

Monocultural Authority and Imperialist Extraction in the Primary-Secondary Source Division Implications for Library Instruction

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Article abstract

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Monocultural Authority and Imperialist Extraction in the Primary-Secondary Source Division: Implications for Library Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines one way that colonial logic is embedded in Western academic practices. It argues that the conventional dichotomy between primary and secondary sources in the humanities and social sciences reflects western monocultural hegemony in its application to non-western knowledges. In these fields, primary sources are treated as objects, analysed as evidence, and used as data, while secondary sources get to act as subjects and are engaged with as experts. This paper identifies a problematic dynamic where Indigenous authorities whose expertise does not align with Western academic norms are categorised and used as primary sources, thereby stripping them of their agency and subjectivity. Their knowledge is extracted, commodified, and appropriated for the benefit of the West. Further, the paper critiques the role of librarians and archivists in perpetuating this colonial logic through their instruction practices and professional frameworks and standards, especially around primary source literacy and evaluating authority. These practices promulgate monocultural tools through which knowledge is extracted and evaluated. This paper calls on librarians to critically assess their role in maintaining colonial structures that continue to marginalise Indigenous Knowledge.

Keywords: *evaluating information · Indigenous knowledges · information literacy · knowledge organization · primary source literacy · ways of knowing*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse une manière dont la logique coloniale est ancrée dans les pratiques académiques occidentales. Il soutient que la dichotomie conventionnelle entre les sources primaires et secondaires en sciences humaines et sociales reflète l'hégémonie monoculturelle occidentale dans son application aux savoirs non occidentaux. Dans ces domaines, les sources primaires sont traitées comme des objets, analysées comme des preuves et utilisées comme des données, tandis que les sources secondaires agissent comme des sujets et sont engagées en tant qu'expert.e.s. Cet article identifie une dynamique problématique dans laquelle les autorités autochtones dont l'expertise ne correspond pas aux normes académiques occidentales sont catégorisées et utilisées comme sources primaires, les privant ainsi de leur agence et de leur subjectivité. Leurs savoirs sont extraits, marchandisés et appropriés au profit de l'Occident. De plus, l'article critique le rôle des bibliothécaires et des archivistes dans la perpétuation de cette logique coloniale à travers leurs pratiques d'enseignement et leurs cadres et normes professionnels, en particulier autour de l'alphabétisation aux sources primaires et l'évaluation de l'autorité. Ces pratiques promulguent des outils monoculturels à travers lesquels les savoirs sont extraits et évalués. Cet article appelle les bibliothécaires à évaluer de manière critique leur rôle dans le maintien des structures coloniales qui continuent de marginaliser les savoirs autochtones.

Mots-clés : évaluation de l'information · maîtrise de l'information · maîtrise des sources primaires · modes de connaissance · organisation des connaissances · savoirs autochtones

THE way primary and secondary sources are classified and taught by librarians and the academy reflects power, reinforces dominant systems, and enables the extraction of Indigenous Knowledge. Primary and secondary categories are relative—they reflect how a writer uses their sources. Colonial logic is embedded in the way western scholars think about and engage with sources.¹ One significant manifestation of this logic is the classification of Indigenous Knowledge as a primary source in the humanities and social sciences. In these fields, primary sources are analysed as evidence and used as data, while secondary sources are engaged as fellow experts. Primary sources are often judged by their perceived authenticity, while secondary sources are evaluated based on their academic authority. The dichotomies of informant/peer, data/knowledge, and authenticity/authority reflect at their core the treatment of primary sources as objects and secondary sources as subjects. Secondary sources are allowed their subjecthood, while primary sources become objects that are spoken for,

1. It is in the framework of coloniser/colonised that the terms western/non-western are used in this paper. We use western in reference to the culturally supremacist knowledge system emerging from the enlightenment and positivist ideas, that is exclusive of all other ways of knowing and knowledge traditions. The western knowledge system is tied to encyclopaedic colonialist paradigms that aim to collect and extract the knowledge of the colonised. We use non-western to imperfectly refer to ways of knowing and knowledge systems that have been subjugated and extracted under colonist systems while being simultaneously devalued under the western tradition. This term is meant to include the large variety of global knowledge systems including the multitude of diverse Indigenous ways of knowing. In general, we have followed the terminology of our sources when discussing their ideas and arguments.

analysed, extracted, and interpreted in academic discourse. While this terminology is different in the sciences, the same division between data and knowledge exists.

