



Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety in Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, the field of library and information studies (LIS) has promoted cultural competence as a means of improving services to multicultural or traditionally underserved populations. However, critical LIS scholars have noted that cultural competence and diversity are viewed predominately as a matter of skill acquisition on the part of the library worker, rather than as one that involves a critique of the forces of structural racism, discrimination, and colonialism in society. In response, this paper proposes adapting frameworks from other professions for the library context: Multi-Dimensional Cultural Competence (MDCC) from counselling psychology, and cultural safety (CS) from Indigenous nursing. The former views cultural competence in terms of diversity factors, components, and multiple levels of foci, while the second is premised on postcolonial understandings and respect for Indigenous knowledges. The proposed synthesis, Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety (MDCS), is established by first identifying the epistemological and ideological shortcomings of cultural competence, focusing on the need for institutional critiques as well as a recognition of racialization and power structures. Next, the two existing frameworks are explained in terms of their origins, content, and professional contexts, noting how each addresses the shortcomings of cultural competence as well as each other's shortcomings. The proposed framework is then elaborated upon in an LIS context and illustrated with hypothetical examples.

Keywords: *cultural competence · cultural safety · diversity · inclusion · Indigenous library users · inequality · postcolonialism · power · racialization*

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours de la dernière décennie, le domaine de la bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information (BSI) a fait la promotion de la compétence culturelle comme moyen d'améliorer les services aux populations multiculturelles ou traditionnellement mal servies. Cependant, les universitaires critiques en BSI ont noté que la compétence et la diversité culturelles sont perçues principalement comme une question d'acquisition de compétences de la part des bibliothécaires, plutôt que comme une question qui implique une critique des forces du racisme structurel, de la discrimination et du colonialisme dans la société. En réponse, le présent article propose d'adapter les cadres d'autres professions au contexte des bibliothèques : Compétence culturelle multidimensionnelle (CCMD) en psychologie du counseling, et sécurité culturelle (SC) en soins infirmiers autochtones. La



première considère la compétence culturelle sur le plan des facteurs de diversité, de composantes et de multiples niveaux de centres d'intérêt, tandis que la seconde est fondée sur des conceptions postcoloniales et sur le respect des savoirs autochtones. La synthèse proposée, la sécurité culturelle multidimensionnelle (SCMD), est établie en déterminant d'abord les lacunes épistémologiques et idéologiques de la compétence culturelle, en se concentrant sur le besoin de critiques institutionnelles ainsi que sur la reconnaissance de la racialisation et des structures de pouvoir. Ensuite, les deux cadres existants sont expliqués selon l'origine, le contenu et le contexte professionnel, en notant comment chacun aborde les lacunes de la compétence culturelle ainsi que les lacunes de l'autre. Le cadre proposé est ensuite développé dans un contexte de BSI et illustré d'exemples hypothétiques.

Mots-clés: *compétence culturelle · diversité · inclusion · inégalité · pouvoir · sécurité culturelle · postcolonialisme · racialisation · usagers autochtones des bibliothèques*

THE field of library and information studies (LIS) has for decades engaged with the rhetoric of diversity and multiculturalism in order to promote the expansion of services to multicultural or traditionally underserved populations and to improve their relevance and quality, as well as to augment the profession's overwhelmingly white workforce (Bourg 2014).¹ While the recognition of the social justice obligations of libraries dates back to at least 1969 and the formation of the American Library Association's Round Table on Social Responsibilities of Libraries,² contemporary efforts are premised on aspirations toward diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence.³ The latter concept, adapted from the field of social work (NASW 2001), applied to LIS by Overall (2009), and later codified for use in academic libraries by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL 2012), is defined by the latter as a "congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (para. 6).

The LIS literature concerning diversity and cultural competence, while well intentioned, has nonetheless been criticized for being uncritical and deliberately constrained in scope, intention, and focus, being aimed primarily at the practitioner's attitudes and skills rather than at supporting a structural critique. In particular, David James Hudson's (2017a) award-winning paper, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique," thoroughly deconstructs diversity discourses and what he calls the cultural competence paradigm in LIS for their preoccupation not only with physical inclusion—the actual representation of diverse individuals to correspond with the social reality beyond the library's walls—but also

1. The author would like to thank the tireless interlibrary loan staff at the University of Winnipeg Library for their assistance in procuring sources for this paper.

2. Now the Social Responsibilities Round Table.

3. For an overview of social justice initiatives in libraries, see Mehra, Rioux, and Albright 2009.

with the individual professional's own attitudes and skills, to the neglect of historical and contemporary racialized power relations.

Given the embeddedness of library practitioners in larger institutions—as well as the LIS scholar's similar location in the academy—what is needed is a more critical, reflexive, and outcomes-based framework capable of navigating the tensions between institutional reform (which would address transactions between staff and diverse library users) and structural critiques that can account for—and, to the extent possible, address—the impacts of colonialism and racialization on the lives of users and the degree to which our institutions are implicated in those structures.

In this paper, I affirm and respond to Hudson's critique by proposing a framework for the library context synthesized from other professions: Multi-Dimensional Cultural Competence (MDCC) from counselling psychology, and cultural safety (CS) from nursing. The former views cultural competence in terms of diversity factors, components, and multiple levels of foci (Sue 2001), while the second proposes principles and associated competencies premised on postcolonial understandings, respect for Indigenous knowledges, and enabling the agency of the client in assessing and informing the outcomes of institution-client interactions (Hart-Wasekeesikaw and ANAC 2009). I argue that a synthesis of these frameworks, here called Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety, will be better suited to directing the focus of library collections, programs, and services to the origins and impacts of colonialism, discrimination, racialization, and structural inequalities at all levels.

