

Chapter 1

Designing an 'Autistic Book Club': A participatory action research study

Cynthia M. Parkhill

Library and Information Services Program

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Dr. Jenna Kammer

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

This participatory action research proposal was designed to address a need for autistic-friendly spaces in which autistic people can socialize by forming an “Autistic Book Club.” This researcher, being autistic herself, struggles to form connections. One area where this researcher feels most comfortable interacting with others is within the structure of a book club. She recently became aware that a library in Cincinnati had created a Late-identified Neurodivergent Book Club (BieryGolick, 2025; Cincinnati Public Library, n.d.), and wished to create an “Autistic Book Club” through her own public library.

The Research Problem

This action research study examines the problem of autistic people’s unmet needs to socialize in autistic-friendly spaces. Society is dominated by neurotypical standards and autistic people may have a hard time socializing and become isolated as a result (Bay Area Autism Collective, n.d.). Prior research has indicated that autistic people often resort to camouflaging their autistic tendencies in order to gain approval, but the act of camouflaging exerts a considerable strain on the autistic person (Cook, et al., 2021). Therefore, within the context of this paper, an autistic-friendly space would be one in which autistic people can socialize *without* being expected to meet neurotypical standards or conceal aspects of who they are. An autistic-friendly space will also be set up for an autistic person’s comfort in terms of sensory challenges: lighting may be dimmed or softened, noise levels may be reduced, and strong perfumes and other chemical scents may be prohibited.

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The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research study is to construct an “Autistic Book Club” that is autistic-led, and caters to the communication and socializing styles of autistic people. Among book club participants, those who are diagnosed or identify as autistic will hopefully feel emboldened and supported to share their authentic selves. With the study’s successful completion, autistic patrons will indicate satisfaction in the book club as meeting their needs. The rationale for using participatory action research (PAR) is because PAR focuses upon “improving and empowering individuals” (Creswell, 2020, p. 592). It also addresses a social problem that can “constrain and repress” a person’s life (Creswell, 2020, p. 593): in this case, an unmet need for autistic adults to comfortably socialize.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study are:

1. When designing an autistic book club, what do participants feel would help them to socialize?
2. When designing an autistic book club, what are critical components identified by the autistic community for a satisfying book club experience?
3. After attending an autistic book club, how satisfied are autistic patrons with the book club?

Professional Assumptions

This study is guided by the American Library Association’s commitment to Diversity among eight Key Action Areas which are intended as “guiding principles for investment of energy and resources” (ALA, n.d., para. 1). Specifically, in regard to diversity, the association

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states: “Diversity is a fundamental value of the association and its members, and is reflected in its commitment to recruiting people of color and people with disabilities to the profession and to the promotion and development of library collections and services for all people” (ALA, n.d., para. 3). This researcher’s own public library recently expressed its commitment to year-round inclusive programming through its “More than a Month” initiative (Windsor, 2025).

In its use of “identity-first” language instead of “person-first” language (e.g. referring to “autistic people” instead of “people with autism”), this study is guided by the expressed preferences of many in the autistic community, who take pride in being autistic and view it as an integral part of who they are (Wooldridge, 2023). The American Psychological Association has determined that both linguistic approaches are acceptable “unless or until you know that a group clearly prefers one approach, in which case you should use the preferred approach” (2020, p. 137).

This study is further guided by the idea that “listening to and uplifting marginalized voices helps reduce stigma surrounding the Autistic community” (Brunton & Gensic, 2022, p. 213). Some of that stigma, as it manifests in libraries, includes stereotypical attitudes that view autistic people as “challenges” instead of viewing them as people who can make positive contributions “as library users but also as front-line librarians” (Spectrum, 2017, para. 1). As a result of this stigma, autistic library workers may feel pressure to hide their autistic identity (Anderson, 2021). Practices around hiring may prevent autistic people from being hired in the first place (McDaniel, 2022; Moeller & Annabi, 2024).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The core values of librarianship emphasize the importance of serving minority communities. Among a library’s service population, autistic people can be defined as a minority community (Straus, cited by Farahar, 2023), one that is often stigmatized through deficit-based views of autism. The purpose of this study is to determine what makes an enjoyable experience for autistic readers attending an “Autistic Book Club.” Existing literature does not specifically address autistic people’s satisfaction with book clubs. A handful of studies focused on autistic children, with the goal of teaching them social skills (Akhmetzyanova, et al., 2024; Boroson, 2020; Kosmicki, 2016), whereas this study proposes to address autistic adults’ experience. The characteristics that can be ascribed to book clubs are compatible with some autistic adults’ preferences for types or characteristics of activities.

