

On the Micro-Ecology of Racial Division: A Neglected Dimension of Segregation

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Special focus section

Editors of the special focus section:

'Race', isolation and interaction in everyday life

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On the micro-ecology of racial division: A neglected dimension of segregation



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This article provides a general background to this special focus section of the journal on 'racial interaction and isolation in everyday life'. It reviews both the geographic literature on segregation and the psychological literature on the contact hypothesis, and calls for more research on how, when and why racial isolation manifests at a micro-ecological level; that is, the level at which individuals actually encounter one another in situations of bodily co-presence. Some conceptual and methodological implications of this extension of the segregation literature are described. The social psychological significance of the racial organisation of such ordinary activities as eating in cafeterias, relaxing on beaches and occupying public seating are also explored. The focus of the argument is that everyday boundary processes may maintain the salience of racial categories, embody racial attitudes and regulate the possibility of intimate contact.

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In preparing for this special focus section of the journal, we had the opportunity to revisit A. J. Christopher's (1994) *The atlas of apartheid*, a book published in the same year as South Africa's first democratic election. As its title suggests, the atlas

is essentially a book of maps: a visual record of the multifarious forms that racial separation assumed during the apartheid era. Browsing its pages, we find illustrations, for example, of urban apartheid, the homeland system, the racial organisation of institutions of education, industry, transport and many other areas of social life. One of Christopher's entries is particularly relevant to this special focus section, being located in a section of the book devoted to the regulations of 'personal apartheid'. It takes the form not of a map but of a set of architectural plans that specify the design of a house with servants' quarters (see Figure 1). Among other features, the plans indicate how the goal of racial separation might be accomplished within the sphere of domestic life. Thus, we find the so-called maid's quarters located to the rear of the property, physically distanced and bounded from the main house. Separate toilet and washing facilities are designated, as are separate access routes to each building. As is well known, this kind of design did not remain an abstract representation on the drawing tables of architects and town planners: its logic was reproduced all too tangibly within countless homes throughout white suburbia. Concerned that the servant-master relationship would encourage inappropriate forms of intimacy, the apartheid authorities laid down strict guidelines about the living arrangements of black servants in white homes. Such guidelines did not merely incorporate legal strictures such as the Immorality Act of 1926; as ever, they were also stamped upon the material organisation of day-to-day living arrangements.

What impact did this process have on relations in the home? In simple terms, the kind of social space that is depicted in Figure 1 made possible a curious mixture of familiarity and distance, inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, contact between so-called maids and madams was inevitably extensive, even during the height of the apartheid era. Though its impact on intergroup attitudes was probably limited, some beneficial consequences for interpersonal relationships have been documented (e.g., see van Dyk, 1988, cited and discussed in Mynardt & du Toit, 1991). On the other hand, the socio-spatial organisation of domestic life clearly served to preserve racial distance by reminding participants of their 'proper place' in the home. In order to fully appreciate this idea fully, we need move beyond architectural drawings to analyse the lived experiences of those who occupied buildings such as that represented in Figure 1. One of Gordon's (1985) interesting collections of life stories, for example, provides a fascinating window on the meaning of domestic relations from the perspective of the disadvantaged. Entitled *Everything about the backyard*, the story recounts the biography of Muriel Mlebuka, a domestic labourer who has spent her working days in the suburbs of Berea, Durban. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that the 'backyard' of the title is at once a 'real' space of domestic drudgery and a metaphor for a life spent on the domestic margins. Although she has raised their children, lived amidst them for 40 years and shared innumerable confidences, Muriel Mlebuka has remained strangely 'out of place' in her employers' homes, isolated and set apart.

