

Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers, by Jessica Schomberg and Wendy Highby

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Book Review: *Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers*

Schomberg, Jessica and Wendy Highby. *Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2020, 219pp, \$35.00.

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In the years since *Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers* was published, the context around disability has changed quite dramatically. The world (and with it the library profession) has been through a mass-disabling event, with many employers forced to enable sick leave and remote work. The COVID-19 epidemic also affected disabled people more virulently than the currently abled, with comorbidities increasing its mortality rate. At the same time, lockdowns meant many libraries began experimenting with remote and flexible work arrangements that have the potential to support disabled workers. Rather than making this book outdated, this new context means both that there are more disabled workers and that libraries have a more urgent need to consider them.

Schomberg and Highby start with a good introduction to core ideas of disability studies appropriate for readers with little to no theoretical background. While their book is centered primarily on the social model of disability, they include an explanation of and reference to other models, allowing the reader to understand why the social model is their preference, but also how older models are necessary to understand some aspects of disability. Their message throughout is that community support is essential to success as a disabled worker (both a community of colleagues and a community of disabled workers) and that a neoliberal offloading of care to the individual instead of society is a major problem for disabled workers. A theme they return to repeatedly (and convincingly) is that accommodations for disabled workers will also benefit non-disabled workers.



Schomberg and Highby are both themselves disabled library workers, with different disabilities that emerged at different times in their careers. Schomberg has had diabetes since childhood, so came to work as a disabled employee. By contrast, Highby has only recently developed Parkinson's, so she had to adjust to work as a disabled employee as a change. Having these two perspectives helps illustrate a small degree of the diversity among disabled workers (they do point out that their differences are not representative the full breadth of experiences, but even this gesture towards difference is useful). This is an embodied study, and while it does contain both engagement with existing research and first-person interviews with other disabled library workers, it is in Schomberg and Highby's personal anecdotes that it comes most alive. The last two chapters are dedicated to a first-hand account of what working with each of their disabilities is like. For readers who are new to thinking about how disability affects workers, it might be worth starting with these chapters to set the stage, though for the intended audience of the book this was the right placement for them.

This piece is explicitly written for disabled library workers and would probably be most helpful for workers who are newly disabled (or new to thinking of themselves as disabled). While Schomberg and Highby do consider literature and experiences from other countries, the chapters about requesting accommodation under the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) will have varying relevance in other jurisdictions. As one example, the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) has a less adversarial and litigious framework. Nonetheless, their cautions about the promise and perils of disclosing disability in the workplace will be universal.

While the target audience for this book is disabled workers themselves, it can also be of significant value to employers and colleagues of disabled workers (the chapters on the decision to disclose also offer a helpful reminder that just because you don't know you have a colleague or employee with a disability doesn't mean you don't have one, just that nobody has disclosed a disability to you). It would even be useful to disabled workers and those who work with them in other types of workplaces. Aside from a chapter on the library as an organization, the library is not foregrounded: it just happens to be the setting where these particular disabled people work.

Schomberg gets at the core message of the book in the final paragraph of her section on how her disability affects her daily working life: "My disabilities impact my work life because they are part of the package that is me For me, working well requires acknowledging and respecting the fact that I am an embodied creature with bodily needs" (169). While that is particularly evident for disabled workers dealing with a workplace, it is no less true for anybody else. Non-disabled workers are just more likely to have their bodily needs met by their employers without having to ask.

Beyond Accommodation provides a model for how disabled workers can be included in a library that will be useful both for disabled workers themselves and for libraries trying to include them.