

# Accounting for lack of interracial mixing amongst South African university students<sup>1</sup>



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The persistence of informal segregation in post-apartheid South Africa is now well documented. As the articles in this journal issue attest, this segregation is rife in many public spaces, including university campuses. This article explores the reasons to which students attribute the lack of interracial mixing at their institutions. Students from four universities were surveyed using an internet-based questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 1 068 black African and 1 521 white students. Their agreement or disagreement with eight reasons for avoidance of contact was analysed and found to vary as a function of race. The relationship of their responses to levels of prejudice and amount of interracial contact was examined.

**Keywords:** avoidance of contact; interracial contact; meta-stereotypes; prejudice; South Africa

The first democratic elections in 1994 saw the rescinding of the segregationist laws of the apartheid regime. For the first time since the early colonial period, all races in South Africa were permitted to mix freely, attend the same educational institutions, live in the same residential areas, and have access to the same public spaces. However, the removal

of segregationist laws has not resulted in widespread integration. The tentacles of the apartheid past still run deep in contemporary South Africa. While there have been many positive changes in the country, there are not many signs of desegregation having led to more than superficial contact between race groups.

Recent research has shown that residential neighbourhoods have largely retained a racially segregated character (Christopher, 2005; Kitchin, 2002), and studies of public spaces and institutions have revealed that informal segregation is still very much the norm (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). Observations of the seating patterns of students in informal, public spaces of a university (Tredoux, Dixon, Underwood, Nunez, & Finchilescu, 2005) and in dining rooms of university residences (Alexander, 2007; Schrieff, Tredoux, Dixon, & Finchilescu, 2005), have also demonstrated high levels of racial segregation, which appears to be highly resistant to change. This segregated seating pattern is not particular to South Africa, or to South African universities — the same pattern has been observed in universities in other countries (e.g., Buttney, 1999; Clack, Dixon, & Tredoux, 2005).

## **CONTACT AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

The persistence of racial segregation in South Africa is disturbing for a number of reasons. It suggests a lack of reconciliation, and a slow rate of racial transformation, and may well hinder movement towards more positive interracial relations. The improvement of race relations and the reduction of prejudice are two important goals of ‘activist social psychology’, and the ‘contact hypothesis’ is probably the best-known embodiment of these. This hypothesis was articulated by Gordon Allport in his seminal 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. Briefly, the hypothesis predicts that prejudice will be reduced if members of antagonistic groups are brought into contact under certain conditions: Where there is equal status in the situation of contact; where the groups have a common goal, the contact is frequent, and there is ‘true acquaintance potential’; where the contact is cooperative, and not competitive; and where there is normative and institutional support for the contact. Allport did not argue that all group conflict could be solved through contact, or that all prejudice could be reduced in this way. He argued that some prejudice is ‘deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual’ (p. 281), and that there are ‘many economic, international, and ideological conflicts that represent a genuine clash of interests’ (p. 233). Contact is unlikely to ameliorate the hostility emerging in such circumstances.

The considerable body of work that has tested the contact hypothesis over the past half century has produced variable results. A recent meta-analysis of this literature concluded that intergroup contact does, on the whole, lead to reduced prejudice, and that this effect is particularly powerful when the conditions under which contact occurs promote the development of cross-group friendship (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In addition, this

research suggests that Allport's optimal conditions for contact are facilitatory, rather than necessary.

