

**A Reflective Examination of Cultural Competence, Privilege, and Growth in
Counseling Practice**

Joy Macko

Goldey-Beacom College

Diversity & Multicultural Considerations PSY 647 ONLS 01

Dr Andrews

February 25, 2026

Cultural competency is not a fixed achievement. It is an ongoing process of reflection, learning, humility, and intentional action. Cultural competence requires deep self-awareness, honest evaluation of beliefs and attitudes, and the consistent application of skills that support ethical, respectful, and effective clinical practice. This reflection explores my current cultural environment, experiences of privilege, awareness of microaggressions, responses to accusations of racism, and a personal self-assessment of multicultural competence. Throughout, I draw on principles from culturally responsive counseling theory and shame-free, relational approaches to repairing cross-cultural harm (Fisher, 2020, Chapters 1–3; Jones-Smith, 2019, Chapters 1–2).

My current environment is deeply diverse, both personally and professionally. I live and work in a large metropolitan setting that reflects a broad mix of racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. My daily interactions include Black American, Indigenous, Latin, Jewish, and British cultures. Although I currently work and study remotely, my social and professional networks remain international and multicultural. Having lived abroad in multiple countries and grown up across cultures, diversity has always been central to my identity and worldview. I speak three languages, which allows me to engage with people across cultural boundaries and experience different ways of thinking, relating, and problem-solving.

These experiences continue to shape my understanding of cultural differences as a source of strength rather than discomfort. Jones-Smith (2019, Chapter 2) explains that exposure to multiple cultural systems supports the development of cognitive flexibility, empathy, and emotional attunement. Living in culturally rich environments has

expanded my ability to listen without defensiveness, tolerate ambiguity, and recognize the limits of my own perspective. These skills are essential in clinical work, where clients bring complex identities and layered life experiences into the therapeutic space.

Despite this exposure, I continue to benefit from actively seeking new perspectives. Cultural understanding is never complete, and ongoing learning prevents complacency. Fisher (2020, Chapters 2–3) notes that even well-intentioned clinicians can develop blind spots that limit their effectiveness. Expanding my engagement with voices that challenge my assumptions, particularly those from marginalized communities, strengthens my ability to remain open and responsive. My work as a United Nations delegate addressing human trafficking and women's issues deepens my understanding of global trauma, power, and systemic inequality. These experiences sharpen my clinical sensitivity and reinforce the importance of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice.

Privilege is layered and complex. While aspects of my identity expose me to marginalization, others provide meaningful access and opportunity. Speaking multiple languages and having lived abroad allow me to navigate professional and social spaces with relative ease. These experiences grant me access to international networks, education, and leadership opportunities that many people do not share. Jones-Smith (2019, Chapter 3) describes how education and cultural mobility often translate into social capital, professional credibility, and expanded opportunity.

My academic training also grants institutional legitimacy and professional authority. This privilege allows me to advocate within global policy spaces and

professional environments. At the same time, Fisher (2020, Chapter 4) cautions that privilege can create emotional distance from the lived realities of those with fewer resources or less access. Awareness of this dynamic reminds me to approach clients with humility rather than assumption. It also encourages attentiveness to power differences in the therapeutic relationship, which is critical for establishing safety, trust, and collaboration.

Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional behaviors or statements that convey dismissal, stereotyping, or disrespect. Their cumulative impact can be deeply harmful, particularly for individuals from marginalized communities. Fisher (2020, Chapters 5–6) emphasizes that microaggressions frequently occur in everyday conversation and are often invisible to those who commit them. This makes intentional awareness and reflective practice essential components of ethical counseling.

One way I can reduce the likelihood of microaggressions is by listening more and speaking less. Slowing my responses allows space to notice emotional cues, relational shifts, and moments of discomfort that might otherwise be overlooked. Another strategy involves consistently examining my assumptions before responding, particularly when cultural differences are present. By pausing to consider whether my words may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or minimize lived experiences, I can engage more thoughtfully and responsibly. Jones-Smith (2019, Chapter 4) highlights the importance of cultural humility, which requires ongoing self-reflection and openness to correction.

