

# Ethnic pride may boost African-American teens' mental health

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Most adolescents who belong to an ethnic minority group wrestle not only with their self-esteem (like most teens), but also with identity issues unique to their ethnic group, such as dealing with social stigma. A new study tells us that young people's ethnic pride may affect their mental health.

The study, carried out by researchers at Northwestern University, Loyola University Chicago, and Walden University, appears in the November/December 2009 issue of the journal [Child Development](#).

The researchers studied more than 250 African American youths from urban, low-income families in an effort to assess the unique effects of racial identity and self esteem on [mental health](#). They found that when young people's feelings of ethnic pride rose between 7th and 8th grades, their mental health also improved over that period, regardless of their self-esteem. Even for those with low self-esteem, the investigators found, a sense of pride in their ethnic group served as a buffer to some mental health problems. Racial identity was a stronger buffer against symptoms of depression for boys than for girls.

"These findings imply that ethnic pride is important to African American adolescents' mental health for other reasons than it simply makes them feel better about themselves as individuals," according to Jelani Mandara, associate professor of human development and social policy at Northwestern University, who was the study's lead author. "The findings also imply that ethnic pride may be as important as self-esteem

to the mental health of African American [adolescents](#). Parents, schools, and therapists should expose young people to material and environments that help foster a sense of ethnic pride."

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 6, The Effects of Changes in Racial Identity and Self-Esteem on Changes in African American Adolescents' Mental Health by Mandara, J (Northwestern University), Gaylord-Harden, NK, and Richards, MH (Loyola University Chicago), and Ragsdale, BL (Walden University).

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

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