

## When an “Educated” Black Man Becomes Lighter in the Mind’s Eye: Evidence for a Skin Tone Memory Bias



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*Skin tone memory bias* (Ben-Zeev, Dennehy, Goodrich, Kolarik, & Geisler, *in press*) is the tendency to falsely remember a Black person, who defies social stereotypes, as having a lighter complexion. This novel finding – an educated Black male becomes lighter in the mind’s eye – implies that the memory system is complicit in the reconstructive perception of intellectually successful Black individuals as “Whiter” or even as “an exception to their race”; thus perpetuating cultural racial beliefs.

The fact that Black individuals with lighter versus darker skin tone tend to be perceived more favorably and less stereotypically, even within communities of color, has already been established (i.e., *a skin tone memory bias*, see Maddox, 2004). Thus, a skin tone memory bias creates a pernicious catch-22 between stereotyping based on skin tone and a distortion in memory for this allegedly diagnostic racial marker, in the direction of preserving status quo beliefs.

My team and I chose to pursue this line of research because we are passionate about understanding how memory for allegedly diagnostic racial features is affected by, and in turn affects, stereotypes (a bi-directional link) and ultimately how memory distortions of stereotypic phenotypic features leads to prejudice and discrimination.