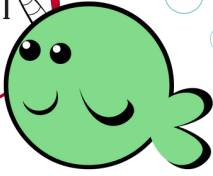


ASK A  
NEURODIVERGENT  
NARWHAL...



Neurodiversity is the diversity of our brains. It's pretty simple! There are all kinds of brains in this world and not one kind is better than another! Neurodiversity is an indisputable biological fact.

WHAT IS  
NEURODIVERSITY?

**NEURODIVERSITY IS FOR EVERYONE!**

WHAT DOES  
ACCEPTANCE  
EVEN MEAN?

Acceptance means that we embrace our natural, autistic ways of being. It does not mean no help or therapies, but it does mean those things are done with respect to our neurology & where our dignity, autonomy, civil rights and voices are centered.

WHAT IS  
AUTISTIC PRIDE?  
WHAT IS  
DISABILITY  
PRIDE?

Some say that labels are bad or that they divide us, but labels can also be empowering. Autism and disability are not the only thing about us, but they are a big and important part of how we see and experience this world. Our labels can be a source of pride. There is no shame in being disabled or autistic, even though that is sometimes what the world wants us to believe. Who we are is actually pretty amazing!

WHAT'S WRONG  
WITH  
FUNCTIONING  
LABELS?

Functioning labels are inherently dehumanizing. They are also inaccurate! We all have weaknesses and we all have abilities and most importantly, we all deserve the same type of respect no matter how we are able to communicate and no matter what you think we are capable of. To label a human being as "low functioning" is to deny our competence. To label a human being as "high functioning" is to deny our very real disabilities.

WHY SHOULD I  
CARE ABOUT  
DISABILITY  
RIGHTS/HISTORY?

Disability Rights are Human Rights! Did you know that disabled people are the largest minority group in the world? Our stories and contributions are important and deserve to be told!

IS AUTISM  
AN  
EPIDEMIC?

Autistic people have always been here. Just because the word "autism" wasn't around, that doesn't mean autistic people did not exist. What has grown is our understanding of the beautiful diversity of our minds and brains! **NEURODIVERSITY!** That's not an epidemic, that's a pretty wonderful thing!

WHAT IS THE  
SOCIAL MODEL OF  
DISABILITY?

The social model of disability says that disability is socially constructed. We are not disabled by who we are, but by a society that is not inclusive or accessible to all people.

WHAT IS  
AUTISM?

Autism is a complex neurological disability that affects sensory processing & communication. Autistic people are as diverse as any other group of humans, with individual strengths and weaknesses but we all experience this world in distinctly autistic ways. Lots of people think they know what autism is but the only real experts are autistic people!

WHY DO YOU SAY  
AUTISTIC INSTEAD  
OF PERSON WITH  
AUTISM?

In choosing identity first language, we recognize that it is impossible to separate a person from their autism. Autism impacts how we see, experience and function in this world. We're not "with autism", we're autistic! Calling ourselves autistic is a declaration of pride in our identities!

WHAT IS  
AUTISTIC  
CULTURE?

Autistic culture is everywhere! It's our shared history, the way autistic people move, communicate, create, experience and understand the world around us in uniquely autistic ways. Our community, the autistic community is a beautiful thing!

WHAT IF MY  
AUTISTIC LOVED  
ONE DOES NOT  
COMMUNICATE?

Everybody has a voice! Communication is more than just speaking. There are as many ways to communicate as there are to be human! All communication, whether it is typing, AAC, FC, signing, or behavior is valid! Every person has a voice and every voice matters!

June 2023 | Volume XLI, Issue 2 »

## My Turn: Neurodivergence in Libraries

June 1, 2023

Alex Towers, The Joseph Sears School, Kenilworth

If you thought trying to find a job during the height of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic was tough, imagine trying to find a job during the height of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic and being on the autism spectrum. That seemed to be the case with me during the first two months of 2022. After being rejected from numerous public library jobs that I felt I was more than qualified for (I received an MSLIS from the University of Illinois' iSchool six months earlier), I felt angry, hopeless, and disappointed. Could it be possible, I wondered, that because I had disclosed my diagnosis in every interview I had, the libraries based their hiring decision on that fact alone as opposed to the qualifications on my resume? The thought of being discriminated against in this manner was too much for me to comprehend because I had been working in public libraries since the age of fourteen, when I began volunteering at the Glencoe Public Library.



However, just when I was about to give up hope, an amazing opportunity in the form of the Joseph Sears School in Kenilworth presented itself, and it would change my life forever. The opportunity presented itself when Carrie De La Cruz, the Sears School's Director of Student Services, stopped by Have Dreams, an Evanston-based autism resource organization that I have been involved with for over ten years. At the time, I was taking part in a job readiness program called Have Dreams Academy (HDA), and Carrie, along with a few other local community leaders, had visited to take part in a "career day" of sorts. They asked my fellow participants and me questions about ourselves and our work experience. When it was my turn, I told Carrie that I was conducting my HDA internship through the Evanston Public Library, possessed an MSLIS degree, and had a part-time job at my hometown public library in Glencoe.

I didn't think much of it at the time, but it just so happened that this little encounter was one of the most serendipitous moments of my life. Shortly after Have Dreams Academy wrapped up, my job coach, Lora Slutsky, called me and said that she had been in contact with the Sears School and their then-head librarian, Lynette Bromiel. Apparently, Carrie had told Lynette that my credentials were impressive. It turned out that the school was looking for a new library aide to help them prepare for a library renovation, and Lora asked if I would be interested in this opening. When I first heard this news, I was a little apprehensive; my limited library experience was in public libraries. However, I quickly realized that opportunities like this are the kinds you really only get once in your lifetime, so I ultimately decided this was a position worth applying for.

After filling out the required paperwork and coming into Sears for some shadowing with Lynette, I anxiously awaited my fate. I felt I had rolled the dice big-time when applying for this position, especially as I was coming off a disheartening series of rejections. Nonetheless, I was cautiously optimistic about my chances with the Sears School. Would this be the royal flush I had been hoping for throughout my job search, or would this wind up being another instance of being discriminated against

on the basis of disability? A week after my shadowing, I got an incredibly happy email from Lynette: I was hired! Needless to say, I was euphoric beyond belief; Lynette understood that me being neurodiverse indeed meant some extra accommodations, but also understood that my autism is a big part of why I am a detail-oriented hard worker with a passion for libraries. In other words, Lynette hired me because she focused on my abilities as a person and not any shortcomings associated with my disability. The world desperately needs more employers like Lynette, who truly mean it when they say they are welcoming to all people!

I started working at the Joseph Sears School in March of 2022 in what began as a part-time role, doing shelf-reading and packing up boxes. One year later, that role has been upgraded to a full-time position, with duties ranging from checking in books, making booklists, and assisting in the school's Library Club on Thursday mornings. When I began my Library Aide job, I had mentioned to Lynette that I preferred working in a quiet space and away from students, and she made sure to accommodate me with those requests. However, as time went on, my role gradually transitioned from being mostly behind-the-scenes to more forward-facing, as I became much more comfortable sharing the space with the Sears School's incredible students. A shortcoming of many neurodiverse individuals is adapting to changes in a routine, and while I share this trait, I ultimately learned to embrace my behind-the-scenes duties being phased out because Lynette and the Sears team made the transitory process go at a pace that did not feel too rapid.

So far, it has been an absolute thrill to be part of the Sears School family because working in a school library setting (a K-8 school, no less) has given me the opportunity to work with children on a more direct level. Whether it's helping them locate a book or complimenting their artwork in Library Club, interacting with kids of all ages brings me so much joy, knowing that I am making an impact on their lives that I hope they won't forget as they grow up. Additionally, every day at work, students address me as "Mr. Towers," which makes my heart grow in size like the Grinch's every time. What's more, even though I'm a library aide, I would like children, especially neurodiverse children, to see me as something more than just a guy who works in the library; I hope that they see me as a buddy of sorts who has had similar experiences, struggling with anxiety and learning differently than their allistic (non-autistic) counterparts.

In a way, I would love to be in the shoes of today's neurodiverse youth because having an autistic mentor is something that I feel could have really helped me when I was a kid myself (even though I received incredible support throughout my entire education that I am grateful for). I have mentioned this idea to Carrie, and she has told me that my idea is excellent and it could potentially become a reality once the 2023-24 school year rolls around because one of the students in the school's Little Adventurers program is on the spectrum. If it does happen, it would be a dream come true, as it would combine my love of libraries and books with my wishes to ensure today's generation of children on the spectrum get the kind of extra-special and inclusive support I never had in my own childhood.

I hope that my journey from being unemployed and frustrated to having a full-time public school library job I love will serve as a wake-up call of sorts for employers across the library world to be more inclusive with hiring qualified neurodiverse applicants. However, I want that hope to become a reality sooner rather than later, because if my job hunting experience is any indication, libraries of all stripes in Illinois have some more steps to do if they want to be inclusive. From my research, I am unable to find any publicly-available data on how many autistic people work in Illinois libraries, whether school libraries or public ones.

In my case, I was beyond fortunate to have people like Carrie, Lynette and Lora hold my hand throughout the application and interview process because they understood that me being on the spectrum required some steps on their respective ends to make me feel more confident.

Additionally, since neurodiverse individuals work best with clear expectations and structure, I would strongly advise employers to include structured visual aids to ensure their employees understand the requirements of their respective position. Finally, and most importantly, employers should never prioritize their neurodiverse employees over those who aren't neurodiverse. These are simple steps to follow, and I wish more employers like the Sears School would apply them.

# *Librarian by Day*

Bobbi L. Newman

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## Supporting Neurodiversity in the Library Workplace

Published on April 26, 2024

[Library Staff, Managers, Workplace Wellness](#)

I'm in the midst of editing book chapters and unable to finish any of the blog posts I have drafted, so this week, I'm sharing some articles I've read that are probably worthy of their own in-depth blog posts (and may eventually be). However, perfect is the enemy of the good, so I want to get them out there.



I came across this article on neurodiversity inclusion in the job interview. Since [April is Autism Acceptance Month](#) and autism is one type of neurodiversity, this is a good topic to explore in this week's post. As someone diagnosed with their neurodiversity late in life, this is a topic I am also personally interested in.

### **Neurodiversity inclusion starts with the job interviews.**

*“Neurodiversity encompasses an extremely diverse set of conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, and Tourette’s syndrome,*

*among others. Despite representing between 15% and 20% of the global population, neurodiverse individuals are severely underrepresented in the workplace. The unemployment rates for neurodiverse individuals reach up to 40%, according to some estimates.*

*When employees commit to inclusive hiring practices, they're less likely to miss out on talented candidates. The more hiring managers use interview questions to express a hidden agenda over a person's suitability and skills, the less legitimacy their organization will have in calling itself "inclusive."*

This article is a good start, but getting neurodiverse people in the door is just one step. If you don't work to change your culture, policies, and practices, you are setting them up for failure. Many of the changes you can make to support neurodiverse staff benefit everyone, like flexible work hours, quiet times, headphones, private workspaces, incorporation of nature, natural light and control of lighting, DEIA training, open and clear communication, psychological safety, more efficient meetings, etc. I have gathered some resources and readings; some are library-specific, and others are not. I pulled out a couple specifically, but I encourage you to explore them all.

**Designing for Neurodiversity in the Workplace** – This article makes recommendations about the physical workspace and environment, and of course, those recommendations don't just benefit neurodiverse people.

*In some ways, the discussion of neurodiversity and design is too limiting. In many ways, all the elements that support neurodiverse individuals also promote comfort and achievement in neurotypical individuals. As one size doesn't fit all neural processes, the focus is on universal experiential design to ensure the space accommodates all individuals.*

**Why It's Important To Embrace Neurodiversity In The Workplace (And How To Do It Effectively)**. Aside from the obvious—it's the right thing to do—embracing neurodiverse staff can be a real benefit to libraries. This article then offers some suggestions on making the workplace friendly for neurodiverse employees.

*Neurodiverse employees often have great attention to detail and are able to stay focused on their tasks. JPMorgan Chase created an Autism at Work initiative and found that their neurodiverse hires were, on average, 90% to 140% more productive than employees who had been at the company for five or 10 years.*

*Neurodiverse employees tend to be loyal to a good company and have a high job retention rate.*

**7 ways to help your neurodiverse team deliver its best work** – Great suggestions on improving the work environment, and again, they benefit everyone.