Autistic People Reading

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disability “that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024). Autistic people have frequently been assumed to possess cognitive impairments, but a study in 2007 disproved this “universal, but untested, assumption” by scoring autistic people’s intelligence via the Wechsler scales and Raven’s Progressive Matrices (Dawson, et al., 2007, p. 1). Autistic children’s scores “were, on average, 30 percentile points, and in some cases more than 70 percentile points, higher than their scores on the Wechsler scales of intelligence ... and a similar contrast was observed when a sample of autistic adults was compared with a sample of nonautistic adults” (Dawson, et al., 2007, p. 1). The authors’ conclusions were that “Although

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autistics no doubt deploy atypical cognitive processes in performing many tasks” (Dawson, et al., 2007, p. 6), the subjects’ intelligence scores challenged assumptions “that autistic intelligence is only simple, low-level, perceptual expertise” (Dawson, et al., 2007, p. 6).

Assumptions about autistic people possessing cognitive impairments is relevant to this study because, as readers, autistic people have been assumed to prefer non-fiction (Chapple, 2022). This belief was based on assuming autistic people “lack the socio-emotional capacity to engage with fiction” (Barnes and Baron-Cohen, cited by Chapple, 2022, p. 43). However, in a recent survey, autistic adults showed an equal preference for both fiction and nonfiction narrative texts, and reported that they gained important social-learning experiences through reading narrative texts (Chapple, 2022). Specifically, reading fiction allowed them to immerse themselves in a fictional situation that they could experience as if it was a real encounter (Chapple, 2022). Reading fiction gave them time to “consider subtexts which would often be unavailable in everyday social experiences” (Chapple, 2022, p. 224).

Autistic people can benefit from books that were written with an autistic point of view. Carroll (2021) addressed the effects of reading fiction that offers alternative perspectives to those of people in society’s majority, especially when the person who is reading is from a minority population. One study participant described a tendency to blend in with her society’s racial majority (Carroll, 2021). The practice as described by Carroll seemed, to this reviewer, very similar to autistic “masking.” Through reading fiction about a person who faced similar pressure to conform, the study participant gained greater appreciation for her own individuality (Carroll, 2021). Carroll’s discussion is relevant to autistic readers because society often promotes a deficit-based narrative in which autistic people are perceived as burdens. One prevalent example is a recent executive order by the U.S. president that lists autism among several “health burdens”

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that pose “a dire threat to the American people and our way of life” (Trump, 2025, para. 6).

Another example concerns media portrayals of autistic or disabled people; these portrayals often rely on stereotypes, sometimes in conjunction with additional stereotypes based on sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, and race (Aspler, Harding, & Cascio, 2022).

Critical reading can help address stereotypical attitudes. In one study, autistic and non-autistic readers were paired up for a series of weekly discussions around a book they’d read in common (Chapple, 2022). The act of reading the book, recording impressions in a diary, and then meeting in discussion helped to eliminate stereotypical thinking and helped to negate misunderstandings between autistic and non-autistic participants (Chapple, 2022).

The act of reading books that center autistic perspectives can also help to foster a culture that is uniquely autistic. Farahar (2023) emphasized the importance of autistic communities and spaces, where autistic people can learn about and become part of autistic culture (p. 235).

Reading books that center autistic people’s points of view can support autistic readers to develop and appreciate their autistic identity. It can also help to combat stigma about people who are autistic (Brunton & Gensic, 2022; Chapple, 2022).

Social Needs of Autistic People

Autistic adults are more likely to be lonely than non-autistic adults, and face unique challenges and discrimination when trying to socialize with others (Ee, et al., 2019). They must often resort to “masking,” or concealing their autistic tendencies, in order to better fit in with neurotypical society (Cook et al., 2022; Price, 2022).

One of the obstacles to socializing is that autistic people and neurotypical people can have very different communication and socializing styles. Autistic people are often characterized as lacking empathy, but studies have determined that neurotypical people often have a hard time

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empathizing with or understanding autistic people (Heasman & Gillespie, 2017; Milton, 2018; Shepperd, 2015). One example of how this lack of understanding manifests is in an assumption by many neurotypical people, that autistic people want to fit in by appearing to be neurotypical (Brunton & Gensic, 2022). Neurotypical people express this through statements like “we’re all a little autistic,” but statements like this invalidate and trivialize an autistic person’s identity (Bonnello, cited by Brunton & Gensic, 2022, p. 123). One study even suggested that neurotypical people form negative impressions of autistic people after only very brief exposure to them (Sasson et al., 2017). A deficit-based view of autism contributes to autistic people being blamed when social communication breaks down between people of different neurotypes (Chown, cited by Chapple, 2022; Neff, 2024).

