

Library Workers and Disabilities: An Annotated Bibliography

Susie Skarl and Amanda Slater, University of Nevada, Las Vegas



Abstract

Within the field of library and information science (LIS), there has been an abundance of scholarship focusing on serving library patrons with disabilities, yet there has not been a great deal of research on library staff members with disabilities in LIS literature. This paucity of data on library staff with disabilities has included demographic information; lived experiences through training, education, and in the field; and experiences across different types of libraries and library roles. Although there has been a recent emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the library field, there is still not a significant amount of attention on disability issues among library staff members compared to other areas of EDI inquiry. This annotated bibliography highlights key journal article publications and book chapters published internationally from 2011 to 2022 that offer insight into the issues faced by library and archival staff living with disabilities.

Keywords: library workers; disability; inclusion; employment; accommodations

Rationale for the Bibliography

While many library professionals are currently focusing their attention and scholarship on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives for both employees and the patrons that they serve, there is less of an emphasis thus far on scholarship focusing on library staff members living with disabilities. Before the 2010s, there were few peer-reviewed articles focusing on library staff living with disabilities. However, there was an abundance of articles focusing on training library staff to work with patrons living with disabilities, as well as disability awareness training in general, along with resources, technologies, and services to assist library users who live with a wide range of disabilities. Earlier publications on library workers with disabilities primarily focused on issues such as the costs and recommendations relating to the hiring of disabled individuals in the library environment.

This annotated bibliography examines twenty-four resources from 2011 to 2022 that provide insight into library staff living with disabilities and the impact of these disabilities on their work lives. Citations were selected from keyword searches in the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database, Google Scholar, and the Primo discovery service. Examples of keyword phrases searches used to identify resources included the following: librarians with disabilities; library staff and disabilities; invisible disabilities; disabled library staff; employment discrimination; and disability and accommodations. In examining the available citations, the authors began with 2011, considering there were very few relevant resources on the topic prior to this date. Initially, when discussing the inclusion criteria for the annotated bibliography, the authors planned on focusing their

bibliography exclusively on disability issues within academic libraries; however, they discovered some significant articles and book chapters reflecting various disability issues in archives, special libraries, law libraries, and public libraries that they included in their analysis. Since several authors have previously discussed disability issues among library patrons and the library staff members who assist them, these resources were excluded from this study. The topic of disabilities and library workers is a relatively new and emerging area of study and the authors of this bibliography were interested in compiling and highlighting recent scholarship. The target audiences for this annotated bibliography may include library managers, administrators, and human resources staff, in addition to library staff members who serve on search committees, colleagues who have an interest in EDI issues, and library staff living with disabilities, who have until recently, rarely witnessed their experiences discussed within the field.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2023), 61 million adults in the United States live with a disability and 26% (one in four) of adults in the United States have some type of disability, while the Census Bureau estimates that 27.2% or 85.3 million persons living in the United States had a disability in 2014 (Taylor, 2018). Worldwide, an estimated 1.3 billion people – or one in six people – experience significant disability (World Health Organization, 2023). Statistics from the American Library Association suggest that in the United States, employment of people with disabilities within libraries stands at the rate of 3% (ALA Office of Research and Statistics, 2017).

Although there are some significant articles over the last decade concentrating on library workers and disabilities, it is worth noting there is no universally accepted definition

of disabilities or single approach to disability theory (Schomberg, 2018). The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) is a complex legal definition which basically defines a person with a disability as “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” (Department of Justice, ADA, 2020). The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person’s association with a person with a disability (ADA National Network, 2023). The World Health Organization (n.d.) has defined the issues related to being disabled as follows: “Disability is . . . not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives.”

Some of the studies highlighted in this annotated bibliography have applied relevant disability models to frame and contextualize information gathered from their survey respondents. Below are the disability models highlighted by the authors in this review:

- **Medical Model:** The medical model frames disability as a defect in a body, which necessitates medical intervention to ameliorate if a person is to live a good life. In this framing, disability is individualized, measured against an ideal of "normal" human function, and medical professionals are centered as the ultimate experts. Disability activists have noted that this model does not address the social elements that impact disability and can disempower and dehumanize those living with disabilities when they are labeled and othered (UCFS, Office of Developmental Primary Care, n.d.).
- **Social Model:** In contrast, the social model considers how social barriers place limits on people living with functional impairments or limitations. An impairment is

a result of a condition a body experiences, but disability is a result of society's failure to provide accommodations, accessibility, and social understanding and acceptance of people living with such impairments. The social model suggests that disabilities are not problems that need to be fixed, but a spectrum of differences that can be effectively accommodated to improve function, access, and social acceptance and interaction of people living with impairment (UCFS, Office of Developmental Primary Care, n.d.).

- **Critical Disability Studies (CDS):** CDS scholars focus on the entire lived experiences of disabled people (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Disability is viewed through the lens of intersectionality as a “political, cultural, and historical experience” influenced by systems of power, which may be further complicated by other facets of identity, such as race and gender (Critical Disability Studies Collective, University of Minnesota, n.d.).
- **Social Justice Model of Disability:** This model focuses on the oppression that people living with disabilities experience through its focus on "ableism," abusive conduct that discriminates against differences or impairments in functional ability and the people who live with them (Harpur, 2012). This framing addresses how oppression occurs at individual, cultural, and institutional levels, and examines how people living with disabilities might attain justice through societal and individual change improving access and accommodation (Evans et al., 2017).
- **Disability Justice:** This is a social justice movement that focuses on examining disability and ableism as they intersect with other forms of oppression and identity

such as race, class, and gender, by uplifting the voices of LGBTQIA+ and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities who often saw the complexity of their experiences absent from earlier Disability Rights activism (Piepznasamarasinha, 2018).

