

Cultural Competency and Archival Appraisal

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Good afternoon. Because cultural competency is grounded in self-awareness, I begin my presentation with a personal note. I concern myself with inclusiveness and diversity in archival work as a member of the dominant demographic and culture in the United States. Furthermore, my career is largely within higher education in predominantly white institutions and the fields of archives and libraries, all which can and do support dominant systems to the exclusion of others. I identify, and present to the wider world, as a member of the dominant professional demographic and culture.¹ I do differ from dominant markers, yet these are not highly visible. I am aware of my privilege and my location, and for me, these demand that I engage with equity, diversity and inclusion (hereafter EDI) work. I became interested in cultural competency on this journey of exploring privilege. In this paper I will present and consider cultural competency, and particularly its relationship to archival appraisal.

¹ through such markers as white, middle class, Euro-American cultural-centric, and cisgender female.

Cultural competency is a useful framework for building acquired diversity.² Also referred to as intercultural, cross-cultural, and global competency, and many more phrases³, it is flexible, multifaceted, and best understood as a framework, or set of concepts. Cultural competency begins with an awareness of self; this self-cultural analysis reveals biases and values, among other things. Cultural competency is process oriented, and emphasizes growth, continuing work, and action.

Scholars and practitioners across disciplines agree that cultural competency is management of human interactions *across our differences*, with results of more appropriate and effective outcomes at the individual, relational, group, and organizational levels.⁴ The World Health Organization defines it in the context of global competency, “. . . as a demonstrated ability to work constructively with people across differences.”⁵ The framework is well respected and established in many human service fields,

² This paper is based upon my recent article; see it and its endnotes for further information: Ellen Engseth, "Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States," *The American Archivist* Fall/Winter 2018, Vol. 81, No. 2, 460-482. All websites referenced in this paper were accessed June, 2019. Acquired diversity is understood as one aspect or metric to workplace diversity from a management perspective: acquired diversity for example encompasses cultural competency and fluencies, and inherent diversity refers typically to qualities one is often born or raised with such as racial, gender and sexual orientation identities. See for example Alexia Hudson-Ward, "Eyeing the New Diversity: An Emerging Paradigm for Recruitment and Retention," *American Libraries* 45, no. 7-8 (2014): 32. And Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin, "How Diversity Can Drive Innovation.(Idea Watch)," *Harvard Business Review* 91, no. 12 (2013): 30.

³ Janet M. Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015), 217.

⁴ Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, 217. Emphasis mine.

⁵ Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, 549.

such as education, health, law enforcement, and social work. And our close colleagues, librarians, have been engaged with the framework since the 1990s when it developed there within the milieu of multiculturalism and diversity efforts [slide: Montiel-Overall definition]; seen here is Montiel-Overall's often-cited definition for libraries.

Briefly described, culture is understood in this framework as shared actions of groups of people, expressed daily, and resulting from historically or socially transmitted customs and traditions.⁶ Competency refers to capacity, or ability developed over time.⁷ To many scholars, cultural competency emphasizes three aspects. These are knowledge (the cognitive), skills (the behavioral), and attitudes (the affective). Knowledge includes cultural self-awareness, as well as knowledge of others' cultures, languages, histories, and lived realities. Essential skills are listening, observing, reflecting, empathizing, and communicating. Attitudes include curiosity, humility, open-mindedness, respect, and tolerance for ambiguity.⁸

⁶ Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, 549.

⁷ Patricia Montiel-Overall, Annabelle Villaescusa Nuñez, and Verónica Reyes-Escudero, *Latinos in Libraries, Museums, and Archives: Cultural Competence in Action! An Asset-Based Approach* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 23; Terry L. Cross et al., *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care* (Washington, D.C.: CASSP Technical Assistance Center, 1989), 13.

⁸ Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, 218–19; Janet M. Bennett, "Intercultural Competence: Vital Perspectives for Diversity and Inclusion," in *Diversity at Work : The Practice of Inclusion*, 157–60.

A useful concept for understanding cultural competency is that of the continuum, developed initially by a team of social workers, adapted by others, including myself as seen here [slide: my adaptation of the continuum first developed by Cross et al., adapted by Montiel-Overall et al., and incorporating Cooke's concept of the possibility of both progression and regression⁹]. The continuum is a conceptual structure on which to locate personal and organizational behaviors. It sets cultural destructiveness, incapacity and blindness on one end of the continuum; followed by awareness or limited competency; and at the high end of the continuum is cultural competency and proficiency.¹⁰

How might we recognize a culturally competent person, or an organization? A colleague may display self-reflection, curiosity, humility, or world-mindedness, or actively seek interaction with varieties of cultures. Organizations will conduct self-assessment, manage the dynamics of difference, acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and adapt to the contexts of individuals and communities they serve.¹¹

⁹ Adaptation published in Engseth, "Cultural Competency," 475.