*And it turns out that most of the adjustments neurodiverse people need are relatively simple and inexpensive to implement.*

*“And most of what we think of as accommodations make the environment better for everybody,” says Cara Pelletier, M.A., senior director of DEI at holistic performance management platform 15Five. “When you’re implementing something that makes life easier for somebody with a disability, you’re making life easier for everybody.”*

**Specialisterne** – Great resource on autism and neurodiversity in the workplace.

*An internationally recognized leader in harnessing the talents of people on the autism spectrum and other neurodivergent people by providing them with the opportunity to sustain meaningful employment.*

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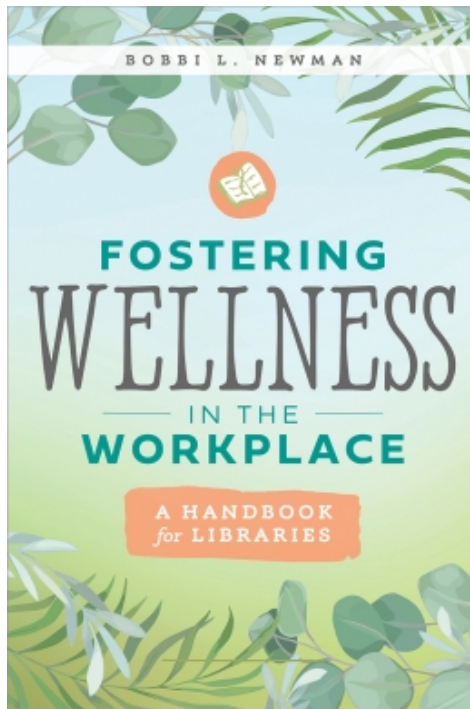
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2017  
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Alice Eng  
2 Comments

JUN

# NEURODIVERSITY IN THE LIBRARY: ONE LIBRARIAN'S EXPERIENCE

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## ***In Brief:***

*The literature about neurodiversity and libraries is heavily skewed toward libraries accommodating neurodivergent patrons. There is little written about librarians who are neurodivergent and their professional experiences. In this interview, Charlie Remy, an academic librarian who has autism, discusses his autism, his professional experience, and what others can do to create a more inclusive neurodiverse profession.*

By Alice Eng

Diversity is a word frequently used in the library profession. The literature that currently exists typically focuses on gender, ethnic, cultural, and sexual diversities. One group rarely mentioned is the neurodivergent. According to the [National Symposium on Neurodiversity at Syracuse University](#), the neurodivergent “include those labeled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others.” ((What is neurodiversity? (n.d.). Retrieved April 7, 2017, from <https://neurodiversitysymposium.wordpress.com/what-is-neurodiversity/> ))

The neurodivergent have always been a part of the community but are now formally recognized as a group of the U.S. population. A [2014 survey](#) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that 1 in 45 children, ages 3-17, have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. ((Zablotsky, B., Black, L. I., Maenner, M. J., Scheive, L. A., & Blumberg, S. J. (2015). *Estimated prevalence of autism and other developmental disabilities following questionnaire changes in the 2014 National Health Interview Survey* (National Health Statistics Reports No. 87). Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/92c2/2987bdb4397ef53b8e2b0b8a7bda432a090> Yet the neurodivergent are noticeably absent in the library workforce and literature. [Emily Lawrence's essay](#), “Loud hands in the library: Neurodiversity in LIS theory & practices,” offers one theory as to why: an overall lack of diversity within librarianship itself. ((Lawrence, E. (2013). Loud hands in the library: Neurodiversity in LIS Theory & Practice. *Progressive Librarian*, 41, 98–109.)) Other reasons might include people not disclosing their autism or people not self-identifying as having autism.

This prompted me to interview Charlie Remy. ((This interview was conducted via email. Any changes to the transcript for publication are minor and intended to improve clarity; the interviewee's ideas and words have not been changed.)) Charlie is the Electronic Resources and Serials Librarian at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) and happens to have autism. He was willing to share his

professional experiences with me with the intention of bringing attention to this overlooked group.

### **When were you diagnosed with Autism?**

**Charlie:** I was diagnosed at the age of 23 when I was in library school. Several years earlier my parents suggested I read *Beyond the Wall* by Stephen Shore. It's a memoir written by an adult on the spectrum. My parents immediately thought of me when they read it and I concurred with them! It described a lot of experiences similar to those in my childhood (intense special interests, social awkwardness, sensory sensitivities, etc.). By the time I received the diagnosis, it was just a confirmation of what I already knew. I just wanted to make it official in case I needed accommodations in the future. It also felt somewhat awkward to participate in autistic organizations without an actual diagnosis. Learning about autism in my early 20s was comforting because I now understood the *why* for many things in my life. The dots were starting to connect. My childhood in the 1980s and 1990s occurred when there was limited knowledge in the medical community about "high functioning" autism. Part of me was somewhat frustrated by finding out about this so late, but it's not productive to focus on something which was out of my control.

### **What drew you to the field of librarianship?**

**Charlie:** I decided to become a librarian for 3 primary reasons: early childhood exposure to public libraries, an extremely positive undergraduate

library experience, and my love for information in all formats.

My parents took me to the public library at least once a week when I was a child. They exposed me to the many wonderful things libraries offer such as access to information, technology training, interesting people, a culture of lifelong learning, etc. I feel fortunate that my parents demonstrated the value of libraries to me as some kids have never set foot in libraries. Back in 1995 I learned how to use the Internet at my local public library. I participated in summer reading programs and enjoyed conducting research for school projects.

I attended Elon University in North Carolina where I had an amazing undergraduate library experience. Endearingly called “Club Belk” by students, Belk Library was my home base during college. I practically lived there. It had comfortable furniture and was inviting, innovative, and featured great print and electronic resources. I considered many of the librarians to be my mentors. Being socially awkward with unique interests, I didn't participate much in the collegiate social scene, so the library was where I did a lot of my socializing. Elon invested a great deal of money into library acquisitions at the time since they had to reach a certain book volume count in order to meet Phi Beta Kappa's library requirement as part of the chapter application process. This resulted in me requesting many, many books (and even databases!), most of which were purchased. I feel like I had somewhat of an impact on that library collection. As an alumnus, I choose to earmark my donations to the library where they use the money to purchase Spanish language materials (I was a Spanish major). They send me a list of the titles

they purchase so I know exactly how my money is used.

Finally, I love information in all formats. In particular, I'm a "news junkie" who obsessively consumes local, national, and international news, mostly in the form of online video (I love newspapers but, unfortunately, I don't have the time to keep up with them). I entered college wanting to be a broadcast journalist but after taking a few introductory courses, I quickly realized that it wasn't for me. Too much of a focus on appearance, ratings, and profits and not enough on the public good. Being a librarian lets me surround myself with information and satisfies my intellectual curiosity.

**It sounds like you had already decided to become a librarian before being diagnosed. After receiving a formal diagnosis, how did you decide to go forward with applying for jobs and interviewing? Did you think this was something you wanted to disclose early in the process or not at all?**

**Charlie:** Yes, my decision to become a librarian wasn't directly related to my autism diagnosis but I will say that libraries can be good places for autistic people to work!

I usually disclose to people after I get to know them for a couple reasons:

- I want them to get to know all aspects of me and not just think of the diagnosis. Autism is just one part of my identity. It doesn't completely define who I am.



- I want to be sure they're mature enough to "handle" this information. Some people don't seem to understand the significance of this diagnosis.
- Sometimes it's really not important that they know. Especially in the case of acquaintances with whom I have more of a surface relationship.

I did disclose my autism once during an on-campus interview at another library. The interview was going so well and I felt genuinely comfortable with the search committee, so I disclosed when a pertinent question came up (I think they were asking me about some of my autism-related [professional] scholarship on my CV). After disclosing, they remarked that there were likely many faculty on the spectrum at their university (whether diagnosed or not) which was probably true!

I disclosed when I was offered my current job here at UTC since I requested a special schedule accommodation (a compressed workweek of Monday-Thursday, 4 ten-hour days). This hadn't been done before at my library and once I explained the reason for why I was requesting it they allowed me to have this schedule. A compressed schedule gives me an extra day to rest from work, both physically and emotionally. It really works well for me and I'm fortunate that they've been willing to accommodate this request. Other than that, I don't receive any formal accommodations.

**How did the interviewers telling you that they suspected many of their faculty to be on the spectrum make you feel?**

**Charlie:** Their response was validating. I felt a sense of acceptance for who I was and it was refreshing that I could be so open with them. I didn't end up getting the job. The chair of the search committee personally contacted me and explained that they offered it to someone with more supervisory experience. I thought it was kind of them to tell me exactly why they chose someone else. I couldn't offer them that part of what they were looking for.

**You mentioned people not understanding the significance of the diagnosis. Can you tell me more about that?**

**Charlie:** I'm on the "high functioning" end of the spectrum which means that I can easily blend in as neurotypical. It's not that I purposefully try to hide my autism, but my characteristics are more subtle. Once people get to know me they can start seeing my autistic quirks. Therefore, sometimes when I tell people I'm on the spectrum, they might say "Really? Are you sure?" or "I never would've known!" I realize that they're probably trying to be nice but it comes across as dismissive and patronizing and causes me to feel like I need to prove my diagnosis. It also makes for an awkward conversation because it's hard to easily respond to those comments, especially if you don't know the person well. Autism can be very much misunderstood. Many associate it with characteristics such as being completely non-verbal, of physically rocking back and forth or flapping hands, which don't apply to me.

**Can you describe the characteristics of your autism? I know some of the more well-known characteristics include sensitivity to sound and touch, but obviously every person is different.**

**Charlie:** Yes—we like to say that when you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism. Each person's characteristics are different and of varying intensities. Here are some characteristics that I have:

- Linear, concrete thinking. It's challenging for me to conceptualize abstract concepts or ambiguity. I can struggle to process complex information that I'm not familiar with and might need it explained multiple times. Math was extremely challenging for me in school and to this day I prefer to avoid math if possible.
- Sensitivity to sudden loud sounds that I'm not expecting (noisy motorcycles, sirens, dogs barking, phone suddenly ringing, etc.).
- High anxiety overall.
- Easily overwhelmed; when I have a lot of things to accomplish, I get very overwhelmed because everything has the same sense of urgency to me. It's challenging for me to prioritize sometimes.
- Poor gross and fine motor skills. I received occupational therapy in middle school.
- Obsessive compulsive/perfectionistic. I constantly check over the work I do to make sure there aren't any mistakes. I check my alarm clock multiple times before I go to bed to make sure it's set properly.
- Transitions between tasks are challenging, especially if I'm not done with a task and need to move on to something else. I prefer to finish my current task and then move on to the next one.
- I often speak what's on my mind and have trouble filtering my thoughts. It's hard for me to adapt to expectations in certain social

situations (you don't say this that way to that person, etc.) since I tend to act the same way in all situations. I'm an open book and often state the obvious even if it's considered rude.

- Special interests. Most people on the spectrum have intense interests where they become very knowledgeable on certain topics since they spend so much time researching and thinking about them. My special interests include television news and the media in general, current events, Spanish language, and world travel. When I was a child I used to love to collect things like keychains, small flags of countries around the world, coffee mugs from TV stations across the country, etc.
- I'm a very intellectually curious person so I ask a lot of questions, some of which can be quite detail oriented. This can annoy others in a meeting or classroom environment.
- I'm detail oriented. I tend to focus on the minutiae and lose the forest for the trees. This can be an asset in librarianship where little details can be important.

### **I think most people find interviewing to be overwhelming and sometimes stressful. How do you handle the interview process?**

**Charlie:** Interviewing in higher education settings can be very tiring and stressful, regardless of whether one is autistic or not. As I mentioned earlier, my autistic characteristics tend to be more subtle so interviews are tiring, but, other than that, not too bad. I've been told by several people that my phone interviews are strong which helps get me in the door. (When I was a child, my parents always made me make calls to other people and businesses myself instead of doing it for me, so I'm

very comfortable on the phone.) I prepare, prepare, prepare ahead of the interview (looking at the website and taking notes on the library and parent institution, researching the presentation question and formulating my own thoughts/experience with the topic). The two most challenging aspects of interviews for me are: being scrutinized throughout the process (even if it's during the more informal social gatherings—you're still being judged on what you say/how you act so I need to be extra careful) and at the end when I'm waiting for a response about whether I've gotten the job or not. Waiting is painful for me because I tend to obsess over the unknown, second guess myself after the interview, etc. It's always a relief to finally be told whether I have a job offer or not. Even if it's not an offer, at least the waiting process and its uncertainty is over. ((I think many people identify with Charlie's reaction to the interview process regardless of his neurodivergence.))

### **Are there things like library projects or professional development projects which you accomplished not knowing you could?**

**Charlie:** I have a great deal of anxiety when it comes to numbers (math calculations, e-resource usage statistics, quantitative information in general). Math has always been a weakness for me academically and I required a lot of tutoring in high school to get through it successfully. Hard work, practice, and good tutors were essential. The least favorite part of my job has to do with numbers (such as usage statistics, cost per use, inflationary increases, etc.). When I started in the profession 6+ years ago, I hardly knew how to use Microsoft Excel. Since then I have gradually developed skills and confidence with how to more effectively use this

program and save myself time and effort. In my opinion, quantitative data often lacks context and can therefore offer limited insights. The reality is that libraries always need to prove their value proposition (as they don't tend to generate revenue), especially in times of budgetary challenges, and numbers are an essential part of this.

Another area of challenge has been managing the work of others. Last spring my library created a part-time position to help me manage our electronic resources. Up until then, I was the only person managing the entire lifecycle of our e-resources (procurement, setup, maintenance, troubleshooting, assessment, etc.). We hired an awesome person who's detail oriented, diligent, trustworthy, and efficient. In the time since, he's gone to full-time—splitting time between e-resources and interlibrary loan.

Prior to this, I had never managed anyone on a regular basis so I've had quite a learning curve (not because of the person but rather myself simply learning how to manage others). I've noticed two challenges: assigning projects and providing him with clear instructions on what I need him to do. Assigning tasks requires time and letting go. It requires planning and clear instructions so the person understands how to complete it in the way you want. On numerous occasions I've found myself being unclear with him (assuming that he knows something when I shouldn't assume, not fully planning out the task and then realizing more parts need to be added to it which results in him having to go back and redo them, etc.). I get frustrated with myself but then acknowledge that I'm new at supervising others and I have to refine

my skills in this area. The other challenge is that he's so good at accurately completing projects in a short amount of time that I struggle to keep up with him! I find it difficult to balance all the work I myself have to get done while trying to maximize his position and delegate tasks to him.

### **Do you look for professional groups or organizations that specifically deal with librarians and neurodiversity?**

**Charlie:** To my knowledge, no specific organizations of this type currently exist which is why I founded a Facebook group called [Autistics in Libraries and Their Allies](#) last year. It currently has nearly 100 members but it's not very active. I try to post relevant news articles a few times per month and occasionally others do so, but I haven't yet figured out how to engage people on a deeper level. It can be challenging to get people's attention these days with all the information that exists online.

### **Do you think groups devoted specifically to neurodiversity issues would be beneficial?**

**Charlie:** Yes, I think a structured organization would be helpful to advocate for our interests on a number of levels such as patrons and employees. I also think it would be important for an organization like this to be actually led by autistics. I love the [Autistic Self Advocacy Network's](#) slogan "Nothing About Us Without Us." For too long, autism-related organizations have tended to not include our voices in the discussion or in their leadership ranks. This needs to change since we're capable and, I would argue, know the most

accurate version of our triumphs and challenges since we live them every day.