To situate this synthesis, I identify barriers to information access owing to structural factors, with emphasis on their impacts on Indigenous library users, as well as the neglect of such factors in the information literacy literature (Seale 2010, 2013, 2016), before outlining the conventional views of cultural competence in LIS as first proposed by Overall (2009) and later codified by ACRL in its *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competence for Academic Libraries* (2012). The epistemological and ideological shortcomings of cultural competence principles are identified, focusing on the need for institutional critiques as well as a recognition of racialization and power structures (Honma 2005; Hudson 2017a, b). Next, the two existing and extrinsic frameworks (Hart-Wasekeesikaw and ANAC 2009; Sue 2001) are explained in detail in terms of their origins, content, and professional contexts, noting how each addresses the shortcomings of cultural competence and of each other. The proposed synthesis, Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety (MDCS), is then elaborated upon in an LIS context and illustrated with hypothetical examples.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake a literature review of how cultural competence is conceived of in LIS and operationalized in academic libraries.⁴ Instead, the two frameworks being adapted shall be compared and contrasted to both Overall's (2009) initial application of cultural competence to the library context and the ACRL *Standards* (2012), while referencing Hudson's (2017a) specific critiques. It should also be stressed that to date the LIS literature has yet to integrate cultural safety approaches.⁵ The CS framework adapted below, which was designed for use by Indigenous nurses in Canada (Hart-Wasekeesikaw and ANAC 2009), was selected from among other examples in the literature owing to its focus on Indigenous clientele in the Canadian context—which is essential for academic libraries seeking to decolonize their collections and services in an era of Reconciliation⁶—as well as its purpose as guidelines directed at a particular profession. As well, Sue's Multi-Dimensional Cultural Competence (2001) has been neglected by LIS researchers yet affords the scholar and practitioner the basis for critiquing the place of the library in society, as shall be seen below.

Literature review: Diversity and Race in LIS

The discourses around cultural competence, diversity, and inclusion in LIS assume a particular suite of institutional policies and the existence of service barriers that might be overcome through the acquisition and exercise of skills on the part of the practitioner. These barriers can include

institutional barriers (e.g., opening hours, availability of library services, staff attitudes, rules and regulations, and sense of ownership), personal/social barriers (e.g., basic literacy skills, low income, and low self-esteem), environmental barriers (e.g., physical access, remote areas, decay, and isolation), and perceptions barriers (sense of isolation, educational disadvantage, relevance of libraries to one's needs, lack of knowledge about existing facilities and services). (UK report *Libraries for All* [1999] summarized in Caidi & Allard 2005, 317)

As well, Caidi and Allard acknowledge the degree to which these and other socioeconomic and environmental factors are exacerbated by racism, another “form of social exclusion” (312).

4. The search “cultural competence” results in 109 hits in the EBSCO database Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts.

5. Searches in the EBSCO database Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts for “cultural safety” and “culturally safe” yield one and two hits respectively, none of which are related to LIS. Similar searches on Google Scholar produce more results, but these concern health care information rather than LIS.

6. In December 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report on the cultural genocide committed in Canada's Indian Residential Schools and their terrible multigenerational impacts on First Nation, Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis peoples. See [HTTP://NCTR.CA/REPORTS.PHP](http://nctr.ca/reports.php)

Such barriers are a critically important consideration for Indigenous library users in Canada, particularly those living on (or having come from) First Nations that have either no library services or inconsistent access to those services. As First Nations fall under federal jurisdiction but library funding is left to provinces and municipalities, there is a major nation-wide structural gap that only the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan have taken steps to address, by funding public libraries on reserves. As well, Indigenous people living in urban areas may find that general, undifferentiated services in public libraries fail to meet their needs (Burns et al. 2014; DeYoung 2014).

Library collections have historically been dominated by works by white authors perpetuating both negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and a white supremacist version of history that suppresses or silences Indigenous voices and perspectives (Bowers, Crowe, and Keeran 2017). Furthermore, the ways in which works concerning Indigenous peoples are made accessible in libraries are rendered even more problematic by the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). As Littletree and Metoyer (2015, 642) write:

Existing subject headings have not been designed with the perspectives of Indigenous people in mind . . . the cataloging language silences Native American history. It disregards the sovereignty of Native nations, as well as historicizes and stereotypes Native people and cultures.

The LCSH is particularly problematic in its ability to accurately describe historical traumas experienced by Indigenous peoples. As I have argued elsewhere (Dudley 2017), monographs describing the occurrence of genocides on the North American continent are frequently assigned generic-sounding subject headings like *Indians of North America—Government relations* or, in the case of books on residential schools, *Indians of North America—Education*, and as a result the historical reality of those traumas is obscured. For many Indigenous library users, then, accessing library collections carries the potential for considerable trauma and cultural risk (Andrews 2017; Loyer 2017).

At the same time, however, a significant body of literature in LIS takes almost no account of such barriers. As Maura Seale (2010, 2013, 2016) has pointed out, dominant discourses surrounding information literacy essentially posit the information user as a neoliberal ideal, unaffected by social forces or power relations of any kind. Seale (2010) criticized the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) for seeing the student primarily as an economic actor born free, and ostensibly free of all constraints, who gains new skills in order to succeed in a—uncritically accepted—neoliberal world. The student as conceived in the *Standards* therefore “exists outside of social, political, and economic contexts” (Seale 2013, 52),

thus ignoring all political, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental realities with which actual students contend. As a result,

the core logic [of the information literacy standards] is that because individuals can choose to become information literate and because information literacy can resolve social and economic inequities, those inequities are ultimately the fault of those individuals. (48)

She also observes (2016) that the significantly reimagined 2015 ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, while being more philosophical in nature in its focus on “dispositions” rather than on performance standards expected of the student, still assumes an atomized information seeker, a “learner emptied of history” with “no sense that context and history bear upon learning” (85).

