Cultural barriers to intercultural/interracial communication among black and white South African women: an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

There are a number of important cultural barriers between black and white South African women. These include language, nonverbal communication, world view, thought patterns and stereotypes. In an attempt to investigate some of the cultural barriers this exploratory study focuses on the opinions of 20 black South African women and 20 white South African women. A convenience sample was used and the respondents were undergraduate students at the University of South Africa. Personal semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents. Open-ended questions were used allowing each respondent to provide her own perspective or point of view.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is not so much to provide an indepth discussion of culture and communication or of intercultural and interracial communication. The focus of this paper is rather to examine on the one hand what black South African women have to say regarding some of the main cultural barriers in their communication with white women. On the other hand this paper also examines white South African women's opinions with regard to cultural barriers in their communication with black women.

Although many of the questions directed at the respondents in the personal interviewing process could have been applied to both men and women it was decided to present a women's perspective. Black and white females comprise a sizable proportion of the population in the Republic of South Africa (which at present includes the self-governing states of Gazankulu, Kangwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa and Qwaqwa). (cf. Van der Kooy 1988:3). According to the 1991 population census there are 10,781,538 black females and 10,864,932 black males in the Republic of South Africa. Conversely there are 2,548,278 white females

and 2,519,833 white males in the Republic of South Africa. (Central Statistical Service 1991). Because of the brevity of this paper this exploratory study looks only at black and white women's opinions on cultural barriers and does not take cognisance of coloured or Asian women's views.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

There are numerous definitions, meanings and interpretations attached to the notion of culture. For instance, it may be viewed from an historical perspective where the emphasis is on culture as the product of human activities, traditions and social learning. The sociological perspective emphasizes cultural patterns and organisations while the psychological perspective focuses among others on learning, development and habits. Culture can also be considered from a normative perspective where the emphasis is on values, norms and human behaviour (cf. Van Aswegen 1983:41-47).

Singer (1987:34) offers an apposite definition of culture and defines it as, a pattern of learned, group-related perceptions – including both verbal and nonverbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems, and behaviors – that is accepted and expected by an identity group

Similarly the term communication covers a multitude of meanings, ranging from, for example Shannon and Weaver's (1949) linear model of communication depicting the recipient as passively accepting the message to Cherry's (1957) view that communication is not merely the response but essentially the relationship determined by the transmission of stimuli and the evocation of responses. For Berelson and Steiner (1964) communication is the act or process of transmission of information, ideas and skills by use of symbols.

WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL/INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION?

According to Kim (1984:15)

the crux of intercultural communication ... is the relatively high degree of difference in the experiential backgrounds of the communicators due to cultural differences

Casmir & Asuncion-Lande (1989:283) agree that the participants in intercultural communication usually " do not share norms, beliefs, values, and even patterns of thinking and behavior". Although intercultural communication focuses on the dissimilitude of participants in the intercultural process there is an assumption "that a degree of homogeneity must be present in order for communication to be initiated" (Casmir & Asuncion-Lande 1989:283).

Intercultural and interracial communication are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are often interrelated and in some cases even overlap (cf. Rich 1974; Hagendoorn 1993). What is important is that both intercultural and interracial communication are based on negotiating cultural barriers, such as language, nonverbal communication, patterns of thought and stereotypes. The study of intercultural/interracial communication is mainly the study of encounters between people of different cultures or racial groups. For the purposes of this paper intercultural and interracial communication are discussed as complementary and interdependent components.

INTERCULTURAL/INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Various approaches consisting of numerous theories on intercultural/ interracial communication have been advanced over time. These range from a positivist approach which includes 'uncertainty reduction theory' and 'com-

munication accommodation in intercultural encounters' to a humanist approach which embraces the 'coordinated management of meaning theory' and the 'constructivist theory'. Furthermore the systems approach to intercultural/ interracial communication includes the 'network theory' and the 'convergence theory' (cf. Gudykunst 1988:123-156; Gallois et al 1988:157-185; Cronen et al 1988:66-98; Applegate & Sypher 1988:41-65; Yum 1988:239-258; Kincaid 1988:280-298).