¹⁰ Cross et al., *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*, 13–18; Patricia Montiel-Overall, "Cultural Competence: A Conceptual Framework for Library and Information Science Professionals," *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2009): 186–87.

¹¹ Cross et al., *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*, 19–21; Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence, "Conceptual Frameworks/Models, Guiding Values and Principles," <https://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/framework.php>.

Archivists in the U.S. are beginning to formally engage with the cultural competency framework, in literature, practice and professional discussion. Practitioners and leaders are reflecting on self, recognizing the role of culture, and acting on such to improve services, relationships, and organizations. My recent research found the earliest pertinent public comment came from leaders in the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the largest professional organization in the U.S.; SAA continues to provide some leadership, within their context of work towards diversity and inclusion. Archivists are discussing the framework occasionally at the national and regional conferences. My survey of four prominent English-language journals, *American Archivist*, *Archives & Records*, *Archival Science*, and *Archivaria* revealed that to date, cultural competency is meaningfully discussed in *the American Archivist*, yet there only occasionally, and in the last six years. One article from 2009 in *Archival Science* pre-dates these. This handful of practice and thought-leadership articles amounts to a nascent professional engagement with cultural competency among American archivists. I am eager to observe how it matures.

In other Anglophone countries, cultural competency is established within other professions, as it is in the U.S. For example, U.K.-based social

work literature discusses the framework. I searched Social Care Online, the UK's largest database of information on all aspects of social work and social care, and located 49 articles based in the U.K. and 2 in Ireland, with surges in usage circa 2010, and still appearing in 2019. The preferred term in that field appears to be “cultural competency,” complemented by intercultural, and global, competency. A search of CINAHL,¹² the renowned research tool for nursing and allied health professionals, yielded 115 results for the phrase or its close variants appearing with a location given as “United Kingdom;” also 8 for Scotland, and 15 for Ireland. Yet, to my knowledge, this particular aspect of equity and inclusion work has yet to engage archives and records practitioners and educators in the U.K. Based on early readings in the literature, and a search of the Archives & Records Association’s journal, cultural competency is a phrase not yet in use.¹³ Of course other terms do reference what I would call broad EDI-related work; in my search, 3 articles referenced “multicultural”, 3 “disability,” 21 “community archives,” and 18 “participatory.” Indeed, diversity and inclusion is of great interest in the UK to some; as summarized by Tola

¹² This database allowed me to expand a search by related words, so terms such as “cultural value” and “cultural diversity” were (appropriately) included in the results.

¹³ *Archives & Records* journal. See footnote 46 in “Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States.” *American Archivist* Fall/Winter 2018, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp. 460-482. <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/201542>

Dabiri Consulting for the Archives and Records Association last year, equity is essential if our profession is to remain relevant, and that “[t]here is no doubt that the issue of diversity and gender equality in the record keeping, library and museum workforce, are recognised as areas of concern” to this workforce wherein 97% identify as white, higher than the national average.¹⁴

My study of Australia and New Zealand revealed that archivists there, and colleagues in cognate fields of libraries and cultural heritage, are indeed engaged in cultural competency. This work appears in the context of reframing and decolonizing the historical narrative, and within professional training. Australian archivist and librarian Fiona Blackburn writes that cultural competency is included in the policies and strategies of major institutions, and training programs incorporate it to various extents. In New Zealand, due to leadership at the national level by both the national library and information organization, and the national body that represents Māori within libraries, cultural, and information fields, library sector workers “are expected to be able to competently engage with a wide variety of

¹⁴ https://www.archives.org.uk/images/Diversity/ARA_literature_review_version_3.4.2019.pdf

A workforce study noted as likely the first of the Library, Archives, Records, Information Management, and Knowledge Management domains found that 96.7% of the workforce identify as ‘white’ compared to 87.5% identifying as ‘white’ in UK Labour Force Survey statistics.

https://archive.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/executive_summary_nov_2015-5_a4web_0.pdf

cultures. . . . The tapestry of social and cultural inclusion in New Zealand is being woven into all areas of the library and information profession in New Zealand....”¹⁵

From my perspective as an archivist working in higher education, with global and local patrons, international projects, and collections that cross many cultural and geographic lines, cultural competency demands engagement with the “global.” And other archivists’ work environments, users, and indeed their records, are global in scope. Across the world, demographic trends of migration increase diversities in the work place. In addition to workers migrating, employers *migrate* to find workers. Academic and research projects cross institutional and national lines. Other forms of diversities affecting our workplaces are growth of non-traditional workers such as older, and other-abled.¹⁶ Seen here [slide] is a relevant International Federation of Library Associations manifesto. This affects the information ecosystem, our user services, and the nature of our archival records. The broad scholarship on cultural competency does recognize the

¹⁵ Fiona Blackburn, “The Intersection between Cultural Competence and Whiteness in Libraries,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2015), Introduction.; Nicole M. Gaston et al., “*Raranga te kete aronui: Weaving Social and Cultural Inclusion into New Zealand Library and Information Science Education*,” in *Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice*, ed. Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, Paul T. Jaeger (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2016), 391, 394.