This division becomes problematic when Indigenous experts are categorised and used, incorrectly, as primary sources.² This robs these experts of their agency and subjecthood, reducing their knowledge and expertise to pieces of evidence to be spoken for, interpreted, and analysed, rather than as authorities to be spoken to, engaged, or argued with. Nor does Indigenous Knowledge fit neatly into the western conception of a secondary source, as it is often built on connection and relationship, rather than the distance and compartmentalisation expected of scholarly sources (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005; Deloria 1999). The primary-secondary source divide is projected onto Indigenous Knowledge in an attempt to fit it into a binary that is not applicable. This western either/or thinking denies the integrated nature of Indigenous Knowledge.

This paper examines three ways in which the primary-secondary source divide reflects colonial logic: the subject/object dichotomy, the concept of western “neutrality” and distancing, and ultimately the extraction of Indigenous Knowledge for the benefit of the west. By treating Indigenous experts as primary sources, scholars extract information from its practitioners and creators to claim this knowledge as their own discovery. This extraction coincides with the denial of the expertise of people who created this knowledge—denying them the authority of a secondary source. By attempting to force Indigenous Knowledge into the primary-secondary divide, western scholars deny its very status as *knowledge* and relegate it to raw data. Treating Indigenous Knowledge as a primary source abets western scholars in extracting the knowledge of Indigenous peoples, speaking for Indigenous experts, and ignoring Indigenous interpretations and expertise in favour of their own.

Library and archival teaching often instructs the next generation of researchers on how to extract and analyse Indigenous Knowledge as a primary source, and then situate it within an academic discourse, where only then can it be recognised as knowledge by scholarly authorities. As emerging scholars engage with their sources, library and archival instruction may validate the inappropriate application of the primary and secondary labels to Indigenous Knowledge. In short, the teaching practices of libraries and archives, especially as codified in standard approaches and professional frameworks, are likely to reinforce the exploitative principles of colonial logic, uphold western supremacy, and continue the objectification of Indigenous Knowledge.

2. Many kinds of knowledge worldwide do not conform to the western, male, and scholarly conception of authority and as a result are incorrectly categorised as primary sources or otherwise invalidated, which facilitates the extraction of their knowledge. This includes feminist ways of knowing and many different global knowledge practices. In this paper we focus on Indigenous ways of knowing.

Defining Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary and Secondary are contingent categories—a source’s categorisation depends on how it is used by the author, especially the scholar’s research question (Kragh 1987; Delgadillo and Lynch 1999; Hofer et al. 2012; RBMS 2018). Primary sources are often described as sources “closer” to the topic under study, accompanied by a list of source types (such as letters or diaries) that are often used as primary sources (Library of Congress 2020). At the core, primary sources are sources that are analysed and interpreted by the author, to provide evidence for their argument. Secondary sources are often thought of as being removed from the subject under study, typically books and articles written about the subject with the benefit of hindsight. Secondary sources are those sources that the author engages with as part of a scholarly discourse—they provide arguments, theories, and methods. Typically, scholarly sources are used as secondary sources, but this categorisation is relative, for example when studying the history of a field, scholarly articles might be analysed as a primary source.

The conditional nature of primary sources is a frequent source of confusion, and this issue was identified as a potential information literacy threshold concept in initial stages of the development of the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*, which we will refer to as the *Framework* (ACRL 2015; Hofer et al. 2012). The confusion has led authors such as Bizup to propose moving away from these terms and to categorise sources more explicitly on the ways they are used by the author (Bizup 2008). In this system, primary sources are called exhibit sources—sources that the author presents for analysis. Secondary sources are generally called argument or method sources—sources that the author either engages with and debates or adopts as a method, theory, or lens. Bizup’s categories are useful here, as they elucidate the divergent ways that primary and secondary sources are used by authors.

