

Autistic Librarians in the Academic Library Hiring Process

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Academic library literature contains several studies on the experience of autistic students navigating the world of higher education and its libraries. However, very little is published on the employment experiences of autistic academic librarians. This study attempts to examine employment barriers for autistic people currently or previously employed in academic libraries in Australia and the United States. It employs the use of a survey to examine the recruitment process for academic library jobs in both countries. The study analyzes survey responses to reveal barriers that exist for autistic librarians seeking employment in a higher education library setting. Finally, the study suggests recommendations to make academic library recruitment more inclusive of autistic people.

Introduction and Background

A commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is a key feature of libraries, and there is increasing awareness of the need to recruit and retain more diverse staff. Equity, diversity and inclusion is one of the core values of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), which states that academic libraries have a role in “embodying diversity in the profession” (2022, November, para. 8). A strategic priority of the Australian Library and Information Association is supporting a diverse workforce (ALIA, 2021), and it recommends opening career opportunities for people with disabilities (ALIA, 2019). These policies demonstrate the importance of all forms of diversity in academic library staff.

Academic library literature contains several studies on the experience of autistic students navigating the world of higher education and its libraries. However, very little is published on the employment experiences of autistic academic librarians. Anderson (2021a; 2021b) has published two of the only other known studies that attempt to gauge the experience of employed

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autistic librarians. This study aims to build on these studies by examining employment barriers for autistic people currently or previously employed in academic libraries in Australia and the United States. These two countries were selected due to the geographic locations of the authors and because they noticed differences in hiring practices across the two countries. Most notably, the Australian selection process was more standardized and focused on skills and experience than the United States, where soft skills and criteria such as “fit” were more commonly employed. The study uses a survey to examine the recruitment process for academic library jobs in both countries. The study compares survey responses between the two countries to reveal any barriers that exist for autistic librarians seeking employment in a higher education library setting. Finally, the study suggests recommendations to make academic library staff more inclusive of autistic people.

As this study centers on the experience of autistic librarians, it is important to define autism. According to the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, autism is characterized by differences in socialization, communication, and sensory input, but how these traits manifest varies widely from person to person (n.d.). Autism exists on a spectrum, but it is not a straight line from “low functioning” to “high functioning.” More accurately, the autism spectrum can be thought of as being composed of several gradients across a circle, like a color wheel indicating the strengths and challenges of an individual autistic person. Once considered to be primarily found in young, white male children, improved diagnostic criteria, screening and reporting procedures, greater public awareness, changes to the definition of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and improved diagnostic ability, has led to more groups—including girls/women, non-binary people, and people of color—being identified as being on the autistic spectrum (Shea & Derry, 2019, p. 327). As of 2019, Spectrum reported that one in 40 children in the United States is autistic, and in Australia the prevalence is around one in 50 children (Wright, 2019; May et al., 2017).

Autistic knowledge production now includes more autistic voices thanks to the neurodiversity movement, as well as to autistic scholars and advocates demanding that their voices and lived experiences be included in the body of knowledge surrounding autism (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2019). Botha (2021) describes the flaws in current psychological research processes by pointing out that inherent biases exist in the methodology of psychological research as well as a scientific objectivity that dehumanizes and objectifies autistic people: “‘Objectivity’ in the scientific method ensures the absence of bias; however the social and cultural environment in which the questions are being examined are not free of bias” (p. 8). The inclusion of autistic voices in autism research has also led to the revelation of a phenomenon called camouflaging or masking, which describes a behavior exhibited by autistics who hide their more obvious, stereotypical traits (e.g., stimming) in an effort to fit in with their social environment (Pearson & Rose, 2021).

Finally, the increasing prevalence of autistic voices can be attributed to the neurodiversity movement. Neurodiversity refers to the neurological variation in all human brains regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense. Australian sociologist and autistic self-advocate Judy Singer coined the term in her honors thesis published in 1998. For this paper, the neurodiversity-based approach to disability is useful (Lawrence, 2013). Currently, two main models of disability generally reign supreme: the social and the medical. While the medical model of disability places the “blame” of disability on and within the individual, the social model of disability suggests that disability

is located in society (Shea & Derry, 2019). This paper chooses to look more critically at the intersection of these models, through a neurodiversity lens, recognizing that while disability can be understood as a physical, neurological, and/or biological difference, it is exacerbated by systemic and societal ableism.

Positionality Statement

Before beginning a study of autistic individuals in the academic library hiring process, it is important to disclose the positionality of the authors. All authors of this study identify as autistic, with a balanced mixture of official and self-diagnoses. Four authors were initially recruited through a Facebook group for autistic librarians and allies with a call to research hiring challenges for academic librarians. The remaining authors joined the project after being recruited by the original authors. All authors are white (non-Hispanic) and are primarily cisgendered females, with one identifying as non-binary and one identifying as a cisgendered male.

A Note on Language

This paper also uses identity first language (i.e., autistic people) rather than person first (i.e., person with autism). While we understand that when speaking with individuals it is important to respect their preferences, a recent study found the Autistic community generally prefers identity first language (Keating et al., 2023). Language used by authors in quotations and references has been retained.

Literature Review

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in autism—as well as the recent analyses and criticism of the unstructured, social aspects of academic library hiring—there are few resources on the relationship between all three factors: autism, academic libraries, and recruitment. In two qualitative studies, Anderson (2021a; 2021b) identified eight common themes across autistic librarians' job seeking and workforce experiences including (but not limited to) barriers, accommodation, and accessibility; disclosure as context-oriented; and expectations for managers. Giles-Smith and Popowich (2023) found autistic academic library workers face discrimination and respond by masking, which leads to difficulties when requesting workplace accommodations. Pionke (2023) describes several first-hand experiences of “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of academic library interviews from disabled applicants. Although the recommendations include potential applications for autistic librarians, they are intended for a wider audience of disabled librarians and do not address autism-specific experiences or needs.

Beyond these studies, there is little current research studying the cross-sectional experiences of autistic librarians' experiences with the job seeking and hiring processes in academic libraries. As a result, we first consider the work that has been done in three broader cross-sections: autism and employment; autism and librarianship or academia; and academic library hiring practices. This will provide a strong foundation for later observations and synthesis.

Autism and Employment

Recent improvements in the research and understanding of ASD suggest that autistic people exist in the workforce in larger numbers than ever before. However, in Australia, only 38% of working age autistic people are employed, compared to 53% of all people with a disability and 84% of people without a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). While there

is not the same level of comprehensive statistics from the United States, a report found that only 58% of young adults on the autism spectrum had ever been employed (Roux et al., 2015).

Studies such as Bublitz et al. (2017) and Anderson et al. (2021) have attempted to explore the reasons behind autistic un-/underemployment and recommend vocational interventions, particularly in college student and young adult populations. These studies use person-first language, do not include autistic voices outside of the data and tend towards deficit-based perspectives. However, they do highlight job seeking as a more difficult process for autistic candidates and recommend the principles of universal design, which seek to make environments usable, accessible and convenient for all (Milton et al., 2016), alongside the recognition that “many barriers to employment [have] less to do with a [candidate’s] characteristics and more to do with larger systems and external realities including prejudice, organizational inflexibility ... and lack of services.” (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 98). Some studies choose to focus more particularly on these characteristics, framing them as “autistic strengths” which can include superior creativity, focus, increased efficiency, honesty, dedication, and the ability to offer a unique autism-specific perspective (Cope & Remington, 2021; Chartered Institution of Personnel and Development & Uptimize, 2018). Still others problematize this perceived “autism advantage,” seeing it as positive stereotyping and non-reflective of the heterogeneous experiences of the autistic population (Bury et al., 2019). The variety of frameworks, perspectives, and results of these studies indicate the continued need for research in this area.

