



**Ironic Effects of Anti-Prejudice Messages:
How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but also
increase) Prejudice**

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RUNNING HEAD: REDUCING PREJUDICE

Ironic Effects of Anti-Prejudice Messages:

How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but also increase) Prejudice

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Abstract

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6 While prejudice reduction policies and interventions abound, is it possible that some of them result in
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8 the precise opposite of their intended effect—an increase in prejudice? We examined this question by
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10 exploring the impact of motivationally-based prejudice reduction interventions, and assessed whether
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12 certain popular practices might in fact increase prejudice. In two experiments, participants received
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14 detailed information on, or were primed with, the goal of prejudice reduction, and this was done by
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16 either encouraging autonomous motivation to regulate prejudice or by stressing the societal requirement
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18 to control prejudice. Results demonstrated that, ironically, motivating people to reduce prejudice by
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20 stressing external control produced more explicit and implicit prejudice than not intervening at all.
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22 Conversely, when autonomous motivation to regulate prejudice was induced, participants displayed less
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24 explicit and implicit prejudice compared to no-treatment controls. We outline strategies for effectively
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26 reducing prejudice and discuss the detrimental consequences of enforcing anti-prejudice standards.
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Ironic Effects of Anti-Prejudice Messages:

How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but also increase) Prejudice

As multiculturalism rises, initiatives aiming to reduce prejudice proliferate in our schools, workplaces, and communities. Programs claiming to reduce racism surround us –invoking the notion that prejudice should be battled against or eliminated. To name only a few, the Partners Against Hate project promotes the *fight against* hate violence; Tolerance-dot-org is an organization devoted to *combating* racial bias; and the Government of Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Department currently espouses a "Racism: Stop it!" campaign in schools throughout the country, calling for the *elimination* of racial discrimination and symbolizing the 'stamping-out' of prejudice (see *Figure 1*). Policymakers in North America spend billions of dollars annually on prejudice interventions (Hansen, 2003), yet very few of these are actually based on sound evidence (Paluck & Green, 2009). Is it possible, then, that certain common prejudice reduction strategies actually increase prejudice?

Research on prejudice reduction is plentiful. Critics suggest, however, that this work is rarely translational, and the few interventions that are developed are often impractical (Cameron & Turner, 2010). To counter these critiques, we take a new direction in prejudice reduction, using fundamental principles of motivation. We inquire whether prejudice can be diminished by boosting the motivational structures underlying the regulation of prejudice. Similarly, we ask whether prejudice reduction can be undermined by enhancing the *wrong kind* of motivation. In short, we explore how targeting different *types of motivation to reduce prejudice* succeeds and backfires.

Motivation to Regulate Prejudice

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Anchored by self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002), a growing body of research demonstrates that the self-regulation of prejudice varies in the extent to which it is autonomous or *self-determined* (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007; Plant & Devine, 1998). Thus, one's motivation to regulate prejudice can stem from personal, self-endorsed reasons, or it can satisfy external controls or incentives. Controlled prejudice regulators are motivated to reduce prejudice for external reasons (e.g., pressure, fear). They might suppress racism because they seek approval from others or because social norms require that prejudice be avoided. Conversely, those with a self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice are motivated by internal factors, such as the personal relevance and importance of striving to be nonprejudiced. For such individuals, the pursuit of nonprejudice is valuable and enjoyable, and energized by the satisfaction gleaned from intergroup relations.

Evidence suggests that, compared to individuals with a self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice, those with a controlled motivation demonstrate greater racial bias (Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Devine, 2003; Devine et al., 2002; Legault et al., 2007, 2009; Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010) and tend to express resentment in response to pro-Black pressure (Plant & Devine, 2001). However, to our knowledge, motivation to regulate prejudice has only been assessed at the level of individual differences. There has been no investigation into whether self-determined and controlled motivation to regulate prejudice can be manipulated and go on to influence prejudice. Thus, we ask: what happens when we encourage people to control prejudice for external reasons? Could this actually increase prejudice? In contrast, what if we encourage people to regulate prejudice for autonomous/self-determined reasons? Can this reduce prejudice?

