

Prospective teachers misperceive Black children as angry

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Prospective teachers appear more likely to misperceive Black children as angry than white children, which may undermine the education of Black youth, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

While previous research has documented this effect in adults, this is the first study to show how anger bias based on [race](#) may extend to teachers and Black elementary and middle-school [children](#), said lead researcher Amy G. Halberstadt, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at North Carolina State University. The study was published online in the APA journal *Emotion*.

"This anger bias can have huge consequences by increasing Black children's experience of not being 'seen' or understood by their teachers and then feeling like school is not for them," she said. "It might also lead to Black children being disciplined unfairly and suspended more often from school, which can have long-term ramifications."

In the study, 178 prospective teachers from education programs at three Southeastern universities viewed short video clips of 72 children ages 9 to 13 years old. The children's faces expressed one of six basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise or disgust. The clips were evenly divided among boys or girls and Black children or [white children](#). The sample was not large enough to determine whether the race or ethnicity of the teachers made a difference in how they perceived the children.

The prospective teachers were somewhat accurate at detecting the children's emotions, but they also made some mistakes that revealed patterns. Boys of both races were misperceived as angry more often than Black or white girls. Black boys and girls also were misperceived as angry at higher rates than white children, with Black boys eliciting the most anger bias.

Anger bias against Black children can have many negative consequences. While controlling for other factors, previous research has found that Black children are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than white children. Black children's negative experiences at school also could contribute to the disparate achievement gap between

Black and white youth that has been documented across the United States, Halberstadt said.

Those in the study also completed questionnaires relating to their implicit and explicit racial bias, but their scores on those tests didn't affect the findings relating to Black children. However, those who displayed greater racial [bias](#) were less likely to misperceive white children as angry.

"Even when people are motivated to be anti-racist, we need to know the specific pathways by which racism travels, and that can include false assumptions that Black people are angry or threatening," Halberstadt said. "Those common racist misperceptions can extend from school into adulthood and potentially have fatal consequences, such as when [police officers](#) kill unarmed Black people on the street or in their own homes."

Previous research with adults in the United States has found that [anger](#) is perceived more quickly than happiness in Black faces, while the opposite effect was found for white faces. Anger also is perceived more quickly and for a longer time in young Black men's faces than young white men's faces.

"Over the last few weeks, many people are waking up to the pervasive extent of systemic racism in American culture, not just in police practices but in our health, banking and education systems," Halberstadt said. "Learning more about how these problems become embedded in our thought processes is an important first step."

Participants in the study were predominantly female (89%) and white (70%), mirroring the gender and race of most public-school teachers across the country. The study didn't include enough people of color from any single race or ethnicity (Hispanic 9%, Asian 8%, Black 6%, Biracial 5%, Native American 1%, and Middle Eastern 1%) to analyze separate

findings based on the race or ethnicity of the participants.

More information: Amy G. Halberstadt et al, Racialized emotion recognition accuracy and anger bias of children's faces., *Emotion* (2020).
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