

# How Supporting the Everyday Information Practices of Students with Autism Can Enhance Their Sensory and Social Well-Being

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## ABSTRACT

Students in higher education are expected to master everyday life, which involves receiving and processing copious information, completing assignments, communicating with their professors and peers, planning for their careers, and building life skills (e.g., budgeting finances, managing schedules, securing housing). To accomplish those tasks, students must seek, use, and share information using everyday information practices. For autistic students, however, engaging in everyday information practices can be difficult due to various affective, cognitive, and social barriers. Institutions unaware of or unwilling to accommodate autistic students' information needs may not provide the structural agency these students need to receive the same quality education as their neurotypical peers. This study defined structural agency as the people, information, norms, and tools (e.g., accommodations, technologies) that aid students' everyday information practices.

Other studies of autistic students' everyday information practices and structural agency privilege information professionals' perspectives (e.g., academic librarians, disability support coordinators, professors) and seldom elicit those students' information needs. Hence, I employed Grounded Theory Method to understand – from autistic students' themselves – how an institution can enable them to master everyday life. I conducted initial and follow-up interviews with 16 autistic students from two flagship universities in the United States. Participants also created everyday life maps, illustrations of their information practices for mastering everyday life. Multiple rounds of data collection and analysis revealed participants' everyday information practices and their recommendations for enhancing *sensory and social well-being*. Implications for academic librarians include developing sensory well-being spaces and providing information literacy skills instruction for building communication competence.

# **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

Information Practices; Education of Information Professionals; Information Services; Information Technologies; Sociocultural Perspectives.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

Autism Spectrum Disorder; Sensory Well-Being; Social Well-Being; Library and Information Services; Higher Education.