Even in apartheid South Africa, where for obvious reasons very little research on interracial contact was conducted, some studies demonstrated that interracial contact improved interracial attitudes. One such study involved a contact intervention among white and coloured school girls, instituted by Luiz and Krige (1981). The race attitudes of the white girls were measured before and after the contact intervention. These were compared with a control group that did not have contact. The results indicated that intergroup attitudes improved after the contact, and were significantly more positive than the attitudes of the control group. Further, this effect was still evident a year later (Luiz & Krige, 1985). Spangenberg and Nel (1983) compared white lecturers working at a university with mainly coloured colleagues and students with a group of white lecturers from an almost all-white university. The contact group exhibited more positive attitudes to coloureds than the non-contact group (but when this was tested separately for English and Afrikaans-speaking respondents, this difference was not nearly as strong). This study also found that cross-race friendship was associated with more positive race attitudes. Finchilescu (1988) investigated the effect of interracial contact among nurses training at private hospitals. Two of the hospitals trained nurses of different races: one had white and Indian nurses, the other African and Indian nurses. The two non-contact hospitals trained white and African nurses respectively. This study found that interracial contact had a positive effect on the attitudes of white respondents toward Indians. However, in the other contact hospital, the Indian and African respondents exhibited strongly ethnocentric attitudes. Van Dyk (1990) considered the relationship between white housewives and their black domestic servants. This study found that the housewives were generally positive towards their domestic servants, but these attitudes did not generalise to the black group in general.

In the small but growing number of contact studies in the post-apartheid era, the positive effect of interracial contact has been demonstrated. Holtman, Louw, Tredoux, and Carney (2005) investigated the interracial attitudes of 1 119 learners in 18 desegregated schools. Contact, and particularly contact outside of school, was found to be a strong predictor of positive interracial attitudes in all subsamples. In a smaller study, Moholola and Finchilescu (2006) compared the attitudes of black learners to white learners, in a multiracial school, with those attending an all-black school. The black learners in the multiracial school were significantly less prejudiced against whites than were the black learners attending the single-race school.

Positive effects of interracial contact have also emerged in a number of recent surveys. Gibson's survey of 2000/2001, involving a representative sample of 3 700 South Africans, found strong relationships between reported level of interracial contact and an index of positive attitudes toward race reconciliation (Gibson, 2004). Finchilescu, Tredoux, Muianga, Mynhardt, and Pillay. (2006) conducted a survey of 2 559 African and white students at four South African universities, and found strong relationships between the

amount of contact and prejudice for both groups. Cross-race friendships and experience of contact were also important predictors of improved intergroup relations. In a nationally representative cellular phone survey considering support for policies and practices aimed at rectifying the injustices of apartheid, Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (in press) found that, among whites, greater interracial contact was associated with stronger support for such policies. However this differed for the black respondents — more contact led to greater opposition to these policies.

Optimistic as these findings are, their import is eclipsed by the concomitant finding from the same surveys, and the observational studies cited earlier, that there is very little interracial contact occurring between different race groups in South Africa. Even in the universities, where an environment is presented that is most conducive to the breakdown of race barriers, there appears to be little interracial mixing. The question thus arises — why are people so reluctant to mix with members of other races?

### ***Obstacles to interracial contact***

Many factors have been hypothesised to explain resistance to interracial contact, most of which are thought to be mediated by ‘intergroup anxiety’. Intergroup anxiety is defined as the state of anxiety felt when interacting with a member of another group (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), and leads to avoidance of contact (Plant, 2004), or to the experience of contact as negative. It can also lead to a reinforcement of negative beliefs and attitudes. However, the argument that intergroup anxiety is an obstacle to contact does not take us a great deal further in our quest, unless we are able to establish its determinants.

The most obvious candidate factor that may lead to both intergroup anxiety and contact avoidance is basic prejudice. Thus, Allport (1954) included avoidance as one of the manifestations of prejudice. His proposition that prejudiced people tend to avoid contact with members of the group against which they are prejudiced has been confirmed by numerous researchers using a variety of different groups — including groups defined by race and sexual orientation (Blair, Park, & Bachelor, 2003). Prejudice against a certain group involves various beliefs and stereotypes about that group, and feelings of threat and of aversion — none of which promotes the desire to interact with members of that group or to feel relaxed in situations in which one is in contact with them. This prejudice can emerge from socio-cultural factors or from more deep-seated personality factors.

The role of perceived threats — either real or symbolic — has been found to be strongly related to intergroup attitudes (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan et al., 2002; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Realistic threats refer to the perception that the outgroup represents a threat to the ingroup’s material resources or well-being. For example, the outgroup may be perceived as ‘taking away jobs’ from the ingroup or as ‘bringing disease’. Symbolic threats, on the other hand, refer to the perception that the outgroup violates the norms or cultural beliefs of the ingroup in some way. Symbolic threats relate to perceived differences in the groups.