This depoliticized and deracialized discourse extends into LIS approaches to cultural competence, which—much like the original social work model from which it largely derives (NASW 2001)—eschews a direct engagement with power relations and various forms of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and colonialism, focusing instead on the power dynamics between the practitioner and client within the context of cultural neutrality.

In her seminal article introducing the concept to LIS, Patricia Overall (2009) sets out the rationale for cultural competence in terms of improving cross-cultural understanding so as to “create and maintain a more equitable environment for library users” (200), many of whom come from backgrounds unlike those of library professionals. She defines cultural competence as

the ability to recognize the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others; and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service. (189–90)

She considers culture primarily from a sociology of knowledge perspective—how linguistic structures and the social construction of knowledge help shape our views of the world, which can therefore represent barriers of understanding between library practitioners and users. Among the impacts of culture, she includes perceptions of libraries on the part of users, arguing that “greater understanding of cultural issues will result in increased library use” (176). She further situates these respective experiences of culture within the three domains of the cognitive (knowledge and self-awareness), interpersonal (ethic of care), and environmental (physical and institutional) (191).

Overall’s framework may do an adequate job of situating identities in terms of culture and its associated dimensions, but unfortunately it is unable to assist in

identifying the nature and impacts of potential inequities emerging from them. For example, she mentions race as a diversity factor but is silent on the reality and experience of multiple forms of racism; similarly, the environments and relationships as depicted in the framework are altogether devoid of reference to power relations. While she refers briefly to perceptions of cultural insensitivity on the part of minority groups in response to “culturally inaccurate” (179) terminology in the catalogue, she appears to be unaware that such terminology arose from—and represents—the exercise of structural power relations born of Eurocentrism and American exceptionalism (Berman 1993; Olson 2002). Instead, culture, broadly conceived, is valorized above other factors, existing somehow independently of socioeconomic structures that contribute to social advantage and disadvantage.

Overall’s article may have been quite influential in the LIS literature⁷ but has not resulted in broad implementation of cultural competence in practice, a fact that has been variously attributed to entrenched white privilege, the legacy of assimilationist values, and self-flattering complacency (summarized in Blackburn 2015).

In 2012, ACRL released its *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competence for Academic Libraries*, which adopts word for word the definition of cultural competence proposed by the NASW in 2001:

A congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. (ACRL 2012, para. 6)

The *Standards* emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills on the part of the library worker, and the development of appropriate organizational and professional values capable of supporting appropriate collections, services, and program delivery that would include linguistic diversity and be delivered by a diverse workforce, in a workplace environment that further promotes such competency through leadership skills and professional development. Given its application to an academic setting, the *Standards* also includes respect for non-Western ways of knowing in academic research.

Critical LIS scholars have taken the discipline to task for its superficial adoption of diversity principles and cultural competence standards. Hudson (2017a) criticizes library diversity and cultural competence training programs, arguing that in framing racism as merely an “interpersonal error” (16) rather than as a socially constructed “precarious product of history” (20), “cultural competence reduces racism to

7. According to Google Scholar, it has been cited 140 times to date.

individual relations, obscuring analysis of broader structures of racial domination behind an emphasis on paradoxically deracializing interpersonal understanding and harmony” (17). The focus on an individual’s “personal work,” he argues, posits racism as an “epidemic of misguided individual attitudes rather than a structural phenomenon” (18); the result, he writes,

tends to effect an erasure of the structural character of racism—that is, the entrenchment of white supremacy as a foundational and sustaining element of the discursive and material conditions of our society. . . . Diversity, in other words, is about achieving the heterogeneity and inclusion presumed to be hallmarks of the existing social order. Any analysis of racism as an effect of broader social structures is thus inconceivable. (11)

In so doing, libraries have made race and racism essentially invisible, and its epistemological “violence invisibilized . . . even as it may be hypervisible to those whose dignity it assaults” (Hudson 2017b, 214–15).

Writing more than a decade earlier, Todd Honma (2005) also criticized institutionalized efforts in LIS to promote diversity and multiculturalism against a background of invisible, normative whiteness; as the absence of any understanding of racism forestalls the ability to identify its structural and cultural sources. In its place, he argues, LIS has promoted a “benign liberal multiculturalism” (11) lacking any potential for institutional or social critique.

The discursive struggle over the rhetorics of diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence points to the fact that “diversity” isn’t just about ontology—that is, the *presence* of many different types of people within or served by an institution—instead, it’s about recognizing and acknowledging the *effects* the positionings of these differences have on individuals. This is also referred to in the literature as status relations or the relational dimensions of the social categories with which people are associated. Determining whether users are restricted in their freedom to use the library based on status relations is much more important than merely affirming social identities (Fincher and Iveson 2009). Instead, an approach is required that can, at multiple levels, aid in identifying and addressing these effects, injustices, and consequences.

