

Racial misidentification causes distress

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University of Iowa sociologists suggest routine racial misidentification causes high levels of emotional distress and might lead to suicide.

Sociology Professors Lisa Troyer and Mary Campbell analyzed data collected between 1994 and 2002 for the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

They found that more than a third of the American Indian youth in the nationally representative sample were mislabeled by an observer as members of another racial group, while less than 5 percent of white, black and Asian participants in the study were identified incorrectly.

Among the American Indians in the study who were misidentified, 13 percent reported thinking about suicide, compared with only 6 percent of those who were identified correctly. Three percent of the misidentified young people had attempted suicide, while 1 percent who were identified correctly had done so.

This study is said to be the first to document empirical evidence of the stress associated with not being recognized as a member of the racial group with which one identifies.

Troyer and Campbell presented their study this week in Montreal, during the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

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