

## **RACE AVOIDANCE IN A DIRECT MARKETING OPERATION**

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### **Abstract**

This investigation presents how the theory of aversive racism applies to an observed race avoidance behavior in a direct marketing operation. The theory of aversive racism has been used to explain racist behavior in a social psychological context while here is used in a business context showing significance in the marketing of high tech equipment.

### **Introduction**

It is a well known practice by many companies to conduct direct promotion operation in a shopping mall as part of the overall marketing strategy. By direct promotion operation we are referring to the act of distributing product literature to potential customers. Our case is related to the promotion of different products by companies using kiosk or booth on mall isles. Many companies owned or franchised booths or kiosks located on the isles of shopping malls. These operations usually are carry-out by a minimal staff of one or two salespersons giving away promotions to potential customers walking by the immediate location of the booth. The strategy is to give away a flyer or any other promotion in order to gain the attention of the potential customer hoping to lure customers to purchase a product.

In various occasions one of the authors noted that potential customers were by-passed or ignored when giving away the promotion. Scattered observations on different locations at different times the same type behavior of observed; where customers with obvious African features (black skin, kinky hair, broad nose and thick lips) were by-passed or ignored by the promoters, instead giving preference to customers with obvious Caucasian features (white skin, straight hair, narrow nose and thin lips). Based on this experience an experiment was set to observe, quantify and measure the significance of this behavior by the promoters.

## Historical Background

The cultural development of the modern Puerto Rican has embedded the idea of “racial improvement” since the Spanish colonization. The Spaniards came to the island when they were going through a process of racial cleansing better known as the “limpieza de la raza” or the cleansing of the race (Scarano, 1993). The process was to rid the Spanish society of anyone who was not classified as Caucasian and Old Christian (converted Jews or Muslims) (Vives, 1982). Eventually the racial cleansing became part of the entire Spanish empire. Combined with la “limpieza de la raza” was the exploitation of America and Africa by Spain and other European colonial powers. This utilized the mechanism of degradation to the level of savage anything that was not European and using it as the pretext to conquer lands from savages for better use and to save them from their ignorance (Rodney, 1981).

During the four hundred years of Spanish domination the opportunities for progress were readily available for those classified as Caucasian Spaniard or Peninsular while the rest of the population such as the “criollo” or Creole<sup>1</sup> and the Africans (free or slave) were restricted in their ability to make progress. The racial exclusion processes created a desire by the excluded social groups to become part of the accepted establishment as a mean of assure their chances of progress. This gave way to the idea of “racial improvement” by moving from an outcast group to an accepted group either by marriage or acquisition (Twinam, 1999). The “racial improvement” is to marry someone who is whiter such as it happened in Argentina, where a population largely black went through a whitening process (Podesta, 1993).

The main goal was to be reclassified and accepted as part of the privileged group. For example, church based associations or *cofradías* were common through the Island well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and membership on those *cofradías* gave high social standing. It turned out that only white people or “blancos” were the only ones allowed to hold officer status (higher status) all the others could only aspire to simple membership. Peninsulares or Spaniards were not only the most privileged “blancos”, but all so classified automatically were assured deference from the other castes (Jimenez-Román, 1996, p.13).

On 1870 was abolished the requirement of *Limpieza de la Raza* as a base to obtain a higher education, to be a priest or occupy public positions (Rodríguez-Cruz, 1965). Furthermore, according to the “El código negro de Carolina” (Carolina Black Code) issued in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century specifically referred to the necessity of establishing the most severe subordination and discipline toward the white population as the fundamental basis of the colonies’ domestic policy. All Blacks whether slave or free, and darkies to the first, second, or third degree on, shall be submissive and respectful to all white persons as though each were their very master or owner (Jimenez-Román, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> The criollo or Creole was the new native of the island whose ancestors came from Spain who stayed in the island and severed its tie with the mainland. The criollo in most part was considered less sophisticated and of a lower cast than the Spaniard or Peninsular as they were known, since they got intermixed with Africans and native Taino Indians.