These conceptual absences regarding race in mainstream LIS cultural competence discourses deepen when we frame our understandings in terms of racialization—as opposed to racism as generally understood. As Patrick Wolfe theorizes in his 2016 book *Traces of History*, racialization refers to historically situated forms of colonial domination, control, and exclusion exercised predominately by European-derived polities over non-white populations, and that vary in intent and content across the globe. He writes that racialization is

race in action . . . practices [that] seek to maintain population-specific modes of colonial domination through time. . . . Racialisation refers to this active productivity of race, whereby colonialism refashions its human terrain. (10)

In this light, he argues, Aboriginal Australians have much more in common with Indigenous people in North America, owing to their shared experience with colonial genocide and removal, than with African Americans despite their apparent shared blackness, the latter having been abducted from their homelands and valued for their physical labour rather than for their land base. As such, we cannot simply speak of racism as a singular social ill or a psychological aberration that might be usefully addressed through training. Rather, it requires a more complex and holistic understanding of how these oppressions manifest and affect individuals and groups differently, depending on the historical and contemporary human geographies and institutions involved (Wolfe 2016).

In the context of a major institution like the academic library, situated as it is in a globalized capitalist and neoliberal society deriving from an overwhelmingly Eurocentric worldview, we are left then with significant tensions between the mainstream acceptance of cultural competence and the more reflexive, fundamental, and difficult questions concerning the dominant, normative, and invisibilized values of colonial whiteness in which libraries operate—and, indeed, serve to reproduce (however unwittingly). Is it therefore enough for libraries to reform our hiring and training practices, or are more fundamental transformations required?

In the search for possible answers, we may find guidance in frameworks from other disciplines.

Counselling Psychology: Multi-Dimensional Cultural Competence

If we cast our view outside of LIS, we find more comprehensive and critical models to guide institutions, organizations, and interactions between professionals and diverse clientele. In his work on cultural competence in the profession of counselling psychology, Derald Wing Sue (2001) posits a multi-dimensional framework based on three axes: the diversity factors of individuals (predominately race and culture, but he also allows that they can include aspects of embodiment [gender, ability, sexuality]); the components of competence, consisting of knowledge, skills, and awareness of one's beliefs and attitudes; and the foci of the professional's attention, at the individual, institutional, organizational, and societal levels. The foci dimension, as Wing describes it, provides a full-spectrum portrait of the complex interplay of historical and ideological forces at work for any professional situated within Western institutions:

At the personal level, the obstacles are biases, prejudice, and misinformation manifested via discrimination; at the professional level, they are culture-bound definitions of psychology and ethnocentric standards of practice/codes of ethics; at the organizational level, they are monocultural policies, practices, programs, and structures; and at the societal level, they are the invisibility of ethnocentric monoculturalism, the power to define reality, and a biased interpretation of history. (802)

It is this third dimension that sets Wing's model apart from conventional cultural competence, in that it opens up a real possibility for the kinds of structural critiques advocated by Honma (2005) and Hudson (2017a,b). It also faces honestly the barrier to the kind of personal work that Hudson (2017a) identifies: the threat posed to the individual's sense of self in facing one's own biases and prejudices if cultural competence is limited solely to a focus on adjusting the beliefs of the professional.

Sue's critique of psychology's monocultural Eurocentric notions of normativity and how they impose major barriers to effective cross-cultural practice certainly echoes much of the critical literature in LIS, which foregrounds Eurocentrism, Christocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism in subject headings and classification, as well as the enduring whiteness of the profession itself (e.g., Berman 1993; Nicholson and Seale 2018; Olson 2002; Schlesselman-Tarango 2017).

Moving next to the organizational level (institutions and professional bodies), Sue portrays these as monocultural (Eurocentric, assimilationist, and negligent of the role played by culture), nondiscriminatory (some awareness of inequities but inconsistent and superficial efforts at addressing them, and usually for public awareness purposes), or multicultural (integration of diversity in mission, planning, and operations, and the active inclusion of minorities in decision-making roles). Again, the LIS literature reflects this continuum in acknowledging the corresponding range of efforts in librarianship, from integrating immigrants while creating a productive middle class for the capitalist economy and to promote democracy, to targeting the needs of diverse and disenfranchised populations (Mehra, Rioux, and Albright 2009).

Finally, Sue sees power at the societal level to shape reality through the very invisibility of ethnocentric monoculturalism and the assumed superiority of the dominant culture and its "civilizing" heritage, culture, and language, which is reproduced in the educational system and history books as a universal ideal and imposed upon members of less powerful groups. Here we can see in the LIS literature the active role the library itself plays in shaping this societal reality, by reflecting and reinforcing ethnocentric monoculturalism and self-flattering triumphalism in its Knowledge Organization Structures (Berman 1993; Olson 2002).

For all its advances over cultural competence generally, Sue's framework is still predicated on the competency of the professional, rather than on potential outcomes for the client, necessitating that we look beyond it to principles of cultural safety.

Indigenous Nursing: Cultural Safety

Our second existing framework is that of cultural safety, which is promoted in the health care literature and goes beyond the objectives of cultural competence in its explicit recognition of the unequal distribution of power in society as a result of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and racism. Cultural safety emerged in the late 1980s in New Zealand as the result of two simultaneous developments in the health care profession: the recognition that, after nearly 150 years of British colonization, the Maori were suffering poorer health outcomes than the non-Maori population and that the health care system needed to actively recruit Maori nurses (Papps and Ramsden 1996). Following the 1987 hiring of a Maori nurse who made recommendations to the Department of Education regarding training for nurses, a *hui* (meeting) between nursing educators and Maori student nurses was held in 1988 to discuss cultural safety; the following year, another *hui* nominated a group of Maori nurses to make specific recommendation for cultural safety standards, or *Kawa Whakaruruhau*. In 1992, the Nursing Council of New Zealand adopted *Kawa Whakaruruhau* and associated guidelines as mandatory components of the state examinations for nurses and midwives (Papps and Ramsden 1996). Key to their principles was articulating the opposite of cultural safety: that "any actions that diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual" would be culturally unsafe (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2011, 7).