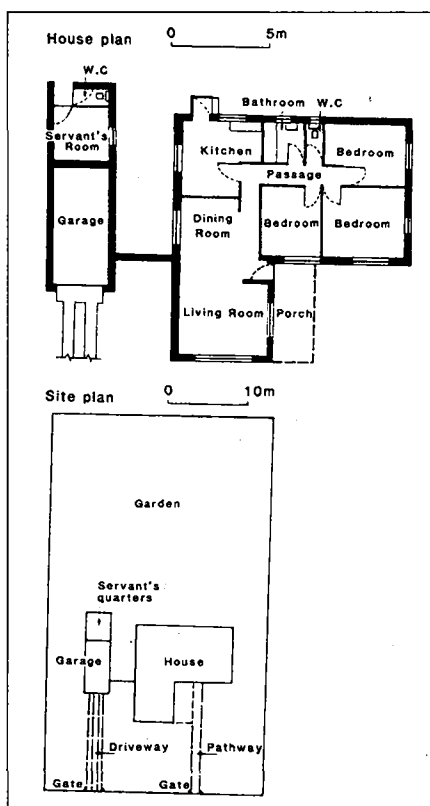


Figure 1: Design of a house with servants' quarters (taken from Christopher, 1994)

In her own words: 'Everything in this story is about the backyard. There is nothing about the front yard' (p. 140).

If the arrangement of domestic relations reminds us that segregation entails a symbolic and experiential as well as a material division of social space, it also demonstrates that segregation may operate across a range of scales. At one level, the apartheid system was famously impressed upon the global organisation of urban life in South Africa, taking the form of group areas, infrastructural barriers, buffer zones, and other features of the apartheid city. Equally important, however, as Figure 1 testifies, apartheid also erected boundaries at more intimate levels of analysis, shaping regions of social life where racial encounters were commonplace and unavoidable. The articles presented in this special focus section centre primarily on relations located at the latter scale, exploring patterns of racial contact and isolation in post-apartheid South Africa. They are based on the assumption that racial transformation (and conservation) can be studied in the delicate choreography of everyday relations as well as in the global reorganisation of cities and institutions.

In this introductory article, we shall sketch some background to this special focus section of the journal. The first section develops its rationale by discussing the neglect of what we term the *micro-ecology of segregation by social scientists*; some instructive exceptions to this trend are also considered. The second section assesses the social psychological implications of micro-ecological practices of racial division, focusing on their role in managing racial contact in everyday life, embodying racial attitudes and concerns, and maintaining the ideological salience of 'race' as a category for organising everyday experience. The concluding section highlights some challenges and opportunities that this line of inquiry presents. We suggest that by neglecting the micro-ecology of segregation, researchers have overlooked a dynamic, subtle, multifaceted and *sui generis* index of social change. However, we also acknowledge the dangers inherent in detaching relations operating at this analytic scale from the broader geopolitics of racial transformation.

THE MICRO-ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF SEGREGATION

For several decades, the topic of racial segregation has generated an extensive empirical literature in geography, sociology and urban studies. The majority of this work has focused on relations in the United States of America (US) and has attempted to track the changes produced by the end of legal segregation in that country. Two general themes can be drawn from this literature. First, segregation has proven to be a highly adaptable and recalcitrant form of social organisation within US society. It is of course possible to find contexts in which the ideal of integration has been achieved (cf. Ellen, 1998); however, the end of *de jure* segregation has not led to a universal dissolution of racial boundaries and distances. To the contrary, as Massey and Denton (1989, 1993) have demonstrated, segregation continues to shape the lives of many US citizens and, in some areas of the country, remains so extensive and multiple in form as to warrant the label *hyper-segregation*.

The second theme concerns the consequences of this state of affairs. To put the matter simplistically, many commentators believe that segregation remains fundamental to the reproduction of racial inequality and discrimination. The racial organisation of American cities in interaction with rising poverty, for example, has been linked to the emergence of an African American 'underclass' and the concentration of urban poverty (e.g., Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey & Fischer, 2000). It has been found to determine access to services and material resources, exposure to negative environments, and even the distribution of health and mortality. Urban segregation has also continued to shape social attitudes in the US by limiting the potential for developing forms of solidarity that cut across racial lines (see e.g. Sigleman, Bledsoe, Welch & Combs, 1996). The so-called New Segregation, in short, may service the rather old political objective of maintaining racial privilege and differentiation: 'In terms of the institutionalisation of segregated city space, the New Segregation has managed to informalise what used to be formally produced [. . .] Race continues to define where

one can go, what one can do, how one is seen and treated, one's social, economic, political, legal and cultural status, in short, one's daily experience' (Goldberg, 1998, p. 25).