Other studies explored the lived experiences of library staff workers who live with disabilities. Through interviews, several of the researchers offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of library workers living with disabilities (including “invisible disabilities”). Respondents addressed a wide variety of issues, including the value of the Americans with Disabilities Act; navigating the hiring process with a disability; the issue of “passing” (attempting to “pass” as nondisabled); and the importance of managers understanding the problems of staff living with disabilities.

A Note on Language: The authors of this annotated bibliography have chosen to use person-first language (e.g., “person with disabilities” or “staff living with disabilities”) in their article. However, the twenty-four annotations retain the selected authors’ choice of words. Therefore, readers will find a wide variety of terms used to describe disabilities, disabled communities, and experiences of living with disabilities.

Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, A. (2021). Job seeking and daily workforce experiences of autistic librarians. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 5(3), 38-63. <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i3.36196>

Amelia Anderson, an assistant professor at Old Dominion University with research interests in the intersection of neurodiversity and librarianship, conducted a qualitative study that focuses on ten librarians with graduate degrees who self-identify as autistic. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the job-seeking and workforce experiences of autistic librarians. Anderson asked the librarians to describe their job-seeking experiences, along with their daily working environments, and what aspects of the work they find most appealing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, although methods of participation varied and additional accessibility measures were taken based on interviewing best practices, including providing interview questions in advance so that all participants could prepare, as necessary. Through the survey, many issues came to the forefront that focused on disclosure, accessibility, and accommodations.

Although autistic librarians faced barriers when entering the workforce, many survey respondents found their careers to be largely rewarding and noted that they thrive in their jobs when their skills are prioritized, when they feel like they are assisting others, when they are doing meaningful work, and when they are working with like-minded people. Moreover, autistic librarians in this study hope that hiring managers and library supervisors have at least some knowledge and understanding of autism, along with the willingness to

learn more. Results from this study also indicate that some job-seeking and daily workforce barriers could be removed through the implementation of more inclusive practices. Focusing on skills, allowing individuals to prepare in advance, developing a more autism-informed workplace, providing clear and honest feedback, and allowing for flexible, adjustable workplace environments are all strategies that would make job interviews and the workplace more accessible for all employees.

Betz, G. (2022). Navigating the academic hiring process with disabilities. *The Library with the Lead Pipe*. <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2022/hiring-with-disabilities/>

In her phenomenological study, Gail Betz conducted in-depth interviews with 40 full-time employed academic librarians with various disabilities to examine the lived experiences of these librarians. Betz investigated how academic librarians with disabilities experience the hiring process, the strategies academic librarians with disabilities use to successfully navigate the hiring process, and what factors influence a disabled academic librarian's decision to disclose disability status during the hiring process. The target audience for this article is not management or search committees looking to improve their recruitment process; rather, it is other academic library workers with disabilities trying to navigate a socially complex process with little concrete professional guidance. The author notes that since a majority of these interviews were completed mostly before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, none of the respondents described experiences with virtual interviews, and no questions were asked about full-day virtual interviews.

Themes were broken down into three categories based on patterns that emerged

from participants' responses: interview day structure (e.g., receiving the questions in advance, sufficient break time, opting out of meals, etc.); intrapersonal coping mechanisms (e.g., self-accommodations, strategically applying to institutions, etc.), and interpersonal coping mechanisms (e.g., strategically disclosing or not disclosing a disability, etc.). Betz concludes that navigating an academic library interview with any kind of disability requires significant effort and self-awareness. However, there are many strategies for disabled library workers to use on their own, without disclosing, to improve their experience of the hiring process. Additionally, Betz states that there are ways in which library administrators and hiring committees can rethink the hiring process to improve inclusivity and accessibility for applicants with disabilities.

Brown, M. E. (2015). Invisible debility: Attitudes toward the underrepresented in library workplaces. *Public Library Quarterly*, 34(2), 124-133.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2015.1036707>

Author Mary E. Brown, who earned a PhD in information studies from Drexel University, states that the American Library Association is committed to recruiting persons of color and those with disabilities to the profession, yet these groups are underrepresented among librarians. In the article, Brown raises the question: How do librarians perceive the underrepresented as potential fellow library staff? To answer this question, invitations to participate in a web-based questionnaire were extended via e-mails to public library administrators, directors, librarians, and library staff within public libraries, in addition to library and information science graduate students. A total of fifty-six library staff from six different states completed the questionnaire (39% directors and

administrators, 32% professional librarians, and 29% other staff) and a total of thirty-four graduate students from four different states completed the questionnaire. The participants agreed that library staff should represent the diversity of the communities served; however, many respondents were less supportive of targeted education or hiring programs that would assist marginalized groups in accessing employment. There was agreement that public libraries should make needed accommodations, such as altering the physical layout of the library, to employ qualified disabled individuals.

When asked about specific interactions, library staff and students felt that library patrons are more comfortable seeking assistance from a staff member with a "physical handicap" than they are seeking assistance from a staff member with a "neurological handicap," such as Parkinson's disease or Tourette syndrome, or from a staff member with a "developmental handicap," such as an intellectual disability or a speech disorder. In conclusion, Brown notes that unconscious bias is repeatedly mentioned in the literature as an obstacle in the hiring and promotion of underrepresented groups. The author provides recommendations to achieve greater employment diversity in libraries, including augmenting the concept of *librarian* with additional examples that provide ample overrepresentation of underrepresented groups to force a change in the mental concept of *librarian*.

