

Communication patterns of some Afrikaans speaking Coloureds and Whites in the Cape Peninsula

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INTERGROUP relations are of the utmost importance in South Africa where these relationships have seriously deteriorated during the past decade. In this study the focus is on the communication patterns of Afrikaans speaking Coloureds and Whites in the Cape Peninsula. These two groups share important facets of a common culture and this aspect should be a major impetus for positive communication between them. This approach proved to be rather simplistic and therefore attention is given to the social identity theory and the contact hypothesis to explain the data obtained in the pilot study. Although there are some similarities between the two population groups there are also some differences in the communication patterns. Communication between the two groups takes place primarily in the context of the work situation. Because of the relatively small number of respondents involved in the study no generalized conclusions could be made. It seems, however, that the relationships of different groups of people in a multicultural society will not improve as long as certain measures exist in the society to treat them as totally different entities with different needs and aspirations. This aspect was discussed in depth in the theoretical foundation of the study.



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1. Introduction

In multicultural societies similarities between the communication patterns of different cultural groups can serve as a link for ongoing contact even when the various cultures act as barriers by making communication difficult and tiresome. The closer the cultures of the various groups are, the greater the likelihood of meaningful contact, all other factors being equal.

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Asante (1980) pointed out that the biggest differences exist between Euro, Afro, and Asia centric cultures.

In plural societies like South Africa it is of the utmost importance to determine the extent to which there is real contact between different cultural and ethnic groups and the effect contact situations have on communication patterns (Main Committee: HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations, 1985). This is particularly the case, because original government policy was aimed at restricting contact between various population groups to the greatest possible extent. The result is that there is in most cases very little contact between members of different groups, while most of the contact occurs in structural vertical situations, for example the work place (supervisor-worker) and in commerce (shop assistant-customer). Communication is accordingly limited to formal topics, the persons concerned clearly fulfil defined roles and the relations towards one another are pre-specified causing intergroup friendships to be extremely rare (Main Committee: HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations, 1985).

The main reason for this research project was therefore to determine the nature and the extent of communication, on the personal as well on the mass communication level, between Afrikaans speaking Coloureds and whites in the Cape Peninsula and the possible effects these have on the relations between the two groups.

Coloureds are historically and legally regarded as a distinct population group, although they are strongly opposed to any attempts to treat them as a separate cultural group (Main Committee: HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations, 1985). Although English is popular especially among Coloureds in the higher socio-economic groups, there are in respect of language, beliefs, values, habits and customs no significant differences between Coloureds and Afrikaans-speaking Whites.

The basic premise underlying this study is that people with more or less the same communication patterns have a lot in common and should be able to communicate without major difficulties. As there are few language and cultural constraints to hinder interaction and communication between these groups (although in-

hibiting factors like the Group Areas Act are still in existence), the assumption can be made that Coloureds and Afrikaans-speaking Whites should interact and communicate freely in a variety of situations and that these interactions and the resulting communication should lead to better intergroup relations and the forming of intergroup friendships.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Social identity theory

One of the recent theories on intergroup behaviour and intergroup relations that could have an influence on communication patterns, is the social identity theory of Tajfel (1981). This theory holds that the individual's self concept is a highly differentiated cognitive structure which regulates behaviour under relevant circumstances. It consists of two subsystems: the personal and social identity. whereas the personal identity refers to self descriptions in terms of personality and physical - and intellectual characteristics, social identity refers to specific identifications with social groups. Different situations can make different self concepts relevant and these concepts serve to interpret social stimuli and regulate behaviour. When a specific social category distinction is highly relevant in a given situation, the individual will respond with respect to that aspect of his or her social identity and behave towards and communicate with other in terms of their corresponding group membership rather than their personal identity (Brewer & Miller, 1984).

