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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether mainstreamed students with mild intellectual disabilities (MID) were socially accepted by general education peers. The setting was a rural area in central Georgia. The participants were 61 mainstreamed students with MID and their 286 general education peers. Preservice special education teachers were trained to use nominal sociometry to measure peer acceptance. The data were aggregated for statistical analysis. The findings were statistically significant. Only 43% of the students with MID were named at least once while 85% of general education students were chosen. There were no statistically significant differences by gender or educational level. These data can provide a baseline for school systems desiring to determine the social outcomes of inclusion programs in rural elementary, middle, or secondary schools. Inclusion programs that increase the amount of time that students with MID spend in general education with appropriate supported should have better outcomes when measured in a similar manner. (Contains 2 figures, 1 table, and 19 references.) (SLD)

Running head: OUTCOME MEASURE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

An Outcome Measure for Social Goals of Inclusion

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Abstract

This study examined whether mainstreamed students with mild intellectual disabilities (MID) were socially acceptance by general education peers. The setting was a rural area in central Georgia. The participants were 61 mainstreamed students with MID and their 286 general education peers. Preservice special education teachers were trained to use nominal sociometry to measure peer acceptance. The data were aggregated for statistical analysis. The findings were statistically significant. Only 43% of the students with MID were named at least once while 85% of general education students were chosen. There were no statistically significant differences by gender or educational level. These data can provide a baseline for school systems desiring to determine the social outcomes of inclusion programs in rural elementary, middle or secondary schools. Inclusion programs in which increase the amount of time that students with MID spend in general education with appropriate supports should have better outcomes when measured in a similar manner.

An Outcome Measure for Social Goals of Inclusion

Compliance with the 1997 amendments to IDEA includes greater participation of all children in the general education classroom; in fact, a justification must be given in the IEP if the child is not educated in a significant manner with students without disabilities (Tate, 2000). No exemptions are given for rural schools. Administrators in those schools, which are often characterized by isolation and lower funding (Johnson, Elrod & Smith, 1999) as cited in Bryant, Dean, Elrod, and Blackbourn (1999), have real concerns about the effectiveness of inclusion and whether or not inclusion is achieving its objectives (Hooper, Pankake, & Schroth, 1999). For students with intellectual disabilities, these objectives may be more social than academic. Full or partial inclusion programs can be expensive to implement when special education support services are provided by special education teachers within the general education class; thus resulting in two teachers on the payroll. In addition for inclusion to succeed, money must be spent on cross-training general and special education teachers and in teaching them to work collaboratively (Bryant, et al.). To justify these expenses, administrators need some measurable evidence that goals are being met or progress toward goals is being accomplished. In the absence of evidence, some rural school superintendents indicated that they are unsatisfied with their current efforts to make inclusion effective and are seeking alternatives (Hooper, Pankake & Schroth, 1999).

Inclusion, as practiced in many schools, can be full inclusion or partial inclusion. Full inclusion for the purposes of this study is defined as the situation where the student with special needs is provided with all of his or her special education services within the general education classroom (Denning, 1995 as cited in Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999). Partial inclusion refers to the situation where some of the time, the student is removed from the general education classroom for special education or related services. The earlier concept, mainstreaming, is used in this study to refer to periods or sessions when a student in a self-contained special education setting joins a regular education class for classes with lower academic demands such as music, physical education, science, social studies, exploratory middle school classes, or vocational classes in the secondary school. During the time that this study was conducted, mainstreaming was the model used in these rural schools for students with MID at elementary, middle, and high schools.

