

Beyond Awareness: Building Cultural Competence

Creating Meaningful Connections Through Cultural Humility and Understanding

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About the Presenter



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- Director for International Programs
- Experience in counseling, higher education, outreach, and international engagement
- Passionate about helping people build meaningful cross-cultural relationships

OPENING REFLECTION

What experiences most shaped your worldview?

Family

Religion

Community

Education

Travel

Life Experiences

Take a moment to reflect: the experiences that shaped how you see the world are the same kinds of experiences that shaped your clients.

By the end of this session, you will be able to...

01

Increase Self-Awareness

Recognize how your own cultural identities, values, and biases show up in the counseling room.

02

Strengthen Communication

Communicate more effectively across cultural differences, in both direct and indirect styles.

03

Apply Responsive Practices

Use culturally responsive counseling practices that build trust and improve outcomes.

What Is Culture?

Culture influences how we live, relate, and seek help:

Communication

Family relationships

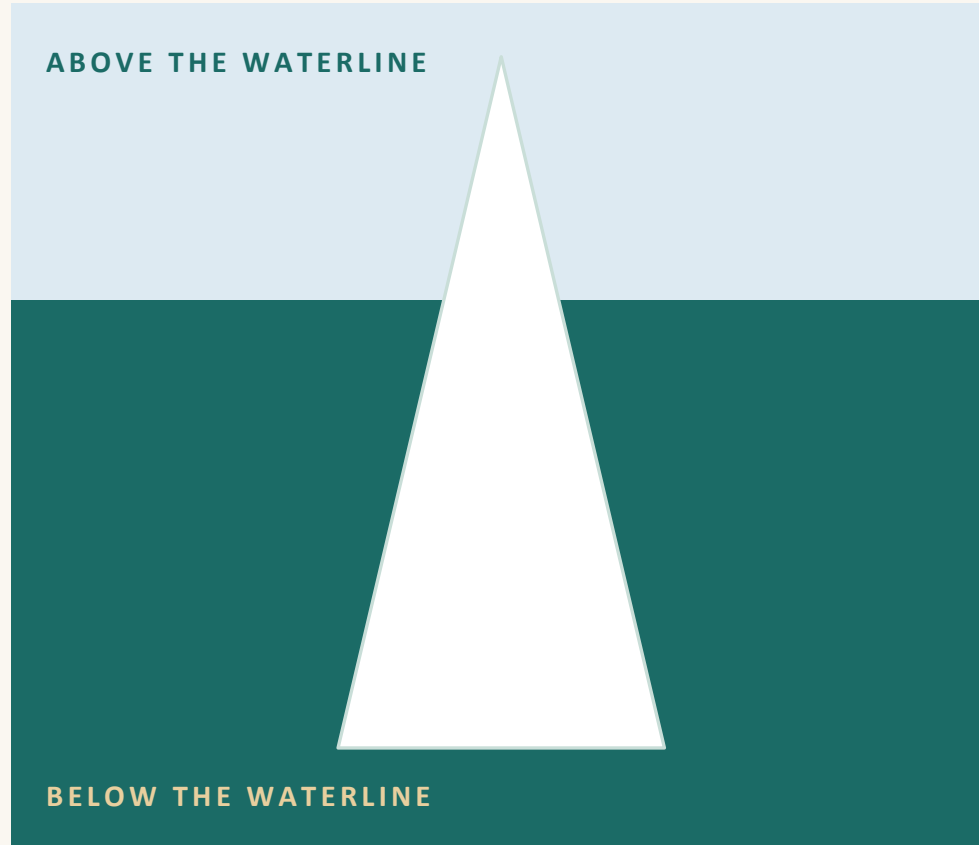
Spiritual beliefs

Help-seeking behaviors

Mental health attitudes

Decision-making

The Iceberg Model of Culture



Visible — what we can see

- Food, music, and language
- Clothing and traditions

Invisible — what lies beneath

- Values and beliefs
- Family roles
- Mental health beliefs
- Communication styles

Model: Edward T. Hall

Why Cultural Competence Matters

Stronger relationships

Better communication

Increased trust

More effective interventions

Greater engagement

Improved outcomes

WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCE?

