

How to See the Invisible: Creating and Engaging Diversity that Can't Be Seen

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Many organizations today, including academic libraries, are committed to diversity. While diversity is an admirable goal with a variety of benefits, many, if not the vast majority, of these organizations are unfortunately committed to appearing diverse rather than genuinely being diverse. For example, job advertisements often claim a desire for diversity in hiring, but then go on to specifically mention only visible minorities from whom they hope to receive applications. As another example, even the call for proposals for this CAPAL/ACBES Annual Meeting, in suggesting topics for proposals, says, with regard to diversity, "perhaps more importantly, it could ask these questions with respect to women, people of colour, and Indigenous librarians," again focusing solely on visible (or at least usually visible) diversity. This focus solely on visible diversity has a negative impact not only on opportunities for non-visible minorities, but also on collections and other services offered by academic and other libraries, and, thus, on their non-visible minority patrons.

In this paper I discuss ways in which representation of, collections relating to, and services for nonvisible minorities can be improved. I begin by discussing three approaches for improving collections relating to and services for non-visible minorities. I first examine these approaches on a theoretical level, arguing in favor of the approach that allows for broad input while simultaneously preserving the anonymity of non-visible minorities who do not wish to be "out." I next look at the practical aspects of implementing these approaches, considering when this preferred approach can be successfully applied and offering an alternative approach in contexts in which anonymity may not be preservable. After this discussion of how to improve collections relating to and services for non-visible minorities, I offer suggestions for hiring practices that will ideally lead to improved opportunities for non-visible minorities and that will, at a minimum, further help to improve collections relating to and services for non-visible minorities. I finish by considering how and to what extent the ideas presented in this paper regarding non-visible minorities apply to visible minorities as well.