A number of things distinguish cultural safety (CS) from cultural competence (CC). In CC, power is recognized only to the extent that there is an imbalance between the service provider and the client (NASW 2001), with *culture* being a descriptive quality about the client that the service provider must understand and appreciate (Gerlach 2012). In CS, by contrast, there is an acute awareness of the historical effects of inequality, discrimination, and racism in the life of the client, and their political position in society as a result of those forces (Gerlach 2012). Brascoupe and Waters (2009) further argue that CS is premised on a critical understanding not just of patients' respective cultures (as is the case with CC) but of their individual and collective locations at the intersections of power, specifically in terms of colonialism, race, ethnicity, embodiment, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It is a more holistic approach to understanding the role of the life-chances that can result from differentials in power and as a result of discrimination. Furthermore, CS is not just a stage further along a continuum from CC, but rather "represents a more radical, politicized understanding of cultural consideration, effectively rejecting the more

limited culturally competent approach for one based not on knowledge but rather on power” (10). More significantly for our purposes, Brascoupé and Waters stress that

it is institutions—government departments, hospitals, clinics, schools, etc.—that must demonstrate cultural safety and cultural competence in order to effect cultural change in the design and delivery of policy. This implies that the culturally safe behaviour and knowledge and the power transfer must be institutionalized. (18)

CS must also be distinguished not only from CC but also from additional models described in various literatures, including cultural sensitivity or cultural humility. These maintain focus on relationship-building between the professional and client and on processes of self-critique on the part of the former, while neglecting understandings of the social forces contributing to health outcomes (Chiarenza 2012).

Ultimately, write Smye and Browne (2002), CS is a “moral discourse” concerned with the fundamental “rightness” of health policy in the face of unjust social realities, so that outcomes don’t put Indigenous patients at risk (48–49). This implies a temporal awareness on the part of the practitioner of the past, present, and future impacts of colonialism and racism and other forms of oppression on an individual’s current health conditions, as well as their hopes for improving their health in the future. A CS approach is necessarily collaborative, involving mutual learning and ongoing conversation so that the patient can inform the practitioner of anything that makes them feel culturally unsafe (Brascoupé and Waters 2009). Perhaps the clearest distinction between these approaches is that whereas CC is a quality of the service provider, CS is an outcome determined by the recipient of health care who is not a passive recipient of services but has agency and power in the relationship with the health care system (Ball summarized in Brascoupé and Waters 2009). Where CC recognizes only the reality of individual and social states of being, CS locates the injustices underlying those conditions; the former only describes, the latter also critiques.

Practitioners must also be aware of their own position of power—and that of their institution—and how this affects their relationships with individuals, putting the onus on the mainstream institution to transform itself to ensure culturally safe practices (Gerlach 2012).

In a 2009 report, *Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety in Nursing Education*, the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada⁸ proposed a set of principles and associated competencies to best translate cultural safety into practice, foregrounding in particular the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit health care recipients (Hart-Wasekeesikaw and ANAC 2009). The report begins by affirming the important distinctions between cultural competence and cultural safety:

8. As of February 2016, the ANAC changed its name to the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association.

Cultural safety takes us beyond cultural awareness and the acknowledgement of difference. It surpasses cultural sensitivity, which recognizes the importance of respecting difference. Cultural safety helps us to understand the limitations of cultural competence, which focuses on the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of practitioners. Cultural safety is predicated on understanding power differentials inherent in health service delivery and redressing these inequities through educational processes. (2)

The cultural safety framework proposed by ANAC consists of both general principles (2) and specific competencies (7), which are summarized below.

Principles⁹

- Improving health care access for patients, aggregates, and populations
- Acknowledging that we are all bearers of culture
- Exposing the social, political, and historical contexts of health care
- Enabling practitioners to consider difficult concepts such as racism, discrimination, and prejudice
- Acknowledging that cultural safety is determined by those to whom nurses provide care
- Understanding the limits of “culture” in terms of people accessing and safely moving through health care systems and encounters with health care providers
- Challenging unequal power relations

Competencies¹⁰

- Post-colonial understanding: Practitioners recognize the intergenerational impacts and trauma of colonization, such as Canada’s Indian residential school system
- Communication: Interactions between providers and clients are culturally safe
- Inclusivity: Interactions are governed by awareness of and insights into Indigenous cultures
- Respect: Practitioners demonstrate openness to and consideration of the Indigenous perspectives of their clients and work with them in researching ways to improve health care
- Indigenous knowledge: Practitioners acknowledge and integrate Indigenous ways of knowing (ontologies and epistemologies), in particular oral and traditional knowledge, along with Western knowledge

9. Derived by ANAC from an unpublished training module (Varcoe 2004).

10. A fifth element, related to mentoring students and aimed at post-secondary instructors, is not included here.

Discussion: Similarities, Differences, and Absences

On their own, each of these frameworks represents a considerable advance over conventional cultural competence in LIS. Both specifically address power relations between practitioners and clients as well as structures of power in society, where the ACRL (2012) *Diversity Standards* refer only to empowerment, and Overall (2009) fails to mention power at all. As well, both the MDCC and CS frameworks specifically and strategically recognize and target racism; the *Standards* mention it only briefly as a social force of which librarians should be aware, while Overall—again—neglects it completely. Most significantly, MDCC and CS make clear that social disparities, inequities, and discrimination have their roots in historical forces and the exercise of power by the dominant European-descended white majority culture; the frameworks by Overall and the ACRL, by contrast, conceive of culture as an ontology unto itself, which library staff should respect and understand, existing somehow independently of normative whiteness and colonialism.