Notwithstanding its descriptive richness and political relevance, the majority of work on segregation has shared some limitations of focus that the research presented in this focus section aims to address. First, although recognising that segregation operates at various scales (e.g., see Kirshenbaum, 1984), researchers have concentrated almost exclusively on processes located at a relatively macro-sociological level. They have investigated, for example, how racial divisions manifest at the level of large-scale institutions (e.g., in the horizontal and vertical stratification of occupations) or through the 'uneven' demography of entire towns and cities. Second, researchers have focused on social contexts where intergroup boundaries are formally demarcated, presenting comparatively stable and institutionalised barriers to interaction (see also Schnell & Yoav, 2001). The racial composition of schools provides an extensively studied example.

Departing from these features of previous work, the research presented in this special focus section suggests that segregation can also be fruitfully treated as a micro-ecological practice: a phenomenon sustained by boundary processes operating at an intimate scale and in 'everyday life spaces' (Schnell & Yoav, 2001) where social relations tend to be fleeting, informal and subject to constant realignment. Segregation, in this sense, is the outcome of innumerable small acts of division that occur 'spontaneously' and in absence of what Schelling (1978) once called 'centralised management'. Viewed in isolation such acts may seem innocuous. Collectively, however, as the articles in this issue illustrate, they may quietly reproduce systems of social isolation and profoundly shape the 'daily experience' of race to which Goldberg (1998) refers.

Some support for this line of work can be drawn from a handful of relevant studies, mainly conducted in the US in the period following the end of *de jure* segregation. Davies, Seibert and Breed (1966) explored relations on public transit buses in New Orleans some six years after abolition of the so-called white precedence law. Until 1958, this law had made it illegal for a black passenger to sit in front of any white passenger and, conversely, for a white passenger to occupy a seat behind any black passenger. Davies and his colleagues wanted to examine the extent to which passengers of either race were prepared to violate this long-established rule once its legal foundations had been removed. In order to do so, they constructed maps of seating arrangements on some 87 journeys during May of 1964, with each map indicating the race, gender, estimated age and seating position of all passengers at the time of sampling. Their results showed that so-called precedence violators were rare and that the vast majority of journeys exhibited continuing high levels of segregation. In other words, legal desegregation had failed to bring about *de facto* integration.

Kaplan and Fugate (1972) used a quasi-experimental design to explore patterns of racial contact and avoidance in supermarkets in two American cities, Cincinnati and Richmond. In a complex set of results, they found that racial factors shaped individuals' willingness to stand in shopping queues together, accept free samples and participate in other forms of racial contact, but that the nature and magnitude of avoidance was moderated by contextual factors. For example, a significant association was found between the race of a customer approaching a shopping line and the race of the last customer in that line: in simple terms, customers tended to avoid queuing behind a person of another race. However, this behaviour was subject to regional variations, being practised mutually by whites and blacks in Cincinnati, but exclusively by whites in Richmond.

Parker (1968) collected participant observational data on relations in the Chicago First Baptist church, and documented a somewhat contradictory pattern of racial interaction and avoidance. On the one hand, members of the congregation seemed willing to initiate and sustain interracial conversations; in fact, on this linguistic measure, in-group preferences were surprisingly moderate, leading the researcher to note that 'a remarkable amount of integration has been achieved'. On the other hand, seating charts plotted over a series of five Sunday services suggested the existence of a systematic process of segregation, with black and white members tending to cluster in different areas of the church. The observed proportion of whites sitting in each of the church's quadrants departed significantly from the expected 'even' distribution and thus maintained seating distances and divisions. An interesting feature of this study is that it shows how racial integration in one dimension (e.g. number of interactions initiated) may be offset by segregation in another (e.g. sitting apart).