Autistic adults face additional challenges due to characteristics or the setting of an event. A venue that is loud, or is overly bright, can provoke sensory challenges (Ee, et al., 2019; Bhargava & Brown, 2021). Many autistic people prefer a quiet setting instead (Ee, et al., 2019). Additionally, autistic people often engage most successfully with other people over shared interests (Neff, 2024). At the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library, the organizer of a recently-formed “Late-identified Neurodivergent Book Club” reported that participants formed “instant connections” on day one of their meetings (BieryGolick, 2025, para. 14). The library offers an inclusive environment in which book club participants can share their insights and build social connections (Cincinnati Public Library, n.d.).

The London-based Centre for Research in Autism and Education has compiled guidelines that contribute to good research practices when working with an autistic population. These guidelines can also help to create safe autistic spaces in which autistic people can socialize: respect a study’s participants by being mindful of their communication preferences and by being

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aware of how you talk about autism, send information ahead of time to help reduce participants’ anxiety, communicate in ways that are clear and unambiguous, and be mindful of people’s sensory challenges (Autistica, n.d.).

Inclusive Book Clubs in Libraries

Library programming is the broad term used to describe the programs sponsored and implemented by libraries. Library programming is typically linked to a library’s “mission, goals, and objectives” (Evans & Carter, 2009, p. 307) and is tailored to user needs (Evans & Carter, 2009). Examples of library programming might include summer reading, book clubs, author presentations, film screenings, hands-on activities, etc.

The history of book clubs in libraries begins with the salons and parlors of 18th-Century Paris and 19th-Century Victorian England (American Library Association, 2025). Book clubs can meet in physical space or online (Fuller & Rehberg, cited by McCook and Phenix, 2018). Sometimes referred to as “book discussion groups,” book clubs have been a “staple” of library programming for “a great many years,” often with a staff member from the library serving as the group’s facilitator (Evans & Carter, 2009, p. 315). Reading and discussing a book with other people can transform reading from a solitary endeavor to one in which individual members’ understanding and appreciation for a book is amplified through listening to the perspectives of other members (Tripp, 1995). Reading fiction and discussing it in a book club offers participants a chance to “to make connections between their own lives and the lives of the characters they read about” (Marcotte, 2019, para. 5).

Goh (2023) identified book clubs as venues to discuss issues affecting minority populations, and points of view that a person might not be exposed to through more mainstream avenues. This was the intention when young people at a subsidized housing complex wanted to

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organize a book club in order to discuss issues related to racial justice (McConnaha, et al., 2024). One young organizer felt that, with the book club, they had really achieved their goal of building readers’ awareness (McConnaha, et al., 2024).

As the organizer of an adult-interest book club, Goh (2023) shared how inclusive strategies were incorporated at every stage in the book club, including title selection and discussions. Other existing practices that contribute to an inclusive book club experience include providing books in participants’ preferred or needed formats, including audio, eBooks, large print, and Braille (Goh, 2024; Marcotte, 2019). One book club, circa 2016, did not even require that participants specifically read the book; if they preferred, they could read a summary online or watch a movie adaptation of the book (Kosmicki, 2016). And in one inclusive model, a “silent book club” that might appeal to introverts, readers were not even required to socialize; they just came together and read silently (Udell, 2020).

Specific to autism, some factors that might make an activity more inclusive include reducing impacts in the sensory environment: “smells, ambient noise, flickering lights, and certain textures” (Reference and User Services Association, n.d., para. 1). It might also mean communicating simply and directly with an autistic patron and not insisting that the person adhere to rigid social norms: making eye contact, for example (RUSA, n.d.).

Summary

This literature review examined the benefits of reading by autistic people, especially when those texts speak directly to their outlook and to their lived experience and offer an alternative to deficit-based narratives with which they are often stigmatized. It also considered factors affecting autistic people’s ability to socialize successfully, as well as some characteristics of inclusive book clubs in libraries.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this action research study is to construct an online “Autistic Book Club” that is autistic-led, and caters to the communication and socializing styles of autistic people so that those book club participants who are diagnosed or identify as autistic will feel emboldened and supported to share their authentic selves, and will indicate satisfaction in the book club as meeting their needs to socialize. This section will explain who will participate, the research design, and the data collection methods used.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study will be people who have signed up for the library’s “Autistic Book Club” and who have, additionally, signed a consent form agreeing to be part of the study. The book club will meet once a month over Zoom and will be advertised as an event that is sponsored and hosted by the library. Because the club meets over Zoom, organizers hope that participants will be able to mitigate sensory or other challenges (e.g. lighting or noise level) by being able to join from a location or setting that is comfortable for them. The library will provide physical and digital copies of each book being discussed, and book-club participants will be able to reserve the books through the library’s online catalog. Participating in the study will not be a requirement to be able to take part in the book club. People do not have to have a formal autism diagnosis, or need to self-identify as autistic in order to attend the book club, but the purpose of this study is specifically to focus on autistic people’s satisfaction with the book club. For the purposes of this study, self-identification as an autistic person will be considered just as valid as possessing formal diagnosis.