The theories of intercultural/interracial communication are as varied as the concept itself. Each theory is a means of looking at the phenomenon in a particular way. This paper adopts the humanist approach to intercultural/interracial communication in its emphasis on "synthetic-holistic-ideographic-contextual methodology" (Kim 1988:17) and the description of the unfolding of the nature of the phenomenon. The humanist approach therefore does not attempt to control the phenomenon but emphasises individual freedom and an understanding of the actions taken by individuals. The basic tenets of the humanistic approach is the understanding of the self and other people and treating them as thinking and reacting people. This focus on the individual nature of the communication process is heuristic and although it allows for expression and quality of interaction critics of the humanist approach question its reliability and logical base (cf. Stacks et al 1991:150-152; Edelstein et al 1989:137-138).

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO INTERCULTURAL/INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

There are a number of cultural barriers in intercultural/ interracial communication among black and white South African women, some of which are language; nonverbal communication; world view; thought patterns; and stereotypes (cf. Asuncion-Lande 1990:213-216).

Language

As Dodd (1987:46) points out "language is another element of culture". The relationship between language and culture is important because people "gather, give and receive information" and consequently meaning through language (Asuncion-Lande 1990:213). In South Africa the linguistic division is apparent if one considers that although at present English and Afrikaans are the two official languages there are at least 24 other sizable home languages, for instance black languages include Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Northern Sotho and Southern Sotho (cf. Human Sciences Research Council 1987:34-35).

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication includes categories, such as kinesics (facial expression, gestures, eye contact and body posture); proxemics (the use of personal space); chronemics (the use of time); haptics (the use of touch) and paralinguistics (tone of voice, volume and silence) (cf. Dodd 1987:172-196). Because the study of nonverbal communication is multi-faceted this paper focuses on the following aspects of nonverbal communication: kinesics; (eye contact) proxemics; (use of personal space) chronemics; (use of time) haptics; (use of touch) and paralinguistics; (vocal quality).

World view

There are three general world views linked to intercultural/ interracial communication namely, Eurocentric, Afrocentric and Asiocentric world views.

For the purposes of this paper the focus is on the Eurocentric and Afrocentric world views. The Eurocentric or westernised world view is individualistic, materialistic, rational and

goal-oriented in nature. Conversely the Afrocentric world view could be described as personalistic, intuitive, collective, based on experience and more traditional in nature (cf. Asante 1980:405-409).

It should be noted that the Afrocentric world view could be considered within the context of Hall's (1976) high and low cultures. Although many black South Africans live in urban areas and may belong to the low context culture group, one may particularly refer to rural black South Africans as part of the high context culture group (cf. Groenewald 1988:234-236).

Thought patterns

Thought patterns are concerned with "the way a cultural group views such things as decision making; the kind of logical system practiced, the nature of the truth and cognitive pathways of thought" (Dodd 1987:49). In other words thought patterning involves how people "form fundamental concepts, organize ideas and define sources of knowledge" (Asuncion-Lande 1990:215). .

For instance, individuals who follow a Eurocentric world view are known to rely on analytical thought patterns in order to form a well-grounded or obvious conclusion. Conversely individuals who follow an Afrocentric world view are known to adopt intuitive thought patterning which is often based on a random, and qualitative process (cf. Asuncion-Lande 1990:215-216).

Stereotypes

The term stereotype is derived from the Greek word (prefix) stereo which means solid and unyielding (cf. Drever 1963:282). Walter Lippmann (1956:116) refers to stereotypes as "images already in our minds". Stereotypes are a compilation of preconceived ideas built into a specific culture

and learned according to the socio-cultural system of that culture. If stereotypes are learned in both the home and the formal schooling system then one is forced to consider Allport's (1954:282) view that "the first six years of life are important for the development of all social attitudes". In other words a child's prejudice is developed by adopting the stereotypes conveyed by his or her family and socio-cultural environment. Individuals or groups who believe in absolute stereotypes, such as **all white women are intolerant or all black women are untrustworthy** will experience extreme difficulty in forging meaningful intercultural/interracial relationships with other cultures.