As the individual has a need for a positive social identity, members of the ingroup are differentiated from members of the outgroup, usually on a basis that favours the ingroup. The need for a positive social identity therefore creates social competition whereby every group strives for positive uniqueness. This competition in turn leads to a depersonalized and deindividuated view of outgroup and ingroup members. Brown and Turner (1981) call this process depersonalization: 'In each case the crucial process is that individuals react to themselves and others not as differentiated, individual persons but as exemplars of the common characteristics of their group' (p. 39).

These social comparisons can, however,

contribute to negative social identity. Within a social system there may be general consensus on the relative value of a group. As high social consensus defines social reality and social stratification is associated with status differences between groups, low status might lead to negative social identity. These status differences might create social psychological pressures for social change. There are three main strategies for subordinate groups to restore their positive distinctiveness (Turner & Giles, 1981):

i) Individual mobility — members may leave or aspire to leave the ingroup and seek to join the higher status or threatening outgroup.

ii) Social creativity — members may seek to redefine or reinterpret the elements of the status comparison so as to change the negative distinctions subjectively into positive characteristics.

iii) Social competition — members may compete directly to change the relative position of the ingroup and outgroup on the status dimension. This strategy may develop into intergroup conflict where the status dimension is related to an unequal division of scarce resources. Where the former two are mainly individual strategies, this strategy mainly implies social action.

There is, however, another alternative: stagnant acceptance of the negative social identity. There are mainly four factors that determine whether positive reactions to negative social identity would occur: the possibility or not of personal movement, the perceived legitimacy of the system and the perceived security of the system. These variables explain the choice between the two kinds of reactions to a negative social reaction: individual attempts or social action to raise the value of the group identity (Brown, 1986).

As social identity theory deals with the relationship between the structural features of the social environment and perceptions and motivations at an individual level, it provides a useful integrative theory for the study of intergroup competition and its effects. Large complex societies, like those of South Africa, are characterized by multiple cross-cutting systems of social categorization and responding multiple social identities any one of which may be activated in a given situation. What is of the utmost importance is what factors make particular so-

cial categories more salient than others across a wide range of social occasions and settings (Brewer & Miller, 1984).

2.2 Determinants of category-based interaction and communication

Brewer and Miller (1984) describe the following factors that could play a role in making category divisions more salient: if categories like ethnic group membership are characterized by convergent boundaries in which group identities based on many different distinctions, for example religious, economic and political characteristics, all coincide, the probability is high that at least one cue to category identity will be relevant in almost any social situation. Distinctive physical features like skin colour, for instance, might be linked to cultural differences so that one automatically cues the other. Convergent category boundaries may also be the product of artificial constraints within a community. Constraints on geographical or economic mobility, for example, may lead to ethnic specialization of occupational roles causing social categorizations based on ethnic origin and on corresponding socio-economic indicators.

Another important factor is differential treatment by outside agents. The perception by external authorities that an aggregate of individuals constitutes a social group usually leads to the common treatment of members of that group. This in turn produces similarities and 'common fate' that enhance group identification. This process highlights the important role that political and social policies officially recognizing certain group distinctions can play in determining the salience of category membership for situations in which those policies are relevant.

Tajfel (1978) emphasized the structure of intergroup relations at societal level in this regard. Of the utmost importance is the presence of intense conflict of interests between groups (for example groups competing for work opportunities or the existence of a fairly rigid system of social stratification within the society that is paralleled by established differences in status accorded to the social categories. For high-status groups the importance of category distinctions will depend on the security of the established status differential: if their high status is secure, category identity will not be

salient in most social situations. If these status differentials are, however, perceived to be insecure or threatened, the need to preserve category distinctiveness may be high and category identity commensurately salient. For members of low-status groups the salience of categories will depend on the extent to which category membership creates barriers to individual achievement or positive social identity. If status mobility at individual level is possible, category-based behaviour will be avoided, but if category membership is a deterrent to achieving a change in the basis of evaluation that determines relative status, it may lead to group-based efforts to change the basis of relative status.