However, both MDCC and CS have shortcomings and blind spots. Sue's focus in MDCC is the therapist-client relationship, but the emphasis is still on the competencies of the therapist rather than the experience of the client. His emphasis on five major racial and cultural categories and the tendencies associated with each occasionally crosses into essentialism—or, as he admits, “gross oversimplifications” (815)—and he makes no mention of colonialism as the central ideological foundation of multiple manifestations of racism and their consequent differing impacts on various racial groups, as articulated by Wolfe (2016). The absence of colonialism as a factor means that short shrift is given to the experience of Indigenous peoples and the recognition of their worldviews. Finally, while he makes brief references to the impacts of gender, sexuality, and ability on the individual's experience of such group identities, he fails to integrate concepts of intersectionality into his analysis.

For their part, Hart-Wasekeesikaw's and ANAC's foregrounding of the Indigenous experience in CS may make up for this lack in the MDCC framework, but it comes at the expense of other group identities and experiences of marginalization, limiting its general adaptation. In addition, the framework is specifically intended to inform collaborative nurse-patient transactions, but missing from the framework is the potential for the kind of multilevel critique (i.e., institutional, organizational, and societal) advocated by Sue. CS as conceived here affords a greatly enhanced platform for reforming institutional practices, but on its own it does not lend itself to critiquing the place of the institution in structures of power, racism, and colonialism.

To build on the strengths of these frameworks while addressing their respective weaknesses, I now turn to adapting both to the library context in the form of Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety.

Synthesis: Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety

In the context of libraries, librarianship, and LIS, Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety refers to an institutional culture in which a diverse body of administrators and library workers, aware of their own cultural, racial, and socioeconomic locations, attitudes, and biases, are able to skillfully engage in transactions with library users representing the full range of the human experience (including race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and sexuality) and whose knowledge and agentive power are acknowledged and respected in terms of determining the success of those transactions, where:

- library collections, programs, and services are created and delivered with a recognition of—and a view to correcting—the historical and contemporary influence and impact of colonialism, unequal power relations, multiple manifestations of racism, and normative monocultural Eurocentrism and whiteness on library users and workers alike;
- library workers and LIS scholars are encouraged to interrogate the historical and contemporary locations of the library and its associated institutions in society—including professional associations and the academy—as well as the extent to which these reproduce the normative, racist, Eurocentric, colonial, and biased values of that society; and
- library workers—in collaboration with multicultural and diverse users—demonstrate leadership in identifying and correcting these biases in their Knowledge Organization Structures, policies, collections, and services so as to remove structural barriers to full, respectful, and culturally safe access for marginalized user groups and individuals.

Principles of Multi-Dimensional Culturally Safe Library Practice^{II}

Culturally safe library collections, programs, and services would strive to:

Improve library and information access for individuals, aggregates, and populations.

Academic libraries can work to overcome the barriers that structural forces represent in the lives of their users, who are conceived of not as atomized individuals but as members of social groups that may be subject to historical and contemporary forms of racialization and systemic oppression. Recognizing the embeddedness of individuals also assists in enhancing services for others who share these group characteristics.

Acknowledge that we are all bearers of culture. This is the default position behind cultural competence, as the library worker and information seeker are both situated culturally, requiring effective cross-cultural communication. At the same time, however, culture should not be understood as an ontology unto itself but rather as historically contingent, having been affected by forces of colonialism, political power,

II. Adapted from Varcoe (2004).

and race-based ideologies. Countless languages and language groups no longer exist, and almost all cultures have been hybridized through centuries of colonialism and, more recently, globalization (Weng and Kulich 2015). As well, culture is only one aspect of individual and group identities, which are intersectional and include aspects of race, language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability.

Understand the limitations of culture in terms of people's access to information. In addition to the forces of racialization and colonialism, the ways in which individuals and social groups encounter and engage with information in general and libraries in particular transcend matters of culture. Other institutions such as schools, the mass media, and organized religion have roles to play in shaping the informational environment of the individual. Furthermore, quite apart from cultural forces, there are numerous contributing factors, for example, in political economy or the built environment, that can limit one's access to libraries and information.

Expose the social, political, and historical contexts of information. Information—be it print-, data-, or web-based—does not exist separate and distinct from the society that produces it, and library practitioners are not agents divorced from the processes of culture, power, racialization, colonialism, etc. As such, this principle reflects the reality of the sociopolitical and cultural values of our institutions and society, which change over time. The relationship between information and the user is potentially problematic as a result; for example, as suggested above, an Indigenous student encountering a decades-old anthropology text that views their culture with a patronizing and colonial lens may find this distressing and culturally unsafe. How our libraries represent such information through ossified and unresponsive subject headings and classification is often equally problematic and can exacerbate the situation. This principle puts us far beyond notions not only of library “neutrality” but also of cultural competence. The structures of power, advantage, and disadvantage in which we are mutually embedded as individual library workers and users have also involved libraries as institutions, which, in their “power to name,” have contributed to reifying these structures (Olson 2002). In this way, both the library and its users are conceived of in a dialectical, transactional manner—mutually learning from one another in an environment consisting of physical, symbolic, ideological, institutional, social, and cultural elements, all of which interact with each other and individuals over time (Bales 2015).