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4 *Autonomy-supportive* contexts nurture inner motivational resources by supporting an internal
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6 perceived locus of causality (deCharms, 1968). Thus, people feel autonomously motivated when they
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8 identify their behavior as originating from a personal, rather than environmental, source. Importantly,
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10 autonomy is cultivated by conditions that provide informative rationale for engaging in a given
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12 behavior. In contrast, contexts that thwart people's need for autonomy are *controlling* (Deci & Ryan,
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14 2000). Controlling environments use pressure to extract an externally prescribed manner of thinking or
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16 behaving. When autonomy is bypassed in this way, motivation becomes contingent on external forces
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18 and internal motivational resources are weakened. Instead of eliciting mere compliance (e.g., Blanchard,
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20 Lily, & Vaughn, 1991), we expect that controlling directives against prejudice, like the common
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22 strategies outlined above (see Figure 1), will in fact hinder inner motivational resources, and produce
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24 results that are opposite to their intentions.
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32 **The Present Studies**

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34 We predicted that strategies that foster self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice would
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36 reduce prejudice, and that controlling strategies would actually increase prejudice. We tested these
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38 predictions in two studies. The first experiment measured the impact of a content-rich contextual
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40 manipulation on explicit prejudice; the second experiment used more subtle priming methods and
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42 measured explicit *and* implicit prejudice. In both studies, we tested the mediating role of motivation in
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44 the link between intervention and prejudice reduction.
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51 **Experiment 1: The Impact of Anti-Prejudice Brochures on Racism**

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53 Experiment 1 sought to design instructional material that might be useful beyond the laboratory
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55 and desirable for practitioners looking to reduce prejudice in classrooms and workplaces. To this end,
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3 we developed two prejudice-reduction brochures based on the principles of autonomy-support and
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5 control outlined by SDT.
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8 *Method*

9 **Participants and Procedure**

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11 103 non-Black undergraduates from the University of Toronto Scarborough (71% female;
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13 $M_{\text{age}}=18.8$ years) participated for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three
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15 groups: an autonomy brochure condition; a controlling brochure condition; and a no-brochure condition.
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17 Brochures were framed as a new campus initiative to reduce prejudice. After carefully reading the
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19 brochures, motivation and prejudice were assessed.
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24 **Brochure Manipulation**

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26 In the autonomy brochure condition, the value of nonprejudice was emphasized. Participants'
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28 inner motivational resources for prejudice reduction were encouraged by emphasizing choice and
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30 explaining why prejudice reduction is important and worthwhile. In the controlling brochure condition,
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32 participants were urged to combat prejudice and to comply with social norms of nonprejudice. In the no-
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34 brochure condition, participants read only introductory information about the definition of prejudice. See
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36 *Brochure Details* in supplemental information.
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40 **Dependent Measures**

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42 The 24-item Motivation to be Nonprejudiced Scale (Legault et al., 2007) assessed respondents'
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44 reasons for regulating prejudice (e.g., Self-Determined: "Because striving to be nonprejudiced is
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46 important to me", $\alpha=.88$; Controlled: "Because racist people are not well-liked", $\alpha=.83$). The Symbolic
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48 Racism 2000 Scale (Henry & Sears, 2002) measured prejudice toward Black people ($\alpha=.74$).
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Results and Discussion

Influencing Motivation

An index of self-determined motivation was created by subtracting the mean of controlled items from the mean of self-determined items. A polynomial contrast revealed a significant linear effect of brochure on self-determination, with autonomy-support eliciting the most ($M=1.76$; $SD=4.34$); and neutral and controlling conditions evoking the least ($M=-2.57$; $SD=6.17$ and $M=-2.54$; $SD=5.04$, respectively), $F(1,100)=12.67$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.14$. Thus, the brochures exerted an effect on motivation to regulate prejudice, although the effect was largely driven by the autonomy condition.

Planned Comparisons: Influencing Prejudice

As per *Figure 2*, those in the autonomy-support condition displayed significantly less prejudice than those in the neutral condition, $F(1, 66)=14.49$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.18$. Conversely, those who read the controlling brochure actually demonstrated greater prejudice than those in the no-brochure condition, $F(1, 66)=4.34$, $p<.04$, $\eta_p^2=.07$. As hypothesized, using control to motivate prejudice reduction backfired, and was more detrimental than not motivating participants at all. The autonomy-support of motivation to regulate prejudice, however, caused a reduction in prejudice.

