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## **A Study of the Cultural Intelligence of Special Libraries: Phase 1**

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**Abstract:** Research is presented from the phase one exploration of the cultural intelligence or cultural quotient (CQ) of special librarians including international information professionals. The term and quotient were developed by Ang and Van Dyne based on their research that measured intercultural performance. This research was inspired by three focused questions: (a) What is the overall level of CQ of participating special librarians?, (b) What variations exist among the four factors of cultural intelligence within the participants?, and (c) What are the viewpoints of these librarians about the importance and value of cultural intelligence within their organizations? Special librarians' cultural intelligence has not been formerly studied (with the exception of United States law firm librarians, a specific type of special librarian). A concurrent strategy was used in this mixed-methods study. A survey that included the cultural intelligence assessment, demographic questions, and open-ended items was disseminated to members of the Special Libraries Association (SLA). Of 148 initial respondents, 51 provided complete survey responses. The data was collected and analyzed resulting in two main conclusions: (a) special librarians feel cultural intelligence is important to their organizations and roles, and (b) participants have various levels of and experiences with CQ. The findings support recommendations to incorporate CQ training within organizational practices and to make CQ a priority as our practices are global. Phase 2 of focus groups of participants that opted-in will take place after this publication and offer additional rich insight into thoughts about cultural intelligence practices and application within organizations.

**Keywords:** cultural intelligence, cultural competency, special libraries, special librarians, information professionals, international special librarians

### **1. Introduction**

The demand for special librarians (information professionals) is changing, specifically with the skills that are now being required of librarians in order to remain competitive, maintain their current positions, or even be promoted.



Librarians must be culturally intelligent in order to work effectively to meet their users' needs. A librarian must also feel motivated to inspire others in a new environment. "Motivation must be aligned with our ways of thinking about a new culture and how we act in it" (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006, p. 78).

The purpose of this research is to examine the cultural intelligence in special librarians around the world to recognize their understanding and application of CQ within their work environments. The population used for this study is information professionals who currently work in a specialized setting with specialized clientele such as in business, government and academic libraries or information centers around the world.

Cultural competence guidelines do not exist for the library profession (Montiel-Overall, 2009). However, Jaeger et al. (2011) note that the profession has made a commitment to diversity and inclusion a long time ago. This is where the cultural intelligence framework can fit in. Cultural intelligence has not made its way specifically into libraries as the focus has primarily been within business, leadership, and psychology. There has been much debate and discussion in the literature as to whether we need another intelligence and what it is (Bailey, 2004; Berry & Ward, 2006; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2006; Middleton, 2014; Plum, Achen, Draeby, & Jensen, 2008). It has often been referred to as intercultural competence, global mindset, and global competencies. This research creates an opportunity for information professionals, specifically special librarians, to deepen their understanding of cultural intelligence and to apply it within their own departments and communities.

## **2. Foundation**

In order to accurately represent the aspects of this study, several definitions guided the research. The underlying conceptual foundation is that of the cultural intelligence and understanding its importance to special librarians.

*Cultural intelligence* is defined as an individual's capability to function effectively in a new or unfamiliar environment across various cultural settings including ethnic, organizational, generational, etc. (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley et al., 2006; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Cultural intelligence goes beyond only one cultural context (i.e., race or gender); as it predicts one's effectiveness working across many different cultural situations. It is a set of transferable skills that can be improved upon and is a way to assess our own ability to engage across cultural boundaries. Cultural intelligence changes how we think about issues of diversity, racism, stereotypes, culture and identity.

The cultural intelligence framework and scale utilized within the study are from the Cultural Intelligence Center. The multifaceted dimensions of CQ include cognitive, motivational, behavioral and metacognitive. As Figure 1 illustrates,

each of these are interrelated and we each have a score for each dimension and an overall cultural intelligence level.



**Figure 1: Four factor cultural intelligence model. Adapted from the Cultural Intelligence Center, retrieved from <https://culturalq.com/>.**

A *special library* was defined as, "libraries that have one or more of the following attributes: a focus on specialized information resources, usually of a limited subject scope; a focus on a specialized and limited clientele; and the delivery of specialized services to that clientele" (Shumaker, 2017, p. 4361). These may include information centers, competitive intelligence units, and knowledge resource centers for example.

