



Practicing Cultural Humility in Behavioral Health: Beyond Competence, Toward Connection

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Learning Objectives

- By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
 1. Describe the principles of cultural humility
 2. Identify at least two strategies for integrating cultural humility into behavioral health practice to address systemic disparities



Community Agreements

- **BE PRESENT**
 - Bring your full self into the room
 - Free your mind from distractions
- **BE COMPASSIONATE**
 - Turn to curiosity when you feel tension in yourself, with the material, or in the discussion
 - Resist judgement by asking questions of yourself and others
- **BE GENEROUS**
 - Share your own knowledge and resources in the discussion
 - Share good energy and ask questions
- **BE BRAVE**
 - Be courageous in your honesty when asked to reflect
 - Commit to applying what you learn in your work
 - Prepare for and expect unfinished business



Starting Point: The Truth

- **The behavioral health field has caused harm** — not only through omission, but through racism, classism, and institutional neglect.
- **Behavioral health care is not experienced equitably**
Access, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes differ dramatically across racial and cultural lines.
- **Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities** face disproportionate barriers to care — including provider bias, lack of culturally grounded services, and systemic exclusion.
- **Trust has been broken.**
And healing — at every level — requires us to show up differently.



Why It Matters: Now

- **DEI programs are being dismantled or defunded** across health systems, education, and government in response to political backlash.
- **Many organizations are rebranding or retreating** from equity work — even as disparities persist and deepen.
- **Without intentional, relational, and equity-rooted practices, behavioral health inequities will only deepen.**
- **Cultural humility offers a grounded, strengths-based path forward** — rooted in connection, reflection, and accountability.
- **This work is no longer optional — it is essential.**





Beyond Cultural Competence

"Connection is the antidote to domination."

Mia Mingus



Reflection

5-minute pair share

- Think about a time when you felt truly seen and respected in a care setting.
 - What made that experience possible?
 - How did the provider show respect for your identity, background, or story?



Cultural Competence

- **Cultural competency** is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.
- It involves:
 - Awareness of one's own cultural worldview
 - Knowledge of different cultural practices and perspectives
 - Development of cross-cultural communication and interaction skills



Cultural Competence Model: Limitations

- **Implied Mastery** – Assumes culture can be fully understood or mastered
- **Skills > Self-Reflection** – Emphasizes knowledge over examining one's own bias
- **Power Dynamics Overlooked** – Ignores systemic and relational inequities
- **Stereotyping Risk** – Reduces cultures to static categories; ignores complexities & intersectionality
- **Lacks Humility & Curiosity** – Centers expertise over openness to others' truths
- **Misses Connection** – Doesn't center authentic, respectful relationship-building
- **No Structural Accountability** – Focuses only on individual skill-building



From Cultural Competency to Cultural Humility

Limitation of Cultural Competency

Implied Mastery – Assumes culture can be fully understood or mastered

Skills > Self-Reflection – Emphasizes knowledge over examining one's own bias

Power Dynamics Overlooked – Ignores systemic and relational inequities

Stereotyping Risk – Reduces cultures to static categories; ignores intersectionality

Lacks Humility & Curiosity – Centers expertise over openness to others' truths

Misses Connection – Doesn't center authentic, respectful relationship-building

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Cultural Humility

✓ **Lifelong Learning:** Humility embraces growth and unlearning without a finish line

✓ **Self-Reflection:** Encourages ongoing exploration of our own identities and assumptions

✓ **Power-Consciousness:** Acknowledges and works to rebalance power in clinical and organizational settings

✓ **Contextualized Understanding:** Recognizes intersectionality and the fluidity of identity

✓ **Curiosity and Humility:** Centers listening, questioning, and honoring lived experience

✓ **Relational Orientation:** Prioritizes trust, co-creation, and mutual respect

✓ **Institutional Accountability:** Requires systemic reflection and organizational change to align with equity principles



Principles & Practices

Cultural Humility



Cultural Humility

(definitions)

- A lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique, acknowledging power imbalances, and committing to institutional accountability.

