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FINDING COMMON GROUND IN AN ARGUMENT

Objective: To identify shared values or expectations, even though behaviors may be dissonant, in an argument across cultures.

TIME REQUIRED 30 minutes or less

RISK LEVEL Low

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED Any number of participants, plus one facilitator

PROCEDURE Please take the following steps:

1. Ask for two volunteers from the group, one man and one woman, to role-play a husband and a wife wanting to get a divorce. (A variation of this would be an employer in conflict with an employee or even any two people who are in conflict, defining culture broadly to include work roles.)
2. Have each describe for a minute or two (no longer) why they want the divorce or how they have been badly treated by the other.
3. At the end of these two brief, uninterrupted monologues, ask the rest of the group members to act as marriage counselors (or conflict managers) and ask questions of one or the other person, who remain in role. The other group members may work individually or build on one another's comments, but ideally everyone will have a chance to contribute.
4. Interrupt the group member "marriage counselors" from time to time, reminding them to avoid interpreting the behavior out of context.
5. At the end of the role-play, have both people comment on what advice was most useful.

DEBRIEFING In debriefing the leader asks each of the two role-players to tell how they felt during the interaction and to recall which comments seemed most helpful and why. As long as the marriage counselors' comments focus on the "bad" behaviors of one or the other person, the conflict will be seen to escalate (and it is very hard not to focus on

the behaviors). However, if the group members address the topic of positive shared *expectations* (e.g., “Tell me about when the two of you met and fell in love”) without discussing behaviors until both parties in the conflict can clearly see that they share the common ground of wanting respect, fairness, trust, safety, or some other positive expectation, the conflict can be contained, even though their behaviors for expressing or getting that expectation might be different.

Discussion questions might include the following:

1. Was it difficult to avoid focusing on the behaviors of the people in conflict?
2. Were you surprised by the comments identified as “most helpful”?
3. Why is it important to establish common ground in managing conflict constructively?
4. Can conflict ever be managed constructively without first finding common ground?
5. Why does the argument escalate when you focus on behaviors?
6. How does this strategy fit with your natural method of managing conflict?

INSIGHT

The same behaviors can have different meanings, and different behaviors can have similar meanings across cultures.

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CRITICAL INCIDENTS INVOLVING
ETHNIC MINORITIES

Objective: To examine brief hypothetical critical incidents involving cultural groups.

TIME REQUIRED A half day or full day

RISK LEVEL High

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED Any number of participants, plus a facilitator

PROCEDURE Please take the following steps:

1. Discuss an incident in Exhibit 4.10 by looking for similarities and differences between and among the participants.
2. Diagram the conflict in each of the brief critical incidents using the Interpersonal Cultural Grid in Exhibit 4.11 to find examples of common ground where the individuals shared the same positive expectations but expressed their expectation using culturally different behaviors. -

DEBRIEFING Students will no doubt find that one or more critical incident in this experience is similar to something they have experienced in the past. The facilitator should be sensitive to the emotions students may connect to such incidents and should not force the students to reveal more than they might want. Use the incidents themselves as a springboard for a discussion on constructive multicultural problem solving. Some questions for discussion are as follows:

Note. The critical incidents were developed by Daniel Hernandez. From *Decisional Dialogues in a Cultural Context: Structured Exercises* (pp. 97–109), by P. B. Pedersen and D. Hernandez, 1997, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 1997 by Sage. Adapted with permission of publisher and author.

1. Which incidents seemed most powerful, and why?
2. Were you able to find examples of common ground using the Interpersonal Cultural Grid?
3. Were you tempted to focus on behavior in managing the conflict before you had established a foundation of common ground?
4. Can you see how conflict moves quickly from being cultural to becoming personal?
5. How will this experience help you solve problems in a multicultural context?

INSIGHT

Each critical incident in life is a valuable educational resource.

Incident 1

At a rally protesting the lack of Black, Hispanic, and Native American professors at a state university campus, students gathered and listened to speakers as they expressed their concerns about the inequalities. The rally was a part of a week of events creating cultural awareness in higher education. Issues discussed centered around the slow recruitment of minority professors, admissions standards that were biased against minorities, and the lack of ethnic studies on campus.