Because deference was not limited to matters of social etiquette but included access to employment, goods and services, the rewards of whiteness made it a much sought-after classification. In an attempt to control the forging and fixing of documents so prevalent in the colonies, the Church and State periodically passed regulations establishing the criteria for membership in one or another caste. None was guarded more closely than the classification as white, even as its legitimacy was clearly being regarded with increasing suspicion. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century visitors reported that Puerto Rico had a lack of families of refined and pure ancestry and that even among the scant white families there were few without mixture of all types of bad blood (Jimenez-Román, 1996, p.13).

The social stigma of being classified of bad blood forced many families to accept all kind of adventurers, vagabonds, drifters and people of questionable reputations as long as they were white and could help in the process of the improvement of the race. The amount of darkies or “criollos” with an improved purchasing power continually increased but their social status was stagnant due to the established rules. On the other hand the Monarchical government was suffering from decreasing revenues and in a move to boost revenues the local government and the Spanish Crown allowed a selected group of people to purchase an upgraded from a lower cast to an upper cast (Twinam, 1999).

Those with the money and strict conditions imposed by the Crown and the Church were able to buy an official change to be classified as white and be addressed as “Don” or “Doña” that is Gentleman or Lady. According to Dr. Ann Twinam (1999) from the University of Cincinnati, with the aide of the “Cédula de Gracias al Sacar” many people in Spanish America were able to change their status from illegitimate or substandard status to one of acceptance or recognition with the purchase of the “Cédula” (i.e. certificate or warrant) that officially reclassified people to the white status. This allowed the Crown to bring more revenues and to lower the instances of rebellion against the monarchical government of the colony. The ethnic cleansing practices of Spain plus the need to progress from substandard living status lead many people classified as non-white in frenzy to continuously seek ways to improve their social status. This was the mean to secure a better life out of poverty since the opportunities were readily open to those devoted Catholic and publicly recognized as white people.

Puerto Rico became part of the United States after the Spanish American War of 1898 and the colony encountered a new twist to the racial problem. Basically the Spanish system allowed the purchase of a new status or improving by marriage, since each new white blood will make the person whiter and better. In the United States one drop of black blood will make you black, therefore, the new colony at the eyes of the Americans was a land of racially inferior people. This accelerated the whitening process since already being non-white person was bad now it was worst.

**Table 1**  
Puerto Rico Population during the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Year	White Population	Black Population
1834	168,217	126,399
1846	188,831	175,791
1860	282,751	241,015
1867	310,270	266,909
1872	289,344	251,709

Source: Díaz-Soler, L.M. (2000). *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* [History of black slavery in Puerto Rico] San Juan: UPR Press. p. 256

A close examination of the Census of the Population reports during the Spanish ruling showed basically a ratio of 1 to 1 of white population to black population (See Table 1). In contrast the Census of the Population since the American ruling has showed a clear tendency towards the whitening process with 4 of every saying to belong to the white race (See Table 2).

**Table 2**  
Population Changes in Puerto Rico  
since 1910 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Year	White Population	Non White Population
<b>1910 (total figure)</b>	732,555	385,437
Percentage	65.5%	34.5%
Ratio	2/3	1/3
<b>1920 (total figure)</b>	948,709	351,062
Percentage	73%	27%
Ratio	3/4	1/4
<b>1930 (total figure)</b>	1,146,719	397,156
Percentage	74.3%	25.7%
Ratio	3/4	1/4
<b>1940 (total figure)</b>	1,430,744	438,511
Percentage	77%	23%
Ratio	3/4	1/4
<b>1950 (total figure)</b>	1,762,411	448,292
Percentage	80%	20%
Ratio	4/5	1/5
<b>2000 (total figure)</b>	3,199,547	410,296
Percentage	84%	16%
Ratio	4/5	1/5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau –

- 1) Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics, 2000 Census of Population and Housing Puerto Rico, Table DP-1, page 1.
- 2) 1950 Census of the Population Vol II Characteristics, parts 51-54, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1953, pages 53-107.
- 3) 1930 Census of the Population of Puerto Rico, Table 3, page 136.

