
Abstract

Friendculture: Predictors of Diversity in the Social Networks of College Students

Much research within social psychology has explored the conditions under which college students form and maintain friendships. The current research explores the degree to which students are likely to become friends with those of different races and cultures. How diverse are the friend networks of college students? How likely is the diversity to change over the course of students' college career? To what degree is the diversity of students' college friend network related to the diversity of their high school social environments? Social networking websites (e.g., Facebook) provide a novel and data-rich way to investigate such questions. In the current study, we analyzed the friend networks of 47 Caucasian University of Virginia students (21 male) at the end of their first semester (Time 1) and second year (Time 2) at college. Participants also completed a series of self-report measures at the beginning and end of their first semester. Results indicate that 40% of the variance in the diversity of friends at Time 1 is explained by the diversity of participants' high school social network, and the (self-estimated) diversity of their in-college acquaintances ($R^2 = .40, p < .01$). The strongest predictor of the change in the college network between Time 1 and Time 2, however, is the diversity of the college network at Time 1 ($R^2 = .27, p < .01$). We also discuss the relationship between diversity in students' social networks and subjective well-being.
Friendculture: Predictors of Ethnic Diversity in the Social Networks of College Students

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Questions
- What are the biggest predictors of ethnic diversity in the social networks of Caucasian college students?
- How does the diversity of students’ social networks evolve across the course of their first 2 years at college?
- What is the association between Well-Being and the diversity of college students’ social networks?

The Current Research
- The ethnic diversity of participants’ college and high school social networks was analyzed using the popular website Facebook.

Self-Report measures were completed at the beginning and end of participants’ first semester of college

Participants
- 47 Caucasian students (21 male) at University of Virginia.
- All students were in their first semester of college in Fall 2005

Procedure
- Diversity of High School and On-Campus Facebook Friends was coded at the end of Semester 1 at college (Fall 2005)
- New On-Campus Facebook Friends added after Semester 1 were analyzed at the end of Semester 4 at college (Spring 2007)

Coding for Ethnic Diversity in the Social Network
- Percentage of codeable Facebook friends (e.g., profile contains clear photographs) judged to be “Non-Caucasian.”
- Reliability across 6 coders, \( \alpha = .92 \)
- Joke profiles were not counted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Ethnic Diversity in the Social Networks</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of High School Facebook Friends</td>
<td>.16 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of On-Campus Facebook Friends: Semester 1</td>
<td>.20 (-.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of On-Campus Facebook Friends: Semester 4</td>
<td>.21 (-.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of New Facebook Friends Added: Semester 2 - 4</td>
<td>.23 (-.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Best Predictors of Ethnic Diversity Coded in the On-Campus Facebook Network at Semester 1

Best Predictors of Ethnic Diversity Coded in New Friends Added Between Semester 2 and 4

Diversity of the Social Network and Well-Being: Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Ethnic Diversity in the Social Networks</th>
<th>SWLS: Time 1</th>
<th>SWLS: Time 2</th>
<th>Poz</th>
<th>Global Well-Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of High School Facebook Friends</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>n/c</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of On-Campus Facebook Friends: Semester 1</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of On-Campus Facebook Friends: Semester 4</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
<td>n/c</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of New Facebook Friends Added: Semester 2 - 4</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>n/c</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  ** p < .01  ~ p = .053

Main Findings

Semester 1
- The Diversity of students’ High School Facebook network explains 27% of the variance in the Diversity of on-campus friends made during Semester 1 of college, \( R^2 = .27, p < .05 \)
- 40% of the variance in the Diversity of on-campus friends made during Semester 1 of college is explained by a model consisting of the Diversity of students’ High School Facebook network (\( \beta = .412, t = 3.40 \)), and the Self-Estimated Diversity of their On-Campus Acquaintances (\( \beta = .382, t = 3.15 \)), \( R^2 = .40, p < .01 \)

Semester 2-4
- 27% of the variance in the Diversity of New On-Campus Facebook Friends added between Semester 2 and 4 is explained by the Diversity of Friends Coded in the On-Campus Facebook Network at Semester 1 (\( \beta = .524, t = 4.17 \)), \( R^2 = .27, p < .01 \)

Diversity & Well-Being
- Contrary to predictions, Well-Being (assessed at the beginning and the end of Semester 1) was negatively correlated with Ethnic Diversity in the Social Network

Conclusions
- Predictors of Ethnic Diversity in the social networks of Caucasian college students change over the first 2 years of college
- Further research is being conducted in order to better explain the negative correlation between Diversity and Well-Being