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AT THE MARGINS: A DISTINCTIVENESS APPROACH TO THE SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS OF UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

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Using distinctiveness theory, this research showed that the relative rarity of a group in a social context tended to promote members' use of that group as a basis for shared identity and social interaction. Relative to majority group members, racial minorities and women in a master of business administration cohort were more likely to make identity and friendship choices within-group. The marginalization of racial minorities in the friendship network resulted both from exclusionary pressures and from minority individuals' own preferences for same-race friends. By contrast, the marginalization of women resulted more from exclusionary pressures than from their preferences for woman friends.

People are social beings who seek to establish ties of identity and friendship with others. In organizational settings, diverse groups of people use these ties for social support and work accomplishment. But the process of identification and friendship formation may unfold differently for members of minority groups and members of majority groups.

Research on the patterning of social relations in organizations has suggested the importance of visible categories such as race and sex as bases for identification and network formation (e.g., Hughes, 1946). For example, the extent to which women are a token presence in a work setting rather than a substantial proportion of the workforce tends to influence informal interaction patterns (Kanter, 1977a). Access to informal networks is important because, to get things done in organizations, individuals must draw on both instrumental resources (such as work-related advice and sponsorship) and emotional resources (such as friendship) that informal network contacts offer (Ibarra, 1993). Lack of access to informal networks may be one reason that women and minorities, who are entering organizations in unprecedented numbers, are still underrepresented, especially in upper-management

ranks (Brass, 1985). A recent report, for example, showed that only 57 women (compared to 2,373 men) held positions in the highest ranks of *Fortune* 500 companies (Catalyst, 1996).

Given the rarity of studies that examine the networks of both women and minorities (see Ibarra [1995] for one such study), it remains unclear whether women and members of racial minority groups face similar pressures in informal networks. Research does suggest that people tend to interact with similar others, and this is particularly true for relations, such as friendship, that are more expressive than instrumental (Blau, 1977). Together with exclusionary pressures from the majority, this preference for similar, or "homophilous," others may contribute to segregation within informal networks (Brass, 1985).

The homophily proposition, however, leaves the basis of similarity unspecified. In a social context that includes men and women of different races, it is unclear whether people are more likely to identify with and select friends on the basis of sex, race, or some other nominal characteristic. We sought to clarify the patterns and consequences of such network preferences (1) by examining the extent to which membership in salient demographic groups influenced social identification and interaction patterns (cf. Ely, 1995; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992) and (2) by examining the extent to which members of underrepresented groups tended to occupy the margins of informal social networks.

Our sample consisted of individuals enrolled in

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an elite master of business administration (M.B.A.) program that functioned as one of the portals to management in corporate America (Kilduff & Day, 1994). These managers-in-training made network and social identity choices in a campus setting that imposed relatively few of the hierarchical constraints on interaction characteristic of formal organizations. We compared the identification and friendship patterns of women with those of men, compared the patterns of whites with those of racial minorities, and examined the structural marginality of those groups.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Distinctiveness and Social Identity

What determines individuals' identifications with others? Distinctiveness theory (McGuire, 1984) suggests a parsimonious answer: People in a social context tend to identify with others with whom they share characteristics that are relatively rare in that context. Thus, two African Americans in a crowd of whites will tend to notice and identify with each other because of their common race; however, when in a group of other African Americans, the same two people are unlikely to notice or identify with each other on the basis of race. According to distinctiveness theory, the attention-grabbing salience of distinctive characteristics is the basis for social identification. Distinctiveness theory extends understanding of homophily by suggesting that similarity is relative to the context.

In a test of distinctiveness theory, the salience of ethnicity was higher for minority (African American and Hispanic) grade school children than it was for those in the majority (whites). Only 1 percent of the white majority children spontaneously mentioned ethnicity in self-descriptions, compared to 17 percent of the African American and 14 percent of the Hispanic children (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). A follow-up study examined the effect of the sex composition of a group on the use of sex as a self-identifying characteristic. The likelihood of a child's mentioning his or her sex in a self-description increased as a function of the number of opposite-sex others in the child's household (McGuire, McGuire, & Winton, 1979). Similarly, in an experiment using ad hoc groups, identification based on sex was more frequent in the spontaneous reports of members of the minority sex in mixed-sex groups (Cota & Dion, 1986).

Drawing on distinctiveness theory, we predicted that members of numerically underrepresented groups, relative to those in the majority, would exhibit a stronger tendency to identify within-

group. But this prediction still left unanswered the question of which of several possible underrepresented groups any particular individual will tend to identify with most strongly. For example, when is an African American woman more likely to feel strongly African American, and when is she more likely to feel strongly female? Distinctiveness theory suggests that race will be a more salient basis for identity when a person is in a group numerically dominated by those of the same sex as the focal person but of a different race, and sex will be a more salient basis for identity when a person is in a group dominated by those of the same race but of the other sex. Distinctiveness theory suggests that the salience of a category as a basis for social identification is a function of its relative rarity in a given context.

