Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers

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Jessica Schomberg and Wendy Highby draw on personal experiences as librarians with disabilities in their 2020 book Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers. The comprehensive and informative text helps define what it means to be a person with a disability working in a library. While reflecting on their careers, Schomberg and Highby also examine the experiences of other librarians with disabilities, the history of disability in the US, and critical disability theory to complete this text. Beyond Accommodation, while not written specifically with an archival environment in mind, provides a framework for library employees in any type of library, whether they have a disability or not.

The authors start by providing information on the demographics of disability and models of disability, including the medical model, which “manifests in a fixation on pathology and symptom alleviation” (p. 20), and the rehabilitation model, which “focuses on recovery and adjusting . . . to the existing environment” (p. 21); this information provides the foundation for the rest of the text. From there, Schomberg and Highby discuss issues that employees with disabilities often face in the workplace and provide concrete solutions for employees of all levels to combat ableism.

However, that is not what makes this book unique. Schomberg and Highby not only address barriers and solutions but also spend most of the text informing readers, disabled and non-disabled, how to change the way they think about disabilities to enhance learning and maximize impact for employees. As a library employee with a disability, this is what keeps me coming back to this book; employees with disabilities need more than to be simply hired and accommodated. Schomberg and Highby’s text shows readers that disability in the library is complicated yet compelling, making for a fascinating text.