The objectives of inclusion for students with MID often include social as well as academic skill development. There are numerous ways of measuring academic progress in mastering the general education curriculum such as standardized tests and teacher-made tests. Pretests, posttests, and examples of students' work in

portfolios can be used to measure the academic outcome of participation in the general education curriculum. However, measuring the ability to access the social events of the general education classroom is a different challenge (Asher & Taylor, 1981). The social aspect of inclusion has long been valued even when the probability of academic benefit is minimal (Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999). But both parents and teachers know that more must be done to promote social interactions with peers than just assigning the child to a seat in the general education classroom. Children with disabilities need both opportunities and social skills to make and keep friends in their schools, neighborhoods, and communities. Many parents state that their child has no friends and notice that their child is not invited to neighborhood social events like birthday parties. Teachers see the loners on the playground and hear the unkind remarks of the non-disabled peers. Siblings of children with disabilities often carry a double burden trying to share friends with their brother or sister (Salend, 1994).

There are many strategies that teachers can use to increase peer acceptance of children with disabilities. One place that these strategies can be found is in the introductory texts used in teacher education courses (Salend, 1994). For example, teachers can give students information about varying types of disabilities prior to the arrival of students with special needs in the general education class. Students can be taught preferred ways of interacting positively with others with specific disabilities. The arts can be used to help students empathize with others who look or act differently. Special activities can be conducted as introductions and get acquainted mixers. Within the general education class, teachers can include the student with special needs in collaborative group activities or communication exercises (Salend, 1994). Many of these strategies work well in improving social acceptance and are not difficult to implement. However, prior to 1997, mainstreamed students with MID spent such short periods of time in general education classroom that they were not well known by their classmates even if they had basic social skills evidenced by successful interactions with friends in their neighborhoods (Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1998). As a consequence of isolation in self-contained clasrroms, teachers and parents often noted positive and not so positive social incidents and documented them, even if only in their memories.

Researchers have recently studied the social behaviors of younger children (aged 8-12) with and without disabilities in both classroom and play situations (Fredrickson & Furnham, 1998a). One of their findings was that it is more difficult for a student with disabilities to be accepted in a work situation (such as in the classroom). This study is extensive with many other applicable findings. However, the sociometric methods that Fredrickson and Furnham used are reliable and valid and could be used to measure the social outcomes of inclusion. In addition,

these measurement strategies can be targeted to the achievement of social acceptance of a particular student as well as take into account changes by a group of students over time to determine if goals are being met.

Sociometry

Sociometry has long been used to measure social systems in various settings. Sociometry has been taught in many educational psychology or teacher education preparation classes since the 1960's (Horne, 1981). Based on the theoretical work of J. L. Moreno, sociometry has long been used to depict social relationships in various settings (Mendelson, 1989). In addition, a person wishing to researach social relationships among peers in a small setting such as a classroom needs little in terms of material or class time to conduct a simple sociometric study. In the nominal technique, the researcher gives each participant a form and asks him or her to put their name on it. Then the researcher proposes a hypothetical or real social situation and ask each participant to write down the names of persons in the classroom with whom they would like to do this social activity (Cook, Drennan, & Drennan, 1997). For example, a teacher might say to the students "We are going on a field trip, please write down the names of three people that you would like to sit next to on the bus." Numeric codes can be used instead of names for confidentiality purposes (Salend, 1994). Sometimes participants are asked to name in addition, some persons that they would *not* like to associate with. Usually the researcher verifies the results by repeating the procedure by describing a different social situation. Then the data is analyzed in a visual way by drawing a map, called a sociogram, with circles representing each participant and arrows to other participant that indicate the direction of the choice (Asher & Taylor, 1981). Who chose whom? And how many choices did each person receive? These are the primary questions of interest. The sociograms are examined to discover leaders, loners, cliques, etc. Software is available to assist in analysis for large studies (Treadwell, T., Kumar, V., Stein, S., & Prossnick, K., 1998).

Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted in the winter of 1998 to study the social effectiveness of the mainstreaming model in classes in the local school systems where preservice special education teachers were working in an extended practicum with host teachers of self-contained classes of students with MID. At this time, full and partial inclusion models were in textbooks, but not yet in use in the local schools. The purpose of this study was to discover if the students with MID who were mainstreamed out of their self-contained classes for at least one period a day had made friends in their general education classes. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (a) Would students with MID be chosen as friends by at least one general education peer when

sociograms were conducted in the general education class? (b) Would boys or girls with MID have more friends in the general education class? And (c) Would younger or older students with MID have more friends?

