**An Intercultural Dating Dilemma**

Meena is a South Asian Indian American and has been dating Alex (a Caucasian male) for two years. Her sister is getting married to a traditional North Indian Hindu boy this December. Because most of Meena’s family and relatives live across different cities in the United States, it is hard to find a common time when everyone is present. So, her sister’s wedding seems like a perfect occasion for everyone to meet her special boyfriend.

Meena would like to invite Alex to the wedding, but her parents do not allow her to do so. Her parents do not approve of the relationship and they think that inviting her boyfriend would bring “shame” onto the family name. They say that they do not approve of the religious differences, but she knows that they are color-conscious and are mainly concerned because Alex is Caucasian. Meena also understands that her parents’ friend circle will be shocked by her dating preferences and they will blame her parents for being so lenient with her and not instilling traditional Indian values in her upbringing. Meena does not want her family to be the center of all gossip at Indian events as her family will have to bear this burden she has brought upon them due to her dating choices.

Meena is facing a dilemma now because she is caught between both worlds that are pulling her in opposite directions. Unfortunately, her sister does not have a say because her in-laws are very close-minded and they too do not approve. Meena’s boyfriend, Alex, assumes that he would be invited to the wedding. Meena is having a hard time telling him the truth. As you may know, Indian weddings can be very long, lavish, and fun, and she wants her boyfriend to see the fun side of her family. Since Alex is aware that Meena’s parents do not approve of the relationship, he has a negative perception of them. But Meena thinks that the wedding celebrations and festivities will change her boyfriend’s opinions about her family.

How should Meena address this intercultural relationship conflict situation? Should she approach her parents about it? What should she tell Alex? Should she break the news to Alex that her parents do not want to invite him?

Circle the most ideal solution and briefly jot down why you think this works best. Compare your choice with your group members.

1. Meena should threaten her parents by saying that she will elope with Alex if they continue to reject him.
2. Meena should break up with Alex because she knows that her parents and the Indian community will never accept him.
3. Meena should lie to Alex and tell him that her parents invited him to the wedding. When Alex shows up to the wedding, Meena should lie again and tell her parents that another common friend brought him along and that she did not really invite him.
4. Meena should invite Alex but not introduce Alex as her boyfriend at the wedding. She should also invite other American friends to the wedding so that Alex is not the only non-Indian person who stands out in the crowd.
5. Meena should try explaining to her parents that it is important that they invite Alex to the wedding because he means a lot to her.

*Source*: An original critical incident developed by Noorie Baig (2011), Department of Human Communication Studies, California State University, Fullerton. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Interactive Probes for “An Intercultural Dating Dilemma”**

1. What happened in this critical incident? Can you paraphrase Meena’s dilemma in your own words? Can you paraphrase her parents’ viewpoint in your own words?

2. To what extent can you relate to Meena’s dating experience? How so?

3. How would you feel if you were Alex? If Alex knew of Meena’s stress level, how could he help to resolve the party invitation situation?

4. Of the five solution choices, which solution did you select? Why?

5. Can you create a sixth solution (or brainstorm with other group members) that combines the best of all options and present it to the class?

*(continue on the next page if needed)*

**The Case of Rajpal and Balbir**

This conflict involves Rajpal, a woman of South Asian descent who was born in Canada but raised in India. Rajpal returned to Vancouver at the age of 18 to marry Balbir, a man also raised in India whom she had never met. Rajpal, as a Canadian citizen, sponsored Balbir to emigrate from India. Rajpal is now 27 years old. She self-identifies as Punjab and Indo-Canadian.

Rajpal’s marriage to Balbir lasted for three-and-one-half years. She spoke to her family about her concerns as the marriage continued, but she reports that “they did more damage than anything.” In response to Rajpal’s complaints about having no communication with her husband and no intimate relationship, her family cited their successful marriages and blamed Rajpal for failing. Her feelings were hurt by their accusations, which made her feel even worse.

Rajpal’s husband Balbir, who was raised in India, had traditional Indian expectations of the relationship. He reports that the marriage was acceptable to him. He and Rajpal did not discuss their differences at all, and he did not know she was basically very unhappy until more than three years had passed. When she raised her concerns, he was upset because he needed a stable family to apply to sponsor his parents to emigrate from India. He did not want to lose face with his family or his community by being involved in a divorce or separation.

Rajpal, the 27-year-old woman, is currently enrolled in your Intercultural Communication course. She makes a special appointment to seek your advice, as an expert in intercultural communication. As her teacher, what advice would you give her? Please check the answer:

\_\_\_\_\_ Get a divorce

\_\_\_\_\_ Grin and bear it

\_\_\_\_\_ Seek marital counseling

\_\_\_\_\_ Have a frank and open talk with Balbir

\_\_\_\_\_ Try a temporary separation

\_\_\_\_\_ Find a trusting friend to mediate

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

\_\_\_\_\_ Your choice

What is your rationale for your choice? Explain below:

*(continue on the next page if needed)*

*Source*: Exercise adapted from Michelle LeBaron (1996). “Culture and Conflict in Canada.” In F. Jandt and P. Pedersen (Eds.), *Constructive Conflict Management.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Self-Disclosure Activity: Public and Private Self**

Please identify the following topics as either:

Public: If it is comfortable to discuss with casual friends, acquaintances, or strangers OR

Private: If it is comfortable to discuss only with self, family, and intimate friends.

