

You may not be able to say how you feel about your race

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A new study from the School of Science at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis looks at how much African Americans and whites favor or prefer their own racial group over the other, how much they identify with their own racial group, and how positively they feel about themselves.

The work, by Leslie Ashburn-Nardo, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology in the School of Science at IUPUI, looked at both consciously controllable sentiments and gut feelings about social stigma and found a significant difference in both groups between what people say they feel and their less controllable "gut feelings."

"The Importance of Implicit and Explicit Measures for Understanding Social Stigma" appears in the current (September 2010) issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*.

Many studies of stigma have been conducted since the end of World War II but until recently they have looked primarily at explicit (recently learned) attitudes and did not include implicit measures of deep seated feelings acquired earlier in life and not consciously accessible.

To explain the difference between explicit and implicit measures, Ashburn-Nardo uses an illustration from everyday life. "You may be asked how you feel and you respond, "I'm okay," yet your body is showing signs of distress (e.g., high blood pressure or fast pulse rate). You're not necessarily lying when you say 'I'm okay.' It's more likely that

you just may not realize how stress is affecting you. Explicit measures are much like your 'I'm okay' response to how you are whereas implicit measures are like the blood pressure cuff or stethoscope findings. It's important that we don't rely exclusively on the asking and neglect the less easy to access information if we hope to increase our understanding of stigma and be in a position to help people."

In her study Ashburn-Nardo found that African Americans consciously reported that they favored their own race, identified with their own race and felt very good about themselves at a rate much higher than whites. However when tested on non-conscious feelings, that was not the case. African Americans favored their race less and less strongly identified with their own race than whites.

Both African Americans and whites had positive gut feelings about themselves.

"This study provides a greater understanding of how stigma affects people in ways in which they are unwilling or unable to report explicitly. For over half a century social psychologists have asked members of stigmatized groups how they feel about themselves and about the group to which they belong. But they have only been learning part of the story – the perceptions individuals realize they have, not the ones they may have internalized over a long period of time. That is, people might suffer more from experiences with prejudice than they are able to report via questionnaires," said Ashburn-Nardo.

Provided by Indiana University School of Medicine

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