

## 4. Discussions and Conclusion

In this part of the thesis I will discuss the findings deriving from my theoretical and empirical studies. I will demonstrate how Culture, Communication and Intimacy are interlaced in the frame of the Couple Relationship. This part ends with my conclusions.

### 4.1 Discussions and Conclusion

#### **1- The communicational process in these couples presents as central features the importance of the language in the disclosure of their meanings and cultural backgrounds.**

The communicational process crosses over different stages in which the language has a central role. The language that the members of the couple use is a permanent process of negotiation. Depending on the country where they have been living they use the language of this country as a main language at home to communicate between them.

However, the importance of the language is not the words in a cognitive level. It is all the cultural heritage of every phrase in a symbolic level. Although learning any language requires time, the real comprehension of its symbols is a lengthy process. The members of these couples have learned that throughout their mutual contact. Moreover, they are willing to know the origin country of the other person in the attempt to know the roots of the other person

Furthermore, to all these couples the communicational process is the corner stone of their relation. Clarifying their meanings is the way that they have found in order to get to know the inside world of the other. Thus the communicational process has two main functions for these couples. First, it is the disclosure of their innermost feelings and thoughts (Derlega, 1984; Harvey & Shalom, 1997; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979) and second, it is the transmission of the meanings of their cultural background throughout the language.

Depending on the moment that as a family they have been lived certain topics of communication prevails over others. Thus, the couples with little children have to talk frequently about norms and rules that they go to transmit to their children (Regulative Communication). Among the topics that they may talk (Informative Communication) the category that promotes more interaction is Work/Studies followed by Personal issues. What they do out of the couple and their worries are central topics in their daily conversations. The communicational interaction concerning Affective Communication is related with passional feelings. If they still feel desire like at the beginning of their relation this point become the source of frequent interactions.

#### **2- Building Intimacy is a process achieved, among other things, as a consequence of their communication in-depth and because the members of the couple rely exclusively one to each other.**

Analyzing the answers to the questionnaire of Intimacy we can observe that these couples have created an intimate space. They disclose their innermost thoughts and

feelings in a wide variety of topics (Sexuality, Affection, Norms and Rules that they go to transmit to their children).

However, the Latin American member of the couple feels how his/her partner plays many other roles that usually have been fulfilled for other relatives. Although the Latin American member of the couple used to talk about his/her worries with other relatives, while they have been living abroad the couple occupies that space. So, the partner has to fill many other functions and roles that in Latin American countries are occupied by relatives.

**3- The Swedish and the Latin American member of these couples have different styles expressing affection one to each other.**

The Latin American member is more direct saying by words what he/she feels whereas the Swedish member prefers to show it by facts and doing things. How they express affection is part of their symbols and meanings as couple. Hence, the process of learning and interpreting these symbols in a proper way had had to run a long way. The communicational process has been the arena in which they make clear their meanings.

**4- The graphic expression to the answers of each questionnaire reveals how the couples have similar perceptions concerning Communication, Intimacy and, Satisfaction of their marital life which is a signal of flexibility in their relationships.**

The similarities in those perceptions make them reach an agreement about what they go to do. They respect their differences and accept one to each other in their own ways. Respect and tolerance with their differences is an important point in their relation.

Other researches based on studies among couples with similar cultural background have referred similar findings. "The stresses and success of marriage still need not be attributed to sexual or even individual personality differences, but could conceivably be expected to be true of any hypothetical relationship which is also voluntary, permanent, exclusive, and task-oriented. *The actual differences between marriage partners are probably not nearly so important as the difficulty in collaborating; furthermore, any two people in these conditions have to work out rules based on differences or similarities*" (Watzlawick & Weakland 1977 p.24).

Additionally, in his studies about Love, Sternberg found "*four attributes of relationships to increase in importance: sharing values, willingness to change in response to each other, willingness to tolerate each other's flaws, and match in religious beliefs.* The second and third items are of particular interest because they show the importance of flexibility in a relationship. *To make this things work, either you need to change in a way that better suits your partner, or your partner has to come to accept an aspect of your behavior as "the way you are" and as something not likely to change* (Sternberg, 1998 p.150).

