



Episode 3: Diving Deeper into Cultural Humility for Mid-Training Clinicians

Dr. Carmen Bell is a licensed professional counselor and PsyD in the metro Detroit, Michigan area. Her therapeutic interests include social justice, multicultural and diversity issues, trauma, emotional distress, identity, faith, and overall wellness. So if you're a student enrolled in classes at University of Michigan-Dearborn you can find her in the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) office and Dr. Bell has a private practice in Farmington Hills called [Empowered Elevation, PLLC](#).

Before you listen: *Self-reflect and/or journal about the following*

- Do you see yourself as culturally competent? Why?
- Consider the different cultural groups that your clients or students belong to. How often does your client bring up aspects of their identities in session? How much have you integrated this information into your case conceptualization?
- Think about any experiences you have had with clients where topics have come up related to race, religion, or another cultural aspect. How did you handle it? Were you ready?

Episode Summary

- The hosts and guest, Dr. Bell, discuss the importance of a thorough assessment at the beginning of the therapeutic relationship. Dr. Bell recommends that every therapist have a good biopsychosocial interview form to complete with each client to build an understanding of how their social environment is impacting their presenting problem.
- Dr. Bell discusses how she brings up culture with her clients, by just asking them. She recommends asking clients about aspects of their culture, the religion, and their families. She also recommends asking clients what they like to be called, as some clients may prefer to be called "Black," and others may prefer to be called "African American."
- It is important to recognize certain biases, because we all have them. Dr. Bell recommends assessing those biases that we may have and addressing them head on. She recommends doing research on different topics and not relying on clients to fill us in on every aspect of their culture that may be different from our own. She also recommends being up to date on things going on in the news. For instance, she gives an example of having an Afghani client who has family living in Afghanistan. In 2021, around the time that this interview took place, the Taliban had taken control of Kabul and U.S. forces were withdrawing. In the interview, Dr. Bell emphasizes how important it would be for this client's therapist to know broadly what is going on in Afghanistan in order to evaluate how it is affecting the client's health.
- Dr. Bell discusses the struggle of being a nonwhite therapist treating white clients in a mental health setting. It can be difficult to put experiences of racism outside the therapy room (e.g., microaggressions) aside and be present and validating to the client. Dr. Bell recommends being mindful of those thoughts and feelings, as well as how they might present themselves in the session (e.g., facial expressions), and working to place your own experiences aside to maintain a warm and accepting environment for the client.
- For all therapists treating clients with a different cultural background, Dr. Bell recommends leaning on supervisors and colleagues for support in difficult situations.
- *Dr. Bell shouts out to her mentors: [Shannon Chávez-Korell](#) and [Dr. La-Toya Gaines](#). Their information can be found at their websites, listed below.*

After You Listen: *Discuss the following with an accountability group and/or partner*

- How do you view cultural competence now? Have your views about cultural competence changed?
- Have you been honest with yourself about having biases? What biases do you have?
- Have you noticed other therapists behave in a culturally insensitive way? Did you do something about it? What might you do about it in the future?
- Have you had an experience where there was a difference between, as Dr. Bell calls it, your “front face and back face”? How did you control the “internal eyeroll”?
- If you have an uncomfortable experience in therapy related to culture, who will you reach out to for supervision? A peer? A faculty member?
- Dr. Bell listed a number of cultures during this discussion. Are there any that you would like to add to your list from “Before you listen #2”?
- Are there topics that you feel like you need to read up on in order to fully engage in important cultural conversations with your clients?

After You Listen: *Action items*

- Subscribe to a daily news source to keep up to date with what is going on in the world. Some suggestions are included below
 - The Daily – a podcast (about 30 minutes per episode) from The New York Times
 - Up First – a shorter (~15) daily podcast from NPR
 - Need2Know – a daily brief news email – <https://cheddar.com/need2know>
 - NBC News Morning Briefing – <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/morning-briefing>
- For any therapist treating a client with a different culture, religion, etc., find resources to be sure that you are broadly informed about these important parts of your client’s case conceptualization.
- For white therapists treating BIPOC clients, acknowledge any internal biases you may have, and gather resources to unlearn these biases.

Additional Resources and Further Reading

- Visit Dr. Bell’s website for more information about her training program: <http://www.empoweredelelevationpllc.com/>
- Email her at drcarmen@empoweredelelevationpllc.com

Host Bios

Jiwon “Jennie” Min, M.S., is a cisgender heterosexual Korean Canadian. She is a 6th-year doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Oklahoma State University. Her research focuses on the daily processes of personality pathology, mobile treatment of related maladaptive behaviors (e.g., nonsuicidal self-injury, substance use) and multi-method, multi-informant assessment of personality pathology. In her free time, she loves to play with her cats and sing. You can find her on Twitter @JiwonMin.

Harley Layman, M.S., is a cisgender heterosexual white American woman of Polish descent, originally from MI. She is a first-generation college student from a low-income background. She is a 3rd year Clinical Psychology doctoral student whose research focuses on body image ideals and associated psychological, cognitive, and physiological outcomes. She enjoys exercise and walking her Goldendoodle, Winston, in her spare time. You can find her on Twitter @laymanharley.