### **Have you ever felt discriminated against in the workplace for disclosing your autism?**

**Charlie:** Not that I know of. Nobody has commented anything to my face, but it's possible that they might hold a certain set of assumptions due to my having disclosed. I'm hoping that my disclosure and openness about autism will help them better understand neurodiversity and the range of experiences of those on the spectrum. I'd rather be known for my contributions at work instead of a diagnostic label.

### **Why do you think there is so little literature about the neurodiversity of librarians?**

**Charlie:** I think some of this has to do with the continued societal focus on children with autism, although this is slowly changing. Autistic kids grow up and deserve meaningful employment opportunities. In addition, professional organizations such as the American Library Association should have diversity initiatives that include neurodiversity. Many large research libraries have diversity residency programs for new graduates of library schools. I'd love to see a few neurodiverse residency programs at academic libraries. These could serve as a good professional entry point for those on the spectrum. Finally, more librarians on the spectrum need to feel comfortable enough to disclose so these conversations can happen.

### **What advice would you give to professionals**



## **with autism (librarians or students studying to be librarians) about finding success in the field?**

**Charlie:** Experience, experience, experience! Whether it's volunteering, working part-time, internship, etc., I cannot emphasize this enough. Nearly all library jobs require some kind of experience regardless of whether someone has an MLS. Even many paraprofessional jobs require library experience. Hopefully they're attending library schools with autism support programs on their campuses that can help them prepare for the job search with mock interviews, career fairs, resume preparation, etc.

Sometimes a person's valuable and, perhaps, unique skillset might be able to "compensate" for their social awkwardness during interviews. Therefore, it's important that they showcase their skillsets via a website, portfolio, multimedia, etc.

## **What advice would you give to a manager who is hiring a librarian with autism?**

**Charlie:** First, have an open mind and don't define the person by their autism! Autism is an important part of our identities but it's only a part. Some of the qualities I look for in a good boss are: ability to listen and provide reassurance when I doubt myself, patience with my quirks (such as asking endless questions), providing clear and detailed instructions, flexible and willing to make accommodations when necessary, and a clear and direct communicator who will regularly provide me with constructive feedback (especially when it comes to navigating office politics!).

## **What professional goals do you have that you have not yet accomplished?**

**Charlie:** I would eventually like to work at a small, private liberal arts college that's closer to my aging parents in the Northeast. I like the strong sense of community at these schools as well as their commitment to preparing students to be engaged global citizens who embrace lifelong learning. In many respects, higher education has become more focused on job preparation instead of liberal arts and sciences that provide students with a solid base (critical thinking, reasoning, writing, reading analytically, etc.) no matter what kind of career they choose.

As the world of e-resources and library collections in general continues to evolve, it's important that I develop my knowledge and skillset so they don't become stagnant. This also means exploring new technologies. Yes, I'm a millennial, but this doesn't automatically make me a techy person. The older I get, the more flexible and open to new things I become. Hopefully, this will serve me well as librarianship and higher education progress onward.

---

### ***Acknowledgements***

*Thank you to Charlie Remy for allowing me to interview you and sharing your very personal experiences with readers. Thank you to Craig Fansler for helping me find the right focus and the right outlet. Finally, thank you to my reviewers Bethany Messersmith and Robb Waltner.*

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autism      neurodiversity

< [Librarians Leading Short-Term Study Abroad Following the Yik Yak: Using Social Media Observations to Understand Student Needs on College Campuses](#) >

## 2 RESPONSES

M

🕒 2017-07-17 at 4:55 pm

Thank you for this article! I'm in the pseudo-diagnosis area (therapists say it's obvious but nothing on paper just yet) of my life and find myself looking for others like me working in library land. I'm always happy to read about how other folks on the spectrum are navigating their careers.

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# Perceptions of Disability and Neurodiversity: A Survey of Library Employees

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Phase 3 of the IMLS-funded project  
*The Practice Model for an Equitable  
Workplace Transition Program  
(EWTP):  
Disability and Neurodiversity*



INSTITUTE of  
**Museum and Library**  
SERVICES

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (#LG-252342-OLS-22)

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## **The Practice Model for an Equitable Workplace Transition Program (EWTP): Disability and Neurodiversity**

### **An Overview of The Institute of Museum & Library Services National Leadership Grant Project**

#### **Funding Acknowledgement**

This study is made possible, in part, by the Institute of Museum & Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant No. #[LG-252342-OLS-22](#) (2022-2025) for the amount of \$149,966.

#### **Grant Project Summary**

Libraries have come a long way in being more inclusive of disabled and neurodiverse patrons, although no true inclusion of patrons can be achieved if they are not represented in the library workforce. Yet these patrons are mostly served by non-disabled and neurotypical employees, a situation which gets little attention even in the context of diversity discourse. Employment rates for disabled and neurodiverse professionals remain persistently low, while both recruitment and retention efforts fall short. However, examples from the corporate world (e.g., Microsoft's recruitment of neurodiverse employees) show that in inclusive work environments disabled and neurodiverse employees thrive, especially if employment support programs are in place. Despite the recent resurgence of studies on the experiences of librarians with disabilities, none of them focus on recent graduates or the benefit of a strategic school-to-workplace transition program for disabled and neurodiverse graduates. This IMLS-funded project addresses these gaps, implemented by the team of researchers from the Library and Information Science program at the University of Denver (Dr. Keren Dali, Director) and the iSchool at the University of South Carolina (Dr. Kim M. Thompson, co-Director), alongside partners at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries (Merinda McLure and Frederick Charles Carey) and the University of South Carolina Libraries (Rebecca Padgett). This is a two-year exploratory study, which lays the groundwork for a future equitable workplace transition program. The study takes a multi-stage approach.

#### **Project Phases**

The research study consists of four phases:

1. Interviews with disabled and neurodiverse LIS graduates from participating MLIS programs.
2. Survey of managers in participating academic libraries.
3. Survey of academic library employee peers who work with disabled and neurodiverse colleagues in participating academic libraries.
4. Analysis of policy documents in participating academic libraries.

As a result of the overall research study, the project team will:

5. Create guidelines for policy change (i.e., equitable and inclusive job advertisement, application, interviewing, and onboarding), and
6. Develop a practice model for an equitable workplace transition program.

This is a report of phase 3 findings from the survey of employees in academic libraries.

## The Project Team



**Keren Dali**, University of Denver Principal Investigator (Project Director)



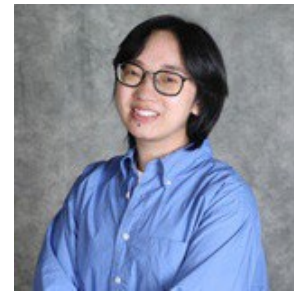
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Cameron Gillespie



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**Graduate Assistants**



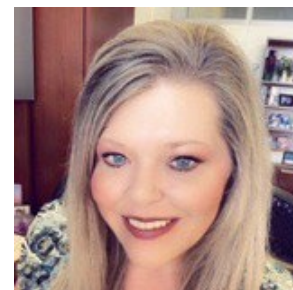
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Rebecca Padgett



Deborah Charbonneau



Stephanie Sendaula  
**Advisory Board**



Carli Spina

## Perceptions of Disability and Neurodiversity: A Survey of Library Employees

This IMLS pilot study is designed to examine the lived experience of both potential academic library workers (i.e., MLIS graduates) and to analyze the academic library workspace in terms of managerial and collegial attitudes toward and understanding of disability and neurodiversity. This report will focus on Phase 3 of the larger study. In Phase 3 we have collected data that will be useful to further understanding of academic librarians' perceptions of colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity, shed light on the existing dynamics, barriers, and opportunities within library workplaces, and contribute to a more holistic understanding of how inclusion and equity for librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity can be fostered at the workplace.

The research questions guiding Phase 3 are:

- RQ1: Do colleagues of disabled and neurodiverse library staff members see them as able to engage in professional activities on the level playing field with non-disabled employees?
- RQ2: What are library staff's perceptions of their workplace in terms of inclusion and equity for disabled and neurodiverse colleagues?
- RQ3: Do library staff desire any changes to the state of inclusion and equity for disabled and neurodiverse colleagues in their libraries and, if yes, what are these changes?

Phase 3 data were collected via an open-ended questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics from Monday June 26, 2023 to Monday July 24, 2023 and distributed by project partner Rebecca Padgett (Assistant Dean, Director of Administrative Services, University of South Carolina Library System) and by Robert H. McDonald (Dean of University Libraries, University of Colorado-Boulder). The questionnaire is accessible here: [Perceptions of Disability and Neurodiversity: A Survey of Library Employees](#).

The data from any participant who completed at least 30% of the questionnaire (i.e., more than only consent to participate and basic demographic information) is included in this analysis. The total population to whom the survey was sent in both library systems was approximately 380 library staff members (not including managers, who were the target population for Phase 2). The total number of survey responses that met the 30% threshold was n=42 (effective recovery=11%).

Interestingly, nine of the 42 participants (21%) in the Phase 3 survey self-identified as having disabilities and/or being neurodiverse themselves. While this number may not be an accurate total—some may not have disclosed—it still adds a layer of personal history to the data that we did not seek out, but that amplifies the experiential truthfulness of participant responses. In light of the RQs, some participants may be giving a voice to the experience of being in the workplace with a disability or neurodiversity at the same time that they are reflecting on how they, themselves, provide equitable and inclusive collegial support.

One of the primary investigators and one graduate research assistant coded the data inductively. A first layer of coding identified attitudes, values, and beliefs expressed in the open-ended survey data. The second layer of analysis was to group codes by category, and then compare the Phase 3



categories with Phase 2 categories to ensure cohesion to the overall analyses of the larger project's data. The third layer of analysis identified themes based on the categories. The Phase 3 Codebook is included as an Appendix.

## Key Survey Findings

### Contextual Data

Questions 1 through 3 are demographic questions, and question 4 asked “Do you have experience working with disabled and neurodiverse library colleagues?”. If the participant answered “No” to question 4, their data were excluded from the analyzed dataset. Question 1-3 demographic questions resulted in the following self-disclosed descriptions of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Data (Questions 1-4)*

Participants characteristic	<i>n</i> (%)
Age Range	
18-39	24(57%)
40+	18(43%)
Gender Identity	
Male	14(33%)
Female	21(50%)
Queer	1(2%)
Prefer not to say	6(14%)
Years worked in libraries (range)	
Less than 5 years	8(19%)
5-10 years	12(29%)
11-15 years	8(19%)
16-20 years	1(2%)
21-25 years	3(7%)
More than 26 years	9(21%)
Prefer not to say	1(2%)
Work Experience with Disabled/Neurodiverse Peers	
Yes, both disabled and neurodiverse employees	24(57%)
Yes, only disabled employees	4(10%)
Yes, only neurodiverse employees	5(12%)
Yes, but I don't know whether they had a disability or neurodiversity	4(10%)
Unsure	5(12%)

*Note.* N=42

The demographic data show a reasonable representation across age, gender identity, and years worked in libraries. All participants who are included in the dataset for analysis either worked



And while these supportive responses are excellent, we also want to point out that there can be a risk of over-neutrality or ignoring potential workplace impacts of employees with disabilities and neurodiversity. Disabilities and neurodiversity are not static; they can change from day to day, month to month, and even from hour to hour, impacting that employee's ability to continue their work or to interact with other people. For example, panic attacks can arise at any time and interrupt the person's ability to continue their work role temporarily, which can impact the workplace. However, feeling positive about an inclusive workplace is commendable.

While, as noted above, all participants said there is a place for disabled and neurodiverse colleagues in the workplace, some went on to convey concerns that there could be some troubles created when adjusting practices to allow for accommodation. They did not express an attitude that the employee with a disability or neurodiversity is problematic, but rather that the accommodation provided can sometimes be an issue or be perceived as an issue.

I think there is a perception that these accommodations make it hard for libraries to stay open if there are not enough employees onsite.

An unpopular response, to be sure, but needed for honesty. Working around life-events is one thing, and employers are bad at that (I've seen maternity leave diminished because a manager had to take care of an in-law prior to it). The management of work schedule flexing is sometimes not better. It does inconvenience everyone, that is simply factual. It is a matter of what everyone is willing to accommodate/tolerate and where the line must be drawn, to be questioned.

However even with non-[neurodiverse/disabled] staff, it is easy for these things to either have the perception of unfairness, or in many cases, legitimate concerns about the excess burden that comes with having a great deal of specialized exceptions.

Sometimes the accommodation provided by the institution may not actually decrease the barriers facing librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity.

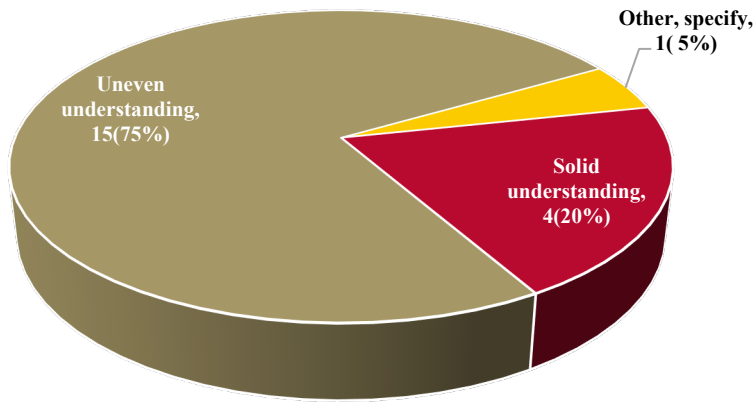
For example, someone with a brain injury may get migraines and feel sick around fluorescent lighting. The university refuses to replace the lighting saying they make glasses to help. The glasses have not helped this colleague.

Other respondents remarked that they have noticed workplace hostility toward employees with disabilities and neurodiversity.

Personally, I have found academic libraries hostile to people with disabilities and neurodivergence, because we're unable to "perform," "act the part" and "toe the line" - we are more justice oriented, struggle with a host of dysphoria (body, rejection sensitivity), have coping mechanisms and stimulations that annoy others.

