

Ironic Effects of Anti-Prejudice Messages

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(Medical Xpress) -- Organizations and programs have been set up all over the globe in the hopes of urging people to end prejudice. According to a research article, which will be published in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, such programs may actually increase prejudices.

Lisa Legault, Jennifer Gutsell and Michael Inzlicht, from the University of Toronto Scarborough, were interested in exploring how one's everyday environment influences people's motivation toward prejudice reduction.

The authors conducted two experiments which looked at the effect of two different types of motivational intervention – a controlled form (telling people what they should do) and a more personal form (explaining why being non-prejudiced is enjoyable and personally valuable).

In experiment one; participants were randomly assigned one of two brochures to read: an autonomy brochure or a controlling brochure. These brochures discussed a new campus initiative to reduce prejudice. A third group was offered no motivational instructions to reduce prejudice. The authors found that, ironically, those who read the controlling brochure later demonstrated more prejudice than those who had not been urged to reduce prejudice. Those who read the brochure designed to support personal motivation showed less prejudice than those in the other two groups.

In experiment two, participants were randomly assigned a questionnaire, designed to stimulate personal or controlling motivation to reduce prejudice. The authors found that those who were exposed to controlling messages regarding prejudice reduction showed significantly more prejudice than those who did not receive any controlling cues.

The authors suggest that when interventions eliminate people's freedom to value diversity on their own terms, they may actually be creating hostility toward the targets of prejudice.

According to Dr. Legault, "Controlling prejudice reduction practices are tempting because they are quick and easy to implement. They tell people how they should think and behave and stress the negative consequences of failing to think and behave in desirable ways." Legault continues, "But people need to feel that they are freely choosing to be nonprejudiced, rather than having it forced upon them."

Legault stresses the need to focus less on the requirement to reduce [prejudices](#) and start focusing more on the reasons why diversity and equality are important and beneficial to both majority and minority group members.

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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