METHOD

Sample

The sample was one of convenience, selected from black and white South African undergraduate women students at the University of South Africa (cf. Smith 1988: 85). Twenty black women and twenty white women were involved in this exploratory study. The aim was to elicit their opinions on the above five cultural barriers. Two additional questions were added, one regarding social contact, the other on suggestions as to how to improve intercultural/interracial communication.

A personal interviewing technique was selected for collecting data because as Smith (1988:230) points out "interpersonal interviews are often preferred for relatively small samples". The semi-structured interview using open-ended questions was employed which allowed a wide scope for the respondent to define her views from her own perspective. The respondents were also encouraged to elaborate on their responses and to provide additional information.

The interviews were conducted between 12 May and 7 June 1993. Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes and was tape recorded with the respondents permission. Each respondent was interviewed individually. The average age of the black respondents was 25 years and of the white respondents 28 years. Of the 20 black women 8 had Northern Sotho as their home language, 5 Tswana, 4 Zulu, 2 Southern Sotho, and 1 Northern Ndebele. Of the 20 white women 16 had English as their home language and 4 Afrikaans. All the interviews were conducted in English. All respondents interviewed lived in urban areas, such as the cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg and the townships of Mamelodi and Soweto.

Because the University of South Africa is a distance education university and caters mainly for the part-time student 15 of the black respondents were either fully employed or employed on a part-time basis, while 5 had bursaries and were full-time students. All 20 white respondents were either fully employed or employed on a part-time basis. Of the black respondents 11 were first year BA students, 2 were second year BA students, 3 were second year BA (Social Work) students, 2 were third year BA (Social Work) students and 2 were second year BComm students. Of the white respondents 4 were first year BA students, 1 was a first year BA (Fine Art) student, 6 were second year BA students, 3 were third year BA students, 1 was a first year BSc student, 2 were third year BSc students and 3 were first year BComm students.

The nature of the interviews

The following represent the questions raised during the interviews:

1 Is language a cultural/communication barrier between black and white South African women? If so why? If not why not?

2 How does nonverbal communication differ between black/white South African women?

   (a) In terms of kinesics (eye contact)

   (b) In terms of proxemics (use of personal space)

   (c) In terms of chronemics (time)

   (d) In terms of haptics (use of touch)

   (e) In terms of paralinguistics (vocal quality)

3 Do you adhere to a Eurocentric or an Afrocentric world view? Which world view do you follow and why?

4 As regards thought patterns do you rely on analytical or intuitive thinking? Why is your choice of thought pattern more acceptable to you?

5 Do you have stereotypes of black/white South African women. If so what are they?

6 Do you have any social contact with black/white South African women? If so to what degree?

7 What suggestions do you have to improve intercultural/ interracial contact between black/white South African women?

FINDINGS

As this was an exploratory study and essentially of a qualitative nature it is limited from a representative sampling point of view, and precludes a claim of providing a complete picture of the opinions of black and white South African women on cultural barriers. An overview of the findings are as follows:

Views of black respondents

Language as a cultural barier

17 black respondents (85 percent) felt that language was a barrier in their ability to communicate with white women. Responses ranged from:

(i) Yes, language is definitely a problem. I speak English in order to communicate and also Afrikaans to a degree, but white women do not speak Northern Sotho and I prefer to speak my own language. White women should learn a black language.

(ii) I can speak English to white women but it is very difficult for me to make myself understood. I do not understand English all that well. If I could study at Unisa in my home language which is Zulu there will be no problem.

(iii) My home language is Northern Ndebele and my English is not very good, but I think it is better for us to speak English because everyone understands it. If I speak Ndebele white women will not understand me but I feel they must learn a black language, like Zulu or Tswana.