Another important factor in category salience is the group structure within a specific setting, particularly the relative proportion of different group members. A relatively equal representation of two social categories will usually make category distinctions less salient, whereas the presence of a clear minority will enhance category salience. The minority-majority representation also tends to interact with status differentials: majority groups with positive self-images have been found to display the greatest degree of discrimination against outgroups (Moscovici & Paicheler, 1978).

2.3 The reduction of category-based interaction and communication

It is therefore important to clarify processes whereby category-based social interactions and communication patterns may be replaced by social relations that are more interpersonally oriented in order to facilitate intergroup acceptance and reduce the role that category membership plays in creating barriers to individual social mobility and the development of positive interpersonal relationships.

As the major symptoms of category-based interaction are deindividuation and depersonalization of outgroup members, the reduction of categorical responding should be associated with social interactions based on increased differentiation and personalization. "Differentiation refers to the distinctiveness of individual category members within that category ... Personalization, on the other hand, involves responding to other individuals in terms of their relationship to the self, which necessarily in-

volves making direct self-other interpersonal comparisons that cross category boundaries' (Brewer & Miller, 1984:287).

Although differentiation might occur without personalization, for example in high task oriented interactions in the work place, such differentiation might have no personal implications so that the positive effect would not spread to other members of the outgroup or other social situations. The elimination of categorized responding in an intergroup situation therefore requires both elements, namely differentiation and personalization.

Factors that would promote personalization may be seen as the obverse of those that enhance the salience of category boundaries in particular settings. Brewer and Miller (1984) summarize a large number of specific structural and psychological features of the contact situation that have been proposed as important determinants of intergroup acceptance by hypothesizing that the effect of categorization on social interaction can be successfully reduced by promoting an interpersonal rather than a task orientation to fellow participants. Moreover, the basis for the assignment of roles, status, social functions and subgroup composition should be perceived to be category-independent rather than category-related.

2.4 The contact hypothesis

The starting point for much of the research and theory in the subject of intergroup relation is the so-called contact hypothesis: basically this hypothesis posits that a member's behaviour and attitudes towards members of another social category or racial group become more positive after direct interpersonal communication with them. Although it was sometimes thought that contact per se would produce these positive effects, numerous research studies done in diverse settings such as the military (for example Brophy, 1945; Roberts, 1953; Nieuwoudt, 1976), housing projects (Williams, 1944; Wilner, Walkley & Cook, 1952), the working place (Grundlach, 1950) and schools (Johnson, Johnson & Maruyama, 1984; Mynhardt, 1982) have shown that qualifications to the contact hypothesis are needed.

The result was that a number of contingencies on the general hypothesis have been added. These involve various characteristics of

the contact situation that presumably affect the nature and quality of interpersonal communication including equal status within the situation, opportunities to disconfirm prevailing stereotypes about the characteristics of outgroup members, mutual interdependence such as co-operations in the achievement of joint goals, the promotion of intimate interpersonal associations and the presence of egalitarian norms (Cook, 1978).

According to the elaborated version of social identity theory described in the previous section, it is, however, clear that contact would not lead to better intergroup acceptance if group distinctions in contact situations remain salient. It is also important that a process of differentiation and personalization should take place during intergroup communication. As preexisting status differences between groups are likely to carry over into new situations, it is important to introduce into the contact situation alternative sources of status or positive social identity that cross-cut group membership (Rogers, Hennigan, Bowman & Miller, 1984). The reduction of stereotyped expectations, on the other hand, requires frequent exposure to multiple types of disconfirming information that is dispersed across a large number of outgroup members. Additionally the condition of interaction must encourage attending to individual differences on a number of dimensions and it is not likely that highly task-focused interactions would lead to such attention. In the same way as equal status, cooperative goals also provide an opportunity for reducing the salience of category membership, but whether it would do so will also depend on the task structure and the nature of the interaction it promotes among members. The effect will depend heavily on whether the interaction and communication is primarily task- or personally oriented (Brewer & Miller, 1984).