However a DNA research in relation to the percentage of racial mix for some countries in the Caribbean basin conducted by the DNA Institute of the University of

Panama showed that the racial mix for Puerto Rico was in accordance with the results of the Spanish Census of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a ratio of approximately 1 white person to 1 non-white person, an indication of the whitening frenzy of the Puerto Ricans (See Table 2). It can be fairly assumed that the social stigma of being classified as non-white is ever present in the population and that an aversion towards anything related to any African tie, in particular genealogical relationship is abhorred, excluded, deleted or bypassed (Candelas, 2000; Duany, 2000; Mulero, 2001; Ortiz, 1990; Vera-Irizarry, 1999). This racial avoidance permeates the business environment since a research of black faces in the high echelons of the Puerto Rican corporate world only returned a 1/3 of 1%. A study related to the announcement of promotions in the local business world showed only the promotion of 5 persons with obvious African features out of 320 or 1.56%. A more detailed examination of the same 320 persons yielded 57 persons that could be classified as non-white persons since they had an obvious racial mixture observable in some of their part of their facial features or 17.8%; still far from the approximate 50% of the DNA research conducted by the University of Panama (Otero, 2005).

**Table 3**  
Percentage of Racial Mix in  
Some Caribbean and Latin American Countries

<b>Country</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Indian</b>
Argentina	81.62	-----	18.4
Chile (Santiago)	69.0	-----	31.0
Costa Rica	61.0	9.1	29.9
Cuba	62.0	20.0	18.0
Dominican Republic	40.0	43.0	17.0
México	37.7	6.1	56.2
Panamá	27.4	32.9	39.7
Puerto Rico	45.0	37.0	18.0

Source: Instituto del DNA y del Genoma Humano de la Universidad de Panamá [University of Panamá DNA and Human Gene Institute]

A study ordered in 1962 by the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico to investigate the racial composition in the Banking Industry revealed open discrimination against black persons working in that industry (Díaz-Pabón, 1975). Other industries, such as the entertainment and communication industries openly discriminates against black persons (López-Llanos, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d, 1982e; López-Ruyol, 2005; Rivera-Ortiz, 2001; Vargas, 2000). The House of Representative had project for the research of racial discrimination, however, so far the report has not been available for this research.

The evidence is overwhelming of the racial problem of Puerto Rico and it also shows that the problem is sidelined by many people who negate the existence of racial discrimination in the island. The argument by many is that Local and Federal Laws severely punish racial discrimination, hate crimes and other forms of discrimination. However, many forms of discrimination and bias are not that easy to detect or measure due to the hidden nature of the behavior. The socialization process in Puerto Rico is such that encourages the whitening process by means of the improvement of the race and the

negation of the African ancestry. This socialization process creates cultural bias conduct forming a dichotomous logic embracing the white European ancestry and washing away the African ancestry. Therefore, the behavioral pattern will reject a black for a white, such as the one presented in this study.

**Table 4**  
 Black employees in the Banking Industry of Puerto Rico October 1962 research sponsored by the State House of Representatives of Puerto Rico

<b>Bank</b>	<b>Observations / Findings</b>
Banco Popular of Puerto Rico	Only 5 out of 942 workers of the Bank were black. Four of them hired after an investigation ordered October 1962 by the State House of Representatives.
Banco Crédito y Ahorro Ponceño	Had no black tellers.
Banco de Ponce	There were no black employee out 414 bank employees
Banco de San Juan	No black employee
Banco Roig	No black employee
First National City Bank	There were no black employee out 653 bank employees
Chase Manhattan Bank	No black employee
First Federal Savings	No black employee
Royal Bank of Canada	The Bank had an unfavorable selection method for selecting black candidates. They had no black or mulatto employees and their policy diverged from their integration policy in other Caribbean Islands.
The Nova Scotia Bank	One black person was employed as elevator worker and a mulatto as a chauffer for the Bank Manager. This bank did not discriminate in other Caribbean islands where they had operations.

