

The arts help people form diverse friendship groups

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This research was conducted by **Mike Owen Benediktsson** at **Hunter College, CUNY, USA**

Summary

The paper explores the degree to which people with high levels of arts engagement form ethnically diverse friendship networks. The paper presents the results of a study that analysed data from a survey of college students in the US. The survey followed just under 4000 students who were surveyed over repeated years at 27 different universities. The results suggest that people engaged in arts activity tended to have more diverse groups of friends than the average college student.

A wide range of factors were controlled for in the analysis

It turns out that arts engagement works above and independently from a student's gender, family background, attitudes to people from other backgrounds, whether they arrived at college with a racially diverse group of friends, the ethnic make-up of the student body and the percentage of the students that lived on-campus.

Arts activities formed the crucial element that allowed people to interact and form friendships across racial divides

The author is clear that a wide variety of factors go into creating friendship networks at college, including chance encounters provided on and off campus, the types of organised activity provided by the university and student groups, and the existing cultural preferences of any individual person.

Something to keep in mind

It is not clear what types of arts activity generate more or less diverse friendship groups, and the author is keen to emphasise that while overall the arts may be a focal point that brings a variety of students together it may also act in some cases like a sorting mechanism that reinforces existing networks and social groupings.

Keywords

cohesion **USA** **college** **friendships** **survey** **race** **students** **diversity**
networks

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