

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Within the last two decades of the 20th century there have been immense changes in American's way of life. The restructuring of the economy, a more conservative political climate, and a large influx of people from around the world has created many changes. The realization that the United States has once again become a nation of immigrants is more prevalent than ever. It is no longer possible to ignore the fact that the changing demographics in the United States indicate that people who are currently classified as ethnic "minorities" are becoming the "majority." According to the 2000 U. S. census, radical demographic changes are occurring. Currently there are 32.8 million Latinos residing in the U.S., and they represent 12.0 % of the total U.S. population. Projections are claiming that by the year 2030, 40% of the population will be of ethnic minorities, and 18% of the population would be Latino. The flux of these changes especially impacts the lives of individuals and their families. As people considered to be of an ethnic minority become a larger share of the U.S. population, the ability to understand the new social diversity will become a central task for family scientists and practitioners (Baca Zinn, 1999).

While there has been significant interest in social science in the area of communication within couples and families, little attention has been given to empirical studies that address these interests with ethnic minority populations. Stereotypes, assumptions, and biases abound and when Latinos are mentioned in scholarly works, all

too often there is a disclaimer stating that empirical data needs to be conducted in order to support the discourse. It is no longer possible for family scientists and therapists to continue to operate under outdated frameworks about how couples and families communicate. For too long white, middle class, heterosexist views have been perceived as the norm and any one who deviates, either due to cultural, class, or racial differences has been categorized as “other”. This especially impacts people of color who were once only mentioned in social science in comparison to the dominant group.

Even when most therapists agree that culture and ethnicity play a significant role in shaping the lives of individuals and their families, therapists still view “the family” from a monolithic stance. It appears evident that therapists are becoming more aware of the necessity to integrate empirical knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and individual awareness of our biases when working with people who are culturally different (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996). Given these highly quoted statistics mentioned above, it is surprising that research on marital/couple therapy has not focused on the diversity of couples in our current population.

Although efforts have been made to study marriage and family therapy (MFT) with different populations, much more research needs to be done in different cultural contexts before a comprehensive and culturally informed theory of MFT can be developed (Pinsoff & Wynne, 1995, p.608).

Most of the current body of literature describing ethnically and culturally diverse families is not based on empirical data. For the most part it is unclear how this information has been accrued. It is likely that most of the clinical literature is based on clinicians’ experiences with a particular ethnic population. Research needs to be conducted to

examine if there are any basic differences in marital relations across ethnic groups and to assess whether therapeutic interventions need to be adjusted for these couples (Bray & Jouriles, 1995). If adjustments do need to be made for ethnically diverse couples, then it will be imperative that these adjustments be based on sound evidence derived from thorough research findings.

In the light of demographic shift from a dominant Anglo-European society to a multiracial, multicultural society, theoretical and practical issues for studying and working with Latino families in therapy need to be addressed. One of the most common and complicated presenting concerns for people going to therapy involve issues related to communication problems. Communication is an essential aspect of being a living entity, especially of being human. The field of family therapy began with social scientists, psychiatrists, and psychologists interested in the communication process, especially among people with schizophrenia and their families. While there is more research in the area of conflict resolution in politics, law, mediation, business, anthropology, and sociology, there is a dearth of studies examining theories of conflict and conflict resolution among intimate relationships from a cross-cultural or intercultural perspective (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Factors for this have primarily stemmed from the belief that theories about conflict resolution strategies are universal, even though we have a plethora of information from other disciplines that inform us otherwise.

Culture makes a difference in our interactions, communication, and preferred and socially ascribed ways of resolving conflict, but in what ways? In this study, the variables used to examine conflict resolutions styles among Latinos are demographic

data, conflict resolution styles, and direct statements describing Latino couples from the marriage and family therapy literature.

Problem Statement

More empirical studies in MFT need to be conducted with ethnically or culturally diverse populations, especially with ethnic minority couples. Specific to Latino couples, there are certain phenomenon related to communication that are worthy of empirical investigation. It has been stated that constructs such as connectedness, politeness, harmony, and hierarchies are reflected in the cultural meaning systems that significantly shape the Hispanic family's style of communication, conflict management, and emotional expression, all of which are important areas for the couple and family therapist (Ho, 1987; Falicov, 1998). It is imperative for family therapists to have an empirically based understanding of the communication and conflict resolution process germane to Latino couples and families if they want to effectively work with them in therapy. Assumptions and stereotypes abound and these biases may hinder the therapeutic process instead of enrich it.

Assumptions about Latino's Conflict Resolution Styles

The assumptions found in the MFT literature that describe Latino couple's communication and conflict resolution styles are as follows:

1. Latino couples are conflict avoidant because they are members of a collectivistic culture.
2. Ideologies about connectedness, hierarchy, and personalismo shape the Latino family's style of communication, conflict management, and emotional expression.
3. Latinos view direct form of communication as undesirable and disrespectful.

4. The varying acculturation rates of family members complicates communication, which is often governed by traditional hierarchical structure.
5. Communication is formal, indirect, and guarded in public, especially with authority figures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine conflict resolution styles most predominant among the Latino couple's in the sample and to examine if various demographic data, such as years they have been married, years living in the United states, education, gender, country of origin, religion, and/or language preference may be related to couples conflict resolution style. The primary construct for this study will be conflict resolution style.

Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses used to guide the analysis of the data.

1. Gender differences will be found due to traditional beliefs about gender roles:
Women will be avoidant or validating, and men will be avoidant or volatile
2. Independent variables related to culture will impact conflict resolution styles: a)
Latinos who are foreign born and/or are most comfortable with speaking and writing in Spanish will be more avoidant, b) Latinos who are born in the U.S., prefer speaking English, and foreign born Latinos who have lived many years in the United States will be more validating.
3. Religious and/or traditional values and strong religious participation will yield greater preference for an avoidant style.

4. Educational attainment will demonstrate differences; high education will yield greater validating styles and lower education will yield more avoidant and volatile styles.

Research Questions

Although the use of research hypothesis are standard in quantitative research studies, I find the use of research questions to be equally as important to guide my thinking about my study. The following are questions that stand out as important to my work in this inquiry. These questions, as well as the hypotheses, are address in the last chapter of this dissertation.

1. What types of conflict resolution styles are most predominant among the Latino couples in this sample; validator, volatile, and avoidant?
2. Do other conflict resolution styles emerge from the data?
3. Do the answers related to the likert questions match the answers on the vignettes?
4. Are there gender differences in conflict resolution styles?
5. What variables are present when couples have the same conflict resolution style?
6. Do the participants' style of conflict resolution fit the assumptions about Latino couples in the MFT literature? Primarily are they avoidant due to the collectivistic nature of their culture?
7. Is Gottman's (1994) pen and paper instrument a reliable measure of conflict resolution? If not, how can the constructs used to measure conflict resolution be ethnically sensitive when using Latino participants?

Although there is much to gain to see how the Latinos in this sample may be the same or different from couples of other ethnicities, the intent of this study is to move

away from comparative studies. The purpose is to examine within group differences that relate to married Latino couple's conflict resolution styles and to examine the background variables that determine the variability within this sample. In addition, another research interest will be to assess if The Marital Conflict Styles Inventory (MCS) is sensitive enough to tease apart the subtle communication nuances that are culturally sensitive and highly correlated. The Marital Conflict Styles Inventory (MCS), a measurement found in Gottman's popular book, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail, and How You Can Make Yours Last* (1994) was derived from the research published in his scholarly book, *What Predicts Divorce: The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes* (1994).

Self of the Researcher

Equally important as the results of this study was the process by which the research was conducted. The topic, methodology, and data analysis reflect the self-of-the-researcher. One of the factors most prevalent for me as the researcher was the awareness and struggle of conducting a quantitative study from a social constructionist and feminist standpoint. My cultural and personal experiences also impacted the way in which I conducted the study and analyzed the data. I have become increasingly sensitive about how my theoretical stance as a therapist is congruent with myself as a researcher. There are various aspects of this struggle that have led to my doing a quantitative study in the area of conflict resolution among Latino couples. Several factors have shaped and influenced the development and application of my theoretical framework as well as my research interests and methodology.

Social Constructionist Feminist Standpoint

This research project has been extremely challenging on many levels. The process has forced me to self examine on every level imaginable, often rendering me feeling challenged, discouraged, helpless, confused, enlightened, inadequate, stuck, and methodologically and theoretically incongruent. My hope is to be open and reflexive as I disclose my internal struggle along this academic journey. Intellectually, I locate myself as both a social constructionist and a feminist. Social constructionist theorists believe all ideas, concepts, and memories arise from the social interchange, mediated through language, between people (Hoffman, 1994.). I believe that all aspects of understanding our reality and existence as human beings are a social construction. This has become evident, especially with constructs related to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, health, age, social class and status, intelligence, sexuality, power, religious beliefs, and physical and cognitive ability. To think that we create our reality through our discourse and the meanings we attach to our discourse is freeing because this belief implies that we can self define and change social realities that seem oppressive or harmful. However, this added sense of agency can also feel overwhelming since we, especially those whose realities are not validated, are then called to act to make changes. Although I have been moving in this direction since the onset of my clinical training, it is a standpoint that still feels relatively new in the context of my life.

There is no question that the integration of a feminist identity has altered my sense of who I am as a person, woman, therapist, student, teacher, and researcher. In this study I attend to the following feminist issues: Differences and similarities associated with being a Latino woman or man in a heterosexual marriage, gender differences and similarities in conflict resolution styles among Latinos, cultural stereotypes and

assumptions as they relate to racism, classism, and sexism among Latinos, and a reflexive stance as a researcher. I expect other themes to emerge once I begin to interact with my data.

My social location I choose to punctuate is that of being a woman, bi-cultural Caucasian Latina, born in 1967, emigrant from Honduras, heterosexual, Catholic, low-middle socioeconomic status, and privileged due to skin color and educational attainment. My experience within my family of origin has strongly influenced my decision to study marriage and family therapy. I am the youngest of 6 children. My parents separated when I was 6 and my siblings were grown and out of the house. My mother remarried when I was 15 and divorced 12 years later. There have been many divorces in my family, beginning with my parents, three brothers, and my sister. I have read that this is common with immigrant families and the stress of uprooting takes its toll. Perhaps that is why I am so interested in the work of John Gottman, who has done extensive research in the area of divorce. My family is very close, which is also a trait of immigrant families. We had to rely on each other in order to survive in a foreign country. Undoubtedly my mother is the family matriarch. She is the foundation and the nucleus of my family. I am close to my mother and admire her for bringing us to the U. S., keeping our family cohesive, and for being a strong, independent, professional woman.