From the report of the Main Committee of the HSRC's investigation into Intergroup Relations (1985) it is, however, clear that contact in the South African situation rarely fulfills the specifications of the contact hypothesis: contact between members of different groups, and especially equal status contact, is mostly limited to the work situation where interaction is mainly task oriented giving few opportunities for spontaneous interaction on an equal status basis.

Stereotypes of outgroups are therefore not likely to change. Moreover, opportunities to learn personalizing information of members of other groups are scarce, because real intimate contact is rare. As the processes of differentiation and personalization are restricted it is not likely that intergroup contact would promote better intergroup relations.

There have also been indications that different groups in South Africa do not evaluate their contact with other groups in the same way. Whites generally evaluate their contact significantly more positively than the other groups rate theirs with Whites. This concerns especially the contact between White officials and African civilians: this contact and interaction was often experienced as unpleasant by Africans. This is very important in view of the fact that contact with officials is one of the few contacts outside the work situation and can be ascribed to the fact that Africans in particular but perhaps other groups too — due to the asymmetrical nature of the distribution of power that is inherent in the official-civilian interaction — experience the actions of officials as indicative of the inaccessibility and lack of sympathy of the authorities and Whites in general. Because Whites are unconcerned about and unaware of this — or prefer to be unaware of the fact that other groups do not find the contact pleasant — they lack the motivation to effect a change in the contact patterns (Main Committee: HSRC Investigation into Intergroup Relations, 1985).

3. Empirical Study

3.1 The study samples

The communication patterns of 48 Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds and 50 Afrikaans-speaking Whites in the Cape Peninsula were studied in a pilot study undertaken during March 1984 by the Institute of Communication Research of the Human Sciences Research Council. The sample of Coloured respondents was obtained non-randomly by fieldwork organizers of the Western Cape Regional Office of the HSRC. The White participants were also non-randomly interviewed by members of the HSRC co-workers panel in the Cape Province. Both samples were stratified for age and gender according to the latest AMPS (All Media and Products Survey) figures.

3.2 Method

A questionnaire in Afrikaans containing questions of a biographical nature as well as questions on the frequency and type of interpersonal contact and communication between Whites and Coloureds was used in the survey. Questions on the two groups' perception of and attitudes towards each other, as well as their mass media usage, were also included.

4. Discussion

4.1 Biographical information

The final Coloured sample consisted of 25 men and 23 women (two questionnaires were damaged and could not be used), while 28 White men and 22 White women took part in the survey. The majority of both groups (83,1% of the Coloureds and 96% of the Whites) had completed at least part of their secondary school training. A considerable proportion of both groups (39,6% of the Coloureds and 28,0% of the Whites) were either pensionnaires, out of work or housewives, while the greatest part of the remainder (27,1% of the Coloureds and 54% of the Whites) were doing technical or clerical work. More of the Coloureds (70,2%) than of the Whites (46,0%) fell in the lower income group (R1 000 per month and lower) while only 19,2% of the Coloureds, in contrast with 46,0% of the Whites, fell in the middle group (between R1 000 and R2 000). Slightly more Coloureds (10,6%) than Whites (8,0%), however, earned more than R2 000 a month.

4.2 Interpersonal contact and communication

There seemed to be a reasonable amount of interpersonal contact between the Whites and Coloureds: 39,6% of the Coloured and 48,0% of the White respondents reported six or more contacts of this nature during the week before the survey. It is, however, significant that only 25,0% of the Coloureds — in contrast to 46,0% of the Whites — said that they had ten or more conversations with Whites/Coloureds. This might be an indication that the two groups perceived contact differently: what the Whites regarded as a conversation, was not viewed by the Coloureds in the same way. Contact in the home was mainly restricted to employer-