Method

Participants

The 61 students with MID were selected for this study from the host teachers' classrooms if they attended at least one period per day in a general education class. The 286 general education students were the classmates of the mainstreamed students with MID. This sample of convenience included students from two rural high schools, five middle schools, one elementary school, and one Headstart preschool in five different school systems. These schools in this study had a total population (N = 18,112) that was 43% White, 55% African American, and 2% other minorities. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch ranged from 34% to 59%.

At the high school level, there were 25 students with MID (11 boys and 14 girls) in eight general vocational classes (43 boys and 87 girls) where the students with MID were regular members of these classes. At the middle schools, there were 24 students with MID (14 boys and 10 girls) in seven exploratory classes (72 boys and 43 girls). At the elementary and Headstart schools, there were 12 students with MID (8 boys and 4 girls) and 41 general education students (19 boys and 22 girls). The elementary students with MID participated in science or social studies lessons in general education classrooms. The Headstart students participated about 90 minutes per day with general education peers during semi-structured activities or free play.

All participants were students in self-contained classes for students with mild intellectual disabilities (I.Q. range 55 to 70). The teachers of these students were deliberately selected to be a mentor for a preservice teacher in their third year in a teacher education program at a local university. These host teachers were selected for their ability to mentor a preservice teacher, for their communication skills, and for their willingness to share their class and their teaching strategies with a novice who would spend 20 hours per week in their classroom for five weeks. All students in their classes who met the criteria of participation in a general education class at least one session daily (mainstreaming) were included in the sample for this study. All of the host teachers were certified by the State of Georgia to teach students with Intellectual Disabilities.

Setting

The middle Georgia area that these school systems serve is populated by families who work for large government institutions such as hospitals and prisons; who work in agriculture such as dairy farms, cotton and

soybean seed farms, or the logging industry; who are employed in kaolin mines and associated processing plants; or who work in supporting service industries. There is only one interstate highway which goes along the southern boarder of this area. To the north are a set of lakes that are used to generate power and which support small retirement communities. All throughout this area is a small, but growing, tourist industry focused on antebellum and civil war sites. Winters are short and mild, spring is spectacularly beautiful, summers are hot, and fall brings a welcome relief from the heat. In 1998 when these data were collected, most of the schools were 20 to 30 years old and overpopulated with many special education self-contained classes in portable buildings. Some of the middle and elementary schools were formerly outgrown high schools built before desegregation in the 1960's. However at this time local option sales taxes were legislated into existance and quickly adopted in most communities. The result was that most school systems had plans for two or three new schools in the near future.

Procedures

The data were collected by 25 preservice teachers in a cohort majoring in special education for children with intellectual disabilities. They were each was placed with a host teacher in a public school that was as close as possible to either their home or their university domicile for their 20 hours per week of fieldwork. Each host teacher was experienced in mentoring preservice teachers from this university. Permission was obtained from the host teachers and from the general education teachers (in whose classes the students with MID were mainstreamed) to conduct the study using sociograms in the general education classes. Interestingly, when the preservice teachers asked their hosts about conducting the study, most of the host teachers remarked that they knew that the children with MID had friends in their own neighborhoods; for example, general education peers on the same school bus routes. However, none of the host teachers knew about any particular strategies that the general education teacher may have used to promote general education peer acceptance of the mainstreamed students (possibly due to confidentiality concerns).