A *special librarian* for purposes of this study was defined as an information professional, often a subject specialist, who uses "information to advance the mission of the organization through the development, deployment, and management of specialized information resources and services" for specific clientele (Special Libraries Association, 2019, para. 1).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research study builds upon the framework of cultural intelligence. The profession of librarianship is very expansive and special librarians are just one group of professionals within the profession. Phase 1 of this research study involved a concurrent mixed-methods process to understand the cultural intelligence of special librarians. Quantitative and qualitative data were combined with a traditional research design. Both were collected at the same time within a web-based survey. The qualitative open-ended items offered a wealth of information that the quantitative data could not provide. The researcher embedded the cultural intelligence instrument (CQS), which consists

of a 20-item four-factor scale used for academic research purposes from the Cultural Intelligence Center, into the web survey with their approval. This instrument measures an individual's cultural intelligence level overall. It includes a four-factor scale that was created to measure each of the four dimensions of CQ: (a) metacognitive, (b) cognitive, (c) motivation, and (d) behavioral. In addition to the CQS, demographic information was collected and open-ended items were included to examine the participants' thoughts regarding cultural intelligence and their organization.

The researcher used the Special Libraries Association (SLA) membership as the source for participants to participate. The Special Libraries Association (SLA) is a global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners in business, government, academic, and other "specialized" settings (Special Libraries Association, "About SLA," 2019, para. 1). This was the most logical choice to reach the largest number of special librarians including international special librarians. SLA currently has 49 regional chapters with 7 international chapters outside of the United States. The seven international chapters include three in Canada (Eastern Canada, Toronto, and Western Canada), Arabian Gulf, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe.

The Special Libraries Association was founded in 1909 and has grown to more than 6,000 members as of 2017. There are 5,282 members of the Open Forum of SLA Connect, which was the basis for invitation to participate in the web-based survey. The survey was also shared directly on other SLA Connect pages and via social media pages. Participants of the web-based survey had the option to opt-in to participate in a focus group within a separate page after the survey. The focus groups will take place at the annual Special Libraries Association annual conference in June 2019 and virtually thereafter as part of the phase 2 research. The phase 2 research is important for obtaining even richer data about this essential topic from this population. The survey data was collected in March 2019.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

The researcher prepared the raw data from the Qualtrics website for analysis and interpretation following steps outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). The quantitative data was examined in Excel while the qualitative data was imported into NVivo for examination of text. Both data sets were analyzed and inspected several times. Within NVivo, the researcher categorized the data and setting themes for phase 1. The quantitative data included descriptive analyses and the qualitative data was read to create notes for forming the topics. The notes were tracked by the researcher and a coding was developed based on themes. This thematic coding offered understanding into remarks on items related to CQ that may not have been collected by the CQS alone. The data was checked for accuracy, and merged to interpret holistically.

#### **5. Findings & Discussion**

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected in March 2019 from the Special Libraries Association membership. Of 148 initial respondents, 51 provided survey responses. The population for the research study was made up of special librarians working within the world who currently serve in a special librarian capacity and work within a special library.

### Demographic Findings

All gender identities, a range of educational levels and years of experience responded. Job titles varied. As Figure 2 shows, females represented 73% of the participants ( $n=37$ ), males 23% ( $n=12$ ), and both non-binary/third gender or prefer not to answer 2% ( $n=1$ ). The librarian profession is predominantly female, so this is consistent with profession demographics.