(iv) Language is a barrier because as a black woman I find it difficult to speak both English and Afrikaans and white women do not want to learn a black language. White women must learn a black language. There are many black languages and my language is Northern Sotho, and I think white women should learn Zulu and Northern Sotho because they are the most popular in South Africa.

(v) Yes, language is a problem. I speak both English and Afrikaans but not very well. My home language is Tswana and I think white

women must also learn to speak Tswana.

(vi) I have difficulty in speaking English. I speak no Afrikaans. White women must learn at least one black language.

Only 3 of the 20 black respondents (15 percent) said that language was not a cultural or communication barrier in conversing with white South African women. Responses ranged from:

(i) No, language is not a barrier when I speak to white women. I can express myself clearly in English and I also enjoy speaking Afrikaans. I do not think that white women must speak a black language, but I would appreciate it if they could.

(ii) I do not want to speak Zulu to white women. I feel they are not obliged to learn Zulu or a black language. I think English is a common language for the future so that we can all understand each other. I speak English and we must all learn English as it is an international language.

Nonverbal communication

Kinesics (eye contact)

18 of the 20 respondents (90 percent) maintained that eye contact was very important. Responses ranged from:

(i) Yes it is important because it is easy to understand the message and the metamessages if you look at the woman in her eyes.

(ii) Eye contact with a white woman is important because you can't speak to her looking down you must look her in the face.

(iii) Yes it is important because if we look at each other we can concentrate on what we are discussing.

(iv) Yes it is important I want to see her face and explain what I mean.

(v) It is important because you can read a person from her eyes.

The 2 respondents (10 percent) who felt that eye contact was not important said:

(i) I think eye contact for white women is important but in our African culture we do not look at people straight in the eye but with white women I've come to accept it.

(ii) I do not like to look at white women in the eye it is not part of my African culture.

Proxemics (use of personal space)

All 20 respondents (100 percent) rated the use of personal space (standing between eighteen inches to four feet) from the person as important. Responses ranged from:

(i) I prefer to stand close to a white woman when I am speaking to her so that I can understand what she is saying.

(ii) To stand close is better because we should respect each other

(iii) I would rather stand close to a white woman because if I stand far from her I am afraid she might be my enemy. We must stand close in order to understand each other.

Chronemics (use of time)

12 respondents (60 percent) rated time as not being important. Responses ranged from:

(i) We black women don't respect time. We might be ten or twenty minutes late for a meeting, to be honest time is not our first priority.

(ii) Time is not so important most black women are not always on time.

8 respondents (40 percent) rated time as important. Responses ranged from:

(i) It is important to be on time for a lecture at Unisa otherwise I will miss what the lecturer says.

(ii) aI must be on time to get my train to work otherwise my employer will be angry.

Haptics (use of touch)

19 (95 percent) of the respondents said that the use of touch was important. Responses ranged from:

(i) I like to touch it conveys understanding and empathy.

(ii) If I touch a white woman on the hand or arm it means that we can be friendly and develop better communication.

(iii) It is better to touch a white woman on my level so that we can have good communication.

1 respondent (5 percent) responded by saying:

(i) I am afraid to touch a white woman in case she thinks I am inferior to her.

Paralinguistics (vocal quality)

20 respondents (100 percent) felt that white women were restrained in terms of vocal quality. Responses ranged from:

(i) White women speak so quietly, they do not show their true feelings.

(ii) White women are worried what men will think that is why they speak softly.

(iii) White women do not show their emotions when they speak, perhaps they are afraid.

Eurocentric/Afrocentric world view

16 respondents (80 percent) said that they adhered solely to an Afrocentric world view. Responses ranged from:

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(i) I follow the African culture because I'm black. I prefer the African culture and will not follow the European culture because I was not born a European.

(ii) I like the African culture because I am an African. I don't know the European culture.

(iii) I am not interested in the European culture. I live in South Africa and the African culture is number one here.

