Solace in Solidarity: Ingroup affiliation benefits well-being and achievement for People with Disabilities

People often affiliate with others who share their circumstances. Such affiliation can offer a social buffer against stigmatization and other negative experiences. In this research, we examined whether affiliating with others who share one's physical disability uniquely benefits well-being and achievement. In Study 1, blind adults who had a greater proportion of blind friends (relative to non-blind friends) reported being less lonely and more satisfied with themselves and their lives. Having more blind friends was also associated with more professional achievement: a higher likelihood of employment, higher earnings and a lower likelihood of poverty. We suggest these effects occur partly because friendships centered around a social identity aid coping with threatening experiences involving that identity. Consistent with this, blind participants were more likely to persist on a challenging, stereotype-relevant math task if they had reflected on their friendship with another blind person right before the task than if they had either reflected on their friendship with someone who was not blind or a non-social topic (Study 2). In Study 3 we replicated this effect and found that reflecting on an ingroup friendship also increased persistence on a challenging verbal task. The results suggest that affiliation with others who share one's minority group membership can help one to overcome psychological impediments to motivation, such as those arising from stigmatization.