

# Telling people not to be racist fails, study finds

## Pressure tactics less successful than lauding personal benefits

BY DEREK ABMA, POSTMEDIA NEWS JULY 9, 2011

Aggressive anti-racism campaigns might actually increase bias toward other groups, suggests a new study from researchers at the University of Toronto.

Messages emphasizing the personal stake one has in a more open-minded society can be more effective, says the paper, which will appear in an upcoming issue of Psychological Science.

In one experiment outlined, 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 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.

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

Later testing found those who read the authoritative anti-prejudice message demonstrated higher levels of prejudice against black people compared with those who did not read either brochure.

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

Another experiment was designed to seem like a questionnaire, with questions about racism mixed in with "filler" questions for two of the three groups participating. One group answered questions relating to their personal motivation for not being prejudiced; others responded to questions about social pressures not to be biased against other cultures. A third group did a questionnaire with just filler questions.

Like the other experiment, it resulted in those manipulated with social-pressure tactics displaying the highest level of prejudice in subsequent measures, those subject to personal-motivation priming being the least discriminatory and subjects with no manipulation in the middle.

"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. "But people need to feel that they are freely choosing to be non-prejudiced rather than

having it forced upon them."

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