

Ethnicity and Friendship: Inter-Ethnic Analysis Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the relationship between ethnicity and friendship in higher education among college students. I selected the friendships of the student population with various ethnic identities from an elite university as the cultural object to study for this research. As adolescents grow older, the importance of friendships outside of the family increases significantly. Studies in the expanding field of human interactions have consistently shown that these connections are critical to healthy psychological and social development. These relationships provide opportunities for adolescents to learn how to interact with peers, practice interpersonal skills, and build meaningful connections(Giordano 2003: 257). While the cultural diamond is an accounting device intended to understand any cultural object's relationship to the social world that contains four elements: creators, cultural objects, recipients, and the social world(Griswold 2013: 15), it is necessary to define the cultural object represented in this study. In Griswold's view, a cultural object personifies a value that is held by a group of people. In other words, it is a manifestation that may be communicated audibly, visually, or physically, and it carries with it the potential to reflect societal value(Griswold 2013: 11).

The forming of friendships between student body groups in higher education demonstrates how ethnic identification influences the social behavior of the population in higher education and how this relationship between ethnicity and friendship reflects the existence of ethnic concerns in college experience. Once the literature on interpersonal interactions expands, more research suggests that as teenagers join college, they have increased contact with their friends, which play a crucial element in determining their future development. As a result, friend groups are important because "they provide a kind of safety zone—an arena of comfort—that enhances the adolescent's ability to cope with these changes" (Call and Mortimer 2001: 2).

Discussing the elements that influence the formation of friendships might assist students from varied backgrounds develop a feeling of community and belonging. Although racial concerns have always been a contentious topic throughout the history of humanity, this relationship between ethnicity and friendship demonstrates how these issues continue to exist and play a significant role in contemporary American society.

The study results reveal a synthesis of Swidler's and Bourdieu's cultural and social theories. While Swidler views culture as a toolbox of habits, skills, and styles upon which people's conduct relies on the interpretations they ascribe to comparable or disparate items (Swidler 1986, Puckett 2022a), Bourdieu believes that because individuals subjected to various social contexts and cultivate various habitus, this shapes the distribution of assets and forthcoming stratifications of groups (Puckett 2022b).

Utilizing survey techniques, I conducted quantitative analysis based on the results of prior research that had neglected. The result of this research presents that while our hypothesis is correct in that most ethnic groups have a tendency to develop friendship with their own ethnicity, people of Asian students are less likely to develop friendships with people of other ethnicities and students of African American and Hispanic are more likely to build inter-ethnic friendships. The findings of this research may provide light on how to establish connections and mutual respect among college students, eventually leading to a more coherent college experience for everybody. Inter-ethnic relationships can help to bridge cultural divides and provide an opportunity for people to learn from each other. Furthermore, these relationships can lead to increased acceptance and understanding of different cultures and perspectives, which in turn can lead to stronger communities and a more harmonious society.

PAST RESEARCH

While substantial research has focused on the factors that may impact the formation of interracial friendships, relatively few studies have used quantitative analysis of contemporary data to examine the interactions between the different ethnic groups. Giordano focuses on the significance of personal friendships, as well as the broader social networks and romantic connections of persons of varying ethnicities(2003). He demonstrates why these connections are integral to how individuals define oneself and sense of belonging. Furthermore, the study highlights how these connections shape attitudes towards diversity and inclusion in the communities.

According to Jugert and Feddes, cross-ethnic friendships influence the development of many social and emotional qualities like solving conflicts and positively influences self-esteem and socio-emotional support(2017). The study suggests that cross-ethnic friendships provide unique psychosocial benefits as they associate with social competence, and less victimization by peers: it provides a positive impact on psychosocial development. Individuals in such friendships tend to have higher levels of social competence, as well as a lower risk of being victimized by peers. This underscores the importance of creating an environment that encourages and supports social diversity, as it can have a positive impact on an individual's psychological health.

Research has also analyzed how interracial friendships form and evolve in primary, secondary and higher education. Academics have inquired into the shifts that take place in the racial makeup of friendship networks during the transition from high school to college, as well as the ways in which various features of the college environment connect to these shifts(Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009). Understanding about the dynamics of friendships in college can

shed light on the socialization process of young adults, and the potential implications this may have on identity formation.