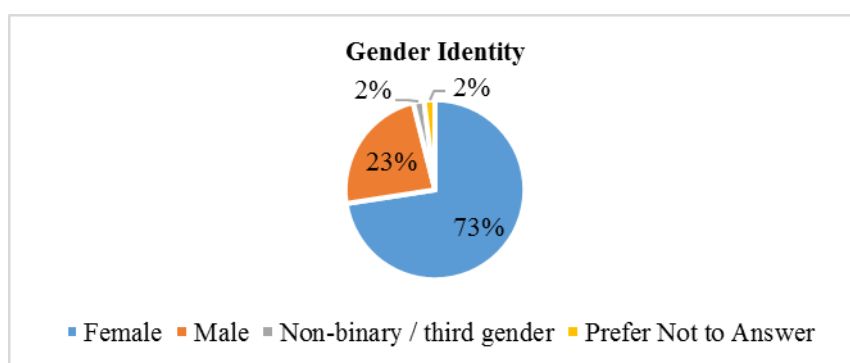
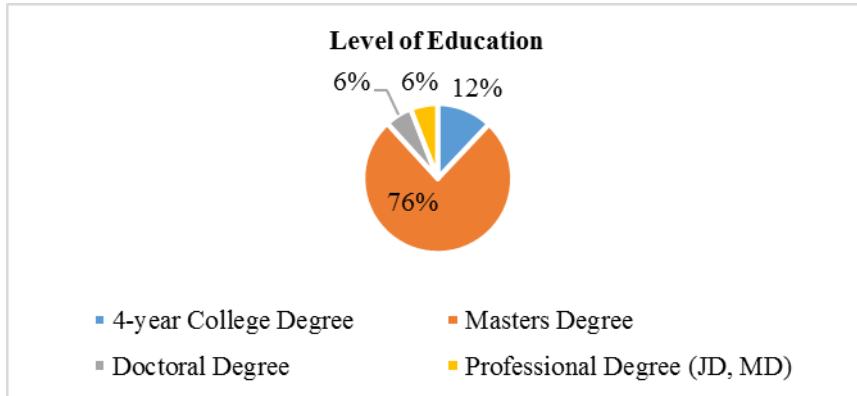


Figure 2: Frequency distribution of gender identity (N=51)

Sixty-five percent of participants ( $n=33$ ) reported no minority status with thirty-five percent reporting a minority status (Asian,  $n=2$ ; American Indian/Native American,  $n=1$ ; Black/African American,  $n=1$ ; Hispanic/Latina/o,  $n=2$ ; Multi-Racial,  $n=5$ ; and Other,  $n=7$ ). This is also true of the profession demographics as minorities are still a smaller percentage overall practicing within the profession. There have been expanded efforts and initiatives to address and recruit diverse members to librarianship over the years.

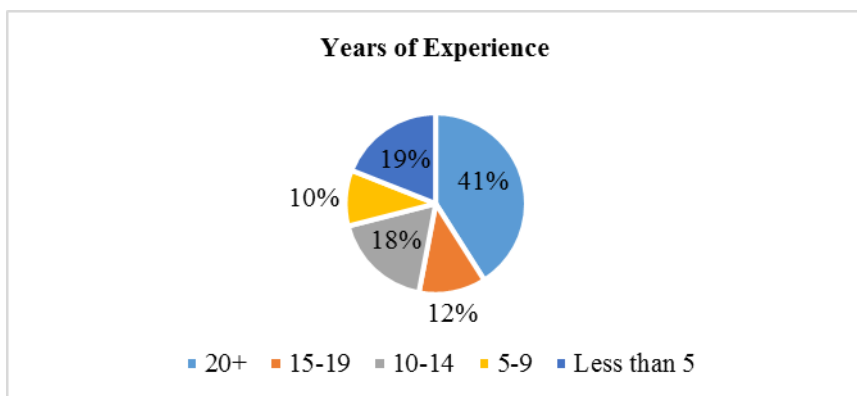
A little more than three-quarters of respondents have a master's degree (76%;  $n= 39$ ), 12% have a 4-year college degree, and both doctoral and professional degree was 3 each (6% each). No respondents reported less than a 4-year college degree (Figure 3). A master's degree was not a requirement of a special librarian in order to participate within this study.



**Figure 3: Frequency distribution of level of education (N=51)**

Twenty-six percent of respondents ( $n=13$ ) currently work in an academic library (law, public health, university subject department, technical academic), 18% ( $n=9$ ) within corporate (pharmaceutical, records management, global manufacturing, advertising), 14% in law firm ( $n=7$ ), 6% in federal/state/county/court ( $n=3$ ), 6% in other federal government ( $n=3$ ), 2% as consultant/independent ( $n=1$ ), and 2% vendor/publisher ( $n=1$ ). Other included 26% of respondents ( $n=13$ ) with responses of tribal, federally funded research and development center, archives, museum, student, non-profit, academic educator, public research funder, retired, and unemployed.