Mediation by Motivation to Regulate Prejudice

To test the mediating effect of motivation on the relationship between brochure and prejudice (*Figure 3a*), we constructed an effect-coded condition variable (1=autonomy; 0=neutral; -1=controlling) which predicted self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice, $t(101)=3.39$, $p<.001$. Furthermore, after controlling for condition, self-determined motivation negatively predicted prejudice, $t(101)=-3.34$, $p<.001$. Importantly, a Sobel (1982) test supported a significant indirect effect of self-determined motivation on prejudice, $z=-2.79$, $p<.01$. Thus, the two types of prejudice reduction brochures produced opposite effects on prejudice, and this effect was partially explained by the source of motivation to

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3 regulate prejudice. It should be noted, however, that although autonomy support boosts self-determined
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5 motivation to be nonprejudiced, the impact of control on prejudice appears to be more direct.
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8 Experiment 1 used rich and realistic – albeit explicit – measures. Although it is interesting that
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10 we nevertheless observed an effect on prejudice despite potential demand characteristics, it would be
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12 advantageous to document the generalizability of this effect using subtler methods.
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15 **Experiment 2: The Impact of Motivational Priming on Racism**

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17 In Experiment 2, we manipulated motivation subtly, and then measured automatic racism with
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19 the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). This strategy affords the
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21 potential advantage of broadening the results of Experiment 1 to another index of prejudice; it also tests
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23 whether these effects can occur in situations where motivation is shifted subtly, rather than through the
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25 overt appeals made by the brochure.
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29 *Method*

30 **Participants and Priming Procedure**

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33 109 Non-Black undergraduates from the University of Toronto Scarborough participated for
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35 partial course credit (69% female; $M_{age}=19.3$ years). Participants were randomly assigned to
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37 experimental conditions designed to prime self-determined and controlling motivation to reduce
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39 prejudice (as well as a no-prime condition). Priming was achieved using a questionnaire format adapted
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41 from Burton, Lydon, D'Alessandro, & Koestner, (2006). To maintain the appearance of a survey rather
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43 than an experimental induction, each questionnaire contained demographic and filler questions, followed
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45 by a two-part manipulation. First, participants indicated their agreement with eight statements (see *Table*
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47 *1* for prime content), the endorsement of which was facilitated by requiring participants to indicate either
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49 “Yes, I agree at least somewhat” or “No, I disagree completely.” Next, participants were asked to write
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51 three sentences regarding the target motivation. In the self-determined condition, they were asked to
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3 describe why it is *personally satisfying, enjoyable, and important* to be nonprejudiced. In the controlled
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5 condition, participants described their felt *internal demands, obligation, and social expectation* to be
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7 nonprejudiced. In the neutral no-prime condition, only filler questions were administered.
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10 **Dependent Measures**

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12 Again, the MNPS assessed respondents' reasons for refraining from prejudice ($\alpha=.86$ for self-
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14 determined; $\alpha=.84$ for controlled). The Symbolic Racism Scale assessed explicit prejudice ($\alpha=.71$). The
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16 Race IAT (Greenwald et al. 1998) assessed implicit prejudice – a reaction-time measure of racial bias.
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19 **Results and Discussion**

20 **Influencing Motivation**

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22 Polynomial contrasts indicated a significant linear effect of condition on self-determined
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24 motivation, with self-determination priming producing the most ($M=5.00$; $SD=3.27$); controlled
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26 motivation producing the least ($M=2.53$ $SD=3.21$); and no-priming landing in the middle ($M=3.33$;
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28 $SD=2.65$), $F(1,106)=12.77$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.10$. This suggests that the priming manipulation was successful
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30 in targeting motivation to regulate prejudice.
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36 **Planned Comparisons: Influencing Prejudice**

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38 **Symbolic Racism.** Those primed with self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice
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40 displayed less prejudice ($M=3.71$; $SD=.51$) than those in the no-prime condition ($M=4.04$; $SD=.56$), $F(1,$
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42 $70)=6.67$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.10$. In contrast, those primed with controlling motivation demonstrated greater
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44 prejudice ($M=4.43$; $SD=.57$) than those in the no-prime condition, $F(1, 70)=8.48$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.11$. These
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46 findings complement those of Experiment 1 by again illustrating the ironic effect of controlling
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48 motivation in augmenting prejudice. Conversely, activating autonomous motivation reduced prejudice.
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53 **Implicit race bias.** As per *Figure 3*, those primed with self-determined motivation to regulate
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55 prejudice exhibited significantly less prejudice than those in the no-prime condition, $F(1, 70)=5.86$,
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3 $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. In fact, participants in the self-determined condition showed no preference for White
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5 over Black. Conversely, those primed with controlled motivation displayed significantly more prejudice,
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7 relative to neutrals, $F(1, 70) = 4.18$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Thus, priming controlling motivation elicited greater
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9 preference for White over Black, compared to not presenting a prejudice-reduction prime. These
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11 findings illustrate that the ironic effect of controlling motivation extends to implicit evaluations of
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13 outgroup members.
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16 17 **Mediation by Self-Determined Motivation to Regulate Prejudice**