Hypothesis 1. The relative rarity of a social category in a particular social setting will promote members' use of that social category as a basis for social identification.

In our sample, members of racial minorities were numerically rarer than women. For racial minorities, we predicted that race would be a stronger category for social identification than sex. However, for whites, the same reasoning suggested that sex, not race, would be a stronger category for social identification.

Similarly, we predicted that the salience of race relative to sex would help determine whether people more often chose same-sex or same-race friends. To the extent that an individual is in a numerical minority with respect to sex or race, then that category becomes more salient as the basis for friendship choice.

Hypothesis 2. The relative rarity of a social category in a particular social setting will tend to promote members' use of that social category as a basis for friendship formation.

Marginality

Members of underrepresented groups are likely to be less central in friendship networks than members of well-represented groups because of the former's tendency to select friends from the distinctive groups to which they belong rather than from the social network as a whole. Indeed, the general human tendency toward sex and race homophily in friendship choices may work to reduce the centrality of members of underrepresented groups (who have fewer similar others to choose from) relative to the centrality of members of majority groups (see the discussion in Ibarra [1993]).

Previous theorizing has emphasized exclusionary pressures that tend to relegate underrepresented group members to the margins of social networks. Kanter (1977b) argued that members of a group underrepresented in an organization tend to be viewed as tokens, as Os in a series of Xs. Members of the majority tend to avoid friendship with tokens because tokens are viewed through negative stereotypes, because performance failures by tokens tend to attract disproportionate attention, and because majority members exaggerate their differences from tokens in order to preserve in-group distinctiveness.

Thus, the structural marginality of members of underrepresented groups may well be overdetermined: it is due both to the friendship choices of underrepresented group members and to exclusionary pressures and biases that focus on visible demographic characteristics such as race and sex. The following hypotheses summarize the preceding discussion:

Hypothesis 3. Members of numerically underrepresented groups, relative to members of majority groups, are more likely to be structurally marginal (less central) in friendship networks.

Hypothesis 4. Homophily-based friendship ties will be negatively related to centrality for members of underrepresented groups and positively related to centrality for members of majority groups.

Hypothesis 5. Visible demographic characteristics, such as sex and race, will be negatively related to centrality for members of underrepresented groups and positively related to centrality for members of majority groups.

METHODS

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of a class of second-year M.B.A. candidates enrolled in a nationally ranked M.B.A. program. Nonresidents of the United States were excluded from the sample (and from all questionnaires) because the original research design focused on the job choice process and included only those eligible to work in the United States. The average age of the respondents was 27 years. Of the 209 students sampled, 181 (87 percent) completed mailed copies of the sociometric questionnaire. Missing data reduced the sample to 159 people, 76 percent of the original population. The final sample included 95 white men, 44 white women, 10 racial minority men, and 10 racial minority women. Nonrespondents did not differ

significantly from respondents with respect to race or sex.

Measures

The identity network. The social component of identity "is the perception of oneness" with others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 21). These perceptions of the social self are necessarily "relational and comparative" (Tajfel & Turner, 1985: 16). Thus, we measured social identity by asking individuals to look down an alphabetical list of second-year M.B.A. students and place checks next to the names of those people they considered especially similar to themselves. Individuals were free to make identity choices based on individually salient criteria, unaffected by researcher-imposed categories (cf. Kelly, 1955).

The friendship network. We measured friendship by asking respondents to look down an alphabetical list of second-year M.B.A. students and place checks next to the names of those people they considered to be personal friends.

Homophily. In measuring race and sex homophily in the identity and friendship networks, we controlled for the relative availability of different groups (cf. Ibarra, 1992) because what may appear as a tendency on the part of, for example, women to form friendships with men, may be attributable to the proportionally higher number of men in a group. The adjusted homophily index, known as the point correlation coefficient (see Gower and Legendre [1986] for a review and Krackhardt [1990] for the formula), ranged from -1 (indicative of extreme "heterophily") to $+1$ (indicative of extreme homophily).

Sex. This was coded as 1 for men and 0 for women.

Race. Using photographs from the school directory and information from publicly available student résumés detailing membership in societies such as the Black Students Association, two people independently coded respondents as either white, African American, Asian American, or Hispanic (these were standard categories used by the administration at this school). Agreement between the two coders was high (98 percent interrater agreement). Disputed cases were resolved through discussion and a search for further information in the résumé book published by the school. For the homophily and regression analyses, we dichotomized race as 0 for whites and 1 for all others.