**Attitudes and Opinions:**

**Public Private**

1. My opinions on political issues \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. My views on religious issues \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. My attitudes on controversial racial issues \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. My views on sexual morality \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. The behaviors I regard as ethical or unethical \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Tastes and Interests:**

1. My favorite foods; my likes and dislikes for certain   
foods \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. My likes and dislikes for certain music \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. My favorite books and websites \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. My favorite movies and TV shows \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. The kind of social gathering I like best; the kind   
that bores me \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Work or Studies:**

1. What I feel are my shortcomings for school or   
work-related projects \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. What I feel are my strong points for school or   
work-related projects. \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. My goals and long-range plans in my college or work \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. How I feel about my career plans; whether I am confused   
or satisfied with the direction \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. How I really feel about the individuals I work with   
in a team project \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Money:**

1. How much money I have in my bank account \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Whether or not I owe money; if so, how much? \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. My total financial worth \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. If I had any extra money, how I would spend it \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. How I budget my money \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Personality:**

1. Aspects of my personality that really need improving \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. What particular feelings I have trouble expressing \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Aspects of my personality I really like \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. Things I feel ashamed or guilty about \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. Things that make me feel really proud \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Body:**

1. My feelings about my face \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. My feelings about my height and weight \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. My past health problems and treatment \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. My comfort level about specific parts of my body \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. My sexual experiences—past and present \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

**Family:**

1. Inquiries about the health of family members \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Descriptions of family disagreements \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Problems with siblings or parents \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

4. The family’s financial situation \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

5. Inquiries about the family’s daily routines \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_

*Source*: Adapted from Dean Barnlund (1989), *Communicative Styles of Japanese & Americans*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

**A Critical Incident: Arrival of the In-Laws**

Ken and Kim have been married for six years. For most of those six years, they have been a happily married couple. Ken is a 33-year-old German American and works at a high-tech firm in Silicon Valley. Kim is a 30-year-old Chinese immigrant who is a pharmacist and works in a nearby hospital. The couple has a 3-year-old son, Kevin. For the past three years, Kim has spent countless hours at the immigration office, applying for her parents to emigrate from China to the United States. Ken has been very supportive of Kim throughout this process. At long last, her parents finally gained entrance to the United States. They have been here for eight months, living across the street from the couple. The grandparents are delighted to be reunited with their daughter, and they dote on their only grandson. While Ken and Kim are at work, the grandparents baby-sit Kevin. Because the grandparents do not speak English, they only speak Chinese to Kevin. To their delight, Kevin has been picking up Chinese quickly.

Recently, Ken and Kim have had many tense moments and communication difficulties relating to the in-law issue. To begin with, Ken feels he is never alone with Kim in the house anymore. His in-laws are always there. Kim and her parents chatter constantly in Chinese. They also laugh in that strange Chinese tone. To make matters worse, Kim has now started to speak to him in Chinese rather than English! Ken feels very left out in his own house. He hears the Chinese laughter from the kitchen and he feels like an outsider. He loves his family and he wants things back to normal—the way it was. He decides to have an upfront, honest talk with Kim about his frustrations.

He asks Kim to please tell her parents to reduce their visits from every day to only on the weekends. Moreover, they should really call them ahead of time rather than just popping in to visit. He asks Kim to register Kevin in a nearby English-speaking preschool so that he can play with other English-speaking kids. While Kim nods “uh- huh” to all his comments, nothing seems to change. Her parents continue to visit unannounced every day and often cook up strange-smelling Chinese food in the kitchen. Ken feels increased frustration in his own house.

Meanwhile, from Kim’s viewpoint, she cannot understand how Ken can be so selfish. Her parents are new immigrants to this country. They have no friends and they do not drive. She is glad that Kevin has a chance to learn Chinese from her parents. Before their arrival, she spoke to Kevin only in English so that Ken could be included in the conversation. Now that her parents are here, she feels that her Chinese roots are taking hold again. She hopes that by ignoring Ken’s “ridiculous” requests, he’ll eventually forget about them and come to his senses. Although at one point she yells back at Ken for raising his voice and making another of his “off-the-wall” comments, often she ends up only staring at Ken in silence. She does not want to upset her parents, who are playing with Kevin in the next room. Inwardly, Kim grows increasingly resentful. She loves Ken, but at the same time she feels that her marriage is spiraling out of control. She feels misunderstood all the time. She desperately needs some help and advice to handle her marital crisis.

How would you explain Ken’s frustration and Kim’s stress? Can you draw upon some of the ideas in Chapter 11 to help Ken and Kim to understand each other’s intercultural lens with flexibility?

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Interactive Probes for “Arrival of the In-Laws”**

(Ask yourself and probe your classmates’ reactions)

1. To what extent can you relate to Ken? How so?

2. To what extent can you relate to Kim? How so?

3. Can you draw upon any real-life intimate relationship examples (involving yourself or your family members) that have had caused you tremendous relationship frustrations and stress? Are any of them related to cultural, ethnic, gender, religion, or sexual-orientation issues?

4. If you could serve as a “relationship coach” to Ken and Kim, what would you say to them?

*(continue on next page if needed)*