I am originally from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Both my parents are from Honduras, and their parents and grandparents were immigrants from England, Spain, Austria-Hungary, the United States, as well as Mayan Indian. The legacy of immigration and family cohesion are evident in my family. We moved to Houston, Texas when I was two, for many of the same reason most immigrants move here; for the opportunities to

have a better way of life. As a consequence, I think that I feel a sense of indebtedness and I need to give back to Latinos, since I have been fortunate to pursue personal and professional goals in my life. It is no accident that I want to research Latino populations and find ways to help them via my research, therapy, and writings. As long as Latinos in the United States interface with issues related to racism, poverty, unequal opportunities, marginalized social status, and lack of culturally sensitive therapeutic alternatives, I will continue to raise awareness through my work as a scholar, researcher, and political activist.

Reflexivity and Researching Culture

Integrating a reflexive voice in my scholarship has become important since all of my academic pursuits feel personal. I think it is no accident that I am interested in the dynamics affecting Latino families and couples. I am still in the process of understanding the underpinnings of the marginalization of research pertaining to Latino couples and families. The following are personal questions I ask myself to be as honest as possible in the process:

1. Am I studying ethnic and cultural issues because I am bi-cultural and want to know more about “other Latino’s” experiences, or do I really want to know more about my Latino family and marriage?
2. When I see how the voice of Latinos is subjugated in MFT and social science literature, what feelings does this bring up in me and how does that impact my work?

3. Can we study an ethnic group, such as Latinos, Asian, or African Americans without perpetuating more stereotypes and essentializing them? Am I doing the very thing I am being critical of in other scholars?
4. Am I able to discern individual voices if I examine people collectively? If not, how then is my research congruent with Feminist and Social Constructionist ideology?
5. How will my research benefit the people I am studying?

Obtaining answers to these questions helps me maintain a sense of reflexivity and to remember the human aspect of the research process. I know that while my study of Latino families was not on a conscious level to study my own family, I have learned a lot about my family and my culture in the process. As I did this quantitative research study, I made a conscious effort to not suppress the reflexive nature of my inquiry about Latino and Latinas and their perceptions of their marriages and communication styles. It is my hope that this study will enable me to learn more about my self, family, culture, research participants, and the research process. This scholarly inquiry is a personal journey. The whole process is reflexive, whether I am consciously aware of it or publicly voice it.

Philosophical Stances to Knowing "Other"

As I work on this research project I am in constantly coping with my internal struggle about researching Latino Couples as a monolithic group. Should people continue to do research about ethnic groups as if there were no within group differences? How can I generalize, even within a sample, about such a diverse group of people such as Hispanics? Can a group of people be described as possessing traits that are culturally ascribed? How can those traits be distinguished from other variables such as gender,

social class, IQ, and religious beliefs? I continue to struggle with these questions and so many more. Doing work in the area of ethnic and racial diversity is becoming increasingly necessary for therapists to be culturally informed. Laird (1998) believes that to be a multiculturally competent, therapists need to know about and to appreciate "difference." But she states that "different from" often implies "less than." How do we learn people of a given culture without continuing to put them in boxes and narrowly define them? Laird (1998) suggests "it is cultural questioning process, not cultural characteristics, that has transferability across cultural categories" (p. 23). Continuing my research will inevitably help me continue the cultural questioning process rather than arrive to conclusions about how Latino couples and their styles of communicating and resolving conflict can be described.

Regardless of empirical data, clinical observation, and personal experience with people from a particular "group," we can really ever know another person or group? These ideas stemmed from Goolishian and Anderson's (1992) "not knowing stance" to therapy. Anderson (1997) believes that knowing is the delusion of understanding or the security of methodology and it decreases the possibility of seeing and increases our deafness to the unexpected, the unsaid, and the not-yet-said. "Not-knowing refers to a therapist's attitude or belief that s/he does not have access to privileged information, can never fully understand another person, always needs to be in a state of being informed by the other, and always needs to learn more about what has been said or may not have been said (Anderson, p. 134, 1997)." Not-knowing means humility about what one knows, not that the therapist does not have knowledge or expertise. Humble does not mean meek, unsure, or timid. It is an unassuming manner. This stance also applies to my stance as a

researcher. The goal is to seek to understand, not to prove, disprove, or arrive at a set of conclusions about Latino couples or marriages.

As the United States becomes more ethnically diverse and the world becomes a smaller place, it seems that now more than ever we are striving to obtain information that will help us better understand diverse populations. We want to learn all that we can so that we can “understand” them. There could be several perils about relying on pre-learned information. First, we run the risk of making broad generalizations of how “these people are.” As we know, people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds may not be the same in terms of socioeconomic levels, religions, and acculturation levels. Second, because therapists will attempt to be credible and competent, we may feel like it is important to show the clients that we “know.” This would be especially true in the beginning stages of therapy when the therapist is building trust and joining. Third, we may not be able or willing to “suspend” our knowledge to verify the local knowledge of the client. As Anerson (1997) states,

if we truly do not know, then we must learn. If we attempt to learn, then we attempt to understand what the client is telling us. Knowing and understanding in the mode are always on the way. A therapist must risk being a learner again with each client, which is a very humbling and freeing experience, (p. 135). When a therapist takes a reflective philosophical stance, the dualism and hierarchy between a client and a therapist collapse and responsibility and accountability are shared (p.105).”

I tend to gravitate more toward Joan Laird’s (1998) assertions, which are somewhat different from those of Anderson's. Laird espouses the "informed not-

knowing" stance of Shapiro (1995). This both/and stance assumes that if we are to understand cultural stories, we need to know enough about the culture to ask good questions and that special "knowledges" are helpful as long as we hold them tentatively.

Scholars Influencing This Study

Of course everything I have read, every conversation and experience I have had, especially with clients, students, professors, and colleagues has shaped my beliefs about myself as a therapist and scholar. However, the most influential scholars on my thinking about research and practice have been family therapists who have shown interest in ethnic and minority inclusion in the field. Scholars such as Monica McGoldrick, Celia Jaes Falicov, Kenneth V. Hardy, Man Keung Ho, Nydia Gracia-Preto, Guillermo Bernal, Joan Larid, Jodie Kliman, Robert-Jay Green, Judith Myers-Avis, Nancy Boyd-Franklin, and many others, have laid the foundation for empirical studies to begin to come to fruition. Other scholars include John M. Gottman, Harlene Anderson, Sheila McNamee, Kenneth J. Gergen, Michael White, David Epston, and Froma Walsh. Their influence becomes evident through out this text.

Benefits of This Study

Studying the conflict resolution styles of Latino Couples has several benefits. First and foremost it will add significant, empirically based information to the scant body of literature with a Latino sample. This literary contribution will hopefully help family scientists and therapists become more effective when working with Latino couples. Second, I will be able to ascertain the validity or usefulness of Gottman's survey instrument and make suggestions for improvements. There is currently a need for culturally sensitive measures and this process may contribute to body of measurements

currently available for Latinos. Third, it will help me explore the possibilities of doing a quantitative study from a social constructionist, reflexive stance. Having research and theoretical ideologies be congruent is important. It enables one to pursue academic integrity and deconstruct some of the monolithic, either/or thinking we have about the research process. The process is isomorphic to the polarized thinking about Latinos and other ethnic groups and this way of thinking must change if we are to truly meet the needs of Latino couples and families in therapy.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature for this study will address the following:

Communication among intimate relationships, theoretical frameworks for conflict resolution, conflict resolution and culture, diversity and Marriage and Family Therapy, and the social construction of culture. In addition, I will review the literature examining Latino couple's marital expectations, ecosystemic issues, styles of communication and conflict resolution, the impact of acculturation, and Latino's experience in family therapy.

Understanding the process of communication is important because communication is a critical component to all forms of psychotherapy. A proper understanding of communication is especially important in marital therapy because improving problems in communication is often the primary goal for therapy (O'Donohue & Crouch, 1996).

Communication among Intimate Relationships

Communication is far from a new intrigue in the social sciences. Over the last twenty years, marital therapists, especially those working from the behavioral and cognitive behavioral model, have placed a strong emphasis on the relationship between communication and marital adjustment and stability (Gordon, Baucom, Epstein, Burnett, & Rankin, 1999). However, problems in communication continue to be one of the main presenting problems bringing couples into therapy and a contributing factor to marital

dissolution (Gottman, 1994). In addition, communication patterns have consistently been shown to be strongly associated with marital satisfaction (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1991) and how a couple communicates prior to marriage is a strong predictor of later marital satisfaction (Cate & Loyd, 1992). So even though we know that having effective communication is mentioned as an important component to the change process for couples in therapy (Christensen, Russell, Miller, & Peterson, 1998), outcome studies show that interventions that have communication skills as their main focus are only successful in helping couples become non-distressed only 50% of the time (Bray & Jouriles, 1995).

Theoretical Frameworks for Conflict Resolution

Theoretically, three approaches have been identified by Cahn (1990, 1992), as explanatory frameworks to guide our understanding of conflict among intimate relationships in the U.S.: Cognitive-exchange, rules-interventionist, and systems-interactionist. Briefly, these theories are delineated.

The Cognitive Exchange Model

The cognitive exchange model emphasizes the importance of perceived costs and rewards, comparisons of alternative choices, and the degree of interdependence in close relationships. This framework emphasizes relational partners as being rational and calculating in the conflict resolution process.

Rules-Interventionist

The rules-interventionist perspective examines a couple's relational expectations and rules they use to regulate appropriate and inappropriate conflict behaviors in the relationship. This framework closely examines how rules and emotions are used to govern the conflict negotiation process. The role of a conflict mediator in re-establishing

boundaries and rules in the intimate conflict situation is also a valued component of this theory.

Systems-Interactionism

In contrast, the systems interactionist framework (e.g. Gottman, 1979, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1983) emphasizes the importance of delineating the verbal and nonverbal patterns of intimate conflict and how they affect the quality of the relationship.

Although these approaches are valuable frameworks for understanding intimate conflict concepts in Western-based nations such as the U.S. and Australia, major questions concerning these traditions remain to be addressed from a cross-cultural perspective (Ting-Toomey, 1994). The work of John Gottman will be discussed in detail since his studies have strongly shaped my research interests.

John Gottman's Research

In recent years, the work of Gottman has been influential in the field of marriage and family therapy and has especially been influential in my work with couples. Gottman's (1993) typology of marriages has been instrumental in helping relational therapists work with couples to define their conflict resolution styles and to assess how their styles impact their ability to communicate effectively about volatile topics. Gottman has identified five types of couples, three of which he claims are stable and nondistressed: The volatile couple, which was the highest in emotional expressiveness, the validating couple, who was intermediate in emotional expressiveness, and the conflict-avoiding couple, who were the lowest.