As a check on how reliably the coding reproduced individuals' self-coding of race, our coding was compared with the official school records on 113 individuals who had voluntarily reported their

race. Only one person had been misclassified (our classification was white, but the self-classification was Hispanic). There was complete agreement between the two codings for all of those we had classified as minority group members and for whom self-report records existed (17 people). We concluded that our coding of race reproduced self-ratings at an acceptable degree of accuracy. The absence of questionnaire items concerning race or sex insured that the questionnaire itself did not trigger salient categories for reporting social identity or friendship.

Structural marginality. Those on the margins have difficulty accessing the center of a network either through their own friends (direct ties) or through friends of friends (indirect ties). To capture both direct and indirect friendship ties, we used an eigenvector measure (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 1992) that computed centrality as the summed connections to others weighted by the centrality of those others (see Bonacich [1972] for the formula). Marginality was defined as the converse of centrality: those scoring low on centrality scored high on marginality.

Because the eigenvector analysis program handled only symmetric data, for this analysis we symmetrized the friendship matrix, using the rule that if either member of a pair nominated the other, then the pair was a friendship pair. This operational definition preserved information on weak ties (cf. Granovetter, 1973) and produced the most robust indicator of centrality as measured by the ratio of the largest eigenvalue to the next highest eigen-

value. To check whether the results were affected by this definition of the friendship measure, we also symmetrized the matrix using two alternate rules: (1) replace X_{ij} and X_{ji} by the minimum of (X_{ij} or X_{ji}) and (2) replace X_{ij} and X_{ji} by the average of (X_{ij} or X_{ji}). The pattern of results remained the same.

Major. Most of the students in the sample had chosen one of two majors: finance (56 percent of the sample) or marketing (26 percent), with the remaining students (18 percent) choosing a number of other possible concentrations. Because we were interested in the core/periphery structure of the social world of the M.B.A. students, we dichotomized choice of major to differentiate those students choosing popular majors (finance or marketing, coded as 1) from those choosing unpopular majors (coded as 0). This dichotomization resulted in a significant effect for the control variable in our analyses, whereas a coding representing all possible majors had no significant effects.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The mean homophily values given in Table 1 show that, with availability controlled for, individuals tended to identify with ($\bar{x} = 0.04$, s.d. = 0.11) and form friendships with ($\bar{x} = 0.04$, s.d. = 0.12) others of the same race. Similarly, individuals tended to identify with ($\bar{x} = 0.05$, s.d. = 0.08) and form friendships with ($\bar{x} = 0.04$, s.d. = 0.13) others of the same sex. Individuals tended to establish smaller identity networks ($\bar{x} = 5.06$, s.d. = 3.58)

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations^a

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Major ^b									
2. Sex ^c			.02						
3. Race ^d			-.09	-.13					
4. Centrality	9.09	6.53	.21**	.15 ⁺	-.22***				
Race homophily									
5. Friendship network	0.04	0.12	.15 ⁺	-.00	.25***	.16*			
6. Identity network	0.04	0.11	.07	-.08	.32***	.25**	.47***		
Sex homophily									
7. Friendship network	0.04	0.13	.12	-.13	-.19*	.15 ⁺	.07	.18*	
8. Identity network	0.05	0.08	.03	-.27***	-.06	.07	.05	.17*	.34***

^a $N = 159$.

^b Finance and marketing = 1, other majors = 0.

^c Men = 1, women = 0.

^d Minorities = 1, whites = 0.

⁺ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

than friendship networks ($\bar{x} = 16.07$, $s.d. = 9.43$), although the two networks were significantly correlated ($r = .28$, $p < .001$).

Recall that Hypothesis 1 suggests that people tend to identify with those with whom they share a demographic characteristic that is relatively rare. The mean homophily values in Table 2 provide support for this hypothesis. The results for the identity network presented in the top half of Table 2 show that the tendency for minorities ($\bar{x} = 0.13$) to identify within-group was significantly stronger ($t = -2.03$, $df = 19.5$, $p < .05$) than that of whites ($\bar{x} = 0.02$). Similarly, the tendency for women ($\bar{x} = 0.09$) to identify within-group was significantly stronger ($t = 3.82$, $df = 157$, $p < .001$) than that of men ($\bar{x} = 0.04$). Further, the paired comparison t -tests in the first two rows of Table 2 show that, as predicted, whites were significantly more likely to identify with others on the basis of sex rather than race ($t = -3.99$, $df = 137$, $p < .001$), whereas minorities were significantly more likely to identify with others on the basis of race rather than sex ($t = 1.72$, $df = 18$, $p < .05$).

