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ABSTRACT
        The social network characteristics of a culturally
and racially diverse group of first-year college students (n=208) and
white students (n=84) attending the same college were examined at the
time of college entry and at the beginning of the second semester.
Relationships between network characteristics and college adjustment
in the second semester were also explored. White students reported
larger social networks and more interaction with perceived sources of
support than Asian and Latino/a students. Asian students obtained a
larger percentage of support from college faculty/staff by the second
semester than other students. Multiple regression analyses suggest
that obtaining support from family members is positively associated
with personal and social adjustment for students of color, while
obtaining support from pre-college friends is negatively related with
institutional attachment. For white college students, obtaining
support from college friends was positively associated with social
adjustment and institutional attachment. Having network members that
increase one's self-esteem was associated with personal adjustment
and institutional attachment for students of color and with academic,
social and personal adjustment for white students. In addition,
having network members that one could get together with for fun and
relaxation was associated with social adjustment for students of
color, and having network members that can be counted on to loan
things was associated with social adjustment and institutional
attachment. (Author/RB)

Social Network Characteristics of White, African-American, Asian and Latino/a college

Students and College Adjustment: A longitudinal study

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RUNNING HEAD: Social Network

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Abstract

The social network characteristics of a culturally and racially diverse group of first-year college students (n = 124) and white students (n = 84) attending the same college were examined at the time of college entry and at the beginning of second semester. Relationships between network characteristics and college adjustment in the second semester were also explored. White students reported larger social networks and more interaction with perceived sources of support than Asian and Latino/a students. Asian students obtained a larger percentage of support from college faculty/staff by the second semester than other students. Multiple regression analyses suggest that obtaining support from family members is positively associated with personal and social adjustment for students of color, while obtaining supporting from pre-college friends is negatively related with institutional attachment, For white college students, obtaining support from college friends was positively associated with social adjustment and institutional attachment. Having network members that help you to feel good about yourself was associated with personal adjustment and institutional attachment for students of color and with academic, social and personal adjustment for white students. In addition, having network members that you can get together with for fun and relaxation was associated with social adjustment for students of color, and having network members that you can count on to loan you things was associated with social adjustment and institutional attachment.

Social Network Characteristics of White, African-American, Asian and Latino/a college

Students and College Adjustment: A longitudinal analysis

The transition to college, involving social, emotional and academic adjustments, is a normal life event, which nevertheless is often a source of stress. The stress associated with that transition may be greatest for those entering a college environment where the predominant racial and ethnic culture differs from that of the individual. Isolation, alienation and lack of support have been identified as serious problems for African-American and other minority students as they are often forced to create their own social and cultural networks in response to their exclusion from the wider White-oriented university (Allen, 1985; 1992).

Despite general evidence that the presence of a strong support person (i.e., Tracey & Sedlaceck, 1985) and involvement in a large number of rewarding and successful interactions (Tinto, 1975; 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) are important to college adjustment among culturally and racially diverse students on predominantly White college campuses, knowledge of specific sources of student social support is very limited. Pierce, Sarason & Sarason (1991) suggest that the identification of specific relationships and their contributions to social support contribute to a better understanding of the psychological well-being of college students than global, non-specific assessments of support. Knowledge of the kinds of support most beneficial for responding to specific kinds of stressors may contribute, furthermore, to a better understanding of how social support enhances well-being and to the design of more beneficial support interventions (Cutrona & Russell, 1985).

This study examined the social network characteristics of a culturally and racially diverse group of first-year college students and White students attending the same college at the time of college entry and at the second semester, and explored the relationship between network characteristics and college adjustment as described by students in the second semester.

Method

The participants were 209 (84 White, 37 African-American, 38 Latino, 49 Asian) first-year college students at a private, urban, co-educational university in the Northeast, who

completed questionnaires during classes and freshman orientation seminars at the time of college entry and at the beginning of the second semester. Students were recruited over a five-year period from orientation seminars conducted during the late summer for students enrolled in an intensive summer orientation program for ethnically diverse students, who had been identified by the admissions office as educationally and financially disadvantaged.

Social Support Networks were assessed at both the orientation session and during the second semester through procedures described by Hays & Oxley (1986) and Martin & Burks (1985). Respondents were asked to "think of all the people with whom you have contact at school, home, work, in social or religious settings....provide the names of up to ten of those persons who are important in your life at the present time and with whom you feel you have an important relationship." Satisfaction with support available from each network member in each of six support functions, including guidance (advice or information), reliable alliance (assurance that others can be counted on to provide tangible assistance), reassurance of worth (recognition of one's competence and value by others), attachment (emotional support and closeness), social integration (shares interests, concerns and recreational activities and provides a sense of group belonging), and opportunity for nurturance (the sense that others rely on you), was assessed using a 3-point scale, where (0) = not at all, (1) = somewhat, and (2) = very much. Students completed the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1989) in to assess adjustment to college in the second semester.