Disciplinary Differences in Terminology

There are further distinctions between the categories of primary and secondary sources based on the field or context in which they are used. The humanities categorises sources such as a novel or object (photograph, artwork, diary) created during the time being studied as a primary source because, in this context, these pieces of evidence were made by direct participants of past events (Scheuler 2014). By contrast in the sciences, a primary source is any document that provides a comprehensive description of the original research; meaning a field or lab notebook, academic article, patent, or data set would be assessed as primary sources (Holopainen et al. 2023). In both the sciences and the humanities, secondary sources are documents which offer commentary and critique on the historical object, creative

work, or data set in question. They do so by placing the work in conversation with other scholars and scholarship in the field while reviewing or interpreting the methods, argument, and theory present in the primary source, as mentioned above.

In the social sciences, oral histories and interviews can serve as primary sources (Sommer and Quinlan 2018). Individuals who provide this data during interviews, oral history, or ethnographic work are traditionally called “informants” (Vivanco 2018). Like other primary sources of information, the data from interviews and questionnaires is extracted by researchers to be codified and preserved for future analysis, typically by other experts or scholars (Sommer and Quinlan 2018). In this paper, we use the term primary source as it is understood in the humanities and social sciences to mean an object, text, interview, oral history, person, or community under study, rather than how the term is understood in the sciences, which would generally refer to the same concept as data.

Primary and Secondary Source Dichotomies

The primary-secondary source divide represents multiple dichotomies, which define how sources are split into these two discrete groups and ultimately how these groups are interacted with, used, and evaluated. Outlining these differences creates the foundation on which we can analyse the role these divisions play in extraction and colonial logics in scholarship, and make clear the binary nature of these categories.

Informants and Peers

Secondary sources are engaged with as colleagues and peers, while primary sources are often thought of as “informants.” Secondary sources are generally the literature of a field, where scholarly debate and conversation happens. This concept is described in the *Framework* section “Scholarship as Conversation”: “Research in scholarly and professional fields is a discursive practice in which ideas are formulated, debated, and weighed against one another over extended periods of time” (ACRL 2015). Secondary sources are built upon, their ideas forwarded and responded to (Harris 2017). Researchers use secondary sources to draw on the work of other scholars and position themselves within the research tradition of a field (Anson and Schwegler 2000, 636). Secondary sources are used for “questions, problems, and arguments that spur your own thinking” (Booth et al. 2016, 85). Secondary sources can be used as models to follow, authors might adopt their line of reasoning, their thinking, their modes of analysis, their theoretical frameworks, or their methodology (Booth et al. 2016). Overall, secondary sources are the works that an author engages with as an intellectual peer or predecessor. In contrast, primary sources are described as informants and objects: Harris (2017), writing from a humanities perspective,

describes primary sources as “texts,” artefacts that hold meaning, that have been made and designed, and can be “shelved, filed, or stored, and then retrieved and reexamined” (11). The very term informant suggests someone who simply provides data and information (Chandler and Munday 2020). Authors do not enter a conversation with their informants; they are not writing to the people and things they are writing about, but rather writing to their fellow scholars (Harris 2017, 37). The problematic nature of this relationship is evident in fields like cultural anthropology that have worked to change the “informant” terminology to create a more collaborative rather than extractive relationship, using terms like collaborator, interlocutor, or consultant (Vivanco 2018).

Data and Knowledge

The primary-secondary divide is also a divide between what is knowledge and what is data. In information science there is a hierarchical understanding of data, information, and knowledge, in which data is the raw material of information, and information is synthesised to become knowledge. While this definition has been challenged or expanded, a Delphi study of scholars in information science shows how primary sources are treated as a type of data (Zins 2007). Scholars described data variously as: statements by informants in an empirical study, “objects of cultural experience,” raw evidence, or unprocessed artefacts. In other words, descriptions of primary sources and data are strongly overlapping. Importantly, data is typically perceived as raw, unprocessed, even “meaning-neutral” or “without information” before they are interpreted, deciphered, processed, or analysed, just as primary must be analysed and interpreted before it can be considered authoritative knowledge (Given 2008; Zins 2007). Secondary sources on the other hand can be considered knowledge under this definition, by virtue of scholars processing, interpreting, and assigning meaning to sources considered data. As knowledge, secondary sources are accorded higher value than data, for example the *Framework* section, “Information has Value” states that researchers should “value the skills, time, and effort needed to produce knowledge” (ACRL 2015).