The primary hypothesis guiding Gottman's (1994) research stemmed from the hypothesis generated by Kaplan, Burch, and Bloom (1964), in which they found

physiological linkage between people only when they did not like each other. This differed from the therapy literature, which had focused on the synchronous physiological reactions between patient and therapist as a measure for empathy. However, Gottman was able to show that this physiological linkage accounted for enormous portions of the variance in marital satisfaction, just like Kaplan et al. (1964) had suggested. Gottman's primary recent research endeavor is to propose a theoretical formulation about marital stability and dissolution that attempts to integrate behavior, cognition, and physiology in marital interaction (Gottman, 1994, p. 330). While he does not claim certain behaviors "cause" divorce, from his longitudinal studies he has been able to identify a downward regression that inevitably leads to divorce. Gottman suggests a mechanism through which the outcome and process cascades may be linked.

A theoretical formulation is proposed that is designed to link the outcome cascade (cascade toward dissolution), the process cascade (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling), the distance and isolation cascade, and concepts of physiological arousal and reactivity (Gottman, 1994, p.330). The cascade model of marital dissolution suggests that there are separate trajectories for couples whose marriages are dissolving (nonregulated couples) and couples whose marriages are stable (regulated couples). The cascade model is as follows: low marital satisfaction at Time 1 and at Time 2 (separated by four years in their study) leads to consideration of separation or consideration of divorce, which then leads to separation, which then leads to divorce. Gottman's research study is also based on the balance theory of marriage. This theory proposes that there is a process that is related to this outcome cascade and that the dissolution ratio is related to a positive-to-negative ratio of less than one (0.8:1), whereas stability is associated with a

5:1 ratio. Generally speaking, those processes most important in predicting dissolution would involve a balance, or a regulation of positive and negative behavior. This is how the terms regulated and non-regulated have a precise meaning. The research methodology involves collecting a multi-method database for studying couples. This includes interview data with questionnaires, observational, and physiological data. The research process is very technical and involves many levels of measurement, which makes it difficult to replicate a study to the exact specifications.

The clinical implications of this research has been important. First, it is important that researchers have made a strong attempt to empirically examine communication factors that have shown to lead to divorce. Second, if Gottman's predictor variables are correct, then these data could help generate more data on how to prevent marital dissolution. Lastly, I think this type of research is important because MFT's could begin to test treatment modalities based on the cascade model of marital dissolution and on the balance theory of marriage, in which couples could learn how to gauge a 5:1 positive to negative interaction ratio. Sharing this knowledge with our clients could prove to be helpful.

Evidence was provided that contradicts Gottman's (1994) assertion that couples who have similar conflict management styles are happier than those who have mixed types (Wall & Cole, 1997). It was asserted that of the three conflict resolution types (conflict avoiders, volatile, and validators), couples who were both validators had happier marriages. The implications for therapy are important since a major therapeutic goal would be to help couples move toward a validating style, instead of accepting a "preferred style" that is not conducive to their marital satisfaction.

Although these data are important for marriage and family therapists, this typology of couples has not been empirically tested to verify if they can be generalized to couples from non-Anglo and non-Hispanic populations. As Gordon et. al (1999) suggest, the failure of a significant number of couples to benefit from communication focused therapies suggests that communication, although important, may not always be the most critical ingredient in marital adjustment for all couples. What appears to be sorely lacking in Gottman's research, and in others such as Gordon et al., is the inclusion of diversity among their samples; couples from diverse nationalities, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, interracial couples, same sex couples, elderly couples, and remarried couples. Since the majority of the literature is based on an White, non-Hispanic population, it will be important to test if a Hispanic population will yield different results, therefore different therapeutic implications. This exclusion of diversity is what has inspired me to adapt Gottman's work into the study of Latino couples.

Communication and Gender

It is a common belief that there are gender differences in communication. Several studies from MFT and psychology have directly addressed the relationships between gender and SES and the communication process.

O'Donohue and Crouch (1996) examine if communication training programs in marital therapy have sufficiently addressed the complexities of gender-linked factors in communication. Their review of the literature examined communication behaviors for each marital partner for a) quantitative features (e.g. length of utterance, total duration of talk time), b) qualitative features (e.g. choice of words, use of qualifiers), c) interactional

style (e.g. including consideration of both form and function of communication styles), and d) nonverbal behaviors (e.g. smiling, eye contact). The data suggested that individuals tend to hold stereotypes of gender differences in language, but many of these supposed differences have not been supported in empirical investigations. Overall, they noted that convergence across studies suggests that gender has an important suggestive role in communication, in that the gender of the listener functions to elicit different language and communication from speakers. Thus, effective communication therapy may be facilitated by evaluating each partner's gender-based expectations of hers/his own communication behavior and the gender-based expectations regarding their partner's communication.

Other researchers have explored gender and conflict structure in marital interaction (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). Conflict structure was defined by who was requesting change. They established across two studies that there are no general demand/withdraw role differentiation between spouses when discussing problems raised by husbands, but there is a definite role differentiation along gender lines when discussing the wife's issues. Also, both husbands and wives reported having more anxiety when they discussed the issue identified by the husband, possibly because husbands brought up issues less often. They assert that couples who have gender-stereotyped roles also appear to be particularly at risk for experiencing longitudinal deterioration in their relation satisfaction, possibly because their conflict behavior becomes more polarized and rigid over time, making it harder for them to resolve their problems effectively.

In the previous study by Christensen and Heavey (1990) as cited by Heavey et al. (1993), two different causal explanations for gender differences in the demand/withdraw pattern of interaction was provided. The first was labeled the individual differences perspective, which focuses on the stable differences between women and men (i.e. personality and biological differences). This view explains how the higher physical arousal of men during conflict leads them to try to minimize or to avoid conflict to escape the unpleasant arousal (Gottman and Levenson, 1986). Another individual differences explanation suggests that since women are socialized to be highly relationship oriented and to seek closeness and intimacy, they are encouraged to seek closeness and intimacy. In contrast, men are socialized to be independent and achievement oriented, which encourages them to avoid discussions in pursuit of their independence (Gilligan, 1982 and Rubin, 1983 as cited in Heavey et al. 1993). The second explanation was labeled a conflict structure perspective, which examined the larger social structure that affords men greater power and higher status, which enables men to avoid conflict. Whereas women have typically less power than men and are more dissatisfied with the status quo, they see conflict in their discussions as the only way of getting what they want. The social structure gives men greater power, which leads to specific conflict structures where women have more investment in change than men.

Data from White's study examines gender differences in marital communication patterns (1989). She asserts that women and men operate from different worldviews to reach solutions to their problems. The study engaged 56, highly educated, middle class Caucasian couples in a task involving conflict resolution, and related their consequential and sequential interactions to their marital satisfaction. Men used coercion to distance,

analyze the situation, and take control in order to correct negative situations before they escalate, thus, maintaining autonomy. In contrast, women repeatedly used affiliation to maintain connection long enough to find a solution, thus maintaining their relatedness. In response to marital dissatisfaction, male coerciveness and female affiliation could also be understood as a historical pattern, given that males and females within a marriage are constrained by socially constructed gender roles and stereotypes of gender-specific modes of conflict resolution. This gender pattern of male coerciveness and female affiliation may mirror the social imbalance of power.

Very few studies have directly examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and conflict resolution among marital couples. This is especially true when the research participants are of an ethnic minority. Most often social sciences mistake difference due to race, ethnicity, or gender, may often be due to class or SES differences.

Conflict Resolution and Culture

Conflict resolution is a cultural phenomenon (Fry & Bjorkqvist, 1997). However, the role of culture in conflict among intimate relationships has been essentially ignored (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Ross (1993), as cited by Fry et al., states that the 'culture of conflict' reflects a society's relevant norms, practices, and institutions regarding conflict. These norms, practices, and institutions then provide a perceptual framework and appropriate scripts people use for conflict resolution. Fry and Bjorkqvist (1997) affirm we should be cautious when attempting to apply conflict-resolution techniques across cultural settings, especially when attempting to mediate within a culture different from our own. Furthermore, since conflict is a cultural phenomenon with culturally specific ways of perceiving and responding to conflict, many unquestioned assumptions can be

rendered invisible to the members of any given culture (Fry & Fry, 1997). Since people often follow social scripts to resolve conflict, options for dealing with conflict are often outside a person's cultural repertoire, which is why exploring cross-cultural diversity in how conflicts are handled gives us more options and possibilities for peaceful resolution. Fry and Fry (1997) assert that although there have been numerous anthropological studies examining the culturally specific nature of conflict resolution, many of the models and techniques used for conflict resolution have stemmed from non-anthropological sources from Western societies, which convey implicit assumptions about the generalizability of these models. Fry and Fry argue for a both/and stance that helps practitioners and analysts obtain a balance and integration for the importance of cultural influence with the search for more general patterns for models of conflict resolution. In the next session I will provide a brief overview of how various cultures address issues related to interpersonal conflict resolution.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

Although there are many ways in which cultures differ, one dimension that has consistently received attention from cross-cultural communication researchers and psychologists around the world is individualism-collectivism (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Examining the value orientations of various cultures from an individualistic-collectivistic continuum can be useful framework for explaining some of the basic relational differences and similarities in individualistic vs. group-based cultures. In general, it is believed that in individualistic cultures, importance is given to an individual's identity, rights, and needs over a group's identity, rights and needs. On the contrary, in collectivistic cultures, there is a broad value tendency for a culture to emphasize the

importance of “we” identity over the “I” identity, group obligations over individual rights, and in-group-oriented needs over individual wants and desires (Ting-Toomey, 1994). As cited by Ting-Toomey (1994), high individualistic value tendencies have been found in the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, among others as opposed to high collectivistic value tendencies examined in China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, and Guatemala, to name a few (Hofstede, 1991; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Ting-Toomey cautions us to be mindful of the variability found within various societies in regard to the low/individualistic and high/collectivistic community sharing value tendencies. This is especially evident in highly heterogeneous societies such as those found in the United States and in many parts of Europe where there may be large populations of immigrants or first generation nationals.

Although empirical data are not available to examine cultural variability within romantic or married couple relationships from the individualism-collectivism perspective, Ting-Toomey (1997) speculates that couples with collectivistic values would tend to use passive conflict responses, such as neglect and passive loyalty, more so than active responses in handling relational dissatisfaction. Also, she predicts there would be gender differences in which males would tend to use more passive conflict responses (such as “neglect” and “passive loyalty”), and females would tend to use more active conflict responses, (such as “voice” and “exit”). In contrast, studies conducted in the United States (presumably from a Euro-Anglo sample) revealed that large relational investment size encourages the use of “constructive” conflict responses, such as assertive “voice” and active “loyalty”, and discourages the use of “destructive” responses, such as “exit”

and “neglect” (Rusbult, 1987; Healy & Bell, 1990, as cited in Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Attractive alternatives are perceived to be the use of “active” conflict responses such as “voice” and exit “shape up or ship out”, and that there are not alternative to promote the use of “passive” conflict responses such as “neglect” and passive loyalty. Furthermore, men in the U.S. tend to prefer the use of neglect and exit responses in dealing with intimate conflict more than so than U.S. women, who preferred the use of voice and loyalty responses. While this information may be informative for examining cultural values from a collectivistic-individualist paradigm, it may be more useful if the conflict responses of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect were operationally defined in order to not need to infer their meanings.

