

# DEI Training Material Increases Perception of Nonexistent Prejudice, Agreement with Hitler Rhetoric, Study Finds



Entrance to Old Queen's, the oldest building on the Rutgers University campus, with historic plaque about slave labor, New Brunswick, N.J., December 27, 2020. (peterspiro/via Getty Images)

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A new study found that diversity, equity, and inclusion materials have a wide range of negative consequences, including psychological harm, increased hostility, and greater agreement with extreme authoritarian rhetoric, such as adapted Adolf Hitler quotes.

Both the *New York Times* and *Bloomberg* were preparing stories on the findings, but axed them just before publication citing editorial decisions.

The Network Contagion Research Institute, or NCRI, and Rutgers University Social Perception Lab released the study “Instructing Animosity: How DEI Pedagogy Produces the Hostile Attribution Bias” on Monday. The study examined whether the themes and materials common in DEI trainings foster inclusion or exacerbate conflicts, and whether such materials promote empathy or increase hostility towards groups labeled as oppressors. The study consisted of three experiments — one focusing on race, one on religion, and the last on caste.

Although proponents of DEI trainings claim that they are designed to educate individuals about biases and reduce discrimination, the study found that participants primed with DEI materials were more likely to perceive prejudice where none existed and were more willing to punish the perceived perpetrators. In one experiment, the DEI materials made people more willing to agree with Hitler quotes that substituted “Jew” with “Brahmin,” the highest caste in the Indian caste system.

“Participants exposed to the DEI content were markedly more likely to endorse Hitler’s demonization statements, agreeing that Brahmins are ‘parasites’ (+35.4%), ‘viruses’ (+33.8%), and ‘the devil personified’ (+27.1%),” the study reads. “These findings suggest that exposure to anti-oppressive narratives can increase the endorsement of the type of demonization and scapegoating characteristic of authoritarianism.”

In the experiment focused on race, the researchers randomly assigned 423 Rutgers University undergraduates into two groups: one control group exposed to a neutral essay about U.S. corn production, and the other exposed to an essay that combined material from Ibram X. Kendi’s book *How to Be an Antiracist* and Robin DiAngelo’s book *White Fragility*. After exposure to either text, participants were presented with the following race-neutral scenario: “A student applied to an elite East Coast university in Fall 2024. During the application process, he was interviewed by an admissions officer. Ultimately, the student’s application was rejected.”

The results showed that participants primed with Kendi and DiAngelo materials perceived more discrimination from the admissions officer, despite the absence of any racial identification and evidence of discrimination. Those participants also believed that the admissions officer was more unfair to the applicant, had caused more harm to the applicant, and had committed more “microaggressions.”

In addition to imputing bias without evidence, the participants who read Kendi and DiAngelo were 12 percent more willing to support suspending the admission officer for a semester, 16 percent more willing to demand a public apology to the applicant, and 12 percent more willing to require additional DEI training to correct the officer compared to participants in the control group.

“Educational materials from some of the most well-published and well-known DEI scholars not only failed to positively enhance interracial attitudes, they provoked baseless suspicion and encouraged punitive attitudes,” the study states.

Lee Jussim, a professor at Rutgers University and one of the study’s authors, told NATIONAL REVIEW, said

researchers purposely built some ambiguity into the scenarios.

“In social psychology, we purposely study situations that have some ambiguity in order to evaluate whether and when people’s biases influence their judgments of those situations,” he said.

In the experiment on anti-Islamophobia trainings, the researchers presented over 2,000 participants with either the essay about corn or content drawn from the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding organization that addresses Islamophobia. The participants were then presented with a scenario involving two hypothetical individuals, Ahmed Akhtar and George Green, who were both convicted of identical terrorism charges for bombing a local government building.

The participants exposed to the corn essay perceived Akhtar and Green’s trials as equally fair and did not indicate any perception of Islamophobia. However, those exposed to anti-Islamophobia training materials rated Akhtar’s trial significantly less fair.

“These results suggest that anti-Islamophobia training inspired by ISPU materials may cause individuals to assume unfair treatment of Muslim people, even when no evidence of bias or unfairness is present,” the study states. “This effect highlights a broader issue: DEI narratives that focus heavily on victimization and systemic oppression can foster unwarranted distrust and suspicions of institutions and alter subjective assessments of events.”

The third experiment about caste involved nearly 850 participants and used materials developed by Equality Labs, a self-described “South Asian feminist organization” that works to “end caste apartheid, gender-based violence, Islamophobia, and religious intolerance.”

