



HD Racism is not hard-wired, researchers find.  
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LP WASHINGTON, Dec 10 (Reuters) - Racism is not hard-wired into the brain and a little coalition-building can help people lose their racist tendencies, researchers said on Monday.

They said their findings offer hope for ending conflicts based on an "us and them" mentality as it relates to race.

TD A simple, four-minute experiment could make people forget their notions of race, at least for a little while, Leda **Cosmides**, John Tooby, and Robert Kurzban of the Center for Evolutionary Psychology at the University of California Santa Barbara reported.

"Social psychologists had found that it seemed no matter what you did, people would categorize others by their race," **Cosmides** said in a telephone interview.

"They were trying really hard to get people not to categorize people by race and they weren't having any luck and they were getting really depressed by this."

But **Cosmides** said while it makes sense that people should have evolved to notice sex and age, there was no reason to think recognizing race was important to survival. Genetic researchers say "race" does not show up in the genes and humans are highly interbred.

"It didn't make sense to us that the mind would be designed to automatically encode race," **Cosmides** said.

Kurzban said the group set up an experiment in which people were asked to watch two racially integrated basketball teams have a conversation on a computer screen.

"The participants' task was to remember who said what," Kurzban said. They did not know why.

But Kurzban said in most cases, if people get two strangers mixed up, they are more likely to mix up a black person with another black person, white with white and so on.

"What the experiment was designed to do is show that ... when members of two races are on both teams, the mistakes are no longer as (extensive)," Kurzban said.

Instead, the volunteers mixed up remarks based on which team a person was on, the researchers reported in Tuesday's issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"What is most striking about these results is just how easy it was to diminish the importance of race by manipulating coalition," they wrote in their report.

"What people are really good at is detecting patterns of alliance," Kurzban said.

**Cosmides** said in racially segregated societies, this often boils down to skin color.

"Let's face it - we don't live in an integrated society," she said.

People will always assign someone to a race, but it is possible to make it signify little more than noticing someone's hair color, she said.

A similar pattern has been seen since the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks, she said - pointing to news reports from New York that said police were getting better cooperation.

"It wasn't like white police officers against black teenagers any more," she said. "It was like, 'We are both Americans'."

But there was a downside.

"People immediately began to pick up cues associated with being Middle Eastern - such as headgear," **Cosmides** said.

"It had a positive side for white-black relations in New York but a negative side if you are Middle Eastern."

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