch them whenever I need to

KA: I should start doing that. I'm never prepared I'm like never prepared. And it happens all the time and I just I think I normally try and throw like a shoe or a book at them um

Goldfox: I have a plastic cup and a pair of tweezers so I can catch them myself

KA: OK nice nice very prepared. Um oh the last I just realised there was one last thing I need to ask and then I can I can let you go. Um and that was just with regard to like the eating stuff we were talking about earlier um this can sometimes be a bit of a sensitive topic. I know you mentioned that you're a bit of it like a picky eater and stuff. Have you ever considered or have you ever like received a diagnosis relating to like an eating disorder or do you just think that it's like a pickiness or not pickiness but a sensory thing?

Goldfox: Yeah it’s just a sensory thing I don’t have an eating disorder. I’m like it (.) I don’t really it doesn’t really bother me it’s just that I’m a very intuitive eater I just eat well not anymore but I was an intuitive eater. I'd eat when I felt like it but now I'm very (.) like eat. I’m very like inclined to eating a lot more now. So actively thinking about eating more

KA: Mm yeah

Goldfox: But

KA: OK well

Goldfox: No eating disorders for me

KA: I’m very glad to hear that. Um cool that really is this time everything from my end. What will happen is I will take this recording away. I'm actually going to stop recording now because I don't need to hear myself say this