Another important set of factors comprises the anxiety and fears about how one will be treated or viewed by members of the other group. It also includes the anxiety about not knowing the 'right way to behave', particularly in circumstances in which the other group's norms are dominant. This set of anxiety factors is sometimes termed 'rejection sensitivity'. In addition groups that have a history of being the targets of prejudice are highly likely to anticipate that they will be met with hostility or disdain when interacting with members of the prejudiced group (Combs et al., 2006; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Tropp, 2003). Even in the absence of a history as the target of prejudice, most people are aware that other groups may have negative stereotypes or feelings about them. These perceptions are encapsulated in the concept 'meta-stereotypes', a term originally coined by Sigelman & Tuch (1997). The initial work on meta-stereotypes focused on the actual traits that were held in people's meta-stereotypes (cf. Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998), but it subsequently became clear that it is the valence of the traits, rather than the content of the traits, that produces the anxiety. Meta-stereotypes have also been found to influence interpersonal judgement, the expectations and experience of intergroup interactions, and behaviour towards both ingroup and outgroup members (Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer et al., 1998). Further, while individuals may recognise that their own behaviour comes from fear of rejection by the outgroup member(s), they do not generally consider that the outgroup member shares the same fears (Shelton & Richeson, 2005).

A factor that much of the literature on intergroup contact tends to gloss over is that groups frequently embody real cultural differences. These differences include a range of attitudes, behaviours, norms, beliefs, and knowledge systems, which Triandis (1990) refers to as 'cultural syndromes'. He identifies these syndromes as an important source of difficulties in intergroup contact. Avoidance of contact with other groups also stems from the fear of and reluctance to deal with the unfamiliar.

### ***Accounting for lack of mixing***

How do people explain the persistence of segregation and their reluctance to mix with other race groups? The few studies that have explored people's explanation for their own self-segregation have largely done this within the discursive paradigm (e.g., Buttny, 1997, 1999; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). However, themes pertaining to self-segregation have emerged in discursive studies exploring other aspects of race and race relations (e.g., Leibowitz, Rohleder, Bozalek, Carolissen, & Swartz, 2007). Discursive studies have demonstrated how interactants use language to construct and validate their world views and positions. Individuals do not wish to appear prejudiced, and are invested in appearing fair and reasonable (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005).

A number of discursive studies have reported explanations for self-segregation that have resonance in the South African student population. Talk about socio-cultural differences between the races features prominently (Buttny, 1997, 1999; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). Participants in these studies (particularly white people) frequently cited differences in

a range of behaviours, from noisiness to hygiene, as well as differences in interests, as explanations for self-segregation. Van Dijk (1987, 1993; cited in Buttny, 1997) argues that focus on difference is generally constructed so as to implicitly convey a group's superiority.

The history of past oppression has inevitable and divergent consequences for the construction of the present on the part of previous dominant and subordinate groups. The perception of the other group as being preoccupied with race issues appears in the talk of white students in the United States (USA), whereas black students talk of white students' lack of understanding of their experiences (Buttny, 1999). Another issue that appears in the discussions of students in both the USA and South Africa is the accusation that students who mix cross-racially are rejecting their own group and attempting to become like the other group (Buttny, 1999; Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). The question of differences in language and socio-economic status appears frequently in the discourses reported in South African studies (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; Durrheim & Mtose, 2006; Leibowitz et al., 2007), undoubtedly reflecting the particular legacy of apartheid.

In this study, we were interested in exploring South African students' attributions for the lack of interracial mixing on university campuses. We hypothesised that students from two race<sup>2</sup> groups would view this segregation differently. In addition, we explored whether the attributions endorsed are related to prejudice and to the amount of interracial contact experienced by the students.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

The sample consisted of 2 559 students from four universities in South Africa. Their average age was 24 years, ranging from 17 to 60 years. Thirty-nine per cent (39%) of the sample were men, and 59% were white. Within the sample, 34% came from the University of Cape Town (UCT), 26% from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), 26% from the University of South Africa (Unisa) and 14% from the University of Johannesburg (UJ). Unisa is predominantly a correspondence university. We decided to include this university as the students are generally working, and so are likely to have a wider experience of intergroup contact.

