

ABSTRACT

This research report explores patterns of social integration and segregation and their constructed meanings for post-apartheid adolescents. The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the research involved naturalistic observation of the patterns of social integration and segregation, primarily on the basis of 'race', occurring among a group of post-apartheid adolescents during 'free' time at a desegregated co-educational private high school. While both integration and segregation were observed, a dominant pattern of social self-segregation on the basis of 'race' was noted. Integration primarily occurred around sports. 'White' female learners were seen to be most likely to self-segregate, while 'black', 'Indian' and 'coloured' learners were frequently seen to be racially integrated with each other. The second phase of the research involved a focus group discussion with eight adolescents at a different desegregated co-educational private high school. In the focus group discussion the adolescents confirmed the racialised nature of the dominant pattern of social self-segregation at the school in which observations were conducted (as reflected to them in photographs) as well as in their own social experiences. This research report highlights and attempts to explain these patterns and then goes on to discuss and analyse the numerous ways in which the adolescents explained and made sense of these patterns. Explanations and justifications for self-segregation were full of contradictions and included the racialisation of interests, the naturalisation of segregation, homophily, socialisation, and the avoidance of conflict or threat. The use of psychological defenses and positive self-presentation strategies, as well as the numerous contradictions noted in their explanations, highlighted the highly complex affective nature of the topic and the ideological dilemmas that seemed to characterise their social experiences and everyday realities.