Ethnic/racial homogeneity in college students' Facebook friendship networks and subjective well-being

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A B S T R A C T
We examined the relationship between subjective well-being and the ethnic/racial homogeneity of the Facebook friendship networks of first-year college students. We coded each participant’s “Facebook friends” into European Americans or not. Participants reported their life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and felt understanding and misunderstanding. Among European American participants, having a more homogeneous friendship network was associated with higher life satisfaction and positive affect, as well as lower felt misunderstanding. Political conservatism was also marginally associated with having more homogeneous friendship networks, as well as marginally higher levels of life satisfaction but did not mediate the relationship between them. Among non-European American participants, we did not find any relationship between the homogeneity of friendship networks and subjective well-being.

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1. Introduction

Institutions of higher learning strive to create an environment in which people from varied backgrounds can come together in order to receive an education and feel part of a larger community. Much research has shown that ethnically/racially diverse learning environments can be beneficial (see Page (2007) for review). A majority of such studies have, however, focused on cognitive outcomes. Little research has examined the relationship between ethnic/racial diversity and well-being in such contexts. While some research suggests that exposure to racial and ethnic diversity should have a positive association with well-being (e.g., Antonio et al., 2004), Putnam (2007) recently found that residents in ethnically diverse US communities trusted their neighbors and their in-groups less than those who lived in more homogeneous communities. Because general trust is positively associated with subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), this suggests that there may be reason to expect a negative relationship between ethnic/racial diversity and subjective well-being. In the current research, we will address this question by investigating the relationship between the homogeneity/diversity of the friendship networks and the subjective well-being of a cohort of first-year college students using the popular social networking website Facebook.

1.1. A diversity of findings about ethnic/racial diversity

A sizeable empirical literature has documented the positive effects of racial and ethnic diversity on a variety of cognitive and performance outcomes. For instance, racial diversity of the student body has been shown to be associated with various positive educational outcomes in colleges (Chang, 1999). In another study, Antonio et al. (2004) randomly assigned participants to a racially diverse or racially homogeneous discussion group; those in the diverse group scored higher on a subsequent task involving integrative complexity. Organizational behavior research has also shown a positive effect of racial diversity in work group productivity (Richard, Murthi, & Ismail, 2007). Finally, multi-cultural experience has also been shown to be causally related to creativity (e.g., Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). It should be noted, however, that some null or negative outcomes of racial diversity have also been reported. For instance, Rothman, Martin Lipset, and Nevitte (2003) pointed out methodological flaws in previous positive findings regarding racial diversity in higher education (e.g., social desirability, selection bias), and argued that racial diversity was associated with more intercultural conflict. Similarly, diversity in work groups led to interpersonal conflict and undermined group performance in some research (e.g., Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; see Swann, Kwan, Polzer, and Milton (2003) for a moderating effect of positive perceptions among group members on the relation between diversity and group task performance). Racial diversity of employees was also associated with a higher rate of turnover, and a negative change in profitability over time in fast-food restaurant chains (Sacco & Schmitt, 2005).

A recent study by Putnam (2007) revealed another “downside” to diversity in the domain of general trust and social capital. Putnam analyzed a large, nationally representative survey involving roughly 30,000 respondents living in 41 cities across the US. Results showed that residents in ethnically diverse communities...
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long run, then, there may not be a negative association between
ethnic diversity of the community and the level of trust among
In sum, Putnam’s findings provide an intriguing, if not disturbing,
picture of the role played by ethnic diversity in community
residents’ general trust and civic engagement. Considering the po-
itive correlation between general trust and life satisfaction found in
large-scale meta-analysis (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), Putnam’s
ﬁndings give rise to a prediction that racial and ethnic homogeneity
in the friendship networks of college students will be positively
associated with subjective well-being. Given that well-being dur-
during college years has been shown to predict future occupational
success (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), it is important
to gain a better understanding of the relationship between these
two variables.

1.2. The current research

We examined the relationships between the ethnic/racial
homogeneity of the social networks of college students and the
students’ subjective well-being. Our study attempts to extend pre-
vious research on this topic in several ways. First, we analyzed the
ethnic/racial homogeneity of the public, self-declared social net-
works of a cohort of first-year college students by coding each par-
ticipant’s ‘’Facebook friends’’ into European Americans or not. This
enabled us to minimize the potential for study-related self-presen-
tational biases (e.g., over- or under-estimation of the number of di-
verse friends by our participants). It also enabled us to get a ‘’big’’
picture of the diversity of participants’ friends—on campus and at
other schools.