Schofield and Sagar (1977) studied eating arrangements in a multiracial school over a year-long period, measuring the patterning of both face-to-face and side-by-side seating in the school cafeteria. Adapting a statistical index developed by Campbell, Kruskal and Wallace (1966), they found that mixing across both racial and gender lines was minimal and that seating adjacencies were part of a process of re-segregation in the school. Qualifying this trend, however, they also found eating patterns were subject to temporal and contextual shifts. Notably, segregation in the cafeteria tended to decrease over time for seventh graders, whereas it tended to increase over time for the eighth graders – possibly because racial status discrepancies were more marked in the latter group. Schrieffer and her colleagues' contribution to the present issue is essentially an extended replication of Schofield and Sagar's work, exploring patterns of racial isolation and interaction during meal times in two university catering halls.

The final study is perhaps most relevant to this special focus section, being located in the changing landscape of the new South Africa. Dixon and Durrheim (2003) investigated relations on an open beach in KwaZulu-Natal, recording spatial patterns of assembly and distribution over the Christmas holiday period, as well as collecting direct observations of processes of racial contact. They found relations on the

beachfront were characterised by both integration and segregation. On the one hand, the demographic composition of the beach seemed to reflect racial diversity of South African society, with about 64% of occupants being classified as black, 24% white, 10% Indian, and 2% coloured. If one bears in mind that during the apartheid era the entire space depicted in Figure 2 was reserved for whites, then its present multiracial status must be viewed as a progressive change. On the other hand, Dixon and Durrheim (2003) reported that actual interracial contact seldom occurred on the beach and that relations were arranged in terms of recurring patterns of informal segregation. Although sharing the same space, groups remained divided from one another by boundary processes that operated at various levels. These ranged from the maintenance of racially exclusive 'umbrella spaces' on a micro-interactional scale to the production



Figure 2: Mapping the ecology of segregation: Relations on Scottburgh's beachfront, KwaZulu-Natal (taken from Dixon & Durrheim, 2003)

of broader patterns of dispersal and division across the beachfront as a whole. Figure 2, for instance, illustrates one of the most common ecological formations this study documented, which took the form of a process of racial clustering. As can be

seen, black holiday-makers tended to congregate in and around the swimming pool, while white holiday-makers predominated in the adjacent embankments and sand areas.

The foregoing, somewhat scattered, collection of studies does not amount to a coherent literature on how, when and why processes of micro-segregation shape 'race relations'. Moreover, in some cases they suffer from a lack of sophistication regarding the conception and measurement of segregation. *Ad hoc* measures of 'unevenness' and seating adjacencies, for instance, compare unfavourably with the sophisticated, multidimensional indices of segregation employed by urban geographers and sociologists (e.g., see Hutchens, 2001; Massey & Denton, 1988). Nevertheless, the studies do provide *prima facie* evidence for some of the assumptions that underpin this special focus section: they indicate that segregation exists within everyday life spaces (e.g., in buses, shopping centres, churches, cafeterias and beaches), and that it is maintained, whether deliberately or inadvertently, by ordinary people as they go about the mundane business of travelling, queuing, worshipping, eating and sunbathing.

In addition, the studies begin to illustrate what we mean by the phrase the *micro-ecology of segregation*. Perhaps most important, this phrase designates a particular kind of spatial structure, a structure that institutes and maintains racial boundaries in situations where the possibility of interaction is perpetually imminent. It should already be apparent that the micro-ecology of segregation may assume widely varying forms. It may be incorporated, for example, within the logic and design of built environments, the architecture of domestic service in South Africa providing a stark illustration. It may find expression within the appropriation and use of public spaces, such as the arrangement of seating on buses or queuing in shopping centres. It may even be immanent within territorial organisation of spaces of recreation, such as beaches, where the relaxation of bodies and minds is not necessarily accompanied by the relaxation of boundaries and distances.

Figure 2 is useful in that it visualises one example of this kind of socio-spatial structure of division. It helps us to imagine how a particular configuration of bodily positions and forms of dispersal might work to limit the potential for racial contact. However, there are two important features of segregation that this kind of image is in danger of misrepresenting. First of all, it 'freezes' what is an essentially dynamic process, portraying segregation as an outcome rather than a process. The danger here is that racial boundaries become viewed as pre-given features of the context of social relations, being accorded a reality that is independent of individual actions and activities. By contrast, in speaking of the micro-ecology of segregation, we wish to highlight the 'constant becoming' of a particular kind of material and symbolic environment (Pred, 1984). As Tredoux and his colleagues elaborate in their contribution to this issue, this requires a methodological approach that is able to capture the dynamic and emergent quality of micro-processes of boundary construction, negotiation, maintenance and dissolution within a given space. Moreover, it requires an approach that

is able to elucidate how the 'endless dialectic between practice and social structure expresses itself locally' (Pred, 1984, p. 92); that is, to clarify how individual practices of boundary regulation are both enabled by broader systems of segregation and the means whereby such systems are reproduced or transformed.