In other words: The flexibility of the couples endures and strengthens their relationships.

**5- The cultural background of these couples is transmitted to their children through different ways. I have found five main approaches. (1) the language, (2) the preparation of the food (3) different rules that they have at home such as: show respect for the adults, learn how to use properly the set table (4) the Latin American parent makes distinctions by sexes concerning how they behave with their children emphasizing the gender role stereotypes (5) they visit their home countries with their children because they do not want to lose the contact with their roots.**

Concerning the transmission of their cultural backgrounds through foodways and ceremonies other researchers have pointed that: "legends, songs, ceremonies, rituals, and foodways permeate every facet of ethnic life, from dislocation to rites of passage to the maintenance of ethnic enclaves and institutions (...) By emphasizing some traditions while downplaying others, and by combining various traditions, styles, and interpretations of ethnicity, ethnic men and women take greater control of their lives. They come to play active roles in determining what cultural features are relevant to their understandings of ethnicity (Stern & Cicala 1991 p.XIV).

Thus, food is one of those dynamic arenas where sensitivities and meanings are generated, experienced and communicated.

**6- From the personal perspective, the members of these couples had had an especial interest in other cultures besides their own before being in love and living together.**

They were open to different influences and costumes. Their curiosity pushes them to encounter and direct contact with other cultures. This process was possible because they were secure about themselves and their identities as members of a specific culture. "A sense of identity provides the feeling of security from which one can encounter other cultures with an open mind" (Hofstede, 1991).

**7- The members of these couples are different in the sense of their cultural background whereas they share similar values and norms.**

The experiences and references of the members of these couples are completely different. However, as persons they share the same values and perspectives about the world and life. Researches have found that persons from different cultures might feel attracted because the curiosity for something different to their costumes and habits (Månsson, 1993). Other researches have found that persons with different cultural backgrounds may form a couple if they could share similar educational level (Darvishpour, 2000). The former refers to the process of forming a couple based on the excitement because of the differences, whereas the latter refers to the same process because the members of the couple have similar strategies in solving conflicts.

Moreover, as a result of this study I have found that the stability of mixed couples could also be a result of their similarities concerning values, norms and cosmovision of the world. Beyond culture and educational level they agree in expectations about what the family is, how to raise their children, what kind of things they want to give to

their children, what kind of society they want to build. All these factors go beyond personal characteristics or cultural traits. They are universal.

#### **4.2 Conclusion**

I started this paper making reference to the importance of the study of mixed couples nowadays. Throughout the research I realized that forming a stable couple between two persons with different cultural backgrounds is a difficult rather than an impossible task. The stories of these couples are an example of that.

Because they come from different cultures, the expression of their innermost feelings and thoughts has a cultural component. Nonetheless, understanding the real meaning and dimension of these expressions requires a long process. Communication is the way that they have to disclose their meanings and is the entrance door into their worlds. Thus, the language has an important part in their relation. Through the language they have the opportunity to transmit their symbols and meanings to the other person.

Although they differ in their personal characteristics, they have similar perceptions about their relation regarding Communication, Intimacy and Satisfaction. The similarities make it possible for them achieve an agreement showing respect and tolerance with their differences. They are aware that forming a couple is hard. Nonetheless, they are not afraid to face and solve conflicts.

Furthermore, despite their differences in cultural backgrounds, they share similar values that could be considered as universal ones. The process in which they have to accommodate their differences because of different personalities and cultures is very complex. However, the distance is shorter because they share similar cosmovision of the world.

## **Recommendations.**

Reviewing the present study I have realized that some issues could be part of further researches. I will summarize which aspect I consider especially interesting for further studies.

-Communication and Intimacy could be compared in cross-cultural studies among couples with different cultural backgrounds. It could be interesting to know similarities and differences in those two aspects depending on the culture of the members of the couple.

-Several research have demonstrated the importance of the concept "Gender Role" in the understanding of culture and identity (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hatfiel & Rapson, 1996). In the frame of the couple relations the concept of gender role reaches new dimensions because of the interaction of the persons. The study of this concept throughout mixed couples could enlighten new dimensions in this topic.

-The questionnaires about Intimacy, Communication and, Satisfaction could be useful techniques in comparative studies.

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