

Confrontation may reduce white prejudices, study finds

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Confronting a white person who makes a racist or sexist statement can make them reflect on their words and avoid making biased statements about race or gender in the future, Rutgers researchers find.

The study, published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, suggests that when [white men](#) and [women](#) are confronted after expressing a [bias](#) about African Americans, Latinos, and women, they seek to identify and regulate their own biases about multiple groups of people.

"Many people are reluctant to confront instances of bias because they worry about backlash from others," said Kimberly Chaney, a doctoral graduate student in [social psychology](#) at Rutgers University-New Brunswick's School of Arts and Sciences. "But we found that confronting prejudice can be a powerful way to reduce not just one but multiple types of prejudice. We all have the ability to make a change and sometimes speaking out against small instances of bias may make a big change."

In the first part of the study, a group of 161 white college students was shown images of white and Black people accompanied with descriptive sentences, and then asked to draw inferences about the people pictured. Three photos of Black men included sentences intended to evoke a stereotypical [response](#), such as "This man spends a lot of time behind bars." The task could draw the stereotypical response of "This man is a criminal" or a neutral response like "bartender," the researchers said.

Half of the participants were then randomly assigned to be verbally confronted for using a [negative stereotype](#) in their response. They then completed a similar task with different faces and sentences, including ones with women that could elicit stereotypical responses. For example, responses such as "This person works at a hospital" could elicit a stereotypical response of "nurse" instead of "doctor." Participants who were confronted for using a negative Black stereotype used significantly fewer stereotypes about women than participants who were not confronted for using a negative Black stereotype.

Another part of the study considered whether confrontation for using a stereotype about women reduces expressions of bias toward ethnic and racial minorities. Each white adult male participant believed he was interacting with another white adult male online to discuss moral dilemmas. One scenario involved a nurse who discovered an issue at a hospital and was asked to discuss with their partner what the nurse should do. Half of the participants who referred to the nurse as "she" during the online discussion were confronted by their online partner. Those participants were later asked to complete a task that could elicit negative stereotypes about Black and Latinx Americans. Participants who were confronted for using a negative stereotype about women used significantly fewer stereotypes about Black and Latinx Americans than participants who were not confronted for using a negative [stereotype](#) about women.

"There is still a lot more to understand about confronting prejudice, including how it should be done, what you should say and when it will be most effective," said study co-author Diana Sanchez, a professor of psychology. "Confronting someone is challenging, but we hope that knowing that it can be effective might make people more willing to step up."

More information: Kimberly E. Chaney et al, The Breadth of Confrontations as a Prejudice Reduction Strategy, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550620919318](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620919318)

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