Authenticity and Authority

One of the main differences between primary and secondary sources is in how scholars are taught to evaluate them. The authenticity of primary sources is considered critical, and researchers are taught to question and evaluate the authenticity of their primary sources (Given 2008). When these primary sources are people, these “informants” are then judged on their authenticity, a problematic metric that often ignores change and cultural exchange. Secondary sources on the other hand aim to be authoritative not authentic (Ballenger 2009, 11). When assessing

the quality of secondary sources, researchers are advised to look for authoritative sources, and are often given a list of characteristics to evaluate the authority of secondary sources (Ballenger 2009, 73). Typically, authors are deemed authoritative when they have these western markers of authority. The *Framework* discusses evaluating authority as an important aspect of information seeking (ACRL 2015). The *Framework* advises researchers should seek out authority, though it is flexible in pointing out that different questions might require different types of authority, and that different cultures or ways of knowing may produce and evaluate authority differently.

Colonial Logics in the Primary-Secondary Source Divide

These dichotomies between primary and secondary sources are not always problematic—scholars need to engage with the ideas of those they consider their peers, and they typically need to use and analyse primary sources. In many cases it is essential that they analyse and interpret through the biases of their primary sources. However, this relationship becomes extractive as power, authority, and monoculturalism often determine just who gets to be a secondary source. Power determines whose knowledge and ideas are engaged with as an intellectual equal, and on the other hand, whose knowledge is treated as the raw materials of scholarship.

Primary and Secondary sources as Objects and Subjects

As discussed, secondary sources are peers, whose ideas are considered knowledge to be engaged and debated and ultimately forwarded to the reader. In this manner, secondary sources are subjects, they are allowed the agency to speak for themselves. Primary sources on the other hand are treated as data and evidence that must be interpreted and examined. To become knowledge, primary sources must first be interpreted by scholars. Scholars are not in conversation with their primary sources, but rather building arguments about them intended for other scholars. Thus, primary sources are objects, spoken for by others.

When knowledge and people that should be treated as authorities are instead treated as a primary source, it robs that knowledge and people of agency and subjecthood. When treated as a primary source, people are spoken for by scholars, rather than speaking for themselves. Their knowledge is reduced to mere data. This miscategorisation of knowledge is all too common, especially for Indigenous Knowledge and authorities, who instead of being acknowledged as experts and subjective actors are reduced to the role of primary sources and the objects of study. As Tuhiwai Smith (2021) points out “the objects of research do not have a voice and do

not contribute to research or science” (107). Through the primary-secondary source division, scholars rob Indigenous experts of their voice, agency, and authority.

“Neutrality” and Distancing

Western research methodologies prize distance from the object of research, which in this positivist construction imparts neutrality and objectivity to the researcher. Such theories posit that researchers should be outsiders who can observe without bias or self-implication, and who operate at a distance from communities (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Even the use of third person in scholarly writing is designed to project a false perception of objectivity, as its use “can create distance between [the writer] and the research at hand, which allows the writer to maintain an objective tone and stance” (SJSU 2022). Primary sources are often defined as first-hand sources, evaluated on authenticity based on how close to the object or time of study they are, while secondary sources are sources that are more distanced from the object of study (Library of Congress 2020). Under the western construction this distance inherently imparts secondary sources with an assumed objectivity which allows them authority. Thus, primary sources are evaluated inversely from western conceptions of authority.

The value placed on distance is used to delegitimise non-western experts, researchers, and knowledge, placing them into the category of primary source for not being “properly” distanced. The primary-secondary divide places Indigenous scholars in a double bind, both too Indigenous to be distanced, while too westernised to be “authentically” Indigenous (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Indigenous scholars can find themselves “marginalised and dismissed as contaminated, impure and inauthentic” (Harris et al. 2013, 2). While Indigenous experts without a western education have their authority and expertise questioned. The value of distance in the primary-secondary division positions authenticity and authority as mutually exclusive. This binary cannot encompass the fact that Indigenous Knowledge is often rooted in experience and relationships, and indeed that this is a source of its authority, rather than in opposition to it.