In addition, a vast number of studies focus on the influence of a person's skin color on their possibilities to become friends with members of different ethnic groupings. Dixon and Telles provided compelling evidence of the close ties between color, colorism, race, and racism throughout history(2007). The research highlights the importance of recognizing the various ways in which individuals often use color and colorism to create and maintain power structures and racial hierarchies.

One of the most remarkable aspects of college students' friendships is that they are racially monogamous (Massey et al. 2003). While White tend to have predominantly white social connections, African American have connections that are more significantly diverse than those of White, and Asian and Latino have friendships that are slightly more diversified compared to those of whites and African American. Homophily, or the tendency for people to associate and bond with those of similar backgrounds, is one of the most prominent aspects of social life today. Research has demonstrated that race and ethnicity are the primary drivers of homophily, creating the strongest divides in our personal environments. Other aspects of identity, such as age, religion, education, occupation, and gender, are also influential, although to a lesser degree (McPherson, Lovin, and Coo, 2001). The study result demonstrates how students prioritize connecting with those of the same race or ethnicity and how the strength of the bonds that college students form shows the importance of race and identity in college friendships.

However, very few previous studies have investigated the relationships that occur between the various ethnic groups or the dynamics that take place within each of the groupings itself. Past studies on college friendships have mostly either observational or narrowly focused

on minority relationships at majority white institutions. In other words, there is a gap in the comparison of how each ethnic group stacks up against one another in terms of its propensity to develop friendships with persons of different ethnicities. This is an important factor to consider when attempting to gain a better understanding of the interaction between ethnic groups, as the relationships and dynamics between people of different backgrounds have a profound effect on the environment as a whole. Furthermore, this can help us to better comprehend the overall racial concerns and the impact that ethnic diversity has on it.

The vast majority of research used qualitative approaches like interviews, historical analysis, and participant observation on their topic related to inter-ethnic studying. However, very few of the research topics applied the quantitative method. Advantages of this method include the provision of more stringent data for the generation of in-depth analytical results, which in turn allows the drawing of more credible conclusions.

Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau carried out the most recent quantitative study on the topic of establishing friendships among people of different racial groups in the United States(2009). Since the researchers conducted the study more than a decade ago, their use of the data is not an appropriate representative of the current societal condition. The findings of this study may not reflect the contemporary political and social environment, which suggests that they might not be relevant to the contemporary population as a whole. It's possible that this is the consequence of developments in society or technology or any one of a variety of other things that have taken place. As the world enters a new era of rapid information interchange made possible by the internet and social media, it is imperative to make use of recently collected data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role that students' ethnicity plays in the higher education system and how it might have an impact on adolescent's development.

This study fills in the gap left by previous research that investigated the significance of personal friendship, the racial composition of friendship networks, and the racially monogamous nature of college friendship. In order to achieve this goal, I make use of survey methods and quantitative analysis of contemporary data in order to investigate the linkages that exist between the many different ethnic groups. An analysis of the elements that influence the creation of friendships, with a particular focus on how characteristics such as ethnicity and culture influence the likelihood of friendships developing between individuals from diverse backgrounds. As a result, we can get a deeper understanding of the disparities that exist across different ethnic groups as well as the ways in which these differences influence friendships and other types of connection. Gaining an understanding of the dynamics at play in the friendships that young people form in college might provide insights on how to enhance the socialization process. Socializing is one of the most important factors in the development of an individual's sense of self, given that individuals become self-aware via their interactions with other people.

The research question seeks to uncover how cultural, social, and ethnic background can shape an individual's concept of friendship. The answer may provide insight into why individuals from different ethnicities choose to form alliances that either include or exclude people of a particular ethnicity. By exploring this topic, we can gain insight into the underlying motivations and dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Previous studies seldom made use of quantitative methods to study the interrelationships that exist between ethnic groups or the dynamics that exist within each of these groupings. Although Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau conducted the most current quantitative study on the

topic of intergroup interactions in the United States more than a decade ago, the conclusions of that study do not adequately represent the state of things in contemporary America(2009). It is essential to make use of freshly obtained data in order to get a deeper understanding of the role that students' ethnicity plays in the development of their identity as teenagers as well as the relevance that ethnicity plays in the context of the higher education system.