Enable practitioners to consider difficult concepts such as racism, discrimination, and prejudice at the personal, institutional, organizational, and societal levels. The MDCS framework allows us to look beyond comforting notions of multiculturalism and intercultural communication as well as overcome personal biases and prejudices to confront the more difficult impacts of structural racism and racialization processes,

which implicate our institutions and the society. It places a responsibility on us as practitioners to acknowledge and address how our discourses, policies, and practices may contribute to structural racism, but it also situates us and these forces within socially embedded and politically sanctioned institutions.

Acknowledge that cultural safety is determined by library users. Where cultural competence is seen to have been accomplished through standards and measures internal to institutions, MDCS locates this assessment with users. We may assess ourselves as competent, but what is essential here is that users feel safe in our libraries. They should see themselves and their cultures reflected respectfully in collections (and in how these are organized) and feel that they have been treated respectfully themselves. So while Overall (2009) refers to Thwaites (1993) in describing culturally inaccurate terminology in the catalogue as a barrier for library users belonging to affected ethnic or racial groups, she does not discuss this in terms of the emotional impact of encountering these headings, nor in terms of how these users might feel culturally unsafe.

Ensure that users safely move through encounters with library staff. In all interactions with library staff, users should feel safe expressing themselves, asking questions, and seeking to meet their information needs. Library service policies should account for the needs of diverse users (e.g., not all will have photo identification), and collection development efforts should, to the extent possible, ensure that the perspectives, histories, and needs of diverse users are represented in the collection. As well, competence in MDCS should not be the domain of a single staff person, but rather training opportunities should be offered to all staff—including administrators—so that they have the requisite knowledge and skills and the opportunity to reflect on their own biases.

Challenge unequal power relations. Unlike the cultural competence framework from the NASW (2001), which recognizes unequal power relations only between the practitioner and the client, MDCS would be premised on a recognition of the profound effects on our users of both unequal power relations in society as a result of racism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, and the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, and the political economy in which information is produced, organized, and disseminated. Within this framework, academic libraries are not mere “neutral” mediating institutions but are themselves deeply embedded in these power relations, making it incumbent upon library administrators and practitioners to be open to recognizing and addressing such imbalances. By framing cultural safety as an outcome, librarians will open ourselves to learning how power relations are understood by our users and, accordingly, how our status as professionals and experts is viewed.

Competencies for Multi-Dimensional Culturally Safe Library Practice¹²

In order to establish, provide, and develop culturally safe library collections, programs, and services, libraries and their staff would need to demonstrate:

Post-colonial understanding. The library has institutionalized a recognition of the intergenerational impacts that past and present government policies have had on Indigenous and racialized peoples as well as on those facing other forms of discrimination or marginalization. Library administrators and workers account for the fact that colonial and racist policies, including the Indian residential school system, can have grave and lifelong consequences for these users' access to information and their ability to develop information literacy skills. More broadly, such users have experiences and cultures that inform their information-seeking practices, and for whom conventional library services may be insufficient. Some long-standing service standards may, as a result of structural disparities, have overlooked or worked against the interests of Indigenous, racialized, or marginalized classes of users in the community.

Communication. The library promotes the centrality of communication in providing culturally safe library services, as opposed to proceeding with interventions, programming, or innovations based on assumptions regarding the needs of target communities and users. The practitioner establishes positive relationships with Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized library users based on understanding, trust, respect, honesty, reciprocity, and empathy.

Inclusivity. The library actively engages with Indigenous, racialized, or marginalized library users in genuine consultation and collaboration through understanding, valuing, and integrating diverse worldviews and knowledges in library services, collections, practices, and pedagogy.

Respect. The library worker treats with respect all concerns on the part of library users regarding their sense of cultural safety. The library demonstrates an understanding that the colonized and racialized histories and circumstances experienced by Indigenous people and other marginalized users mean that these information-seekers will not feel safe encountering information sources or systems that dismiss or disregard their interests and therefore place them at risk for cultural harm. Library staff engage respectfully with all users based on consultation, empowerment, capacity-building, and reciprocity to identify informational issues and needs.

¹². Adapted from Hart-Wasekeesikaw and ANAC (2009).

Indigenous knowledges. The library demonstrates ways to acknowledge, value, and integrate Indigenous knowledges with respect to generating and organizing information and access to it. This includes not just documenting and amending biased subject headings and classification but also incorporating Indigenous knowledge organization systems into library discovery tools. The practitioner engages in collaborative collection-development efforts with Indigenous colleagues, faculty, and community members to ensure robust representation of Indigenous literary, scientific, and cultural production and the replacement of outdated, stereotyped collections.

We can establish a matrix illustrating the basic intersections between Sue's (2001) Multi-Dimensional Competencies (column headings) and the Hart-Wasekesikaw and ANAC (2009) cultural safety principles (row headings), as shown in Table I.

	Race / Culture	Components	Foci
Post-colonial understanding	Multiracial / multicultural, but particularly important for Indigenous library users	Awareness of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge	Individual, institutional, organizational, societal
Communication	Multiracial / multicultural	Skills	Individual, institutional, organizational, societal
Inclusivity	Multiracial / multicultural	Awareness of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills	Individual, institutional, organizational, societal
Respect	Multiracial / multicultural	Awareness of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills	Individual, institutional, organizational, societal
Indigenous knowledge	Indigenous	Knowledge	Individual, institutional, organizational, societal

TABLE I Summary of Multi-Dimensional Competencies for Cultural Safety

We can see that, while there are some points of variation, the focus of these components is ideally directed at all levels.