## Understanding about Disabilities and Neurodiversity

**Figure 2. Level of Understanding about Disabilities and Neurodiversity (n=20)**



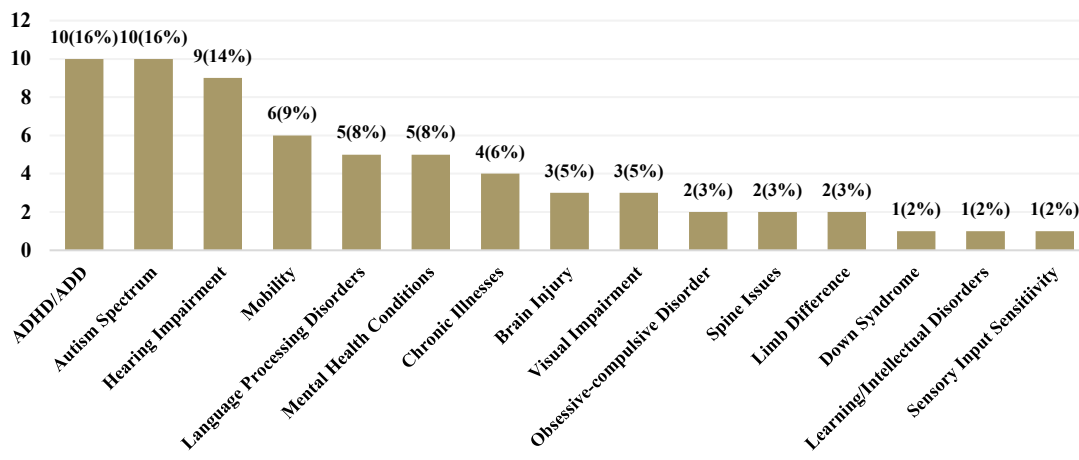
Questions 8-10 are multiple choice and matrix questions asking about understanding of disabilities and neurodiversity at a more intellectual level. Question 8 asks specifically about their level of understanding about disabilities and neurodiversity, allowing them to select between whether they had a solid, uneven, or little to no understanding, and they were allowed to specify or expand on their response, (see Figure 2). More than

half (22 participants or 52%) chose not to respond to this question, and one participant marked “Other, specify” and shared person experience of interaction with persons with disabilities and neurodiversity without defining a level of understanding by stating:

I have a developmentally disabled brother and a deaf sister. I also practiced nursing for eight years.

Questions 9 and 10 allowed the participant to write short answers to identify the disabilities and neurodiversity with which they are familiar and then they provided their understanding of disability and neurodiversity in terms of barriers and advantages in the workplace. Figure 3 summarizes the data collected:

**Figure 3. Types of Disabilities and Neurodiversity Identified (n=64)**



13 participants answered both Q9 and Q10 and they gave 64 answers, most of which were repeated by multiple participants. We have grouped the responses into the 15 categories of disabilities and/or neurodiversity listed above. Some participants used similar terms such as “Autism” and “Autism Spectrum” or “ADHD” and “ADD” in which case we grouped those terms together for our counts; we have grouped the conditions according to common features:

- Mental Health Conditions: “Major Depressive Disorder with CPTSD”, “Anxiety”, “Depression”, “Bipolar”, “Mood disorders (i.e., Depressive and anxiety disorders, Bipolar I/II, etc.)”
- Mobility: “Mobility/kinesthetic”, “Movement disabled” “Movement/needs something to help walk, etc.”, “Wheelchair bound”, “Wheelchair user”
- Chronic illness: “Parkinson’s”, “Arthritis”, “Diabetes”, and “Chronic migraine”

### *Participant Critical Analysis of Disability and Neurodiversity*

In open-ended questions throughout the survey, participants shared their holistic understanding on disabilities and neurodiversity, potential limitations and advantages facing librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity, and the supports for and barriers to librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity found in the workplace. Participants emphasized that disabilities or/and neurodiversity are not a monolith; each difference will have its own impact on creating an inclusive environment and social space. For example, when asked about inclusive hiring, spaces, and policies, answers included:

As far as I've ever notice [the institution is] very good at accommodating physical disabilities in any area, could probably do a little better with neurodiversity, but some of that is kind of new as something to take into account/accommodate for & much more complex & individual.

Working with colleagues that have physical disabilities requiring redistribution of non-essential duties like shelving and assisting with patrons. Neurodivergence did not seem to play a role in the workplace experience outside some modest discussion between coworkers. I have ADHD myself, so we would sometimes discuss how symptoms differed out of mutual curiosity. One coworker professed a need for noise-cancelling headphones as she has hearing sensitivities, where I might need to work on my emotion regulation more. Too many differences that did not necessarily manifest in work for us to have overt interactions with them.

Working with people who have visible physical disabilities is pretty straightforward, if you are walking with someone, walk at their pace, take the elevator instead of recommending the stairs, don't make a point of noticing someone's disabilities unless they bring it up, be polite and accommodating, etc. Neurodiverse colleagues usually have to tell you they're neurodiverse for you to know how to accommodate them, but usually these conversations are straightforward mentions of how their brain works a little differently and how that affects/improves their work.

Each of these participants noted a difference in accommodation needs for different types of disability and neurodiversity. They also point out that physical disability is more visible and so perhaps sometimes more carefully considered when hiring or creating policies and practices than neurodiversity might be. When working with neurodiverse employees, even though the difference may not be visible, there will be variability:

Obviously it depends on the nature of the neurodivergence. However I have met (self-disclosed) neurodivergent people in the library world who on the surface appear completely competent in their roles. Certain conditions are slightly more challenging than others.

One survey respondent expressed the need for decision-makers to be careful when describing disabilities and neurodiversity, as the very words have connotations:

Yes, it [the word neurodivergent] could be considered physiologically and psychologically accurate, but how it is used in common parlance is more as a badge of merit, a positive, in response to the perceived negative attributions of "disabled" and the like.

The words used when discussing disability and neurodiversity are meaningful, as a diagnosis can be a life-changing experience:

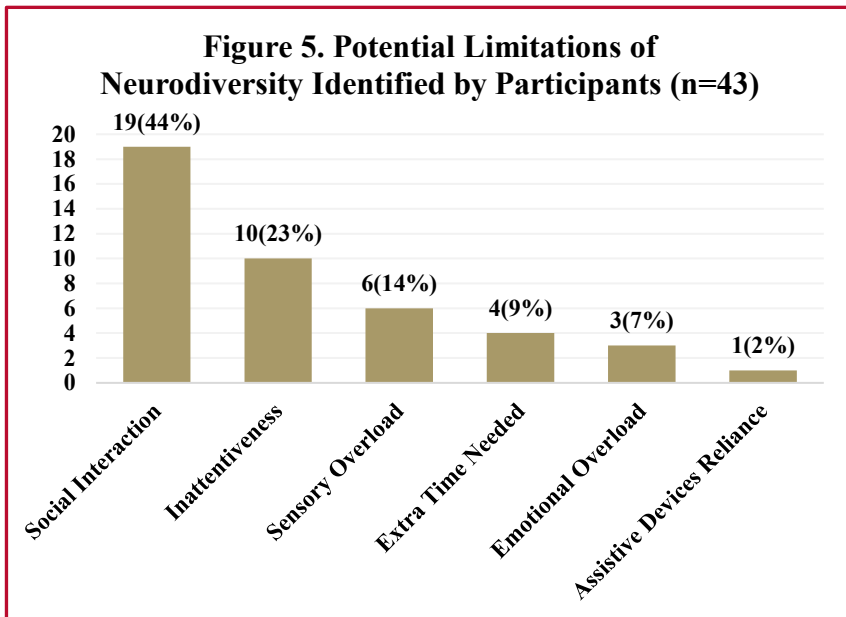
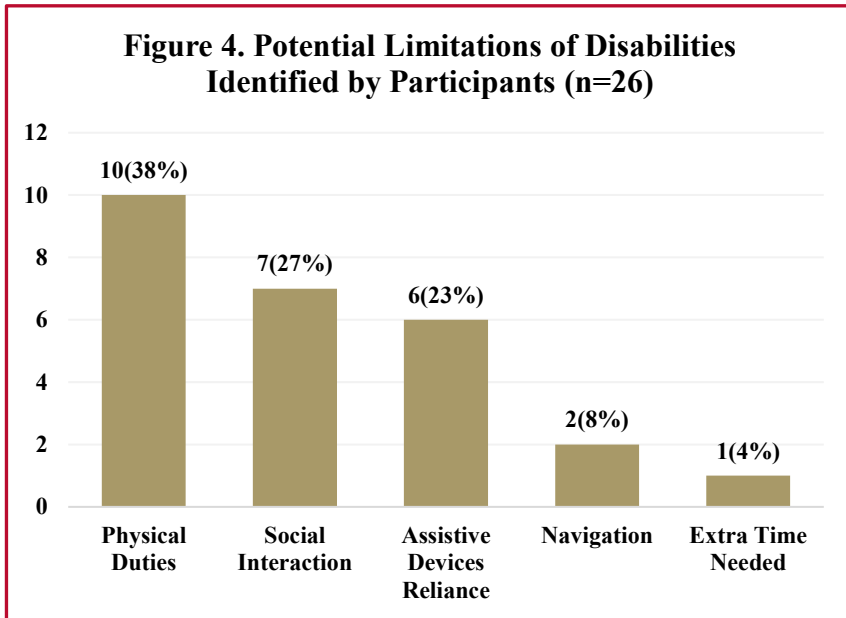
In the case of a colleague with likely but undiagnosed autism, he proved unsuited to a position of customer service and supervision of employees because his temperament and communication abilities were unsuited. (Had he been diagnosed, he may have been able to continue in the position with further training.)

As someone with ADHD, I know where I thrive and where I don't. There are parts of my job I know I'm not good at, and need to slog through to get them done. However, I seem to bring unique skills in other ways - I am very good at developing processes so that we don't forget how to do things, and I also make sure that such documentation explains why we do things the way we do them. And that commitment is driven by countering my own ADHD.

One participant who identified as having a health condition themselves reported how meaningful it was to them when seen as a whole person in the workplace.

Speaking anecdotally, when an employer shows understanding and willingness to accommodate (again, being reasonable within the duties assigned for the position), I feel more motivated and engaged with my responsibilities because I am being valued as a person first and a 'worker' second.

*Limitations That Might Arise in the Workplace for Employees with Disabilities and/or Neurodiversity*



Q9 and Q10 asked participants to identify the possible limitations in the workplace of disabilities and neurodiversity with which they are most familiar. Figures 4 and 5 show that social interaction with colleagues and patrons is a commonly perceived limitation of disabilities and neurodiversity. For librarians with disabilities, the most frequently mentioned potential limitation is the possibility of conducting physical duties in the workplace, such as lifting certain weights and reaching high shelves. Another repeatedly stated limitation of disabilities is reliance on assistive devices during work. Differently, being distracted, including inattentiveness and sensory overload, is the most perceived limitation of neurodiversity.

Certainly some disabilities and neurodiversity require changes to workplace settings or responsibilities, but not

always. Each individual has variations in behavior, ability, skill, and other personal factors that affect their working life. Participants point out that:

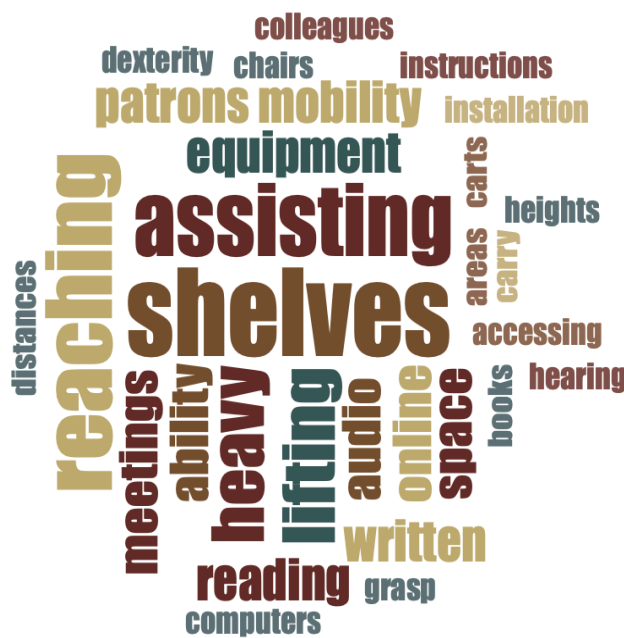
As someone with ADHD, I know where I thrive and where I don't. There are parts of my job I know I'm not good at, and need to slog through to get them done.

The neurodivergent aspect is too broad a category, to me. It can include anything from a mild form of autism to an intellectual disability that keeps someone from certain job functions.

While there are some tasks they struggle with, I don't think it's much different from a neurotypical who struggles with doing tasks.

Again, whole person thinking will ensure each employee has the support needed to be successful in the academic library workplace. Participants listed a range of workplace limitations that might occur based on disability and/or neurodiversity. We have grouped these into three types of limitations: *physical*, *intellectual*, and *social*. The types of disabilities and/or neurodiversity enclosed in quotes within the brackets were provided by participants in adjacent cells in the survey questions.

**Figure 6. Potential Physical Limitations at Workplace**



**Physical limitations** include restrictions and barriers related to physical mobility and the need for assistive devices. The word cloud (Figure. 6) highlights the potential physical limitations noted most frequently by the survey respondents.

Physical mobility limitations include such actions as lifting, reaching, standing, sitting for a long time, or otherwise navigating physical spaces. Some comments from our participants include:

[Librarians with mobility/kinesthetic disabilities may be limited in] lifting, reaching, accessing areas restricted by stairs or space.

[Librarian with movement disabilities/needs something to help walk may face limitation on] general getting around, desk heights, reaching high/low shelves.

[Librarians with arthritis may face] pain, lower mobility, reduced dexterity, receded ability to carry heavy items.

It may/or may not be a challenge to conduct certain tasks such as heavy lifting, reaching or maneuvering heavy equipment.

Written and reading are slowed and possibly spatial reasoning impaired [for librarians with dyslexia].



