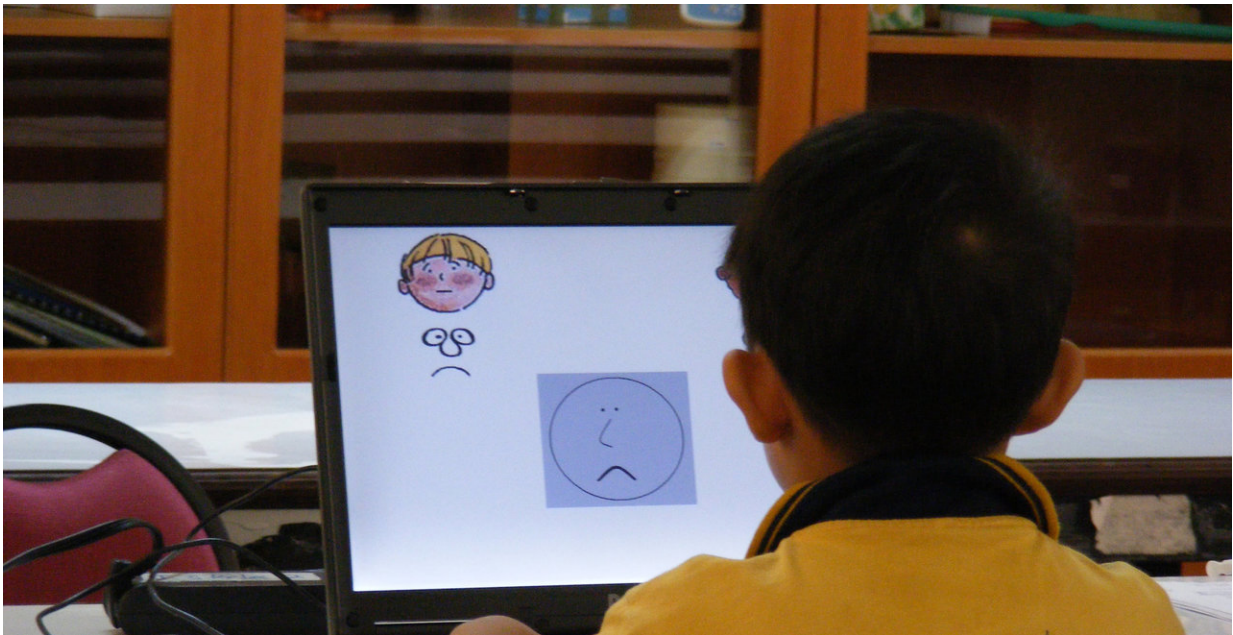


Minority children develop implicit racial bias in early childhood

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New research from York University suggests that minority children as young as six years old show an implicit pro-White racial bias when exposed to images of both White and Black children. But how ingrained these biases become and whether they persist into late childhood and adulthood might depend on their social environment. Credit: York University

New research from York University suggests that minority children as young as six years old show an implicit pro-White racial bias when exposed to images of both White and Black children. But how ingrained

these biases become and whether they persist into late childhood and adulthood might depend on their social environment.

Faculty of Health Professor Jennifer Steele conducted two studies with graduate student Meghan George and her former Ph.D. student Amanda Williams, now at the School of Education, University of Bristol. They were interested in looking at implicit racial [bias](#) in traditionally understudied populations. The goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of [children](#)'s automatic racial attitudes.

In both studies children were asked to complete a child-friendly Implicit Association Test (IAT) which measures automatic associations that children may have toward different races. In this computer task, children were asked to pair pictures of people with positive or negative images as quickly as possible.

The first study was conducted in the large urban city of Toronto, Canada and included 162 South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, as well as Black minority children; children were divided into younger and older age groups with average ages of seven and nine respectively. Children were recruited from racially diverse areas with a large Black population within their schools and local community.

"We found that non-Black minority children living in a racially diverse part of Toronto showed an implicit pro-White bias from six years of age," says Steele. "However, what was interesting was that older children, who were on average nine years of age, showed less pro-White bias than younger children. This suggests to us that [racial biases](#) might not be as stable across development as researchers first thought. In this case, there could be factors in their racially diverse environment that are leading older children to show less bias, such as cross-race friends, mentors, positive Black role models, or a more Afrocentric curriculum that are helping to reinforce positive associations with this racial group."

In contrast, the second study was conducted in the urban city of Bandar Seri Begawan, in the small Southeast Asian country of Brunei Darussalam and included Malay majority and Chinese [minority children](#) and adults. These children had limited opportunities for direct contact with members of either White or Black outgroups in both their immediate environment, as well as the larger Southeast Asian cultural context of Brunei.

In this study, younger children, [older children](#), and adults were quicker to pair positive pictures with White faces and negative pictures with Black faces on the IAT. However, the magnitude of bias was greater for adults.

Steele believes that this could be because they have had more time and opportunity than children to develop positive associations with people from White racial outgroups, due to their depiction and overrepresentation in high status roles in the news and online.

More research will be needed to determine what exactly led to these age differences in implicit [racial bias](#). However, the results point to the role that the environment can play in shaping implicit racial attitudes. These results, combined with other research, indicate the importance of giving children the opportunity to connect with people from diverse groups early in life in order to challenge racial biases, says Steele.

"It is important for children to be exposed to diversity in their lives and for them to learn to appreciate this diversity. That can include reading stories with main characters from different backgrounds when people live in more racially homogeneous environments, or through positive experiences in multicultural cities," says Steele. "In our educational system, it is important that our materials reflect our increasingly diverse communities, and that children have the opportunity to learn about successful, contributing members of society from all walks of life. This

can help to challenge racial biases and can help to contribute to a more equitable society for everyone."

The study is published in *Developmental Science*.

More information: Jennifer R. Steele et al. A cross-cultural investigation of children's implicit attitudes toward White and Black racial outgroups, *Developmental Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/desc.12673](https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12673)

Provided by York University

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