(iv) I prefer the African culture because I am black. The European culture is not part of Africa.

4 respondents (20 percent) said that they followed a combination of Afrocentric and Eurocentric world views. Responses ranged from:

(i) Although I am African I want to understand the European culture. We cannot just have one culture in South Africa.

(ii) My first priority is the African culture but I'm interested in the European culture. We live with Europeans and must get to know them.

(iii) I mix the Afrocentric and Eurocentric cultures. I maintain my culture but I accommodate the European culture because these days we are socialised into the European culture. At home we are encouraged to keep our African culture. I practise both.

Thought patterns

19 of the respondents (95 percent) favoured intuitive thinking as opposed to analytical thinking. 1 respondent (5 percent) said that both intuitive and analytical thought patterns were important. Responses ranged from:

(i) Definitely intuitive thinking because that is the only way to understand how the white woman is thinking.

(ii) It must be intuitive thinking because you cannot live by analysing everything.

(iii) Intuitive thinking is more important it is the only way to really communicate with a white woman or anybody for that matter.

The 1 respondent (5 percent) who favoured both analytical and intuitive thinking said:

(i) Both analytical and intuitive thinking are important. Sometimes we do need to analyse things.

Stereotypes

14 respondents (70 percent) said that they had stereotypes of white women. 6 respondents (30 percent) said they had no stereotypes of white women. Responses ranged from:

(i) I see white women as being honest towards black women. Black women are not as honest as white women.

(ii) White women do not show favouritism and they treat me well at work and also the women lecturers at Unisa take an interest in me.

(iii) I think white women differ. Some are friendly to me, some are cruel perhaps they don't like me. I think they treat me better than black women treat me.

(iv) White women are very independent, I think most of them are feminists, they believe in themselves. They believe they can do anything they wish without anyone's help. They believe in themselves more than black women do.

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Social contact

19 respondents (95 percent) had no social contact with white women. Responses ranged from:

(i) I have no white women friends but I would like to have one.

(ii) I work with white women and we have a good working relationship but I can't call them friends. They never invite me to their homes. I would like to have them as friends.

(iii) I have no white women friends but I would not mind having them as friends.

1 respondent (5 percent) said:

(i) I have one white woman friend I met at work. I visit her and she telephones me on a regular basis..

Suggestions on how to improve contact between black and white women

All 20 respondents (100 percent) provided suggestions on how to improve contact between black and white women. Responses ranged from:

(i) Black and white women must come together as South African women, we must organise groups and clubs and share ideas together.

(ii) Unity is the best. For example, we should attend the same churches and at Unisa where we are students black women must get to know white women. We do not know white women and the way they think.

(iii) We must organise sports activities together and then share our views.

(iv) We must communicate at Unisa where we are studying and let white women study with us and share ideas and problems.

(v) Black and white women must meet and teach each other our cultures. There must not only be political meetings where we can meet but we must make contact at work and at Unisa.

(vi) It must begin at school level where black and white children can meet and get to know each other. Also at discussion classes at Unisa the white and black women don't really mix. It would be better if I could say hello I'm Francina what is your name. But often the white women are in such a hurry to get home.

(vi) I think we must hold workshops throughout South Africa and black and white women must express their cultural experiences to understand one another. Also there must be more women's organisations which include both black and white women. I think if we can understand each others backgrounds there will not be a colour problem, except perhaps for those women who have had bad experiences with people of the other racial group.

Views of white respondents

Language as a cultural barrier

19 respondents (95 percent) felt that language was a barrier in their communication with black women. Responses ranged from:

(i) Language is definitely a communication barrier when I converse with black women. I speak English and Afrikaans but no black language and I find that black women do not really understand what I'm saying.

(ii) Yes language is definitely a barrier. I speak English and Afrikaans and am attempting to learn Northern Sotho. What I say to black

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women is not necessarily what they're hearing.