Brown, R., & Sheidlower, S. (2019). Claiming our space: A quantitative and qualitative picture of disabled librarians. *Library Trends*, 67(3), 471-486.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0007>

Authors Robin Brown and Scott Sheidlower report on a research survey they

conducted that focuses on the experiences of librarians who self-identify as disabled librarians. At the time of publication, slightly over fifty participants were included in the authors' dataset. Along with a quantitative survey, survey participants were offered the opportunity to participate in an interview to further explore the issues raised in the survey. The majority of the respondents were from the United States and stated a wide range of disabilities, including mobility, energy level, psychological, sensory, cognitive, and learning. A substantial number of respondents (37.5%) felt that their challenges were invisible, such as mental health issues, for example. Respondents addressed issues including the following: reasonable accommodations, the value of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the impact of disabilities in the job market, the issue of "passing," and the importance of managers understanding the problems of staff with disabilities. Also worth noting is that the authors included questions from both surveys in the article.

Part I of the survey was a widely distributed quantitative survey consisting of eight questions about the respondents' disability-related issues, accommodations, and challenges the respondents face in the workplace. Part II of the survey included questions from the oral interviews, which focused on the respondents' disability and its impact on their job performance, in addition to how their disabilities have evolved over time. The authors concluded by noting that there is a need to further explore several issues regarding libraries and disabilities, including the impact of invisible disabilities in the library world; changing the library school curriculum to include disability-awareness training; the impact of ADA, especially among new librarians; the need to address intersectionality; and building community around disabled librarians.

Burns, E., & Green, K. E. C. (2019). Academic librarians' experiences and perceptions on mental illness stigma and the workplace. *College & Research Libraries*, 80(5), 638-657. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.5.638>

Seeking to fill a gap in the academic literature on mental illness and experiences of stigma, Erin Burns's and Kristin E.C. Green's work provides insight into how stigma shapes the experiences of academic librarians living with mental illness and their professional lives. The authors provide definitions of invisible versus visible disabilities, mental illness, stigma, and burnout, in addition to an overview and discussion of research and writings on mental illness and employment in academia broadly, and disability and stigma in recent LIS literature more specifically. The survey developed by Burns and Green is based upon a psychological survey measuring experiences of stigma and was widely distributed through ALA channels. Of the 549 survey respondents, more than half identified themselves as living with a mental illness. The survey asked respondents about burnout, disability accommodations and use of sick leave, workplace training regarding mental health, their sense of stigma within the library environment, and comfort level with disclosure. The survey findings suggest that academic librarians living with mental illness have a fairly positive view of their mental illness (such as a sense that their experiences have made them more sensitive and empathetic to students and colleagues), and some respondents (40%) even feel somewhat safe at work, finding more acceptance of mental illness inside the academic library than outside.

However, there is still hesitancy to disclose and ask for accommodations, with 55% of respondents agreeing that their sense that mental illness is not accepted in the general

population prevents them from disclosing at work. In addition, few of the respondents reported their mental illness as a disability and few had sought formal accommodations. Most staff and supervisors (approximately two-thirds for both groups) noted they have not received any specific work training towards accommodating people with mental illness, suggesting their institutions have not been focused on destigmatization. The authors conclude with a review that mental health awareness programming has been shown to reduce stigma and improve understanding of mental illness and that this work is needed to support creating an inclusive environment where staff can better support each other.

Cheney, M. (2021). The hearing-impaired law librarian: Navigating silent spaces. *AALL Spectrum*, 25(3), 34–37.

https://lawlibrary.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/Mari_Cheney-The_Hearing-Impaired_Law_Librarian_and_Law_Library_Patron.pdf

Mary Cheney, a hearing-impaired law librarian, reached out to other hard-of-hearing colleagues to share their experiences and guidance in navigating workplace issues. Cheney states that some low-cost hearing loss accommodations can be especially beneficial, including rearranging a reference desk, installing an amplified or volume-enhanced telephone, having a designated notetaker at staff meetings who provides written notes to anyone who wants them, and allowing the hearing-impaired individual to temporarily move offices or move to a quiet area in the library if necessary to avoid distracting noises. More expensive and time-consuming accommodations may include employer assistance in purchasing hearing aids; the standardization of captions on voice-over recordings; closed captioning of live virtual meetings, such as interviews and

committee meetings; and significant alterations to the reference or library desk setup, which may require that built-in furniture be removed. Regardless of the type of accommodation, Cheney and her colleagues recommend that hearing-impaired library workers concentrate on being open, honest, and upfront with employers, supervisors, and co-workers. This allows them to understand why a hearing-impaired person may be asking for help in certain circumstances and makes them feel comfortable with the hearing-impaired individual's communication techniques.

Cheney also offers a “best practices” section for employers with suggestions, including becoming familiar with the ADA-required accommodations for hearing-impaired employees and advocating for those accommodations if your institution is falling short; not penalizing hearing-impaired employees for requesting accommodations, which includes not discriminating when it comes to pay increases or promotions; and not pressuring hearing-impaired employees to attend in-person conferences, since many conferences do not provide adequate accommodations.

Cirasella, J., Fullington, L., Berger, M., & Gargan, W. (2021). Shhh-stereotypes: A conversation among librarians with hearing loss. *Urban Library Journal*, 27(2).

<https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ulj/vol27/iss2/3>

Authors Jill Cirasella, Lee Ann Fullington, Monica Berger, and William Gargan are four hard-of-hearing public-facing academic librarians who utilize hearing aids. Their article, based on their panel at the 2021 LACUNY Institute, offers a glimpse into the lived experiences of hard-of-hearing librarians, and shares suggestions for effectively communicating and supporting hard-of-hearing colleagues. The authors highlight

pervasive stereotypes and misconceptions about hearing loss, along with fallacies about hearing aids. For example, many people mistake hearing loss for a lack of intelligence, lack of attentiveness, aloofness, rudeness, or lack of caring, in addition to assuming that hearing loss is almost always connected to aging. In addition to sharing their personal experiences and challenges with hearing loss, the authors provide details on how their hearing loss affects their work and how they have managed their hearing loss at the reference desk, during face-to-face instruction, and during meetings, as well as the benefits and complications of remote work.