Some researchers have chosen to investigate the question of low autistic employment from the side of the employer, leaning more into the social model of disability as they explore employer perceptions of, and biases against autism, as well as autistic characteristics as barriers to employment. McMahon et al. (2021) determined that the employer’s prior knowledge of ASD and autistic characteristics significantly influenced perceptions of a candidate’s employability and recommended employer-based interventions to increase employment among autistic individuals. Mai (2019) argues that “hiring agents’ beliefs and associated discriminations are what prevents them from hiring qualified autistic candidates to fill open positions” (p. 8). Similarly, Whelpley and May (2023) found that atypical social behaviors and actions consistently and adversely affected employer’s perceptions of candidates and interview outcomes, noting that when social performance is removed from the hiring process, autistic candidates were considered more competitively with neurotypical candidates.

Autism in Libraries and Academia

Despite anecdotal evidence that librarianship can be fulfilling and meaningful work for autistic individuals, Everhart and Anderson (2020) echo Lawrence’s earlier suggestion that “there is ‘virtually nothing in the LIS literature discussing autistic librarians or information professionals’” (2013, p. 103). Instead, articles gravitate either towards the wider lens of disability in librarianship or disability and autism in academia (Farahar & Foster, 2021; Hollich, 2020; Moeller, 2019; Oud, 2018; Pionke, 2019, 2023). Early studies rarely consider autism in the library workforce. Instead, the research and advice tends to focus on library design and services for autistic *users*, particularly children. Indeed, case studies of employment for autistic individuals in libraries continued to remain largely anecdotal until Strub and Stewart’s article in 2010, which describes the “implications” involved with hiring and supervising a non-professional autistic employee. Despite the explicit ableism of a stereotypical perspective of autism, it is important to note the relative recency of these viewpoints, which often continue to reinforce

stigmatizations and create barriers for autistic librarians and information professionals. As Lawrence points out, “in the total absence of materials on Autistic professionals [this article] may do more harm than good” (2013, p. 103).

In part, the lack of research in this area may be related to incomplete counts of disability in academia and academic libraries (Brown & Leigh, 2018). Although some studies have shown diagnostic disclosure to have positive benefits, the possible negative impacts of disclosure—such as stigmatization and discrimination—make many individuals wary of sharing their disabled, neurodivergent, or autistic identities with colleagues or employers (Hollich, 2020; Lindsay et al., 2019; Moeller, 2019). As a result, the numbers of disabled and autistic librarians are almost certainly higher than research would suggest. Moeller (2019) goes into depth on disclosure as “risk management,” connecting it with potential precarity in librarianship: “rather than assume the risks associated with disclosure, individuals may instead conceal their disability or disabilities in an act known as ‘passing’” (Moeller, 2019, p. 465). While passing can be intentional or unconscious, many studies have revealed it to be exhausting and damaging to an individual’s mental well-being (Pearson & Rose, 2021; Hollich, 2020; Hull et al. 2021). Giles-Smith and Popowich (2023) identify masking/camouflaging, job precarity, and risks of disclosure as themes in the responses to their qualitative survey of autistic academic librarians in Canadian institutions.

Academic Libraries, Employment, and Hiring

A far greater number of studies have been conducted about academic library interview and hiring practices than in either of the previous two sections. Guidance for job seekers on common interview questions, hiring timelines, application documentation, and more is well-documented throughout the field, especially due to the complexity of academic library job applications in comparison to other library types (e.g., Franks et al., 2017). In 2021, the Core Academic Interview Project Team (Arch et al., 2021) published a report of best interview practices aligned with three guiding principles: structure and consistency; preparation and planning; and the danger of “fit.” This last principle is of particular importance to the current study and deserves particular attention.

A significant selection of literature in the library field argues for the importance of hiring for “fit.” Gaspar and Brown (2015) argue that “fit is essential” and liken the search process to matchmaking between the library and candidate, emphasizing the importance of being able to analyze and judge candidates’ affective and social skills as a marker of fit. However, the idea of “fit” and a consistent measurement of what a “good fit” would constitute, are not defined.

As Cunningham et al. (2019) point out, the concept of “fit” in the context of hiring is varied, ill-defined, and often intangible. Referencing Powell (1998), the authors argue that most often the concept of fit in academic libraries is tied to “person-organization” fit. When put into practice, hiring for good fit is ultimately a practice of reproducing the status quo within an organization, threatening diversity initiatives (Cunningham et al., 2019; Arch & Gilman, 2021). Judgment of a candidate’s fit often relies on interpretations of social performance (Arch & Gilman, 2021). Social elements of the academic library interview process, including candidate meals, presentations, and a candidate’s nonverbal behaviors can unintentionally introduce biases into a search committee’s decision-making (Arch & Gilman, 2021). While these authors do not mention autism, the implications of fit and social performance can be uniquely difficult for autistic candidates who must make the choice between masking (i.e.,

exhaustively monitoring autistic behaviors and ‘acting’ neurotypical) or disclosing (i.e., potentially opening themselves up for stigmatization or discrimination). Recommendations for reducing the impact of “fit” on hiring decisions include providing implicit bias training for search committees, creating and providing structures such as rubrics for evaluating the interview, and ensuring the same questions are asked to all participants in the same order, ensuring an equitable interview experience (Arch & Gilman, 2021; Cunningham et al., 2019).

Methodology

This cross-sectional study explores the experiences of autistic people when applying for jobs at academic libraries in the United States and Australia. It used a mixed methods approach as this provides the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative research, allowing for reliable results as well as in-depth, personal responses about peoples’ experiences. The survey was therefore designed to include multiple choice, ranking, matrix questions, and free text responses (see Appendix A). As the research centers autistic voices, only people who identify as autistic were eligible to complete the survey, excluding non-autistic family members, carers, professionals, and library staff.

This study was approved by the ethics board of Federation University (reference number 2023/012) and the Institutional Review Boards of Louisiana State University (IRBAM-22-1359) and Indiana University (Protocol Number 16688). Respondents could add their email address in a separate survey to be entered into a random drawing to win one of 30 vouchers worth \$25 USD funded by an Indiana University Libraries Support Grant.

The survey was limited to autistic adults who have engaged in the hiring process of an academic library in the United States or Australia. Purposive sampling was used to meet the criteria of the study. There was no desired sample size sought as it is not known what proportion of academic library staff are autistic. The survey was distributed through the researchers’ social media networks, autism advocacy organizations, and memberships of professional organizations, such as the Australian Library and Information Association and the American College and Research Libraries. A link to the survey with a request for distribution was sent to the selected contacts on February 17, 2023, and a follow-up request was sent on May 23, 2023.