Colonial Logic and Extraction

As illustrated in the discussion above, extraction is how western scholars extricate “raw data” from primary sources, before situating that data in disciplinary discourse with secondary sources to become information, and then synthesising that information into knowledge. This academic process is an uncanny mirror to those of colonialism: the extraction of raw goods and materials from colonies, exploitation of labour to create marketable goods with those materials in the industrial zones of empires, before packaging and selling these newfound products as commodities,

often back to the very people who were stripped of the raw materials in the first place to enact policies of economic domination (Kumar 2021; Ortiz 2023, 1; Young 2015, 54; Scale 2021, 4; Junka-Aikio and Cortes-Severino 2017, 177). This extension of colonial logic allows western scholars to extract data and lay claim to it because of their role in the production of knowledge, their distance from the primary sources of this information, and their certifications, e.g., academic degrees, that imbue them with the bureaucratic authority to synthesise data into knowledge. In contrast, scholars' reciprocal relationship with other authorities is evident through the practice of discourse and the engagement of secondary sources. Scholars initiate academic conversations through scholarly publications and presentations, establishing relational, disciplinary discourse according to their ontological frameworks (Phillips 1948).

Colonial Logics and Indigenous Knowledge

Forcing Indigenous Knowledge into the primary-secondary source divide of objectification, distance, and extraction, just outlined, is a pernicious application of colonial logic. These logics allow scholars to extract and claim Indigenous Knowledge, by treating it as a primary source, while denying the authority and expertise of Indigenous people—by excluding them from the authority of a secondary source. It is “extremely rare and unusual when indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place” (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, 75). Treating Indigenous Knowledge as a primary source is to deny its status as knowledge, and to relegate that knowledge to data that must be interpreted by others. This allows western scholars to speak for Indigenous people, to ignore their interpretations and offer their own. This categorisation of Indigenous Knowledge is an act of silencing, that diminishes Indigenous experts, and denies their agency and self-determination.

The primary-secondary source division exemplifies how Indigenous scholars have discussed the treatment of their knowledge by western scholars. Vine Deloria Jr. describes Western Science as “examin[ing] tribal knowledge to locate interesting tidbits and insights and use these ideas to enhance its own activities,” by doing so scholars divide Indigenous Knowledge into discrete bits to be extracted, rather than seeing it as a complete, holistic way of understanding the world (1999, 65). Tuhiwai Smith (2021) argues that western researchers extract and claim ownership of Indigenous Knowledge while rejecting the Indigenous people who created that knowledge. Lambert (2014) has described traditional western research methodology as one in which “the researcher as the ‘authority,’ an expert who can describe and predict changes in a society even if the ‘objects’ of the study disagree with the

findings” (13). Lambert perfectly describes the primary source-ification of Indigenous Knowledge, objectification of Indigenous experts, and the primacy in western scholarship of the authoritative secondary source. Furthering this harm, categorising or using a source as a primary source devalues the knowledge tradition that it comes from, sending the message that this way of knowing does not create authoritative knowledge. Indigenous scholars who seek to use Indigenous Knowledge and cite Indigenous experts have their scholarship questioned for not including the secondary literature, precisely because these sources are wrongly categorised as primary sources. Editors will then require the citation of white western scholars (Movono et al. 2021). Indigenous scholars have made the argument that Indigenous Knowledge systems and methods, such as storywork, should be valued and are valid, as well as fighting for self-determination and agency in many venues including scholarship (Archibald et al. 2019). “Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, 68).

Library Instruction’s Role in Upholding Colonial Logics

Teaching Authority and Source Evaluation

Librarians often teach how to evaluate the authority of sources in order to identify sources that are appropriate to use as either a secondary or primary source. Such teaching has been typically dominated by checklists and tests (named using acronyms such as ABC, CRAAP, RADAR, and 5 Ws) that verify that a source conforms to the western academic way of knowing in order to be used as a secondary source (Schrock 1998; Blakeslee 2004, 4; Mandalios 2013; Radom and Gammons 2014). Almost all such tools include evaluating authority via proxies such as publisher status and the authors’ credentials (Sye and Thompson 2023). This focus reflects the west’s dependence on bureaucratic processes that provide markers of authority. Additionally, students are often taught to check for bias, often characterised as a lack of distance from the subject. These requirements limit the range of acceptable secondary sources to ones specifically produced by western academic ways of knowing, while other sources are only acceptable when relegated to the status of primary source. This binary thinking was evident in the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, now superseded by the *Framework*, which “dichotomise[d] information” as either reliable and valid or not (Seale 2010). Thus, teaching only a binary western conception of authority has confined non-western experts to objecthood, and unfortunately “as librarians teaching information literacy, we seldom reflect on how the work of the university sees Indigenous people primarily as Othered objects of research and rarely as researchers” (Loyer 2018, 147).

