

Public Abstract

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Title:Youths' Cross-Ethnic Friendships and Associations with Socioemotional Adjustment

Relationships with peers and friends are important and influential in the lives of youth, especially in adolescence. Increasing diversity in the United States has drawn attention to the important role of race/ethnicity in youths' peer relations. Still, surprisingly little is known about the formation of one-on-one friendships between youths of differing ethnic backgrounds. The current research examines the prevalence of cross-ethnic friendships and investigates relations of cross-ethnic friendships with various aspects of social and emotional adjustment using a large sample of adolescent youth in an ethnically diverse urban middle school (grades 6-8). Youths responded to questionnaires in their classrooms at school. Results indicated that cross-ethnic friendships were more prevalent than previously thought, and importantly, the findings for prevalence differed based on the method used to assess friendships. Gender, developmental, and ethnic differences in cross-ethnic friendship prevalence also were tested. Regarding relations with social and emotional adjustment, youths with advanced social perspective-taking skills had more cross-ethnic friends, whereas youths who experienced perceived barriers to forming cross-ethnic friendships had fewer cross-ethnic friends. Prosocial behavior, likeability among peers, depression, and anxiety were unrelated to cross-ethnic friendship. Associations of perceived popularity with cross-ethnic friendship were positive for boys, but negative for girls. In addition, youths' ethnic identity was differently associated with cross-ethnic friendship for ethnic minority versus non-minority White youth. Race relations is a complex and compelling issue, and understanding youths' friendships with peers who are different from themselves in terms of race/ethnicity will help to illuminate ways to foster positive intergroup relations.