The patterns of friendship choices paralleled these results, as predicted by Hypothesis 2. Looking at the bottom half of Table 2, the tendency for members of minority groups ($\bar{x} = 0.16$) to make friends within-group was significantly stronger ($t = -3.28$, $df = 20.3$, $p < .01$) than that of whites ($\bar{x} = 0.02$). Similarly, the tendency for women ($\bar{x} = .06$) to make friends within-group was significantly stronger ($t = 2.11$, $df = 137$, $p < .05$) than that of men ($\bar{x} = 0.02$). The paired comparison t -tests in

rows 5 and 6 in Table 2 show that, as predicted, whites were significantly more likely to make friends with others on the basis of sex rather than race ($t = -2.62$, $df = 137$, $p < .01$), whereas minorities were significantly more likely to make friends with others on the basis of race rather than sex ($t = 4.63$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$).

The results presented in Table 3 confirm that these univariate effects of race and sex on the tendency to make in-group network choices remained significant when control variables were introduced into the analyses. The regression analysis results presented in the first column (labeled "Sex") show that the tendency to identify with and make friends with members of one's own sex was stronger for women than for men, with an individual's race and choice of major controlled for. The regression results under the second column (labeled "Race") show that minorities were more likely than whites to identify and make friends within-group, with sex and choice of major controlled for.

The third hypothesis suggests that members of underrepresented groups are likely to be structurally marginal in a friendship network. This hypothesis was supported. Men ($\bar{x} = 9.84$, $s.d. = 6.89$) were more central than women ($\bar{x} = 7.63$, $s.d. = 5.72$), and this difference was significant ($t = -2.02$, $df = 157$, $p < .05$). Similarly, whites ($\bar{x} = 9.59$, $s.d. = 6.59$) were more central than minorities ($\bar{x} = 5.59$, $s.d. = 5.47$), and this difference was also significant ($t = 2.58$, $df = 157$, $p < .01$).

The first regression model in Table 4 confirms that, with major and sex controlled for, members of

TABLE 2
Mean Homophily Values Showing Tendency to Choose Partners Similar to Self^a

Group	<i>n</i>	Type of Homophily		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
		Sex ^b	Race ^c		
Identity network					
Whites	139	0.06 (0.72)	0.02 (0.93)	−3.99***	137
Minorities	20	0.04 (0.68)	0.13 (0.36)	1.72*	18
Men	105	0.04 (0.77)	0.03 (0.85)	−0.96	103
Women	54	0.09 (0.60)	0.06 (0.85)	−1.45	52
Friendship network					
Whites	139	0.05 (0.65)	0.02 (0.90)	−2.62**	137
Minorities	20	−0.06 (0.40)	0.16 (0.27)	4.63***	18
Men	105	0.02 (0.69)	0.03 (0.86)	0.46	103
Women	54	0.06 (0.41)	0.05 (0.82)	−0.68	52

^a Unadjusted homophily values are in parentheses.

^b Men = 1, women = 0.

^c Minorities = 1, whites = 0.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 3
Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Homophily^a

Variable	Type of Homophily	
	Sex ^b	Race ^c
Identity network		
Major	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Sex	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)
Race	-0.02 (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)
Model <i>F</i>	5.56***	6.80***
<i>R</i> ²	0.10	0.11
Friendship network		
Major	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)
Sex	-0.05*** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
Race	-0.11*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.02)
Model <i>F</i>	6.34***	10.98***
<i>R</i> ²	0.11	0.18

^a *N* = 159. Values represent unstandardized coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses.

^b Men = 1, women = 0.

^c Minorities = 1, whites = 0.

* *p* < .05

** *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

racial minorities tended to be more marginal than whites (*p* < .05). This same model shows that women were only marginally less central than men (*p* < .10), with major and race controlled for.

The fourth hypothesis suggests that the tendency to make in-group (i.e., homophilous) friendship ties will be negatively related to the centrality of underrepresented group members and positively related to the centrality of majority group members. The results of subsample analyses offered support for this hypothesis. The subsample results presented in column 4 of Table 4 show that sex homophily (the tendency to choose friends of the same sex) was positively associated with centrality for men. But the separate analysis for women presented in column 5 showed no significant effect for sex homophily. In an analysis not reported in the table, the positive correlation between sex homophily and centrality for the male subsample (*r* = .26, *p* < .01) was significantly higher (*Z* = 2.57, *p* < .05) than the negative correlation for the female subsample (*r* = -.17, n.s.).

Similarly, the subsample regression results shown in the last two columns of Table 4 show that race homophily (the tendency to choose same-race friends) was positively associated with centrality for whites, but marginally negatively associated with centrality for minorities. The correlation between race homophily and centrality for the white

subsample (*r* = .46, *p* < .05) was significantly higher (*Z* = 3.92, *p* < .001) than the same correlation for minorities (*r* = -.46, *p* < .05).