employee situations with Whites as employers in the majority of cases. A further indication of a difference in the two groups' perception of contact situations is the fact that 31,6% of the Coloureds reported home contact in social situations or as regular friends, while no Whites gave an indication of these. It also appeared that Coloureds in the sample reported more contacts with Whites in work, cultural and social situations than *vice versa*, although the amount of contact in professional situations was nearly the same for the representatives of both groups. A considerable number of both groups (35,4% of the Coloureds and 30,0% of the Whites) also reported equal status contact in the work situation, but whereas 29,2% of the Coloureds said that they had contact with Whites in the work situation as friends, only 2,0% of the Whites gave such indications. Most of the Coloureds (83,0%) and the Whites (76,0%) evaluated their contact with members of the other group as meaningful, although 60,9% of the Coloureds and 46,9% of the Whites felt that conflict resolution was easier among members of the same group than among members of different groups.

4.3 Perceptions of intergroup communication

Perceptions of various aspects of intergroup communication were each measured on a five point scale. It appeared that at least half of the Coloureds in the sample regarded their communication with Whites in the past as pleasant, relaxed, spontaneous and acceptable. Similarly, at least 50% of the White respondents regarded their contact with Coloureds in general as pleasant, relaxed, spontaneous, non-aggressive and acceptable.

Vast differences between the two groups were identified with regard to their responses to a series of questions concerning integration between Whites and Coloureds on various levels in society (interpersonal, school, church, cultural organizations and work); at least two thirds (66%) of the Coloureds in the sample were *in favour of* more integration in schools, churches, cultural organizations, interpersonal relations and on beaches. In contrast, at least 80% of the White respondents were *against* integration in schools, on an interpersonal level and on beaches. It was also found that 36% of all White

respondents were *in favour of* integrated churches and cultural organizations. More than half of the Coloureds perceived themselves on a five point scale (1=very near, 5=very far) as being very near to Whites, while only a fifth of the White participants saw themselves as being near (two on the scale) to the Coloured population and none as being very near.

Approximately 46% of the Coloureds and 56% of the Whites were looking forward to an improvement in Coloured-White relations within the next three years, although 34% of the Coloureds and 28% of the Whites were uncertain about this prospect. It is interesting to note that more or less 80% of the respondents of both groups felt that Afrikaans would continue

