



## IJIDI: Book Review

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This edited collection, *Hopeful Visions, Practical Actions: Cultural Humility in Library Work* from Sara R. Kostelecky, Lori Townsend, and David A. Hurley, invites us to delve into how we do library work, focusing not so much on the tasks but on the relationships that arise through professional practice. In the introduction, the editors assert that a “culturally humble approach...recognizes the need for partnership” that empowers library workers to shape environments and services that challenge incidental and structural power imbalances “with patience and hope” (p. xv).

This 13-chapter volume is a follow-up to the editors’ 2019 paper, “Cultural Humility in Libraries,” and their 2022 ALA Special Report on cultural humility (Hurley et al., 2019; 2022). Hurley et al.’s work, notes that cultural humility can be an antidote to the problematic stance of cultural competency, which is a mid-20th century reaction to the increasingly global nature of the model that spread to other fields like medicine and nursing, social work, and education (Hurley et al., 2019). While cultural competence acknowledges that one-size-fits-all solutions are inappropriate when multiple cultural contexts are involved in interactions, it runs the risk of becoming reductive, as well as of becoming a “demonstrable mastery of [finite bodies] of knowledge” that may have very little to do with the actual persons interacting with each other (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998, p. 118). Such knowledge can quickly reproduce power imbalances between dominant and marginalized communities. More recent critiques suggest the very notion of competency may be rooted in Western ways of knowing that undergird White supremacy culture (Beckford, 2020; Grenier, 2020) and that while cultural competency training may raise awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues, they may not lead to active commitment of addressing inequities, which may reduce what is learned to simplistic notions that reinforce oppressive structures (Lekas et al., 2020; Comeaux et al., 2023).

An important thread running through *Hopeful Visions, Practical Actions* addresses power imbalances. For example, in Chapter Two, Twanna Hodge and Xan Goodman explore the relationship between cultural humility and power. Hodge and Goodman are Black women who acknowledge that cultural humility for marginalized persons and communities is a “survival mechanism” (as cited in Kostelecky et al., 2023, p. 20). Because libraries and library structures have traditionally shown “a distinct preference for white people, whiteness, and those who adhere to white supremacy culture” (p. 26), Goodman and Hodge

recommend that both library leaders and library workers adopt a position of cultural humility to help them examine their positionalities in library structures and broader cultural structures as a way of discovering where persons and communities may be erased or entirely dismissed. The authors speak about how they engage with cultural humility as a way to interrogate their own practice. They do this with the underlying assertion that if everyone were to engage in such reflective practices, we might start seeing and honoring each other's humanity in richer ways.

In Chapter Three, Liliana Montoya and Sara Polkinghorne deconstruct textbook notions of approachability in reference interactions. For example, Montoya and Polkinghorne note that being approachable is more than a checklist of behaviors (i.e., smiling and offering a warm welcome) to manage first impressions, it is also about how patrons perceive us. Concepts of approachability must acknowledge that we enter into relationships with patrons and must become attentive to their experiences and needs. Montoya and Polkinghorne suggest that adopting a culturally humble approach to reference services “promotes self-reflection,” “provides new ways to think about service quality and improvement,” and “encourages awareness of partial expertise,” which reminds us that our own perspectives are not the only ones that matter (pp. 42-43).

*Hopeful Visions, Practical Action* includes a chapter from Rhiannon Sorrell, a Diné tribal college librarian, who recounts how she needed to relearn tribal concepts of humility and how to unself herself after being away from the community for a time. In re-rooting her practice in relationship and humility, she notes that interactions “almost always ended with gratitude, a plan for moving forward, and a stronger sense of community” (p. 119). The underlying lesson here is that as we come to see each other as related, we may develop a more substantial commitment to serve each other in more open and authentic ways.

In Chapter 11, Emmons' chapter carries Hodge and Goodman's positionality about inequities in power dynamics. Emmons notes that humility and servitude are conflated in many mainstream conceptions of power. This error is especially problematic when we consider how humility has been weaponized against women, persons of color, and other marginalized groups. Thus, using the language of humility runs the risk of evoking these old and deeply established cultural scripts. As a possible way through this minefield, Emmons encourages us to think differently about power. He observes that “power, at its most basic, is the capacity to influence” (p. 159). Furthermore, the most enduring and meaningful conceptions of power emerge not from position or the ability to coerce and reward, but from “relationships with collaborators” (p. 160). Leaders who embody humility keep their “own interests, talents, and achievements” in perspective with the overall mission and progress of the group (p. 157). In Chapter 12, Nicholae Cline and Jorge R. López-McKnight posit that cultural humility is a “theory of change” that puts relationality at the center of our labors (p. 181).

The hopeful vision offered in Kostelecky, Townsend, and Hurley's collection stems from a more humanizing approach that centers on “authentic and long-lasting relationships” (p. 190). Nagem Swade and Daniyom “Dani” Bekele, the co-authors of the final chapter, remind us to be patient with ourselves because humility is a long journey, and we will make mistakes, but it can bring consolation, if not joy, because it is about “honoring the validity and humanity of one another” (p. 202). For those library workers who have committed themselves to paths of equity, this collection offers a good deal of encouragement and advice.

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