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19 As per *Figure 3b*, an effect-coded condition variable (1=autonomy; 0=neutral; -1=controlling)
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21 predicted self-determined motivation to regulate prejudice, $t(106) = 3.56$, $p < .01$. Controlling for priming,
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23 self-determined motivation negatively predicted explicit prejudice, $t(106) = -2.78$, $p < .01$, and implicit
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25 prejudice, $t(106) = -2.22$, $p < .05$. Importantly, Sobel tests indicated that these indirect effects were
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27 significant, $z = -2.31$, $p < .05$ (explicit), $z = -1.96$, $p < .05$ (implicit). Results substantiate the intervening role
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29 of motivation to regulate prejudice in the link between priming and prejudice reduction.
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34 Experiment 2 extends Experiment 1 by priming motivation using subtler, direct methods and by
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36 affecting prejudice at the automatic level. The addition of an implicit measure of prejudice is important
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38 because although our motivation primes were subtly embedded, they may still have been detectable.
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41 **General Discussion**

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43 Our work exposes the adverse effects of pressuring people to be nonprejudiced, while
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45 demonstrating the causal role of self-determination in prejudice reduction. Notably, we demonstrate that
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47 strategies urging people to comply with anti-prejudice standards are worse than doing *nothing* at all.
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49 This direct effect was robust, even after controlling for motivation. Thus, it appears that social control
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51 elicited a reflexive, reactive effect on prejudice. According to Reactance Theory (Brehm & Brehm,
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53 1981), this 'rebellion' represents a direct counter-response (i.e., defiance) to threatened autonomy. When
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3 we eliminate people's freedom to choose egalitarian goals or to value diversity on their own terms, we
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5 may be inciting hostility toward the perceived source of the pressure (i.e., the stigmatized group), or a
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7 desire to rebel against prejudice reduction itself. These findings have serious implications for the
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9 enforcement of rules and standards of nonprejudice, especially when we consider that many intervention
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11 programs and policies use controlling, anti-prejudice techniques. This research reveals that, not only do
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13 these types of messages not work, but can produce the opposite of their intended effects. At the same
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15 time, we offer evidence that supporting autonomy is crucial for prejudice reduction. When people see
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17 the value in nonprejudice, they are more likely to internalize it and sustain it (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008).
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19 The promotion of autonomous prejudice regulation, then, is clearly more beneficial than the burden
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21 society places on political correctness.
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27 **Applications in Programming and Policy**

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29 By focusing on the motivational underpinnings of prejudice regulation, this work offers clear
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31 guidelines for practitioners looking to develop prejudice reduction techniques. We advise teachers and
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33 managers to steer away from the anti-prejudice strategy; to be aware of controlling tactics; to reduce the
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35 use of pressuring language; to avoid power assertion; and to refrain from pressuring people toward
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37 strictly prescribed outcomes. Instead, it is important for education to encourage the personal valuing of
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39 diversity and equality. This can be done by offering informative rationale; by discussing the importance
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41 and enjoyment of nonprejudice; and by examining the benefits of diverse and fair classrooms and
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43 workplaces. Similarly, initiatives such as the *Partners Against Hate* project and the *Racism: Stop it!*
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45 campaign, which promote the "elimination of intolerance" and "fight against racism", might benefit from
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47 reframing their approach. We suggest that anti-prejudice pressure backfires –deflating personal
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49 autonomy, tapping into external and social concerns at the expense of personal ones, and ultimately
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51 increasing prejudice.
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Conclusion

This research joins other promising prejudice reduction research (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 1984; Kawakami, Phillips, Steele, & Dovidio, 2007; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Phillips, Kawakami, Tabi, Nadolny, & Inzlicht, 2011) in developing strategies for prejudice reduction. Although researchers have outlined the benefits of autonomous motivation to be nonprejudiced for more than a decade (Plant & Devine, 1998), notions of how to systematically increase this motivation have been relatively unexplored. We now offer an answer to this problem using self-determination theory, and we recommend the use of these principles at various societal levels. Moreover, we demonstrate the need to terminate ineffective prejudice reduction practices. We suggest that many organizational strategies are actually counterproductive, and our results provide a possible explanation for the finding that, despite the billions of dollars spent annually on prejudice reduction interventions (Hansen, 2003), prejudice is rarely reduced.