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Participant Sampling/Selection

This study uses a nonprobability sampling method. A nonprobability sample does not use a randomized unit of population, and instead uses a convenience sampling approach due to the availability of participants to the researcher (Wolf et al., 2016). Participants will be selected due to their convenience to the researcher, and their willingness to take part in the study.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher will recruit participant-researchers from the initial group of book club members. In order to connect with people within the autistic community, the researcher may invite members of the Bay Area Autism Collective or “Autistics in Libraries and Their Allies” on Facebook to join the initial group). When participant-researchers begin meeting to design the “Autistic Book Club,” the researcher will read a letter to them at the beginning of their first meeting, and will post a link to a consent form that has been approved by the Human Subjects Board at the University of Central Missouri and the Sonoma County Library Commission (see Appendix A).

Special note about autistic readers’ participation in this study

UCM’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects considers people with cognitive impairments to be “vulnerable populations” (Kammer, n.d., slide 11; Office of Sponsored Programs & Research Integrity, n.d., slide 11). This study will make use of best practices for working with an autistic population: such as those guidelines compiled by the Centre for Research in Autism and Education, as well as recommendations by authors of *The #Actually Autistic Guide to Advocacy*. First and foremost, this study will assume competence on the part of autistic researcher-participants, as well as on the part of autistic people who attend the public

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book club. Risk to participants will also be minimized by the research method, because the study will directly benefit the participants (J. Kammer, personal communication, April 28, 2025).

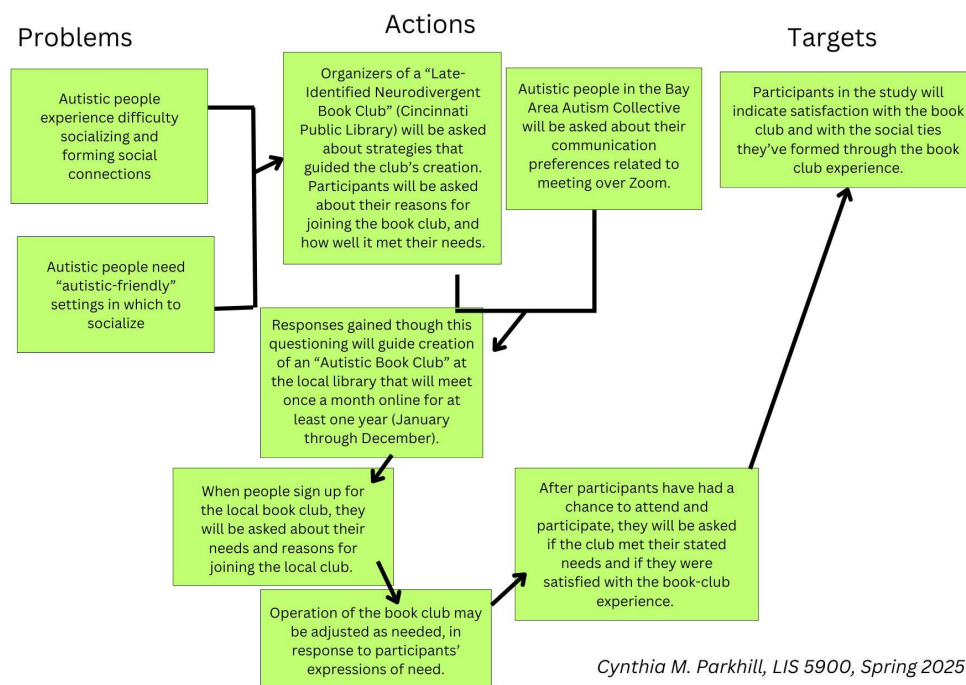
Research Design

This study uses a participatory action research design. A participatory action research design was the best choice for this study, which seeks to “improve the quality of people’s organizations, communities, and family lives” (Stringer, cited by Creswell, 2020, p. 592). This design is guided by Stringer’s action research interacting spiral which contains three phases: look, think and act (Creswell, 2020).

Theory of Action

Sagor and Williams (2016) described a theory of action as the visual process necessary to articulate the study. The theory of action for this study identifies the problems, actions, and targets needed to complete this study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Theory of Action



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The problems identified in this study are:

1. Autistic people experience difficulty with socializing and forming social connections.
2. Autistic people need “autistic-friendly” settings in which to socialize.