Librarians are working to make source evaluation more critical and culturally aware. The *Framework*, adopted in 2015, encourages teaching a broader definition of authority, one that takes into account the context and culturally constructed nature of authority (ACRL 2015). However, the *Framework* still sidelines non-western authority as an alternative to “traditional,” read western, forms of authority, while failing to fully engage in the power dynamics inherent in academic research (Battista et al. 2015; Watkins 2017). Practitioners of critical pedagogy have worked to disrupt binary and simplistic constructions of authority in library instruction, as well as encourage students to recognise and seek marginalised voices and authorities that go unrecognised by western mechanisms (Bartow and Mann 2020; Donovan and O’Donnell 2013; Tewell and Angell 2016; Watkins 2017). Maria T. Accardi (2013) writes persuasively that library instruction should integrate feminist ways of knowing, rather than only teaching male-dominated western knowledge practices. Overall, critical librarians have a robust history of developing library instruction that questions western authority and values diverse ways of knowing.

Critical approaches to authority, however, have not yet fully permeated library instruction, and unfortunately, with the crisis of fake news, culturally informed approaches to authority have received significant pushback. In response, librarians such as Andrea Baer (2018) have written to reaffirm the importance of teaching authority as being constructed and contextual. Indeed, the fake news crisis exists within a western construction of authority, because it takes advantage of the west’s bureaucratic approach to authority, as traditional Western gatekeepers of information no longer serve as effective filters (Badke, 2017). Thus it makes little sense then that teaching other cultural conceptions of authority would worsen this crisis. Rather, Indigenous approaches to knowledge are often based in relationships, community, traditional lifeways, and stories, and are likely to be more resistant to disinformation by outsiders, as long-standing community relationships are more difficult to fake or co-opt (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005). Librarians should work to more fully teach contextual approaches to authority, and our instruction should acknowledge the value of non-western knowledge, authority, and ways of knowing; adopting lessons from diverse ways of knowing will improve students’ ability to be more critical users of information. Teaching limited evaluative methods and definitions of authority is an act of gatekeeping that will not solve the disinformation crisis, instead: it teaches students to force all information into the primary-secondary divide, wrongly relegating Indigenous experts to primary sources.

Teaching Primary Source Information Literacy

Libraries professionals, from archivists to liaison librarians, recognise the significance of primary source literacy. Across library professions, there is substantial discourse surrounding the development of primary source competencies (Daines et al. 2022; Badhe 2013). Primary source literacy competencies have been established by professional bodies, including the Rare Book and Manuscript Section's (RBMS) *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*, and the *Framework* (RBMS 2018; ACRL 2015). Even the *Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals* makes reference to the significance of primary source literacy instruction and RBMS librarians' responsibility to share this knowledge (RBMS 2008). As these guidelines have been created by libraries professionals with various specialities, for specific areas of librarianship, their foci vary, but they all underscore the significance of primary source literacy by highlighting libraries professionals' roles in teaching this competency. A few of the core primary source literacy competencies libraries professionals teach may include: locating a first-hand account of an event or idea; reading, understanding, and summarising knowledge can be gleaned from primary sources and why this information cannot be found elsewhere; interpreting, evaluating, and analysing the type of information presented by first-hand accounts; and how to appropriately incorporate both primary and secondary sources into their own research (RBMS 2018, 4-6). Librarians' information literacy instruction teaches the next generation of researchers to interpret sources (Scheuler 2014).