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For Review Only

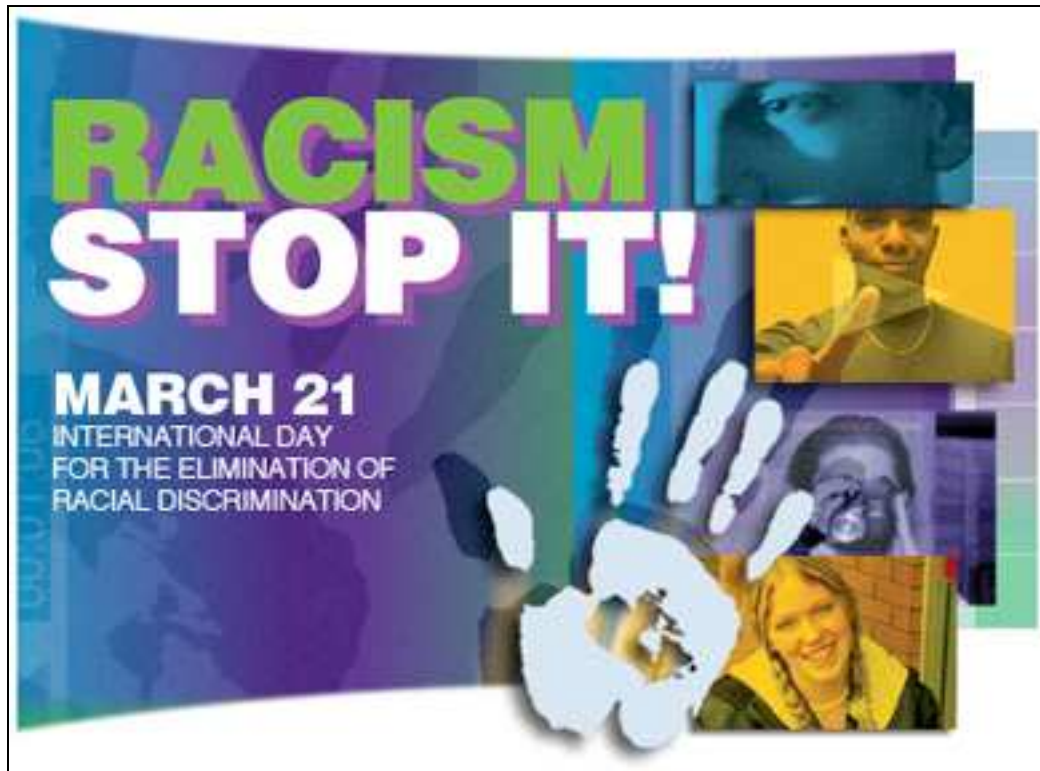
Table 1

Motivational Priming Task (Experiment 2)

<i>Type of Motivation Prime</i>	<i>Statements Participants Were Induced to Agree or Disagree With</i>
Self-Determined	<i>I enjoy relating to people of different groups</i> <i>Being nonprejudiced is important to me</i> <i>I can freely decide to be a nonprejudiced person</i> <i>I value diversity</i> <i>It's fun to meet people from other cultures</i> <i>It's not important to understand others</i> <i>Equality and equal rights across cultural groups are important values</i> <i>I think that issues of diversity are interesting</i>
Controlled	<i>It is socially unacceptable to discriminate based on cultural background</i> <i>People should be unprejudiced</i> <i>I would be ashamed of myself if I discriminated against someone because they were Black</i> <i>There are no social norms about prejudice in society</i> <i>I should avoid being a racist</i> <i>I would feel guilty if I were prejudiced</i> <i>Prejudiced people are not well-liked</i> <i>People in my social circle disapprove of prejudice</i>