Participants were exposed to either caste-sensitivity-training material from Equality Labs or an academic essay about caste, then were presented the following scenario: “Raj Kumar applied to an elite East Coast university in Fall 2022. During the application process, he was interviewed by an admissions officer, Anand Prakash. Ultimately, Raj’s application was rejected.” (The names were reversed between respondents to avoid the possibility that the results reflected inferences drawn from the names themselves.)

“Rather than using a purely neutral control like the corn essay, we had a more historically accurate and less politically charged, less accusatory, control essay on caste to see if we still see pernicious effects of the DEI training,” Jussim said. “And the answer is yes.”

Compared to the group that read the neutral academic essay, the participants who were exposed to the DEI materials had a significantly higher perception of “microaggressions,” perceived harm, and assumptions of bias. Additionally, those who read the DEI materials showed a higher willingness to punish the admissions officer and assessed Hindus as more racist.

In the caste experiment, participants were interviewed and asked to rate the accuracy of the following Hitler quotes that replaced “Jew” with “Brahmin”: 1) “The Brahmin was only and always a parasite in the body of other peoples. . . The Brahmins are a people under whose parasitism the whole of honest humanity is suffering,” 2) “The personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Brahmin,” and 3) “Innumerable sicknesses have their origin in one virus: the Brahmin! We will get well when we eliminate the Brahmin.”

Compared to the control group, the participants primed with DEI content had more than a 35 percent increase agreeing with the “parasite” statement, a 27 percent increase in agreeing with the “devil personified” statement, and a 33 percent increase in agreeing with the “virus” statement.

The researchers concluded from the three experiments that DEI materials can “engender a hostile attribution bias and heighten racial suspicion, prejudicial attitudes, authoritarian policing, and support for punitive behaviors in the absence of evidence for a transgression deserving punishment.”

“This research raises critical questions about how many individuals, as a result of these programs, have experienced undue duress, social ostracization, or even termination of employment,” the report reads.

The study was set to be covered by *Bloomberg* and the *New York Times*, although both publications axed their articles just before publication, according to communications reviewed by NATIONAL REVIEW.

“Unfortunately, both publications jumped on the story enthusiastically only for it to be inexplicably pulled at the highest editorial levels,” a NCRI researcher told NATIONAL REVIEW. “This has never happened to the NCRI in its 5 year history.”

Two reporters at *Bloomberg* had agreed to cover the study and wrote an article. One of the journalists had described the coverage as “an important story” in communications with the NCRI and expressed being “eager” to publish the article; that journalist had further stated on November 11 that the article should be published in the next few days.

However, an editor — Nabila Ahmed, the team leader for Global Equality at *Bloomberg* News who “lead[s] a global team of reporters focused on stories that elevate issues of race, gender, diversity and fairness within companies, governments and societies” — informed the NCRI on November 15 that *Bloomberg* would not go forward with the article.

The NCRI asked for either a scientific or journalistic explanation, and Ahmed directed the researchers to Anna Kitanaka, the executive editor of *Bloomberg* Equality. Kitanaka told the NCRI that what stories get published and when is entirely an “editorial decision,” and did not provide details on why the publication axed the article.

A *New York Times* reporter told the NCRI that he would cover the new study on DEI materials, and further told the institute that an article was prepared to run on either October 14 or 15.

However, on October 12, he told an NCRI researcher that the *Times* would “hold off” on covering the study on DEI due to “some concerns,” and suggested that the publication would revisit the study if it underwent the academic peer-review process.

Although the reporter disclosed that he did not have “any concerns about the methodology” and that someone at the *Times*’ “data-driven reporting team” had “no problems” with the study, he stated that he had concluded the study wasn’t strong enough after speaking with an editor.

“The piece was reported and ready for publication, but at the eleventh hour, the *New York Times* insisted the research undergo peer review after discussions with editorial staff — an unprecedented demand for our work,” an NCRI researcher told NATIONAL REVIEW. “The journalist involved had previously covered far more sensitive NCRI findings, such as our QAnon and January 6th studies, without any such request.” (The *New York Times* wrote to NATIONAL REVIEW and denied that the story was “ready for publication.”)

The *Times* reporter suggested that the research wasn’t strong enough.

“I told my editor I thought if we were going to write a story casting serious doubts on the efficacy of the work of two of the country’s most prominent DEI scholars, the case against them has to be as strong as possible,” he wrote to the NCRI.

“Our journalists are always considering potential topics for news coverage, evaluating them for newsworthiness, and often choose not to pursue further reporting for a variety of reasons,” a spokesperson for the *New York Times* told NATIONAL REVIEW. “Speculative claims from outside parties about *The Times*’s editorial process are just that.”

NATIONAL REVIEW has reached out to Ahmed and Kitanaka with *Bloomberg* but has not yet received a response.

*Editor’s Note: This article was updated with comments from the New York Times.*

*Send a tip to the news team at NR.*

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