### ***Measures***

An internet-based questionnaire was constructed, containing scales measuring the following variables:

*Reasons for lack of interracial mixing:* Eight reasons for lack of interracial mixing were selected from extant literature in the area. Informal discussions with students suggested these had current relevance. Each was presented as a statement to which the respondent

was required to express his or her agreement or disagreement on a 6-point Likert scale, with the points identified as (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree.

*Affective prejudice scale:* This scale consisted of 6 items. Each item consisted of two bipolar adjectives anchoring the ends of a 7-point continuum. The respondents were required to indicate their feelings towards the other group using these sets of adjectives. The scoring was such that a high score indicated a high level of prejudice. The affective prejudice scale was originally proposed by Zanna (1994) and has been successfully used in South Africa. Moholola and Finchilescu (2006) used this scale on a sample of black learners, and found an alpha coefficient of 0.71. Laher and Finchilescu (2006), using a student sample, found alpha coefficients of 0.88 for blacks and 0.93 for whites. In this study, we found an alpha coefficient of 0.88, with 0.87 for the black students and 0.89 for the whites.

*Social distance scale:* This scale is based on the original by Bogardus (1925). It consists of six items answered on a 5-point scale. The items essentially measure how close the respondents are willing to allow the other group into their lives. Again, a high score indicated a high level of prejudice / desired social distance. Various versions of this scale have been used in South Africa, and have shown good psychometric properties. Moholola and Finchilescu (2006) found an alpha coefficient of 0.84 for black learners, while Holtman et al. (2005) found alpha coefficients of 0.88 for black learners and 0.92 for white Afrikaans-speaking learners. Laher and Finchilescu (2006) also found good reliability — 0.78 for black students and 0.84 for white students. Our survey produced an alpha coefficient of 0.88, with 0.88 for black students, and 0.87 for white students.

*Meta-stereotypes:* This scale measures the degree to which respondents believe that the other group thinks badly of them as members of their race group. The scale consists of five pairs of bipolar adjectives anchoring each side of a 6-point scale. A high score on this scale denotes the belief that the outgroup views the ingroup negatively. Versions of this scale have been used by Moholola and Finchilescu (2006) and by Laher and Finchilescu (2006). In each case, alpha coefficients of approximately 0.80 were found. In this study, the reliability was stronger, with 0.90 for the black students, 0.87 for the white students, and 0.89 for the whole sample.

*Amount of contact with people of the other race:* This scale consists of eight items asking whether the respondents have contact with people of the other race in a number of situations. The respondents are required to answer on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) Never to (5) Very often. Thus, the higher the score, the more contact experienced. A similar version of this scale was used by Holtman et al. (2005), and proved to have good reliability. Alpha coefficients of 0.85 for the black learners and 0.93 for the white Afrikaans-speaking learners were found. In this study, the reliability for the black learners was 0.76, 0.77 for the white learners, and 0.77 for the whole sample.

## **Procedure**

Students were invited, via several routes, to complete the internet-based questionnaire. Where it was possible to get email addresses, we made a mass posting of a notice inviting

the students to complete the survey via an internet site. We also issued notices through the login scripts of computers in laboratories, at lectures, and on notice boards around the universities. In addition, a raffle for R1 000 was offered as an incentive for completing the questionnaire. Each respondent's email address was captured in a separate file, so that the identity of the questionnaire respondent remained anonymous.

## RESULTS

### *Endorsement of the reasons for lack of interracial mixing*

In this analysis, we were interested in the number of students who did or did not endorse various reasons for lack of interracial mixing. Marking any of the agree options ('strongly agree', 'agree' or 'agree slightly') was taken as endorsement. The three disagree options were taken as non-endorsement. The percentage of the sample, as a whole and divided by race, that endorsed the eight reasons, is given in Table 1. In the table, 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' replace 'black' or 'white' (depending on the race of the respondent).

