Exploring Relationships Between Ethnic-Racial Identity & Adolescent Friendships

INTRODUCTION

• Understanding how students’ ethnic-racial identities (ERI) impact their social and friend choices could inform efforts to reduce racial bias, improve equity, and promote resilience (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Byng, 1998).

• Previous research linked centrality (importance of ERI to overall self-image) with avoidance attitudes for BIPOC and White students (Wantchekon et al., 2022, Satterthwaite-Freiman et al., 2023), but affirmation (feeling good about one’s ERI) with increased outgroup warmth (Whitehead et al., 2009).

AIM & HYPOTHESES

• Explore relations between ERI affirmation and centrality to in-group friendships among diverse high school students in the Midwest

• In both BIPOC and White students, higher centrality will be positively associated with more in-group friendships, while higher affirmation will be positively associated with fewer in-group friendships.

METHODS

SAMPLE & DATA COLLECTION

• 226 9th grade students in a Midwest school reported on their ERI in class during 10 consecutive school days and their friendships in May 2022.

• Most students in our sample were BIPOC (57.1%) vs. White (42.9%)

• Self-reported gender: 50.0% male, 42.0% female, and 8.0% non-binary or other gender identity.

MEASURES

Ethnic-Racial Identity Centrality and Affirmation

• We measured ERI centrality & affirmation using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, created by Sellers et al., (1997) and adapted into a format for daily use by Wang (2021). Adolescents rated three statements about each on a three-point scale. These scores were averaged across days.

  • Sample statement regarding centrality: (Feel that your race/ethnicity is an important part of your self-image)
  • Sample statement regarding affirmation: (Feel proud to be your race/ethnicity)

In-Group Friendships

• Students reported their own and their five closest friends’ race/ethnicity. Percentage of in-group friendship was calculated (e.g., 3 same-ethnicity friends = 60%).

RESULTS

Figure 2. Overall Mean Values for White and BIPOC Students

Figure 3. Model Predicted In-Group Friendships for BIPOC students

BIPOC students whose ethnic-racial identity is more central to their self-image also have more friends who share that identity.

DISCUSSION

• As hypothesized, BIPOC students whose ethnicity/race are central parts of their identity are more likely to have more in-group friendships. Centrality was not a predictor for White students

• Affirmation did not predict friendships for BIPOC or White students

• In-group contact among BIPOC students may be linked to a well-rounded ERI development. Findings support efforts to foster these in-group relationships and speaks to the importance of BIPOC student groups.

LIMITATIONS

• Results may differ between BIPOC groups

• Cannot infer causality: BIPOC students with high centrality could select in-group friends, and/or having many in-group friends could increase centrality.

FUTURE RESEARCH

• Explore the impact of these in-group friendships on BIPOC students’ mental health, school belonging, and community engagement (Wang, 2021)

• Explore other predictors of in-group friendships for White students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Table 1. Regression Models Predicting Percent In-Group Friendships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIPOC Student Model</th>
<th>White Student Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F test</td>
<td>F(2, 94) = [1.27 – 4.18] p&gt; 0.05 for 4 of 5 models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.14 - 0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.58*** 0.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>-0.174 0.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality</td>
<td>0.359* 0.145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001. B are unstandardized regression coefficients pooled across 5 imputations.