When I encounter accusations of racism directed toward others, I believe thoughtful reflection is more productive than immediate judgment. Questions that help

guide my evaluation include whether power differences are present, whether cultural stereotypes are being activated, and whether harm has occurred regardless of intent. I also consider whose perspective is being centered and whose experience may be minimized. Fisher (2020, Chapters 7–8) explains that defensiveness often blocks accountability and learning, while curiosity and humility support growth.

In most situations, I would not intervene directly, allowing individuals to address the situation in their own way. However, if the interaction escalated or someone appeared emotionally or physically unsafe, I would step in to support de-escalation and respectful communication. This approach aligns with trauma-informed principles that prioritize safety, dignity, and emotional regulation in moments of conflict (Jones-Smith, 2019, Chapter 6).

Multicultural competence involves growth across awareness, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, skills, clinical practice, social justice engagement, and self-confidence. My strongest areas are awareness and clinical practice. Years of multicultural exposure and international experience have sharpened my sensitivity to cultural differences and power dynamics. This awareness guides my daily interactions, encouraging respect, curiosity, and emotional presence. Jones-Smith (2019, Chapter 5) identifies awareness as foundational to culturally effective counseling because it shapes perception, interpretation, and relational attunement.

Self-awareness and social justice engagement are also strong areas. I regularly reflect on how my history, values, and emotional responses shape my clinical presence. This reflection helps prevent reactivity and supports ethical decision-making. My

advocacy work addressing human trafficking and women's rights strengthens my understanding of structural oppression and collective trauma. Fisher (2020, Chapter 9) explains that social justice engagement deepens clinical effectiveness by situating personal suffering within broader systemic realities.

Beliefs and self-confidence represent moderate growth areas. While I hold inclusive values, I remain aware that unconscious biases can surface under stress or uncertainty. Ongoing education, supervision, and consultation remain essential. Similarly, although I generally feel confident in cross-cultural work, complex trauma cases involving intersecting identities challenge that confidence. Continued clinical training and reflective practice will support growth in these areas.

Knowledge and multicultural counseling skills remain my primary areas for continued development. While lived experience offers insight, formal understanding of cultural frameworks, historical trauma, and systemic inequities is essential for ethical and effective care. Jones-Smith (2019, Chapters 7–8) emphasizes that cultural knowledge enhances accurate assessment and treatment planning. I plan to expand this knowledge through specialized coursework, professional workshops, and scholarly reading. Skill development will involve applying culturally responsive interventions, seeking regular feedback, and practicing relational repair when missteps occur. Fisher (2020, Chapters 10–11) emphasizes that accountability and repair strengthen therapeutic alliances and foster trust.

To support ongoing growth, I will continue reflective journaling, mindfulness practice, and clinical supervision. Personal therapy and cultural consultation will further

deepen self-awareness. Structured learning opportunities will expand my cultural knowledge base, while peer consultation will refine clinical skills. My commitment to social justice will continue through advocacy, policy engagement, and community collaboration. Self-confidence will be strengthened through consistent practice, outcome evaluation, and ethical self-reflection.

Cultural competency remains a lifelong journey shaped by humility, curiosity, and ethical responsibility. My diverse environment, international background, and advocacy work provide a strong foundation for culturally responsive counseling. At the same time, ongoing reflection, education, and accountability remain essential. By integrating awareness, knowledge, and compassionate action, I aim to offer clinical care that honors the dignity, resilience, and complexity of every client. As emphasized by both Jones-Smith (2019) and Fisher (2020), multicultural competence is not defined by perfection but by presence, responsibility, and sustained commitment to growth.

References

- Fisher, L. (2020). *Diversity in Clinical Practice: A Practical & Shame-Free Guide to Reducing Cultural Offenses & Repairing Cross-Cultural Relationships*. PESI Publishing.
- Jones-Smith, E. (2019). *Culturally Diverse Counseling: Theory and Practice* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.