A second danger of the kind of representation of segregation presented in Figure 2 is that it masks participants' own perspectives on the meaning of boundary processes, what Lefebvre (1991) famously called their 'spaces of representation'. This kind of map is effective in modelling the abstract configuration of racial separation, just as segregation statistics are effective in measuring its magnitude on particular dimensions. In both instances, however, the rich phenomenology and anthropology of daily relations are neglected, and researchers' capacity to explain segregation is impoverished as a result. For, as both Durrheim and Finchilescu argue in their articles, processes of contact and segregation cannot be understood apart from the categories, (meta)stereotypes, emotions and other forms of social evaluation through which ordinary people experience others' co-presence within particular settings of everyday life. In other words, the lived experience of social relations in a given social space is bound up with, but irreducible to, abstract representations of space, whether such representations are produced by town planners (Figure 1) or by academics (Figure 2). Clearly, this experience must lie at the very heart of a social psychological analysis of everyday segregation.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Social psychological research on segregation has mainly worked within the theoretical framework of the 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954). This hypothesis holds that the mutual isolation of groups encourages the development of negative attitudes and stereotypes, increasing the likelihood of intergroup tension and conflict. Conversely, it holds that regular interaction between groups tends to reduce prejudice, particularly when it occurs under certain optimal conditions. For example, contact should involve equal status participants; it should be non-competitive and organised around superordinate goals; it should involve the kind of intimate interaction that leads to friendship formation; and it should be supported by institutional rules and norms (see Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawamaki, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, for reviews of the contact literature).

This beguilingly simple theory represents one of social psychology's most important contributions to the struggle against racism. Research on the contact hypothesis has had a profound impact on ethnic and racial policy, particularly in the US where it has been heralded as a successful example of 'action research' (e.g. see Brewer, 1997). Perhaps most important, it has provided a rational challenge to the doctrine of segregation, a challenge eloquently summarised by Pettigrew (1969, p. 66): 'Racially separate or together? Our social psychological examination of separatist assumptions leads to one imperative: the attainment of a viable democratic America, free from

personal and institutional racism, requires extensive integration in all realms of life.'

While endorsing these sentiments, we believe that psychological work on the contact hypothesis might benefit from a better understanding of the social practices on which the contributors to this section focus. Specifically, such work might consider more closely the role of micro-ecological processes in limiting the possibilities for racial interaction in everyday life, and in both expressing and actively constituting how participants interpret their everyday relations with others.

MANAGING RACIAL INTIMACY: DESEGREGATION AND THE PROBLEM OF 'ILLUSORY CONTACT'

Although there now exists a substantial body of evidence to support the basic premise of the contact hypothesis, questions have been raised about its everyday relevance and ecological validity (e.g. see Connolly, 2000; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; Foster & Finchilescu, 1986; Maoz, 2002). In point of fact, as both Schrieffer et al. and Tredoux et al. point out in their articles in this special focus section, direct observations of contact are surprisingly rare in the literature. The majority of studies has focused either on relations unfolding under relatively unusual circumstances (e.g., the laboratory or the 'jigsaw classroom') or on respondents' self-reports of their interactions with others. Perhaps as a result, the psychological literature on the contact hypothesis works well as a resource for imagining the abstract preconditions for an ideal society. However, it is arguably less effective as an account of the outcome of ethnic and racial contact in everyday settings or as a realistic explanation of the obstacles to transformation that may exist there.

