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A COMPARISON OF SAME-ETHNICITY AND CROSS-ETHNICITY FRIENDSHIP QUALITY OF ADOLESCENTS IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

The present study explored the differences of same-ethnicity and cross-ethnicity friendship quality of adolescents in Vietnam. Participants were 200 ethnic majority students and 200 ethnic minority students from two public high schools in DakLak, Vietnam. The participants answered the McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Respondent's Affection (MFQ-RA). Adolescents from ethnic majority and minority groups did not show any significant differences for same-ethnicity friendship quality, but for the cross-ethnicity friendship quality, adolescents from ethnic minority groups reported significantly higher "positive feelings for a friend" than adolescents from the ethnic majority group. In contrast, there were significant differences between genders in same-ethnicity friendship quality but not in cross-ethnicity friendship quality with girls reporting significantly higher "positive feelings for a friend" and overall same-ethnicity friendship quality than boys. These findings are discussed vis-à-vis past research on intra- and inter-ethnic friendship and gender comparison in friendship.

Keywords: *Friendship quality, adolescents, ethnicity, gender, Vietnam*

INTRODUCTION

Friendship is a distinctively personal relationship characterized by intimacy and grounded by the concern of a person for the welfare and sake of the other. Friendship plays a central role of our lives, because one part of a broader set of concerns we have is the special concern for friends and because our friends can help shape who we are (Helm, 2005). As such, friendships have significant influences on the developmental, environmental, and social aspects of individuals across all cultures throughout their lifespan. Numerous studies have explored how friendship affects psychological well-being (Moore & Boldero, 1991; Parker & Asher, 1993; Thomas & Daubman, 2001; Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008). Friendship quality can be considered as people's "impression of the degree to which a given relationship meets specified needs ranging from the provision of opportunities for play and companionship to allowing intimate disclosure and exchange" (Nangle, Erdley, Newman, Mason, & Carpenter, 2003, p. 547). Friendship quality is particularly important because it not only has direct effects on many aspects of children's social development, including their self-esteem and social adjustment, but also has indirect effects on their attitudes and behaviors (Berndt, 2002). Most theorists perceive friendship quality as multidimensional, addressing both positive aspect (e.g., companionship, trust and support, disclosure, communication and validation, prosocial behavior, self-esteem support, intimacy, loyalty, etc.) and negative aspect (e.g., conflict and betrayal, dominance attempts, and rivalry) of the relationship (Berndt, 2002; Parker & Asher, 1993). Adolescents' self-esteem and psychological health may be enhanced by high-quality friendships

(Berndt & Keefe, 1995).

Previous studies have highlighted the influences of environmental or contextual characteristics on the interethnic formation of friendship. The more opportunity for intergroup contact, the higher the quality of friendship; the lower the intergroup contact, the lower the quality of friendship (Blau, 1977). On the other hand, culture influence individuals' developmental and social processes and can be considered as an important shaper of mind. As such, the various society's cultural norms and values may lead to differing friendship qualities across cultures (Bae, 2003). Ethnicity, as an index of cultural distinctions, may influence how friendship quality is perceived (Rodebaugh, Fernandez, & Levinson, 2012). So, ethnicity is a major factor that should focused on when we explore friendship quality. Same-ethnicity friendships are more stable than interethnic friendships, even after controlling for a variety of contextual and dyadic characteristics, such as school ethnic composition and friends' similarities in attitudes and behaviors. Reciprocity and closeness are strong predictors of friendship stability and appear to dampen the effects of ethnicity. This suggests that ethnicity is important in structuring the social lives of adolescents. More attention should be paid to the quality of interethnic friendships, as measured by degree of reciprocity and closeness (Rude & Herda, 2010).