The actions that will be taken in this study will be:

1. The participant-researchers will collaboratively learn more about the needs of the autistic community. For example, organizers of an existing book club (the Late-identified Neurodivergent Book Club, at the Cincinnati Public Library) will be invited to speak to the group during an early planning meeting. These organizers will be asked about the strategies that guided the club’s creation. Participants will be asked about their reasons for joining the book club, and whether or not they thought the club met those needs.
2. The participant-researchers will engage in a focus group together, and to gather more information from the community, including autistic people with whom they can come in contact through the Bay Area Autism Collective or from Internet-based groups, e.g. “Autistics in Libraries and Their Allies” on Facebook. Participant-researchers will also ask these autistic people about communication styles and preferences related to meeting over Zoom (e.g. whether or not they’d prefer to speak aloud or if they prefer to post in Chat, whether or not they feel comfortable “jumping in” with comments or if they’d prefer that speakers “raise their hand” and wait to be acknowledged).

Participant-researchers will also draw upon their own lived experiences when designing an “Autistic Book Club.”
3. Participant-researchers will learn more about people with autism by reading and discussing books that feature an autistic main character or address a topic of relevance to the autistic community. The book club may address books on other topics but when

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reading books about or of relevance to the autistic community, priority will be given to books written by authors who are, themselves, autistic. The book club will ideally be led, or facilitated, by an autistic person.

4. Designers of the book club will co-create club guidelines. The designers will work collaboratively to create etiquette guidelines and determine options through which participants can share perspectives during the book club.
5. The book club will be opened to others, and when participants sign up, they will be asked about their needs and reasons for joining the local book club.
6. After each meeting, the club’s designers will consider ways that operation of the club may be refined as needed, so that people can participate as fully as they wish to, in a way that feels comfortable to them.
7. After participants have had a chance to attend and participate in the local club, they will be asked (in mid-September, when books are selected for the upcoming year) if the club met their stated needs and if they were satisfied with the book-club experience. Designers of the book club will consider all responses when planning operation of the book club.

This study will make use of only those responses by people who have given their consent to participate in the study (See Appendix A).

The targets expected to be reached in this study are:

1. Participants in the study will indicate their satisfaction with an “Autistic Book Club,” and with the social ties they’ve experienced through participating in the club.

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Data Collection Instrumentation

Data collection in this study will include both qualitative and quantitative data (See Appendix G). As a participatory action research study, the participants will be engaged as researchers.

Surveys

Researchers will survey other autistic people about what they need to socialize comfortably and would like in a book club (See Appendix B). Researchers will survey people who are taking part in an existing book club, the Late-identified Neurodivergent Book Club at Cincinnati Public Library (See Appendix D). Post-intervention, researchers will administer a survey to, or conduct interviews with people who participated in the local “Sonoma County Autistic Book Club” (See Appendix E). Questions on the survey were adapted from a list of book-club survey questions at SurveySparrow (n.d.). Some of the questions were used as originally created, while others were adapted into statements. Most of the questions (or statements) were assigned multiple-choice responses on a Likert scale (concerning the participant’s level of satisfaction or the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement), with two questions eliciting longer, open-ended answers. Questions will be recorded and transcribed, and the researchers will then bring those responses back to the group for discussion.

Interviews

Some people with whom the researchers interact may prefer an interview to a survey. Pre-intervention, the participant-researchers will ask autistic people about what they need to comfortably socialize in a book-club setting (See Appendix C). Those subjects who want to share their views but are uncomfortable talking with an interviewer will be encouraged to

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express themselves through email or text exchanges. Post-intervention, researchers will conduct interviews with people who participated in the local “Sonoma County Autistic Book Club” (See Appendix F).

Focus Group with Concept Mapping

Other data sources include a focus group among participant-researchers, in which they will elicit and brainstorm opinions from each other and from other autistic people and create a concept map of common themes that emerge during the discussion. Participant-researchers will observe participants in the local book club and will take field notes to reflect on their own experiences.

Observation

Participant-researchers will observe the experiences of participants in the local book club, making note of what seems to help participants to relax and enjoy themselves and what, if anything, interferes with their enjoyment. Being autistic themselves, this study’s participant-researchers will pay attention to their *own* experiences and responses as they relate to this study’s goals of supporting autistic people to share their authentic selves and be able to comfortably socialize.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data and qualitative data will be analyzed separately. The surveys’ multiple-choice answers will be analyzed by finding the mean for Likert-Scale responses, and then grouped by above 3 and below 3 to understand satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Long-form survey questions and responses gained through interviews and from participant-researchers’ brainstorming and field notes will be examined and coded. Those codes will then be grouped into common themes.