Most primary sources are removed from their original context when students engage with them in addition to the challenge of missing key pieces of bibliographic information. Students, therefore, are taught to engage with the primary source as they are and extract the information available to address some of the aforementioned questions. By extracting these key pieces of evidence from primary sources, students then use this data to inform their arguments; a disciplinary rite of passage for burgeoning western scholars. There are many contexts, however, in which this model is harmful, particularly when employed in the western model of scholarship that devalues multicultural ways of knowing. Primary source instruction forces Indigenous Knowledge into the inappropriate primary-secondary binary, and even calling such teaching "primary source instruction" presumes that all such sources are available for extraction. For example, western scholars have historically failed to recognise the difference between oral histories and Indigenous oral traditions, which has resulted in the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Indigenous Knowledge, as well as the dissemination of culturally sensitive data (Sommer and Quinlan 2018).

Librarians have the opportunity to counter colonial logics and move past extractive practices by integrating principles of Indigenous Knowledge, particularly: relationality, reciprocity, and respect, into their primary source instruction (Littletree et al. 2023). Indigenous librarians and scholars have developed robust principles of Indigenous information literacy and relational pedagogy that should lead librarians in decolonising their instruction.³ Indigenous informed information literacy situates librarians “in a framework of care because it recognises that those who teach information literacy are responsible not only for the mental work of research but also for providing an ethic of care” (Loyer 2018, 153). By practising the tenants of respect, relationality, and reciprocity, centering the whole student, and reflecting on their personal successes or failures in this work, librarians can subvert colonial power dynamics, and further, work to make libraries, both as institutions and as a profession, more diverse and welcoming for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Knowledge (Andrews 2018).

Librarians should apply the principles of Indigenous information literacy to “primary source” instruction, which will require recognising the impact of power and colonialism and the significance of cultural context, relationships, and trust. In such instruction, Indigenous sources must be approached by moving away from teaching that dichotomises information into a strict binary of primary and secondary. Instead, Indigenous sources should be approached with an ethic of care and understood within the context of Indigenous worldviews, values, and communities. To engage students with these issues librarians can use questions such as: What is the relationship between the people involved in the creation of this knowledge and how has it evolved within the community? How is materiality, place, and time reflected in this knowledge? How does this knowledge relate to holistic worldviews, histories, or Indigenous ways of life? Additionally, library professionals will need to expand beyond the written manuscript sources that are staples of archival collections, to incorporate material and oral sources into students’ understanding of Indigenous Knowledge. Such instruction has to go beyond “teach[ing] students how to assess, critique, find, and use resources [but also] instruct them on the lasting effects of doing traumatic research and giving [Indigenous scholars] the tools to take care of themselves in this process” (Loyer 2018, 154). By situating the cultural context of the relationship between scholars, lines of inquiry, and sources of knowledge, specifically when engaging with Indigenous Knowledge, librarians can transform what was once an extractive practice into relational and sustainable framework.

3. See the following sources for more in-depth discussions of Indigenous information literacy and relational librarianship: Ball and Lar-Son 2021; Dudley and Blackbird 2021; Edwards 2019; Gosart 2021; Hurley et al. 2017; Lilley 2021; Littletree et al. 2023; Loyer 2018; Turner 2021.

Conclusion

The primary-secondary source divide as applied to diverse ways of knowing is shaped by colonial and imperial logic. Primary sources are characterised as data to be analysed by scholars and evaluated based on their authenticity. Secondary sources are considered knowledge to be engaged by scholars and evaluated based on their authority and distance. These dichotomies form the foundation of colonial methods that force a false division on Indigenous authorities and confine them to the role of primary source, as they lack the distance and bureaucratic markers that define authority in the western scholarly tradition. Such a classification denies agency and subjectivity to these authorities, who as a primary source in an academic context, must be interpreted to be heard, must be analysed to be knowledge. Ultimately this facilitates extraction of their knowledge by scholars for the benefit of the west. The standards, frameworks, and practices of library instruction are a key facilitator of this extraction, they perpetuate this binary system of categorisation and limited way of thinking about sources, upholding the primacy of western scholarship over Indigenous Knowledge. Librarians must extricate themselves from these extractive models of thinking about authority, knowledge, and data, and move to models based on relationality, reciprocity, and respect. A relational, rather than extractive interaction with sources of information and knowledge is a contextually informed way of knowing and provides a sustainable path for scholarship. We must decolonise our thinking about whose knowledge is valid. Library professionals should embrace the duality of Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge that is authoritative precisely because of its connection to community, experiences, and relationships.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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