The result of this research should address the following question: how does a person's ethnicity affect their probability of forming an interracial friendship? And whether any ethnicity has an inclination to build friendship with another specific ethnic group. In order to dive into the different aspects of each ethnic group on perceiving inter-ethnic friendship, this study focuses on whether each ethnicity is more likely to develop friendships within its own ethnic group, or if any of the five ethnic groups have markedly different patterns of friendship preferences in comparison to the others.

Gurin et al. (2002:333) discovered that interactional diversity affects both educational objectives, such as academic engagement and capacity, and democratic outcomes, such as participation in citizenship and heightened racial consciousness. Understanding how, why, and with whom university students establish friendships has taken on increased significance in light of recent shifts in demographics as well as in policies. It is essential to analyze the possibilities for forming interracial friendships and to comprehend how students' propensity to form racially homophilous friendships manifest within these systems.

Based on what past research has overlooked, we are able to develop testable hypotheses based on our research questions as it allows us to identify potential relationships between ethnicity and friendship.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the research questions previously, this research hypothesizes that people of different races have a natural inclination to associate with those of their own ethnicity. Students in primary and secondary schools are more likely to select racially homophilous relationship choices, meaning they are more inclined to befriend people of the same race as themselves as opposed to those of different races, as has been documented repeatedly in studies of interracial friendships (Hallinan and Williams 1989). Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau further reached the conclusion that white people have more monolithic relationship groups than people of other races, while black people have much more diverse friendship groups than white people. Asians and Latinos have marginally more diverse friendship groups than whites and blacks(2009).

I anticipated that college students would exhibit the same inclination towards homophily, the inclination to associate and form relationships with those of similar backgrounds, as McPherson, Lovin, and Coo noted(2001). I further hypothesize that white students at Emory are the most likely to form friendships with members of their own ethnic group; African American students are more likely to form connections with members of other ethnicities; and Asian and Latino have friendships more diversified compared to those of White and African American.

Through the analysis of the data, I anticipated to gain insights regarding the relationship between race and ethnic identity and the potential implications this has on social integration and cohesion. In order to collect the most updated data and apply quantitative analysis, I will then introduce my methodology of using survey method and composition score to test the hypothesis.

METHODOLOGY

This section further discusses the research method, the data collection method, and the data analysis procedure. Based on previous research questions, I chose to use surveys because I intended to explore whether there is a relationship between college student's ethnicity and the inclination to build friendship with another specific ethnic group, which required "broadly representative answer" and "good data" (Vogt et al. 2017a: 14). Because of the efficiency, wealth of evidence provided to researchers, and ability to satisfactorily address the aforementioned research objectives, website surveys and paper surveys are effective sampling approaches in this case(Vogt et al. 2017b: 14). Moreover, I collected and analyzed data using structured and short-answer questions in order to clearly present my question to the participants(Vogt et al. 2017c: 14). The participants were mostly students from sociology classes ranging from freshman to senior.

Because this research aim to produce quantitative analysis, I created six variables from the collected survey dataset : 1) the ethnicity of participants, 2)the ethnicity of participants' best friends, 3)the ethnicity of participants' connection with the most non-academically(outside of school), 4) the ethnicity of participants' connection with the most academically(at Emory), 5)the ethnicity of participants' majority of friends are in, 6)the ethnicity which participants' feel most comfortable making friends with. Specifically, I used Python to analyze and clean sample data for each ethnic group and produced visualization in order to provide intuitive answers to the aforementioned questions.

In addition to exploratory data analysis for descriptive statistics, I computed a composition score for each participant based on their self-identification ethnic group from the answers to each question. In this scenario, the independent variable is the participant's self-reported ethnicity from the first question listed above, and the dependent variable is the

participant's composition score. I calculated the composition score as follows: for each question, if a participant's response contained answers that are the same as their self-identified ethnicity, I added a score of 1 to their final composition score; otherwise, I added a score of 2 to their final composition score.

| Composition Score Calculation | |
|---|-------|
| Answer | Score |
| Answer contained one's own ethnic group | 1 |
| Answer contained other ethnic group | 2 |

| Example | Best Friend | Non-acade | Academical | Major Friend | Most Comfortable Making Friends | Total |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Self Identifica | Asian | Asian | Asian | Asian | White;Asian | White;Black or African American;Asian |
| Score | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2+1=3 | 2+2+1=5 | 11 |

Figure 1: Composition Score Calculation

The example(*Figure 1*) above illustrates how to calculate the composition score. Since this person self-identified as Asian, questions containing Asian as answer would contribute one point to their final score, while questions containing other ethnicities would contribute two points. In this situation, the first three variables only contained the participant's self-reported ethnicity (Asian), hence I added three points to its composition score. The fourth question had Asian and one non-Asian ethnicity (White), hence I added a total of three points(1+2) etc. This participant's response resulted in a total score of 13. After calculating the composition score for each participant, I generated a box plot depicting the distribution and mean of the dataset based on self-reported ethnicity.