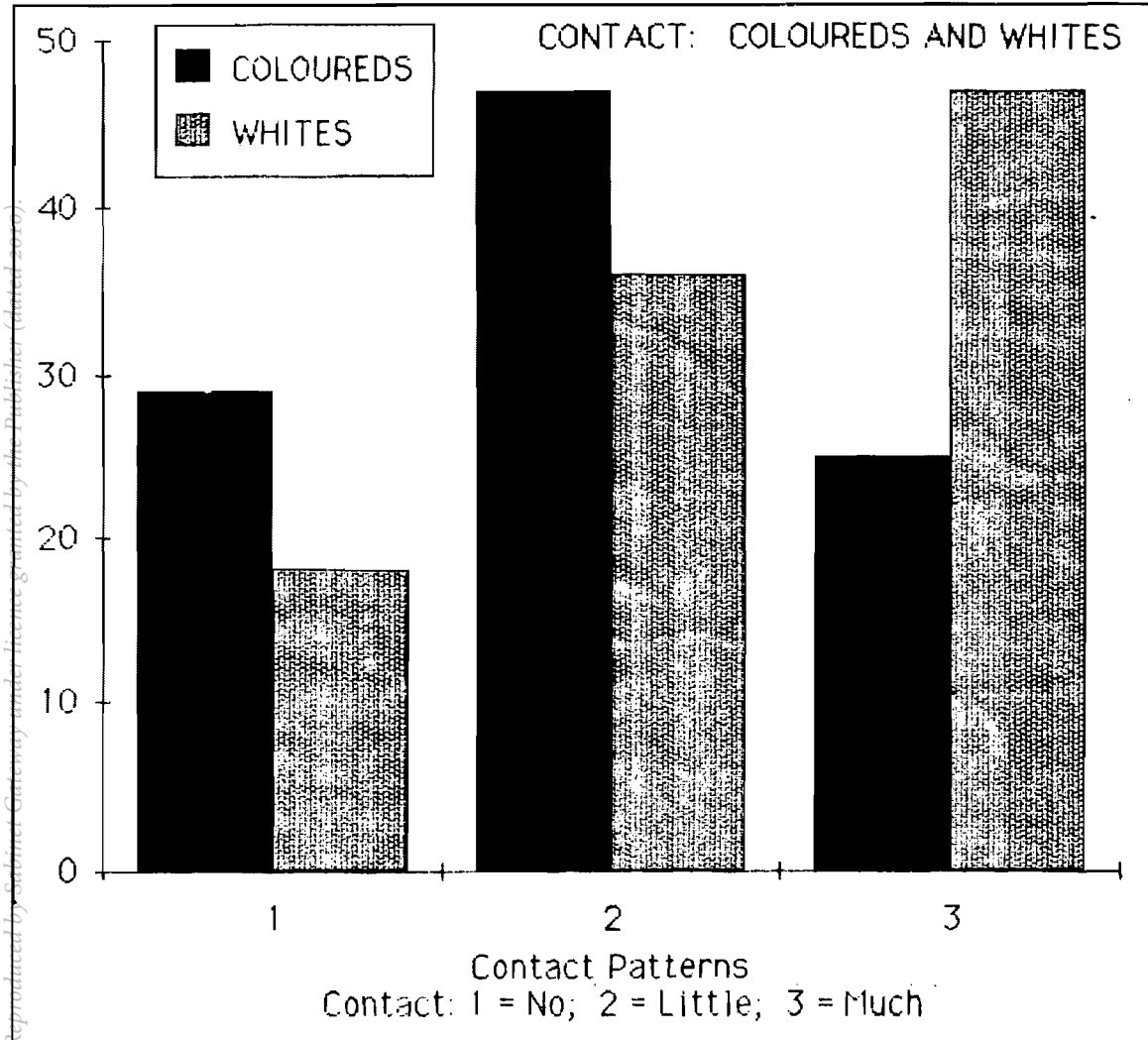
to exist as the language of both groups in South Africa.

4.4 Mass media usage

As both groups were Afrikaans speaking, similarities in their media usage could be expected. Definite differences, however, emerged from the results of this survey:

1) Newspapers

The most prominent aspect of newspaper reading patterns is that most of the Coloureds (66,7%) preferred English papers in contrast to only 8,0% of the Whites. There is also a substantial percentage of all the Whites (46%) who preferred not to read any English papers



whereas only 6,38% of all the Coloureds were of the same opinion. In accordance with this tendency more of the Whites than of the Coloureds read *Die Burger* on a regular basis. The percentage of readers of the Sunday paper *Rapport*, however, does not differ very much (32,7% for the Whites and 25,5% for the Coloureds), although most of the Coloureds (62,5%) preferred *Rapport Ekstra*.

A number of reasons can be given for Coloureds' preference for English newspapers: Coloureds probably perceived Afrikaans papers as mouthpieces of the government and therefore not objective in their reporting of news events. It is probably also an indication that Coloureds do not want to identify with the Afrikaans language as Afrikaans is seen as a symbol of the Afrikaner groups who are held responsible for racial discrimination in South Africa.

The Afrikaans speaking White readers were more interested in political commentary, letters, financial, social and local news than their Coloured counterparts, while both groups' interest in international news and sport were more or less the same.

2) Magazines

Magazine reading patterns show more or less the same pattern as those of newspapers: 45,8% of the Coloureds prefer English magazines in contrast to 22,0% of the Whites. The most popular Afrikaans magazine, *Die Huisgenoot*, was for example read by only 16,7% of the Coloured group, while 58,3% of the Whites were regular readers. The women's magazine *Sarie* had four times more readers in the White group as in the Coloured group.

