

## SCIENCE

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### Diversity in Grade School Appears to Help Reduce Bias

White children in first and fourth grades who live in areas and attend schools with little ethnic diversity are more likely to blame a black child than a white child when presented with ambiguous information involving potential misbehavior, according to a study released last week that explores the origins of bias.

Researchers showed 138 white children attending a rural Mid-Atlantic school a number of pictures and then asked them what they thought was happening. One set of pictures, for example, showed a child sitting on the ground with a pained expression, while another child stood behind a swing -- suggesting that the child on the ground might have been pushed. Another interpretation would be that the child on the ground had fallen off.

In every case, the pictures showed children of different races. In some, a white child stood behind the swing and a black child was on the ground. In other pictures, a black child was the potential perpetrator, and the white child the potential victim.

While 71 percent of the 7- and 10-year-old children said the pictures showed evidence of wrongdoing when the child behind the swing was black, only 60 percent guessed that the white child had pushed the black child when the roles were reversed, University of Maryland researchers Heidi McGlothlin and Melanie Killen reported last week in the journal *Child Development*.

The paper noted that white children at a more diverse school had not shown such a bias in a previous experiment, suggesting that greater social contact among children of different ethnicities may prevent or reduce bias among youngsters. -- **Shankar Vedantam**