Results

Four 4 (race/ethnicity) X 2 (sex) X 2 (time) repeated measures MANOVAs were completed to assess group differences for social network characteristics, including network size, amount of contact, satisfaction ratings with support and percent of total network satisfaction obtained from specific network sources at entry to college and at the beginning of the second semester. Follow-up ANOVAs and post hoc analyses using the Tukey-HSD procedure were also completed to further identify group differences.

The findings, presented in Table 1, reveal that white college students indicated larger social networks than Asian and Latina/o students, although all students reported increases by the second semester in the total size of their networks and the number of college staff/faculty perceived as sources of support. An overall decrease over time in the number of non-college/non-family member adult authorities listed in the network was evident for all cultural groups. White students reported a higher frequency of interaction with network members than Asian and Latina/o students. From the time of college entry to the second semester, students from all ethnic/racial groups indicated an increase in the percent of support obtained from friends on campus and college faculty and staff. Asian students indicated that they received a larger percentage of support from college faculty and staff than students of other ethnicities, although the amount of support obtained from faculty and staff was less than 4%. All ethnicities reported a decrease over time in support that helped them to feel good about themselves. No racial/ethnic group differences on any of the four scales assessing college adjustment were identified through MANOVA.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were completed separately for White students and students of color to assess the relationship between size, frequency of interaction, support satisfaction and source of support characteristics of the social network and academic, personal, and social adjustment to college and institutional attachment. For students of color, obtaining support from family members was positively associated with social ($\underline{R}$ = .21, $\underline{F}$ (1, 110) = 5.18, $\underline{p}$ < .02) and personal adjustment ($\underline{R}$ = .26, $\underline{F}$ (1, 110) = 7.91, $\underline{p}$ < .006). Increased interaction with family members was also associated with personal adjustment ($\underline{R}$ = .34, $\underline{F}$ (2, 109) = 7.33, $\underline{p}$ < .001). Obtaining support from friends away from college was negatively related with institutional attachment ($\underline{R}$ = .27, $\underline{F}$ (1, 110) = 8.49, $\underline{p}$ < .005). For white students, obtaining support from friends on campus was positively associated with social adjustment ($\underline{R}$ = .23, $\underline{F}$ (1, 82) = 4.76, $\underline{p}$ < .03) and institutional attachment ($\underline{R}$ = .22, $\underline{F}$(1,82) = 4.17, $\underline{p}$ < .05). Perceiving network members as helping you to feel good about yourself was positively associated with academic ($\underline{R}$ = .23, $\underline{F}$ (1, 81) = 4.56, $\underline{p}$ < .03), social ($\underline{R}$ = .25, $\underline{F}$

(1, 81) = 5.45, $p < .02$) and personal adjustment ($R = .33$, F (1, 81) = 9.69, $p < .003$) for white students, and with academic ($R = .37$, F (1, 105) = 16.37, $p < .001$) and personal ($R = .32$, F (1, 105) = 12.24, $p < .001$) adjustment for students of color. Having network members that help you to feel good about yourself, and network members that are a reliable source of tangible support were associated with institutional attachment ($R = .34$, F (2, 104) = 6.74, $p < .002$) for students of color, and social adjustment was related with having network members that are source of fun and relaxation, as well as a reliable source of tangible support ($R = .39$, F (2, 104) =9.60, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which specific aspects of the social network are associated with multiple components of college adjustment for culturally diverse college students. Students descriptions of network characteristics were remarkably similar across ethnic groups. Changes across time occurred for all students in logical ways, e.g. more friends on campus and more interaction with campus staff and faculty. The findings suggest, however, that the ways in which network characteristics are associated with dimensions of college adjustment may differ for white students and students of color.

Consistent with other research assessing the social networks of predominantly white college students (Hays & Oxley, 1986; Martin & Burks, 1985), the development of friendships on campus was associated with social adjustment and enjoyment of college life. For students of color, obtaining support from friends away from the college campus was negatively associated with college involvement and attachment to the institution. Direction of effects cannot be determined from this analysis, and interpretation of the finding is speculative. .Student discomfort on the college campus, for example, may be related to difficulties in forming friendships on campus and may contribute to the maintenance of friendships off campus. Since, according to our data, students across ethnic/racial groups reported similar levels of friendship support on and off-campus, it is plausible that the friendships maintained off-campus detract from college involvement more for students of color than for white students.

To the extent that off-campus friends differ from the cultural norm of the college. this interpretation makes intuitive sense.