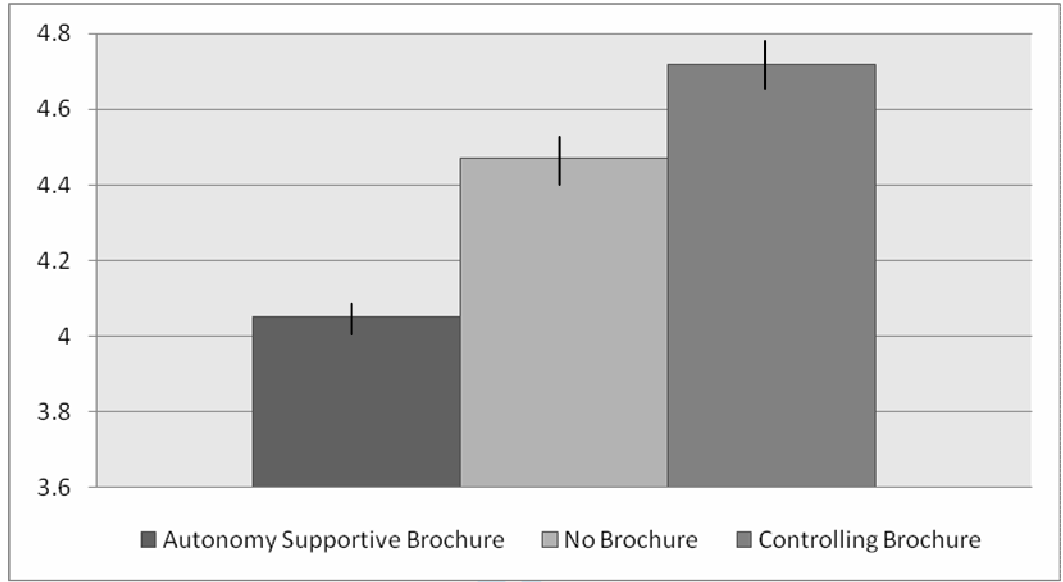
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Figure 1. Poster for the Government of Canada's "Racism: Stop It!" campaign (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011)



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Figure 2. Effect of Brochure on Prejudice

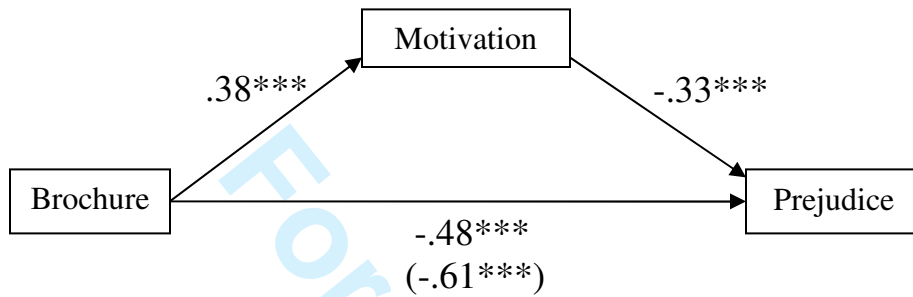


Note. All differences significant at $p < .05$.

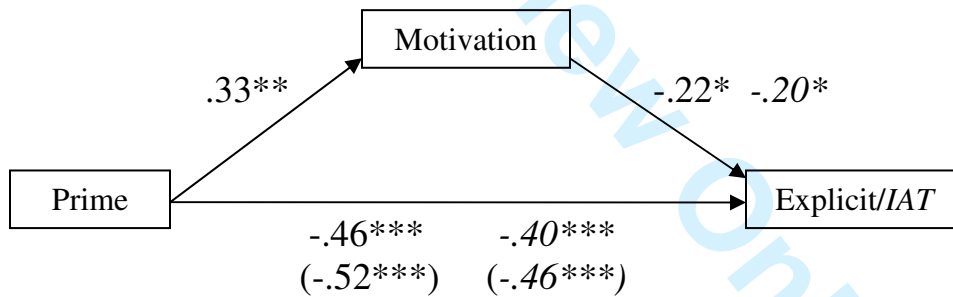
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Figure 3. Indirect Effect of Motivation on the Link Between Experimental Condition and Prejudice