Cook, S., & Clement, K. (2019). Navigating the hidden void: The unique challenges of accommodating library employees with invisible disabilities. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 45(5), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.02.010>

In their column, authors Samantha Cook and Kristine Clement investigate invisible disability and library employment and make recommendations for how employers can help mitigate experiences of ableism and build more broadly accessible workspaces. This paper relies on a literature review and one of the author's lived experiences as a person living with invisible disability. The column begins with a discussion of the decision to use “first-person” language, definitions of invisible disabilities from the Invisible Disabilities Association, and the tendency for people living with invisible disability to avoid disclosing their disability to their employer based upon past experiences and/or fear of stigma and ableism. Cook and Clement make a strong point for employers to avoid making assumptions about the disability status of any employee or what their accommodations needs may be. A perceived difference, such as walking with a limp, does not necessarily

indicate a disability, nor does a seeming lack of difference indicate that a disability does not exist. While the nature of an invisible disability may seem furtive, considering a wide variety of needs and allowing employees multiple options to participate in workplace activities can help to develop a safe and more generally accessible workspace where people with invisible disabilities have more tools at their disposal, as well as greater privacy in deciding when and if to disclose their disability. The authors' work is informed by that of Kattari, Olzman, and Hanna (2018), who identified several themes common to the experiences of people living with invisible disabilities. The authors summarize how one's troubling experiences of ableism in the workplace could have been alleviated had their employers taken more care to develop an accommodating workplace and greater flexibility and respect among colleagues.

Fife, K., & Henthorn, H. (2021). Brick walls and tick boxes. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 5(1), 6-32.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34667>

In 2017, Kristy Fife and Hannah Henthorn began collaborating on a grassroots project to explore the experiences of archive workers from marginalized backgrounds (including women, trans people, queer people, disabled people, people of color, and underrepresented class backgrounds, particularly working-class people). At the time of this publication, Fife was a PhD student in information studies who identified as white, working-class, queer, non-binary, and disabled. Henthorn was an archives assistant who identified as a white, cis, queer, disabled woman. The authors utilized a combination of autoethnography and qualitative data gathered through an anonymous survey from ninety-

seven participants which explored work experiences that articulated a common set of frustrations that are often shared but rarely documented or discussed when developing diversity and inclusion strategies and schemes. The authors designed the survey to be anonymous so that respondents could be honest in their responses, and they noted that confidentiality was crucial to building trust within their relationships with participants. They also stated that they were conscious not to jeopardize any individual's work situation by sharing their negative experiences more widely. Additionally, what may have made this survey unique was that the authors included themselves in the data, which made themselves and their histories within the profession visible.

Fife and Henthorn explore the entry routes into their careers, career progression, and perceptions of leadership within the field. Then, the authors identify common experiences that emerged in the data that they gathered, including isolation and otherness in both workplaces and universities, feeling unsafe and/or underconfident, the lack of support given to marginalized workers by employers, and a frustration at lack of diversity in leadership. A good portion of the paper includes a summary and discussion of the qualitative research, including lengthy quotes from respondents, along with a copy of the survey questions.

George, K. (2020). *DisService: Disabled library staff and service expectations*. In V. A. Douglas and J. Gadsby (Eds). *Deconstructing service in libraries: Intersections of identities and expectations* (pp. 95-124). Litwin Books & Library Juice Press.

This book chapter by Kelsey George examines how the ethos of service in libraries harms library staff with disabilities through a discussion of disability theory and LIS

literature and a survey of ninety-nine library staff living with disabilities. George provides an analytical discussion of models and theories of disability and the ethos of service, vocational awe, and the gendering of labor in libraries as scaffolding for their survey research. The survey methodology and results are shared in-depth. The section on implicit bias and microaggressions is particularly detailed, discussing the concepts of invisibility and passing and providing examples of how microaggressions may manifest.

A notable thread throughout George's work is the persistent highlighting of how the intersection between disability and other minoritized identities can place additional strain on groups that are already underrepresented in librarianship, such as people of color, queer identities, and others. George aptly discusses a core frustration people with disabilities often feel when seeking accommodations in the workplace. Strict focus on legal compliance can be a dehumanizing experience for disabled people, with institutions too often shifting the burden on employees to ensure their own success at work rather than sharing that responsibility by engaging in an ethic of care that could better address institutional inaccessibility and create a more inclusive place of work.

Hollich, S. (2020). What it means for a disabled librarian to “pass.” *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 4(1), 94-107.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i1.32440>

Author Shanna Hollich notes that much of the current literature on disability in higher education focuses on issues involving serving students or library patrons with disabilities. A less explored area of research focuses on the experience of being a library worker with a disability and how that may affect the nature of information work and the

provision of service. The article focuses primarily on one central question: What does it mean to be a disabled library/information worker? The autoethnographic work of this paper is primarily grounded in the social and critical models of disability. Hollich analyzes the consequences of working in a library setting with a hidden disability and the ethical dilemmas workers may face when “passing” as abled. While the decision to pass is not always purposeful, this passing is often done through consciously masking the characteristics of a disability.