Psychologists' tendency to underestimate – and thus to underspecify – the resilience of ethnic and racial segregation provides a relevant case in point. As noted in our introduction, research conducted by geographers and urban sociologists indicates that segregation remains a dominant feature of social life in many societies, including the US where most psychological work on the contact hypothesis has been conducted. Schools, universities, occupations, neighbourhoods and other institutional settings continue to be racially divided; they thus offer limited opportunities for the kinds of familiar exchanges that contact researchers study and advocate. Without an understanding of the resilience of segregation and a strategy for specifying how it might be overcome, the contact literature may ultimately offer a utopian vision of social change (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003).

Perhaps more relevant to this special focus section, even when integration at an institutional level is successfully achieved, actual racial contact may remain limited, being circumscribed by the micro-ecological practices on which the contributors focus. Schofield and Sagar's (1977) study of seating arrangements in school cafeterias can be revisited in this light. Among other themes, what their research demonstrates is that integration in terms of the overall ratio of black-to-white students in a school

is no guarantee of integration at the level of meaningful social interaction. Indeed, Schofield (1986) has herself argued that processes of re-segregation remain an insidious but neglected problem in many schools and that this may help to account for the rather mixed success of integrated education initiatives. She suggests that the psychological and educational benefits of multiracial classrooms are frequently undermined by the recurrence of racial isolation in settings such as the playground, the cafeteria and the sports field.

Speaking in somewhat broader terms, Taylor and Mogghadam (1994) have written about the so-called illusion of contact. They argue that in many everyday contexts the appearance of integration belies the reality of segregation and that both the frequency and the quality of interaction are more limited than commonly assumed. Along similar lines, Maoz (2002) has questioned whether regular contact occurs even when interventions to promote interaction have been actively implemented. In an article titled 'Is there contact at all', he reported a study that gathered observations of 46 'planned encounter' programmes conducted in Israel between 1999 and 2000. Designed expressly to improve relations between Arabs and Jews, these programmes incorporated an array of joint activities (e.g., games, drawing and drama), as well as direct attempts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. However, Maoz found that there was considerable variability in the extent of actual interaction between Jewish and Arab participants across programmes. For example, in around 35% of dialogue groups observed, only 'small' or 'medium' levels of interaction occurred, a surprising figure given that their *raison d'être* was to maximise ethnic contact. Maoz concluded that just because members of different groups are 'sitting together in the same space does not necessarily create or entail significant interaction between them' (p. 193). He urged researchers to pay more careful attention to the concrete behavioural practices through which both contact and isolation are sustained.

Developing this theme, several of the articles presented in this section of the journal clarify the problem of illusory contact, illustrating how and why proximity may fail to translate into actual interaction. Moreover, they indicate that in order to understand this problem it is insufficient simply to measure individuals' self-reports of their face-to-face interactions with others. This methodology does not capture the spatial and systemic character of ethnic and racial separation as it is practised in everyday contexts. Further, it masks how the illusion of contact may be sustained through a supra-individual system of racial boundaries and distances, a micro-ecology of segregation that is simultaneously the medium and the outcome of coordinated social practices.

MICRO-ECOLOGIES AS LIVED 'SPACES OF REPRESENTATION'

Systems of micro-segregation are relevant to social psychologists not only because they regulate the opportunity for interaction between groups. They also form an integral feature of the symbolic context in which we experience our relations with others,

helping to constitute the meaning of our social identities and interactions. A tentative analogy might be drawn here with the rich tradition of psychological research on the regulation of personal space. This tradition has revealed that the everyday management of personal distances and boundaries – what Hall (1966) famously called the ‘hidden dimension’ – is not a trivial process; to the contrary, it is a highly sensitive index of the nature of our relationships and a precondition for what passes as ordinary social interaction. Indeed, seemingly inconsequential variations in our ‘proxemic’ alignments to others may express highly complex relations of threat and security, distance and solidarity, respect and disdain, as well as culturally specific assumptions about what constitutes ‘proper’ spacing. By implication, one should not presuppose that the racial organisation of, say, seating in a cafeteria or sunbathing on a beach is psychologically insignificant, that micro-ecological processes are merely a dull backdrop to, or passive reflection of, more important processes.