Based on what I produced from the data analysis and valuation process, the next section discusses the findings between ethnicity and possible inclination of building friendship.

FINDINGS

Our findings are consistent with and at odds with those of prior research. African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be active in inter-ethnic friendships, whereas Asian students are less likely to do so. In spite of the fact that our hypothesis—that people of most ethnicities tend to form friendships within their own group—is correct, it runs counter to the findings of other studies, which have found that white people are more likely to have homogeneous relationship groups than people of other races, and that Asian people are more likely to have diverse friendship networks than people of other races.

Self-Identification Ethnicity vs Best Friends Ethnicity

The upper left-hand side of the graph presents how the participants' self-identified ethnicity relates to the ethnicity of their closest friend. The result demonstrates homophily: students who come from Asian, Hispanic, and African American backgrounds are more likely to have their closest friends from within their own ethnic group. On the other hand, the number of participants who identify as white students has the lowest account of having their best friends with their same ethnicity. This pattern shows that people of certain ethnicities may have a larger tendency to create the closest friendships with persons who have similar origins. According to the findings of previous studies, the fact that college students maintain connections with only people of the same racial identity is the most noteworthy feature of their friendships (Massey et al. 2003). In terms of inter-ethnic relationships, it is important to take into consideration that members of every ethnic group have a propensity to have inter-ethnic closest friends who are Asian.