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Validity and Reliability

This study uses several methods to increase validity of the action research. First, credibility will be established through participant-researchers’ prolonged participation in the Autistic Book Club. Guba (1981) explained that researchers who were immersed in a setting could “test their own biases and perceptions” (p. 84). Prolonged exposure also gives a study’s participants time to get used to the presence of the researchers and “to satisfy themselves that [the researchers] do not constitute a threat” (Guba, 1981, p. 84).

This study also uses triangulation. Triangulation means that a variety of data sources are compared so that data can be cross-checked (Mills, 2018). Lastly, peer debriefing will be used. Mills (2018) equated peer debriefing to a “critical friend” or colleague who can help the researcher “reflect on our own situations by listening, prompting, and recording our insights throughout the process” (p. 154). Guba recommended that researchers should regularly expose their thinking and their growing insights to a “‘jury’ of [their] peers” (1981, p. 85).

Statement of Reflexivity

Being autistic myself, I struggle with forming social connections and have found the most success in socializing around a shared interest or activity. Because I’ve enjoyed prior book-club experiences, I acknowledge that I have a vested interest in creating an “Autistic Book Club.” I am additionally an autistic person pursuing a library career.

I was recently reminded that stigma still exists around autism within the field of librarianship. During an exploration of the downtown library in a community I was visiting, I mentioned wanting to start a book club that would read books by autistic authors that centered on autistic characters. In response, a librarian working at the library said that it “sounded sad.” This attitude surprised me, based on what I’d read about cultural humility in librarianship: which

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encourages library workers to identify toxic narratives within their personal cultures (Swade & Bekele, 2023). Cultural humility might prompt a person asking “Why do we act the way we do? Why are we comfortable with one group of people over another group?” (Swade & Bekele, 2023, p. 191). But this library worker wasn’t questioning her judgements about autism; she was clearly expressing a belief in autism as equating to tragedy. Her attitude made me that much more determined to design an Autistic Book Club that, while autistic-led, would be sponsored and hosted by a library. It could offer participants with a variety of neurotypes to share their experiences and find common ground while questioning their biases.

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APPENDIX A
TEXT OF RECRUITMENT LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Text of recruitment letter:

Dear [insert name],

My name is Cynthia Parkhill and I am a graduate student from the Library and Information Services program at the University of Central Missouri. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about creating an Autistic Book Club that provides a satisfying social experience to its autistic participants. You're eligible to be in this study because you self-identify as an autistic person or are diagnosed with autism. I obtained your contact information through the Bay Area Autism Collective.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be part of a group of participant-researchers who design and implement an Autistic Book Club. You will help to administer and evaluate responses to a survey for participants in an existing book club that will help to inform the local club's creation. After the local book club is opened to the public, you will observe participants, as well as gauge your own reactions and opportunities to socialize.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at cmp90370@ucmo.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Cynthia M. Parkhill

Modeled after a sample letter, found at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h_c8QZvCjWyGp43UEOlHoA4M6bQj5Hce0MLNokX6J2M/edit?usp=sharing

Designing an 'Autistic Book Club'

Text Of Consent Form:

Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Cynthia Parkhill, graduate student in Library and Information Science; along with my advisor, Professor Jenna Kammer. We are with the University of Central Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to design an Autistic Book Club that offers its participants a satisfying social experience.

Request for Participation: We are inviting you to participate in a study on whether or not an Autistic Book Club can offer autistic readers a satisfactory experience socializing. The time commitment will involve being part of a group that plans a local Autistic Book Club and then being a member of the book club once it is up and running.

If you decide not to participate in the study, you will not be penalized in any way. You are welcome to join the monthly book club meetings without being part of the study. You can also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any questions asked of you, you may simply skip them.

Exclusions: You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves attending focus groups and meetings to plan an Autistic Book Club, and helping to administer and evaluate surveys. Participant-researchers will also attend club meetings over Zoom when the book club is opened to the public. They will observe book-club participants and also gauge their own experiences.

Privacy: All of the information we collect will be confidential. We will not record any information that could be used to identify you.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life. You risk encountering people who disagree with you, or with whom you disagree.

Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by participating in a social experience that is intended to be enjoyable.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Cynthia Parkhill at cmp90370@ucmo.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UCM Research Compliance Officer at 660-543-8562. If you would like to participate, please sign this electronic form.