Our fifth hypothesis suggests that visible demographic characteristics, such as sex and race, will be negatively related to centrality for underrepresented group members and positively related to centrality for majority group members. Model 2 in Table 4 shows that, with a marginally significant (*p* < .10) effect of sex homophily controlled for, sex had a significant effect (*p* < .05) on centrality. This pattern of results suggests that women were less central in the friendship network not so much because of their tendency to prefer woman friends, but more as a result of their exclusion on the basis of gender. Model 3 in Table 4 shows that, with a significant (*p* < .01) effect of race homophily controlled for, race had a significant (*p* < .01) effect on centrality. These results suggest that the marginality of members of racial minorities was due both to race homophily and to exclusion on the basis of race. One caveat is in order: the significance of the race variable in model 3 (and similarly, of the sex variable in model 2) indicates only that an individual's race (or sex) tends to contribute to the individual's centrality. These results do not allow us to say that race (or sex) was used as a basis for friendship exclusion by majority group members more than it was by underrepresented group members.

To examine the structural network positions of whites and minorities in greater detail, we used multidimensional scaling (MDS; Krackhardt, Blythe, & McGrath, 1994) on the unsymmetrized 159 × 159 friendship matrix. Figure 1 shows that the center of the network was occupied exclusively by whites, with a cluster of African Americans located in the upper right of the graph and other racial minority members located around the periphery. The MDS analysis depicted in Figure 2 shows just the friendship patterns among racial minorities. African Americans (represented by ovals surrounding "Bill") formed a relatively tight friendship group, with many links between members. However, the members of other racial groups depended less on cohesive links among themselves than on the network-spanning activities of particular individuals. For example, the African American "Fay" represented a link to the Hispanic community, and the Hispanic "Jen" linked the African Americans, the Hispanics, and the Asian Americans.

DISCUSSION

The results show consistent support for a distinctiveness approach to the patterning of social net-

TABLE 4
Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Centrality in the Friendship Network^a

Independent Variable	Full Sample			Subsamples			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Men	Women	Whites	Minorities
Major ^b	3.03* (1.39)	3.07* (1.40)	2.49 [†] (1.37)	1.24 (1.84)	5.39** (1.97)	1.11 (1.47)	1.45 (2.68)
Sex homophily		7.13 [†] (3.89)		12.24** (4.68)	-7.44 (6.97)		
Sex ^c	1.86 [†] (1.07)	2.46* (1.08)					
Race homophily			15.03** (4.71)			32.77*** (5.79)	-12.72 [†] (6.39)
Race ^d	-3.33* (1.54)		-5.83** (1.64)				
Model <i>F</i>	4.91**	4.44**	7.48**	4.07*	4.61**	18.50***	2.43
<i>R</i> ²	0.09	0.08	0.13	0.07	0.15	0.21	0.22

^a Values represent unstandardized coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. For the full sample, *N* = 159. For the subsamples, *n*'s are as follows: men, 105; women, 54; whites, 139; minorities, 20.

^b Finance and marketing = 1, other majors = 0.

^c Men = 1, women = 0.

^d Minorities = 1, whites = 0.

[†] *p* < .10

* *p* < .05

** *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

works. The lower the relative proportion of group members in a social context, the higher the likelihood of within-group identification and friendship. Previous homophily research (e.g., Tuma & Hallinan, 1979) has shown that people tend to interact with similar others. Our research refined this general proposition by suggesting that perceptions of similarity are based on distinctiveness within specific contexts. Further, in extending distinctiveness theory from the realm of identity relations to the realm of friendship relations, we have shown how this approach can help explain patterns of structural marginalization in organizations.

From a distinctiveness theory perspective, it is the proportions of people within a specific context (such as a work site) that are important, even if these proportions are different from those of the surrounding society. To the extent that people adjust their identities and friendships in response to the social composition of each locale, the self can be considered a work-in-progress rather than a fixed entity (cf. Kondo, 1990). We have emphasized the potential flexibility of similarity judgments and behaviors, although we were not able to test these ideas because our sample's proportions were similar to those in the surrounding population.