(iii) Language is often a barrier between black and white women. With educated black women who speak a good English I have no problem, I speak a little Afrikaans and no black language.

(iv) Language is a great communication barrier for me. I speak English and some Afrikaans but no black language. I find that black women who cannot speak a good English just do not understand me. It is a pity we did not learn a black language at school.

(v) I speak Afrikaans and English fluently and a few words of Zulu. I find that black women cannot speak Afrikaans which is my home language. I speak English to black women but still experience difficulty in communicating with them.

1 respondent (5 percent) answered:

(i)

Although I do not speak a black language I speak both English and Afrikaans and have never experienced a language problem with black women. I find that the women I come into contact with either speak a reasonable English or Afrikaans.

Nonverbal communication

Kinesics (eye contact)

All 20 respondents (100 percent) said that eye contact was important in face-to face communication with black women. However 4 respondents (20 percent) qualified their responses by saying that they felt it was not important for black women. Responses ranged from:

(i) Eye contact with a black woman is very important because it represents honesty and sincerity.

(ii) In my experience black women make as much eye contact with me as white women.

(iii) Eye contact is important. I have never had any difficultyin experiencing eye contact with black women, it is as though it brings a certain warmth to the communication.

(iv) Although eye contact is important for me I find many black women look away when I speak to them, it is as though they consider themselves on a lower level.

(v) Many black women behave in a subservient way and look down they do not look me in the eye in interpersonal contact

Proxemics (use of personal space)

15 respondents (75 percent) said they found it easier to stand close to a black woman than to a white woman. 5 respondents (25 percent) said they would not stand close to anyone because of their need for personal space. Responses ranged from:

(i) I feel that black women have less of a personal space than white women. They are more inclined to move into .my personal space. I would stand closer to a black woman than to a white woman.

(ii) It is easier to stand close to a black woman than to a white woman. In my experience black women are more comfortable than white women with being close.

(iii) Yes it is important to stand close to a black woman when talking so that I can understand what she is saying.

(iv) Although I need my space my experience with black women is that they like to stand close to one so it does not bother me. I think

closeness is important for black women.

(v) I need a large personal space. I cannot bear it if a woman black or white invades my space.

(vi) I do not like to stand close to anyone. I find that black women have no sense of keep out of my space. They insist on standing close to me.

Chronemics (use of time)

19 respondents (95 percent) said that time was of the utmost importance.

Responses ranged from:

(i) Time is most important. I'm extremely punctual and expect other people to be as well.

(ii) Of course time is important. I do not like to be late for a social engagement and one must be punctual for work.

(iii) Time is important because time is money.

(iv) Time is of the utmost importance. Our whole life revolves around time and schedules. It is imperative to be on time for an appointment.

1 respondent (5 percent) did not feel that time was of the utmost importance. She responded:

(i) For me time is only important in the city. When I taught in Namibia I accepted a totally different time structure. I became used to African time where sometimes black people were between 20 and 30 minutes late for an appointment. This other concept of time is so wonderful in Africa. Western time gives us stress and ulcers.

Haptics (use of touch)

12 respondents (60 percent) did not like the use of touch when engaging in a conversation. 8 respondents (40 per-

cent) felt that the use of touch was essential. Responses ranged from:

(i) I do not wish a black or white woman to touch me at all when we are conversing.

(ii) Nobody must touch me unless I am involved in an intimate relationship with the person. ·

(iii) I think our Western culture is mainly derived from the British who I find cold and distant. Unfortunately it has rubbed off on me and I do not like black or white women to touch me when in conversation.

(iv) People whether women or men must keep their distance from me.

(v) I don't like people to touch me. Only when I know the person it's natural in conversation.

(vi) Touch is important when I speak to a black woman. I am a contact person.

(vi) I don't touch other women but I have seen that black women touch me easily in conversation. It is wonderful as a communication medium.

Paralinguistics (vocal quality)

20 respondents (100 percent) said that they found that black women tended to shout. Responses ranged from:

(i) I find that black women shout rather than speak quietly to me. I find this very offensive because I am not used to it. My culture has not taught me to shout when engaging in conversation.