Using Qualtrics, an online survey was created based on themes around recruitment and autistic people as identified in the literature. Two identical versions were created, one distributed through outlets in the United States and one for Australian outlets. This was to ensure compliance with the ethics approval conditions of all institutions. As well as demographic and background questions, participants were asked about their education and employment history, their experiences with job advertisements and applications, disclosure of autism during recruitment, and free text about how the process could be more inclusive.

The data was downloaded from Qualtrics into Excel spreadsheets. Only responses which met the inclusion criteria were included in the analysis. Descriptive analysis only was conducted as the respondent numbers were not large enough for statistical significance analysis.

Results

When considering the results it is important to understand the differences between recruitment processes in the United States and Australia. In the United States, most library positions require an American Library Association accredited Master’s degree in Library Science. The recruitment process usually begins with a job advertisement, requiring a cover letter, resume,

and a list of references. When selected, candidates usually attend an initial remote interview, followed by a final on-campus interview, though not all institutions follow this exact process. In Australia, universities set their own recruitment processes; in general, applying for a role in an academic library requires submitting a resume, cover letter and written responses to selection criteria, followed by an interview of about one hour in which identical questions are asked of each candidate.

Respondents showed a variety of demographic characteristics (see Table 1). The majority were female (58%) and white (75%) with greater variation in respondents from the United States. The most common age range was 35–44 (37%), although respondents from Australia were younger than those from the United States. Most held a master's degree (78%), however in Australia this was less pronounced. Overall, self-diagnoses and official diagnoses were almost equal, but in Australia participants were more likely to be self-diagnosed.

There were 31 survey responses from Australia, of which 26 met the inclusion criteria, and 91 survey responses from the United States, of which 83 met the inclusion criteria. Thirteen respondents from the United States and four from Australia did not complete the survey fully, resulting in partial data for these participants. Results were calculated according to the number of responses received for each question.

Employment

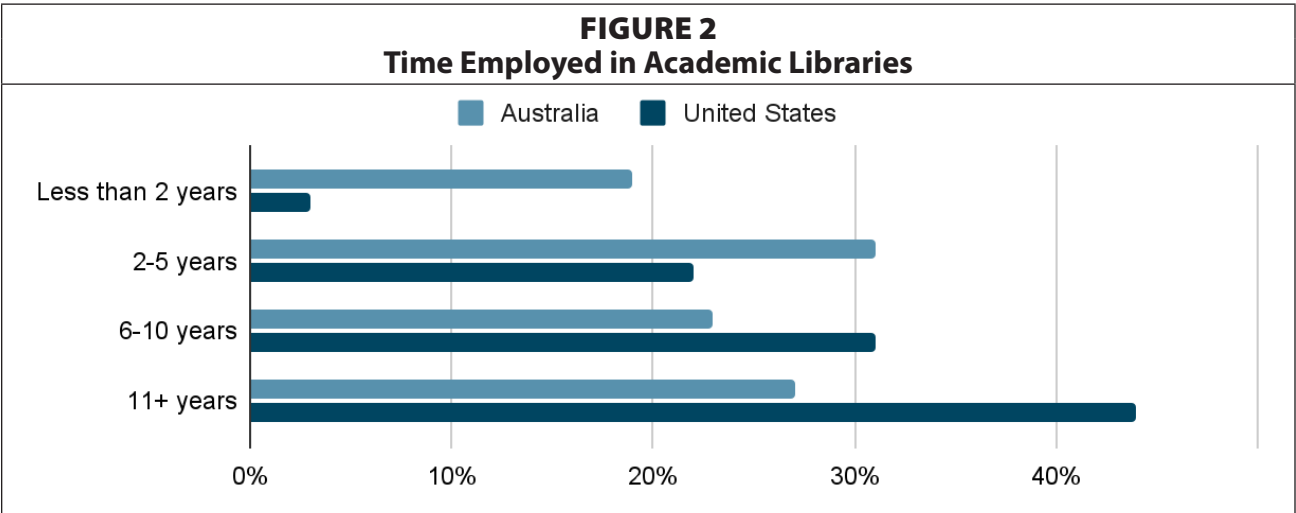
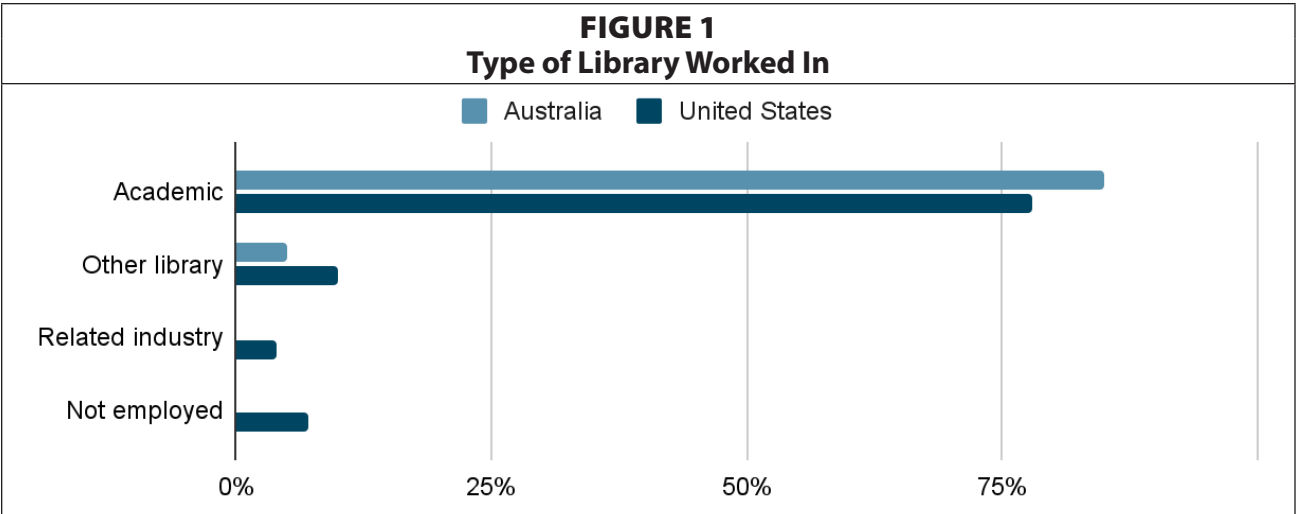
Most respondents worked in an academic library (see Figure 1). Half of Australians are relatively new to the library workforce while respondents from the United States have been working in libraries longer (see Figure 2).

Applications

The number of applications submitted for academic library roles ranged between zero to 100, and the number of interviews between zero to 40. While most had submitted one to 10 applications, there were 21% who had submitted over 30, indicating the challenges of securing a

TABLE 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Baseline Characteristics	Australia	United States	Total
	%	%	%
Gender			
Female	85	55	58
Male	5	19	14
Non-binary	10	26	20
Age			
18–24	5	2	2
25–34	52	25	32
35–44	24	41	37
45–54	14	23	21
55–64	5	7	6
65+	0	3	2
Diagnosis			
Professional	31	51	45
Self	69	49	55
Education			
Masters	58	87	78
Other	42	13	22
Ethnicity			
Black	—	9	7
Bi-racial	—	7	5
Jewish	—	4	3
South Asian	4	—	1
White (Hisp/Latinx)	4	11	9
White (Non-Hisp)	69	70	75



job in academic libraries (see Figure 3). Most respondents had attended one to five interviews, and United States respondents were more likely than Australians to have attended a larger number of interviews (see Figure 4).