The preservice teachers were instructed in their university class about the concept of sociometry and its use in education. Sample studies were examined and possible questions that could be used were generated as a class exercise. A mock exercise was held and small groups of the preservice teachers discussed and planned strategies suitable for high school, middle school, and elementary or preschool classes. Then as a part of the fieldwork, preservice teachers and host teachers were asked to construct two social situations that they would use to collect the data using the nominal technique only (Asher & Taylor, 1981). Although the nominal technique may also include

the naming of peers with whom one would not like to socialize, the preservice teachers were asked to use only positive examples. Hamilton, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Roberts (2000) in their sociometric study mention concerns by parents and teachers of the possible result of "hate lists" being generated in the participants' minds when negative questions are used. By not using negative examples, this possible aversive side effect was avoided, even though Iverson & Barton (1997) determined in their study that no harm was done by using negatives. Examples of questions used are as follows: Name two people in this class that you would like (a) to sit next to during lunch, (b) to sit next to on a field trip, (c) to invite to your birthday party, or (d) to work with on a project. According to Frederick son & Furnham (1998), it is necessary to specify friends *in this class* in order to increase the validity for the nomination method.

Paper and pencil questionnaires were given to all of the students by the preservice teacher in the general education classroom during the period when the students with MID were in that class. A few students with MID were assisted if they were unable to write names of their chosen classmates. In the Headstart class, each preschooler was taken aside by the preservice teacher and given a treat to put in his or her own box and two more to share with friends. They shared by naming their friend and placing the treat in their friend's box marked with their particular symbol. The preservice teacher observed the children and recorded their choices.

The preservice teachers then drew two sociograms; one for each of the two questions. They indicated which students were the ones receiving MID services as they drew the arrows showing the relationships that they found. Some of the sociograms were hand drawn and some were done using computer graphics. Figures 1 and 2 are examples of their sociograms. Each sociogram was labeled with the name of the school, the name of the host teachers and the name of the preservice teacher in case there were questions.

Data Analysis

The sociograms were collected and the data for each student were recorded in a spreadsheet. The variables were group status (MID or not), gender, and level as well as whether or not the student was named by a general education peer at least once in the responses to the two questions asked. The data were then analyzed using Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. A Chi Square Test of Independence was used to determine if the differences in the rate of acceptance by the two groups of students was statistically significant. The data were also disaggregated by gender and by level.

Results

The participation level by the intact general education classes was 100% except for a few absentees. According to Hamilton et al. (2000) student participation within the class of at least 75% yields higher validity and reliability when measuring sociometric status of students with disabilities. The results of this study indicated that there were differences in the acceptance rates of students with MID and their peers without disabilities. See Tables 1 & 2. Overall 57% of the 61 students with mild intellectual disabilities were not chosen at least once by a general education peer. However, only 15% of the 286 general education peers were not chosen by anyone [$X^2(1, N = 347) = 51.7, p < .001$]. Middle school students with MID were chosen more often by their peers without disabilities than either high school or elementary school students with MID as shown in Table 1. This difference approached statistical significance [$X^2(2, N = 347) = 6.01, p = .06$]. There was no statistically significant difference in acceptance by gender of the student as shown in Table 2.

Discussion

The finding that 57% of the students with MID were not chosen by their classmates may have been limited by the fact that the participants were asked to nominate only two friends. Fredrickson & Furnham (1998) summarize in their review of literature that previous studies have shown limited social acceptance of students with disabilities if nominations are limited to three. They recommend the use of unlimited nominations where the participants are encouraged to name as many peers as they would like to associate with. They also found that the more time spent in general education classes, the more likely it was that students with disabilities were accepted.

There were two published studies which were similar to this one but the peer rating technique was used instead of the nominal technique. However it was possible to extrapolate the data by combinating the number of students in the categories of "rejected" and "neglected". By doing this a rough comparison can be made. The study by Stein (1985) as cited in Fredrickson & Furnham (1998b) found that 15% of 81 general education students fell in these categories. This is comparable to the findings here in central Georgia. Fredrickson & Furnam also note in their study that *not chosen* does not mean rejected. It may also mean neglected or just not well-known to their peers. They also caution that their findings show that there is instability in ratings for classes that are newly formed due to transition to a new school.