The rally received a great turnout. Minority students applauded and cheered as the lectures continued. Nonminority students began gathering at the rally to listen to the many speeches being delivered. A Hispanic man, excited at seeing a large nonminority population attend the rally, commented to a White student, "I'm glad to see you attend the rally. It makes me feel good to see you support our cause." The student turned and said, "These issues of inequality are important to me. Being Jewish has not always been easy."

Incident 2

A Hispanic couple living in California hired a live-in nanny to care for their two daughters. Ana, a 19-year-old undocumented immigrant, came to California to seek employment in order to earn money for surgery that her ill father needed. The Hispanic couple were both professionals; the husband was an educator, and the wife worked in marketing in the computer industry.

One day the couple informed Ana that the family would be relocating to the East Coast in 3 months. Ana declined to move with the family, feeling insecure about leaving a large Hispanic population and fearing that the move would bring her into closer contact with immigration agents at state borderlines.

Two weeks before leaving, the couple located a job for Ana with another family. Ana was pleased to have another family to care for but was worried about having to readjust to another environment. Complicating matters further was the fact that the new family spoke little Spanish. A month after relocating to the East Coast, Ana notified the couple that her younger sister had been killed in an auto accident. Ana was facing many hardships—adjustment to a nonbilingual family, not having saved enough money for her father's surgery, and now the loss of her sister. She was offered free counseling services, but she refused because of lack of trust and fear of deportation. Two weeks later, Ana suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized.

Incident 3

A Mexican American doctoral student, Jorge, was having a conversation with the director of the retention program while interviewing for a graduate assistantship position in a student service program. The director discussed the role and responsibility of the assistantship position. The primary responsibility would be outreach targeted specifically toward Hispanic students on campus who were not using the services that were available to them. The director believed that Jorge would be a good role model for the Hispanic students and that he could help convince these students to use the services more frequently.

During the course of the interview the director stated his belief that due to biological factors, some people are able to learn more and are more intelligent than others. The director informed Jorge that he wanted to be open and honest to avoid uneasiness down the road.

Incident 4

Susan, a White student at a small liberal arts college, recently ended a 3-year relationship with her high school boyfriend. Her roommate, Jill, noticed that Susan began sleeping in and eating less. Jill believed that this type of behavior was just a phase and that soon Susan would be herself again.

One night after returning from a late-night movie, Jill noticed that there was a small container of pills on Susan's nightstand. Jill shared her concerns about the pills with Susan and recommended that she seek free counseling available through the campus counseling center. Susan replied that she had thought about counseling but felt uncomfortable because the counselors at the center were all men, and she preferred to meet with a female counselor.

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Incident 5

A Vietnamese high school student, Anh, was experiencing difficulty in concentrating on her schoolwork due to issues at home. Hesitant in talking to someone about family issues, she felt she had no choice but to meet with her school counselor because her studies were suffering.

Anh informed the counselor that because of financial hardships, her father had started drinking and had become physically violent toward the family. Anh also stated that she was staying up late at night comforting her 3-year-old sister, who was scared and had regressed to bed-wetting.

The counselor said that she was saddened to hear of the situation and conveyed to Anh the importance of continuing school so that she could go on to college, graduate, and contribute at home by helping out financially. The counselor informed Anh that her situation was common for recent immigrants and tried to reassure her that things would get better.

Incident 6

A Chinese American student transferring to a 4-year university was invited to an orientation for new students. The new students were given a schedule of spring classes and instructed to tentatively select their classes and then meet with a department advisor for approval.

After completing the instructions, the student, Anthony, met with his advisor. As he left the advisor's office, the advisor attempted to welcome Anthony by saying, "You know, the restaurant across the street sells the best won ton soup around."

Incident 7

A Taiwanese student returned to her home country after receiving her graduate degree in counseling in the United States. Li Ming's initial work consisted of explaining the process of counseling and how counseling was used in the United States. Many of her contacts could not believe that Americans would tell their personal stories to a stranger and that they paid the stranger to listen.

