

# The role of reward in stereotype persistence

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## INTRODUCTION

The mechanisms that underlie the persistence of stereotypes are poorly understood.<sup>1</sup>

Stimuli that align with people's social expectations elicit a neural reward response.<sup>2</sup>

People may thus experience stereotypical others as rewarding, reinforcing their existing stereotype beliefs.

**Do choice behavior or explicit ratings of targets differ based on their stereotypicality?**

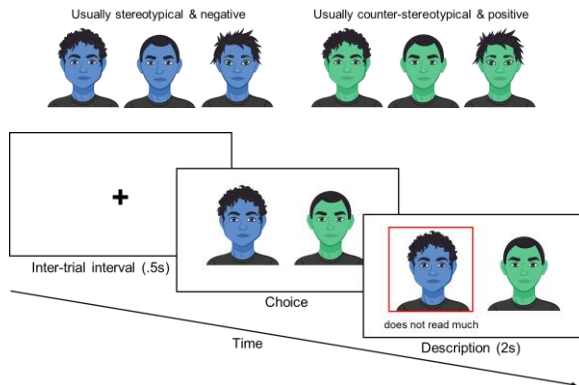
**Is stereotype confirmation rewarding even for novel groups outside real social hierarchies?**

## METHODS

186 Pp on MTurk read a stereotype of a novel group of aliens:

*The aliens from planet Teeku are typically thought of as being very unintelligent/intelligent, simply because of where they are from. Aliens from other planets tend to assume that aliens from planet Teeku are not/are particularly smart.*

They then made 64 choices of which alien to read about:

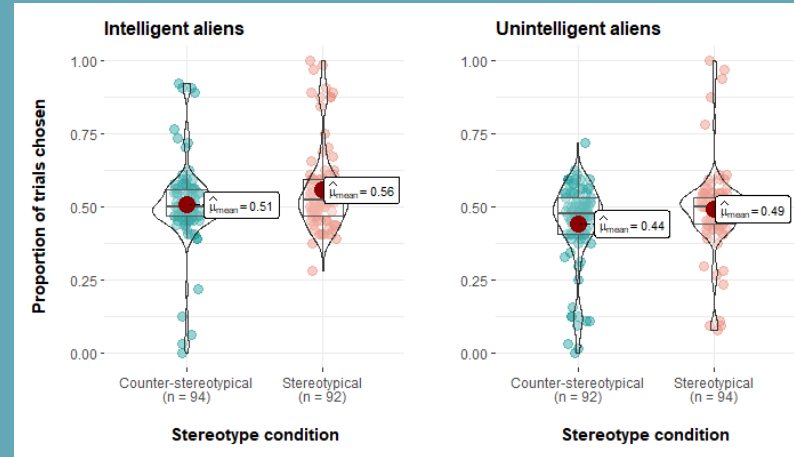


Finally, they reported how warmly they felt toward each group.

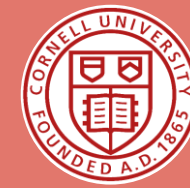
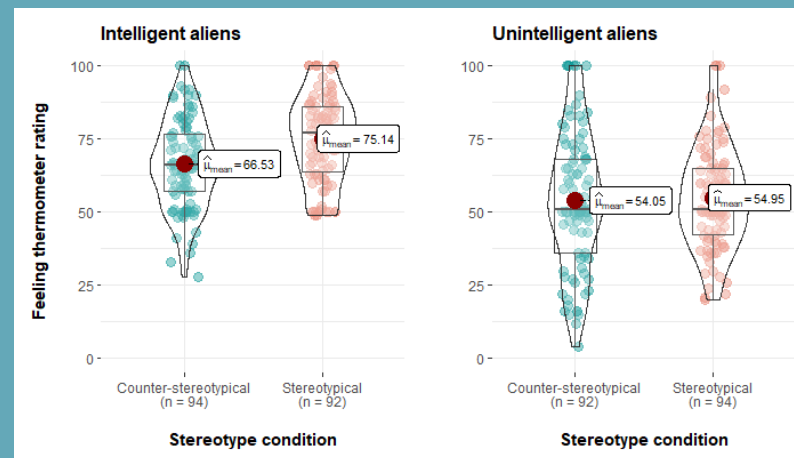
We fit a mixed effects logistic model and conducted a two-way ANOVA to examine the effect of stereotypicality and valence on choices and explicit feelings of warmth.



People choose to interact with targets more often when they are stereotypical (vs. counter-stereotypical), even when their characteristics are negative.



People feel more warmly towards targets when they are stereotypical (vs. counter-stereotypical), but only when their characteristics are positive.



## RESULTS

Participants chose positive (i.e., intelligent) targets more frequently,  $b=.153$ ,  $SE=.054$ ,  $OR=1.17$ ,  $p=.004$ ,  $95\%CI[.05, .26]$ . **However**, this was attenuated when positive targets were counter-stereotypical:

**When a characteristic was stereotypical, participants' odds of choosing a target with that characteristic increased significantly**,  $b=.258$ ,  $SE=.105$ ,  $OR=1.29$ ,  $p=.015$ ,  $95\%CI[.05, .47]$ .

Participants reported greater overall feelings of warmth toward positive (intelligent) targets,  $F(1,184)=80.69$ ,  $p < .001$ .

They also reported greater feelings of warmth toward stereotypical targets,  $F(1,184)=6.33$ ,  $p=.013$ , but this effect was qualified by an interaction: **participants only felt more warmly toward stereotypical targets when they had positive characteristics**,  $F(1,184)=3.98$ ,  $p=.048$ .

## DISCUSSION

**Perceivers value interactions with novel stereotypical targets:** Mere construal of target characteristics as stereotypical or counter-stereotypical affected choice behavior toward both positive and negative targets, though only affected the explicit warmth ratings of positive targets.

**Stereotypes appear rewarding even when they do not reinforce deeply entrenched beliefs about real social groups**, which may make them especially pernicious and difficult to inhibit.

Future work will examine how this reward value contributes to the persistence of both negative and positive stereotypes in the face of other contradictory characteristics.

## References:

<sup>1</sup>Paluck et al 2021, *Ann Rev Psych*  
<sup>2</sup>Reggev et al 2021, *SCAN*

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