In Fredrickson & Furnham's own study using the peer rating technique (1998a) they found that 32% of 115 students with elementary level moderate learning difficulties (mean I.Q. = 79, S.D. = 11) were classified as rejected or neglected by their general education classmates (n = 867). These students were on the register of a general

education class, but some were withdrawn from this class for a mean of 26% of the school day. Others received support from a special education teacher within their general education class for 45% of the day. The rest received no direct special education support. This study was done in Buckinghamshire, England where the ethnic composition was 86% White, 8% African Caribbean, and 6% Asian. While not comparable to our group, these findings give us a possible goal of social acceptance of at least 68% of students with MID. Sale and Carey found that even full inclusion did not eliminate some negative social perceptions of students with disabilities (1995).

The difference between neglected and rejected students was also studied in more detail by Frederickson & Furnham (1998a). They found that both rejected children and neglected children were more accepted in play situations than work situations. This was a finding in another study also (Ray & Cohen, 1995). Further examination revealed that rejected and neglected students with disabilities have low levels of initiating positive interactions with general education peers and do not have the high levels of negative acting out behaviors characterizing rejected general education children. Their study also found that having special education support in the general education class resulted in higher achievement of students with disabilities as well as lower levels of negative incidents--both of which were shown to be related to social acceptance in a work situation.

Implications

These data from the spring of 1998 can become baseline data for comparison with full and partial inclusion programs for students with MID. A school system could determine if progress is being made by systematically selecting classrooms in different schools at different grade levels. However care should be taken to not measure too early in the school year when student friendships are still being formed, especially at transition grades such as sixth and ninth. Questions could be standardized and participants could be allowed to nominate as many friends as they would like. But Ray and Cohen (1995) did find in general education classes that preadolescent girls were likely to nominate more friends than boys. Annual measurements at the same time of the year could indicate progress toward Individualized Education Program goals.

In addition, sociometry could easily be used in classrooms to gather pretest and posttest data to measure the outcomes of specific programs such as using direct and/or indirect methods to promote peer acceptance. For example, recruiting peers with high social status to mentor students with disabilities often will result in increased overall acceptance (McEvoy & Odum, 1987). In addition, the results of a sociogram can be used in a more detailed way to deliberately group specific students to increase the number and types of verbal interactions (Boschee, 1996).

The technique can even be used to assess social interactions in the workplace among school staff and teachers (Blake & McCanse, 1989). The results could be used by administrators to increase the likelihood of successfully matching pairs of teachers for delivering services collaboratively to all students.

To summarize, the findings of this study that 15% of the students in general education classes were not named as a friend were comparable to other studies using sociometric methods to measure social acceptance. However the finding that 57% of students with mild intellectual disabilities were not named as a friend by a general education peer in a mainstreaming class was discouraging but not unexpected. It is unrealistic to expect that children with disabilities will be accepted at the same rate as their peers, but a study in an elementary school in England found that only 32% of students with a similar level of disability, but who were in full or partial inclusion situations were not accepted.

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Table 1

Number Chosen by Group and Level

	n	Number Chosen	Percent Chosen
Elementary School Classrooms			
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	12	2	17%
Peers in General Education Classes	41	35	85%
Middle School Classrooms			
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	24	14	58%
Peers in General Education Classes	115	91	79%
High School Classrooms			
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	25	10	40%
Peers in General Education Classes	130	117	90%
All classrooms			
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	61	26	43%
Peers in General Education Classes	286	243	85%