Friendships of girls and boys have often been assumed to differ: girls have more self-disclosure, empathy, interdependence, and a need for nurturance in an intimate friendship, whereas boys normally search for companionship, competition, control, and conflict in larger friendship groups. Differences in how relationships are perceived or evaluated could result in differences in friendship quality, and males and females have different views of friendship (Bae, 2003; De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Rodebaugh et al., 2012). Previous studies indicated that the underlying construct of friendship quality for males and females is slightly but significantly different. In several important ways the friendships of males and females are assumed to differ, and some evidence demonstrated that the strong gender differences observed in childhood peer relationships may extend into adulthood (De Goede et al., 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

The participants were recruited using non-probability convenient sampling. They were 200 ethnic majority students (Kinh) and 200 ethnic minority students (Ede, Mngong, Tay, Nung, Dao) from two public high schools in DakLak, Vietnam (mean age = 15.26, SD = .57; 71% female). The participants responded to a questionnaire in class under the guidance of the researcher (i.e., the first author). Earlier, approval to conduct the research at the two high schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and the school principals.

Measurement

Friendship quality was measured by using McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Respondent's Affection (MFQ-RA) (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999, 2012). This 16-item questionnaire has two subscales designed to assess two components of friendship quality: positive feelings for a friend (9 items) (e.g., "like x a lot") and friendship satisfaction (7 items) (e.g., "pleased with my friendship with x"). Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of agreement with each positively worded item on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from -4 to 4 and to think about their closest friendships while answering the items. Each participant completed one MFQ-RA for a same-ethnicity best friend and one for a cross-ethnicity best friend. The average of all the items determined the positive feelings for a friend and friendship satisfaction of the participants, with the higher scores reflecting the higher friendship quality. This instrument was translated from English into Vietnamese and was adapted for Vietnamese students. Forward translation method was used for questionnaire translation before sending to Vietnamese psychologists as well as to English experts for editing and correcting. The reliability of the MFQ-RA (Vietnamese version) was determined using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.85$). A factor analysis with oblique rotation applied to the MFQ-RA yielded a two-factor solution (eigenvalues = 9.2, 1.0; % of variance = 57.6, 6.2). Factor 1 consisted of the six satisfaction items, which were averaged as one subscale and factor 2 consisted of the ten other positive-feelings items, which were averaged as another subscale.

RESULTS

Comparison of same-ethnicity and cross-ethnicity friendship quality between ethnic majority and minority adolescents

To examine ethnicity and gender differences in participants' friendship quality dimensions, t-tests were conducted with ethnicity and gender as independent variables and the two domains of friendship quality

as dependent variables. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the friendship domains as well as overall same-ethnicity friendship quality for adolescents from ethnic majority and minority groups. Although the results indicated that the means of “friendship satisfaction,” “positive feelings for a friend” and overall friendship quality for ethnic minority adolescents were slightly higher than those for ethnic majority adolescents, these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 1 - Comparison of Same-Ethnicity Friendship Quality between Ethnic Majority and Minority Adolescents

Friendship Quality Dimension	Ethnicity	M	SD	t (p)
Friendship satisfaction	Majority	1.51	1.30	-.074 (.941)
	Minority	1.52	1.00	
Positive feelings for a friend	Majority	2.21	1.29	-.710 (.478)
	Minority	2.29	.888	
Overall	Majority	1.95	1.23	-.494 (.622)
	Minority	2.00	.865	

Note. *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

The means of the two friendship dimensions and overall cross-ethnicity friendship quality for ethnic minority adolescents were higher than those for ethnic majority adolescents. As can be seen in Table 2, significant differences were found in “positive feelings for a friend” ($t(335) = -2.080, p < .05$) but not in “friendship satisfaction” and overall friendship quality.

Table 2 - Comparison of Cross-Ethnicity Friendship Quality between Ethnic Majority and Minority Adolescents

Friendship Quality Dimension	Ethnicity	M	SD	t (p)
Friendship satisfaction	Majority	1.35	1.60	-1.386 (.167)
	Minority	1.54	1.12	
Positive feelings for a friend	Majority	1.93	1.62	-2.080 (.038*)
	Minority	2.22	1.02	
Overall	Majority	1.71	1.56	-1.893 (.059)
	Minority	1.96	1.00	

Note. *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

Comparison of same-ethnicity and cross-ethnicity friendship quality by gender

The means of same-ethnicity friendship quality for male adolescents were lower than those for female adolescents, for the two friendship dimensions and overall cross-ethnicity friendship quality (see Table 3). t-tests revealed significant differences in “positive feelings for a friend” ($t(184) = -2.076, p < .05$) and in the overall same-ethnicity friendship quality ($t(186) = -2.040, p < .05$). There was no significant difference in “friendship satisfaction” between genders.