¹⁶ Martha Frarnsworth Riche and Michalle E. Mor Barak, “Global Demographic Trends; Impact on Workforce Diversity,” in *Managing Diversity : Toward a Globally Inclusive Workplace*, ed. Michàlle Mor-Barak (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 73.

global nature of the framework, though it is not always clearly articulated. Intercultural competency author Janet Bennett calls up the image of “global souls” who recognize a global community, and Bennett sees intercultural competence as a bridge between EDI work and international efforts.¹⁷ I suggest that our profession advances and our competency is improved when we embrace a global rather than national or culturally-bound perspective, and we integrate an element of global curiosity and humility to our work, including into our appraisal. As in business and higher education, wherein internationalization is generally recognized as either valuable or a necessity, and the trend is to take global rather than local perspective when generating new ways of thinking and working, archivists can do the same.

As we know, archivists in many areas of the world are expanding our models, services and professionalism. Generally, archival principles, values, and practice are moving from the foundational, to that which allows for pluralism and the alternative, so that we might address the social and cultural aspects of our work.¹⁸ And from a perspective of the cultural

¹⁷ Janet M. Bennett, “Intercultural Competence: Vital Perspectives for Diversity and Inclusion,” in *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion*, ed. Bernardo M. Ferdman (San Francisco: Willey, 2014), 155, 163.

¹⁸ For more on this, see the chapter by Anne J. Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, “Archival and Recordkeeping Research,” in *Research Methods: Information, Systems, and Contexts*, ed. Kirsty Williamson and Graeme Johanson (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2017); Anthony Dunbar, “Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started,” *Archival Science* 6, no. 1 (2006): 109–29.

competency framework, I see this work as often self-culturally aware, and incorporating empathy, humility, and tangible support for a variety of cultural norms. This occurs in various functional areas, including appraisal. As example, growing number of theorists and practitioners are working with records where creators or identifying community members retain control over archival decisions, including appraisal. Stilton and Srinivasan in their Participatory Appraisal article published in *Archivaria* called to expand appraisal to respect the knowledge systems embedded within community context, as this will aid understanding of local knowledge and marginalized narratives. Further, they called for appraisal wherein “non-community member archivists must have participation from the community members who are records creators themselves.”¹⁹ When viewed on the cultural competency continuum, such work falls to the higher side of the scale.

This current has been modestly codified or formally articulated. The Society of American Archivists’ *Core Values* reads that we “...collectively seek to document and preserve the record of the broadest possible range.... [we] seek to build connections to under-documented communities

¹⁹ Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, “Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections,” *Archivaria* (2007): 93.

to support: acquisition and preservation of sources relating to these communities' activities...and/or formation of community-based archives." Further, its complementary *Code of Ethics* reads, in part, "Archivists are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions."²⁰ The ICA/UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Archives* makes two points that I feel are particularly pertinent to expanded appraisal: there is inherent diversity within records and archives themselves, and that citizens and creators of records are part of *the collective responsibility* which is the archival endeavor.²¹ The ICA's Committee on Appraisal *Guidelines* notes that "Increasingly, consultation with stakeholders has a role to play in the appraisal process" and these include users, interest groups, and the general public.²² This is natural expansion from foundational Western appraisal practice and theory, which has always demanded recognition of *context* of creation as well as of the creators themselves and the function of the record within operations.²³ An

²⁰ <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>

²¹ https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/UDA_June%202012_press_EN.pdf

²² https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/CAP_2005_guidelines_appraisal_EN.pdf

²³ SAA defines the fundamental aspects of the record as "content, context, and structure;" and context itself as the various *circumstances surrounding materials*.
<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/c/context>

emphasis on the culture surrounding records as one form of context thus fits well into traditional and expanding appraisal.