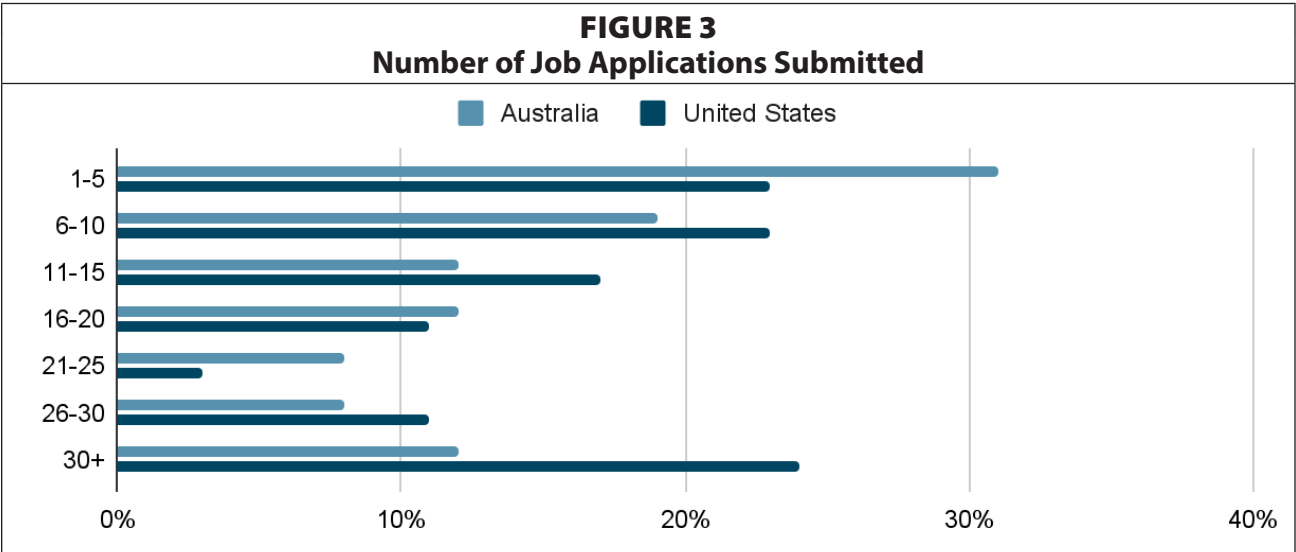
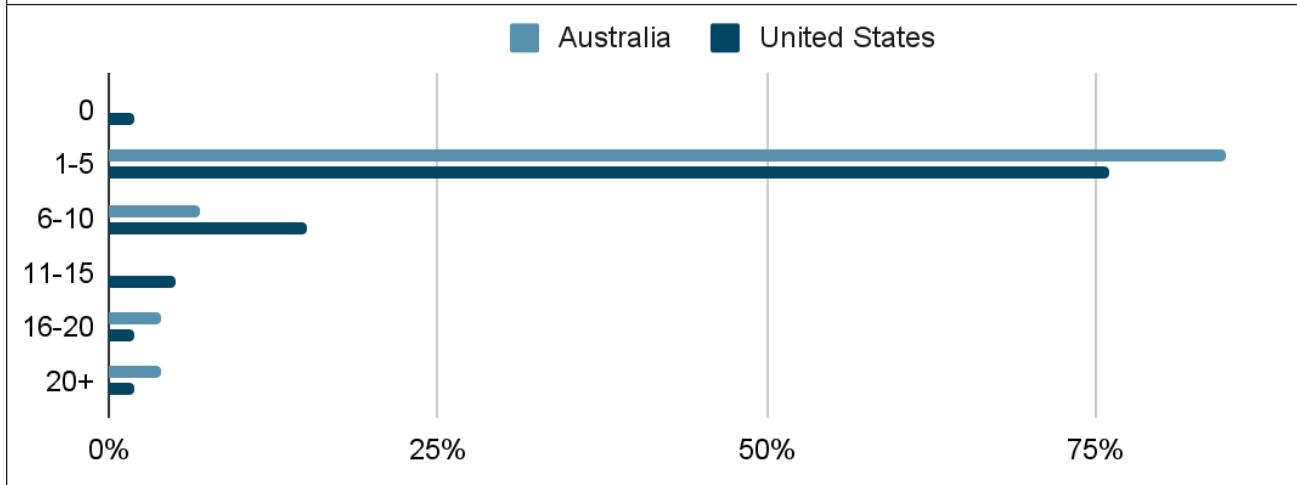


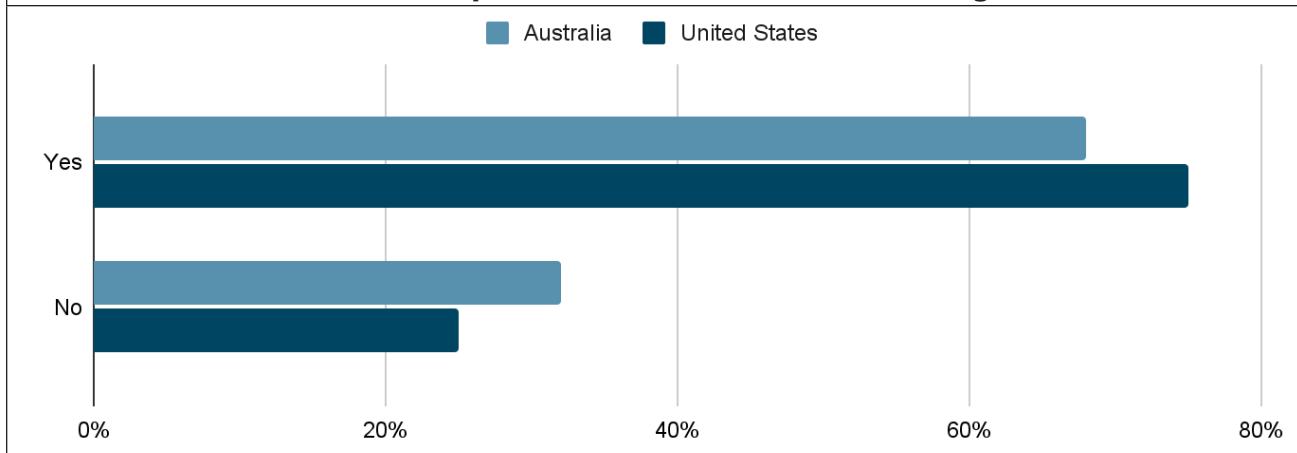
FIGURE 4
Number of Interviews Attended



Information Sought from to Evaluate Acceptance

The most common items looked for to evaluate autism acceptance in the library or institution were support services available to neurodivergent staff and students, and diversity statements or programming (see Figure 5). Six respondents from the United States also looked for the language used about neurodiversity or used word of mouth and informal conversations to gain insights.

