

Understanding Cultural Differences of a Bulgarian Client

Using the ICS Model of Conflict Resolution

Marissa [REDACTED]

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

Understanding Cultural Differences of a Bulgarian Client

Using the ICS Model of Conflict Resolution

Surprising similarities were discovered between my own personal Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (ICS) when compared to the results of my mock client, Virginia, a Bulgarian immigrant, who moved to the United States not more than seven years ago. My score revealed that I ranked 27 on the direct/indirect score, suggesting that I prefer more “direct strategies” when engaging in conflict, while my emotional expression/restraint score was 25, indicating that I prefer “emotionally expressive strategies” (Hammer, 2005). Only one digit off from my own direct/indirect score, Virginia ranked 28 in preferring direct strategies, yet she scored a 20 on the emotional expression/restraint score, thus placing her in the category of preferring “emotionally restrained strategies” (Hammer, 2005). Understanding my own motivations and the ways in which I prefer to resolve conflict, I was not surprised to discover that both Virginia and I seemed to hover on the cusp of preferring direct strategies, yet also occasionally choosing to use indirect strategies as well. While I tend to strongly prefer an in person approach to resolving a conflict, I am also guilty of not always being clear about the message I am intending to convey. I often say one thing when perhaps I mean another, a characteristic of an indirect strategy (Hammer, 2005). Having the opportunity to personally know Virginia already, I have the advantage of knowing that while her collectivist culture employs her to avoid conflict, when conflict arises, she takes a direct approach by omitting the use of metaphors and circular language, and says exactly what she means (Hammer, 2005). Emotionally, we have two very different styles. Our two scores indicated that I am emotionally expressive, where as she is emotionally restrained. As a person who tends to be emotionally expressive within a conflict, it is not uncommon for me to visibly express my feelings by laughing, shouting, crying, or making overtly obvious facial expressions

(Hammer, 2005). As a more emotionally restrained person, Virginia tends to restrain and minimize more of her outward feelings and expressions; however, only slightly since her ICS score rests fairly close to the middle in between extreme emotional expressiveness and extreme emotional restraint (Hammer, 2005). Since I engage directly in conflict with emotional expressiveness, my cross-cultural conflict resolution style is the “engagement style.” This style emphasizes the importance of achieving a positive resolution by the “degree of concern that is demonstrated through more intense, verbal and non-verbal expression of emotion” (Hammer, 2005, p. 691). I find myself identifying with this particular quadrant by my preference to verbally confront a problem and putting my emotions out “on the table” for all to see (Hammer, 2005). Although we scored almost the same in regards to our direct approach to conflict, Virginia’s style is classified as the “dynamic style.” This style tends to use more indirect strategies for dealing with disagreements and uses more emotionally intense expression (Hammer, 2005).

Culturally, Virginia and I come from two very different backgrounds; however, our scores on the ICS indicate that despite our cultural origins, the ways in which we deal with problems of conflict, and even our expressions of emotion are actually more similar than not. The first thing to note when counseling Virginia is that while I come from a very individualistic society, she originates from a collectivist society. In addition to understanding how we both respond to conflict, recognizing Virginia’s cultural differences as they pertain to her value system, immigration, language, and even her social class is crucial in helping to facilitate a positive and productive therapeutic environment (Sue & Sue, 2008). Since Virginia and I both scored one point apart from each other in how we approach conflict, this similarity will be a strength as we work together to resolve a dispute or disagreement within therapy. With both of

us prescribing to a more direct approach, I should be able to avoid the challenge of Virginia possibly feeling attacked, insulted, or disrespected because she views me as either too direct, or seemingly evasive. Although only five points apart on the ICS scale, the manner in which we each use emotion within a conflict varies slightly. This difference can be a challenge if, as the therapist, I do not educate myself on our cultural differences and become culturally competent (Sue & Sue, 2008). As a Bulgarian with an ICS score indicating emotional restraint, Virginia's emotions might be revealed more subtly or perhaps at times not at all, but if I can successfully develop the appropriate intervention technique, then despite our cultural differences with my extreme display of emotions and her slightly more reserved, the healing process can begin and our conflicts can be resolved.

References

- Hammer, M. R. (2005). The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory: A conceptual framework and measure of intercultural conflict resolution approaches. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 675-695.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.