Given that social integration into campus life is frequently cited as a factor in college adjustment and retention for students of color (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980), it is surprising that college friendships and relationships with college faculty were not related with any dimensions of college adjustment for our sample. Elsewhere, the college experience has been understood by academically able minority students as an opportunity for job preparation and upward mobility (Arnold, 1993). Despite social disconnection, minority students were found to persist, motivated more by a strong work ethic and the hope of success, than by the social rewards of college life. Perhaps the social rewards of college life are less salient for students of color because opportunities for socialization are more limited than for their white middle class peers. Perhaps attaining a rewarding social life at a private university requires financial resources, which many be less available to students of color. According to our data, having a reliable source of tangible support (e.g. loans you things) was related to social adjustment and institutional attachment for students of color.

The finding that aspects of family support are positively associated with adjustment among students of color is consistent with the description of ethnic minority families as more cohesive and interdependent (Cohler & Geyer, 1982; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan & Buriel, 1990). Elsewhere, entering minority college students have been described as maintaining close ties with primary or extended family and turning to the family for support and assistance in problem resolution (Wright, 1984). Support and encouragement from family back home have been described by African-American students as sources of strength and survival, rather than as obstacles to adjustment or individuation. Giordano, Cernkovich & DeMaris (1993) found that Black adolescents, with effects of age and SES controlled, described closer relationships with parents and less need for mutuality and similarity in peer relationships than white adolescents. The authors hypothesized that for Black youth, the family represents a safe haven in the midst of a discriminating culture. Family support and interaction may similarly remain

important for the student entering a culturally different, and oftentimes discriminating, college environment.

While theories of college student adjustment and retention emphasize the importance of social integration into the college environment, our findings reveal the importance of continuing family support for students of color. Colleges need to find ways not only to help students fit in, but also to sustain adaptive family support networks. Although family members may lack experience in negotiating the college environment, they appear to fulfill important support functions. Reassurance of worth, rather than academic or career guidance, emerged in our analyses and other research (Cutrona et al., 1994) as the type of social support most related to college adjustment.

Table 1 Support Network Characteristics: Results of MANOVAs and follow-up analyses

Analysis: Significant Findings*

Size   Race : Main Effect (Wilks' L = .77, F (21, 552) = 2.40, P < .001)

                      Total Size: Univariate F significant (F (3, 198) =5.59, p < .001)

                      ANOVA is significant (F (3, 198) = 4.45, p < .005); Total size of

                      network is larger for Whites than Asian & Latino/a (Tukey-HSD)

                Time : Main Effect (Wilks' L = .72 F (7, 192) = 10.58, p < .001)

                      Total Size: Univariate F (1, 198) = 27.40, p < .001; Network is

                      larger at time 2

                      Number of College Staff/faculty: F (1, 198) = 10.60, p < .001.

                      More college staff/faculty at time 2.

                      Non-college authorities: F (1, 198) = 7.47, p < .007. Fewer non-

                      college authorities at time 2.

Interaction   Race: Main Effect (Wilks' L = .82, F (18, 538) = 2.23, p < .003)

Frequency   Total Interaction: F(3, 195) = 4.47, p < .005. Post-hoc ANOVA, F

                      (3, 203) = 4, 02 p < .009. Interaction is highest for White students

                      in comparison with Asian and Latino/a (Tukey-HSD).

                Time: Main Effect (Wilks' L = .65, F (6, 190) = 116.73, p < .001.

                      Total Interaction: F(1, 195) = 39.00, p < .001, greater at time 2.

                      Interaction with Friends on Campus: F (1, 195) = 81.53, p< .001,

                      greater at time 2.

                      Interaction with Staff/Faculty: F (1, 195) = 12.46, p < .001, greater

                            at time 2.

Sources of   Time: Main Effect, Wilks' L = .65, F (6, 187) = 16.45, p < .001.

Perceived Support   College Friend: F (1, 192) = 80.51, p < .001, greater at time 2.

                      College staff/ faculty: F (1,192) = 11.93, p < .001, greater at time

                      2.

Race X Time Interaction: (Wilks' $\underline{L}$ = .84, $\underline{F}$ (18, 529) = 1.82, $\underline{P}$ < .03).

College staff/faculty: Univariate $\underline{F}$ significant ($\underline{F}$ (3, 192) =4.74, $\underline{p}$ < .003) Post-hoc ANOVA is significant ($\underline{F}$ (3, 205) = 9.19, $\underline{p}$ < .001); Asian students obtain a larger percentage of support from staff/faculty than other ethnicities at time 2. (Tukey-HSD).

Satisfaction With Types of Support

Time: Main Effects: Wilks' $\underline{L}$ = .87, $\underline{F}$(6, 182) = 4.35, $\underline{p}$ < .001

Makes you feel good: $\underline{F}$ (1, 187) = 7.24, $\underline{p}$ < .008; decrease at time 2.

* No other significant main effects or interaction effects were found.

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