And lastly, Hall’s (1976) low-context and high-context communication framework may help increase our understanding of intimate conflict style variations within an individualistic-collectivistic frame. Hall asserts that human transaction can be essentially divided into low-context and high-context communication systems. Overall, low-context communication, typically found in individualistic cultures, use a pattern of linear logic, direct verbal interaction, disciplined to relaxed nonverbal emotional expressions, and a sender-oriented persuasive value (Ting-Toomey, 1985). In contrast, high-context communication, typically found in collectivistic cultures, refers to communication patterns of spiral logic interaction approach, indirect verbal negotiation, understated nonverbal nuances (e.g. for some Asians) or animated emotional expressions (e.g. for many people of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East) (Ting-Toomey, 1985). Examining the value orientations of various cultures from an individualistic-collectivistic continuum can provide us with a useful backdrop for unraveling the

idiosyncratic conflict resolution strategies employed in various parts of the world.

Exploring cultural views for handling conflict situations will undoubtedly increase our understanding of the ways in which couples, marriages, and families from those cultures resolve their grievances.

Eastern and Western Views

Johan Galtung (1997) has closely examined conflict theories and worldviews of Eastern and Western cultures. He states that the individualized nature of conflicts in the West, as opposed to the social or collective style in the East, result in contrasting religious based views about conflict. Galtung examines the impact Christianity has made in the West and Buddhism has made in the East and how these worldviews differ. Christianity is time bound with a beginning (genesis) and end (apocalypsis-catharsis) and the culture is said to individualize conflict, seeing conflict as originating in the individual. In contrast, Buddhist time is infinite, with no beginning or end. And although there is a transcendence of nirvana, the transformation is to another unknown and unknowable types of existence. Within this belief system, conflict is seen as arising within a collectivity of significant Others. Reality is boundless in social space as well as in time. Both civilizations have strong views about disharmony and believe that harmony comes to those individuals who follow the Ten Commandments to Christianity or the Noble Eight-Fold path in Buddhism. Conflict of disharmony comes to those to stray away from the Law of God or the Law of karma. Galtung (1997) continues to assert that individuals pays for their bad deeds by answering to God, which is a linear perspective, or by hurting significant Others (alive or deceased, human or nonhuman) which generates bad karma, stems from a collective and systemic perspective. In Christianity, the sinner can repent

by asking for forgiveness of sins, but in Buddhism, the wrong doer needs to do good deeds to improve the karma. These religious foundations to views about conflict resolution, both linear and systemic help provide a broader, cultural anthropological explanation as to why people from various cultures handle interpersonal conflict differently.

There are many ways in which conflict resolution strategies are employed worldwide. Depending on the culture, people will choose most often resolve their differences in ways that are deemed socially acceptable. Conflict avoidance is a strategy that is most evident among collectivistic cultures (Gabrielidis et al. 1997). Hollan (1997), for example, has investigated the Toraja people of South Sulawesi, Indonesia whom primarily use conflict avoidance as their preferred strategy for preventing conflict and violence. They maintain peace through an intricate set of intra and interpersonal controls of thought, emotion, and behavior, by avoiding adversaries, limiting their expressions of anger, recounting the culturally accepted attitudes about the negative consequences of aggressive acts, and by the use of mediation by a village elder when disputes cannot be ignored. The mediator is more concerned with restoring social harmony than with defending individual's rights or punishing the offender. The villagers of Toraja prefer to avoid the people with whom they are in contact with instead of confronting them directly. This stance is perceived to be socially desirable since the Toraja place a high value on community cooperation and interdependence, as well as strongly discourage overt conflict and aggression. Although interpersonal hostility is apparent through gossip and fears of magical poisoning and trickery, they seem to be successful at avoiding, thus

resolving overt forms of conflict and aggression. Other cultures are known to view conflict avoidance as a preferred way to resolve disagreements or disputes.

Although studies done to observe conflict resolution styles among Latin Americans is sparse within the MFT literature, we can turn to disciplines such as cultural anthropology, psychology, and sociology for a closer examination. Cook (1997) explores the ways and beliefs of the islanders of Margarita, who live approximately twenty miles off the northeastern coast of mainland Venezuela. This heterogeneous society is comprised of native Margaritenos, (who are mestizos of Native, African, and Spanish descent), Venezuelan nationals, and foreigners. Cook (1917) states that the term conflict resolution within the Margariteno society is an oxymoron since conflict resolution is a powerful generator of conflict. Conflict is usually resolved by and regenerated through nonviolent, premeditated, activities such as gossip, monologues, spying, limericks, song dueling, ostracism, and witchcraft (Cook, 1993, as cited in Cook, 1997). Within this culture, conflict serves to revitalize the group by expulsing deviants and including new members that make more valuable contributions. These ongoing contentious acts create change patterns and opportunities that bolster their society and allow individuals to make social adjustments without a win/lose outcome.

Another study examined the preferred conflict resolution styles of people from Mexico and the United States (Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997). The authors closely examine how cultural differences in values influence the way individuals resolve conflict. Two frequently studied variables in intercultural research, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity were linked to the conflict resolution styles represented by the dual-concern model. As cited in

Gabrielidis et al., 1997, research on the dual-concern model illustrates the various styles people have for managing interpersonal conflict (Pruitt, 1982, 1991; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). In this model, conflict resolutions styles are determined by individual's concern for their own outcomes and their concern for the outcomes of others. The combination of these two dimensions yields four basic styles of conflict resolution: accommodation, collaboration, avoidance, and competition. Accommodation is described as a high concern for others and a low concern for self. Avoidance is a strategy that is low in concern for self and others. Problems are permitted to go unresolved or others are given the responsibility for solving the problem. Competition is a style in which people are high in concern for self, but low in concern for others. Conflict is perceived to have a win-lose outcome. Lastly, collaboration is a win-win style that is high in both concern for self and concern for others. While in conflict, these individuals will try to integrate the needs of both parties into a solution that will maximize the interests of both parties.

It is suggested that people in collectivistic cultures prefer harmony-enhancing strategies of conflict resolution, but that people in individualistic cultures use more competitive strategies (Gabrielidis et al. 1997). While Asian samples are used to represent collectivistic cultures, differences have been reported when non-Asian collectivistic cultures have been used to examine cultural differences in conflict resolution styles. Gire and Carment (1992) as cited in Gire, 1997, found that Canadians (an individualistic culture) used harmony-enhancing styles, although Nigerians (a collectivistic culture) has an equal preference for both harmony-enhancing and competitive styles. These findings warn us of the danger of oversimplifying the influence

individualism and collectivism may have on the preferred styles of conflict resolution. Latin American collectivism is similar to an Asian style but also has some important differences.

In addition, Hofstede (1980) as cited by Gabrielidis found that masculinity-femininity is also an important cultural dimension when examining conflict resolution styles. Hofstede argues that all societies define behaviors that are more suitable for males and females and that two predominant patterns emerge: male assertiveness, associated with autonomy, aggression, exhibition, and dominance, and female nurturing, associated with affiliation, helpfulness, and humility. Masculine cultures value individual decision-making, competitiveness, and personal recognition, whereas feminine cultures encourage nurturing behavior, friendly relations, and interpersonal cooperation. Gabrielidis et al (1997) study revealed mixed findings. Examining the conflict resolution styles of 103 college students in Mexico (51 males and 40 females) and 91 college students from the southwest U.S. (51 males and 40 females), their results yield very few gender differences. Mexicans scores significantly higher than the Americans on two of the four conflict resolution scales; accommodation and collaboration, however there were no significant differences for avoidance or competition. Participants from Mexico scored higher on the Concern for Others styles such as accommodation and collaboration. And although Mexico is a collectivistic culture, the Mexican sample scored significantly higher than the American sample on both measures of interdependence (maintaining self-other bonds and concern with others' evaluations) as well as scoring higher than the Americans on one measure of independence (self-knowledge). Both cultures preferred collaboration and accommodation to avoidance and competition and there were no significant differences

in masculinity scores, although the Mexican sample scored lower in femininity. These findings are important because they suggest that for interpersonal conflict, avoidance may reflect a concern for others, instead of a lack of concern for others as proposed by the dual-concern model. Furthermore, independence of the self and interdependence of the self may be separate dimensions, instead of constructs on a continuum.

The field of MFT began with a strong concern for social issues, yet there has been little attention paid to the clinical needs and strengths of minority families (Saba, Karrer, & Hardy, 1989). As the ethnic and cultural make-up of Americans continues to diversify, clinicians will continue to encounter considerable complexity in the ethnic minority families they treat. Stereotypes will fit less than before and generalizations and comparisons will need to be made with more care. McGoldrick (1998, p.8) states,

if we look carefully enough, all of us are a hodge-podge. Developing 'cultural competence' requires us to go beyond the dominant values and explore the complexity of culture and cultural identity- not without values and judgments about what is adaptive, healthy, or 'normal', but without accepting unquestionably our society's definitions of these culturally determined categories.

MFT and The Social Construction of Culture

The concepts related to culture, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality are continuously changing within social science. The way therapists accept or reject the social constructions created about the people that they perceive to be different from themselves will have a big impact in the way they work with them in therapy.

Culture, (whether we are talking about gender, age, race, or other cultural categories) is an individual and social construction; a constantly evolving

changing set of meanings that can be understood only in the context of a narrativized past, a co-interpreted present, and a wished-for future. It is always contextual, emergent, improvisational, transformational, and political; above all, it is a matter of linguistics or of languaging, of discourse. It is meaning-defined and itself definitional and constitutive (Laird, 1998, p. 28).

This philosophy rejects the notion that we can fully understand another person/client or truly know a speaker's intention or meaning because the process of a quest for meaning is constantly changing and evolving (Gergen, 1994). Because of the attention given to language and hermeneutics, post-modern therapy can have especially positive effects when working with culturally or ethnically diverse clients. The language we use to describe or to talk about each other is intricately related to the social constructionist beliefs of a given culture or society. Furthermore, the terminology used to describe Latino families has a profound impact in the way we are perceived, and in turn how we perceive ourselves.

