

'Training away stereotypes'

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It may seem difficult to change stereotypical thinking. Perceptions can be very important in forming an individual's attitudes. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that people conditioned to think in opposition to racial stereotypes are more receptive to people from minority groups starring in commercial advertising.

Saleem Alhabash, a doctoral candidate in the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

"This research shows that when people are trained to think in a non-stereotypical way, they will pay more attention to ads with black protégés," said Saleem Alhabash, a doctoral candidate in the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Alhabash conducted the research in the Psychological Research on Information and Media Effects (PRIME) Lab with Kevin Wise, a professor in the Missouri School of Journalism, and Mi Jahng, a doctoral candidate in the Missouri School of Journalism. The study used the "Stereotype Reduction Paradigm," previously studied by other social psychology researchers. Under the paradigm, 10 participants received stereotype affirmation training, while 10 received stereotype negation training. Participants were shown pictures of black and white people paired with stereotype-consistent and stereotype-violating attributes. In the stereotype affirmation condition, participants were instructed to note whenever the picture-attribute pair displayed a racial stereotype. Under negation, participants were instructed to note when they saw a picture-attribute pair inconsistent with common stereotypes.

Then, participants were shown a series of commercials with three advertisements featuring black actors and three advertisements featuring white actors. Researchers tracked various psychophysiological responses to viewing each commercial. Participants who had experienced [stereotype](#) negation training showed decreased heart rate, which is the physiological response indicating increased attention to advertising featuring black protégés while those in the stereotype-affirmation condition showed an increase in heart rate, showing decreased attention levels. Negation and attribution-conditioned participants showed little difference in physiological reaction to white advertising protégés, reflected in heart rate deceleration for both conditions.

The project was presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the Society for Psychophysiological Research (SPR) and was one of 16 projects to win a student poster award.

"Over the years, SPR has been welcoming of our work on how the mind processes media, but this award brings a whole new level of acceptance and validation to the science of media," said Paul Bolls, co-director of the PRIME Lab. "This is a great achievement for the School of Journalism, as well as the field of media psychology research."

The MU team's work beat out 250 projects for the award and is one of a very small number of media psychology projects ever to win an award at the conference.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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