

# Study reveals surprisingly high tolerance for racism

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White people do not get as upset when confronted with racial prejudice as they think they will, a study by researchers at Yale University, York University, and the University of British Columbia suggests. This indifference helps explain why racism persists even as the United States prepares to celebrate the inauguration of Barack Obama, researchers say.

Non-black participants who experienced a racial slur against a black person did not get as upset or react against the racist remark as they predicted they would, according to a study published in the Jan. 9 issue of the journal *Science*. This acquiescence in the face of racism leads to its perpetuation, because numerous studies have shown that people confronted after making slurs are much less likely to repeat the behavior in public or in private, said John Dovidio, Yale psychologist and a co-author of the study.

"We have an unconscious bias that affects us in significant ways," Dovidio said.

The researchers studied 120 non-black participants who volunteered for the experiment and either directly experienced a racial incident or had the incident described to them. The first group watched a black man, posing as a fellow participant, slightly bump a white confederate also posing as a participant. After the black man left the room, the white confederate either said nothing, or "I hate it when black people do that," or said, "clumsy n\_\_\_\_\_." Other groups did not directly experience the event but either read about it or watched it on videotape and were asked

to predict their responses to the events.

The subjects who didn't experience the event were much more likely to report that they were upset at the white worker's slurs and to say they would not work with such a person. Those who actually experienced the event were less distressed and were as willing to work with the person who made racist comments as someone who did not.

Dovidio argues that participants who witness racism were much less willing to pay the emotional cost of confronting a racist than they thought they would be. That in turn means the racist pays less of a cost in social ostracism by expressing bias, he said.

Source: Yale University

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