What would MDCS look like in practice? Using Sue's application of MDCC to psychology as a model, we can envision that a library adhering to a framework of Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety would operate accordingly:

At the individual level, it must be directed at the provider's awareness of his or her values, biases, and assumptions about human behavior; at the professional level, it might mean changing standards of practice that allow for the practitioner to play different roles . . . at the institutional level, it might mean relocating . . . services in minority communities to increase ease of access, hiring greater numbers of bilingual and minority [practitioners] to increase credibility, developing community outreach programs . . . and offering multicultural incentives to [service] providers, staff, and administrators; and at the societal level, advocating against social policies that have a negative effect on marginalized groups in our society and for those that redress inequities. (813)

Librarians wishing to develop culturally safe practices with and for Indigenous library users are advised to consult the recommendations of the Indigenous Matters Committee of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (2017), which include:

Decolonize Access and Classification by addressing the structural biases in existing schemes of knowledge organization and information retrieval arising from colonialism by committing to integrating Indigenous epistemologies into cataloguing praxis and knowledge management; Decolonize Libraries and Space by recognizing and supporting Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledges through culturally appropriate space planning, interior design, signage, art installations, territorial acknowledgements of geographic-specific traditional territories and public programming in collaboration with local Indigenous stakeholders. (6)

Specific services could include doing dedicated reference outreach to Indigenous students at campus service points, inviting Indigenous Elders and knowledge-keepers to assist with reforming cataloguing and classification schemes, and including Indigenous ceremonies (e.g., smudging) in library spaces. Older items in the collection, such as ethnographies with particularly egregious ethnocentric or racist content, might be physically separated in the collection to provide necessary context about them, and Indigenous students could be invited to identify these items in the course of their research. Indigenous students could be hired to conduct in-library research on relevant collections to assist in collection assessment as well as to act as library ambassadors to conduct tours for incoming students and to provide peer research assistance. Culturally safe information literacy efforts would not only integrate a critical awareness of the historically situated contexts of diverse learners but would also include explanations of the biases in classifications and subject headings and how they might constrain one's ability to conduct research concerning racialized or marginalized populations (Dudley 2017).

Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety would of course benefit other racialized library users and micro-communities, such as international students, those studying English as an additional language, users with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities. Through tailored partnerships with campus service centres, reference and instruction outreach, participation in cultural events and advisory groups, and in consultation with various campus communities in terms of collections, spaces, and services, academic libraries can create mutually rewarding relationships with their diverse users.

Conclusion

As the proposed framework suggests, a Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety approach to library collections, programs, instruction, and services explicitly addresses matters of racialization and power disparities at multiple levels, from the individual to the societal, while retaining the importance of intercultural communication that dominates the literature on cultural competency. Cultural competence alone may be an appropriate response when the library user and the library practitioner share similar status and life experiences, and where the culture of one hasn't been historically dominated by the culture of the other. In other words, MDCS isn't concerned with simply affirming social identities and categories but rather with locating and overcoming potential inequities and barriers to library services as a result of the social treatment of those categories.

MDCS also transcends a focus on the individual library worker. Again, while cultural competence and effective intercultural communication are important, MDCS locates structural inequities in institutions and professions, and the societies of which they are a part. No matter how effective and intercultural the library worker's communication practices, the conjoined realities of racism, whiteness, Eurocentrism, colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism still guide a host of institutional assumptions and practices not just in libraries but in North American society. Through this lens we see ourselves as agents within institutions and guided by professional bodies—both of which are, in turn, granted social licence by governments and the general society. Our practices therefore cannot be viewed in isolation from these sociopolitical and cultural dimensions.

Nor may our practices be assessed solely by our own professional criteria. Instead, MDCS invests the determination of this outcome in library users themselves, who are viewed with considerably more complexity than in either the cultural competence or information literacy discourses. Their agency extends beyond meeting their own informational needs to being active partners in ensuring culturally safe outcomes.

Time itself plays a significant role in MDCS, by forcing us to look beyond an eternal present to view ourselves both historically and into the future. As interconnected repositories of a written culture that has developed across centuries, and in which forces of imperialism and racism were nakedly apparent and indeed celebrated, libraries are uniquely significant institutions, which have a responsibility to make such resources available, contextualized, and accessible in a culturally safe way, continually augmented by current scholarship and cultural production from diverse voices. Both library workers and our users are historically situated, each “bearing” culture in varying degrees, but with the recognition that this can include the burdens of colonialism, racialization, or other forms of oppression. Users pass through our libraries with their own sense of agency and with a view to the future, one which all of us in our own small ways are transforming through our encounters.

Finally, where cultural competence is a matter of gaining knowledge for the purpose of improving service effectiveness, cultural safety is a “moral discourse” (Smye and Browne 2002, 48-49) premised on a powerful social-justice imperative underlying everything the library does. It commits the library as an institution and those who work within it to acknowledge their place in a society that is structurally and deliberately designed to create advantages for some and disadvantages for others.

Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety—if implemented as described above—would likely avoid the superficiality, co-optation, and self-congratulations that often de-radicalize diversity work (Honma 2005; Swan and Fox 2010), as it is purposely and reflexively critical and explicitly rejects the conflation found in cultural competence, in which every human characteristic may be elided as “multicultural.” Not that its implementation would be without challenges: library managers would need to be comfortable with its inherently transformative agenda in the first place, and even if they are, university administrators may not share these aspirations. Yet, in investing responsibility for its implementation in multiple hands—administrators, staff, and library users themselves—Multi-Dimensional Cultural Safety reveals a pathway to a more grounded, collaborative, and outcomes-oriented vision of anti-racist work than has so far obtained.

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