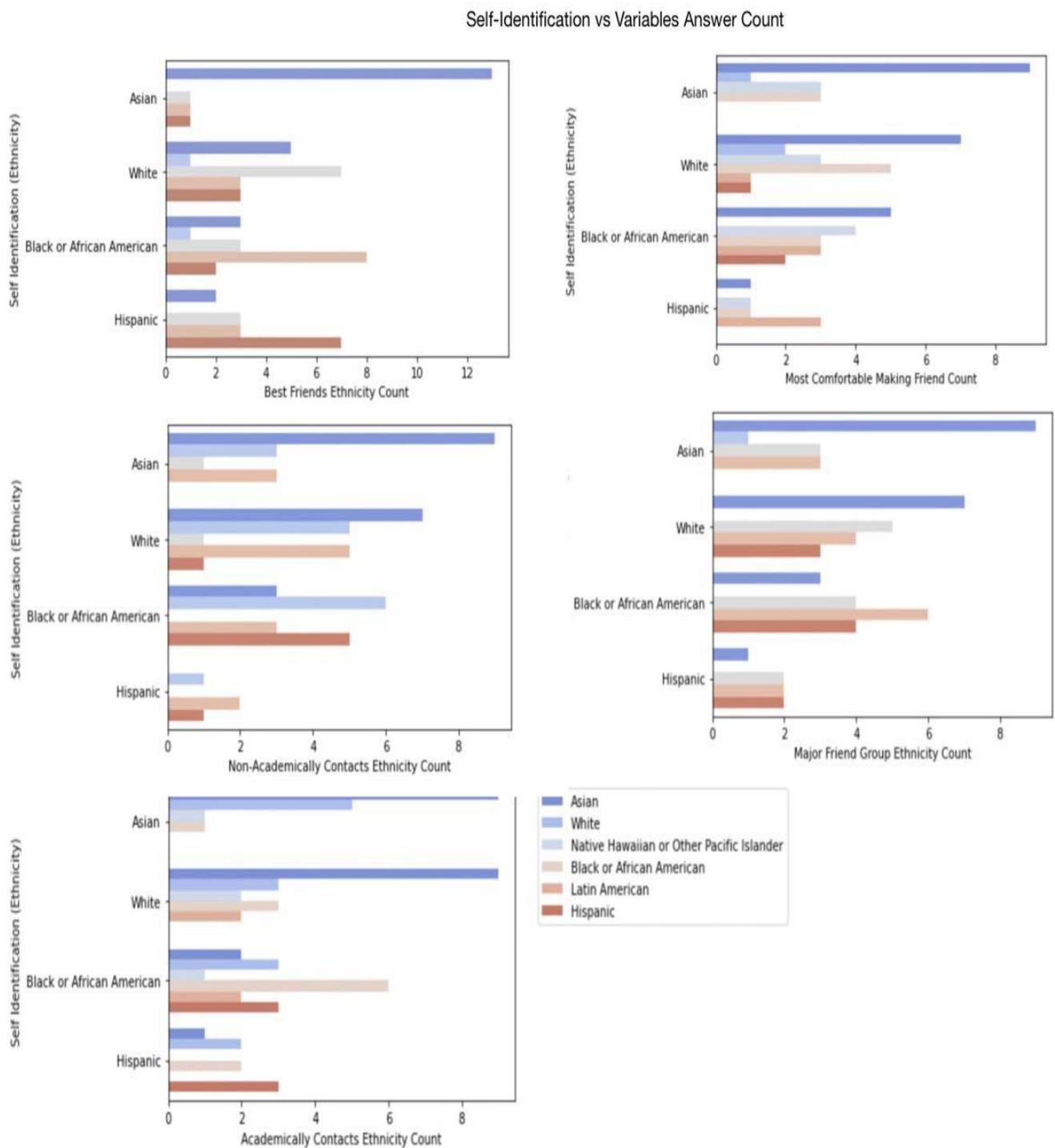


Figure 2: Self-Identification vs. Variables Answer Counts

Self-Identification Ethnicity vs Most Comfortable Making Friends With

The relationship between the participants' self-identified ethnicity and the ethnicity with whom they are most comfortable making friends is shown in the top right corner of the graphic. This reveals, once again, that Asian students have the highest number of selections in which every ethnic group felt most comfortable making friends. Students of African American descent scored second highest overall in terms of being most comfortable establishing friends with. In contrast, all ethnic groups reported the least number of feeling comfortable when establishing friendships with white students. In this particular scenario, students of Asian, Hispanic, and African American descent tend to present the same pattern of presenting ethnic monogamous attitudes when it comes to making friends. On the other hand, white students are the opposite in that they felt the least comfortable making friends within their own ethnic group.

Self-Identification Ethnicity vs Non-Academic Contact

When it comes to the relationship between the participants' self-identified ethnicity and their non-academic contacted ethnicity, the statistics provide a picture that is a little bit different from the previous questions (middle-left bar graph). In spite of the fact that Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander participants had the lowest count number recorded by any ethnic group, it was found that participants of all ethnicities had a larger tendency to establish contact outside of school with white and Asian ethnic groups. According to the findings of previous studies, I also discovered a similar pattern as every ethnic group has a preference for having connections with members of their own ethnicity.

Self-Identification Ethnicity vs Academic Contact

The last graph on the button depicts the correlation between the participants' self-identified ethnicity and the number of academic contacts they had while they were attending

college. Once again, it seems that individuals of different ethnicities are more inclined to engage with persons of Asian descent as compared to other ethnic groups. In addition, African Americans and white people are the ethnic groups that are sought after the most for academic objectives. It should also not come as a surprise that students of all different ethnic groups have a tendency to favor making academic contact with people of their own ethnicity. This is reflecting what previous research has shown that ethnicity is the primary driver of homophily, which creates the strongest divides in our personal environments. (McPherson, Lovin, & Coo, 2001).

Self-Identification Ethnicity vs Major Friend Group's Ethnicity

The graph in the middle-right quadrant illustrates the participants' predominant ethnicity among their acquaintances from different backgrounds. Students of African-American and Hispanic descent had the second-highest potential of forming friends from within their own ethnic group, behind only students of Asian descent, who had the greatest possibility of doing so. In contrast to the results of a previous research, which revealed that white individuals are more likely to create friendships with other members of their own racial or ethnic group, we discovered that black people are most likely to develop friendships with other members of their own group (Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009). In this particular scenario, white students are less likely than students of other races to have the majority of their close friends come from inside their own ethnic group.

