

Study finds 'owning' a darker skin can positively impact racial bias

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Scientists from Royal Holloway University have found that when white Caucasians are under the illusion that they have a dark skin, their racial bias changes in a positive way.

In the study that was funded by the European Research Council and published today in *Cognition*, the team used the tried and tested [Rubber Hand](#) Illusion, where participants are asked to look at a fake hand being touched, while at the same time, the experimenter touches the participants' own hand which is hidden out of view.

The combination of seeing the touch on the rubber hand and feeling touch on your hand, creates the illusion that the fake hand is now part of your body and has replaced your own hand.

The team was keen to take this method one step further by testing whether people can experience a hand of a different skin colour and whether this would change possible [racial biases](#).

Using Caucasian participants, the scientists tested their [implicit attitudes](#) towards people with dark skin before using a dark-skinned rubber hand to make them feel as if this was their own hand. They then tested their [racial attitudes](#) again after the experiment.

The results found that the more intense the participants' illusion of owning the dark-skinned rubber hand, the more positive their racial attitudes became.

"This study has important implications for changing and reducing negative racial attitudes," said researcher Lara Maister from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway. "It comes down to a perceived similarity between white and dark skin. The illusion creates an overlap, which in turn helps to reduce [negative attitudes](#) because participants see less difference between themselves and those with dark skin."

Dr Manos Tsakiris, who led the research, said: "Often formed at an early age, negative racial attitudes are thought to remain relatively stable throughout adulthood. Our results show that we can positively alter them by understanding how the brain is processing sensory information from our bodies and that of others. It will be interesting to replicate the effect with different social groups and see if we can generalise these findings outside of a laboratory setting."

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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