After a short period in Taiwan, Li Ming returned to the United States in hopes of working as a counselor in a university setting. She explained that it was difficult to do counseling in a culture that did not believe in discussing personal or family matters outside the home.

Incident 8

A 50-year-old Mexican woman, Marta, was referred to a counselor by her physician after Marta related her chest pains to being unable to attend her mother's funeral. The counselor, a Mexican American, learned that Marta did not receive notice of her mother's death until months later, because her family in Mexico had no phone.

The counselor believed that Marta's pain was caused by the guilt she carried. The counselor also learned that Marta had no family or relatives nearby. The counselor contacted a local parish that gave mass in Spanish; he spoke with the priest and informed him of Marta's situation. The priest was able to meet with Marta that afternoon.

A few weeks later Marta contacted the counselor and thanked him for his help. She said that the priest was able to say a rosary and a mass for her mother.

Incident 9

A Chinese graduate student, Chen, recently finished his master's degree in counseling psychology and was preparing to apply to a doctoral program. Chen received many invitations to attend numerous universities throughout the country. In addition, he received fellowship offers from several prestigious universities.

Chen visited the doctoral programs at universities that were within reasonable driving distance. From universities that were out of state, Chen was able to do research through the mail.

After narrowing the selection to five universities, Chen met with his advisor to decide on which school to attend. After a lengthy conversation with his advisor, Chen finally made a decision. One important factor that he had overlooked, however, was the fact that none of the five schools had faculty of color, specifically professors of Chinese descent.

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Incident 10

María, a 17-year-old first-generation Mexican American high school student, was angry and upset because her parents did not give her permission to attend a field trip to visit a local university. María's friends were concerned about her and informed a counselor at the counseling and guidance center. Ms. Bustamante, the Mexican American counselor, met with María to find out what was troubling her. María explained that she would like to attend college but that her family did not support her decision. María mentioned that her father wanted her to stay home and help her mother around the house and that maybe, in a few years when she was older, she could possibly go on to school. María believed that her father's real reason for not being supportive of her continuing her education was the rapes that were occurring on college campuses.

Ms. Bustamante shared with María that she too had not had the support of her parents when she went to college. She was not angry at her parents, though, because she knew that they really loved her, and she found a way to convey to her parents the benefits of attending college.

Ms. Bustamante advised María to do the same and suggested that she share with her parents information about the different colleges. In addition, Ms. Bustamante suggested that María gather information about housing and, if possible, the security services the campuses offer students.

Incident 11

A counselor at an urban high school was leaving his office after school to meet with a teacher in another building. As he approached the school library, he heard two people screaming and shouting. The counselor went to see what the commotion was all about and witnessed a Vietnamese woman hitting a Vietnamese student with an umbrella. The counselor immediately stopped the woman from hitting the student and escorted them to the administration office.

Mrs. Troung, a volunteer teacher's aide of Vietnamese origin, was called in to assist with the matter. After a long discussion with the mother and student, Mrs. Troung shared with the counselor the following: The older Vietnamese woman was the mother of the student. She was upset because the daughter had told her mother that she was studying at the school library, and that was why she had arrived home late for the past several nights. That day the mother had come to the school to make sure her daughter was studying. When she arrived at the school, however, the mother found her daughter talking with a Vietnamese boy. The mother began hitting her daughter for lying. The rule was that the student was not to have a boyfriend until she was ready to marry.

Incident 12

A Korean family met with a family therapist because the parents were having difficulty controlling their oldest son. The parents were immigrants and were referred to family services via a community agency. The therapist, a Hispanic woman, was experiencing difficulty in establishing a smooth session. Although she was aware of the cultural factors in counseling Asian families, she realized that for some reason the session was not going as well as she wanted.

As the session came to an end, the therapist scheduled the family for the following week. A couple of days later, the family canceled the appointment and asked if they could have a referral. The therapist asked if she had upset them in any way, and the mother responded that she did not; however, she did comment that her husband would feel more comfortable if the therapist were an older Korean man.

