

TITLE: Stereotypical Black Faces are Most Representative of the Category 'Black'

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Abstract

Stereotypical (e.g., large lips, broad nose), versus non-stereotypical, Black faces are more closely linked with Black stereotypes. Past research has suggested that participants are more likely to associate faces exhibiting strong stereotypical versus non-stereotypical features with a negative African American stereotype (i.e., has failed several classes, had been involved in fights on the basketball court). The typicality effect suggests that more typical, versus atypical, category members are endorsed as a category member more quickly (e.g., category: bird; items: Robin versus Ostrich; Rosch, 1973; Armstrong, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1983). In this study, we found that perceptual cues, such as facial features associated with the Black race, are closely linked to stereotypes and inform categorization decisions. We suggest that stereotypical Black faces more readily activate and are associated with Black stereotypes because they are considered more prototypical of the category 'Black'.

Participants categorized a series of Black and White faces as either 'Black' or 'White' as quickly and accurately as possible via key-press. Black faces were pre-rated for stereotypicality and all faces were rated for attractiveness. Only faces of average attractiveness were included in the study. Consistent with the typicality effect, we expected that prototypical faces should be categorized more quickly than faces that are less prototypical.

Results revealed that participants accurately categorized stereotypical Black faces significantly faster ($M = 580$ ms) than non-stereotypical Black faces ($M = 723$ ms), [$t(22) = 4.947$], $p < .01$.

These findings support our suggestion that stereotypical Black faces are more prototypical than non-stereotypical Black faces. Current follow-up studies suggest that prototypicality of faces underpin the high rate of Black man misidentifications that plague the criminal justice system.