Table 2

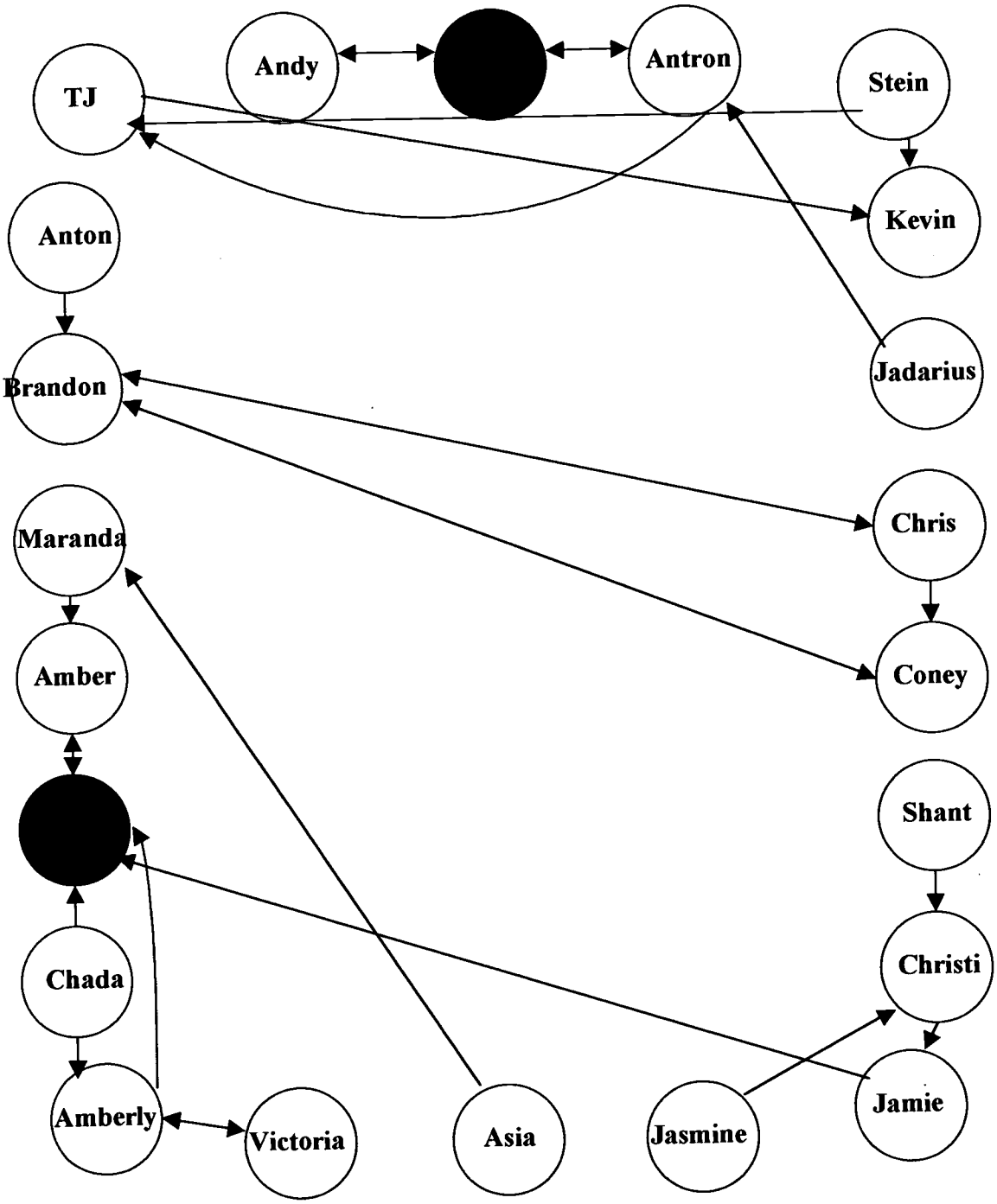
Results by Level and Gender

	Chosen			Not Chosen	
Level	n	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Elementary Schools					
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	12	1	1	7	3
Peers in General Education Classes	41	17	18	2	4
Middle Schools					
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	24	9	5	5	5
Peers in General Education Classes	115	60	31	12	12
High Schools					
Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities	25	5	5	6	9
Peers in General Education Classes	130	38	79	5	8

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Sociogram of an elementary school class. Students with MID are shaded.