“The ability to understand, respect, and respond effectively across cultural differences — and to work collaboratively within them.”

Understanding • Respect • Responsiveness • Collaboration

Awareness vs. Competence vs. Humility

Awareness

Recognize differences

Competence

Develop effective skills

Humility

Commit to lifelong learning

Competence is a destination we move toward; humility is the posture that gets us there.

Awareness vs. Competence vs. Humility



KEY CONCEPTS

Foundations of Cultural Humility

- Recognize personal bias
- Remain curious
- Build relationships
- Stay open to learning
- Seek understanding before action

“

Humility is not thinking less of yourself — it is staying teachable about others.

Framework: Tervalon & Murray-García (1998)

Understanding Unconscious Bias

Confirmation Bias

Noticing what confirms what we already believe — and overlooking the rest.

Affinity Bias

Feeling more comfortable with people who seem similar to us.

Stereotyping

Applying a group assumption to an individual before we know them.

Halo Effect

Letting one positive trait color our whole impression of a person.

ACTIVITY

Self-Awareness Activity

- 1 What identities are important to you?
- 2 What values did you grow up with?
- 3 How do they influence your counseling style?

Take two minutes to reflect, then share with a partner.

Communication Across Cultures

Direct Communication

Say what you mean

Explicit, verbal communication

Clarity is valued over harmony

Indirect Communication

Context matters

Relationship-focused communication

Meaning is often implied, not stated

Neither style is better — effective counselors learn to recognize and adapt to both.

Active Listening Across Cultures

What listening looks like varies across cultures. Pay attention to:

Eye contact

Silence

**Emotional
expression**

Family influence

Cultural values

CHALLENGES

Barriers to Cultural Competence

Assumptions

Stereotypes

Fear of mistakes

Ethnocentrism

Language barriers

Lack of self-awareness

CASE STUDY #1

The Quiet Client

A 19-year-old client who:

- Avoids eye contact
- Speaks minimally
- Appears hesitant

Before you respond — pause. What is your first instinct about this client?

Discussion: The Quiet Client

- 1 What assumptions might be occurring?
- 2 What cultural factors should be explored?
- 3 What might build trust?

CASE STUDY #2

Family-Centered Decision Making

A client frequently consults family before making decisions.

DISCUSSION

- How might culture influence autonomy?
- How can family values be incorporated into treatment?

CASE STUDY #3

Mistrust of Mental Health Services

A client appears skeptical and guarded. Several sessions later, they reveal previous negative experiences with helping professionals.

DISCUSSION

- What might contribute to mistrust?
- How can counselors create psychological safety?

Cultural Competence in Counseling Practice

Why it matters in the room:



**Stronger
therapeutic alliance**



**Increased
engagement**



Better outcomes



Improved retention



Ethical practice

Three Questions Before Every Session

1

What assumptions am I bringing into this room?

2

How might this client's experience differ from mine?

3

Am I seeking to understand before seeking to intervene?

Taking It With You

One thing I learned today...

One assumption I want to challenge...

One action I will take this month...

Write yours down — and share one with a neighbor.

FINAL REFLECTION

“Cultural competence is not about becoming an expert on every culture. It is about approaching every individual with curiosity, humility, respect, and a willingness to learn.”

What to Remember

- Culture influences everyone.
- Self-awareness is essential.
- Curiosity builds connection.
- Humility strengthens trust.
- Growth is lifelong.

“

*People will forget what you said, people will forget
what you did, but people will never forget
how you made them feel.*

— MAYA ANGELOU

Questions & Discussion

Thank you for being here — and for the work you do.

Francis Eneman, MA, LPC