

DuluthNewsTribune.com

Posted on Mon, Sep. 11, 2006

## Survey indicates white people have sense of racial identity

Associated Press

**MINNEAPOLIS** - A majority of white Americans believe their race is an important part of their identity, and many believe being white gives them an advantage over minorities, according to a national telephone survey by the University of Minnesota.

Researchers conducted the study to test preconceived notions that whites have a lack of racial awareness. Instead, 74 percent of white Americans interviewed said their racial identity was important.

More than 80 percent said access to schools and social connections helped explain "white advantage" over racial minorities; 62 percent said prejudice and discrimination against minorities also explained those advantages.

"The assumption has been that for many white Americans, race is something other people have," said Doug Hartmann, a sociology professor at the University of Minnesota and co-author of the study released last week. "Experts in the field and diversity trainers assumed that whites overlooked their own race."

The study was part of a growing field of academic research called "Critical Whiteness Studies," that looks at attitudes and beliefs of white people in the context of race relations.

The field is often controversial. Critics say much of the work has focused too much on white people in the context of oppressing of minorities.

Mitch Pearlstein, president of the Center of the American Experiment, a conservative think tank in Minneapolis, said: "The perspective is almost always built on the assumption this is inherently a racist society, that white people have loads and loads of privileges, and that virtually everything in American society is skewed against people of color. It discounts how complicated race is."

Hartmann said he is "neither pro-Whiteness studies or anti-Whiteness studies." The survey was simply an attempt to test preconceptions about race.

In 2003, Hartmann and the study's co-authors commissioned a telephone survey that reached 2,000 people - 1,000 white, 500 black, 400 Hispanic and 100 other members of racial minorities.

The study showed Caucasians were aware of their race and the advantages it brings to them, said Hartmann. But it also found that both Caucasians and racial minorities strongly valued individualistic ideals such as freedom and hard work.

John Lund, chief executive of the Sons of Norway, said ethnic identity, not skin color, shapes many white Americans.

"I don't think of myself as white," said Lund, whose Minneapolis-based organization works to promote and preserve Norwegian heritage. "I think of myself as an American of Norwegian ancestry. ... I don't know if considering ourselves by color really promotes anything."

*Information from: Star Tribune, <http://www.startribune.com>*