Incident 13

Jessica, a 22-year-old Mexican American woman from central Illinois, left home to attend college in California. A few weeks into the semester, she began to notice the cultural differences between herself and other Hispanics on campus. Jessica noticed that the majority of the Hispanics were able to speak both English and Spanish fluently. Although her parents spoke Spanish at home, they did not insist that the children be bilingual.

In her English class, composed predominantly of White students, Jessica felt comfortable and relaxed. However, in a Chicano studies course that fulfilled the cultural pluralism requirement for graduation, she felt out of place because she did not share the experiences of other Hispanics in class.

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Jessica shared her feelings with the Chicano studies professor, who was very sensitive to her issue. The professor responded by telling Jessica that not all Mexican Americans share the same sociocultural experience and that people need to understand and respect the values of others.

Incident 14

Raquel, a 29-year-old Hispanic college student, recently received her bachelor of arts in English. Raquel graduated with honors and was the first of seven siblings to finish college. Raquel was married and had two children ages 2 and 4. Her husband worked the swing shift at a supermarket, and she worked as a teacher's aide at an elementary school. During the day Raquel's husband would take care of the children, and in the afternoon he would leave them with his mother. Raquel attended classes three nights a week, and after class she would pick up the children.

A couple of weeks before graduation, Raquel was informed that the faculty in her department had nominated her for an award that recognized outstanding students in comparative English literature. In addition, the department chairperson met with Raquel to discuss graduate school. Raquel was offered a scholarship to attend the master's program in English for the following fall.

Raquel was torn between her conflicting desires to go to graduate school and to be at home with her children. After several days of thinking about the offer, she decided that she would take a year off from school to be with her family. Coincidentally, Raquel did not receive the award for which she had been nominated.

Incident 15

Leonard, a Lakota Indian, returned home to the reservation after serving 3 years in the armed services. During Leonard's stay in the Marines, he was stationed at several bases in the United States and was sent to Germany for 1 year. At a sweat lodge, many of Leonard's friends and older members of the tribe shared stories of their ancestors. When Leonard was a child, he remembered listening to his father tell stories about his great-grandfather, and he had always enjoyed learning about his family history. However, Leonard realized that now these stories did not mean anything to him and that he could not understand the importance that his tribe placed on talking about individuals who no longer existed.

After several weeks at home from the service, Leonard found himself in conflict with his parents and siblings. Many of his friends claimed that Leonard was acting as though he was too good to be a Lakota Indian. The conflict with family and friends caused Leonard much pain. He felt that no one understood him. He felt alone. Leonard wanted to leave the reservation to find work so that he could save his money and travel through Europe; however, he knew that with only a high school education, getting a job would be difficult.

Leonard became more depressed about the conflict that he was experiencing at home. He realized he could no longer live on the reservation and be happy. After 2 months at home, Leonard left the reservation and reenlisted in the Marines for another full term.

Incident 16

In the book *Silent Language*, Edward T. Hall talked about his experience working for the Soil Conservation program at a Navajo reservation. In his experience supervising the construction of small earth dams, he noticed that the Navajo workmen operated at a relaxed pace, as though they had no worries at all. He recalled sharing his American values about hard work and how working hard today will bring rewards tomorrow. Hall noticed that this had no effect on their work behavior.

After discussing this problem with a friend who had spent all his life on a reservation, Hall decided to approach the Navajo workmen in a different manner. He recalled talking with the work crew and telling them how the American government was helping them get out of debt by providing them jobs near their families and giving them water for their sheep. Hall stressed the fact that in return, they had to work hard for 8 hours a day. He noticed that the change in approach altered their work performance.

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Incident 17

A Middle Eastern student attending an East Coast university was experiencing difficulty in meeting American students. One day after Walid's chemistry class, he decided to talk with a student who sat next to him in class. The classmate was an American woman who easily engaged in a conversation with Walid. After a few minutes of conversing, the American student on several occasions glanced at her watch. Walid noticed her behavior and felt as though he was intruding or boring her with his conversation.