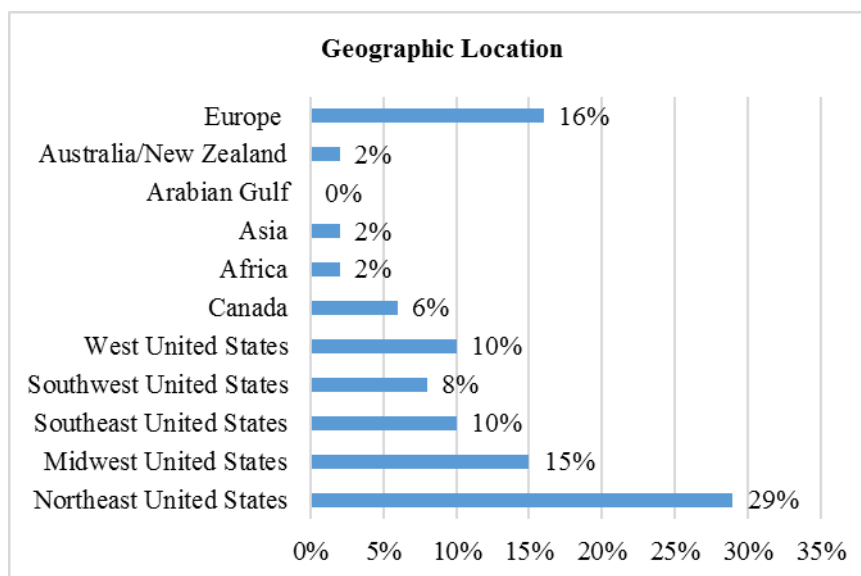
The largest percent, forty-one percent of respondents ( $n=21$ ) have 20+ years of experience, 12% ( $n=6$ ) have 15-19 years of experience, 18% ( $n=9$ ) have 10-14, 10% ( $n=5$ ) have 5-9 years, and 19% ( $n=10$ ) have less than 5 years of experience working in a special library (Figure 4). This is also comparative to the profession as there are now more than five generations working within the workplace.



**Figure 4: Frequency distribution of years of experience working in a special library (N=51)**

Job titles were across the board: 52% ( $n=26$ ) included the word “library” or “librarian” even with continuous transition and expansion of titles and names within the profession (such as analyst, information specialist). 40% ( $n=20$ ) of respondents were in positions with management titles such as director, manager or supervisor.

All fifty-one respondents reported their geographic location. As figure 5 shows, 29% ( $n=15$ ) were from Northeast (New England or Mid-Atlantic), 15% ( $n=8$ ) from the Midwest (East North Central / West North Central), 10% ( $n=5$ ) from Southeast, 8% ( $n=4$ ) from the Southwest, and 10% ( $n=5$ ) from the West (Pacific or Mountain) within the United States. Internationally, Australia/New Zealand, Asia, and Africa each had 2% ( $n=1$ ) of respondents in these locations. Six percent ( $n=3$ ) were from Canada and 16% ( $n=8$ ) from Europe. These locations were included within the study as Special Libraries Association has corresponding chapters within these areas. 28% of respondents were outside of the United States.