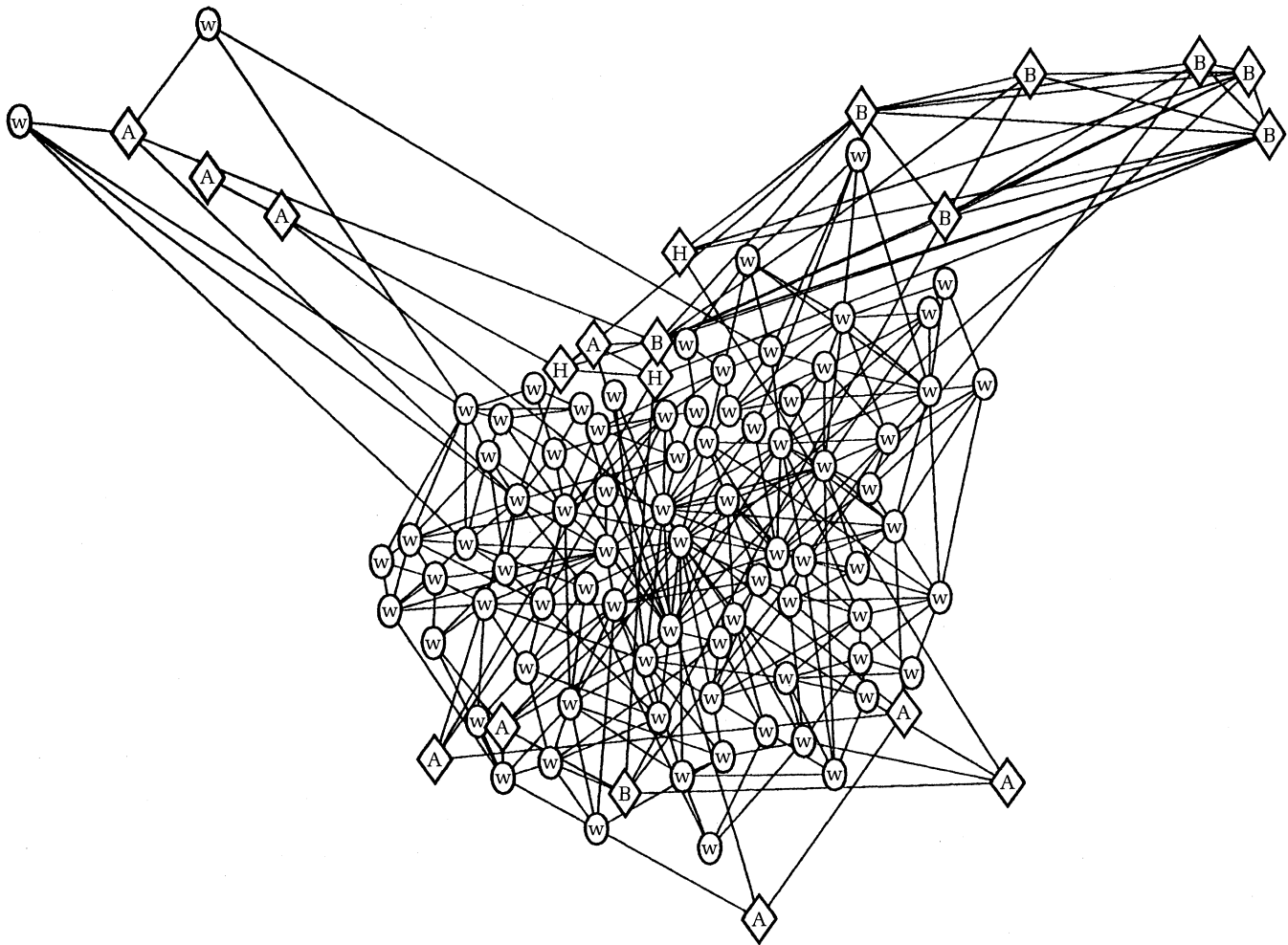
People's identity and friendship choices may be influenced not just by social context, but also by such factors as the social status of different groups in society. For example, the social status of white men in society at large may mitigate any exclusionary pressures they face when present in token numbers in a specific context (Fairhurst & Snavely,

1983); however, Segal (1962) presented contrary evidence. Although we can predict, from a distinctiveness perspective, that token white males will tend to identify and form friendships with each other, we are less sure concerning the conditions under which they will experience marginalization. Further research in settings in which men and whites are in the minority rather than the majority is needed.

Our research raises the question of the boundary conditions of distinctiveness theory. Although women constituted 34 percent of the sample and racial minorities only 13 percent, both groups tended to have relatively high rates of within-group identification and friendship. Future research, using different percentages of underrepresented group members, can help identify the point at which groups begin to lose the distinctiveness that enhances identity.

The marginalization of racial minority members in the friendship network appeared to result both from exclusionary pressures and from the preferences of the minorities for same-race friends. The marginalization of women in the friendship network appeared to result more from exclusionary pressures than from women's preferences for woman friends. Future research could help clarify whether some demographic categories, such as race, evoke stronger exclusionary pressures than other demographic categories, such as sex. Future research could also help clarify whether the marginalization of underrepresented groups is more

FIGURE 1
Friendship Relations among Individuals^{a, b, c}



^a Letters indicate race of individual: W = white, A = Asian American, B = African American, and H = Hispanic.

^b To preserve visual clarity, some whites near the center of the sociogram are not shown here.

^c The sociogram was drawn by Krackplot (Krackhardt, Blythe, & McGrath, 1994).