(ii) I find that black women speak very loudly in shrill voices.

(iii) Many black women are extrovert and they shout. My Westernupbringing teaches me that people should not shout to each other. However I think sound is import-

ant for black women and that is why they shout. I also think black women show their emotions more easily than white women.

Eurocentric/Afrocentric world view

17 respondents (85 percent) said they adhered fully to a Eurocentric world view. Responses ranged from:

(i)   I don't think in South Africa you have any other choice but to follow a Eurocentric world view.

(ii) Yes I have been socialised into a Eurocentric world view and I do not know any other world view.

(iii) My whole upbringing was Eurocentric I do not see how I could adopt an Afrocentric world view at the age of 30. My priorities are to advance in my career and to make money.

(iv) I adhere fully to a Eurocentric world view. I am materialistic and extremely goal oriented.

3 respondents (15 percent) said they did not adhere fully to a Eurocentric world view. Responses ranged from:

(i)   I do not totally follow a Eurocentric world view. I was brought up on a farm and learnt to know black women as a child. I understand an Afrocentric world view and although I am an individualist I am not very materialistic.

(ii) Until a few years ago I was completely Eurocentric. However now I have great respect for an Afrocentric world view and would say I follow a combination of the two world views. My goals are more value oriented than materialistic.

(iii) No my world view is only slightly Eurocentric. The six years I taught in Namibia influenced me to share material things. I believe in love for your nearest and for me this does not go together with a Eurocentric world view.

Thought patterns

6 respondents (30 percent) favoured only analytical thought, while 2 respondents (10 percent) relied wholly on intuitive thought. 12 respondents (60 percent) favoured a combination of both analytical and intuitive thought patterns. Responses ranged from:

(i)   I rely totally on analytical thinking. I feel that intuitive thinking is most unscientific and leads to speculation.

(ii) Definitely analytical thinking, how could I as a student of computer science rely on intuitive thinking?

(iii) I rely on intuitive thinking totally. My intuition never lets me down.

(iv) I rely mostly on intuitive thought. I know I should favour analytical thinking but I only use it as an adjunct to intuitive thinking.

(v)   I favour both analytical and intuitive thinking. I think is important to be open to intuitive thinking.

(vi) I mainly follow analytical thought processes but sometimes follow intuitive thinking depending on the situation.

(vii) I think intuitive thinking is more important but in contact with my white colleagues I have to be analytical if I want to prove a point. I feel it is more honest to go according to one's intuition.

Stereotypes

19 respondents (95 percent) had stereotypical pictures of black women. Responses ranged from:

(i)   The only stereotype I have of a black woman is that of her as a maid or domestic worker.

(ii) Because I was brought up by a nanny I tend to picture all black

women as nannies or domestic workers although I've seen black women who are university students, shop assistants and managers.

(iii) I would say that black women are more earthy and basic than white women.

(iv) I see black women as being separated from their families and living ,in a township like Soweto or Alexandra, working a long day as a domestic worker. I have no contact with academic or more affluent black women.

(v) Yes unfortunately I see black women as slaves of their tradition. I cannot understand why they accept this. As a feminist I see black women as wanting numerous children and doing anything to please their husbands or boyfriends. I feel that black women are not in charge of their own destiny.

The 1 respondent (5 percent) who had no stereotypes of black women said:

(i) I have no stereotypes of black women as I do not know any on an intimate level.

Social contact

18 respondents (90 percent) had no social contact with black women.

Responses ranged from:

(i) I have no social contact with black women. I work in the commercial world and there is not one black woman in our company on any level so to speak. They are either cleaners or serve the tea. I'm a third year computer science student at Unisa and would love to meet black women with whom I can communicate.

(ii) I have no social contact with black women. For me there is

both a language and a cultural barrier. I also do not go out of my way to make contact with black women. It is certainly not an issue in terms of colour. It is a language and cultural problem.