Hollich reflects that workers with hidden disabilities often receive two-fold stigmatization: there is the stigma that comes with being a disabled individual, such as rejection, ableism, and discrimination, as well as the additional stigma of not appearing disabled enough to need accommodations or support services. In conclusion, the author offers several practical applications that libraries and information workers can take to better understand issues of hidden disability and marginalization, including training and workshops in specific areas such as cultural humility and awareness of implicit bias, along with Universal Design, education, and advocacy.

Litwak, K.D. (2022). Desperately seeking librarians with disabilities. In C. Lee, B. Lym, T. Bryant, J. Cain, & K. Schlessinger (Eds). (pp.97-119). *Implementing excellence in diversity, equity, and inclusion: A handbook for academic libraries*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

Kenneth D. Litwak’s study focuses on the presence (or lack) of full-time librarians in academic libraries who have an “apparent” disability, especially when that disability was apparent during the hiring process. The author defines an apparent disability as one with

“visible or recognizable features or characteristics.” Litwak, who lives with a visual impairment, had been denied a position due to a search committee’s concern that the impairment could affect their work. Employing a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the survey, “Diversity and Disability in Academic Librarianship,” was conducted in 2019 and resulted in a pool of sixty respondents. The author finds that their research suggests that jobseekers with apparent disabilities experience significant barriers in gaining full-time library employment. The survey results also suggest that relatively few academic libraries employ librarians with apparent disabilities and that successfully navigating the hiring process as a librarian with apparent disabilities is against the odds.

Litwak found that the textual data that this survey collected to be the most impactful and found some recurring themes, including ableism or bias against those with disabilities. Survey respondents also provided a wide variety of suggestions on what disabled applicants might do to improve their chances of being hired. They conclude their chapter with a discussion of future research that could expand upon and strengthen their conclusions, including working with a larger respondent pool. Litwak calls for more focus on this topic in academic libraries and academia more broadly, noting that diversification efforts are hollow without the inclusion of disabled people in the workforce. Survey questions and responses are shared in an appendix to the chapter.

Manwiller, K. Q., & Pionke, J. J. (2022) Understanding disability to support library workers, *Journal of Library Administration*, 62(8), 1077-1084.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2022.2127590>

Although libraries have focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives

for nearly two decades, Katelyn Quirin Manwiller and J.J. Pionke note that disability issues are often excluded in these discussions. The authors call upon library supervisors and managers to move beyond cultures of “basic accessibility,” where institutions hit only bare minimum requirements under disability rights laws (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act), to develop truly inclusive workplaces in which accommodations are a shared responsibility between the institution and its workers. One of the authors uses their own disabilities as an example of disabilities that do not fit neatly into the legal definition, as the severity of their symptoms are variable, and their disabilities are not immediately apparent to others. The authors state that maintaining a culture of basic accessibility, which has been compounded by COVID-19 issues, may also place an undue burden on employees who do not have a formal diagnosis or may otherwise have difficulty establishing the documentation institutions typically require to process an accommodation request under disability rights laws.

Manwiller and Pionke discuss the differences between the legal definition of disability under the ADA and the lived experiences of those who have disabilities. They also argue that creating an inclusive workplace demands that administrators understand accommodation laws and processes, that work be designed to be flexible so that formal accommodations may not be needed except in special cases, and that supervisors be willing to support employees who do need formal accommodations through the process, especially when human resources may argue against it, all of which is especially necessary for workers whose disabilities are not as broadly recognizable or understood by others. In addition to sharing these lessons learned, Manwiller and Pionke recommend

that these issues can be better addressed by administration and supervisors becoming familiar with the ADA and Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) policies so that supervisors can act as pillars of support to their employees through those processes. They also recommend ensuring that all employees are familiar with their rights to these areas, and integrating disability into EDI workplace education, policies, and advocacy.

Moeller, C.M. (2019). Disability, identity, and professionalism: Precarity in librarianship. *Library Trends*, 67(3), 455-470.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0006>

Christine M. Moeller begins their paper with a strong idea: Library work must be redefined to become inclusive of the complex nature of disability if libraries as workplaces are to become truly accessible. Their paper begins with a succinct rundown of the history of disability studies and critical disability studies, its influences, and broad arguments, and moves into a discussion of ableism in academic libraries and higher education, wherein disabled people are viewed as an individual exception outside of an abled norm. The author finds that academia tends to rely on “retrofitting,” where disability is addressed as a problem that must go away, rather than through design, by assuming that people with disabilities will be present in a workplace and naturally require space.

Moeller discusses the ableism inherent in resilience discourse within academic spaces and in notions of professionalism and vocational awe, which fail to acknowledge the systemic inequities that people with disabilities may live with. The precarity of library labor, gaps in protections provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act, and risk factors in disclosing disabilities are also discussed as sites of inequity. Moeller ultimately finds

that addressing the multi-faceted issue of accessibility demands a total rethinking of librarianship, library work environments, and work relationships.

O'Neill, A., & Urquhart, C. (2011). Accommodating employees with disabilities:

Perceptions of Irish academic library managers. *New Review of Academic*

***Librarianship*, 17(2), 234-258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2011.593852>**

This study by Anne-Marie O'Neill and Christine Urquhart examines library managers' views and their practice concerning the provision of "reasonable accommodation" for employees with disabilities in college and university libraries in the Republic of Ireland. The authors' main goal of this study is to clarify how Irish academic library managers view problems and opportunities that arise from the accommodation of employees with disabilities. The research questions emerged from inconsistencies, gaps, and uncertainties in the literature, including apparent significant disparities in the commitment of employers to accommodation in the workplace, employers' perceptions of employees with disabilities, and an absence of information on accommodating library employees (as compared to library patrons) with disabilities, particularly for employees with less visible disabilities. Additionally, the literature indicated that there was a need for positive action to be taken by employers about the accommodation of disability in the workplace so that equality of opportunity might be achieved. The authors used a mixed method approach comprising a quantitative survey with 163 library managers, followed by a qualitative telephone interview. The questionnaire comprised fifteen questions (simple classification, dichotomous, vignette [with real-life scenarios], multiple choice, and open-ended). There were several findings from the study, including the following: academic library managers

perceive the needs of employees with disabilities as different from library patrons with disabilities and an overwhelming majority of academic library managers are aware of their legal duty to accommodate employees with disabilities, although that does not always translate into practice.