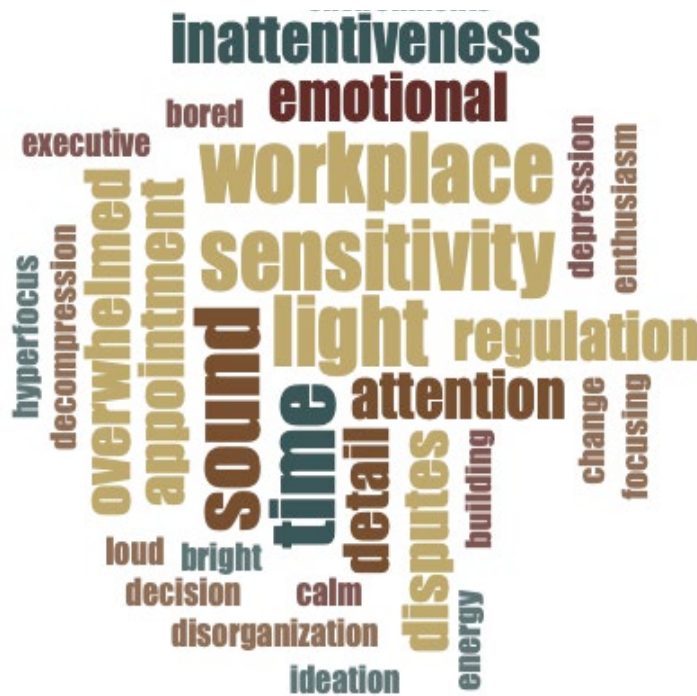
Participants mentioned that assistive devices can be needed by librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity to aid physical access, and that these devices could be helpful for employees with visual or hearing impairment, mobility limitations, and ADHD:

Changing default written instructions to have an audio option [for librarians with visual impairment could be a limitation].

Hearing colleagues & audio in meetings or through computers without aids [could be a limitation to librarians with hearing impairment].

Installation of ramps, adaptive chairs, and other mobility aids [could be needed for librarians with mobility limitations].

**Figure 7. Potential Intellectual Limitations at Workplace**



The next theme we identified based on participant data we have titled **intellectual limitations**, as the limitations are based on an individual's ability to focus their attention or endure the emotional or sensory stimulus around them. Figure 7 shows the frequently mentioned keywords about the potential intellectual limitations facing librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity at the workplace, which can be grouped into inattentiveness, emotional overload, and sensory overload.

In terms of inattentiveness, the participants mentioned that:

[Librarians with ADD have] sound/light sensitivity, inattentiveness or limited focus, time blindness (and not being able to do anything until after a thing has happened, like a late appointment).

[Librarians with ADD] sometimes needs things taught a little different, focusing on one thing, executive decision problems.

[Librarians with ADHD may] find it difficult to focus, disorganization, sometimes can't recall detail, sometimes hyperfocus.



written, and casual and official communication, due to the different communication styles:

[For librarians with hearing impairments,] communication barriers may occur with colleagues unwilling to learn new communication modes.

[Autism] impacts the way folks communicate and behave.

[Working with librarians with language processing disorders] may require multi-faceted methods of communication (i.e. written word, images, video) to accompany spoken word when communicating.

On the other hand, there may be challenges to communication between neurodiverse and "neurotypical" individuals, for example, between autistic and allistic persons.

Participants also described potential limitations to social communication with patrons:

Patron interactions can be challenging in some very specific cases [for librarians who are hard of hearing].

[Librarians under the autism spectrum may experience] varies from difficulties relating to patrons and being overly literal in social situations.

[Librarians experiencing depression may have] low energy and enthusiasm, suicidal ideation, difficulty building and maintaining relationships.

Another subtheme from the data was the belief that librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity may also face social barriers at the institutional level if they need extra support when engaging in trainings or team projects:

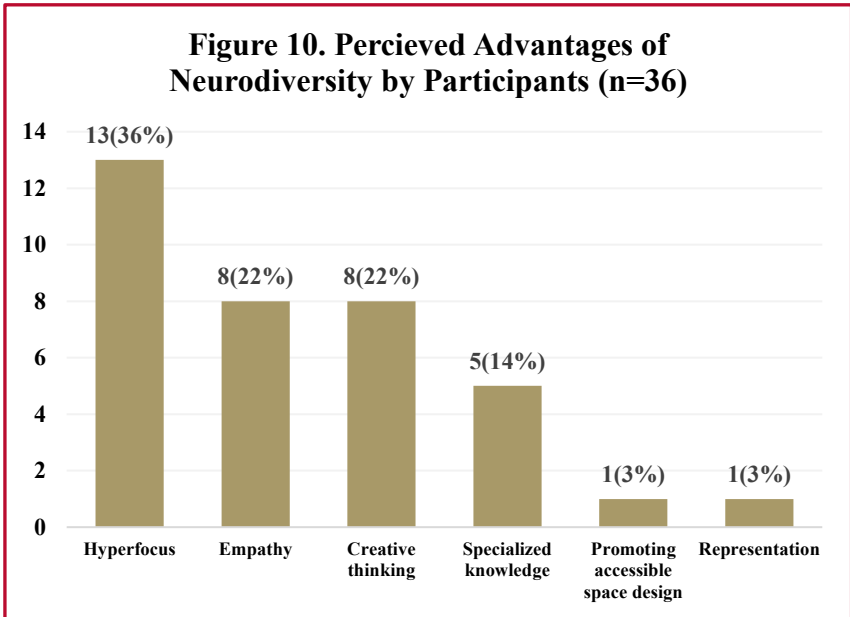
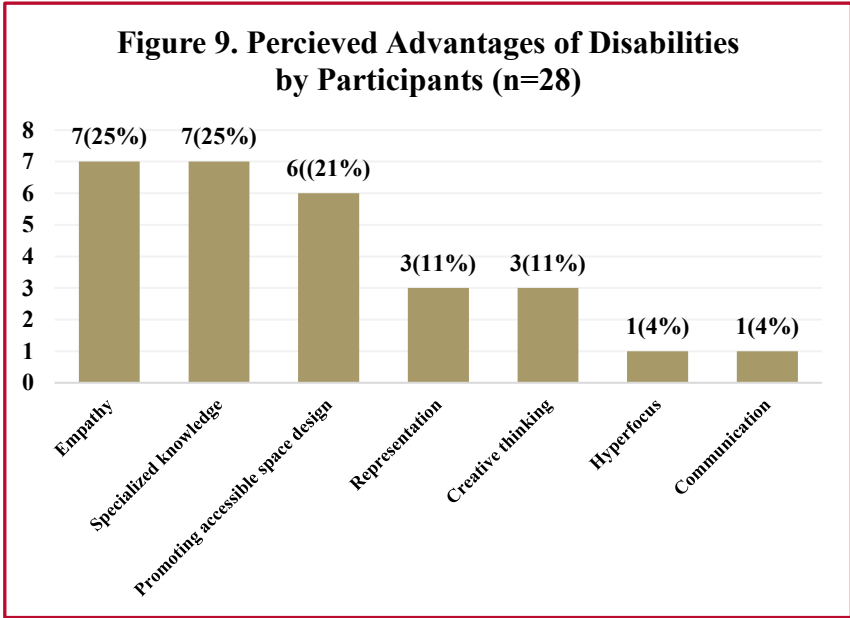
[ADHD may cause] challenges with organizing projects and planning time in traditional work environments.

[A librarian with ADD] sometimes needs things taught a little differently, focusing on one thing, executive decision problems.

[Librarians with mood disorders, such as depressive and anxiety disorders, bipolar I/II, etc.] may need flexible scheduling, sick leave, and other accommodations for fluctuations in condition/treatment. May need calm decompression spaces at the workplace.

Since the survey question asked the participant to think of limitations, the above themes include some real-life experience limitations, but it is important to remember that some of these are simply imaginings of what could potentially be a problem and may include stereotypes of disability and neurodiversity based on their knowledge and understanding.

*Advantages of Having Disability and Neurodiverse Employees in the Academic Library Workplace*



Another set of questions invited participants to consider the potential value of having employees with disabilities and neurodiversity in the workplace. Similar to the above limitations section, their responses included both expressions of their own lived experiences but also included some general guesses based on their knowledge and understanding of the disabilities and neurodiversity they named.

Responses included benefits to service, knowledge, social inclusion, and other aspects of making libraries more inclusive through the impacts of social interaction and creative thinking brought by librarians with disabilities or neurodiversity. As shown in Figure 9 and 10, participants pointed out that employees with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in libraries can provide specialized knowledge and increase

empathy to patrons in services. Moreover, having librarians with disabilities can promote accessible designs in libraries. They also can increase the visibility of the disabled community in our society. Librarians with neurodiversity may benefit the institution in different ways, such as their ability to hyperfocus on their work and provide creative ideas in problem-solving. These advantages can also be grouped by the themes of *physical advantages*, *intellectual advantages*, and *social advantages*.

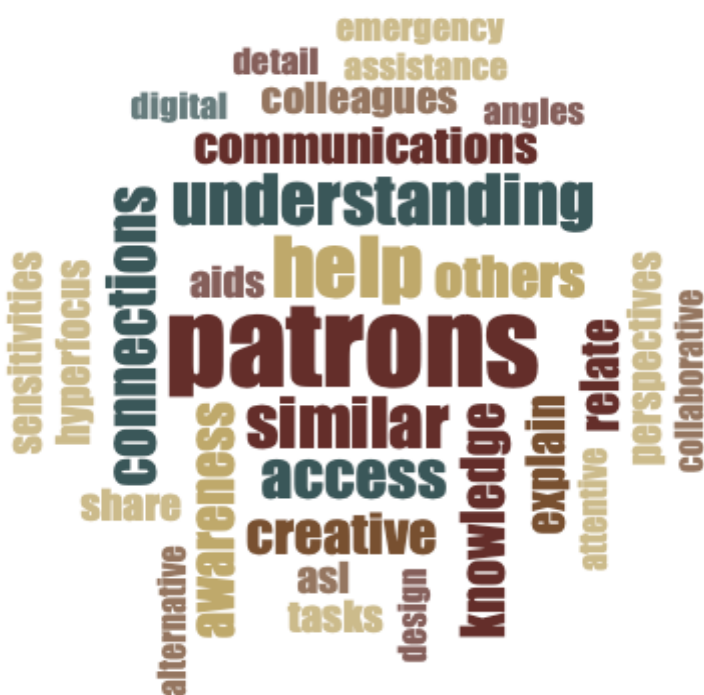
Participants mentioned only two **physical advantages** of employing individuals with certain disabilities: accessibility measures and universal design. When a worksite is reviewed with accommodation and accessibility in mind, the design of the infrastructure and furnishing can improve the workplace for all. Participants pointed this out in comments such as:

[Hiring a librarian with mobility limitation can make] everyone more aware of any deficiencies in our practices & building.

People who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices have a good understanding of how spaces should be designed, and often can provide useful information about how to make signage and exhibits accessible for children, disabled folks, or people who just aren't tall.

Participants listed quite a few more **intellectual advantages** that colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity bring to the workplace. Figure 11 provides a word cloud of keywords they supplied. Participants noted that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity provide their

**Figure 11. Potential Intellectual Advantages at Workplace**



embodied knowledge to deepen the understanding of disabilities and neurodiversity within libraries, helping to create a more inclusive space for disabled and neurodiverse employees and patrons. They conveyed these colleagues can potentially contribute to problem-solving in terms of creative thinking, hyperfocus, and special skills. Participants pointed out that librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity have specialized knowledge of American Sign Language (ASL), assistive devices, and the needs of patrons with similar health conditions and are aware of

what practices within libraries need to be updated. Their specialized knowledge helps libraries become more inclusive spaces; in addition, it also challenges the able-centric world in understanding human abilities. Participants noted the value of:

[Librarians with hearing impairment who] can offer better solutions to our digital library platforms for folks with hearing impairments. Can offer ASL learning sessions for employees.

[A librarian with sight impairment] experienced with accessible tech like screen readers, etc., offers a different way of understanding information outside of a visually centric world, often great with written or oral communications.

Disabled and neurodiverse people offer unique ideas and skillsets to library work, but too often these strengths are treated as extractable resources rather than talents with finite energies.

My colleagues from different backgrounds and different life experiences have often pushed me to think about and explain things in a different way than I would normally, often creating better outcomes to projects or collaborative projects.

[Librarian with dyslexia can] assistance with learning materials and resources is based on personal experience.

[Librarians with language processing disorder(s)] promoted development of visual signifiers which can benefit the library population and patrons as a whole.

Participants also offered ideas of how disabled and neurodiverse employees bring a greater understanding of others (intellectual advantage), adding value to the library in terms of the ability to shape services to meet the needs of the broader community.

Having neurodiverse librarians can help better serve neurodiverse patrons inasmuch as some traits may be seen in common; for example, many autistic people are known for literal thinking and may struggle with vague or metaphorical language.

[A librarian who is limb-different] brings knowledge of accessibility, connect to patrons with limb difference and other visible disabilities.

[A librarian with autism has] awareness & how to help others with similar neurodiversity.

[A librarian with autism might have] knowledge to better support patrons, [and bring] special interests [that] enrich work & help connect patrons.

Having disabled librarians can help in serving disabled patrons, as they may bring awareness of accessibility issues that need to be addressed.

The participants also indicated that their colleagues with disabilities or neurodiversity could provide creative angles on decision-making or problem-solving as these individuals sometimes can see patterns, connections, or details others might not. Librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity are often described as “thinking out of the box” and “hyper-focused” by the participants:

[Librarians with autism or learning/intellectual disorders] provide alternative methods to the way we communicate and share information in the workplace.

[Librarian with ADHD] provides key insights to thinking about problems from a multitude of angles.

