

Boys secure in their racial identity seek more diverse friendships

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Kids often seek answers from parents, friends and media to better understand their racial identity.

Middle school boys who feel secure about their [race](#) during this ongoing

information gathering will likely befriend diverse people, according to a new University of Michigan study.

The study's researchers sought to explain how ethnic-[racial identity](#) exploration and resolution might affect friendship networks among youth in a diverse setting, as well as their peers over time.

Exploration expands knowledge of one's group. The more they learn, the more prepared they are in society, said Deborah Rivas-Drake, U-M associate professor of psychology and education.

Resolution means having more clarity about one's belonging to a race.

"Parents need to open these lines of communication if they haven't already done so," said Rivas-Drake, the study's lead author. "It's just like sex and drugs—you want to be someone your kids can check in with. In this case, the topic is race."

Rivas-Drake collaborated on the study with Adriana Umana-Taylor and David Schaefer, both from Arizona State University, and Michael Medina of U-M.

About 353 diverse 6th- and 7th-graders at a Midwestern [middle school](#) completed surveys in spring 2014, and six months and year later about their behaviors to learn about their ethnicity and their friends.

Boys who demonstrated greater clarity about their ethnicity or race had more diverse friends at the beginning of the following academic year and in follow-up surveys.

Rivas-Drake said that having more diverse friendships can lead to less prejudice because the boys are able to learn more about—and potentially feel more emotionally comfortable with—other groups.

There were not similar associations for girls, who overall tended to demonstrate higher friendship diversity in their peer [group](#).

The researchers also explored the extent to which early adolescents selected friends who were similar to them. Many did "flock together" along ethnic-racial lines as expected, but they still sought out friends from other racial groups, Rivas-Drake said. When they did so, they drew on these friends to help learn more about their identities later that school year.

"This opens up possibilities for youth from different ethnic-racial groups to form bonds based on their shared engagement in the process of developing their identities," she said.

The findings appear in a special section of *Child Development* that deals with ethnic and racial identity in youth.

Provided by University of Michigan

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