We face a difficulty in trying to develop this point however. For in contrast to the prolific literature on personal space, the spatial dimension of face-to-face relations between groups has been under-researched by social psychologists (c.f. Paulus & Nagar, 1987), including psychologists interested in processes of contact and desegregation (Dixon, 2001). Although the classic writings of Festinger, Schachter and Back (1959) showed that spatial factors facilitate group formation, communication and cohesion, their role in shaping intergroup perceptions and meanings has barely been explored by social psychologists. Of particular relevance to this issue, they have neglected how the complex ordering of ‘bodied spaces’ (cf. Foster, 1997) may allow members to enact their group differences and allegiances, and to create social spaces that are recognisably populated by ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

Let us reconsider, as a working example of the latter process, the study by Davies et al. (1966). As we have seen, they found that racial mixing on public transit buses in New Orleans was minimal because most passengers continued to observe the (legally defunct) ‘white precedence’ rule. The effects on rates of casual contact of a micro-ecological system in which white passengers sit mainly at the front of buses while black passengers sit to the rear need not be laboured. However, one might also consider its status as a lived ‘space of representation’: an environment that reflects and informs the meanings that users attribute to their social relations. Unfortunately, Davies and his colleagues did not gather data on how passengers themselves interpreted or experienced the patterns of segregation they documented. Even so, we wish to use their study to open up some potentially relevant themes:

(a) First, we might consider whether or not the racial division of seating on buses worked to preserve relations of status. Is it not feasible that the ongoing observance of front and back regions by most passengers – albeit in terms of a virtual, relational and constantly shifting boundary – may have marked a distinction between high and low groups on transit buses? Certainly, this interpretation accords with the logic of

the 'white precedence' law, which was intended not only to separate groups by 'race' but also to preserve the association between race, space and rank.

(b) Equally, the seating patterns documented by Davies et al. may have stood as public expressions of racial allegiance and distance. After all, in a context where segregation is not legally obligated, where one 'chooses' to sit (or not to sit) may operate as a behavioural index of attitudes, and may be recognised as such by passengers. Supporting this idea, Campbell, Kruskal and Wallace (1966) and others found that a positive relationship exists between ethnic and racial prejudice and micro-ecological variables related to segregation (e.g. seating adjacencies).

(c) Third, seating arrangements may have helped to maintain the everyday salience of racial categories on transit buses by making them a visible feature of the material organisation of relations there. How this process operates need not be elaborated for a South African audience, for the strong classification (Sibley, 1995) of space has long helped to sustain the strong classification of people in this country. As Goldberg (1993) has observed, one's place in the world is often more than a mere 'locational co-ordinate': it is also a 'trope for identity'. By this same logic, the spatial patterns described by Davies and his colleagues may have facilitated a symbolic process of racial sorting and classification, visibly separating 'us' from 'them'.

If one accepts that the arrangement of seating on the New Orleans's public transport system in the mid-1960s signified relations of status, distance and differentiation, then one must also consider the possibility that it serviced a broader ideological agenda. That is, it helped to perpetuate the norms and values of the officially defunct Jim Crow race laws, which had mandated the segregation of public transport in the first place. This may seem a polemical and over-wrought interpretation of an innocuous process. However, the apparent banality of everyday spatial practices should not disguise their political resonance. The ideology of separatism, after all, is never merely a matter of abstract philosophising and law-making. It is also embodied in the routines, activities, choices and behaviours of ordinary people, which may survive the abolition of legal segregation and indeed enable the 'informal' reproduction of segregationist values and meanings in absence of apartheid-style laws. As Foster (2000, p. 5) has recently observed,

Interactional space tends to be governed by norms, historical customs and cultural conventions as well as, importantly but often neglected, the representational and organised rituals of bodies. In different places, bodies customarily do different things; immediate space is embodied space, and bodies are always 'sexed', 'gendered', 'racialised' and 'abled' or 'disabled', as well as carriers of other forms of identity such as status and class. Given that everyday life is so taken for granted, analysts tend to forget the extent to which immediate lived spaces continue to be racialised. In South Africa, years after non-racial elections, there are relatively few interactional settings, not least those of civil society, which are easily and comfortably non-racial.