**Figure 5: Frequency distribution of geographic location (N=51)**

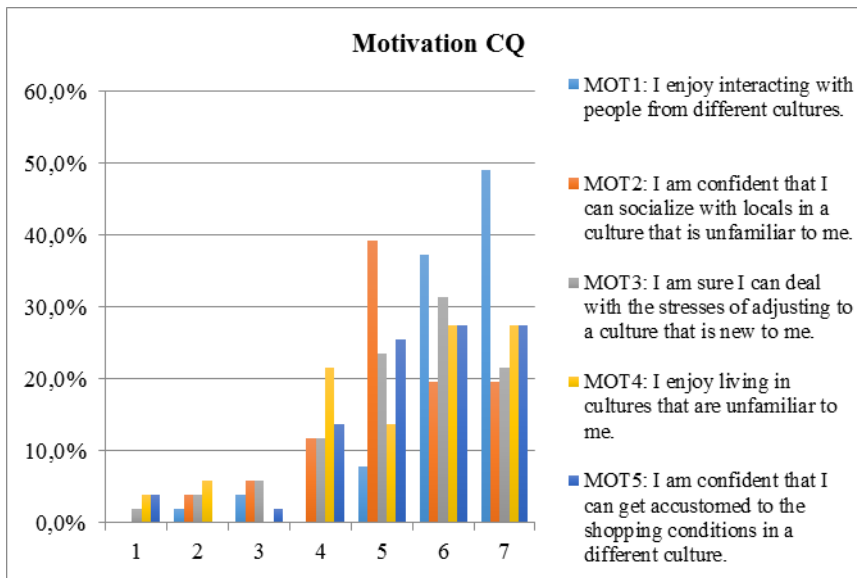
Seventy-one percent ( $n=36$ ) were born within the United States and 29% ( $n=15$ ) were not. The majority of respondents, 39% ( $n=20$ ) speak and/or write two languages, 27% ( $n=14$ ) speak and/or write one language, 22% ( $n=11$ ) indicated speaking and/or writing three languages. Twelve percent ( $n=6$ ) speak and/or write 4 or more.



**Quantitative Findings of CQS**

The cultural intelligence scale embedded within the web-based survey included twenty items/statements with the four factors of the model (motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral). This scale was set up on a Likert scale of 1 to 7 with 1 as strongly disagree, 7 as strongly agree, and the range in-between. Descriptive statistics show the findings from each of the items within the four elements of CQ below. All 51 respondents completed all questionnaire items related to the CQS. MOT1-MOT5 represent the five motivational CQ statements, COG1-COG6 represents the six cognitive statements, MC1-MC4 represent the four metacognitive statements, and BEH1-BEH5 represent the five behavioral statements on the CQS.

**Motivation CQ Scores.** These relate to your drive and self-confidence to use your cultural understanding in multicultural situations. For the first two statements, *MOT1: I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures*, and *MOT2: I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me* no one rated themselves at “strongly disagree.” Forty-nine percent of 51 respondents responded as “strongly agree” for *MOT1*. Almost 60%, a majority of responses, chose either agree or strongly agree for both statements 4 and 5 (*MOT4: I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me*, and *MOT5: I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture*). The means for each statement were all higher than “somewhat agree.”



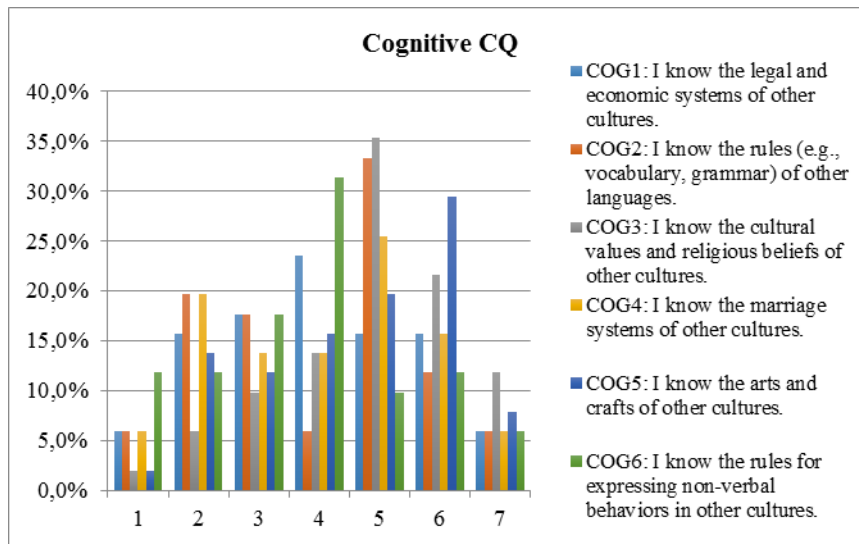
**Figure 6: Motivation CQ Questionnaire Items**

Note: Likert scale on horizontal axis from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) in ascending order. Vertical axis represents percentage of respondents' agreement per MOT statement.