On another occasion, Walid was having lunch at the campus cafeteria. While he ate, he noticed that many American students were eating and reading at the same time. Others were eating and writing letters or doing their schoolwork. He found it very interesting that American students rarely relaxed.

Incident 18

Pélin, an international student from Taiwan, was asked to share her experiences with students who had recently arrived in the United States from China. Pélin shared that when she first arrived, she was excited about attending an American university. In her spare time she went to see American movies and ate a variety of American foods. After some time, she began noticing the major differences in the behavior of American students and how their beliefs, values, and lifestyles conflicted with hers.

Pélin lived in the residential halls and had an American roommate. She spoke of how offended and embarrassed she was when her roommate's boyfriend came by to visit and how openly they would kiss and hug each other. She also shared the difficulty she experienced when using the community showers for women. Her sense of privacy and personal space was constantly being challenged.

Pélin shared with the group that at first, her adjustment as a student at an American university was difficult, and although many of the values were different from hers, she was able to adjust. Pélin ended by saying that her biggest growth was being able to appreciate her own values by learning to appreciate American values.

Incident 19

An admissions counselor at a California state university was reviewing an admissions application submitted by Thanh, a Vietnamese refugee student. Sections of the admissions application requested parental information and asked specific questions about the family history. Because these sections were left blank, the admissions counselor asked Thanh to make an appointment.

During their meeting the counselor learned that Thanh and his sister were living with an aunt and that they had no knowledge of the whereabouts of their parents. Thanh hesitantly shared with the counselor that his parents were taken prisoner by the communist regime in Vietnam, and he was left behind with his younger sister. Through the Vietnamese Immigration Agency, the refugee program, he was able to locate his aunt in California.

It had been 10 years since Thanh had last seen his parents. He expressed that it was important for him to go to college, because with a college degree he would be able to take care of his younger sister and not be such a burden to his aunt.

Incident 20

A Hispanic social worker in Colorado was assigned a client who had been raped by her employer. The client, Teresa, was a 25-year-old Salvadoran woman who came to the United States so that she could work and save money to pay for an operation that her son needed.

Teresa had answered an ad in the paper to work as a live-in nanny. The employer was a successful dentist who was married and had two children. Within days after Teresa had started working, she was raped by the dentist. Unable to speak English and fearful of the consequences of deportation, Teresa could not report the incident to authorities.

In desperation, Teresa went to see a priest for help. The priest contacted a clinic, which later contacted the social work agency. The social worker discovered that Teresa had been raped on 11 different occasions within a 5-day period.

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Incident 21

A counselor at a rehabilitation center for juveniles was assigned to a case in which the minor, Will, had a history of aggressive behavior. Will was sent to the rehabilitation center for 8 months because of violation of probation. After a few counseling sessions, the counselor and Will were able to identify situations that caused Will to act aggressively. The counselor learned in the counseling session that as a young child Will had witnessed his father physically abuse his mother. Will described his father as a man who had a short fuse and vented his anger at his mother.

Will internalized his feelings and developed an intense hatred toward his father. Will grew up not knowing how to deal with his anger, and he would act out when confronted with stressful situations. Through additional counseling the counselor discovered that Will had an uncle whom he respected very highly and always called whenever he was in trouble. Will shared with the counselor that his uncle was someone who was always there when he needed someone to talk with. The uncle, who was the mother's older brother, was self-employed and often traveled.

Through further counseling Will and the counselor were able to develop strategies for Will to use in dealing with stressful situations. Rewards were granted in the form of additional visitation time with his mother on Sundays when Will was able to control his anger. The counselor trained Will to use breathing exercises to help him control his emotions in a stressful event. The counselor also arranged special visitations with Will's uncle. In addition, the counselor worked with Will's mother in teaching him prosocial skills in preparation for release.