Designing an ‘Autistic Book Club’

Modeled after a sample form, found at:

<https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/sponsored-programs-and-research-integrity/forms-and-resources/consent-file-rule.pdf>

Designing an ‘Autistic Book Club’

APPENDIX B PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY: AUTISTIC ADULTS’ COMFORT WITH, AND NEED FOR SOCIALIZING (TO BE USED IN PLANNING A LOCAL “AUTISTIC BOOK CLUB”)

<i>Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Very uncomfortable. 2 = Somewhat uncomfortable. 3 = Somewhat comfortable. 4 = Very comfortable.</i>				
1. How comfortable are you with participating in an online activity?				1 2 3 4
2. How comfortable do you feel interacting with people who you may not already know?				1 2 3 4
<i>Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Very structured. 2. Somewhat structured. 3 = Somewhat unstructured. 4 = Very unstructured.</i>				
1. How structured must an activity be, in order for you to fully and comfortably participate?				1 2 3 4
<i>Open-response questions:</i>				
1. What do you look for when choosing social activities?				
2. When joining an activity, what makes you most comfortable?				
2. When taking part in online activities (e.g. meetings over Zoom), how do you prefer to participate?				
(Do you prefer to listen in silence, without feeling pressured to speak? Do you feel comfortable speaking up, or would you rather “raise your hand” and wait to be called on by a moderator? Do you prefer to post in “Chat”? Is there some other way that you prefer to express yourself?)				
3. What can organizers do to make a space especially welcoming?				
4. Is there anything that makes a space feel inhospitable to you?				
5. Would you like to be in an online book club for autistic adults?				
6. What would make the book club safe, fun, and comfortable for you?				

APPENDIX C
PRE-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW, TO BE ASKED OF AUTISTIC ADULTS

This interview gauges respondents’ comfort with, and/or needs for socializing. It covers points similar to those raised in surveys, but is intended for people who prefer the format of a one-to-one or focus-group discussion over that of completing a survey.

1. What do you look for when choosing social activities?

2. During meetings over Zoom, how do you prefer to participate?

(Do you prefer to listen in silence, without feeling pressured to speak? Do you feel comfortable speaking up, or would you rather “raise your hand” and wait to be called on by a moderator? Do you prefer to post in “Chat”? Is there some other way that you prefer to express yourself?)

3. How comfortable do you feel interacting with people who you may not already know?

4. What can organizers do to make a space especially welcoming?

5. Is there anything that makes a space feel inhospitable to you?

6. How comfortable are you with joining a conversation on Zoom?

(Do you prefer that speakers “raise their hand” and be acknowledged by moderators, or do you feel OK with “jumping in”?)

7. Would you like to be in an online book club for autistic adults?

8. What would make the book club safe, fun, and comfortable for you?

During the interviews, these questions will be asked of people who have experience with book clubs:

7. What types or genres of book do you prefer to read and discuss?

8. How important is it to you that participants read the book ahead of time?

9. What materials do you rely on when preparing to attend the book club?

(Questions provided in advance, a LibGuide or supplemental information about the book or author, etc.)

Designing an ‘Autistic Book Club’

APPENDIX D

PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY: AUTISTIC ADULTS ATTENDING THE LATE-IDENTIFIED NEURODIVERGENT BOOK CLUB, CINCINNATI PUBLIC LIBRARY (TO BE USED IN PLANNING THE LOCAL BOOK CLUB)

<i>These questions were taken as-is from a book-club survey template at SurveySparrow.com (n.d.). Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Very unsatisfied. 2 = Unsatisfied. 3 = Satisfied. 4 = Very satisfied.</i>				
1. How would you rate your overall experience in the book club?	1	2	3	4
2. How satisfied are you with opportunities for social interaction and networking within the book club?	1	2	3	4
3. How would you rate the variety and quality of books chosen for the book club?	1	2	3	4
4. Are you satisfied with the current format of the book club meetings?	1	2	3	4
5. How do you feel about the frequency of the book club meetings?	1	2	3	4
6. How would you rate the quality of resources shared, like discussion notes, book summaries, and other materials?	1	2	3	4
7. How satisfied are you with the quality of the discussions?	1	2	3	4
<i>The following statements were adapted from questions on a book-club survey template at SurveySparrow.com (n.d.). They were converted from questions into statements. Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Strongly disagree. 2 = Disagree. 3 = Agree. 4 = Strongly agree.</i>				
1. Meeting facilitators were effective in guiding discussions.	1	2	3	4
2. I felt encouraged to share my thoughts during club interactions.	1	2	3	4
3. I felt that all members had an equal opportunity to contribute to the discussions.	1	2	3	4
<i>Open-response questions, taken from SurveySparrow.com (n.d.):</i>				
1. Do you have any suggestions for improving the book club experience?				
2. Do you have any suggestions for additional activities or events to have other than book discussions? (e.g., author talks, social gatherings, themed discussions)?				
<i>Demographic questions:</i>				
1. Are you self-identified as autistic / diagnosed with autism? (Yes or No answer)				
2. How do you describe your sex or gender identity? (Write-in short answer)				