Table 3 - Comparison of Same-Ethnicity Friendship Quality by Gender

Friendship Quality Dimension	Gender	M	SD	t (p)
Friendship satisfaction	Male	1.39	1.28	-1.336 (.183)
	Female	1.57	1.10	
Positive feelings for a friend	Male	2.05	1.24	-2.076 (.039*)
	Female	2.33	1.04	
Overall	Male	1.80	1.18	-2.040 (.042*)
	Female	2.04	1.00	

Note. *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

Table 4 shows that female adolescents had higher cross-ethnicity friendship quality than male adolescents for the two friendship dimensions and overall cross-ethnicity friendship quality. However, t-tests showed no significant differences in “friendship satisfaction,” “positive feelings for a friend” and overall cross-ethnicity friendship quality between genders.

Table 4 - Comparison of Cross-Ethnicity Friendship Quality by Gender

Friendship Quality Dimension	Gender	M	SD	t (p)
Friendship satisfaction	Male	1.28	1.47	-1.539 (.125)
	Female	1.51	1.35	
Positive feelings for a friend	Male	1.87	1.53	-1.826 (.070)
	Female	2.16	1.28	
Overall	Male	1.65	1.44	-1.881 (.061)
	Female	1.92	1.25	

Note. *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

DISCUSSION

The present study revealed that Vietnamese adolescents from ethnic minority groups reported higher positive feelings and friendship satisfaction for a same-ethnicity best friend as well as for a cross-ethnicity best friend than did those from the ethnic majority group. This finding is consistent with the ethnic differences in friendship quality reported in the literature although such differences were quite small or not significant (Rodebaugh et al., 2012; Rude & Herda, 2010). As expected, adolescents from both groups did not show any significant differences for same-ethnicity friendship quality. However, for cross-ethnicity friendship quality, a significant difference in the dimension "positive feelings for a friend" was found between ethnic minority and majority adolescents. These results support the idea that future studies should focus more attention on exploring the quality of interethnic friendships, as measured by degree of reciprocity and closeness and suggest ways to promote interethnic friendships by encouraging equal-status contact in friendships, improving racial attitudes and reducing racial prejudice (Rude & Herda, 2010). It is assumed that interethnic friendships can provide ethnic minority adolescents greater chance to access the resources and opportunities available to the majority group. Cross-ethnicity friendships may serve as "bridging ties" that help connect disparate social networks and ensure a degree of cohesion in a society traditionally divided by ethnicity (Briggs, 2007).

For the differences in friendship quality between genders, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research (Bae, 2003; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999, 2012; Rodebaugh et al., 2012; Thomas & Daubman, 2001). Girls had higher friendship quality than boys for both same- and cross-ethnicity friendship quality. It is inferred that males and females perceive friendships differently. Females may be more attentive and sensitive to their friends, tend to use more personality characteristics to describe best friends, perceive their friendships to be closer, and emphasize the importance of trust and confidence in a friend more than do males (Bae, 2003; Rodebaugh et al., 2012). Girls also tend to be more supportive and focus on equality than do boys because they are generally two years ahead of boys in intellectual and social-cognitive functioning (De Goede et al., 2009). In addition, females are hypothesized to be more willing and tend to share more information on intimate topics with their best friend than their male counterparts. Moreover, males may engage in less self-disclosure because of homosexual adjudgment or societal gender role that stresses expressiveness for only females (Bae, 2003). Further, boys in same sex groups would be expected to present less expressive and engage in more agentic behaviors in order to secure and maintain mastery and power over the other partner, whereas girls would be expected to engage in more communal behaviors, such as striving for intimacy and connectedness (Zhou, Li, Zhang, & Zeng, 2012). It is notable that in the present study, there were significant differences between genders for same-ethnicity friendship quality but not for cross-ethnicity friendship quality. This brings us to the question of what factors contributed to these differences and highlights the need for future studies to focus on same-ethnicity friendship quality by gender across ethnic groups in Vietnam.

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