Composition Score Analysis

As we discussed in the section devoted to the methodology, a higher composition score indicates a greater propensity to form friendships with members of other ethnic groups. The box plot (*figure 3*) presented displays the aggregate statistical outcome of the participants' responses. Comparatively, pupils from Asian ethnic groups have both the lowest mean and ranges of the

composition scores. It suggests that Asian students are less likely to favor making friends with people of other ethnicities. Because most of the asian students in this study are international students, the result could be due to a number of factors such as cultural differences, language barriers, and social norms. Hispanic and white students had about the same mean value, whereas African American and hispanic students have a greater range of middle percentages. The data suggests that, while White students have a higher overall likelihood of building friendships outside of their ethnic groups, African American and Hispanic students' responses are more varied. This implies that the degree to which African American and Hispanic students are willing to build friendships outside of their own ethnicity is more unpredictable and potentially more diverse than that of their White counterparts.

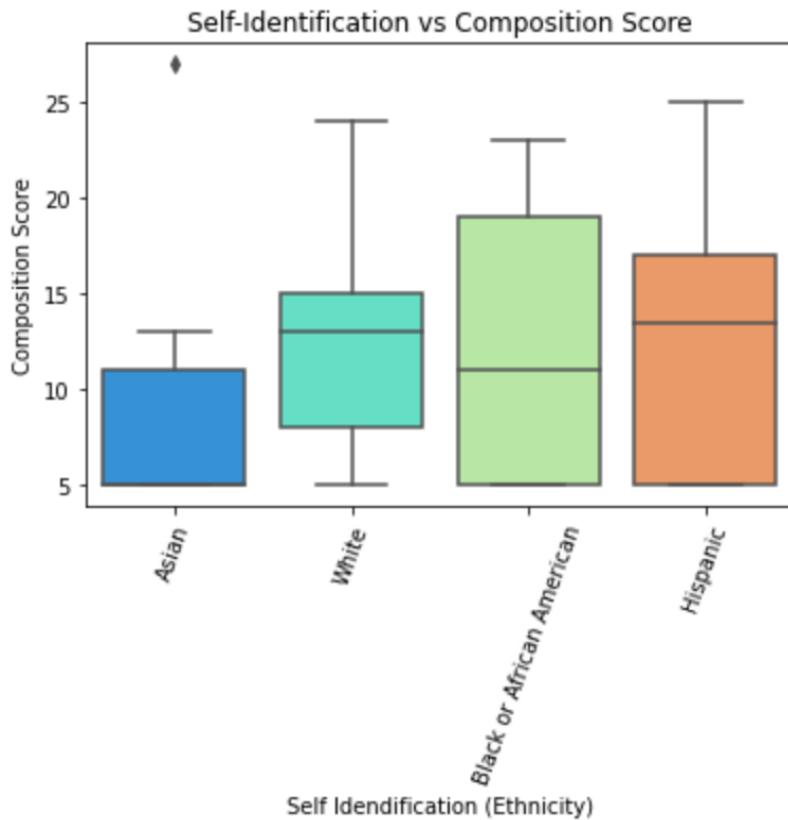


Figure 3: Self-Identification vs. Composition Score

On the basis of these figures, we can further answer the research question that people of Asian students are less likely to develop friendships with people of other ethnicities, whereas students of African American and Hispanic are more likely to build inter-ethnic friendships. While our hypothesis is correct that most ethnic groups have a tendency to develop friendship with their own ethnicity(Massey et al. 2003), it contradicts what past research has found that white people have more monolithic relationship groups than people of other races(Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009) and Asian have friendships that are more diversified compared to others(McPherson, Lovin, and Coo, 2001). In the next section, I will discuss more on what are some implications of these findings and what might contribute to the contradicting pattern from the previous research.

DISCUSSION

This section elaborates on the results, how it adds to our understanding of the link between ethnicity and friendship, the study's limitations, and our recommendations for additional research. I also discuss the implications of my research for the study of culture and society and how my findings relate to sociological theory.

Although the data support our hypothesis showing that people of most ethnicities prefer to form friendships within their own group and that African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to engage in inter-ethnic friendships, it runs counter to previous studies' findings that white people have more homogeneous relationship groups than people of other races and that Asians have friends from a wider range of backgrounds.

Based on the finding, while Asian students are less likely to build inter-ethnic friendship, for all the variables' responses count, it always has the higher number of which other ethnic groups are most likely to contact. In other words, other ethnic groups tend to have a preference to

build connections with Asian ethnicity. Even though the results contradict what previous research concludes that Asians tend to have more inter-ethnic friendships, other ethnic groups all present similar results with past research. The result of this study might be due to the reason that most of the Asian participants included are international students. International students face unique challenges when transitioning to life in the United States. Unlike Asian American students, who may have already become accustomed to the culture and language, international students have only recently arrived in the U.S. As a result, they may have difficulty adapting to the cultural, linguistic, and social differences they may encounter. These challenges can make it difficult for international students to assimilate with other ethnic groups and may require additional support to ensure their successful integration into American society.

