

Alan Peshkin (1991). The Color Of Strangers, The Color Of Friends: The Play of Ethnicity In School and Community.**Main Point:**

The main idea of this study, or rather observation was to examine the boundaries of friendship at a notable high school in Chicago. The author's main focus is on examining the patterns of mingling among the different races and ethnic groups in the high school, to look for general patterns. The purpose was not so much to make predictions, or recommend a certain model for future behavior, but to indicate certain key factors about the school—for which the author followed in yearlong field study. What he generally focuses on is the phenomena of ethnic peace—a concept which he focuses specifically on.

Central Issues and Concepts:

- The author's goes about gathering information on the students at Riverside High, a high school in Chicago, by interviewing students, teachers and parents. What he generally saw was that from the students' perspectives, there was a general sense of community and oneness at the school. That is, they feel that race has no real effect on the students there, and they go into detail about the unimportance of color at the school. In essence, color doesn't mater, one can talk to whoever he or she pleases, can date within or without their own race, and any instances of prejudice are marginal.
- The races/ethnicities noted are: Black, White, Mexican, and Filipino
- Peshkin identifies a set of moral codes for social interaction, which include:
 - 1. Don't make decisions based solely off of color
 - 2. Claim but do not assert your ethnic identity.
 - 3. "Prejudice is not cool." Keep it to yourself, and this includes name-calling or disrespect for others
 - 4. Social interactions can be within one's ethnic group, across ethnic groups, or both. No single style prevails
 - 5. Be yourself, without pretense, particularly about being better than someone else.
 - 6. Students are more like than unlike each other. Differences exist, but they matter less than similarities.
- What Peshkin posits however, is that this "ethnic peace" does not come without a few caveats and special considerations, nor is the school a social utopia: he points out that blacks are the most abused race there, and that the hierarchy falls as follows: newcomers, Mexicans, Filipinos, and Whites. He points out that there seems to be a correlation between the antipathy for a given group and the ease of articulating images for that group. Further, he points out that this antipathy intensifies over the issue of interracial dating in some cases more than others (Black parents in particular), and that this resistance from parents is usually based off of some experience that their children will never have.

- Peshkin points to the ambiguity of social relations at Riverside High, and pointed to the fact there really were no extremes, and that indeed, there are no blanket feelings among the different races about each other. Further he points out that examining the social relations will lead to a frustrating result of paradoxes, in which people feel strongly about race relations in one instance, but are opposed in another direction the next.
- Not to discredit the progress RHS has made, Peshkin offers some demographic information to help explain the race dynamics there.

Two Key Quotes

“The disposition of students to date and marry persons outside of their ethnic group is eventually accepted by their parents whose early reactions range from reluctance to enraged rejection. By their decisions, students help resocialize their parents and other adults...”

“There are constraints to mingling and they take several forms, none of them novel: peers, parents, and teachers name-call, stereotype, and inculcate prejudice. These practices, familiar to all students, exist as a minor subtheme to the major theme of mingling, a ranking that does not trivialize their presence as an abiding fact of life at RHS.”

Two Questions:

The article pointed out that in social interactions, that people who are most like you are least receptive, and people least like you are most receptive; why is this?

Peshkin suggests that some mingling arrangements are seasonal (i.e. during basketball season, the players see each other so much they get closer). Is this a plausible argument? Or is this simply forced interaction that really is of no consequence to true race relations? Does it really provide the sense of being in the same boat?