**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents agreeing with particular reasons for avoiding interracial contact

Statement	Whole sample	Black	White	Chi-square (df = 1)
People like to talk to their friends in their home language. This is a major barrier to social mixing between white and black students. (Language)	76.1%	72.1%	79.0%	16.10*
[Ingroup] students do not mix socially with [Outgroup] students because they have different interests in sport, music, etc. (Interests)	54.4%	52.8%	55.6%	2.00
[Ingroup] students who mix socially with [Outgroup] students are seen as dissociating themselves from the [Ingroup] group. (Dissociation)	30.0%	53.4%	14.0%	455.13*
[Ingroup] and [Outgroup] students have different ways of behaving which makes it difficult for them to mix socially. (Behaviour)	59.7%	59.8%	59.9%	0.0
It is difficult to mix with [Outgroup] students because they are so preoccupied with race issues. (Race issues)	43.6%	35.8%	49.1%	43.85*
It is difficult to mix with [Outgroup] students because they have no understanding of the culture of [Ingroup] students. (Culture)	35.2%	46.9%	27.3%	103.71*
There is very little social mixing because [Outgroup] students do not want to have [Ingroup] friends. (Rejection)	29.3%	34.9%	25.6%	25.64*
[Ingroup] students find it difficult to mix socially with [Outgroup] students because they generally come from a different socio-economic class. (SES)	60.0%	71.8%	52.0%	100.39*

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.001$

Only one reason received strong endorsement. Language differences were seen by most of the sample, both black and white, as a major obstacle to mixing. For the black respondents, the next most compelling reason was a difference in socio-economic status. This was not endorsed as strongly by white respondents. The other reasons that were seen as obstacles by over half of the respondents in each race group were (a) differences in behaviour, and (b) differences in interests. An optimistic finding was that a relatively small proportion of each group felt that the other race group did not want them as friends. It was interesting that the largest discrepancy between the races was on the statement referring to the perception that those students who mix interracially are dissociating from their group. Over half the black respondents (53.4%) endorsed this in contrast with only 14% of the white respondents.

### ***Do the reasons considered important differ for students of different races?***

To answer this question, the categorised scores were subjected to Chi-square analysis. There were significant race differences in the endorsement of six of the eight reasons. A similar proportion (approximately 50%) of black and white students agreed that differences in interests and in the behaviour of races presented an obstacle to mixing. Just over half the students in each race group endorsed each of these reasons.

There were only two reasons on which more white students than black were in agreement. More white students than blacks endorsed language as an obstacle. While the difference was significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 16.10, p < 0.001$ ), it was not substantial (6.9%). The difference was more marked (13.3%) on the statement about preoccupation with race issues ( $\chi^2(1) = 43.85, p < 0.001$ ). Almost half the white sample thought blacks' concern with race issues was an obstacle to mixing.

The reason on which there was most difference between the races was the item that suggested that students who mixed socially with the other group were dissociating from their own group. Over half (53.4%) the black sample endorsed this reason, in contrast with only 14% of the white sample ( $\chi^2(1) = 455.13, p < 0.001$ ). The perception that the other group did not understand their culture, and differences in socio-economic status, were also agreed to by substantially more black students than white students. Almost half (46.9%) of the black students endorsed the culture item, 19.6% more than white students ( $\chi^2(1) = 103.71, p < 0.001$ ). While the item tapping perceived difference in socio-economic status was endorsed by the majority of students, the proportion of the black sample endorsing this item (71.8%) was considerably higher than the proportion of the white sample (52%) ( $\chi^2(1) = 100.39, p < 0.001$ ). The item suggesting that lack of mixing was due to not wanting friends of the other group was endorsed by a relatively low proportion of the samples, though the proportion of blacks (34.9%) was significantly higher than whites (25.6%) ( $\chi^2(1) = 25.64, p < 0.001$ ).

In summary, of the eight reasons provided, the responses of the black and white samples differed on six. On four of these, a greater proportion of the black sample endorsed them

(dissociation, socio-economic status, culture, and rejection) while a greater proportion of the white sample endorsed items dealing with differences on language and race. Similar proportions across the two groups endorsed items suggesting that differences in interests and behaviour accounted for lack of mixing.