Second, whereas previous research (e.g., Putnam, 2007) has
focused on the contextual effect of racial/ethnic homogeneity
on the construct under study, we have focused on individual
differences in the racial/ethnic homogeneity of participants’
friendship networks, namely how individuals create homogeneous or not-so-homogeneous friendship networks within the
same overall environment. First-year students at University of
Virginia live in freshman dorms, eat in freshman dining halls,
take large lecture classes with other incoming students, and
are bombarded with the same invitations to participate in
extracurricular activities. The day-to-day environments of first-
year students should be relatively similar. Thus, individual dif-
fences in the degree of ethnic/racial diversity/homogeneity of
On-Campus friendship networks should reﬂect individuals’
choices and preferences.

Third, we assessed several individual difference variables that
could be associated with the degree of ethnic/racial homogeneity
of friendship networks such as political conservatism and lower
levels of openness to experiences. This allowed us to test whether
the observed relationship between ethnic/racial homogeneity of
friendship networks and subjective well-being could be accounted
for by these variables.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were ninety-three ﬁrst semester, ﬁrst-year under-
graduates (class of 2009) at the University of Virginia (35 male).
The age of participants ranged from 17 to 19, with a mean age of
17.98 (SD = .42). In terms of ethnicity, 8 (8.6%) were African–Amer-
ican, 17 (18.3%) Asian, 48 (51.6%) European American, 3 (3.2%) La-
tino, 2 (2.2%) Middle Eastern, and 14 (15.1%) were categorized as
“Multi-Ethnic.” All participants received partial fulﬁllment of their
course requirement in exchange for participation.

2.2. Procedure

A majority (n = 73) of the participants in the current study com-
pleted several well-being and personality measures as part of a
mass testing session at the beginning of their ﬁrst semester at col-
lege in September 2005 (Time 1). In addition, as part of the current
study all participants completed numerous self-report measures
via the web at in the last quarter of their ﬁrst semester at college
(Time 2). Finally, all participants gave consent to have their Face-
book proﬁle and Facebook friend pages retrieved and analyzed.
The web pages containing participants’ On-Campus Friends and
Other-School Friends were retrieved and saved at the end of their
ﬁrst semester at college (Time 2).

2.3. Materials

At Time 1, participants completed the Satisfaction with Life
Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; α = .82,
possible range of 5–35), and the Felt Understanding (1 = Not at
to 7 = A lot in the past month: understood, appreciated, vali-
dated; α = .87) and Felt Misunderstanding scales (1 = Not at to 7 =
A lot in the past month: alienated, misunderstood, ignored;
α = .73), (Oishi, Miao, & Krochik, 2007; possible range of 3–21 for
each). In addition, we assessed Big Five personality traits (Brody
& Ehrlichman, 1997; extraversion α = .83; neuroticism α = .87;
agreeableness α = .78; conscientiousness α = .77; openness α = .64;
the possible range of 1–5), as well as religiosity (0 = Not at all Religious to 6 = Extremely Religious) and political conservatism
(1 = Very Liberal to 7 = Very Conservative). At Time 2, all participants completed the SWLS (α = .86), and the Positive and Negative Affect
Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; α = .83 for PA,
α = .79 for NA).

2.4. Procedure for coding Facebook friends for ethnic diversity

Participants’ Facebook friend pages (which display 50 friends
to a page) were retrieved and saved at the end of their ﬁrst semester at
college. This included their friends who were attending University
of Virginia (‘’On-Campus Friends’’) (M = 117.18, SD = 59.67). In
addition, participants’ friends at other colleges (‘’Other-School
 Friends’’) (M = 126.83, SD = 64.56) were saved separately. Given
the timing of the retrieval (i.e., after only one semester at college),
we presumed that the majority of the latter individuals were likely
to be friends and acquaintances from the participants’ high school.
The primary goal of the coding was to assess the racial/ethnic
diversity of the participants’ friends by coding the identifying
information (i.e., photographs and names) of the individuals who
were publicly declared to be part of their social network. We rec-
ognized, however, that determining speciﬁc ethnicity from this
information alone was likely to be quite difﬁcult (if not impossi-
ble). Because ample social psychological research suggests that
accurate judgments about broad race categories can be made via
use of even minimal visual information (e.g., Ambady, Bernieri, &
دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
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