

Anti-racism campaigns increase bias: study

Message of tolerance proves more effective

BY DEREK ABMA, POSTMEDIA NEWS JULY 9, 2011

Touting the benefits of tolerance, as opposed to trying to shame people for their prejudices, can be more effective in reducing racism, suggests a new study from researchers at the University of Toronto.

Aggressive anti-racism campaigns might actually increase bias toward other groups, while messages emphasizing the personal stake one has in a more open-minded society can be most effective, says the paper, which will appear in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science*.

In one experiment, non-black subjects were divided into three groups. Two of the groups read brochures designed to prevent prejudice.

The first brochure was forthright in telling readers not to be prejudiced, urging readers to conform to social norms and legal obligations. It said things such as "being Canadian means having an anti-prejudiced attitude," and that laws and policies in schools and workplaces can result in serious consequences for those who are seen as racist.

The second group read material that said not being prejudiced is good for them personally for reasons such as the opportunity to interact with and learn from people of other cultures. That brochure emphasized personal choice when it comes to such matters.

The third group read a value-neutral definition of prejudice.

Subsequent testing found those who read the authoritative antiprejudice message demonstrated higher levels of prejudice against black people in comparison to those who did not read either brochure.

The group given the brochure explaining the benefits of not being prejudiced were the least discriminatory of the groups assessed.

"Controlling prejudice reduction practices are tempting because they are quick and easy to implement," Lisa Legault, a researcher with the University of Toronto's psychology department, said in a statement. "They tell people how they should think and behave, and stress the negative consequences of failing to think and behave in desirable ways.

"But people need to feel that they are freely choosing to be non-prejudiced rather than having it forced upon them."