"The relationship between language and culture is inextricably and jointly bound to psychotherapeutic process (Clauss, 1998)." Language is representational of the cultural context in which the therapist and client live. As mentioned before, my review of the literature began while working on my master's thesis. It was then that I began to appreciate the significance and impact that language and terminology has on the lives of people. Specific nuances of language shape and influence our biases, attitudes, actions towards others, and the way we feel about ourselves. For example, when I speak in Spanish, I think and feel differently than when I speak in English, my preferred language. I know that when others see me (a White woman with blue eyes) speaking in Spanish,

they also perceive me differently. I always feel the prolonged stare and the instant reminder that I am “other”, when I choose to be. At other times when I speak English and look the way I do, I easily blend in with the dominant culture. This is the nature of being a bi-cultural, multi-race/ethnic Latina. Examining our cultural assumptions and biases is especially important for mental health professionals who will inevitably work with clients who they consider different from themselves (Bermúdez, 1997). Because I am interested in social constructionism and how language generates meaning, I have deconstructed the terms used to describe Latinos and other cultural, racial, and ethnic groups in the MFT literature.

The language we use to describe or talk about minority or marginalized groups is currently a heated topic within the social sciences. As a profession, we continued to privilege the white, male, middle-class discourse within our practice and scholarship. It has been 32 years since the publication of *Families of the Slums* (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967), when family therapists began to recognize the importance of addressing class, race, and ethnicity. However, the field has been criticized for traditionally alienating this type of literature which was often marginalized, ignored, or seen as an afterthought in most of the MFT training and writing (Kliman, 1994). Race, culture, and ethnicity still have not been completely incorporated into mainstream family therapy literature (Hardy, 1989). In addition, “we continue to use words such as ‘culture,’ ‘gender,’ ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ ‘social class,’ and ‘sexual orientation’ as if they had consistent definitions and as if we have some agreement on their meanings (Laird, 1998, p.20).”

It appears as if people from the dominant group (those who are not of an ethnic minority) provide the real norm of the family life cycle, the family structure, and so forth, and often times mark the standard by which poor, dark, gay, or other disenfranchised groups are compared and valued. This is evidenced in the comparative research studies done in the Field of MFT. Studies comparing African American to White subjects remain the most frequently utilized method in research on African Americans, and in APA ,covering a 20 year span, 72% of the research articles on African Americans were based on such race-comparative studies (Azibo, 1992; Graham 1992, as cited in Laird, 1998).

Fontes & Thomas (1996) assert that issues pertaining to culture in MFT can no longer be considered extra, specialized, or optional. Cultural issues are always present for all families, and “the extent to which therapists harness their own power and potential depends on their knowledge, comfort, and commitment in this area (p. 257).” Kliman (1994) discusses the interweaving of gender, class, and race in the field of marriage and family therapy (MFT). She asserts that race is far more powerful than ethnicity in terms of how it affects our experience. Traditionally race referred to a membership in a biological human grouping, distinguishable by features such as skin color, hair texture, facial structure, and the like. Ethnicity referred to a grouping of people based in their national origin and linguistic and cultural traditions, with which members may or may not identify with. A group of people can claim the same ethnicity and still have different racial make-up. Hispanics are an example of this, since they are a group comprised of people from different races. Yet, if race is a more powerful word than ethnicity in terms of how it shapes our experience, then why is the term race not used more often?

Race

The term “race” historically has been referred to as having three racial groups: Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasoid (Hardy and Laszloffy, 1994). However, contrary to how race was once constructed, or how Kliman discusses race above, others believe race is no longer based on any distinctive cultural or linguistic heritage, nor on any irreducible physical differences (Coontz, 1999).

Racialization draws on real or imagined physical differences to define and separate people, but race is a socially constructed and constantly changing phenomenon that has no coherent biological base and has never been shown to explain differences in human behavior. Nevertheless ideologies of race have real consequences such that acting in a “race-blind” way on an individual level allows and even encourages the racial structuring of society to continue (Coontz, 1999, p. xv-xvi).

Hardy and Laszloffy (1994) discuss the ways in which the field of family therapy has marginalized racial issues. The inadequacy in our choice of language is further complicated when using socio-political categories such as Hispanic and Asian. Hardy and Lazloffy (1994) assert that these politically based descriptors confuse understanding the differences between race, skin color, ethnicity, and culture. For example, the terms Hispanic or Latino is generally used to refer to people of Spanish origin. However, this seemingly monolithic group is comprised of many ethnic groups and various racial ancestries: European, African, Amerindian, Asian, and a variety of combinations of theses (mulatto or metizo). Current descriptions do not adequately reflect this heterogeneous reality. In addition, Latinos, unlike African Americans, are divided rather

than united by the construct of race, even though all are subject to discrimination from white society. Racial and ethnic categories are always evolving. For example, some former racial categories have become ethnic ones over time, such as with the Irish, who were once considered a nonwhite race. They won their whiteness in large part through participation in the fabrication of color as a category that was thought to outweigh class (Coontz, 1999). As Mary Waters states, as cited in Coontz, 1999, “optional ethnicities” can make the celebration of diversity a new excuse to avoid confronting racism.

Asserting that everyone has an ethnicity, many whites are able to deny the distinct histories of groups whose racial or ethnic identity was socially imposed in order to facilitate discriminating and oppressing them. In times of racial tension, speaking in terms of ethnicity may be a softer descriptor, easier, and more politically correct for people in the dominant culture.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity describes people by their presumed common ancestry, language, and cultural heritage (Coontz, 1999). However, the term ethnicity is often viewed in relation to minority status, and hence relegated to “other” status. This is because ethnicity does not occur where the socio-political environment is homogeneous (Melville, 1988, p.76).” Therefore, the process of ascribing minority status is based on attitudes and behaviors that are not valued by the dominant culture (Karrer, 1989). Although ethnicity is beginning to be recognized in the family therapy field, it has caused therapists to stereotype certain groups of people. This narrowing of context creates a false sense of understanding because we are not accounting for individual or within group differences.

In essence, whether we pertain to a minority or majority status, we are all ethnic people (Rotheran & Phinney, 1987).

Minority Status

Saba, Karrer, and Hardy (1989) direct our attention to the term “minority.” While the term “minority” is used to describe millions of people, it conjures up the notion that there are fewer of these people and that they require less attention. Women, homosexuals, Jews, and other groups have been classified as minorities. When we use the word minority to describe a person or a group, it permits us to ignore the individuality and humanness of the people we attempt to describe. Further, “minority families” become narrowly defined. Mindel, Habenstein, and Wright (1988) discuss the term “minority” as it relates to power or dominance in a sociological sense rather than a statistical one. The groups of people who have unequal access to power are considered unworthy of equally sharing power, and are stigmatized in terms of assumed inferior traits or characteristic are minority groups.

To be a member of a minority group is to share a status relationship, and to act as a minority group member is to express power consciously. On the other hand, to be a member of an ethnic group, is to share a sense of cultural and historical uniqueness, and to act a member of an ethnic group is to express feelings or call attention to that uniqueness (Mindel, Habenstein, and Wright, 1988, p. 8).

It is important to understand that any individual at any moment may act in either capacity; the capacity to express power or powerlessness based on their belonging to an ethnic group.

Hispanic

In addition, the term Hispanic is currently controversial. In 1988, Melville discussed the political underpinnings of the name Hispanic, questioning whether it is a race, class, or ethnicity. The current designation of Hispanic was sanctioned for official and generalized use in the U. S. in 1968 when the President of the U. S. declared the week beginning September 15th and 16th as National Hispanic Week and Annual Celebration. This was done upon the request of Senator Joseph A. Montoya of New Mexico (Melville, 1988). The choice of the adjective Hispanic (which is more common in Texas and California) instead of Latino, can be traced to New Mexico's influence in congress. The name Latino is often preferred because of its emphasis of one's Latin American origin that includes the influence of indigenous cultures, separate from the heritage of Spain. This poses a current dilemma for me because I was reared referring to myself as a Hispanic and now that term is politically incorrect. But from whose standpoint is it politically incorrect; Anglo Americans or those Hispanic/Latino groups that are most powerful? Regardless of whom is deeming certain descriptors as incorrect, it is impossible for a large heterogeneous group to self define. Much of the controversy stems from an increasing desire to "reject the politically conservative groups that regard their Spanish European ancestry as superior to the "conquered" indigenous groups of the Americas (Falicov, 1998, p.34)." I understand the logic and I am aware that politically correct terms is always in motion, however, it is hard to break years of conditioning, even if the term used to describe myself ethnically was imposed by the dominant ethnic group. The same dilemma has occurred with African Americans for decades. Once referred to as Negroid, Negroes, Colored, Blacks, and now African Americans, they are continually

being defined by people from the dominant culture. The term African American to describe black people isn't even accurate, given that there are white people from Africa. In addition, there are many foreign Black people in the U. S. who are neither define themselves as Americans or Africans. Regardless of how we choose to define ourselves or others, we need to hold on to those labels loosely and be aware of the other ways in which we define ourselves besides our ethnicity. As Laird (1998, p.22) states,

...special “knowledges” are helpful as long as we hold them tentatively; for if we do not learn about our own cultural selves and the culture of the other, it will be difficult to move beyond our own cultural lenses and biases when we encounter practices that we do not understand or find distasteful; we will not be able to ask the questions that help surface subtle ethnic, gender, or sexuality meanings; and we may not see or hear such meanings when they are right there in from of us.

People of Color

Latinos are now classified as “people of color,” which is a recent development. Until 1954, Hispanics had been identified racially as Caucasian or white. This change was a reaction to the 1954 desegregation order that motivated some racist school districts to use Latinos to desegregate black schools (Melville, 1988). This classification is especially conflictual for Latinos, such as myself, who are Caucasian. Am I a person of color? Are all Caucasians people of color too? Regardless of how Latino/a people decide to define themselves, whether it be “Latino,” “Chicana,” “Hispanic,” “Minority,” “Caucasian,” “people of color,” or “Mulato”, it is imperative to the field of MFT that scholars who venture to study and describe "these families," that their information have

an empirical base instead of outdated social constructions that often perpetuate stereotypes and confusion between racial constructs and socioeconomic issues.

Social Class

Defining social class is complicated. Kliman (p. 51, 1998) defines class as “involving multiple relationships to economic and other social structures, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, physical and mental well-being, and geography”. From a social constructionist stance, the dominant discourse acknowledges class for only the very rich or very poor, although class issues impact all families. Furthermore, when we live in a racist and classist society neither class nor race can be understood by isolation (Kliman, 1994). Together they shape either a family’s hope or despair. Class oppression is intensified by racism. For example, people of color are disproportionately undereducated, unemployed, imprisoned, and impoverished. These social disadvantages and oppressive realities are often ignored in social science. Social scientists need to adequately measure and control for socioeconomic status when conducting research studies that include people from racial and ethnic populations. Green (1998) asserts that studies in the past frequently compared middle-class white families to lower-socioeconomic-status African American families. When race and social class issues are confound, then factors measuring a certain construct or phenomenon cannot tease apart race and class issues.