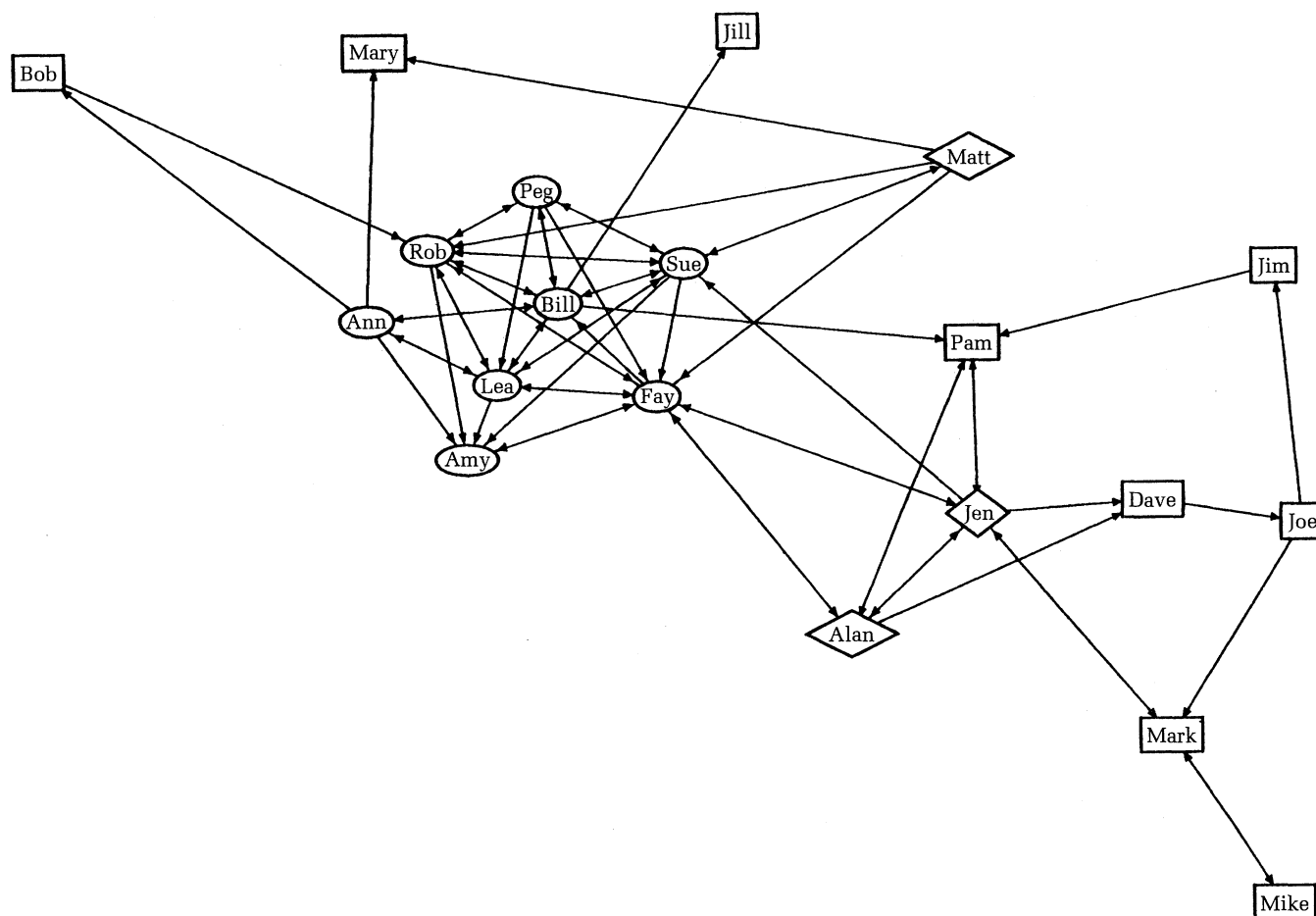
affected by the relative proportions of these groups than by the demographic categories themselves.

Although minorities were structurally marginal in terms of the whole network, they had extensive links among themselves. The African Americans, in particular, formed a tightly knit group on the margins of the friendship network. This pattern suggests further research on the possibility that marginality in informal networks may have advantages as well as disadvantages. Previous work has emphasized the extent to which marginality reduces access to important information (Burt, 1982), fuels dissatisfaction with work (Rice & Mitchell, 1973), and generates feelings of isolation (Miller, 1975). However, from a resource dependence perspective (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), centrality in a network is often gained at the expense of auton-

omy. By forming cohesive groups on the margins of social networks, minority students, such as the tightly knit African Americans, may sustain social solidarity while preserving autonomy of action. Thus, on issues of concern to racial minorities, the members of this group may have been free to act as a cohesive unit relatively unconstrained by binding ties to those in the majority.