### **Are there different factors underlying the different reasons?**

To explore this question, we performed a Principal Components analysis on the responses given on the 6-point continuous scale. Two factors with eigenvalues over 1.00 emerged after varimax rotation. These factors together explained approximately 52.5% of the variability. Loadings of 0.5 and above were taken as definitive of factors. The resultant factor matrix is given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Factor loadings of the reasons for lack of interracial mixing

	<b>Factor 1 'Blame'</b>	<b>Factor 2 'Differences'</b>
Language	–	0.640
Interests	–	0.754
Dissociation	–	–
Behaviour	–	0.624
Race issues	0.802	–
Culture	0.689	–
Rejection	0.803	–
SES	–	0.545
Eigenvalue	2.120	2.000
Proportion of variance explained	0.265	0.250

The statement asserting that interracial mixing constitutes ingroup dissociation did not load on either factor. Factor 1 consists of statements that blame the other group for the lack of mixing — *they* are preoccupied with race issues, *they* do not understand my culture, *they* do not want people from my group as friends. Factor 2 consists of statements about differences — in language, interests, behaviour, and socio-economic status. The consistency of these factors was additionally checked by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The Difference factor yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.63, with an average inter-item correlation of 0.30. The Blame factor had an alpha coefficient of 0.72, with an average inter-item correlation of 0.45. Thus, the factors had adequate reliability.

T-tests were performed to test whether there were race differences on the degree of agreement with the factors. In each case, the black sample had significantly higher agreement with the factors than the white sample. On the 'Difference' factor, the black sample evidenced a significantly greater degree of agreement ( $M = 3.86$ ) than the white sample ( $M = 3.71$ ) ( $t(2\ 556) = 3.91$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, for the 'Blame' factor, the black

sample ( $M = 3.15$ ) had a significantly greater agreement than the white sample ( $M = 2.96$ ) ( $t(2\ 555) = 4.51$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the effect sizes for these differences were not very large (Difference:  $d = 0.14$ ; Blame:  $d = 0.17$ ).

### ***Are there relationships between endorsement of the various statements and intergroup attitudes, and intergroup contact?***

The statements were grouped into the factors identified above — that is, the Blame and Difference factors. Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated between each of the factors and the various measures of intergroup attitudes (affective prejudice, social distance, and meta-stereotypes) and contact variables (amount of contact and feelings about contact). The correlations are also provided for each race group, and a Fisher's  $z$  coefficient was computed to determine whether the correlations of the groups differed. The results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Correlations between endorsement of the reason statements, contact, and intergroup attitudes

Statement		Amount of contact	Affective prejudice	Social distance	Meta-stereotypes
Difference factor	All	-0.21	0.27	0.25	0.27
	Black	-0.14	0.12	0.15	0.13
	White	-0.26	0.39	0.37	0.37
	$z$	3.10	7.22	5.88	6.37
Blame factor	All	-0.24	0.45	0.35	0.50
	Black	-0.25	0.41	0.29	0.46
	White	-0.22	0.48	0.43	0.53
	$z$	-0.27 <sup>a</sup>	2.16	3.99	2.31

**Note:** All  $z$  statistics are significant at the 5% level, except for that marked with an 'a' (n.s.) The correlation coefficients are all statistically significant and most are at least moderate in size (greater than  $r = \pm 0.2$ ).

*Amount of contact:* Amount of contact was negatively correlated with the difference factor for the white sample ( $r = -0.26$ ), but the correlation is too low to be accepted as substantial for the black sample ( $r = -0.14$ ). Thus, those respondents who reported more contact with members of the other race also tended to disagree that differences in language, behaviour, interests, and socio-economic status accounted for lack of mixing. This relationship was significantly stronger for the white students ( $z = 3.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The Blame factor was significantly correlated with amount of contact for both groups — the greater the amount of contact, the less the respondents believed that lack of understanding of their culture, preoccupation with race issues, and belief that the other group did not want them as friends were obstacles to interracial mixing. Those who tended to endorse the items blaming the other group registered low levels of interracial contact.