No research studies were found that explored the relationship between race, social status, and conflict resolution among marital partners. The following studies examined the impact of social class, marital communication style, and marital satisfaction. As cited in Aubé & Linden (1991), Higgins (1976) reviewed eleven studies on socio-

economic status (SES) differences in communication. The majority of those findings failed to find SES differences in interactive communications. Complicating the use of SES as a variable in research is that there is not a universally accepted definition. Some researchers use education (i.e. highest educational attainment), while others use income as a criterion for membership in a particular class (Aubé & Linden, 1991).

Although strides have been made toward furthering our understanding about the diversity of Hispanic families, it is evident that most of our understanding of these families derives from conclusions based on research or assumptions from the past. Vega (1990) asserts that although there is an increase in empirical research, there still remains pervasive conjecture about family social patterns and differences in attitudes and values across cultures. Therefore, learning about the differences, as well as similarities among couples and families from various ethnic groups does not necessarily mean that therapists will have an accurate view of them.

All of the above mentioned terms/labels are continuously evolving social constructions. Regardless of the terms used to describe people of a Latino/a/Hispanic origin or decent, we must be mindful of the vast within group variability among Latinos. As mentioned, Latinos are extremely diverse people who live all over the world, encompass different races and ethnic combinations, speak various native languages, and espouse a diverse range of traditions, beliefs, and attitudes. When Latinos are referred to as a monolithic group, if mentioned at all, it is essential to remember that all descriptions are gross generalizations and we must be sensitive to the diversity often overlooked in philosophy, theory, scholar literary, and research. Next, a synopsis of how Latino couples are described in the MFT literature will be provided.

Latino Couples

Specific to the literature related to MFT, the following will be a presentation of how Latino couples are described in the MFT literature. This section will review Latino's expectations of marriage, ecosystemic factors, styles of communication and conflict resolution, and the impact of acculturation.

Marital Expectations

When attempting to understand what a Latino's expectations for marriage and primacy are, it is helpful to examine the underlying expectations of their gender roles. I will describe the ways in which the non-empirical literature describes Latino's exceptions of marriage. Traditionally, there has been a hierarchical role of male dominance, in which the male assumed the instrumental role of provider and protector of the family. He is expected to be dignified, hardworking, and "macho." The wife has been traditionally expected to play a submissive, expressive role homemaker and caretaker (Ho, 1987). However, the outward compliance with this cultural ideal may be more social fiction than an actuality. The wife may be making major behind-the-scene-decisions concerning the family.

Within this culture, the children and the concept of *familismo* play key roles in the marriage. For example, children obtain a central role in the marriage and validate and cement the union. The couple is not central to the marriage. Ho (1987) states that it is expected that the woman's mother role is more important than her wife role. She is expected to be a dutiful wife and a good mother, however the woman has not traditionally defined herself as an individual. She is not expected to have roles outside of the family, or be attractive, romantic, and passionate towards her husband. In addition, the divorce

rate among Hispanics is lower than that for Anglo populations (Frisbie, Bean, & Eberstein, 1978; Alvarez, 1981; as cited in Ho (1987). This may be attributed to the cultural values of familism, where self-worth is dependent upon one's belonging to and obligations toward the family, the wife's expectations of submissiveness and reduced romantic love, and the Catholic church's strong prohibition against divorce.

Ecosystemic Factors

Culture is political (Laird, 1998). People do not have equal voice in shaping their personal narratives, and not all people have equal opportunities to have their particular stories prevail. As cited in Ho, 1987, Latinos in the U. S. have been affected by low income, unemployment, underemployment, undereducation, poor housing, prejudice, discrimination, and cultural/linguistic barriers (President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978). Another factor that conditions Latinos to maintain the status quo is the socioeconomic structure in Latin America. In most countries in Latin America there are typically two classes, the very rich and the very poor. Unlike in the United States, most Latin American countries strain to maintain a middle class of people who are mostly college educated professionals, professors, medical professionals, and business people who struggle to have comfort and luxuries. A Latino's economic level in their country of origin may affect their economic status when they move to the U. S. and for many years to follow. When studying Latinos as an ethnic group, it is imperative that we not underestimate the flexibility and evolving realities of contemporary Latino families.

There are other ecosystemic factors worthy of mentioning. Vega (1990) noted that current studies de-emphasize the importance of gender role flexibility, the movement of Hispanic women in the labor force, and the effects of acculturation in

multigenerational Hispanic populations. Vega (1990) also points out that with the census data gathered between 1960 and 1980, there appears to be two major trends emerging within Hispanic families. One, is that the average size of Hispanic households is decreasing, and second, that marital disruption is increasing. In addition, the impact of educational attainment is different for Latinos from different countries and/or national heritage. Mexican American and Cuban American marital stability is inversely related to educational attainment, while among Puerto Ricans, marital stability increased with educational attainment. These factors are crucial when assessing the caveats of generalizing to all Latino groups. Furthermore, not all immigrant Latinos will choose to assimilate at the same pace or will choose to assimilate at all.

Acculturation

When examining the process of conflict resolution among an ethnic minority group, it is important to understand how acculturation impacts these processes. The concept of acculturation is a well-established research phenomenon in the behavioral sciences. Cross-cultural research has consistently focused on investigating what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context and reestablish their lives in another (Berry, 1996). Acculturation can be defined as a long-term, fluid process in which individuals simultaneously move along at least two cultural dimensions and whereby individuals learn and/or modify certain aspects of the new culture and of the culture of origin (Marín and Gamba, 1996).

A theoretical framework for acculturation research has recently been developed so that group level and individual level variables could be investigated (Berry, 1997). On the group level, three situational variables are examined: 1) society of origin, which

examines political context, economic situation, and demographic factors, 2) group acculturation, which examines physical, biological, economic, social and cultural variables, and 3) society of settlement, which examines attitudes and social support. The individual variables examine moderating factors prior to acculturation, such as age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, migration motivation, personality, cultural distance (language and religion), and moderating variables during acculturation such as length of time in the new country, acculturation strategies (attitudes and behaviors), coping strategies (strategies and resources), social support, and societal attitudes (prejudice and discrimination). The main purpose of the framework is to explicate the key variables that should be attended to when carrying out studies of psychological acculturation. This framework could be useful to examine the effects of acculturation on Latino couple's conflict resolution style. Assessing variables such as acculturation attitudes, behaviors, and societal attitudes are beyond the scope of this study. However, acculturation will be examined in a more simplistic, non-comprehensive standpoint. The independent variables assessing cultural features will be derived from the participant's demographic data, such as the language in which the participant answered the survey (Spanish or English), preferred language spoken, country of origin, if they are born in another country besides the U.S, how long have they been residing in the U. S., religion, religiosity (how often they attend religious services), and educational attainment. These data may help provide a context for the participant's style of resolving conflict.

Country of Origin

A way of better understanding the Latino population is to trace the country of origin (Flores, 2000). In addition to differing in race, socioeconomic status, language,

religion, and ethnic identification, Latinos and Latinas also come from many different countries and parts of the world. The diversity among Latinos is immense since they represent twenty-one Spanish speaking countries and two in which the primary language spoken is Portuguese. In North America, Hispanics come from Mexico, which is the largest group of Latinos living in the United States. In Central America, there are seven countries: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. In South America there is Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Brazil. And Latinos also come from the Caribbean Islands; Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, and from Spain and Portugal in Europe. Given this diversity, it is no longer possible to assume that a single generalization within or between Latino groups can be made and projected onto all. The new multicultural view takes into account country of origin, social class, religion, acculturation, family history, gender, personal choice, individuality, geographic location, immigration, and discrimination to help shatter the myth of sameness (Flores, 2000).

Language Preference

Spanish is the common language in Latin America, except for Brazilians who speak Portuguese (Garcia-Preto, 1996). However for Latinos living in the U.S., many may be bilingual, Spanish speaking only, or may not speak Spanish at all. There are many Latinos living in the U.S. who are second generation or higher, who do not speak Spanish. Language preservation has been much more difficult for children born in the U.S. primarily due to the “English only” movements that are less supportive of bilingual education. The erosion of the Spanish language as a valuable resource for cultural heritage is problematic for most Latino and Latina Families in the U.S., whose ethnic

socialization includes language as a key dimension of cultural continuity (Bernal & Shapiro, as cited in Garcia-Preto, 1996). Today, many Latinos feel a sense of pride for speaking Spanish and recognize the importance and advantages this brings for work and professional opportunities. In contrast, many Latinos feel a sense of shame when they don't speak Spanish. Historically there are reasons many Hispanics did not teach their children Spanish, especially those residing in Texas, and the southwest. Hispanics were greatly discriminated against and older people still remember their painful experience of reading signs on restaurants and stores forbidding their entrance: No dogs, no niggers, and no Mexicans! In order to protect their children from the discrimination they experienced, they did not teach their children Spanish or other ethnic values and traditions. One colleague of mine stated that he did not really feel Hispanic since his Guatemalan parents did not teach him Spanish growing up. He lived in "white" neighborhoods, went to "white" schools, and spoke English. He was also cut-off from his other Guatemalan relatives. Although this was not overtly stated, as with many parents, his parents hoped "Americanizing" him would help him better assimilate into American way of life and avoid discrimination.

Language is a critical issue for most Latinos living in the United States. One's native language is one of the most enduring aspects of the original culture, extending into the new culture and even across generations (Mock, 1998). Emotions and thoughts are deeply connected to our native language and a person's language preference will speak volumes about the person and their cultural location. Immigrants remaining in the U.S. may become fluent in English, and as a consequence, develop new cognitive structures for articulating ideas. "Ultimately the choice of language goes beyond fluency or

comfort in the new tongue; language is symbolic of memory, affect, places, family alliances, and intimate and public situations” (Falicov, p. 77, 1998).

The language factor can be a major clinical issue and barrier if family members are unable to speak English. Conducting the interview in Spanish is essential for engaging them and being clinically effective (Garcia-Preto, 1996). Mock (1998) asserts that even when clients are proficient in English, the nuances and power of their native language are clear. Language is also important for assessing the changes in family dynamics that create role shifts and family hierarchies. In cases where one or more family members have problems functioning in a society with a different language, they may need to rely on relatives who are more fluent in the new language and this dependence can create serious problems and roles shifts (Mock, 1998), especially if the language brokers are children (Garcia-Preto, 1996). Children should not be placed inappropriately in a position of power that may unbalances the family’s hierarchical power structure. Furthermore, while bilingual competence and the use of “Spanglish” (the use of Spanish and English interchangeably) represents invaluable resources for adaptation, the use of both languages can become entangled in family conflict. Family members often differ in their language proficiency and in their positive or negative regard for Spanish or English (Falicov, 1998). Mock (1998) suggests that a family therapist can be more effective if she or he acknowledges the continuing prominence of the client’s primary language even when the clients are bilingual. This reinforces cultural sharing, exchange, and facilitates deeper communication between family members.