Furthermore, even though academic library managers have a general knowledge of the needs and accommodations for staff with less apparent disabilities (such as hard-of-hearing individuals and those with mental health issues), more training is required to enable institutions to be more proactive and responsive to the needs of the staff members. Additionally, over 30% of library managers reported that their college library did not have a procedure in place to address a request from employees with disabilities for reasonable accommodation despite judicial rulings that they should be in place. While these findings represented the situation in 2009, and that on the whole, the legislation was working in practice, the authors recommend that additional disability awareness training for staff would be beneficial and further research should examine the views of library staff with disabilities.

Oud, J. (2018). Academic librarians with disabilities: Job perceptions and factors influencing positive workplace experiences. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 13(1).

<https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v13i1.4090>

Author Joanne Oud states that although there has been increasing attention to diversity in librarianship, minimal attention has been paid to librarians with disabilities. In this study, Oud uses a mixed method approach from a survey and in-depth follow-up

interviews to investigate the characteristics of Canadian academic librarians with disabilities. The survey focuses on how the respondents perceive their jobs and workplace environments and what factors influence those perceptions. This study builds on existing studies related to the work perceptions of visible minority librarians and workers with disabilities. It examines similar issues but uses the perspective of disability studies to focus on the experiences of librarians with disabilities who work in Canadian university libraries. Ten librarians from across Canada agreed to be interviewed and were given a choice of interview mode (by phone, Skype, or in-person).

In this exploratory study, all respondents were somewhat less satisfied with the climate for diversity and accessibility in their workplace. Librarians with disabilities felt that their workplace was less accepting of diversity than non-disabled respondents did. Librarians who belonged to another minority group similarly rated their workplace as less inclusive. Respondents noted that one of the biggest challenges was the lack of understanding or awareness of disability and disability-related issues in the workplace, particularly from managers. One of the main takeaways from this study is that all librarians could and should improve their awareness of disability-related issues in the workplace—especially those in supervisory positions. Oud included the survey questions in the appendix, which may be helpful to researchers constructing their own surveys.

Oud, J. (2019). Systemic workplace barriers for academic librarians with disabilities.

***College & Research Libraries*, 80(2), 169–194.**

<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.2.169>

Joanne Oud provides the results of a qualitative study with ten librarians with disabilities in

Canada. While Oud's pool of research participants is small, recurring themes emerge across the ten interviews that reflect data from the broader body of research within disability studies focusing on the perspectives of disabled workers in different types of institutions. The author discusses definitions and theories within disability studies, including medical vs. social models of disability, the influence of capitalism upon labor in Western cultures, and the construction and systematic institutionalization of the ideal of an able-bodied worker.

Oud found that while this group of academic librarians were overall happy with their chosen career path, they faced numerous challenges, largely centered around ignorance and misunderstanding of disability and accommodation. These impacts range from the interpersonal, such as microaggressions of individual colleagues, to systemic abuses, such as institutional denial of necessary accommodations. The complexity of navigating academic librarianship as persons with disabilities is highlighted in minimally edited interview snippets, sharing intimate instances of how ableism can manifest when workplace expectations based on assumptions of abledness are applied to people who are not.

Pionke, J. J. (2019). The impact of disbelief: On being a library employee with a disability. *Library Trends*, 67(3), 423-435. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0004>

Reflecting on personal experience, librarian J.J. Pionke, who lives with a hidden disability, provides an extensive picture of the process of requesting and obtaining accommodation for a disability in the workplace. Although the accommodation process may seem straightforward, there can be many barriers during the process that can lead to

dissatisfaction for everyone involved. The author describes the invasive process, which not only requires a letter from a care provider explaining the accommodation and its necessity but also includes an interview with a disability specialist who is not familiar with the employee or their issues. Furthermore, there are several components surrounding how employers and fellow employees interact with a person with a disability. Stigma, harassment, ableism, and an institutional culture that values overwork all contribute to whether a person with a disability will disclose to get the accommodations that they need. Pionke concludes the article by providing guidelines for combating ableism in the library workplace and focuses on the following issues: developing a culture of equity that includes disability and accessibility; using Universal Design; and educating all employees, including having an educational program that focuses on microaggressions, implicit bias, and other types of discrimination.

Rathbun-Grubb, S. (2021). Voices of strength: A survey of librarians working with chronic illnesses or conditions. *Journal of Library Administration*, 61(1), 42-57.
<https://doi.org.10.1080/01930826.2020.1845546>

Susan Rathbun-Grubb's work narrows in on the experiences and perspectives of library staff living with chronic conditions. The paper begins with a literature review and discussion of related research within library and information science and adjacent fields. The author developed an online survey instrument using Qualtrics and participants were solicited to take the survey using an invitation emailed to thirteen library-related listservs. Respondents self-identified as having a visible or invisible chronic illness or condition. The survey consisted of thirteen closed- and eight open-ended questions on the type of

workplace, type of chronic condition, longevity of the condition, disclosure, accommodations, level of support, career mobility and advancement, work challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions of disability. Rathbun-Grubb compiled data through a survey of a sizable pool of 616 librarians across different types of libraries. Demographic data is presented in calculated percentages and graphs, and narrative data is presented in summary and with select direct quotes from respondents. Since “chronic condition” is a broad category, respondents report living with a variety of disabilities, some more visible and some less visible, and the results are a mix of positive and negative experiences. Despite limitations from chronic conditions, some respondents noted that they are coping well and navigating career advancements; however, a substantial number of workers (39%) believe that their condition has negatively impacted their career advancement.