There was no difference in the strength of association between the race groups ( $z = 0.27$ , n.s.).

*Affective prejudice:* Amongst the white students, this variable was strongly associated with the Difference factor ( $r = 0.39$ ), but the association for the black students was not strong ( $r = 0.12$ ). Respondents with higher levels of affective prejudice tended to endorse the Difference items.

The association with the Blame factor was much stronger, for both white and black students. The higher the respondents' level of prejudice, the more likely they were to endorse that lack of mixing was due to the other group not understanding their culture, being preoccupied with race issues, and not wanting to have them as friends. The race differences between the correlation coefficients for both factors were significant (Difference:  $z = 7.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Blame:  $z = 2.16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

*Social distance:* As with affective prejudice, the correlation between social distance and the Difference factor was strong for the white students ( $r = 0.37$ ) but not for the black students ( $r = 0.15$ ). The correlation between social distance and the Blame factor was strong for both groups, but again higher for the white sample ( $r = 0.43$ ) than for the black sample ( $r = 0.29$ ). The differences between the correlation coefficients for both factors were significant (Difference:  $z = 5.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Blame:  $z = 3.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the respondents with higher social distance scores were more likely to endorse the difference and blame items.

*Meta-stereotypes:* The highest correlations were between this variable and the Blame factor for both black ( $r = 0.46$ ) and white ( $r = 0.53$ ) students. Thus, respondents who thought the other group thought badly of them because of their group membership also believed that the other group did not want to be friends with people from their group, were preoccupied with race issues, and did not understand their culture.

This variable was also positively associated with attributions to difference in the case of the white students ( $r = 0.37$ ). The correlation for the black students ( $r = 0.13$ ) was statistically significant, but too low to be considered substantial. Respondents with negative meta-stereotypes were more likely to attribute lack of mixing to differences in language, interests, behaviour, and socio-economic status. The strength of associations differed significantly between the races for both factors (Difference:  $z = 6.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Blame:  $z = 2.31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In exploring students' responses to the reasons for lack of interracial mixing, one of our main interests was to discover whether race plays a central role in the ways in which interracial relations are viewed.

The analysis of endorsements of reasons for lack of interracial interaction indicated some definite race differences. The first reason for which this was clearly the case was the attribution to preoccupation with race issues. This was endorsed by more white students

than black students. While not endorsed by a majority, this clearly reflects a perception of a sizeable number of students. This situation reflects an observation that is frequently made in South Africa — blacks argue that whites want to forget apartheid, while whites argue that blacks want to dwell on it. On the part of white students, there may be a feeling of unfairness that they are being held responsible for something that they are too young to have had a part in. But at the same time there may also be a lack of understanding that the legacy of apartheid still affects their black counterparts in numerous ways — from their access to resources, to the normative beliefs in their communities.

The item that claimed that the other group did not want friends from the respondent's group was endorsed by more black students than white students. The proportion of students who agree with this item is relatively low. The response may reflect personal experience, or it could suggest that rejection sensitivity is a matter of concern. We do not wish to argue that racism is not present on university campuses. However, it is also possible that the actions of the other are misinterpreted through the expectation of rejection (Shelton & Richeson, 2005).

The item suggesting that mixing with the other group represents a dissociation from one's own group was endorsed by approximately half of the black students, while only 14% of white students agreed with this. The tendency of black students to stigmatise fellow group members who mix with whites, calling them 'coconuts' or 'Oreos', has been noted elsewhere (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). Black identity is far from unitary, and is indeed much contested. Durrheim and Mtose (2006) argue that there is a range of black identities that students subscribe to, and terms that are used to describe these positions — 'native', 'comrade', 'black-black', 'white-black'. These positions reflect differences in the way black identity is constructed relative to or in reaction to colonialism, whiteness, 'Westernness', community, and tradition. Endorsement of this item thus reflects at least knowledge, if not engagement, with this contested terrain.