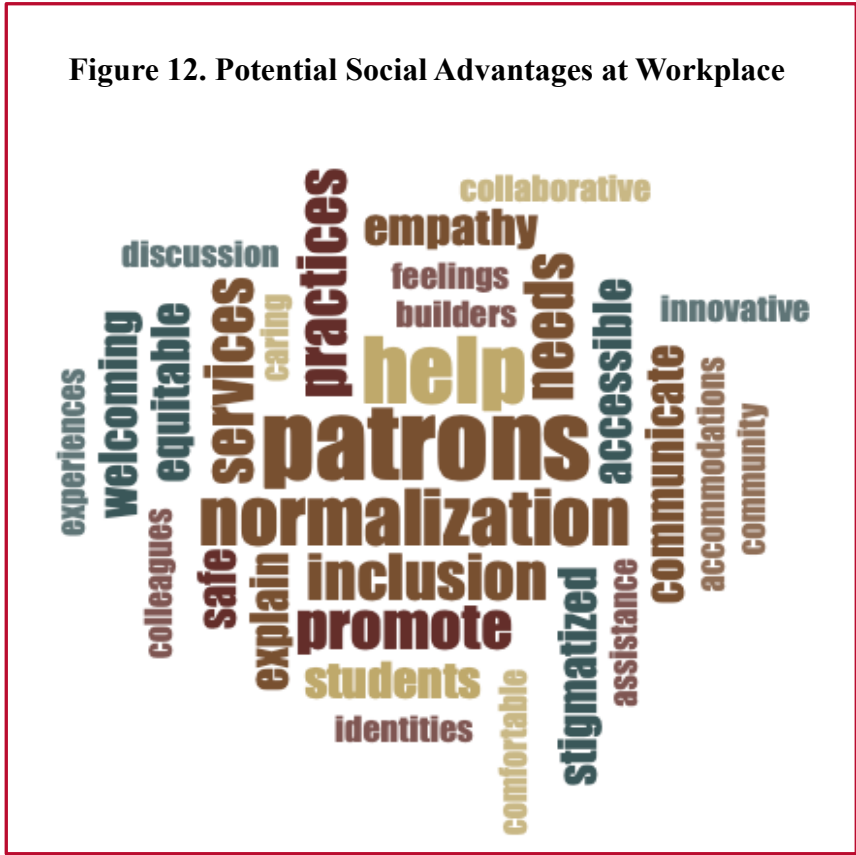
These folks [librarians with anxiety] tend to overprepare and think about many contingencies, which can help in an emergency or if things don't go according to plan.

[Librarians under the autism spectrum could be] quick to find connections and respond to clearly written out tasks, creative thinking.

[Librarians with ADHD are] hyperfocus on problems and solve them with a great deal of detail.

If you can get them [librarians with ADD] focused on a particular project they will work fact.

Librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity may also bring **social advantages** to the library workplace. As shown in Figure 12, participants wrote that seeing librarians with disabilities



and/or neurodiversity working in libraries can increase the sense of belonging of patrons with similar health conditions or with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in general. They indicated that these employees' presence in the workplace is not only a symbol of disabilities and neurodiversity inclusion in the space but also a counter-discourse of the deficit assumptions and stigmas on the disabled and/or neurodiverse community. Working with disabled and/or neurodiverse colleagues encourages their peers to reconsider the able-centric design of the building, devices, policies,

and procedures, and similar normativity of the broader society. Quotes from participants about representation in the workplace include:

[Patrons] would think that having disabled and neurodiverse librarians would indicate that the library is a welcoming and safe space.

It [having disabled and/or neurodiverse librarians] would hopefully cause us to create more equitable and accessible practices. Which I'd expect would reflect on to our disabled & neurodiverse users.

Also, representation matters, and disabled patrons seeing visibly disabled librarians might make them more comfortable and more likely to ask for the services and assistance they need.

In addition to the representation role, the participants also thought that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity could bring positive changes to a more inclusive space, as the participants stated:

I think it [having disabled and/or neurodiverse librarians] would help us create better or more innovative services/practices for our diverse patrons and diverse workplace.

[Librarian with physical/cerebral palsy] influences the workplace to create accessible features and equitable accommodations.

Specifically, some participants pointed out that adjusting communication styles and showing empathy could help to achieve inclusivity for the disabled and neurodiverse communities within the libraries, which were two advantages of having libraries with disabilities and neurodiversity.

[Working with librarians with hearing impairment] promotes discussion of how we communicate within the workplace as well as with the population we serve (i.e. students, professors who also have communication needs).

[Librarian with major depression or disorder with CPTSD] is probably a kind and caring person, community builders through empathy.

My colleagues from different backgrounds and different life experiences have often pushed me to think about and explain things in a different way than I would normally, often creating better outcomes to projects or collaborative projects.

Moreover, participants also believed that having librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in their libraries could normalize the disabled and neurodiverse communities, which would increase social inclusion for the communities ultimately.

Inclusivity of disabled and neurodiverse librarians can promote feelings of solidarity and support to other persons (e.g., students, staff, and professors) with similar identities, as well as promote the normalization of social inclusion for persons in this often overlooked demographic.

[Librarian with diabetes could help to] normalize an often stigmatized condition and removed shame to attend to physical needs.

[Librarian with mood disorders (i.e., depressive and anxiety disorders, bipolar I/II, etc.)] normalizes conditions often stigmatized in popular culture and by the medical industry.

### ***Barriers Facing Librarians with Disabilities and Neurodiversity within the Workplace***

Participants analyzed infrastructure-level hurdles that could limit the capacity or potential of colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the workplace. They underlined the inflexibility of academic libraries to make changes for disability and neurodiversity inclusion due to its bureaucratic nature. As bureaucratic infrastructures are designed to support production through blanket organizational policies and procedures and power hierarchies, they can lead to promotion structures and normative work allocations that ignore individual needs.

We need spaces that are psychologically and physically safe, quiet and controllable, but power differentials make that difficult.

I do think the bureaucratic system in academic libraries is often inflexible and makes it challenging to meet expectations for people with disabilities.



Basically, if libraries continue to adopt corporate-like practices rather than respecting a plurality of workstyles and scheduling needs, they will continue to be undercover beacons of white supremacy and neoliberal poisons mixed with vocational awe.

Specifically, our study participants expressed an understanding of how the physical, institutional, and social hurdles marginalized their colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in their own academic library settings. In terms of **physical barriers**, participants highlighted the issues of accessibility due to the age and/or space limitations of the library buildings and the outdated equipment within the workplace.

Building accessibility is a large factor when considering mobility and ADA-compliance at [our main] library location. Due to the historic age and construction of this building, there is very poor adaptability when considering alterations, leading to sections or offices, some stacks materials, and study spaces being inaccessible by mobility aids.

We are also in an older building where a lot of things don't meet ADA standards but are allowed to remain because they are essentially unfixable unless the entire building is torn down.

I work at a library that is in need of renovations both structurally and to be more accommodating of physical disabilities and sensory sensitivities. Fluorescent lighting is bad, especially when they flicker or are buzzy.

The participants also pointed out that the **institutional policies and/or procedures** within libraries may cause unnecessary hurdles to librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity. Firstly, some participants noticed a lack of disability- and neurodiversity-inclusive policies and/or practices in their institutions, such as onboarding and other activities.

As a disabled neurodiverse person, I have been ostracized for standing up to unreasonable demands, such as taking on others' roles permanently without faculty governance negotiations and compensation, calling out that I need more planning than being on-call for reference shifts (not part of my role) and be on campus. Many activities of our jobs can be and should be done in ways and places that are most productive and conducive to how our brains work.

My onboarding process felt chaotic, unstructured and not particularly helpful. I realize a lot of things were happening in my institution at the time, but the onboarding process felt rushed and incomplete and not necessarily inclusive of disabled and neurodiverse colleagues.

Participants also indicated that some inclusive policies and/or procedures for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity might be easier to implement in some areas of the workplace than in others, and so may have limited positive impacts, and sometimes the benefit cannot be equally distributed because of staffing limitations.

I work in the back (specifically cataloging), these kinds of adjustments [modifications of work schedules] are fairly easy to accommodate since we don't have to staff a public service desk during "normal" working hours. Sometimes it can be a little bit harder for more public areas to make sure they have someone to be at a desk and available for patrons.

An unpopular response, to be sure, but needed for honesty. Working around life-events is one thing, and employers are bad at that (I've seen maternity leave diminished because a manager had to take care of an in-law prior to it). The management of work schedule flexing is sometimes not

better. It does inconvenience everyone, that is simply factual. It is a matter of what everyone is willing to accommodate/tolerate and where the line must be drawn, to be questioned. I have seen work-from-home abused severely when building policy requires at least two people in the building and suddenly another person has to take time off because they have no work to be done from home. I have also seen people band together when an immune-compromised coworker could not come in to do their shift and people would volunteer to come in. It all depends on the workplace ethic and how much is forced policy from HR over worker engagement.

Another participant pointed out that inclusive policies and/or procedures could be on the books but not offered in a way that is truly inclusive.

Our university too requires reporting of disabilities to an office external to the library in order to receive accommodations and this process can be exhausting and demoralizing.

Moreover, some participants also argued that performance evaluation criteria might undervalue the contributions of their disabled and/or neurodiverse colleagues since the criteria are one-size-fits-all and were created based on the neurotypical and non-disabled worldview. Participants questioned the object of performance evaluation:

As a society, we often confuse effort/suitability with the end product. An example I see a lot is spelling being used against someone because it is a sign of a lack of effort or time spent on the product. I have seen otherwise good candidates rejected because of a spelling error. We also measure success on a numerical scale and compare these numbers to other people. Often with very different jobs and duties. There is an expectation that all people are evaluated on the same scale, but the scales rarely match. I also think there is an underlying assumption all people are treated equally and have equal opportunity, which is not true from position to position. There is a general lack of understanding of why accommodations exist and how disabilities affect people. Finally, almost all of the documentation surrounding policies and practices on all levels are written for and by neurotypical and non-disabled people and is communicated in a way that often excludes others. These processes have unwritten rules that must be followed for others to see the value of work.

Respondents also questioned whether their institutionalized performance evaluations are fair in terms of staff diversities or whether they might:

I feel that hiring is getting better, but the way performance evaluation is conducted is quite outdated and not suitable for folks who might struggle with learning disabilities.

I don't think performance evaluation and policies are inclusive, instead they punish us. I have been downgraded and literally ostracized for not being able to take on additional reference desk shifts, for not being present at many social events (because of anxiety and C-PTSD related somatic dysregulation), for refusing to work more than 40 hours a week to prevent a third cycle of clinical burnout, and for preferring to conduct meetings on Zoom where I can be my most professional self. My supervisor was downgraded on their eval for not keeping their team "in line" - we have the most (openly) neurodiverse unit.

In addition to the difficulties policies and procedures can create, survey participants also identified other **social hurdles** in the workplace for employees with disabilities and neurodiversity. Some respondents wrote about these hurdles in very general terms, such as:

I also think there is an underlying assumption all people are treated equally and have equal opportunity, which is not true from position to position. There is a general lack of understanding of why accommodations exist and how disabilities affect people.

It would be nice if we talked about them in terms of valuing differences and gaining greater understanding rather than simply whether we are complying with ADA. It seems to me that we don't really talk about or take into account disabilities or (even more so) neurodiversity other than the smallest of nods to their existence.

Others specified ways in which social hurdles were particular to their own institutions and interpersonal interactions.

We have some DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] workshops, and they focus more on race. Disabled and neurodivergent individuals are largely ignored in the DEI space.

In the broader library, disability and neurodivergence are becoming focus of JEDI [justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion] work, but most people I know with disabilities seem to feel uncomfortable with self-advocating or being vulnerable, possibly because our leadership scoffs that so many of us in these groups are negatively impacted by neoliberal corporate practices they espouse.

We also frankly need social change for this to be a safe and equitable organization--it's hard to encourage people to take up what is offered when I can't promise they won't face others' internalized bias or judgment.

### **Action: Training, Accommodation, and Universal Design**

The third portion of the survey (Q12-15) asked participants to recommend actions that can be taken to create a more inclusive workplace for librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity. Several participants called for more training opportunities. This was an action that they indicated could help them feel more confident in their ability to include colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity. Accommodation was another strong action theme in this section, and respondents provided concrete scenarios and suggestions for how to improve accommodation decisions. Some of the answers detailed actions that the institution can incorporate into hiring, onboarding, performance evaluation, and other policies and practices, while other answers outlined what actions individuals can take to create a more inclusive and collegial environment. A third action theme was universal design and how making the infrastructure more inclusive for variations in ability could potentially make the infrastructure better for all—employees as well as patrons. In this section, we will discuss each of these themes in detail.

### ***Training Needs and Self-reflection on Personal Knowledge, Understanding of and Attitudes toward Disability and Neurodiversity***

Participants noted their own interest in opening more discussion and learning more about disability and neurodiversity in the workplace:

More education in this realm would be appreciated on an institution level for myself.

[Collaborating with colleagues with disabilities or neurodiversity is] Good. Would need some education on how to accommodate them in projects.

I want to be trained on how to socialize with autistic people in ways they enjoy.

Would appreciate training/tips for interaction [with colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity].

They identified a lack of their own knowledge about both general aspects of disability and neurodiversity, and also about potential colleague's needs.

I think we have a lot of willingness to accommodate some types of disabilities but a lack of knowledge to ensure all disabilities/neurodivergence can be accommodated.

[Working with colleagues with mental illness is] fine, have some experience but mental illness is wide spread so would need to learn more about individual's need.

Specific mention of American Sign Language (ASL) and software for assisting visually impaired people highlighted the importance of being able to communicate with others. Participants also discussed interpersonal communication styles and ways that style affects or is affected by working with colleagues with disability and neurodiversity.

I adjust my style of communication [with colleagues who are on the autism spectrum], it is fine.

[I] would respect boundaries and not pry, show compassion and patience. I've experienced compassion fatigue from collaborators as the mentally ill person; [I try to] work with [others'] ups and downs to carry us if I can.

This willingness to change own behaviors based on colleague needs expanded to more general aspects beyond communication as well,

[I] would adjust work according to their [librarians with chronic autoimmune, neurological, or inflammatory illness] needs.

In their responses, the participants sometimes wrote about training needs in very general terms, but later provided very specific areas for training—for example, communication style, how to use assistive devices, social boundaries and inclusive social practices, how to best collaborate with colleagues with different abilities and needs in a way that also protects colleagues from “compassion fatigue”, and so forth.