**Table 1. Motivation Cultural Intelligence Range, Means, and Standard Deviations**

Statistic	MOT1	MOT2	MOT3	MOT4	MOT5
Min Value	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Max Value	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Mean	6.22	5.24	5.31	5.27	5.49
Standard Deviation	1.09	1.28	1.45	1.63	1.41
Variance	1.19	1.63	2.10	2.67	1.98

**Cognitive CQ Scores.** Cognitive (knowledge) relates to how one functions within a new culture and understands cultures as similar or different. There was a significant amount of variation with the cognitive scores versus motivational scores. All 51 respondents responded with values from 1 to 7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree with all values in-between). The means were lower for all statements and all around “neither agree nor disagree.” From 1 to 6 individuals responded “strongly disagree” for each statement. *COG3: I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures* had the highest number of respondents (18) for “somewhat agree.”



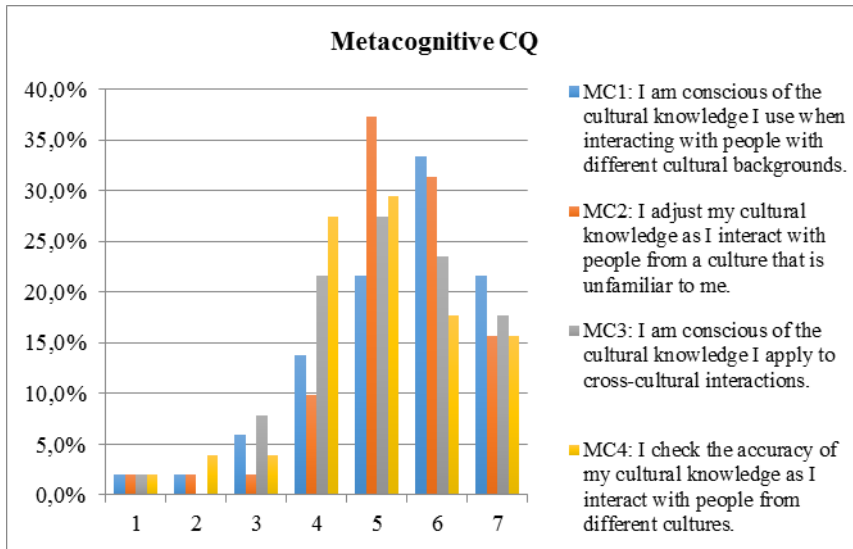
**Figure 7: Cognitive CQ Questionnaire Items**

Note: Likert scale on horizontal axis from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) in ascending order. Vertical axis represents percentage of respondents' agreement per COG statement.

**Table 2. Cognitive Cultural Intelligence Range, Means, and Standard Deviations**

Statistic	COG1	COG2	COG3	COG4	COG5	COG6
Min Value	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Max Value	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Mean	3.98	4.00	4.86	4.04	4.57	3.75
Standard Deviation	1.63	1.68	1.43	1.69	1.61	1.65
Variance	2.65	2.82	2.04	2.86	2.60	2.74

**Metacognitive CQ Scores.** This factor relates to one's awareness of a situation and how that awareness is used. There was not too much variation among means or standard deviation. *MC4: I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures* had the lowest mean. For MC2-MC4, majority of respondents selected "somewhat agree." There were a minimum (4% or less) of responses to "strongly disagree" and "disagree" for all statements.