Figure 2. Sociogram of a high school vocational class in cosmetology. Students with MID are shaded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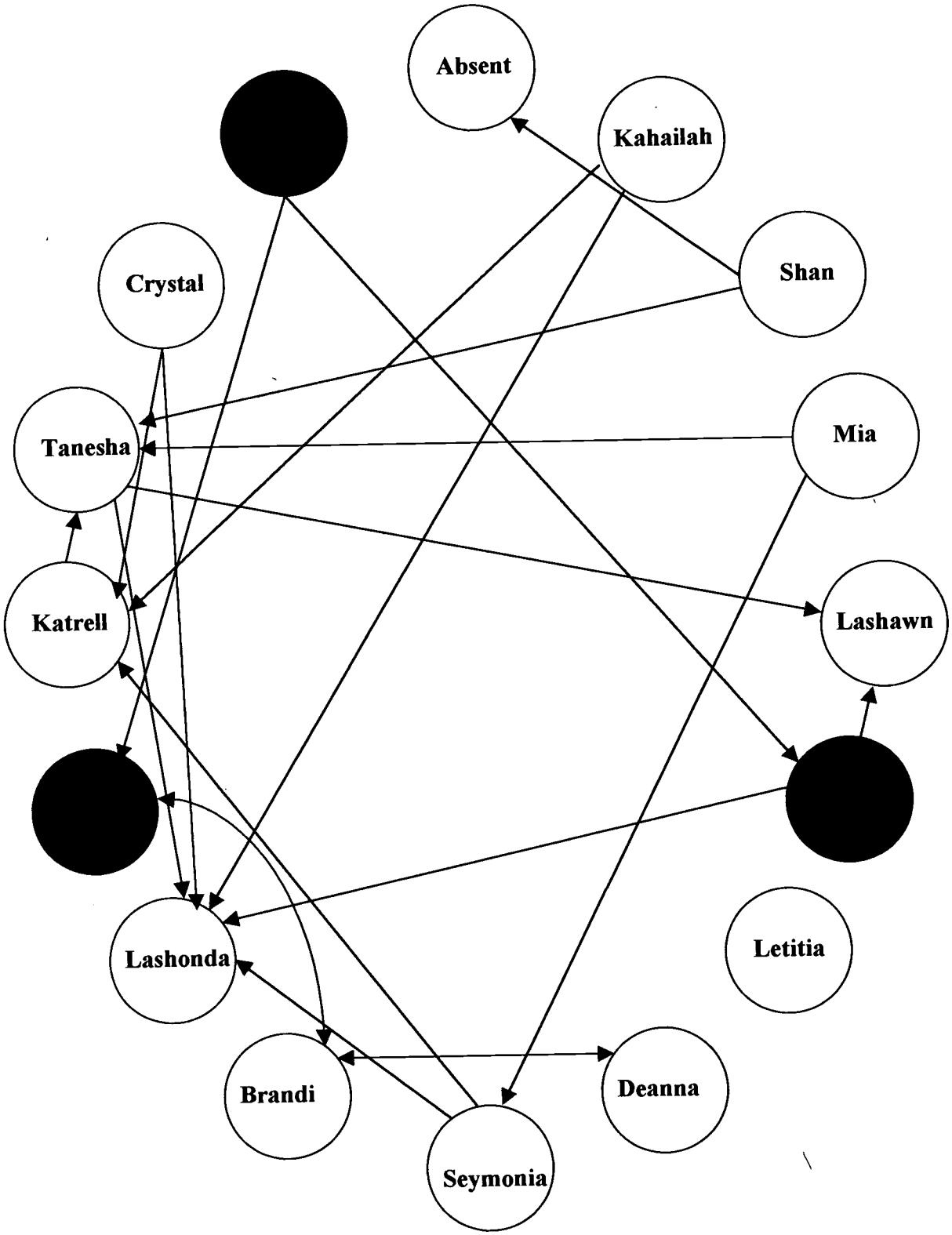
Absent
Kahailah
Shan
Crystal
Tanesha
Mia
Katrell
Lashawn
Lashonda
Letitia
Brandi
Deanna
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