That socio-economic status is an obstacle to interracial mixing was also endorsed by more black students (71.8%) than white students (52.0%). This reason is the second most frequently endorsed item in this study. While there has been some improvement in the economic position of blacks since the end of apartheid, this is probably not sufficiently widespread to change the view (or fact) that whites are privileged. Socio-economic status, even within racially homogeneous societies, has always been a determinant of friendship and social engagement. This item indicates that the association of race with advantage or disadvantage is still strong in South Africa.

Two principal component factors were found to underlie reasons believed to explain lack of interracial mixing. One of these reflected items referring to real differences between the groups, and the other to items that blame the other group in some way. The scores on these sets of items were correlated with measures of prejudice, meta-stereotypes, attitudes to interracial mixing, and to amount of reported interracial contact. The race differences in these patterns of correlations raise some interesting issues. While the black students

in general tended to endorse both the Difference and Blame factors more than whites, the links to the attitude and contact variables were weaker.

For the white students, endorsement of both the Difference and Blame factors was associated with higher prejudice scores (both affective prejudice and social distance), and stronger beliefs that blacks had negative views of them. Those who agreed with these factors also reported less contact and more negative feelings about contact. For the black students, there was a low association between the Difference factor and these variables. However, endorsement of the Blame factor mirrored the findings of the white students.

We do not claim that the endorsement of the reasons provided actually explains why students are not mixing interracially. It is very difficult to distinguish whether explanations are causal or are simply justifications for behaviour (cf. Finchilescu, 1991). Research on intergroup attributions has demonstrated that individuals are frequently motivated to place a positive 'spin' on their own or their group's actions, while at the same time placing negative connotations on the behaviour of other groups.

The link between explanations and prejudice is suggestive. The researchers in the discursive tradition argue that 'talk' about race and race relations is frequently constructed to disguise prejudice (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; Van Dijk, 1987, 1993, cited in Buttny, 1997). This notion is supported to some extent in the present study, specifically in the association between item endorsement and prejudice. Recent work has demonstrated that blatant racism (e.g., open denigration of the stigmatised group) is on the decline. Subtle racism, in which traditional values, cultural differences, and negative affect are highlighted, has become more prevalent (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). The association of many of the Difference items with our measures of prejudice suggests that the endorsed reasons could represent a form of subtle prejudice on the part of the white students. The Blame items could be argued to represent a more blatant form of prejudice. However, the very strong association of the Blame items with level of negative meta-stereotypes also suggests that it might serve as a form of defensiveness against the perceived rejection of the other group.

On the other hand, the link between contact and the item endorsement is more tentative. The correlations between the factors and the reported amount of interracial contact are relatively low. This finding may be due to the low frequency of such interactions in South Africa.

The present study — reliant as it is on self-report — cannot provide definitive evidence of actual obstacles to interracial mixing. We also cannot claim that the obstacles we explored represent the full repertoire of hindrances to interracial interaction. Nevertheless, it has provided some insight into the concerns that students have about racial interaction. The role of language is crucial. A large majority of students endorsed this reason as an obstacle to interracial mixing. At present, the school syllabus requires learners to study a number of South African languages, but the level of teaching does not lead to fluency. Perhaps, as multilingualism becomes more prevalent, language will cease to be an obstacle to mixing.

However, it may also be that language is a proxy for group membership, and language facility may well not surmount group barriers.

A number of the items we used in our scale were sourced from the talk of USA students about racial interaction (Buttny, 1997, 1999). While the forms of oppression experienced by the African American minority in the USA have many similarities to those suffered by blacks under apartheid, formal segregationist policies in the USA were removed over four decades ago. This serves as a salutary warning that self-segregation will not simply disappear with time, nor need it become benign. Buttny's (1997, 1999) findings suggest that self-segregation on USA campuses reflects racial conflict and hostility. This emphasises the relevance of research aimed at decreasing intergroup isolation in all spheres of society.

## NOTES

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2. It must be noted that, in using the term 'race', we are not proposing that race is anything but a social construction. Irrespective of whether they are better termed ethnicities or population groups, these so-called 'race' categories that were laid down by the apartheid system have come to define our lives and identities in innumerable ways. Terminology is also difficult. For the purpose of this paper, we will use the terms 'black' to refer to black Africans and 'white' to refer to students of European descent.

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