FIGURE 5
Consideration of Acceptance as an Autistic Person Looking at Job Ads



Information Sought or Wished For

The most common information looked or wished for by respondents were the possibility of remote work, flexible hours and the requirements and duties of the role (see Figure 6). Seven respondents from the United States indicated they looked for other things including self-disclosure of employees, university documents addressing their approach to autism (deficit centered vs. person centered), realistic criteria for candidates and the amount of time per week needed for interactions like phone calls and meetings (see Figure 7).

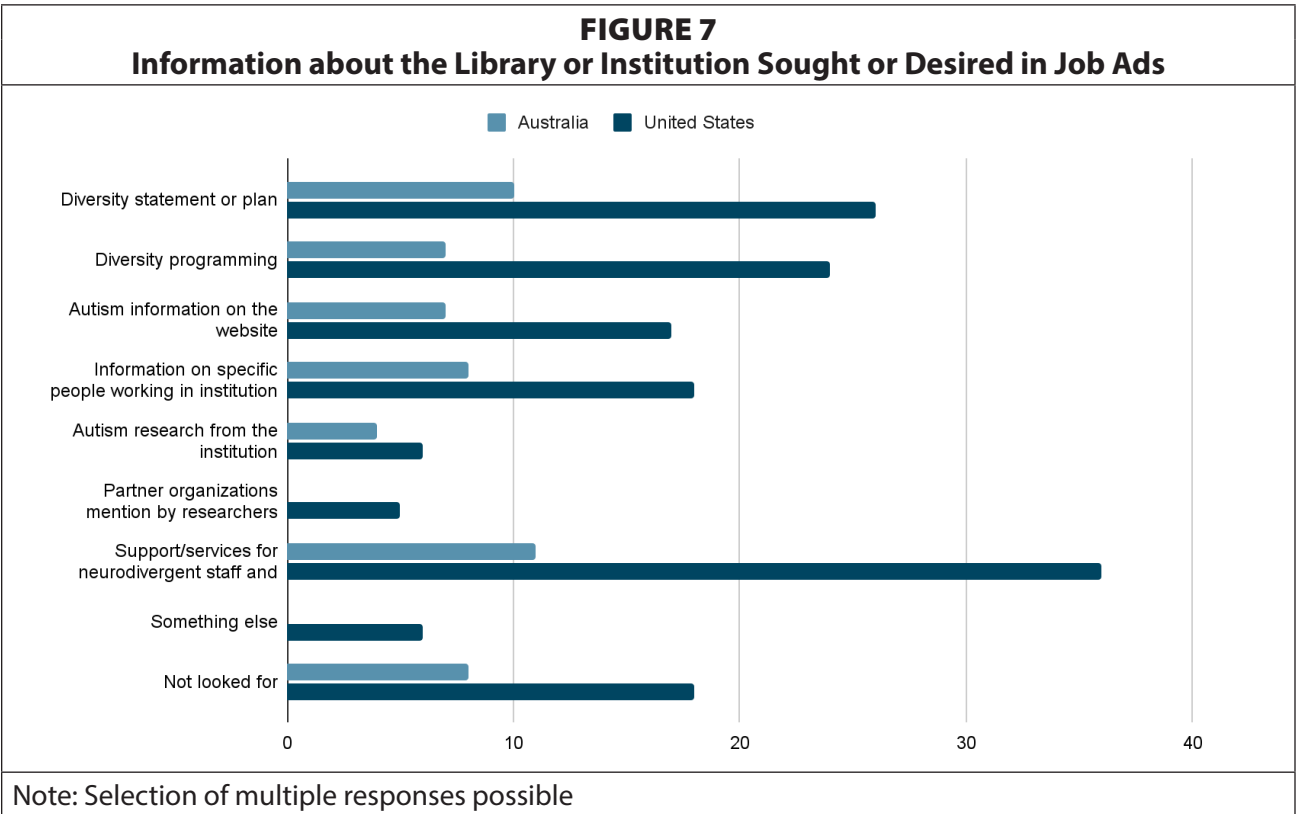
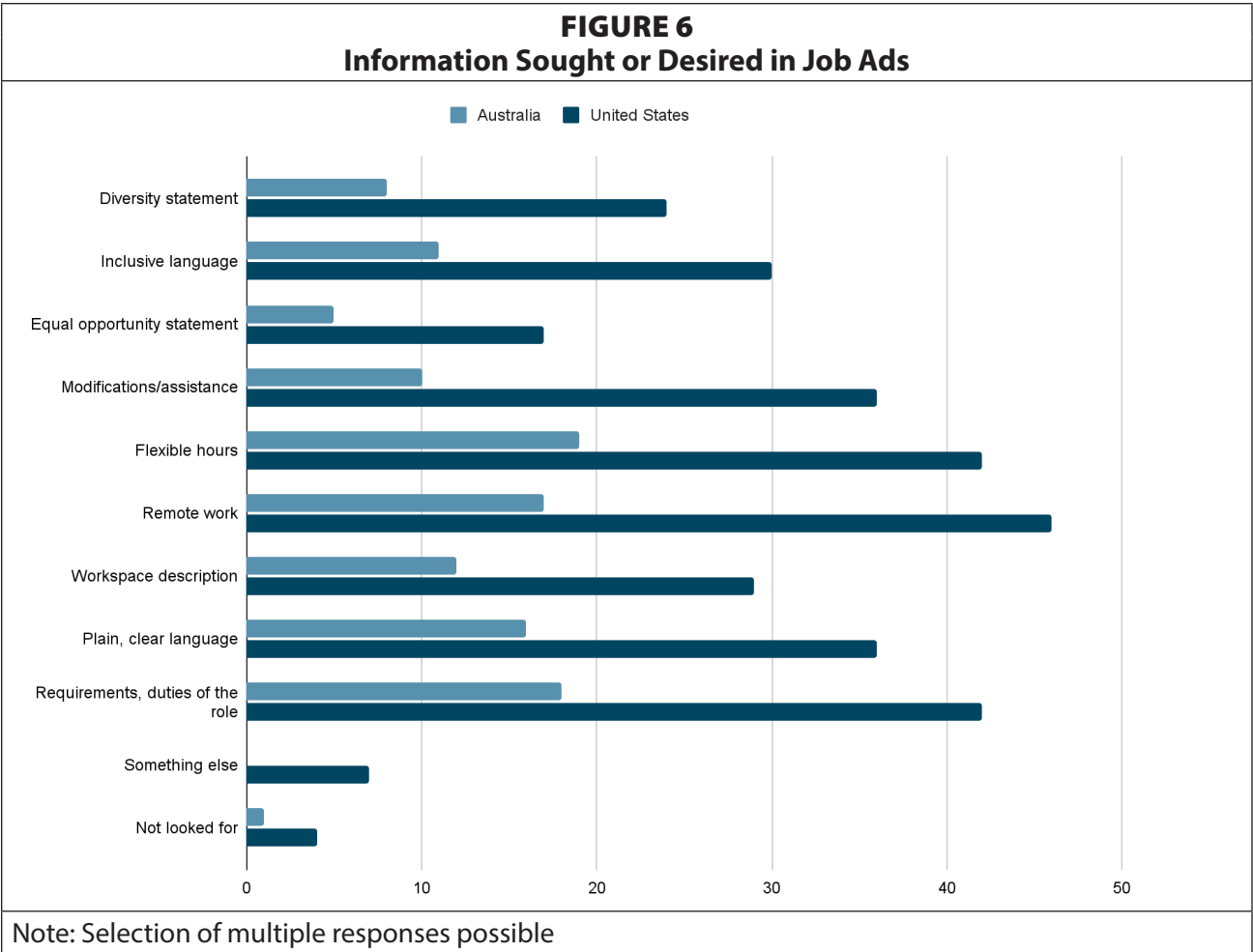
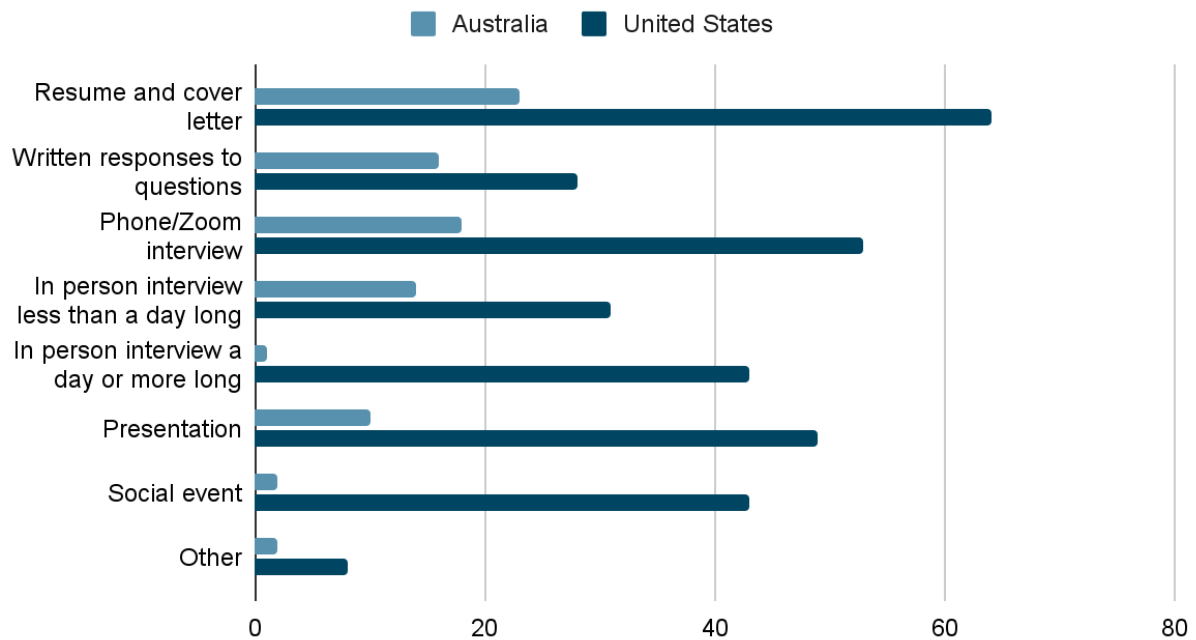