a) Experiment 1: Explicit Prejudice



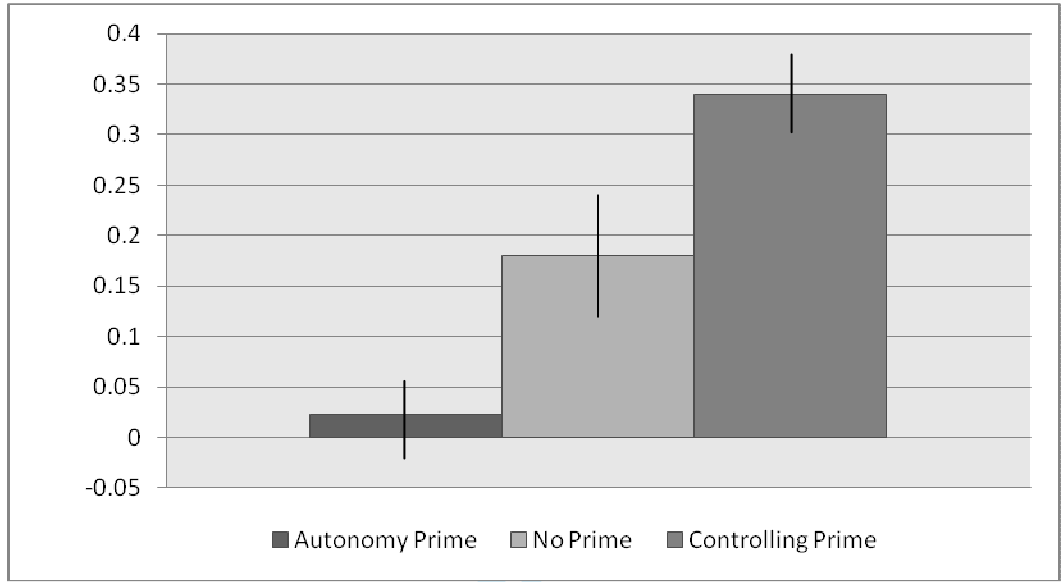
b) Experiment 2: Explicit and Implicit Prejudice (*implicit coefficients in italics*)



Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Unmediated effect of condition on prejudice in parentheses.

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Figure 4. Effect of Motivational Priming on Implicit Race Bias



Note. All differences significant at $p < .05$.

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3 Brochure Excerpts
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8 *The following is an excerpt from the autonomy-support brochure:*
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12 **Why it's Important to Reduce Prejudice in Our Society**
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14 As a society, we hold the virtues of tolerance and nonprejudice in a very special
15 place - they are important because they increase open-mindedness and social
16 justice. Social justice is the vital ingredient in a free, fair, and peaceful society.
17 When equality and equity among human beings are achieved, there is less reason
18 for any group or individual to be unhappy..... It is also important to be
19 nonprejudiced because it is *so* interesting to interact with and learn about people
20 from other cultural and social groups. We live in a wonderful and diverse cultural
21 community. That diversity makes our society great because it brings a wealth of
22 knowledge and experience together. When we let go of prejudice, the rich
23 diversity of society is ours to enjoy..... Not to mention, being open-minded is a
24 real advantage to our mood and well-being. When there is less racial and cultural
25 tension, people are happier and healthier, and better able to do the things they
26 enjoy..... You are free to choose to value nonprejudice. Only you can decide to be
27 an egalitarian person..... In today's increasingly diverse and multicultural society,
28 such a personal choice is likely to help you connected to yourself and your
29 social world.....
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39 *The following is an excerpt from the controlling brochure:*
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44 **Cracking Down on Prejudice in Our Society**
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46 In today's society, you must control prejudice. In other words, being Canadian
47 means having an anti-prejudiced attitude. For instance, The Human Rights,
48 Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act *prohibits* discrimination in employment
49 based on the grounds of race, color, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs
50 Employers have an obligation to create a 'no prejudice' workplace, and
51 companies face legal liability for workplace prejudice or discrimination. The same
52 standards are being set in the education domain. In fact, a recent government
53 policy initiative by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada requires
54 that educators demand anti-prejudice classrooms. Teachers and students caught
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3 displaying racist attitudes and behavior can face serious consequences, such as
4 termination or expulsion..... There are also social perks to controlling racism -
5 for instance, low prejudiced people tend to be better liked than racists. The better
6 we are at reducing prejudice, the more we are likely to fit in with today's anti-
7 prejudice norms. Research studies reveal that people with prejudiced attitudes are
8 at risk of being excluded or ostracized. In one recent study, most people reported
9 that their social groups at work and at school disapproved of prejudice and racism,
10 and people feared being looked down upon if they made prejudiced or racist
11 remarks..... In today's multicultural society, we should all be less prejudiced.
12 We should all refrain from negative stereotyping. It is, after all, the politically and
13 socially correct thing to do, and it's something that society demands of us.
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