APPENDIX E
POST-INTERVENTION SURVEY: AUTISTIC ADULTS ATTENDING THE
LOCAL “SONOMA COUNTY AUTISTIC BOOK CLUB”

<i>These questions were taken as-is from a book-club survey template at SurveySparrow.com (n.d.). Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Very unsatisfied. 2 = Unsatisfied. 3 = Satisfied. 4 = Very satisfied.</i>				
1. How would you rate your overall experience in the book club?	1	2	3	4
2. How satisfied are you with opportunities for social interaction and networking within the book club?	1	2	3	4
3. How would you rate the variety and quality of books chosen for the book club?	1	2	3	4
4. Are you satisfied with the current format of the book club meetings?	1	2	3	4
5. How do you feel about the frequency of the book club meetings?	1	2	3	4
6. How would you rate the quality of resources shared, like discussion notes, book summaries, and other materials?	1	2	3	4
7. How satisfied are you with the quality of the discussions?	1	2	3	4
<i>The following statements were adapted from questions on a book-club survey template at SurveySparrow.com (n.d.). They were converted from questions into statements. Likert-Scale responses: 1 = Strongly disagree. 2 = Disagree. 3 = Agree. 4 = Strongly agree.</i>				
1. Meeting facilitators were effective in guiding discussions.	1	2	3	4
2. I felt encouraged to share my thoughts during club interactions.	1	2	3	4
3. I felt that all members had an equal opportunity to contribute to the discussions.	1	2	3	4
Open-response questions, taken from SurveySparrow.com (n.d.): 1. Do you have any suggestions for improving the book club experience? 2. Do you have any suggestions for additional activities or events to have other than book discussions? (e.g., author talks, social gatherings, themed discussions)?				
Demographic questions: 1. Are you self-identified as autistic / diagnosed with autism? (Yes or No answer) 2. How do you describe your sex or gender identity? (Write-in short answer)				

APPENDIX F
POST-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW OF BOOK-CLUB PARTICIPANTS

These questions will be asked of people who attended the local book club and are interested in participating in a one-to-one or focus group discussion in addition to completing a survey.

1. What did you like best about your experience with the book club?
2. Is there anything that made a particular impact?
3. What would you change about how the book club was organized or run?
4. Among the books that the club read and discussed, which book was your favorite? What did you like about it?
5. What books would you like to read in the book club?
6. How do you think the book club should choose its books?

These last two questions came from SurveySparrow.com:

7. Do you have any suggestions for improving the book club experience?
8. Do you have any suggestions for additional activities or events to have other than book discussions? (e.g., author talks, social gatherings, themed discussions)?

APPENDIX G

DATA TRIANGULATION

Research Questions (or variable)	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
1. When designing an autistic book club, what do participants feel would help them to socialize?	During the design phase, researchers will interview the organizers of an existing book club (the Late-identified Neurodivergent Book Club at the Cincinnati Public Library).	Researchers will conduct surveys and/or focus groups with people who attend the Cincinnati library’s book club. Surveys will include both altitude-scale questioning and open-ended responses.	Through brainstorming , or a concept map, researchers will consider their own experiences as autistic people and what <i>they</i> feel would help them socialize.
2. When designing an autistic book club, what are critical components identified by the autistic community for a satisfying book club experience?	Researchers will elicit opinions from each other regarding critical components.	Researchers will question other autistic people (e.g. people from the Bay Area Autism Collective and/or “Autistics in Libraries and their Allies” on Facebook).	Through interviews , researchers will ask attendees of the Cincinnati library’s book club what made their book-club experience most satisfying.
3. After attending an autistic book club, how satisfied are autistic patrons with the book club?	Researchers will observe the experiences of participants in the book club.	Through taking field notes , researchers will reflect upon their own levels of satisfaction with the book club.	Researchers will survey book-club participants regarding their levels of satisfaction. Surveys will include both altitude-scale questioning and open-ended responses.

APPENDIX H

USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

I used the Elicit A.I. tool to find articles related to the prompt: “How can an ‘Autistic Book Club’ help autistic people socialize?” It generated a list of possibilities, but all of them were dated (published in 2016 or earlier). I decided for myself which article(s) fit my needs. Elicit A.I. also offered a summary paragraph that cited some of the articles, but I did not use its summary paragraph. Instead, I read and summarized the article(s) I chose, on my own. I also relied on grammatical and spelling suggestions generated by Google Docs, but I accepted or rejected these suggestions on a case-by-case basis.