Process of Communication

The following literature describing communication and conflict resolution styles among Latinos is primarily focused on the literature found in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT). Strong assertions have been made about the Latino's style of communication within marriage and the family. Most of this information has been generated from clinical observation and personal experience. For decades the MFT literature has produced information with the intention to help clinicians communicate more effectively with Latino families, and thus be more effective in treatment. The following is a review of the literature that describes Latino couples style of communication.

Overall, the MFT literature describes Latino couples and families to be conflict avoidant. In collectivistic cultures, such as with Latinos, there is a strong desire to preserve family harmony, avoid interpersonal conflict, and to favor indirect, implicit, and covert communications. A character value of such a culture is to value public agreement, to get along, and not make others feel uncomfortable. Being assertive with each other, having open differences of opinion, and expressing direct demands for clarification are seen as rude or insensitive to other's feelings (Falicov, 1998). On occasion, when indirect and civil communication styles are used to avoid conflict, they can become excessive and lead to concealment, lies, and intrigues (Falicov, 1998, p. 180).

Ideologies about connectedness and hierarchies are reflected in the cultural meaning systems of *familismo* and *respeto*. *Familismo* and *respeto* significantly shape the Latino family's style of communication, conflict management, and emotional expression (Falicov, 1998, p.178). In addition, Latinos are said to espouse interactional styles that

include amiability, gentility, and civility in order to contribute to a polite demeanor, deportment, and address. Latinos are raised with the notion that much can be achieved interpersonally if you talk nicely, explain a lot, and give compliments.

Harmony can be maintained in various ways. For example, by using *idirectas*, a person is able to say what she/he wants in the third-person. This helps Latinos to indirectly say what you want to say without being disrespectful. An example would be to say, “one could say he was not nice...”. Another form of communication that helps Latinos maintain harmony is the use of *choteo* (humor). *Choteo* is a way of ridiculing or making fun of people, situations, or things. This form of exaggeration, joking or satire can serve to modify tense situations. The formation of “light” triangles are also used to create alliances, most often along gender lines. Triangulating provides an emotional outlet in the form of gossip and secrets which may serve to enhance the stability of marriage (Komarovsky, 1967, as seen in Falicov, 1998, p.180). While Falicov sees these triangles within a normative view, Ho (1987) asserts that the spousal system boundary is never that close and during moments of crisis triggered by acculturation, triangulation may develop, (p.139). Other harmony maintaining forms may be seen in the use of positive expression. Positive emotional expression, such as words of endearment and compliments, are highly valued and spice up conversations among intimates. And lastly, Latinos will often use *simpatia*, which is the ability to create smooth, friendly, and pleasant relationships that avoid conflict (Falicov, 1998, p.180). Children are praised for using *simpatia* because this means they have learned to have proper demeanor, to be considerate, helpful, and to have a warm approach toward others.

Ho (1987) has used Satir's classification of family behavior for a family member under stress (Satir, Stachowiak, and Taschman, 1975) to help explain a Latino father's behavior under stress.

It is not uncommon for a father to assume the blamer role, find fault in others as a means to reassure his machismo, and accuse others as a way to resurrect his power in the family. The in-between (husband and children) position occupied by the Hispanic mother often places her in a placator role of agreeing, pleasing, and apologizing. In addition to these two dysfunctional roles, other family roles such as "super reasonable" and "irrelevant" hinder open communication among family member (Ho, 1987, p.136).

Ho suggests that "therapists should help family members to abandon these roles and adopt genuine and congruent ways of relating to one another" (p. 137). These assertions stem from a belief that Latino couples hold stereotypical gender roles, in which the male is dominant and the female is submissive. When discussing Puerto Rican couples, Garcia-Preto (1996) asserts that when traditional sex roles are reversed, conflict in the marital relationship may erupt.

While these observations about Latino families are insightful and perhaps accurate for some, they are not based on empirical data. There have been no published research studies done within the field of MFT to examine conflict resolution among Latino couples. It is hypothesized that the couples in my sample will show a wide range of conflict resolution styles, not only conflict avoidant as suggested in the MFT literature. It will also be interesting to examine if mixed or similar conflict resolution styles is correlated with marital satisfaction and cultural factors. This study will assess if various

background variables such as gender and culture are correlated with certain conflict resolution styles. The purpose of my study is to use Gottman's measurement of conflict resolution style as a way to examine if the MFT literature is accurate in the assumptions about Latino couple's conflict resolution style.

Latinos in Therapy

There is still a strong stigma that prevents Latinos from seeking psychotherapy (Bernal & Gutiérrez, 1988; Bermudez, 1997). Most Cubans (as other Latinos) perceive mental health services as a place to treat "crazy people." Psychology is still a relatively emerging profession with few qualified therapists (Bernal & Gutiérrez, 1988). Latinos residing in Latin American seek psychiatric treatment if they are experiencing a psychotic episode or if they experience a severe crisis. Psychotherapy is mostly provided for the wealthy upper-class and the field and practice of marriage and family therapy is an emerging profession, relatively unheard of within the general population.

In addition to this, Latino clients from poor, rural, and uneducated backgrounds, have different expectations of a therapist, than do their counterparts who are urbanized and educated (Bach-y-Rita, 1982). The less educated or rural clients will usually have no prior understanding of the therapeutic process. When they do come in for therapy, there is often an ambivalence towards and a distrust of psychiatric institutions, as well as the fear of being labeled "crazy." The rural or poor, unacculturated Mexican family will often expect a therapeutic relationship similar to that which is found with a physician. This role confusion may increase misunderstanding between the Hispanic/a client and the therapist if the therapist does not clarify mutual therapeutic goals and expectations (Bach-y-Rita, 1982).

McGoldrick et al. (1991) discuss similar treatment implications with Puerto Ricans. Because Puerto Ricans rely on the family and their extended network of personal relationships, it is highly unlikely for them to initiate therapy. The Puerto Ricans who do are probably more acculturated and belong to a higher socioeconomic class. In contrast, the families who are seen in social service agencies are usually poor and referred by a third party. When they arrive they are usually in a state of crisis and expect emergency types of intervention.

There are currently several authors that address the use of family therapy with minority families. Canino & Canino (1982) found a systems-oriented family therapy approach to be effective and syntonetic with the Hispanic culture. They warn however, that when dealing with immigrants, there could be potential problems when therapists misinterpret culturally sanctioned behaviors with dysfunctional family patterns. Saba and Rodgers (1989) examine common discriminatory pitfalls when treating minority poor families. They offer strategies to help family practitioners and therapists avoid the pitfalls and recover when they are encountered. McGoldrick et al. (1996) and Montalvo and Gutierrez (1989) offer a set of assumptions and guidelines that are also instrumental when working with ethnic minority families. Their aim is to lessen the possibilities of being misunderstood and misunderstanding the clients they treat. In addition, Twemlow (1995) examines the tools we use to assess, diagnose, and treat minority families.

Implications for Therapists

One can not effectively remain a mental health provider with out considering the future of psychotherapy with ethnic minorities (Comas-Díaz, 1992). One in four Americans already defines him or herself as a person belonging to an ethnic minority

(U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1990) and this is rapidly increasing. The demographic changes we are experiencing will alter society in every way. The practice and field of mental health, which reflects the cultural values and biases of the dominant culture, will begin to reflect the values of ethnically diverse people. The drastic changes in the demographic distribution will inevitably alter the way in which psychotherapy will be conceptualized, practiced, and researched.

Comas-Díaz (1992) suggests that there are two distinct stages of the future of psychotherapy. First is the immediate future, encompassing the next 5 to 15 years, which will be characterized by integration of the context. This phase will critically consider the experiences of identity conflict, racism, biology, culture, gender, religion, sexual orientation, historical and sociopolitical forces, and oppression in the development of new theoretical models. This will be done by integrating ethnicity, culture, and race into core psychological variables in psychology, psychotherapy and other disciplines, and by teaching and training. Second is the distant future, which will include the following 16 to 40 years. This phase will be characterized by pluralism, in which we will experience dramatically different from the integration stage. The changing demographics in the U. S. will provide an impetus for the profound transformation of society, and the visibility and impact of people of color will generate a massive response to therapeutic approaches (Katz & Taylor, 1988). As a result, pluralism will become a social blueprint that will infuse diversity, flexibility, and choices into psychotherapeutic constructs and parameters. Continued training and research is necessary to move in this direction.

I certainly think we are still in the integration phase. My research interests are about integrating the experiences of Latinos into mainstream literature related to

conversation processes, the impact of language on one's beliefs and actions, and managing conflict resolution that is culturally informed.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The variables used in this study comprised of the demographic data, which were the independent variables, and conflict resolution styles, which were the dependent variables. The following are operational definitions of the variables.

Demographic Data- The independent variables used in this study are the following: Gender, age, length of marriage, occupation, educational obtainment, country of origin, parent's country of origin, number of years residing in the United States, religion, and preferred spoken and written language. In regard to the culture variables, the author is referring to the variables that have to do specifically with issues related to education, language preference, religion, religiosity, country of origin, and years living in the U.S. if emigrated from another country.

Conflict Resolution Styles- The dependent variables are the conflict resolution styles derived from Gottman's (1994) research on the predictors of divorce and their relationship with process and outcome; conflict avoidant, validator, and volatile.

Conflict Avoidant Style: Conflict avoidant couples avoid disagreements and tend to put their arguments behind them, letting bygones be bygones. They do not address significant differences and do not let this lack of direct communication decrease their marital satisfaction.

Validator Style: In this style of conflict resolution, each partner listens and interchanges positively with their spouse. Conflicts are not ignored, nor are they a

catalyst for negativity. Validating couples handle negative conflicts as the need arises, in as positive an environment as possible.

Volatile Style: In this style of conflict management the couple engages in behaviors that would include being vocal and vociferous in their differences, often interrupting each other, and having heated discussions.

The Marriage and Family Therapy Literature- Included in the survey instrument are ten direct statements taken from the MFT literature (See appendix J). These statements refer to assumptions about how Latinos communicate with their families, how they resolve conflict and if they are satisfied in their marriage and how they resolve problems.