Further research on the possible costs and benefits of marginality may contribute to a more balanced understanding of informal social dynamics. For example, preliminary work on the increasingly popular minority network groups (such as Xerox's black caucus) suggests that the positive aspects of belonging to such groups may outweigh the negative effects of symbolic separation (Friedman, 1996). Members of underrepresented groups may

FIGURE 2
Friendship Relations among Minorities^{a, b}



^a African Americans' names are enclosed in ovals; Asian Americans', in rectangles; and Hispanics', in diamonds. Names are sex-specific.

^b The sociogram was drawn by Krackplot (Krackhardt, Blythe, & McGrath, 1994).

compensate for apparent marginality in any particular organizational setting by establishing extensive cross-organizational ties (see the discussion in Thomas and Higgins [1996]).

Within the subsample of racial minorities, the Asian Americans appeared to be less cohesive as a group than the African Americans. Future research could examine identity and interaction differences among minority groups in organizations. To what extent, for example, do Asian Americans tend to subscribe to a common identity across different subgroups such as Korean American, Chinese American, Vietnamese American, and Japanese American? There is some discussion in the ethnic studies literature concerning the emergence of Asian American panethnicity (Espiritu, 1992), but other research indicates a continuing preference among some Asian Americans for social interaction based on national origin (e.g., Oh & Kilduff, 1997). This preference for interacting with people of sim-

ilar national origin may be particularly evident among those groups (such as Korean Americans) that include many recent immigrants with strong ties to a common homeland.

Practical Implications

In addition to providing a different lens through which to study patterns of structural marginalization, distinctiveness theory generates insights that may help organizational policy makers. Many organizations struggle to reconcile pressures toward demographic differentiation and integration. For example, in countries that recruit both men and women into the armed forces, policy makers must decide whether or not to follow the example of the U.S. Marines and train men and women recruits separately. Universities try to preserve diversity on campus while striving to maintain an integrative community. In practice, this means having to de-

cide when, for example, members belonging to religious or racial groups will be allowed to live separately (Denby, 1997). A separate facility for members of an underrepresented group may appear to majority group members as a self-imposed isolation that threatens to splinter the community. Our research suggests that pressures toward within-group identification and friendship tend to be stronger among members of underrepresented groups than among members of majority groups. To achieve integration in organizations, it may be necessary to first recognize heightened pressures for within-group solidarity among underrepresented group members.

Previous research has shown that the lower hierarchical rank of women and minorities in many organizations exacerbates the difficulties they encounter in integrating themselves into informal networks of influential others (e.g., Ibarra, 1992). The results we report from a sample lacking a formal hierarchy suggest that segregation in informal networks may persist even in "delayed" organizational forms. Our results provide insights into the social networks likely to emerge in educational organizations, specifically, competitive M.B.A. programs in which a relatively large cohort of would-be executives are socialized together. Similar patterns may emerge in training programs for cohorts of new recruits in work organizations. In addition, to the extent that people depend on friendships formed in M.B.A. programs for job referrals and support throughout their careers, patterns established in these programs may have long-lasting effects. Our research raises practical questions concerning whether network patterns formed in graduate or company training programs have lasting effects on interaction patterns in work settings.

Limitations

A limitation this study shares with most network research is the lack of multiple items for assessing the reliability of the identity and friendship measures. Recall that we gathered data on these variables by using a roster method that required individuals to look down an alphabetical list of fellow students and place checks next to the appropriate names. Repeating this procedure with multiple items would be a time-consuming and cognitively taxing process for respondents. Fortunately, research suggests that single-item network measures are largely reliable when the roster method is used to facilitate individuals' recall (Marsden, 1990).

Another limitation of the current study involves

the small number of minority group members in the sample. Although the statistical results were significant despite the small number, further research is needed using samples in which different minority groups are studied in diverse settings, especially work organizations. Such research could also distinguish the importance of visible social markers, such as race and sex, from that of group underrepresentation. We cannot determine from the current study whether it was the social category or the proportion (in relation to the context) that drove the results.

Conclusion

To the extent that people belong to multiple groups, they have multiple bases of similarity on which to build bridges of social identification and friendship. Simmel (1955: 125–195) discussed this issue. Our study demonstrates that the relative rarity of a group in a social context is likely to promote members' use of that group as a basis for shared identity and social interaction. All people, at some point in their organizational careers, are likely to be members of underrepresented groups, whether this involves race, gender, working in a foreign country as an expatriate, or simply joining a cross-functional team composed mainly of those with different expertise. From this perspective, organizations offer rich environments for identity development based on the shared characteristics individuals can discover. The discovery and promotion of shared bases of identification may be one of the most challenging tasks of management.

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