FIGURE 8
Job Interview Process Activities



Note: Selection of multiple responses possible

Application Process

The most common job interview activities undertaken by Australian respondents were submitting a resume and cover letter, a phone or online interview, and written responses to questions. Only one had an interview more than a day long, and only two had social events. In the United States, the most common tasks included submitting a resume and cover letter, a phone or online interview, and a presentation. The least common task was written responses to questions or prompts (see Figure 8).

When analyzing the survey question that asked respondents to rank what activities they found most and least challenging, it is important to remember that responses were not the same across all who replied to the survey. Some people only ranked one or two activities, while others ranked several. Therefore, the study only reports items that were selected as “most” or “least” challenging in each country.

Submitting a resume and cover letter was most often selected as the least challenging activity for both United States and Australian respondents. The most challenging tasks selected for Australians were interviews, while for respondents from the United States, it was submitting a resume and cover letter. One United States respondent found an interview with non-library administration least challenging, while for others the most challenging was campus or library tours. While there was an overall trend of activities found most and least challenging, all activities were rated as most and least challenging by different respondents, apart from social events in Australia.

The most common information given prior to an interview was general institute or library information and a schedule. The most common items not received were information about accommodations for disabilities and interview questions; however, these were the most desired items. Australian respondents were more likely not to receive information about promotion and tenure.

Only 13% of United States respondents and 4% of Australians disclosed an autism diagnosis during recruitment. No Australian respondents and only 6% of United States respondents requested accommodations, which were extra breaks, receiving interview questions in advance, and aid from an outside hiring agency. However, this should not indicate a lack of need for accommodations as roughly a quarter of Australian and half of United States respondents created their own accommodations, such as bringing their own supplies, requesting breaks, fidgeting under the table, asking for further tours, and arriving early to mentally prepare.

Qualitative Data

The survey also asked respondents to address two free text questions. The first asked how the recruitment process could be more inclusive of autistic applicants. Comments mirrored information respondents wished they had received in advance, such as information about requesting accommodations and receiving interview questions in advance.

Regarding making the process more inclusive, many comments were about interview questions, particularly providing them in advance. One Australian respondent stated:

I would love to be given the questions in advance—I take some time to fully get my head around information, and I understand it far better in writing. I think it would enable me to better grasp what the question entails and answer the questions far more substantially and effectively.

Some also expressed opposition to the types of questions asked, suggesting a more task-based approach. One United States respondent noted:

Give interview questions in advance. Give a written reference test. This used to be the standard years ago. For example, which source would you direct a student to who is looking for pro/con arguments on gun control? These types of questions and tests allow autistic people to show off their skills. Instead, interview questions have become much more relational and situational. Answering how you would handle a certain situation on the fly is very hard for an autistic person.

Others commented on the need for questions to be asked clearly and one at a time due to auditory processing issues. Some respondent desired a less formal process and a less constricted time period for the interview.

The need to understand and accept differences in the mannerisms of autistic people—such as not making eye contact or differing speech patterns—was also noted. This relates to the over-reliance on social occasions to assess candidates. As one United States respondent succinctly stated: “The job mostly involves sitting at my computer. You don’t have to enjoy having lunch with me.” Other themes included both acknowledging and actively seeking neurodiverse candidates and making adjustments that would be beneficial to all candidates, not just those with autism.

One of the most common themes of the United States responses centered on the exhaustive nature of the full day in-person interview. Of the 58 responses received for this question, over a third mentioned the need for breaks or the grueling nature of the in-person process. As

one respondent noted, the process of full day interviews, plus overnight stays in unfamiliar places means “definitely never going in at your best.

The second free text question asked what respondents wished people knew about recruiting autistic people. Though one respondent made the valid point that “there is no one way to be autistic,” there were themes that emerged. For example, participants wished that recruiters knew autistic peoples’ stress and anxiety levels may be higher than neurotypicals in an interview situation, and that masking to appear neurotypical takes a lot of energy and creates even more stress. One respondent said:

I have to tune my brain up to 100, and channel the thoughts, ideas, behaviours and responses that I remember from previous recruitment scenarios and hope that they help me seem less anxious about how helpless and ignorant I feel. I wish people knew how much energy it takes to appear as “normal” as possible when you are hyper aware of how not normal you feel, and that is taken in to account or accommodated better during in interview.

