



FACULTY & RESEARCH

Article | Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience | April 2013

An fMRI Investigation of Racial Paralysis

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Abstract

We explore the existence and underlying neural mechanism of a new norm endorsed by both black and white Americans for managing interracial interactions: "racial paralysis," the tendency to opt out of decisions involving members of different races. We show that people are more willing to make choices—Who is more intelligent? Who is more polite?—between two white individuals (same-race decisions) than between a white and a black individual (cross-race decisions), a tendency that was enhanced when judgments involved traits related to black stereotypes. We use fMRI to examine the mechanisms underlying racial paralysis, revealing greater recruitment of brain regions implicated in socially appropriate behavior (VMPFC), conflict detection (ACC), deliberative processing (DLPFC), and inhibition (VLPFC). We discuss the impact of racial paralysis on the quality of interracial relations.

Keywords: [Behavior](#); [Race](#); [Judgments](#); [Decision Choices and Conditions](#); [Personal Characteristics](#); [Recruitment](#); [Conflict and Resolution](#); [United States](#);

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Citation:

Norton, Michael I., Malia F. Mason, Joseph A. Vandello, Andrew Biga, and Rebecca Dyer. "[An fMRI Investigation of Racial Paralysis](#)." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8, no. 4 (April 2013): 387–393.

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