(iii) No I have no social contact with black women. I would like to but I think that because of the present situation in South Africa, the violence and transport problems I am afraid to go to the townships where most black women live. Although I have worked closely with black women I do not know them socially.

(iv) I have some social contact with black women at work where we converse but at home the only contact I have with black women is with my domestic help. I would definitely like to meet black women with whom I have something in common.

Of the 2 respondents (10 percent) who had social contact with black women the responses were as follows:

(i) I have three black women friends. They often visit me at home although I must admit I do not visit them as they live in the townships and I feel it is too dangerous. I met these women in a work situation and we are firm friends.

(ii) Unfortunately I have no social contact with black women in South Africa. I think this is due to the violence and fear of visiting the townships alone as a white woman. The structures here are so that white and black women are strangers in our own country. When I worked in Namibia I had many black women friends and we visited each other. My home language is Afrikaans, I also speak English fluently but no black language and never found this a problem as regards social

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contact with black women in Namibia.

Suggestions on how to improve contact between black and white women

All 20 respondents (100 percent) had suggestions as to how to improve contact between black and white women. Responses ranged from:

(i)   White women must accept that they live in Africa and not in Europe. Both black and white women must realise that they start together in a changing South Africa. It seems to me that the work or the study place is where women would be together for most of the time and I suggest that we start more work/study related groups for black and white women. I personally have experienced a racist white woman adapting in a work environment, when she began to know black women as colleagues her fears disappeared.

(ii) I think we must stop worrying about the baggage that both the English and Afrikaans languages carry in terms of the imperialist and apartheid eras. I know many black women who speak both English and Afrikaans but actually resent it. Black and white women must put language and cultural differences aside and iron out problems at group meetings and women's organisations.

(iii) The best suggestion I have is that we must develop personalfriendships via the work situation.

(iv) More local cultural groups for black and white women should be formed where we can learn about each other, the apartheid system has made us strangers.

(v)   Every business gathering I go to there are 100 men and 5 women

and not one of them is black. I find that in the business world it is difficult to meet black women. Perhaps I should join the Black Sash in order to meet black women. I have been invited to IDASA meetings but have not attended due to lack of time. I'm sounding like an apathetic white South African woman but my time is limited.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Patterns emerging from this exploratory study indicate that black South African women expect white South African women to learn at least one black language in order to facilitate communication. On the other hand although not one white South African woman interviewed in this study spoke a black language they experienced a certain degree of difficulty in understanding or interpreting a black woman's English or Afrikaans.

With regard to nonverbal communication eye contact was equally important to both groups; standing close to white women during conversation was slightly more important to black women than to white women; being on time was definitely more important to white women than to black women; the use of touch in conversation more important to black women than to white women; and in terms of vocal quality 100 percent black women found white women restrained, while conversely 100 percent white women found black women spoke too loudly and were inclined to shout.

In terms of world view 80 percent of black women followed an Afrocentric world view and 85 percent of white women followed a Eurocentric world view.

Apropos thought patterns 95 percent of black women favoured intuitive thinking and although 60 percent of

white women favoured both analytical and intuitive thinking 30 percent confirmed that analytical thinking was the only way to think so as to arrive at a logical deduction. The question on stereotypes pointed to black women mainly thinking of white women as independent and on the whole as treating black women kindly. White women tended to think of black women chiefly as domestic workers or child-minders. Given the fact that black and white South African women had minimal or no social contact with each other one might be inclined to take a pessimistic view of the cultural barriers between the two groups.

Nevertheless, the suggestions offered by both black and white women in this qualitative study on how to improve intercultural/interracial contact presents a more positive scenario. Although Casmir & Asuncion-Lande's (1989: 294-295) notion of a third culture which develops through interaction may not currently exist between black and white South African women on a large scale, one should consider the fact that in this study the majority of the respondents wanted to get to know the other woman's culture and way of thinking. This can hopefully only lead to a positive outcome.

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