Participants

The participants were married couples residing in Houston, and Dallas, Texas. Both partners identified themselves as being Latino/a. The sample was non-clinical and the participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Of the 1000 questionnaires distributed to 500 married Latino couples, a total of 207 couples (414 people) responded to the questionnaire, yielding a 41% response rate. Of those, 8 individuals were eliminated because only one of the marital partners answered the questionnaire and 12 couples were eliminated because one of the partners had too much missing data. If one participant had more than 8 items missing, then the data was not used for that couple. If the participants had less than 10% missing data, then I alternated the options 2 (disagree) or 3 (agree) for the same participant, providing a somewhat neutral response. Hence, 382 questionnaires (N=382) from 191 couples were

used in the analysis of data. Of those, 56.5% of the respondents answered the survey in Spanish, and 43.5% answered in English.

Participants were obtained via snowball sampling procedure. In addition to the primary researcher, approximately thirty acquaintances, family members, and friends of the author distributed the surveys to married Latino couples they knew. Those who agreed to distribute questionnaires were given a cover letter describing their role in the research process and the procedure for returning the surveys. They were then given the amount of envelopes they thought they could distribute (5-50). Each envelope had two surveys for each spouse. Upon completing the surveys, the surveys were either returned directly (in sealed envelopes) to the person who gave the couple the surveys, handed to the primary researcher directly, or mailed to the primary researcher. The people asked to distribute the surveys did so voluntarily, without monetary or other compensation.

Participants were asked to respond to the two sets of the same questionnaire, one for the wife and one for the husband. The instrument booklets were in one envelope per couple, along with the cover letter/consent form. The participation criteria were that the couple identified themselves as being Latino/Hispanic and legally married. The survey took approximately 25 -30 minutes to complete. Clear instructions were given for them to answer the questions independently and to put both surveys back into the envelope upon completing the survey.

Sample Description

The background variables used in this study were the following: Gender, age, education, country of origin, primary language preference, number of years residing in

the United States, and length of marriage. These variables aid in obtaining a profile of the sample.

The survey instrument was only given to those couples in which both partners identified themselves as being Hispanic/Latino/a. When asked which language they felt most comfortable speaking, 59% stated Spanish, 30% stated it was English, .5% Portuguese, and 9.9% stated they felt equally comfortable speaking Spanish and English.

The respondent's country of birth showed an unequal distribution of those born in the United States as opposed to those born outside the continental U. S. The majority, 66.2 %, were Latino immigrants from another country, and 33.5% were born in the continental United States (see Table 1). Twenty-one countries were represented in the sample. Of those respondents who immigrated to the United States, the number of years living in the U.S. ranged from 1 to 58 years. The mean number of years for the wives was 16.61 (SD= 9.23) years and 19.20 for the husbands (SD=11.12).

Table 1.
Sample Distribution by Country of Origin (N=381).

United State of America	33.5 %
Mexico	27.2 %
South America	17.2 %
Central America	14.8 %
Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic	6.0 %
Other	1.2 %

The age distribution ranged from 18 to 81 years. The mean age was 38.35 years for the wives (SD=11.72) and 40.70 (SD=12.12) years for the husbands. The mean

number of years the couples were married was 14.60 (see Table 1). Of these marriages, 85.6% were first marriages.

Table 2.
Number of Years Married (N=382)

1-10	43.8 %
11-19	21.0 %
20-29	25.0 %
30-39	7.2 %
40-49	2.0 %
50+	.5 %

There was a wide distribution for education (see Table 3). More than half of the participants had some college or higher and almost 15 % of the sample had a grade school education. In terms of religion, the majority of the sample, 68.3%, classified themselves as Catholic and 26.2 % as Protestant, Christian, or other. When asked how often they attended religious services, 43.2% stated they attended at least once per week, 10.7% once per month, 29.6% every now and then, 12.8% stated rarely, and 3.1% stated they never attend religious services. Overall, it appears this sample was somewhat religious, especially the wives. Almost 48% of the wives reported going to church once per week and almost 39% of the husbands reported going to church once per week.

Table 3.
Highest Educational Attainment for Wives and Husbands

	Wives (n= 191)	Husbands (n=191)	Combined (n=382)
Grade school	15.7 %	14.6 %	14.6 %
High School / Trade School	34.5 %	32.5 %	33.6 %
Associate Degree / Some College	29.4 %	32.0 %	30.7 %
College / Advanced Degree	20.4 %	19.4 %	21.1 %

Materials

Materials used to gather data were a survey instrument, presented in a booklet format, and a cover letter and informed consent. The instrument consisted of three sections: The first section included demographic questions; the second section included three vignettes, adapted from Gottman (1994), in which the participants were asked to choose the vignette that most reflected their style of communication; and the third section consisted of 58 Likert scale questions in which they can answered strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly disagree. In addition, the front of the booklet also had a small open-ended section to solicit qualitative information, such as additional comments about their communication or conflict resolution style, the survey, or themselves.

The Marital Conflict Styles Inventory (Gottman, 1994) is used to measure conflict resolution styles. The Marital Conflict Styles Inventory (MCS), is a 59 item scale, paper and pencil instrument that assesses which style of conflict management is preferred by the couple: avoidant, volatile, or validator. The first scale had 29 items (of which 28 were used due to an oversight when translating the survey) which assessed the avoidant style, and the second scale had 30 items, which assessed if the individual had a volatile or

validator style. Ten additional Likert scale questions were added to assess marital satisfaction and communication and problem solving satisfaction (see Appendix J).

Translation of Materials

The instrument, informed consent and cover letter were first translated into Spanish by the researcher using the in-back method of translation, in which the materials were first written in English, then translated into Spanish, then back into English again (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2001). Six other Latinos reviewed the instrument and informed consent to make corrections in grammar and spelling, and assessed for the generalizability of meaning in the words used to decrease the use of colloquial language. This is important since words can have different meanings in different countries or different words are used to mean the same thing. For example, the word partner or spouse is rarely used in a gender- neutral term. Some translators used the word “pareja” and others used the word “cónjuge.” The primary researcher decided that the word “cónjuge” better matched the concept of partner in English since “pareja” really means couple and “cónjuge” means the individual within a couple. Also, the translators varied in educational attainment ranging from high school degrees to graduate degrees. It was necessary to assess for a common language not too simplistic or overly sophisticated.

Measures

Gottman’s three subscales were scored and reliability measures were obtained. The internal consistency reliability of the MCS was examined by two techniques: An overall reliability was computed through the Spearman-Brown method and an item analysis was computed to determine the correlation of the items. Factor analysis and

content analysis were used to reduce the data and group similarly related variables.

Content analysis was preferred since the factor analysis groupings did not yield higher reliability scores.

In addition to the dependent variables conflict avoidance, validator, and volatile conflict resolution styles, five additional dependent variables emerged, named “unity”, “harmony”, “conservatism”, “autonomy”, and “passion”. The same items from the MCS and direct statements from the MFT literature were used. Reliability scores were obtained for all the dependent variables, including Gottman’s (1994) avoidant, validator, and volatile subscales, and the redefined variables; unity, harmony, conservatism, autonomy, and passion (See Table 4). The new variables were then correlated using the Pearson Product moment correlation method.

Table 4.
Reliability Analysis using Chronbach Alpha (N= 382)

<u>Gottman's Variables</u>	<u>Alpha</u>	<u>Number of Items</u>
Volatile	.75	15
Avoidant	.73	28
Validator	.59	15
<u>Redefined Variables</u>		
Unity	.87	16
Harmony	.73	19
Conservatism	.72	9
Autonomy	.71	6
Passion	.60	10

Seven items from Gottman's scale were not included in the redefined variables. They did not increase the reliability of the scale. The items were three from the avoidant subscale, two from the volatile subscale, two from the validator subscale, and one from a direct statement taken from the MFT literature (See Appendix L). The Redefined variables are operationally defined below.

Unity

The Unity subscale has the highest reliability of all the subscales combined (See Table 4). This subscale contained ten validator items, three avoidance items, and three direct statements from the literature (See Appendix K). The central themes of these items are feelings of togetherness, strong sense of we-ness and sharing, being best friends or companions, thinking positive about marital issues, feeling satisfied in their marriage, rarely arguing or disagreeing, and liking the way they communicate.

Harmony

The second strongest subscale, Harmony, primarily had items from Gottman's avoidance scale. Thirteen of the items were from the avoidant subscale, five were from the MFT literature, and one was from the validator subscale (See Appendix K). The central themes in this subscale were acceptance of things in marriage they can not change, a lack of desire to talk about or analyze problems, especially when they disagree, and not wanting to share negative feelings with their spouse or to be disrespectful.

Conservatism

The third subscale, Conservatism, also primarily comprised of Gottman's avoidance subscale, having seven avoidance items, and two validator items (See Appendix K). The central themes of the conservatism scale related to religious values and beliefs as well as religiosity, which is measured by regular church attendance. These values are considered to be central to their marriage. Having traditional values and traditional gender roles was also important, as well as using their traditional gender role scripts to solve problems in times of disagreement.

Autonomy

The fourth subscale, Autonomy has four of Gottman's volatile items and two avoidance items (See Appendix K). The central themes in this subscale relate to valuing being separate individuals, often doing things separately, and wanting to have separate and different friends. None of the items directly measure conflict resolution or communication.

Passion

The last subscale, Passion, mostly has Gottman's items from the volatile subscale. Nine items are from the volatile subscale and one is a direct statement from the MFT literature (See Appendix K). The central themes in the passion subscale relate to honestly confronting disagreements, feeling comfortable with strong expressions of negative feelings, understanding values through arguments, the importance of defending your views, enjoying to argue, and experiencing romance and jealousy in the marriage.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses were explored using the descriptive information about the sample. Frequencies were calculated for all independent variables; gender, age, number of years married, country of origin, years living in the U.S., language preference, educational attainment, religion, religious participation, and first marriage. The data was converged into couple data, however, frequencies were also obtained for wives and husbands separately. There was no control group. The primary goal of the study was to examine the within group differences of this sample.

Ten independent variables were correlated together to see which ones related to each other: age, years married, first marriage, language in which they answered the survey, language preference, born in the U.S., years in the U.S. if foreign born, religion, religiosity, and educational attainment.

Self-report data from each spouse was examined to measure their conflict resolution style and the impact certain demographic variables had on the preferred style of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution style was measured with the Marital Conflict Scale(MCS) and direct statements from MFT literature, and the redefined variables from

the MCS and the direct statements from the MFT literature. To test the hypotheses, repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used for each of the analysis. The following hypothesis related to gender, culture (determined by country of birth, years living in the United States, and language preference was tested), religion (Catholic or non-Catholic) and religiosity (extent to which the participants attended religious services), and educational attainment.

When the Wilks Lambda indicated a significant multivariate F-test result for the independent variable, for the interaction between the variable and gender and or gender, then univariate F - Tests were examined for statistically significance. When there were more than two groups, Duncan Multiple Range post hoc tests were conducted to see which groups differed from each other.