Apart from the reasons for this tendency given in the section on newspapers, another valid explanation of magazine reading patterns could be that most articles in Afrikaans magazines are based on the needs and aspirations of Whites, while Coloured personalities and interests enjoy little coverage.

3) Radio and television

It appears that the regular Afrikaans service, *Radio Suid-Afrika*, is also not as popular among the Coloureds as among the Afrikaans-speaking Whites: where 50% of the Whites

listened regularly to this service, only 8,5% of the Coloureds did the same. Moreover, 46,8% of the Coloureds reported that they never listened to this service in contrast to 18% of the Whites. The most popular radio service seemed to be *Radio Good Hope* to which 72,0% of the Coloureds and 52,0% of the Whites listened on a regular basis.

The same orientation towards English could not be detected in the responses of Coloureds to the questions on television viewing, as TV1 is an English and Afrikaans service. Both the Coloureds and the Afrikaans-speaking Whites watched TV1 regularly, probably because this service, in contrast to Afrikaans newspapers and magazines and *Radio Suid-Afrika*, does not concentrate on the interests of only one population group.

5. Conclusions and discussion

Contact patterns emerging from this survey confirm the findings of the Investigation into Intergroup Relations of the HSRC (1985): although both groups speak Afrikaans meaning that the lack of language abilities cannot hinder communication and interaction, there are still few signs of informal and spontaneous contact between them. Most of the contact is also of a structural vertical nature (employer-employee) — a factor which further hinders the learning of personalizing information, intimacy and contact on an equal status basis. The result is that intergroup friendships are scarce and, although the sample was too small to investigate the influence of contact on intergroup relations, it can be predicted that the existing contact patterns cannot have a significant positive influence on interethnic attitudes.

The media usage patterns are an indication that the relations between the two groups are indeed strained. The fact that large numbers of the Coloureds preferred to read English rather than Afrikaans newspapers and magazines and do not listen to the Afrikaans radio service regularly, gives the impression that they wanted to dissociate themselves from the Afrikaans language, regarded as being a symbol of the White Afrikaner. It appears that factors other than the similarities between the two groups have a significant influence of intergroup relation. It might well be that government-

tal political and socio-economic policies with their emphasis on group differences have driven these two groups apart, particularly so as Afrikaans-speaking Whites are strongly linked with the establishment.

The Coloureds, however, were more inclined to attribute a basis of friendship to contact with Whites, while the majority perceived themselves as being very near to White people and were in favour of White-Coloured integration on an interpersonal level. The White participants, on the other hand, did not see themselves very close to Coloureds and the majority were against White-Coloured intermarriage and personal friendships. The root of this matter probably lies in social competition in order to achieve positive social identity: whereas the Coloureds sought to join the high status group and therefore strived for integration and friendship with Whites, the Whites were afraid of losing the benefits of their high status position in the process of desegregation (which does not necessarily mean that they dissociate themselves from Coloureds). Although there is a gradual movement away from segregation since the middle of the seventies, the Group Areas Act as well as a separate education system for each remains,

which may explain Coloured responses concerning Coloured-White integration. Finally it seems that White resistance to desegregation escalates progressively as the nature of contact becomes more personal and intimate.

The majority of respondents, however, viewed their communication with people of the other group as being pleasant, relaxed, spontaneous and acceptable. Integration on various levels of society evoked different responses from people in the sample: most of the Coloureds were against group segregation, while the majority of the White respondents indicated just the opposite. It might be that these attitudes are indeed the result of the lack of real intimate contact between the two groups: factors like the Group Areas Act limit the frequency of equal status contact which, in turn, prevents the forming of intergroup friendships and causes prejudice to prevail.

Owing to the limited size of this study no definite conclusions can, however, be made; more research is needed to get a clearer picture of the factors influencing the communication patterns between these two groups so that ways can be found of improving relations between them.

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