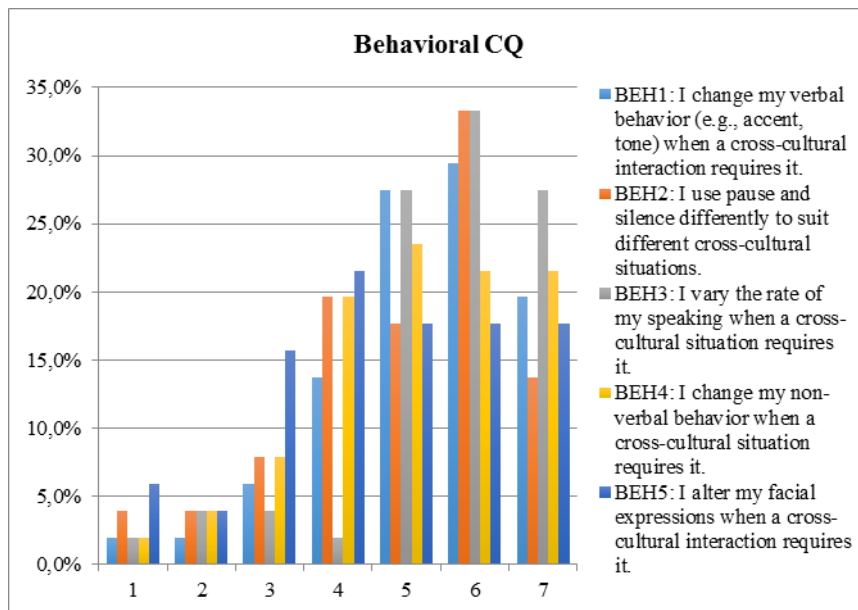
**Figure 8: Metacognitive CQ Questionnaire Items**

Note: Likert scale on horizontal axis from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) in ascending order. Vertical axis represents percentage of respondents' agreement per MC statement.

**Table 3. Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence Range, Means, and Standard Deviations**

Statistic	MC1	MC2	MC3	MC4
Min Value	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Max Value	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Mean	5.37	5.35	5.14	4.94
Standard Deviation	1.39	1.22	1.33	1.38
Variance	1.92	1.48	1.77	1.90

**Behavioral CQ Scores.** This CQ factor relates to our action; do we adapt our nonverbal and verbal communications when we approach a multicultural situation. *BEH5: I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it* had the lowest mean and the highest variance. Majority of respondents (22%) responded “neither agree nor disagree” to BEH5 and 6% “strongly disagreed.” For *BEH2: I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations* and *BEH3: I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it* 33% of respondents “agreed.”



**Figure 9: Behavioral CQ Questionnaire Items**

**Note:** Likert scale on horizontal axis from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) in ascending order. Vertical axis represents percentage of respondents' agreement per BEH statement.

**Table 4. Behavioral Cultural Intelligence Range, Means, and Standard Deviations**

Statistic	BEH1	BEH2	BEH3	BEH4	BEH5
Min Value	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Max Value	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Mean	5.29	4.98	5.59	5.10	4.65
Standard Deviation	1.36	1.54	1.39	1.50	1.70
Variance	1.85	2.37	1.93	2.25	2.90

***Qualitative Findings of Open-ended Items***

Eight items offered the opportunity for participants to provide narrative responses. Fifty-one complete responses were received for all 8 items. The open-ended items are available in Table 5. The responses are being analyzed and will include additional responses once the focus groups are completed. These findings represent a portion of the analysis as it is currently still in progress. Questions #3-6 are not included within this analysis due to expansion in phase 2, however there is some overlap identified within coding and themes present in these questions within the other questions.

**Table 5. Open-ended items**

Question #	Open-ended items
1	What has been your experience with the term or phrase “cultural intelligence”?
2	What do you believe is the value of cultural intelligence to special libraries?
3	Do you have the drive and motivation to work through challenges that come with cross-cultural situations you encounter?
4	Do you have the cultural understanding needed to be effective culturally within your organization?
5	Share an example of a time when you were aware of a multicultural situation at work and how you managed the situation effectively.
6	Share an experience in which you modified your actions and adapted to different cultural norms within your organization.
7	How important is cultural intelligence in your current role?
8	Do you believe your cultural intelligence impacts your organization and/or library? If so, how?

When asked what their experience was with the term or phrase “cultural intelligence” (Q1), 51% of respondents have either never heard of the term “cultural intelligence” prior to this survey or have rarely heard it used in professional context. Only 3% responded to learning about it in undergraduate and graduate studies, and 3% have heard the term within the news, current events or on-going political discussions. One respondent stated, “I have experienced people use the term, but I’m not sure all the participants had the

same understanding of what it meant.” This is certainly possible as the term cultural intelligence was officially defined in 2003, and have been referred as other terms.