There are several important limitations regarding the data that pertain to the conclusions. The participants in this study do not constitute a population of university students in the United States that is representative of the population as a whole: they were dissimilar in a number of significant respects. These students' residential, social, and academic life were thrown for a tremendous loop the moment they stepped foot on campus at their respective universities. Colleges require students in their first year to reside on campus, and a significant number of them come to college having never met another freshman. When seen in this light, it's possible to imagine these students' social interactions going through something akin to a "total reshuffling of the deck." This procedure is less likely to happen when individuals live with their families or attend colleges nearer to family where it could be easier to retain relationships with previous high school contemporaries(Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009). Additionally, this process is less likely to occur when students attend institutions further away from home. The findings of

this study should be applicable to selective schools and universities that recruit students from the general population of the country.

There are a few directions that future study can start from in order to explore more deeply the relationship between ethnicity and friendship in higher education. To begin, one potential subject of research is the impact of foreign students on the development of cross-cultural friendships. A rising percentage of today's student body is composed of students from outside the country due to the increasingly global nature of the educational system. Understanding how to encourage inter-ethnic friendship among students of diverse origins and nations may provide insight on how these students interact and build friendships with one another and with domestic students. This direction of study has the potential to illuminate effective means of fostering intercultural appreciation and collaboration. Because interpersonal relationships are important as people leave homes for schools (Giordano 2003: 257), future studies should also look at how dorm living affects the development of friendships between students of different ethnic backgrounds. How students interact with one another in their living spaces and the availability of possibilities for inter-ethnic involvement are two examples of residential culture in future studies. Also, studies should look at how living in a dorm might help students from different cultural backgrounds bond with one another and learn from one another's perspectives.

This research highlights the importance of culture in society: habitus development implicitly divides individuals into social groupings, and symbolic contact gives actions meaning that directs people's behavior(Puckett 2022a; Puckett 2022b). Culture serves as a driving force behind people's behaviors and decisions, which in this case, individual student's own understanding of relationship, language, openness toward different cultural and background, etc,

may contribute to the formation of friendship within different ethnic groups. These aspects of culture help to shape an individual's outlook and approach to forming social connections.

The study's findings also reflect Swidler's idea, as she sees culture as a Toolkit of "habits, skills, and styles," based on which people utilize to form persistent patterns of action. (Swidler 1986). The formation of friendship is an intricate process influenced by a variety of cultural factors such as family background, socioeconomic status, openness to different cultural backgrounds, and cultural values can all affect the formation of relationships. Additionally, one's cultural context may determine the expectations and norms for developing and maintaining friendships. As such, it is important to be aware of the cultural influences that may affect the formation and development of friendships.

The extent and quality of intercultural interaction in university may have significant effects on the behavior and social connections of individuals of all racial and ethnic groups even beyond graduation and across the life span(Bowen and Bok 1998). Moreover, the ethnic diversity of university students' buddy connections has the potential to impact later-in-life individuals' comfort in ethnically varied workplaces, educational institutions, and neighborhoods(Dawkins and Braddock 1994). According to Berrey, “Diversity discourse also enabled university officials to justify, at once, programs serving students of color, other minority groups, and white students”(2011). As a result, determining the result of university students forming friendships has become increasingly important in light of recent demographic and policy changes. The conclusion presents a clearer picture of how differences in race, culture, and society shape how people of different ethnicities define and experience friendship.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Please select the ethnicity which most accurately describes how you identify yourself
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
2. Please select the ethnicity which most accurately describes your best friends
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
3. Please select the ethnicity which you connect with the most non-academically
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
4. Please select the ethnicity which you connect with the most academically
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
5. Please select the greatest percentage ethnicity that makes up your friend group
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
6. Please select the ethnicity which you feel most comfortable making friends with
 - White - Black - Asian - Indian or Alaska Native - Native Hawaiian
7. Please select the number of friendships that you have that cross racial lines
 - None
 - 1- 5
 - 5 - 10
 - 10 - 15
 - More than 15