This expansion in appraisal as well as emerging work on cultural competency both fit squarely within the broader movements and intellectual developments affecting archival theory and practice. The list of interdisciplinary forces is long, and includes critical theory, indigenous knowledge, postcolonialism, the rights and justice movements, and many developments within education, leadership, management, research, and technology. Looking more closely at only one of these forces, critical theory, what does it reveal about cultural competency, and particularly culturally competent archival appraisal? The critical perspective generally alerts us to issues of oppression, and questions our practices with an ethical or political lens. It encourages examination of privilege. So for example, on the matter of international cultural exchange and higher education, we might consider that internationalization is driven largely by European, American, Canadian, and Australian approaches, which in turn are critiqued as elitist, and promoted by those with the ability and the means to engage around the globe.²⁴ And in some library and information

²⁴ Nico Jooste and Savo Heleta, "Global Citizenship Versus Globally Competent Graduates: A Critical View From the South," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 2017, Vol 21(1): 42-43 quoting Deardorff, de Wit, & Heyl, 2012: 458 and Andreotti, 2006.

science literature, cultural competency is criticized as a form of liberal anti-racism wherein we individualize racism in a primary goal to create harmony, among other critiques.²⁵

Others, including myself, find connection between critical theory and cultural competency. Anthony Dunbar shared Critical Race Theory's application to archival theory and practice including appraisal, and he engaged too with the idea of culture, reminding us that "[i]t is at the point of appraisal that future archival holdings are first assigned a sociohistorical and socio-cultural value...." and summarized that a critical sensibility as well as social consciousness can help understand cultural context beyond institutional perspectives.²⁶ Again, from my perspective of cultural competency, this perspective would likely move us towards the higher end of the continuum. A further connection between critical theory and archival work may lie in the area of oral histories. I suggest that archivists' oral history work can be understood, in the context of critical theory, as forms of counterstories.²⁷ Counterstories help ensure many narratives exist in addition to the majority narrative, and to diminish or equalize a master

²⁵ David James Hudson, "On "Diversity" as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 31, 2017): 14, 16.

²⁶ Anthony W. Dunbar, "Introducing," 116-117.

²⁷ I note that Dunbar points out this connection, as well: "...written, oral, or audio-visual...are potential points of intersection with a counterstory." "Introducing," 115.

narrative. It was formed within critical race theory to decenter Whiteness to recount the perspectives of...marginalized communities.²⁸ Counter-stories consists of four types. Stock stories are those of the status quo and the dominant culture narrative. Concealed stories respond to stock stories; they disagree and speak back. Resistance stories are those that elicit reaction while they highlight injustice. Emerging or Transforming stories are “re(constructed) knowledge” built upon these others.²⁹ Archivists during appraisal often reflect upon how a record might broaden the available historical record. Others create, provide access to and preserve oral sources expressly to strengthen the historical record by amplifying voices previously quieted. I suggest such oral history work may be understood as Concealed and Resistance stories. Archivists who work with such oral histories are thus active participants in what is termed counter-storytelling in the language of critical theory. Our colleague Sharon Kelly shared a recent example of a University of Dundee’s Archive Services project, where new personal experiences of people with learning disabilities are expanding the archival record, because such was not available within official hospital

²⁸ David G. García, “Culture Clash Invades Miami: Oral Histories and Ethnography Center Stage,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, no. 6 (2008): 870.

²⁹ Nicole A. Cooke, “Counter-Storytelling in the LIS Curriculum,” in *Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice*, ed. Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, Paul T. Jaeger (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald, 2016), 335-340.

records.³⁰ This work reveals empathy, embracing others' perspective on hospital and ability culture, and supporting counterstory.

I suggest that the cultural or global competency framework can help us realize expanded appraisal and more effective outcomes towards inclusivity and diversity. I share an example from my own evolution, regarding a record's source language. I work in a setting of higher education at a research institution, and with records centered in topics of American and migration history. I am often appraising material with both a local and global scope, nature, or place of origin. Within our context of a largely English-literate staff, and with a majority of our users understood to be English readers, I was inclined towards English-language materials, due to management and access concerns. And, again in the spirit of self-awareness, I realize this was due - in part - to my perspective as an English speaking archivist and to my own comfort level with the records, as I am single language literate myself. Yet, such concerns in some ways provide a disservice to my users, an inclusive historical record, and the institution's collecting mission. Upon self-reflection, I realized that appraisal was based

³⁰ <https://icasuvblog.wordpress.com/2019/06/05/university-of-dundee-archives/>

in some part upon my own cultural norms and biases, and now appraise less based on source language.

In conclusion, cultural competency is a useful framework towards acquiring diversity skills. It provides an action-based and self-oriented structure in which to assess and support one's work, including in our globalized environments. My emerging understanding of its relationship to archival appraisal shows it to be a tool towards benefitting from the differences inherent in our work environments, and in records themselves. Thank you.