Respondents also emphasized the need for understanding of autism by recruiters, with one Australian respondent commenting: “I wish people had a better understanding of common autistic mannerisms and behaviors, and didn’t silently judge us for these during job interviews.” It was also mentioned that the changes autistic people are asking for would help everyone applying for a position. Respondents wanted recruitment to be overall more relaxed and inclusive, with clear structure and expectations. They also provided some concrete suggestions, such as being able to provide written responses to interview questions, giving more time to respond, a choice of an in person or online interview, and a more practical, task-based approach.

Several respondents also highlighted the need to understand that people with autism are worthy and capable of doing their jobs. As one respondent stated, “We’re not broken, and we don’t make bad employees.” They challenged the notion of a ‘good fit’ and wished recruiters were more open to the type of person they considered suitable for the role. One respondent stated: “Don’t make an assumption about what someone’s personality is like or their capability to progress based on their being autistic. Create an inclusive environment that gives people the opportunity to thrive!”

There were also several comments about disclosing an autism diagnosis and how fraught that can be. Respondents noted concerns about the potential stigma and judgment, as well as how this relates to autistic mannerisms. Overall, it is important to remember that even if a library is open to neurodiverse candidates, it can still be a difficult process for someone with autism. One respondent highlighted this, stating:

While an institution may not discriminate against autistic people, the fear of being discriminated against, treated differently, or dismissed from recruitment [sic] is very real. The academic library interviewing process is extremely stressful and not everyone performs in the same ways that neurotypical people do. Finding a balance between getting the courage to ask for accommodations while not being treated as “different” can be a struggle.

Discussion

Although the academic library recruitment process is very different in the United States and Australia, the study found similar results in responses from both countries. The importance of remote work, flexible scheduling, and clear description of the duties of the role were important to applicants from both countries. Working remotely has been identified as a way of reducing the stress and sensory overload of being in an open plan office, increasing the ability of autistic people to work more productively in academia (Jones, 2022; Martin, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home gave people with disabilities a way to work with reduced distractions and sensory overload, improving their mental health, and had no associated drop in productivity (Williamson et al., 2023, July 25). Clarity in roles, instructions, and communication all support autistic people at work and can help them perform at their best, while reducing the amount of stress (Diener et al., 2020; Waisman-Nitzan et al., 2021). The COVID-19 lockdowns amply demonstrated that remote work is possible and beneficial for those with disabilities; these are practices that can make working in an academic library more inclusive for all.

A surprising result was found in the demographics of respondents from the United States: of respondents who indicated their gender, just over a quarter identified as non-binary. Research has found autistic people are more likely than the general population to be gender diverse, possibly due to less concern about how they are viewed by others because of the social differences and ambivalence to social norms inherent in some autistic people (Corbett et al., 2023; George & Stokes, 2018). This intersectionality adds difficulty in finding employment as gender diverse people already face discrimination during recruitment (Bates et al., 2021). It also means they must navigate multiple sources of stigma when seeking employment.

One area with significant differences between the countries was the activities undertaken as part of recruitment, which reflects the differing hiring processes. In the United States, respondents were much more likely to have undertaken interviews lasting at least a day, and in Australia, they were more likely to have provided written responses to questions. Lengthy interviews are seen as a “test” of applicants’ endurance (Houk & Nielsen, 2023) but even short interviews are a major source of stress and anxiety for autistic people and require masking for long periods of time (Finn et al., 2023). It is also questionable whether each person being interviewed receives equal treatment; the longer timeframe and social elements mean each person is less likely to be asked identical questions throughout the day. In Australia, the standard selection criteria used to shortlist interview candidates, as well as the set questions for each interview, means that Australian library applicants have more chance of being treated equally and evaluated on their skills, rather than personal biases of the selection committee (Arch et al., 2021).

The mixed results of what activities respondents found most challenging exemplify the heterogeneous nature of autism, and the variation in each autistic person’s experiences (Masi et al., 2017). Autism researcher Stephen Shore is attributed with the statement, “If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” While difficulty with social situations and verbal communication is often identified as a trait of autism, this is not the case for all, demonstrating the need to avoid stereotypes. As one Australian participant pointed out, not all autistic people are introverts. Other autistic traits, such as difficulty with eye contact, a need for structure, or sensory overload can be difficult to manage in high stress environ-

ments such as job interviews (Finn et al., 2023). Recruiters' understanding and acceptance of autistic people can go a long way in making the process more inclusive, as this allows autistic people to expend less energy masking autistic traits and worrying about being judged or discriminated against (Anderson, 2021a; Anderson, 2021b; Davies et al., 2023; Finn et al., 2023).

Respondents called for employers to accept all types of people and to understand that being autistic does not mean they are incapable of doing the job. Gaspar and Brown (2015) state that fitting in with the existing workplace culture is essential to enable collaboration, and includes skills such as sharing values, communication, socializing, and understanding leadership structure. A "good fit" in academic libraries means personality traits such as confidence and friendliness (Cunningham et al., 2019), but these can be challenging for autistic people due to differences in communication style, comfort with socializing, and not accepting norms of social hierarchies. Selecting candidates based on their perceived ability to be a "good fit" with the organization not only discriminates against autistic people but leads to a less diverse workforce overall.

A very clear result from both countries was an unwillingness to disclose. This is an important result as it indicates that the stigma around neurodiversity may still be such an issue that prospective librarians with autism or other neurodiverse diagnoses are not comfortable presenting their authentic selves during an interview. Organizations looking to create a supportive environment for individuals who are neurodivergent may want to examine what components of their interview process and organizational presentation and policies might make individuals hesitant to disclose their diagnoses.

Limitations

Though the study identified several potential ideas for future efforts to improve the academic library hiring process in ways that would benefit librarians who are neurodiverse, there were limitations to the study. One of the primary limitations was the sample size, which was only 109 responses for both Australian and American surveys combined. Though clear trends were identified through the survey, it should be noted that neurodiversity is not a monolith, and a single set of proscribed ideas will not represent the needs of the entire community. Future research might consider taking these recommendations and testing their popularity with neurodiverse populations.

Secondly, the study aimed to identify ableist hiring practices experienced by autistic librarians at any library situated in the field of higher education or post-secondary learning institution. We acknowledge that hiring practices vary depending on the institution type, R1 university, liberal arts college, etc., so we intentionally kept the scope of library types broad but limited to higher education/post-secondary institutions. Additionally, we wanted to avoid collecting information that could potentially identify institutions and survey participants.

A further limitation was the demographic differences between the Australian and United States respondents. The Australian participants were overall younger and more likely to be self-diagnosed, while participants from the United States showed greater gender and ethnic diversity. This could be related to overall academic library or adult autistic demographics in both countries, but further investigation would be needed to determine the reasons for those differences. The small sample meant that any examination of the results in relation to demographics would not be sufficiently valid, so we did not undertake this analysis. Somewhat related to a small sample size, the survey respondents overall were not overly diverse in racial identity.

Cooper and Kennady (2021) have identified that autistic people from ethnic minorities experience additional barriers in the workplace and recruitment. Though this may be explained with the overwhelming whiteness in the library profession (Kendrick, 2023, April 13), future research should seek to more purposefully examine the experiences of neurodiverse librarians of color.

