

Behind Closed Doors: The Hidden Intellectual Work and Images of Librarianship

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Abstract

Unlike many professionals, much of the intellectual work of librarians takes place behind closed doors, hidden from those who actually use the resulting service. Research on user perceptions of collection development work in public libraries, (the Who Decides? study), revealed that collection development is a hidden intellectual responsibility. Brief interviews were conducted with 106 adults in two Canadian public libraries. Only 40% identified library staff as being responsible for collection development. Others suggested a variety of decision makers, including users and “ the public” , committees of community leaders, government officials, publishers, and pre-existing lists. Most respondents indicated that they were guessing. They frequently used mental models to generate answers. The authors contend that at least part of the misunderstanding of librarians and their work may be attributed to its hidden nature. Why the public does not know that librarians select materials is considered along with the implications of these findings with respect to the image of librarians, and the staffing and funding of libraries.