Of the forty-nine percent who have heard of this term, many have understood the term first hand through their experiences. One respondent discussed how they “often step back and seek to understand the populations that our projects serve and gather information from the stakeholders to understand better their needs for information.” While another expressed how cultural intelligence is embedded in their personal approach to life due to living in different countries and traveling. This respondent tends to, “see it as something which other people find surprising or execute poorly, but I also try to make a conscious effort to ensure I’m behaving in a culturally intelligent way myself.” Another respondent said, “cultural intelligence has been a measure in two of the organizations I have worked in as a special librarian” where it was used to “measure a person’s ability to welcome, accept, and integrate into, new environments, when working or competing.”

When considering the value of cultural intelligence to special libraries (Q2), the majority of respondents (90%) expressed that CQ was important due to the diverse clientele that we serve. One commented that, “there are multiple cultures within an organization and the librarian must recognize and know those differences.” Another stated that, “we need to know who we are serving and why in order to follow the widely divergent expectations.” Further, “understanding different cultural mores and behaviors helps librarians to better serve their users.” Working with a global clientele was a consistent theme where one respondent stated, “there is benefit for knowledge sharing and interpersonal interaction.” Another librarian agreed in that, “a special librarian must recognize how cultures change and adapt to them, both in the way they create and maintain relationships and in how they provide services.” Adapting to change was another strong theme identified. “Cultural intelligence is a necessary attribute for special librarians to have in order to adapt and succeed in times of constant change.” This is an “essential attribute as our work environment is constantly changing and the change is accelerating.”

Eighty percent of respondents thought that cultural intelligence was very important in their current role when asked ‘how important is CQ in your current role’ (Q7). Two participants mentioned how emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence relate to one another. While they have different definitions, emotional intelligence does overlap with the CQ strategy (metacognitive) element as this factor relates to self-awareness of a situation and how that awareness is used. Others responded that “working with people of many different nationalities make using CQ important,” and “my students are global as well as local... and there are different expectations from communication and interactions, thus cultural intelligence is extremely important.” Two themes that came up more than 50% among respondents were *global* and *language*. “Being

our company has offices around the world, I serve the globe” one respondent stated. Another expressed how important it is to job security and “being seen as adding value and being indispensable within the organization” as libraries and librarians are outsourced or downsized.

Regarding Q8, only three respondents thought that CQ did not impact their organization or their library and two respondents did not know (10%). Themes within this question related to 1) relationships with internal stakeholders, 2) interactions with external patrons, 3) communication and 4) effectiveness in doing your job. “I believe it does positively impact my organization and library because folks feel like they have a safe place or safe person to talk to.” Similarly, another pointed out that, “if there is a lack of understanding, the work is not done well, and there is a higher level of discomfort among colleagues.” Cultural intelligence can “help my colleagues work with disparate groups within and outside of my organization.” Building relationships was also mentioned a dozen times in context of the both internal and external patrons. “I am a representative for the library, my ability (or lack of ability) to gain trust and build relationships within my liaison departments affects their relationship with the library.” One respondent summarized this in a way that relates to the profession as a whole, “if we are not culturally sensitive or aware, we are likely to alienate each other (as professional colleagues) and we are also likely to alienate our user-base. If we cannot maintain our relationship with our user-base, we will become obsolete at worst and at best less robust (fewer staff, etc.)”

## 6. Summary & Implications

An initial 148 individuals from SLA membership responded to this research survey request. Fifty-one provided complete survey responses. Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data from phase 1 was presented. Statistics and frequency distributions were used to analyze the CQ data. The coding & themes were used to examine the qualitative open-ended items. This initial research study of special librarians supports the following conclusions: 1) special librarians feel that CQ is important to their organization and role, and 2) there were varying levels of cultural intelligence and various experiences with the term. The majority of respondents felt their organization can benefit from CQ particularly when working with such diverse colleagues and diverse clients globally (from different generations, genders, race/ethnicities). The overall level of CQ and variations within each element did vary among participants. These findings of phase 1 contribute to the literature on CQ and provide evidence that special librarians can use to deepen their knowledge of CQ within their organizations and/or libraries. Training and embedding cultural intelligence practices within regular practice are starting points.

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