Incident 22

A married couple met with a counselor to discuss the difficulties they were having with their oldest daughter. The daughter was 15 years old and a sophomore in high school. The parents' primary concern was that the daughter was always yelling at her parents and disobeying them. The parents were worried that they had no control over their daughter.

The counselor spoke to the parents in detail about areas that could be worked on; however, it required that the parents receive instruction and training in anger control skills. The parents were very hesitant and shared with the counselor that it would be difficult to actively take part in the process.

Incident 23

In a small community in Texas, parents of Mexican American children were upset when several of the students were placed in a specialized classroom for students with learning disabilities. Several parents received a letter from the teacher stating that their children had been given very low scores on a standardized intelligence test. The letter stated that the exam provided evidence that their child was borderline mentally retarded.

After much pressure from the parents, consultants from a nearby university evaluated the exam and found that it was biased. The test did not take into account the linguistic and cultural factors of the students tested.

The students were retested with an intelligence test that was not biased and was sensitive to linguistic and cultural elements. The results of the exam indicated that the Mexican American students did not differ from White students, and in several areas the Mexican American students scored higher than their counterparts.

Incident 24

An African American woman, Aisha, met with a counselor because she was feeling depressed about being unemployed. Aisha expressed that she felt worthless and useless. Unemployed for the past 4 months, she could not understand why, with a business degree and 4 years of professional experience, she had been unable to find a job.

Aisha stated that for the past 3 months she had been sending out six resumes a week and had not received any responses. Aisha began questioning her own ability and self-confidence and began to feel that she did not have the right stuff.

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Incident 25

A White female school counselor, Linda, recently moved to Los Angeles from Ohio with her husband, who had accepted a principal's position at a high school. Linda experienced culture shock when she met the parents of a Hispanic student who were concerned about their son's truancy problem. The parents spoke limited English, but sufficient enough to be able to communicate with those who did not speak Spanish.

Understanding the demographics of the school where she worked and in anticipation of working with Hispanic parents with limited English fluency, Linda thought it beneficial to enroll in a Spanish class. For the next 6 months she studied Spanish at a community college near her residence.

At work Linda would practice her Spanish with students whenever possible, and she found that Hispanic students were less inhibited around her. On several occasions, Linda was able to speak Spanish with parents who spoke limited English. She noticed that by speaking Spanish with the parents, they felt relaxed and comfortable. Linda realized that by being able to communicate in the language of her clients, she was able to establish trust and rapport.

Incident 26

A family who had immigrated from India was experiencing difficulty with their oldest daughter and met with a family therapist to discuss their concerns. The family informed the counselor that they did not approve of their daughter having boyfriends and had difficulty getting her to obey their rules.

The therapist spoke with the parents about relationships and what they meant to a teenage girl. The therapist informed the parents that it would probably be best if the daughter could attend their next meeting so they could all work out a solution together.

The parents were somewhat taken back by what the therapist told them. They told the therapist they did not think it was possible for the family to meet. All they wanted was for the therapist to tell them how to handle the situation.

Exhibit 4.11 *Interpersonal Cultural Grid: What Was Done?*

Reasons for action	Perceived positive action	Perceived negative action
Perceived positive reasons	1	2
Perceived negative reasons	3	4

1. Cell #1 describes a situation where the behavior/action was considered positive by both parties and the expectation/reason for doing the behavior/action was also positive. Two people are both smiling, and they both want to be friends.
2. Cell #2 describes a situation where the behavior/action was judged negatively by one of the two parties, even though the expectation/reason for doing the behavior/action was in fact positive. Two people both want to be friends and one is smiling but the other is not smiling as an example of a "cultural" misunderstanding.
3. Cell #3 describes a situation where the desired behavior/action is presented as demanded by the stronger party, but now the expectation by the weaker party is negative. One of the two "pretends" to agree with the other but actually does not agree as an example of "personal" misunderstanding.
4. Cell #4 describes a situation where the behavior/action is negative and the expectation is also negative for both parties. Both parties have gone to war against the other.
5. Conflict that can be contained in Cell #2 is potentially positive, but conflict in Cell #3 and ultimately #4 is negative and destructive.

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