While most respondents disclose their conditions to their employers and request accommodations that are partially or fully granted, others prefer not to disclose their situations. In general, due to their chronic conditions, survey respondents face a great deal of physical, emotional, and psychological challenges on the job. Rathbun-Grubb dedicates sections of the paper to the respondents' views on the issue of disclosing disability, seeking accommodations and accommodation outcomes, challenges and coping methods in the workplace, and impacts on career advancement. As one respondent noted, “There is still work to be done in exposure to these conditions which people might not understand or grasp.”

Schomberg, J. (2018). Disability at work: Libraries, built to exclude. In K. P. Nicholson & M. Seale (Eds.), *Politics and theory of critical librarianship* (pp. 111–123).

Library Juice Press. https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/lib_services_fac_pubs/149

Writing from a perspective informed by critical disability theory and personal experience, Jessica Schomberg frames librarianship as a care profession and discusses ways in which ableism can manifest within academic library environments. Their paper begins with a discussion of definitions of disability, identity politics and varying views on disability among disabled communities, historical perspectives, and intersectionality in critical disability studies. Throughout the paper, Schomberg weaves in their experiential knowledge as an academic librarian with diabetes, and experiences from other disabled librarians they have known. Schomberg's insights regarding their particular disability provide an excellent example of how systemic constructions of power enforced by medical stigma and ableism are present in academic libraries. They find that expectations around care work and the role of librarians tend to prevent disabled librarians from being able to enact meaningful care for themselves and suggest that this could potentially be mitigated by institutions developing “communities of care” where care for oneself and others is destigmatized and protected.

Siraki, A. (2021). Too many spoons: Library workers and disabilities. *Library Leadership & Management, 35(3).*

Although most North American employers prohibit discrimination and assert that accommodations for disabled employees are assured, the legal difficulties and Human Rights Commission complaints paint a different picture. Librarian Anita Siraki shares the discrimination she has experienced while working at academic and public libraries, at other institutions, and during library school. Along with sharing her experiences of

discrimination, rudeness, and condescension among managers, colleagues, and patrons, Siraki recommends that administrators and supervisors receive more training focusing on disabled employees. For library staff with disabilities, Siraki provides some thoughtful tips on dealing with work issues, including being your own best advocate; not hiding your disability; reaching out for support; being realistic; and not letting your colleagues “turn you into inspirational porn” (which includes congratulating you on your “bravery”).

Syma, C. (2018). Invisible disabilities: Perceptions and barriers to reasonable accommodations in the workplace. *Library Management*, 40 (1/2), 113-120.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-10-2017-0101>

Carrye Syma’s literature review investigates invisible disabilities in the workplace, coworkers’ perceptions of invisible disabilities, and barriers to requesting reasonable accommodations for invisible disabilities in the workplace. As assistant academic dean and librarian in the human resources division of Texas Tech University, Syma notes that this literature review is of value because it speaks to an important issue facing today’s workplaces – invisible disabilities and accommodations. Invisible disabilities, as defined by the Invisible Disabilities Association, refers to symptoms such as debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, brain injuries, learning differences, and mental health disorders, as well as hearing and vision impairments. Some examples of invisible disabilities include the following: psychiatric disabilities (e.g., major depression, bipolar disorder, etc.); epilepsy; HIV/AIDS; diabetes; and sensory disabilities (vision or hearing problems). At times, employees may be hesitant to disclose their invisible disability to their managers or colleagues, which means that accommodations for disabilities may not be

requested or offered. Accommodations made in the workplace for invisible disabilities can include a flexible schedule, special software for assisting with scheduling or prioritizing tasks, or architectural changes such as a standing desk.

With numerous publications researched and discussed, along with a case study with a library worker with an invisible disability and her supervisor, Syma's findings demonstrate that invisible disabilities are having a profound impact on the workplace and need to be addressed. For employees with invisible disabilities, they need to consider sharing information about their issues with managers, as well as requesting accommodation. It is also vital to educate employers and employees on the issues surrounding invisible disabilities and future research should focus on training opportunities and workplace sensitivity regarding colleagues with invisible disabilities.

Tang, L., Malley, B., Tanguay, C., & Tumlin, Z. (2020). Best practices for hiring people with disabilities. *Archival Outlook*, July/August.

<https://mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?m=30305&i=667849&p=6>

In the July/August 2020 issue of *Archival Outlook*, Lydia Tang, Bridget Malley, Chris Tanguay, and Zachary Tumlin, members from the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Accessibility and Disability Section, crowdsourced a variety of ideas on the prompt: "What should search committees be aware of when filling a position in terms of accessibility and disability inclusion?" The best practices document provides suggestions in a wide variety of categories. For example, when crafting a job posting, the authors recommend that search committees link to the institution's non-discrimination policy, express willingness to provide accommodations, and indicate how applicants can make requests. When

evaluating candidates, the authors suggest creating a rubric to assess and select candidates and focus on essential qualifications directly related to the job duties. They also note that the hiring committee should be sure to avoid judgments based on "fit" or non-essential aspects of their performance. When conducting initial interviews, the authors advocate that search committees establish a standardized set of specific, targeted questions and be sure to avoid ambiguous questions, such as "Tell me about yourself."