### *Accommodation: Flexibility in Hiring, Retention, and Evaluation*

Some survey responses listed institutional supports that could be put into place to ensure a more equitable experience from the very start, even before an employee is hired. This includes changes to the **hiring process**, for example adding inclusive wording to the job description, providing online interview options, and removing job requirements such as the ability to lift certain amounts of weight.

I believe our library institution takes great pride in their efforts to present job positions as approachable to individuals of all backgrounds, including marginalized demographics. Specifically, all job postings posit a diversity statement: "We affirm diversity and inclusive excellence to be vitally integral to the Libraries' mission and vision."

I noticed when I interviewed at my workplace that questions were provided in advance and were available in text during Zoom interviews. This was very helpful and led me to consider the institution to be welcoming to neurodivergent people.

The requirements of the job must be carefully thought out in each case and all possible accommodations made within the framework of what needs to be done in the job. Sometimes this is possible. For example, weight lifting requirements can be waived if there are others who can be made available to do lifting.

Accommodation is not only part of the hiring negotiation but is also vital for **staff retention**. First, disability and neurodiversity may not always be disclosed before a hire is made, for various reasons. Second, disability and neurodiversity may not even be diagnosed at the time of the hire, or may not occur until after someone is in the workplace; disability and neurodiversity are not static. The decision to disclose or not is a personal choice but can affect the ability of the workplace to provide needed support. Accommodations respondents noted as being helpful included ADA compliance, of course, but also very specific small changes to work schedule, role assignment, interpersonal communication, and other flexibilities that seem to be little more than humane treatment of any employee. For example:

Flexibility is requisite if you hire disabled and neurodiverse people. We need access to food so we don't forget to eat; our bathrooms are setup for us and close by; not everyone has the same energy and focus to 8-5 schedules. We can't ride the bus or get to campus easily, especially in inclement weather; we are our own carers, and flexibility asked for is not different from parents with their kids.

I think anyone is suitable to be an information professional because there are so many different and unique roles in a library. It is up to the library to provide a safe space where folks can request equitable accommodations to help them thrive in their role.

Our small unit includes people with ADHD, autism, C-PTSD, and chronic illnesses. We have a feminist culture of care and intentionally share general knowledge of each other's areas in order to back each other up and be flexible as a unit.

To create a really welcoming and open space, institutions should encourage, foster, and model compassion and openness. Creating a welcoming space should not feel like an obligatory chore...Institutions that are properly staffed and have good workflows/policies can reduce worker stress, allowing employees to work in a more positive environment and practice openness and compassion.

Also, overworked, overtired, stressed employees are often grouchy and less productive, and such conditions make it harder to create a welcoming and inclusive space. Institutions that are properly staffed and have good workflows/policies can reduce worker stress, allowing employees to work in a more positive environment and practice openness and compassion.

A good workplace accommodates people to the extent possible regardless of the situation. If someone has a bad day of fibromyalgia pain, they should be given the same consideration we would offer anyone else. To do our best work, we need to be functional, and to do good work in the long term, that means being able to be as healthy as possible.

I have trained an individual that had some noticeable cognitive impairments due to an accident, and that required finding elements of technical service oriented work which required fewer "if/then" scenarios with low variation in tasks. Another person I am adjacent to often requires coordination with their department and supervisors in order to minimize outbursts or potential personnel situations when they interact with other workers.

Part of retention is equitable workplace **evaluation systems and processes** and the ability of all employees to seek promotion or grow and learn in their career. Annual reviews and performance evaluations that disable employees because of physical or neural diversities are unfair. As said by one respondent, “[Libraries may need to] restructure or burn down the evaluation system.” Some systems may be doing better than others. Comments included:

I do think that my library is/would do well in the performance evaluation inclusivity. All goals are set individually with a supervisor & there is a lot of flexibility in that. I have a minor physical disability and everyone has always been good making sure goals are something I can achieve & making any accommodations needed for me to be successful.

I think annual reviews should be able to take neurodiversity into account, but other than that, and knowing that your colleagues may be neurodiverse, I don't think work in libraries would be significantly affected.

Participants also stated that managers might need to be more aware of their assumptions when making decisions about role assignments, work schedules, and so forth.

Disabled individuals mostly need to have management that focuses on making sure that they have tasks that are suited to their capabilities, which depends heavily on the nature of their condition.

A large citation for why employers disapprove of more 'flexible' work scheduling seems to draw from the assumption that in-person or virtual synchronous collaboration is the only and best option for the worker-base as a whole.

In summary, the participant feedback on the topic of accommodation was largely supportive of inclusive practices and procedures that provide more flexibility and support from the hiring stage through to retention of employees and evaluation systems.

### *Universal Design*

While accommodation is a way to provide targeted support for individuals with disabilities and neurodiversity, universal design takes this even further, providing infrastructures and processes that have the potential to benefit all, regardless of ability. One participant stated this extended version of inclusion as: “Instead of these arrangements [i.e., modifications of work schedules] being exceptions it would be possible for them to be offered for everyone so no one is getting special treatment.” The participants provided suggestions for a universal design focusing on physical infrastructure, work schedules and procedures, and designing a safe social space, as follows.

**Physical Infrastructure.** Participants suggested that libraries’ physical space should be accessible to everyone. Although some changes to the physical space seem to serve the disabled and/or neurodiversity community at first glance, they can also be beneficial for “non-disabled” users.

We have an older building that needs major updating, but it is very important so that all persons may access the library.

I do feel that some environments are more or less suited to individuals who are disabled or neurodiverse, but some effort should be made to make spaces accessible and welcoming to all. For example, creating wheelchair accessible spaces is not a great inconvenience to non-disabled persons, but demonstrates understanding and compassion for varying mobility levels and can be useful for non-wheelchair users; additionally, the wider spaces required between ADA-compliant shelving units is also useful for non-wheelchair users.

**Work Schedules or Procedures.** Our respondents emphasized that flexible work schedules or procedures should not just be an accommodation for employees with disabilities and/or neurodiversity. Instead, the work schedules or procedures should respect everyone's needs:

While some jobs require physical presence on a set schedule and it may not always be possible to staff to a model that allows for such flexibility, most librarians' jobs have a great deal to do with intellectual tasks that may not necessarily need to be done in-person or on a set schedule. It's best to not lose someone's skills and good work just because they aren't doing it exactly where and when you think they ought.

Everyone functions better on different schedules (outside a typical 9-5) and with different needs so allowing work from home options and flexible schedules helps employees perform at their best and provide increased workplace performance.

All employees should have modified schedules and management should hire enough people that it's not an inconvenience or unfair to others. Instead of pitting people against each other, this should motivate management to hire more people or adapt priorities in order to make sure everyone's needs are met.

**Safe Social Space.** Participants also indicated that creating safe social space in general for everyone can make people with disabilities and/or neurodiversity feel more comfortable. For example, one participant indicated that:

I also think there are many folks who have invisible disabilities and we need to foster equitable workplace environments so that folks can confidently ask for the accommodations they want and need to perform at their absolute best without feelings of doubt or questions asked from supervisors or administration.

### ***General Tips for Creating Inclusion in the Workplace***

Throughout the dataset, participants provided suggestions for how to create greater inclusion in the library as workplace. These tips extend to how to make changes that will 1) build equity and inclusion through bringing all members of the community into the discussion on what is optimal within the given context (i.e., “nothing about us without us”); 2) consider the cost/benefit balance of decisions around inclusive practices; and 3) reflect the understanding that creating an inclusive environment is an ongoing process, not static. The following three sections provide a list of their comments related to these three topics

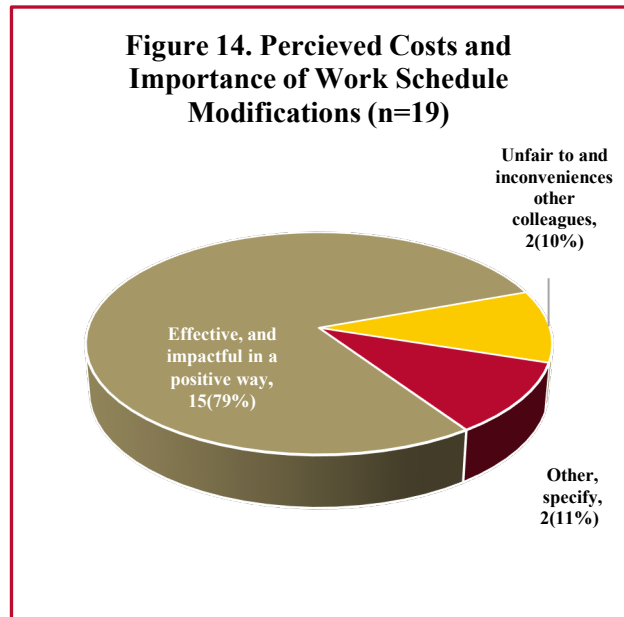
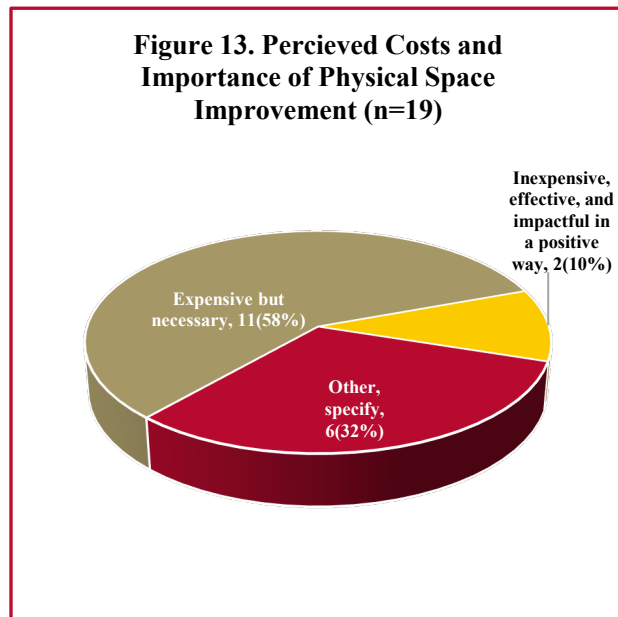
**Nothing about Us without Us.** The person who needs accommodation needs to be part of the conversation about the accommodation and how to design a more inclusive system and infrastructure. Participants stated:

It would be nice if we talked about them in terms of valuing differences and gaining greater understanding rather than simply whether we are complying with ADA.

Often we think we are evaluating something like performance when we are actually evaluating something else. I would also argue that it is often incumbent on a disabled person to point out the flaws and out their disability in order to make changes.

I also think there are many folks who have invisible disabilities and we need to foster equitable workplace environments so that folks can confidently ask for the accommodations they want and need to perform at their absolute best without feelings of doubt or questions asked from supervisors or administration.

**Costs and Benefits of Change.** Q12 and Q13 asked participants' perceptions of the costs and importance of making changes to the physical space and work schedules. As shown in Figures 13 and 14, most participants thought making changes for inclusion was necessary. However, they were also aware that making changes would have costs, especially for upgrading the physical space.



While changes can be expensive or inexpensive, they are necessary and need to undergo systematic evaluation to ensure changes are not simply made for the sake of change, but that they are taking into account the whole context.

I think it can be expensive, but you can find ways that might be more inexpensive. It is also important to do so, but you might need to do a cost analysis along with a community analysis to determine how important it is.



Some participants indicated that changes for inclusion are necessary because accessibility is the nature of libraries:

I CAN speak to the necessity of renovating these spaces, as it allows persons access to resources and work spaces with safety and accessibility in mind. It further shows a commitment to including folks in these demographics within our university.

Access is what libraries provide. If we limit access than we are not actually doing what we are supposed to [do].

One participant pointed out that although some actions for inclusion would be financially expensive, it would be beneficial for institutional development in long run by attracting valuable employees:

Buying a different kind of desk isn't all that expensive. Trying to retrofit an old pre-ADA building can be expensive. But if an organization does not make the investment to make physical spaces accessible, they are likely to miss out on good and valuable employees.

Respondents expressed financial and temporal frustration in actions for inclusion:

The situations can be potentially expensive depending on the case in question. I have seen scenarios where special equipment is occasionally required that demands certain expenditures in order to make the accommodation. Probably the most uncomfortable thing to talk about is the time that it has taken to complete training for individuals with specific cognitive limitations. I have had scenarios in which I have invested 10x the time in training compared to what I would do on average. In addition it required much more oversight and review of their work as well in order to ensure that the outcomes meet our general standards.

**Inclusivity as a Continuing Process.** Finally, participant data reinforced the notion that inclusive design is an ongoing process. Small changes over time make a big difference; the goal is to never stop improving. As stated by participants:

Practices are revised often to make things more inclusive but there is always something more/new.

Continue to be open minded about the technology we have now and how we can really use it to its fullest potential in order to provide employees with better work/life accommodations.

Changes in that area are necessary, expensive or not, they can also take time regardless of [money], but they can be prioritized and sometimes temp work arounds can be found to use until things can get changed.

Something akin to the phrase "lipstick on a pig," where we do not/cannot change reality and the issues that arise but we can say something *nice to make ourselves feel better about being unable to affect things*.

## Summary and Recommendations

### Summary Discussion

While Phase 2 of this IMLS study focused on the management level of inclusion—leading to recommendations for training that can improve hiring and promotion processes—Phase 3 data explored the experiences of academic librarians working with colleagues who have identified as having a disability or neurodiversity. The questionnaire for Phase 3 asked participants to reflect on their own attitudes and understanding of disabled and neurodiverse library staff members and on their perceptions of inclusion and equity in the workplace. The questionnaire also elicited recommendations for change that might improve the academic library workplace as an inclusive and equitable space for disabled and neurodiverse employees. The sections below summarize our observations for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 and then provide recommendations for creating an inclusive workplace based on our participants' responses.

#### **RQ1: Do colleagues of disabled and neurodiverse library staff members see them as able to engage in professional activities on the level playing field with non-disabled employees?**

The survey revealed that librarians generally see themselves as able to engage in professional activities with colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity. Although some participants did not feel well-prepared for collaborating with disabled and/or neurodiverse colleagues, they were willing to learn more inclusive practices and expected support from their institutions. However, the tendency of disability and neurodiversity over-neutrality, or suggesting that there was no impact whatsoever on the workplace, also emerged from the survey.

