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Perceptions of interracial contact in a South African sample : a Q-methodological approach.

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Abstract

Interracial contact in South Africa continues to be fraught with tension. Many investigators have used the contact hypothesis to explore the relationship between contact and prejudice in South African samples, which has revealed the highly complex character of interracial contact. With much of the research on interracial contact being quantitative in nature and comparatively little qualitative work being done, few studies have looked at perceptions of interracial contact and none can be found which have used Q-methodology as the method of investigation. The aim of the study was to uncover groups of people who have similar perceptions about interracial contact in South Africa through the factor analytic process inherent in Q-methodology. Q-methodology is a comprehensive way of looking at people's views, attitudes, opinions and beliefs on a topic and has both qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions, making it unique method which can shed a different kind of insight into the subjectivities of interracial contact compared to traditional research methods. Q-methodology is explained in some detail and supported as the best approach for exploring perceptions of interracial contact in South Africa given the country's history of racial segregation and complexity of intergroup dynamics. The study used a non-probability, volunteer sample of 55 undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand. A centroid factor analysis was performed on the data followed by a varimax rotation, which yielded four groups ("factors") of people with similar patterns of subjectivities on the topic of interracial contact in South Africa. The groups were labelled the experientialists, ethnocentrists, segregationists, and integrationists based on their distinct patterns of perceptions of interracial contact in South Africa.

Key words: race, contact, perceptions, subjectivity, Q-methodology