Tervalon & Murray-García (1998)

- Cultural humility moves beyond the concept of cultural competence to focus on self-humility rather than achieving a state of knowledge or awareness. It requires acknowledging institutional oppression and working to dismantle it as part of service delivery.

Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin (2015)



Lifelong Learning

- **Principle:**

Cultural humility is not a skill to master but a lifelong commitment to growth, unlearning, and being changed by what we encounter.

- **Practices:**

- Engage in regular personal and professional development focused on equity and identity.
- Remain open to feedback — especially from those with less institutional power.
- Recognize that cultural learning is dynamic and non-linear.

Tervalon & Murray-García (1998); Foronda et al. (2016)



Critical Self-Reflection

- **Principle:**
Self-reflection is essential to understanding how your values, social location, and biases shape interactions and decisions.
- **Practices:**
 - Journal or process after difficult interactions: *What came up for you? Why?*
 - Explore your social identity wheel and note areas of privilege and marginalization.
 - Use peer consultation or supervision to check blind spots.

Hook et al. (2013); Fisher-Borne et al. (2015)



Power Consciousness

- **Principle:**

Cultural humility requires an active awareness of power — in relationships, roles, and systems — and a commitment to challenge imbalances.

- **Practices:**

- Use shared decision-making practices with clients.
- Reflect on how your role may unintentionally reinforce power hierarchies.
- Advocate for policies and practices that redistribute power in your organization.

Fisher-Borne et al. (2015); Yeager & Bauer-Wu (2013)



Intersectionality & Complexity

- **Principle:**

People live at the intersection of multiple identities, and their experiences are shaped by overlapping systems of oppression and privilege.

- **Practices:**

- Ask open-ended questions about how clients define themselves and what matters to them.
- Avoid assuming someone's experience based on a single identity category.
- Incorporate intersectional case examples into team discussions or training.

Crenshaw (1991); Ortega & Faller (2011)



Humility & Curiosity

- **Principle:**

Cultural humility centers openness, not certainty — it's about listening deeply, asking meaningful questions, and learning alongside others.

- **Practices:**

- Say: “Can you help me understand?” or “What would you like me to know?”
- Challenge your own need to “know” or “fix” when engaging across difference.
- Cultivate a habit of inquiry rather than assumption.

Hook et al. (2013); Foronda et al. (2016)



Authentic Relationships

- **Principle:**

Healing happens in relationships grounded in mutual respect, attunement, and emotional safety — not just technical skill.

- **Practices:**

- Prioritize trust-building over efficiency when possible.
- Slow down. Make space for connection before diving into assessment.
- Use non-defensive repair if harm occurs in a relationship.

Yeager & Bauer-Wu (2013); Foronda et al. (2016)



Institutional Accountability

- **Principle:**
Cultural humility must be embedded in organizational culture — not just practiced by individuals.
- **Practices:**
 - Examine your organization's policies: Are they inclusive, trauma-informed, and community-responsive?
 - Build in mechanisms for client/community feedback.
 - Promote leadership pathways for BIPOC staff and historically marginalized groups.

Tervalon & Murray-García (1998); Fisher-Borne et al. (2015); Danso (2018)



Bringing It Into Practice

Of the cultural humility principles we explored today, which one are you most called to practice more intentionally in your work and why?

What might that look like in a real moment — with a client, colleague, or within your organization?



Key Takeaways

Cultural humility is a lifelong, relational, and systemic practice — not a destination.

Self-reflection and curiosity are essential tools for interrupting bias and honoring complexity.

Authentic connection and trust are central to healing and transformation.

Organizational change begins with personal commitment but must also be systemic.



*When we lead with humility, we don't just
improve outcomes — we create space for people
to feel seen, heard, and valued in their full
humanity*

THANK YOU!



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