The feeling of being under-prepared to engage with colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity might stem from an inadequate understanding of disabilities and neurodiversity, as 75% of our participants indicated that they had an uneven understanding of disabilities and neurodiversity. As previously shown in Figure 3 on page 8, the survey showed that the following types of disabilities and neurodiversity are more visible in the workplace; participants' discussions of collaborating with colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity are based on the scope:

- ADHA/ADD;
- Autism spectrum;
- Hearing impairment;
- Limited mobility;
- Language processing disorder;
- Mental health conditions;
- Chronic illnesses;
- Brain injury;
- Visual impairment;
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder;

- Spine issues;
- Limb difference;
- Down syndrome;
- Learning/intellectual disorder; and
- Sensory input sensitivity.

Specifically, we have analyzed participant understanding of disabilities and/or neurodiversity as including the following key themes:

- Disabilities and/or neurodiversity are not a monolith; they have different levels of visibility in the workplace and require varied approaches to facilitate equal engagement.
- Collaboration with colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity might be impacted by the following potential limitations:
  - Physical limitations
    - Physical mobility
    - Reliance on assistive devices
  - Intellectual limitations
    - Inattentiveness
    - Emotional overload
    - Sensory overload
  - Social limitations
    - Communication with peers
    - Communication with patrons
    - Need extra support when engaging with training or team projects
- Participant data also indicated an understanding of the advantages of working with colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity, such as:
  - Physical advantages
    - Accessibility measurements
    - Universal design
  - Intellectual advantages
    - Specialized knowledge
    - Understanding of others
    - Creative thinking in decision-making or problem-solving
  - Social Advantages
    - Representation of disability and neurodiversity in the community
    - Encouragement of inclusive practices in the workplace
    - Normalization of disability and neurodiversity

**RQ2: What are library staff’s perceptions of their workplace in terms of inclusion and equity for disabled and neurodiverse colleagues?**

Phase 3 data indicated that although our participants’ workplace achieved inclusivity of disabilities and neurodiversity at a certain level, the inclusivity might not equally benefit

employees with different abilities. The imbalance of the inclusion practices includes the following aspects:

- Uneven attention towards physical disabilities and neurodiversity
- Uneven inclusion levels of disabilities and neurodiversity in the hiring, retention, and evaluation procedures

Our participants highlighted that there are distinct barriers in the workplace that can be addressed to create a more inclusive environment. Perceived barriers in the workplace noted in participant responses included:

- Physical barriers
  - Accessibility issues related to older or out-of-date library building structures and equipment
- Institutional policies and/or procedures
  - Lack of disability and/or neurodiversity-inclusive policies and/or procedures
  - Lack of efficient implementation of inclusive policies, including unequal distribution of the benefits of the policies and ineffective accommodations
  - Undervaluing librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity within performance evaluation criteria or practices
- Social barriers
  - Hostility or ignorance towards disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the workplace
  - Bias or judgment in interpersonal interactions

Understanding peers' perceptions of their disabled and neurodiverse colleagues is essential to creating an inclusive workspace because their attitudes and understandings may decide the working environment for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity, impacting their retention in their institutions. Normativity of the abled in the workplace is an invisible and accumulated strategy that can marginalize librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity. Workplace training and institutional policies could be a way to protect them from discrimination and microaggression; however, the biases are sometimes intentional.

**RQ3: Do library staff desire any changes to the state of inclusion and equity for disabled and neurodiverse colleagues in their libraries and, if yes, what are these changes?**

The phase 3 survey indicated that library staff called for several changes in their institutions to create an inclusive and equal space for their colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity. By self-reflecting on their knowledge of disabilities and neurodiversity, our participants expressed the demands for more institutional training including the following aspects:

- Socializing with colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity;
- American Sign Language (ASL) and assistive devices; and
- Interpersonal communication styles for collaborating with colleagues with disabilities and neurodiversity.

Our participants also pointed out that accommodations for colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the hiring, retention, and evaluation practices are vital for creating inclusion in the workplace. The recommended accommodations highlighted flexibility in these areas. Specifically, the expected accommodations include:

- Hiring
  - Inclusive wording in job descriptions;
  - Online interview options; and
  - Removing exclusionary job requirements (e.g., ability to lift certain amounts of weight).
- Retention
  - ADA compliance;
  - Inclusive/compassionate policies, including flexible work schedules and role assignments; and
  - Accessible means of interpersonal communication.
- Evaluation
  - Tailored definitions of productivity that take disability and neurodiversity into account;
  - Personalized goal management; and
  - Be aware of assumptions when making decisions about role assignments.

Our participants also approached the inclusive workplace from the perspective of universal design, understanding that the potential limitations of disabilities and neurodiversity are created by the social context. The specific changes the participants expected in the workplace include:

- Physical infrastructure is accessible to everyone;
- Work schedules and procedures are designed to accommodate everyone when necessary; and
- A safe social space for everyone, ensuring employees with disabilities and neurodiversity feel comfortable.

Further, our participants suggested that the design of a more inclusive workplace should involve the voices of employees who have disabilities and/or neurodiversity instead of solely relying on the top-down approach. The balance of the costs and benefits of inclusive practices also may need to be considered. Most of our participants indicated that the practices of physical space improvement (68%) and work schedule modifications (79%) would have positive impacts on the workplace. Although some changes might be financially or timely expensive, they will benefit institutions in the long run. Finally, our participants pointed out that creating an inclusive workplace is a continuing process that needs constant reflection and investment.

## Recommendations

Creating an inclusive workplace for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity requires the joint efforts of individuals, institutions, and society. Since achieving inclusivity is a continuing and accumulated process, the strategies should incorporate both short and long-term goals. With a universal design approach, the following recommendations derive from the phase 3 data, with analysis from the research team.

### Individual-level Inclusive Practices

- Recognize the unique challenges and contributions of their colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the workplace (perhaps providing options for alternative communication—written, verbal, etc.; show empathy; think of ways to empower others)
- Actively seek and use existing resources for inclusive practices for disability and neurodiversity (see what is available online; are there community training opportunities, talk with colleagues about best practices; keep up to date with government guidelines for ADA compliance and accessibility standards; see if you can pair up with a mentor who has expertise in areas of disability and neurodiversity; collaborate with disability resource centers, etc.)
- Be open-minded in interactions with colleagues with disabilities and/or neurodiversity (active listening; avoid assumptions; promote inclusivity; seek guidance if unsure; be patient and flexible)

### Institutional-level Inclusive Practices

- Hiring
  - Design inclusive job advertisements by using inclusive language and eliminating exclusionary job requirements
  - Offer reasonable accommodations in job interviews, such as online interview options
- Retention
  - Physical space
    - Accessibility upgrades in buildings and equipment
    - Apply the principles of universal design in the physical workspace, considering the needs of all staff members and patrons
  - Training programs
    - Provide training programs to enhance the understanding of disabilities and neurodiversity among all employees
    - Provide training programs to reduce intentional or unintentional biases, ignorance, and microaggression toward librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the workplace
  - Policy design
    - Involve employees with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the policy-making process in the workplace

- Apply the principle of flexibility in policies of role assignment and work schedule, such as hybrid options, flexible working hours, job sharing and rotational assignments, and tailored job duties.
- Evaluation
  - Re-consider the performance evaluation policies in the workplace to recognize the diverse abilities, skills, and contributions of all employees. Assess performance based on personalized development goals.
  - Implement regular feedback between librarians and managers to ensure that performance evaluation is based on a continuous and collaborative dialogue.

### **Social-level Inclusive Practices**

- Create a safe social space for all employees in the workplace. Encourage social awareness and interaction among employees and, at the same time, respect the interpersonal boundaries and employees' right to choose to disclose or not disclose their health conditions in the workplace.
- Advocate for representation and visibility of disabilities and/or neurodiversity in the community through library events, inclusive programming, and collaborations with disability advocacy groups.
- Emphasize the humanist element of the workplace and normalize the existence of varied bodies, promoting inclusive language and communication in different social scenarios.

## Codes and Definitions

**Attitudes:** The theme describes participants' personal or individual perception, belief, or feeling toward librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity and inclusivity of the workspace.

**Disability and neurodiversity over-neutrality:** Use the code when participants express there is not difference whatsoever between someone with health condition and someone without health condition or overly generalize acceptance of disabilities and/or neurodiversity.

**Accommodation could be unfair:** Use the code when participants express that accommodation could be perceived unfair to other employees or the institution.

**Accommodation could be unhelpful:** Use the code when participants express that accommodation may not decrease the barriers facing librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity.

**Hostility within the unit:** Use the code when participants note that there are or could potentially be non-inclusive actions, activities, policies, procedures, evaluations, atmosphere, etc. in the workplace.

**Critical analysis:** The theme describes larger-than-self perspectives, theoretical overlays, and/or approaches to institutional, infrastructural, or social contexts emerging in the survey responses.

**Critical analysis of disability and/or neurodiversity:** Refers to participants' holistic understandings on disabilities and/or neurodiversity based on knowledge, observation, experiences, or social norms.

**Distinguishing between physical disability and neurodiversity:** Use the code when participants express there is a difference between physical disability and neurodiversity (e.g., visibility of the disability, that physical disability impacts work but neurodiversity does not, etc.).

**Limitation based on disability and/or neurodiversity:** Use the code when participants express that disability can limit workplace abilities (e.g., mobility, emotion, focus, communication, etc.) at individual, interpersonal, or institutional levels.

**Mobility:** Limitations of an individual's ability to change and control their body position.

**Physical duties:** Use the code when participants indicate that disabilities or/and neurodiversity hinder librarians from completing physical duties, such as lifting, reaching, standing, sitting for a long time, etc.

**Navigation:** Use the code when participants indicate that disabilities or/and neurodiversity hinder an individual's ability to move around in physical space.

**Assistive devices:** Use the code when participants mention additional tools, devices, technologies, etc. needed by librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity.



**Inattentiveness:** Refers to limitation wherein person is easily distracted or unable to focus for long periods of time.

**Emotional overload:** Refers to inability to complete tasks because of emotional overwhelm.

**Sensory overload:** Refers to debilitating stress created by noise, light, movement and other surrounding conditions.

**Social interaction:** Use the code when participants indicate that disabilities and/or neurodiversity can create barriers to social engagement with colleagues and patrons and lead to difficulties for managers when making work plans or with teamwork.

**Value of disabled and neurodiverse employees in unit:** Use the code when participants note the positive contributions of disabled or neurodiverse peers in the workplace.

**Social superpower:** Use the code when participants note that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity have abilities to create knowledge through socialization and personal experience and share knowledge to help others both intellectual and emotionally. ~~including emotional impact~~

**Specialized knowledge:** Use the code when participants note that librarians with disabilities and neurodiversity have higher expertise than others in certain fields.

**Empathy:** Use the code when participants note that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity can understand the information needs, expectations of library services, or information practices of patrons under similar health conditions.

**Representation:** Use the code when participants note that having librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity in libraries can increase the sense of belonging and inclusion for patrons under similar health conditions, which normalizes social differences.

**Encouraging library use:** Use the code when participants note that having librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity working in libraries can attract more patrons under similar health conditions and increase their use of library resources and services.

**Creative thinking:** Use the code when participants indicate that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity come up with creative angles on decisions and other planning or problem solving.

**Hyperfocus:** Use the code when participants indicate that librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity see patterns, connections, notices things others might not.

**Diagnosis as life-changing:** Use the code when participants state that having a diagnosis of a health condition (self or others) can change the ability to include this person in the unit more fully, or allows the person to ask for appropriate accommodation, or has been a very positive change in some way.

**Whole-person thinking:** Use the code when participants indicate that accommodations should benefit librarian's development holistically instead of only as a worker

**Critical analysis of infrastructure:** Use the code when participants analyze barriers or supports for individuals with disability and/or neurodiversity arise from the environment, social context, institutional policies/procedures.

**Critical analysis of physical space:** Use the code for barriers or supports for librarians with disability and/or neurodiversity related to physical space (e.g., building design, special technologies, etc.), including micro, meso, and macro levels.

**Critical analysis of social infrastructure:** Use the code when participants identify the socialization of disability/neurodiversity as possible barrier or support.

**Critical analysis of costs and benefits:** Use the code when participants analyze the barriers that accommodation can overcome and the benefit of accommodation regarding time, technology, economic supports.

**Critical analysis of institutional policies/procedures:** Use the code for barriers or supports for librarians with disability and/or neurodiversity caused by institutional policies and/or practice procedures

**Critical analysis of performance criteria:** Use the code for standards that can be inclusive of workers with disability and/or neurodiversity.

**Actions:** The theme describes the actions at individual and institutional levels noticed or suggested by peers to create inclusive workplace for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity.

**Self-reflection:** Use the code when participants point out their lack of knowledge on disabilities and/or neurodiversity; or express the willingness to improve their knowledge on disabilities and/or neurodiversity at an individual level, including physical, intellectual, and social aspects.

**Withholding assumptions:** Use the code when participants try not to assume skill, ability, or suitability related to disability and neurodiversity and not to make assumptions about someone else's health condition

**Accommodation:** Use the code when participants say there are accommodations or suggest that accommodations are needed or provided for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity at the institutional level

**Flexibility:** Use the code when participants mention or suggest that institutions provide flexible hiring, retention, and evolution procedures for librarians with disabilities and/or neurodiversity.

**Training:** Use the code when participants mention that training is provided, needed, and suggested in the workplace related to disability and/or neurodiversity.

**Universal design:** Use the code when participants mention that accessible workplace (including physical and virtual spaces) or work schedule will be beneficial to everyone (both employees and patrons).

**Inclusivity as a continuing process:** Use the code for the idea that inclusion is not a one-time “fix”—it requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment.

**Nothing about us without us (NAUWU):** Use the code when participants express that the person who needs accommodation needs to be or is part of the conversation about that accommodation.