Finally, this study only examined the experiences of librarians. There are a wide range of staff in academic libraries, and it is possible that autistic staff who are not librarians have different experiences of recruitment. This provides an opportunity to conduct further research of all academic library staff to determine commonalities and differences in the recruitment experiences.

Recommendations

There are many ways the recruitment process could be modified to make it more inclusive for all.

- *Universal design*: Libraries looking to improve their hiring practices for neurodiverse populations should focus on implementing universal design principles in the hiring process. Throughout the survey, respondents in both countries indicated the popularity of items like pre-sending interview questions or breaks during a packed interview day schedule. If accommodations are offered to all candidates, it will reduce the conflict between requesting accommodations and 'outing' oneself as autistic and potentially being discriminated against. These items not only benefit individuals with autism but can help every candidate be the best version of themselves during the interview.
- *Educate for understanding*: The importance of educating hiring committees can reduce implicit bias and increase understanding and acceptance of autistic people (Finn et al., 2023). Less reliance on candidates' "fit" and ability to socialize increases equity. Using a practical task-based approach can also increase the equity in interviews, as this assesses applicants on their skills and knowledge (Martin et al., 2018).
- *Clarity and consistency*: Using a standard set of interview questions and providing them in advance is one simple way to achieve a more inclusive recruitment process for all applicants. Providing structure and clarity is another way to enhance inclusivity and can be as simple as giving candidates information about the schedule, interview panel and campus map (Davies et al., 2023).

One of our most poignant responses eloquently sums up these recommendations and attitudes:

Offering universally-accessible, flexible preferences for recruitment process without 'outing' oneself. If it is phrased as a preference for all people rather than as an accommodation for Autistic (or any special needs situations) then all people can participate to the best of their abilities without the fear of bias coming into play.

Improving recruitment for everyone can also help lower some of the stigma or pressure surrounding disclosure to receive necessary accommodations among a population that is clearly not at the point of being comfortable disclosing their condition. If academic libraries want to help make the interview process more inclusive for individuals with autism, they should implement steps that help both neurodivergent and neurotypical candidates alike through universal design.

Data Availability

The dataset generated from this research is not available for sharing to maintain the privacy and anonymity of participants.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Do you identify as autistic?

- ☐ Yes, and I am professionally diagnosed (1)
- ☐ Yes, and I am self-diagnosed (2)
- ☐ No (3)
- ☐ Click to write Choice 4 (4)

2. Have you ever interviewed at an academic library in the USA or Australia? (For the purposes of this study, "[a]cademic libraries encompass research libraries, baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degree granting institutions, junior and community colleges, vocational and technical schools, and distance learning programs of higher education." (ALA Definition))

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

3. Do you have a Library Master's degree? (this could be MLS, MLIS, MIS, etc.)

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ I am currently in a Library Master degree program (3)

4. Employment

- ☐ I am currently employed in an academic library (1)
- ☐ I am currently employed in another type of library (2)
- ☐ I am employed in a related field (e.g., publishing, education) (3)
- ☐ I am employed in a field not related to libraries/librarianship (4)
- ☐ I am not currently employed (5)

5. How long have you worked in the library field?

- ☐ less than 2 years (1)
- ☐ 2-5 years (2)
- ☐ 6-10 years (3)
- ☐ 11 years or more (4)

6. About how many job applications have you submitted to academic libraries?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Click to write Choice 1 ()



7. About how many final round interviews have you gone through at an academic library?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Click to write Choice 1 ()



8. Do you consider how you will fit in or be accepted as an autistic person when viewing job advertisements or postings?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

9. What information do you look for or wish was included in **job advertisements** or **postings** to identify whether you believe you would be accepted as an autistic person?

- ☐ Diversity statement (1)
- ☐ Inclusive language (2)
- ☐ Equal employment opportunity statement (3)
- ☐ Mentions modifications or assistance available for those with disabilities (4)
- ☐ Flexible work hours/times offered (5)
- ☐ Remote work possible (6)
- ☐ Workspace description (7)
- ☐ Plain, clear language (8)
- ☐ Requirements, duties and responsibilities of the role (9)
- ☐ Something else (10) _____
- ☐ I don't look for this (11)

10. What information do you look for about the **library or institution** to identify whether you believe you would be accepted as an autistic person?

- ☐ Diversity statement or plan (1)
- ☐ Diversity related programming (2)
- ☐ Information related to autism on the institution/library website (3)
- ☐ Information about specific people working at the institution (4)
- ☐ Current research on autism by scholars at the institution (5)
- ☐ Partner organizations mentioned by the institution's researchers studying autism (6)
- ☐ Support/services available to neurodivergent students/faculty (7)
- ☐ Something else (8) _____
- ☐ I don't look for this (9)

11. Which of the following activities were included as part of the job interview process?

- ☐ Resume and cover letter submission (1)
- ☐ Written responses to questions or prompts (2)
- ☐ Phone and/or Zoom interview (3)
- ☐ In person interview (less than a full work-day long) (4)
- ☐ In person interview (a day or more long) (5)
- ☐ Giving a presentation (6)
- ☐ Social events e.g. a lunch with the faculty (7)
- ☐ Something else (8) _____

12. Rank the recruitment activities below from least to most challenging (Rank 1 as least challenging).

- _____ Resume and cover letter submission (1)
- _____ Written responses to questions or prompts (2)
- _____ Phone and/or Zoom interview (3)
- _____ In person interview (less than a full work day long) (4)
- _____ In person interview (a day or more long) (5)
- _____ Giving a presentation (6)
- _____ Social events (e.g., a lunch with the faculty) (7)
- _____ Something else (8)

13. What information were you given in advance of an interview, and what do you wish you were given to prepare?

	Given (1)	Not given (2)	Would like to have (3)	Not applicable (4)
General institutional information (1)				
General library information (2)				
A schedule (3)				
Interview questions (4)				
Promotion and Tenure process documentation (5)				
Information about accommodation requests (6)				

14. Have you ever requested accommodations for autism during the hiring process?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

15. What were they?

- ☐ Asking for questions in advance (1)
- ☐ Asking for schedule in advance (2)
- ☐ Taking short breaks (3)
- ☐ Having the interview online or by telephone (4)
- ☐ Other (5) _____

16. Have you ever disclosed an autism diagnosis during the hiring process?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

17. Have you every provided or created your own accommodations during the hiring process (e.g., bringing your own familiar supplies, requesting a break in order to have sensory relief)?

- ☐ Yes (4)
- ☐ No (5)

18. What were those accommodations?

- ☐ Bringing your own supplies (4)
- ☐ Requesting a break (5)
- ☐ Something else (6) _____

19. In your opinion as an autistic person, how could the recruitment process be altered to be more inclusive?

20. What do you wish people knew about recruiting autistic people?

21. Age

- ☐ 18-24 (1)
- ☐ 25-34 (2)
- ☐ 35-44 (3)
- ☐ 45-54 (4)
- ☐ 55-64 (5)
- ☐ 65 and over (6)

22. Please describe your gender identity:

23. Please describe your ethnicity: