

Awareness of racism affects how children do socially and academically

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Most children actively notice and think about race. A new study has found that children develop an awareness about racial stereotypes early, and that those biases can be damaging.

The study, by researchers at Rush University and Yale University, appears in the November/December 2009 issue of the journal [Child Development](#).

This study looked at more than 120 elementary school [children](#) from an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse area of the United States. Children were asked questions to determine their ability to understand another person's stereotypical beliefs as well as their own comprehension of broadly held stereotypes. They were also asked about their own experiences with discrimination. In addition, the children's parents completed questionnaires asking about their parenting.

Between ages 5 and 11, the researchers found, children become aware that many people believe stereotypes, including stereotypes about academic ability (for example, how intelligent certain racial and ethnic groups are). When children become aware of these types of bias about their own racial or ethnic group, it can affect how they respond to everyday situations, ranging from interacting with others to taking tests. For example, African American and Latino youths who were aware of broadly held stereotypes about their groups performed poorly on a standardized test, confirming the negative [stereotype](#) in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"These results have important implications for social policy," according to Clark McKown, assistant professor of pediatrics and behavioral sciences at Rush University Medical Center, who led the study.

"Specifically, they suggest the need for [educational policies](#) and comprehensive programs to reduce stereotypes and their consequences early in children's school careers."

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 6, Developmental Antecedents and Social and Academic Consequences of Stereotype-Consciousness in Middle Childhood by McKown, C (Rush University Medical Center), and Strambler, MJ (Yale University Medical Center).

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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