Implicit Race Attitudes in African-American and Hispanic Children

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On a measure of relative implicit preference for Black over White, adult African-Americans do not exhibit in-group positive attitudes shown by White-Americans. This lack of an in-group positive attitude is presumed to reveal an internalization of the negative attitude toward African-Americans in American society. Children provide an opportunity to test how early such attitudes are learned. If they show strong implicit in-group favoritism, it will suggest that the attitude observed in adults emerges relatively late in development. If they mimic the lack of in-group favoritism observed in large samples of African-American adults, it will suggest this pattern emerges relatively early.

Forty-six African-American and Hispanic-American 12- and 13-year-olds were tested on a modified Black/White IAT measuring race attitude and identity. African-American children showed no bias in their implicit Black-White preference, even though they explicitly reported strong Black preference, mimicking the data of African-American adults. By contrast, Hispanic children showed an implicit preference for White over Black, but explicitly reported neutrality. To the extent that Hispanic children implicitly identified more with White than Black, the more they showed an anti-Black attitude.

These data show that the lack of a strong and positive implicit in-group attitude among African-Americans is present earlier in development than previously observed. Furthermore, these data reveal marked differences in the development of implicit attitudes in Hispanic children compared with African-American children, both in implicit attitudes and in the degree of cognitive-affective balance between identity and attitude. Implications for theories concerning the development of implicit and explicit attitudes are discussed.