CONCLUSION AND OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL FOCUS SECTION OF THE JOURNAL

Some of the work presented in this section of the journal is descriptive rather than explanatory in orientation (Tredoux et al., Shrieff et al.), and necessarily so. As we have emphasised in this introduction, although the literature on segregation is voluminous, relatively little research has been conducted on the kinds of micro-ecological practices that our contributors to this special focus section explore. For this reason, we believe that careful observation of processes of contact and segregation as they unfold within everyday life spaces such as public steps (Tredoux et al.) and cafeterias (Shrieff et al.) is a necessary first step.

The articles presented by Finchilescu and Durrheim do go beyond description and attempt to clarify some psychological, historical and political underpinnings of segregation. Finchilescu suggests racial isolation in everyday life may reflect deep-seated anxieties over the nature and potential consequences of intergroup contact. In particular, she argues that our 'meta-stereotypes' (our representations of how others stereotype us) make contact an emotionally troubling experience and thus act as a barrier to mixing. Working on a somewhat broader scale, Durrheim explores aspects of the historical relationship between representations of race and practices of segregation in the new South Africa. He develops his case via an analysis of changing relations on a local beach. In this context, notwithstanding the official demise of petty apartheid, social relations continue to conform to a supposedly defunct logic of (racial) hierarchy, division and withdrawal, enacted as white and black beachgoers use the social space of the beachfront. Together, these articles help to clarify the tenacity of so-called preferential segregation in the new South Africa.

Of course, the focus of this section of the journal on the apparent recalcitrance of segregation is not meant to imply that racial contact is rare in the new South Africa or ineffective in changing social relationships. On the contrary, as the article by Holtman and her co-researchers illustrates, contact in domains such as education is consistently associated with positive racial attitudes. Thus, although several of the articles in this issue are critical of the classic contact hypothesis, many authors accept that contact, when it does occur, may enable social psychological change.

To conclude, we wish to reiterate our view that the micro-ecological dimension of segregation has considerable social psychological significance. Future research on this topic may provide unique insights into the nature, extent and causes of racial isolation in everyday life. Related to this, we see a need to devise new techniques of data collection and analysis, a point elegantly illustrated by Tredoux et al.'s use of time-lag digital photography and Shrieff et al.'s use of a 'mapping' methodology. Methods developed for investigating ethnic and racial separation at the level of the city, however valuable in their own right, may not be fully adequate to the study of micro-ecological processes of segregation. For one thing, a defining feature of such

processes is their dynamic quality. This is particularly true of relations within everyday life spaces where racial boundaries are typically in a state of flux – constantly forming and dissolving as users enter, move through, occupy and depart from particular material settings – and where, accordingly, patterns of segregation tend to be transitory. In our view, the largely synchronic methods of data collection and analysis that currently dominate the social science literature on segregation are not wholly adequate to these dynamic features of micro-ecological relations. In saying this, of course, we are not denying the potential utility of the methodological tools developed by urban sociologists and geographers (see also McCauley, Plummer, Moskalenko & Mordkoff, 2001). (Indeed, some of our contributors have successfully adapted these tools and found them to be of considerable value.) We are suggesting that methodological innovation is necessary if we are to document the dynamic (re)production of micro-segregation in ‘everyday life spaces’ (Schnell and Yoav, 2001).

A closing caveat is necessary here. If the micro-ecology of segregation constitutes a *sui generis* level of reality, this does not mean that this reality is autonomous from processes operating at other spatial scales. Clearly, the patterning of face-to-face interaction within a given setting is invariably structured by wider political, economic and historical factors, an idea that applies to the articles presented in this section of the journal. For example, it is impossible to understand shifting relations on South African beaches (Durrheim) without understanding the broader transformation of recreational and holiday spaces in this country. Similarly, it is difficult to understand eating patterns in South African university cafeterias (Schrieff et al.) without understanding the racial restructuring of higher education. Even such a simple act as choosing a place to sit on public steps (Tredoux et al.) may be shaped by ‘absent’ relations and constraints that extend beyond the immediacy of interaction. Perhaps, then, the challenge for future researchers is to explore how the global ‘remapping of the apartheid city’ (Robinson, 1998) both determines and is determined by processes of boundary regulation located, as it were, ‘on the ground’.

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