**Title**: Examining the Role of Race and Ethnicity on Social Goal Setting for Neurodiverse Adolescents

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**Introduction**: Adolescence is a crucial period for developing self-determination, as it involves the ability to set and achieve goals, which is key to a successful transition into adulthood (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hui & Tsang, 2012). This developmental process is further complicated by the intersection of race and social connections, as adolescents’ racial identities significantly influence how they build and sustain social relationships (Cheon et al., 2020; De Lise et al., 2023). While a strong racial identity can promote positive social connections, existing literature highlights that adolescents of color often face systemic challenges that can lead to poorer mental health outcomes compared to their White peers (Zilanawala et al., 2019; Benner et al., 2018). One of the few evidence-based social skills programs, PEERS® for Adolescents, incorporates social goal setting to assist participants in improving their social skills and building meaningful relationships (Laugeson et al., 2009). However, it is crucial to explore how racial backgrounds impact social goal setting and achievement to ensure that social skills programs are effective and culturally responsive. The current study examined (1) whether adolescent people of color (POC) identify different types of social goals in comparison to White participants, and (2) how race and ethnicity impact participants’ satisfaction with their goal attainment throughout the PEERS® program.

**Method**: Participants included 91 adolescents (58.2% male; *Mage*=13.9, *SD*=1.8; 63.7% autistic) enrolled in the UCLA PEERS® for Adolescents program. Per caregiver-report, 45.1% of adolescents were POC, while 54.9% were White. Adolescents self-identified 1-3 personal social goals during week 1 of PEERS®, which were coded into six different goal types: conversational skills, making friends, deepening friendships, conflict resolution, social confidence/anxiety, or other. Adolescents assessed their satisfaction with each goal when they began PEERS® (T1) using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied.” Participants subsequently rated their satisfaction with their goal attainment 8 weeks into the program (T2) and once more at 16 weeks, upon completion of the program (T3).

**Results**: A chi-square test showed that there was no significant relationship between race and ethnicity and goal type, χ²(5)=2.12, *p*=.832, suggesting that POC and White participants identified similar kinds of social goals. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant improvements in goal satisfaction over time, *F*(1.62,315.74)=277.14, *p*<.001. However, there was a non-significant interaction between racial group and time, *F*(1.61,312.7)=1.87, *p*=.164, suggesting that adolescents of color and White adolescents benefited similarly.

**Discussion:** Overall, these findings further support the efficacy of the PEERS® program, as goal identification and satisfaction with goal attainment were statistically equivalent across racial groups. As people of color are not a monolith, future research should explore more nuanced cultural and socioeconomic factors on social goal setting to ensure programs are inclusive and equitable for all adolescents.

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