When conducting the in-person interviews, search committees should ask all candidates if they need any accommodations, use the most accessible buildings and rooms available, email all materials ahead of time, and schedule regular breaks into the itinerary. If dining with candidates, the search committee should ask candidates in advance if they have any dietary restrictions, include the menu with the interview packet, and allow the candidate to choose their preferred seating arrangement. The authors recommend extending the job offer through email, in addition to a phone call, to accommodate those who are hard-of-hearing or need additional time to process information.

Williams, T., & Hagood, A. (2019). Disability, the silent D in diversity. *Library Trends*, 67(3), 487-496. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0008>

As librarians for the Georgia Libraries for Statewide Accessible Services (GLASS), Teneka Williams and Asha Hagood examine whether public libraries are hitting necessary accessible employment measures in their aim to be more inclusive workplaces. The authors begin with a startling statement: According to *Disabled World*, those who have

disabilities make up the nation's largest minority group; however, even though there is an increased focus on diversity in employment, people with disabilities are often left out of the conversation. Conducting interviews with GLASS employees, Williams and Hagood set out to ascertain the attitude toward diversity in their own workspace. They interviewed ten colleagues—four with varying hearing, visual, and physical impairments and six without any disabilities. Each person was asked whether they perceived the campaign of accessibility in libraries to be one of action or merely words.

In analyzing the results, the authors noted a divergence concerning the responses, which revealed the disconnect between who they serve and how they serve them. The colleagues without impairments viewed the campaign for accessibility to be one of action, highlighting the purchase of assistive technology, the sponsored conferences focused on accessibility, and outreach especially committed to the promotion of inclusivity. The perspectives of those with impairments were markedly different. The impaired employees remarked on pockets of advances in one area, but nonexistent widespread change. The authors' findings fall in line with similar findings, highlighting that there is greater emphasis on accessible services to patrons and less focus on workplace accommodations for library employees. They conclude that accessibility as an "attitude of service" that is present across library spaces is crucial to creating truly accessible libraries, for patrons and employees alike.

Summary of Recurrent Themes

Within the 24 resources reviewed in this annotated bibliography, common themes appeared through much of the literature. These themes are worth noting, especially in

consideration of the different methods employed by investigators and, for those which surveyed human subjects, the variations in sample sizes and questionnaire type. Some common terms that were defined and discussed throughout the literature included ableism, implicit bias, stigma, passing, and disclosure. The literature also presented the terms hidden or invisible and visible disabilities, as well as apparent and non-apparent disabilities, which are used to describe the phenomena where some types of disabilities may be outwardly noticeable to others, while other types of disabilities are not, allowing some people living with disabilities to avoid disclosing their disabilities and to pass as abled.

Among the themes, several authors noted that while there have been shifts of interest towards diversity, inclusion, and equity across librarianship and related fields, disability had tended to be left out of these conversations as an explicit topic. This assertion was not made by the majority of the authors, yet may be evidenced within other themes, such as the paucity of research on disability and staff in LIS literature, or the barriers which staff living with disabilities have reported encountering during hiring processes and on the job when they find their accommodation needs are treated as a furtive personal process rather than a shared goal across an institution.

Some authors indicated that library staff often lack access to education or training on disabilities and accommodations, except as it may pertain to assisting patrons. This includes supervisors who hire staff and facilitate training, along with managers that may play a role in accommodation requests. Staff living with disabilities may experience stigma, implicit bias, and microaggressions as a result of staff ignorance, and may feel

unsure or unsafe about disclosing their disability or seeking accommodations if institutions do not ensure staff have access to appropriate education or training. Additionally, authors suggested that training opportunities could be included in library education programs, as well as in workplaces, and should be available for staff of all levels. Training on the ADA broadly and accommodation processes more specifically should be available for supervisors and administrators but could also be available for all staff to understand their rights in the workplace.

Ensuring patrons have an accessible library is often a shared responsibility among staff, yet the literature noted that this shared responsibility often stops when considering accessibility for employees. The burden to ensure a workplace is accessible is often placed on staff living with disabilities to seek personal accommodation. This dichotomy may leave staff living with disabilities in a strange position of recognizing that their workspaces may be fairly accessible and their colleagues basically familiar with and accepting of a range of disabilities, while still feeling hesitant to disclose their disabilities or seek formal accommodations. This hesitancy is often based on experiences of ableism and stigma, which may have occurred interpersonally through microaggressions, discrimination, or denial of accommodation requests, or which may be institutional or systemic, through a lack of inclusive design or focus on accessibility through policies, training opportunities, and/or workplace culture.

Workplace culture and the expectations surrounding librarianship and library work were another set of themes throughout the literature. Several studies pointed out that vocational awe, cultures of overwork, or expectations of library staff to operate in care

roles may be rooted in ableism or create an environment where staff may be required or expected to do more with less, put their personal needs aside, or otherwise communicate implicitly or explicitly that staff setting boundaries around their limitations may be met with disapproval, harassment, or poor performance reviews. Some recommendations included redefining the role of librarians and library staff, developing policies that encourage and support flexibility, and creating communities of care that allow for a variety of goals and needs to be negotiated and met.

Lastly, an important theme across much of the literature was exposing the problem of bare minimum institutional adherence to the ADA, which is often retroactive, addressing accessibility case by case as individual employees bring their needs to the institution through formal accommodation requests. Authors noted that considering disability as buildings are built, procedures developed, and policies set in place may assist in creating work environments which are more broadly accessible. If a wider range of accessibility needs are met through an assumption that staff living with disabilities can and do exist in the workplace, a wider range of needs can potentially be met without a formal accommodation process, which might support staff privacy and assist staff who may have had difficulties in documenting their disability.

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