

Cultural Competence Diversity and Social Injustice

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Introduction

My understanding of cultural competence began within my family, especially through the example of my grandmother. She was a deeply religious woman who had endured repeated racial prejudice, including being called the “n” word, yet she refused to let that treatment define her worth. Her Christian faith gave her strength, but her experience also taught me that resilience should never be used as an excuse for leaving injustice unchallenged. As I grew older, I began to see cultural competence as more than politeness toward people who are different from me. It requires self-awareness, listening, respect, historical understanding, and the willingness to examine how institutions distribute opportunity and harm. Diversity also extends beyond race and gender to include religion, disability, language, nationality, class, age, family structure, sexual orientation, education, and other dimensions of identity. Cultural competence therefore asks a person to recognize both individual uniqueness and broader social patterns without reducing anyone to a stereotype or expecting one person to represent an entire community.

Family, Faith, and the Formation of Cultural Awareness

My grandmother’s response to racism shaped the way I think about dignity and responsibility. Her faith allowed her to endure hostility without surrendering to bitterness, yet the lesson I draw from her life is not that people who experience prejudice should simply forgive and remain cheerful. The larger responsibility belongs to individuals and institutions that must challenge discriminatory behavior and the conditions that allow it to continue. My Christian background teaches that every person has inherent value and that faith should produce humility, justice, service, and concern for people who are marginalized. At the same time, religious conviction does not remove the need for self-criticism. Christian institutions, like other social institutions, have histories that include both resistance to injustice and participation in exclusion. Cultural competence therefore requires me to distinguish personal belief from the assumption that everyone shares my worldview. I can remain committed to my faith while respecting the rights and conscience of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, nonreligious people, and others whose experiences differ from mine.

From Competence to Cultural Humility

Cultural competence begins with awareness of one's assumptions and with the ability to notice how [personal identity](#), [privilege](#), and social experience influence what seems normal. Hogan's framework emphasizes movement from awareness toward understanding, appreciation, and effective behavior, but the idea of cultural humility adds an important warning against believing that culture can ever be completely mastered. No amount of reading turns one person into an authority on everyone within a racial, religious, national, or linguistic group. Cultural humility instead requires lifelong learning, self-evaluation, recognition of power differences, and openness to correction (Hogan, 2007; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). This approach allows me to say that I do not know something without placing the entire burden of education on another person. I can research, ask respectful questions, listen carefully, and change my behavior when evidence shows that an assumption was inaccurate. Humility also prevents cultural knowledge from becoming another form of stereotyping disguised as expertise.

Perception, Communication, and Everyday Difference

Culture influences perception because people learn different expectations about authority, emotion, eye contact, time, family roles, conflict, and acceptable communication. Two individuals can therefore encounter the same event and interpret it differently without either person deliberately trying to misunderstand the other. Direct eye contact may communicate confidence in one setting and disrespect toward an elder in another. Silence may indicate uncertainty, reflection, politeness, or disagreement depending on context. Cultural competence does not require memorizing fixed national rules; it requires recognizing ambiguity and checking meaning before judging character.

Communication should include careful listening, understandable language, and qualified interpreters when language barriers make important information difficult to understand. It also requires attention to unequal labeling. The same behavior may be described as confident in one person and aggressive in another because of race, gender, age, or status. Cultural awareness becomes useful when it helps people question those uneven standards and create communication practices that allow participants to explain themselves rather than being interpreted entirely through someone else's assumptions.

Social Injustice Beyond Interpersonal Prejudice

Social injustice cannot be reduced to offensive words or individual prejudice because inequality also appears through housing, education, employment, healthcare, policing, environmental exposure, accessibility, voting, and organizational decision-making. The racial slurs directed at my grandmother were interpersonal acts, but they existed within a broader history in which Black Americans faced segregation and unequal access to institutions. Cultural training that teaches respectful language while ignoring those structures is therefore incomplete. Organizations should examine who is hired,

promoted, disciplined, represented, heard, or excluded and whether apparently neutral policies create predictable barriers. Equity does not mean that every person receives an identical response regardless of circumstances. Providing an interpreter, wheelchair access, or reasonable religious accommodation can create meaningful participation rather than unfair advantage. Cultural competence becomes institutional when systems are designed so that dignity does not depend on a person's ability to assimilate into the preferences of the dominant group. Respectful behavior remains essential, but durable improvement also requires transparent procedures, accessible services, accountability, and evidence about outcomes.

Conclusion

My grandmother's strength remains the foundation of how I understand cultural competence, but her experience also reminds me that people who suffer injustice should not be expected to carry it gracefully while others remain passive. Cultural competence requires awareness, understanding, communication, respect, and behavior that protects dignity across difference. Cultural humility strengthens that approach by recognizing that learning is never complete and that power influences who is expected to adapt. Diversity includes far more than visible race or gender, and individuals within the same group can have very different experiences. Effective practice therefore combines curiosity with caution, personal reflection with institutional accountability, and respect for difference with a willingness to confront harm. I can continue this work by examining my assumptions, building relationships beyond familiar circles, listening before judging, challenging stereotypes, and supporting fair systems in workplaces, churches, schools, and communities. Cultural competence is not a claim that I understand everyone. It is a commitment to keep learning while acting in ways that make participation, safety, and dignity more equitable.

References

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