Source: (Díaz-Pabón, 1975, p.120-121)

**Theoretical Framework**

In 1946, Asch experiment confirmed that impression formation is an organized complex process where characteristics are perceived in their dynamic with central qualities leading peripheral qualities which then exert a continuous effect on the peripherals. In an experiment using a series of discrete terms used in a dichotomy (warm - cold terms), he found that the individual formed a unified impression which was not discrete. Although the experiment failed to account for gender and ethnicity, it demonstrated that humans could form impressions based on discrete unrelated and unsubstantiated traits. Later research conducted by Murphy et. al. (1993) came with the

**Table 5**  
Puerto Ricans Dichotomous Logic Comparison

<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>
White	Black
Male	Female
Secure	Insecure
Powerful	Powerless
Intelligent	Aggressive
Analytical	Impulsive
Educated	Ignorant
Private School	Public School
White Collar	Blue Collar
Refined	Savage
Distinguished	Ordinary
Capable	Unable
Industrious	Lazy
Thrift	Gambler
Prompt	Tardy
Clean	Dirty
Beautiful	Ugly
Tall	Short
Blue Eyes	Brown Eyes
Thin Nose	Broad Nose
Straight Hair	Kinky Hair
Valuable	Worthless
Homeowner	Public Housing
Quiet	Loud
Bolero / Balada	Rap - Salsa
Christian	Espiritista-Santero
Honest	Mendacious
Tennis	Boxing
Alcohol Culture	Drug Culture
Virtuous	Promiscuous
Legitimate	Illegitimate

concept of the Halo Effect where central qualities affect and direct peripheral qualities. Therefore it is possible to estimate using Ash's warm-cold variable and Murphy's Halo Effect that biased behavior is the result of the racially biased socialization of the salesperson (Ash, 1946; Murphy et al, 1993). For example, the dichotomy of terms used in Table 5 can be divided into warm-cold dyad with certain variables used as central qualities and others as peripheral qualities.

Using Ash's and Murphy's findings we can assume that the utilization of discrete traits especially in a racially permeated environment assist the salesperson in the development of erroneous conduct. For example, in the United States positive attributes

fall under the first column of the Table 5 dichotomy, therefore, white-male forms a better combination than white-female since the peripheral trait is part of the negative side of the dichotomy.

Reasoning using dichotomous logic leads to the utilization of deficit models based on erroneous beliefs. Therefore, in a case where the salesperson the first column of the dichotomy serves as an extreme salient component influencing the outcome of the behavior. In accordance to Dovidio (1993), “we all categorize others into groups, typically in terms that delineate our own group from others. This classification, in turn, automatically initiates bias: Once it's made, we begin to value those in our group more and often to devalue people in other groups. Categorization can occur instantly upon meeting a person, based on what we first see. Because race is one of the aspects of another person that we notice first, racial categorization can form a foundation for prejudice”(p.52). Hence we can expect that a potential white customer will trigger a positive reaction while a contrary action will be triggered by a black customer.

### **Research Questions**

The theoretical framework establish that by means of the socialization of the salesperson will behave more positively towards potential white customers than to potential non-white customers. Our research defines white customers as those individuals with white skin, natural straight hair (blonde, brunet, etc.), narrow nose and thin lips. While non-white customers are those individuals with dark skin, kinky or curly hair, wide nose and thick lips. Since Puerto Rico is a racially mixed it is difficult at times to differentiate between an individual classified as white in the United States versus an individual classified as white in Puerto Rico. Therefore for simplification, a person with all the physical features of a white person will be classified as white person, while a person with all the physical features of a black person will be classified as black person and the rest will be classified as “mestizo” or mixed. Based on the previous definition and premise three research questions come in mind:

1. That white persons are perceived as being better customers when compared to non-white persons in Puerto Rico.
2. That perception of a person color by the salesperson is enough to discriminate against a black customer and give preference to the white customer.
3. That perception of a person color by the salesperson is enough to discriminate against a mestizo customer and give preference to a whiter customer.

### **Hypotheses**

To restate these questions in scientific terms for statistical treatments, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- H<sub>1</sub> There won't be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a black potential customers and white potential customer, because in this condition race don't matter.
- H<sub>01</sub> There will be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a black potential customers and white potential customer, because in this condition race matter.
- H<sub>2</sub> There won't be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a mestizo potential customers and white potential customer, because in this condition race don't matter.
- H<sub>02</sub> There will be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a mestizo potential customers and white potential customer, because in this condition race matter.
- H<sub>3</sub> There won't be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a black potential customer and a mestizo potential customer, because in this condition race don't matter.
- H<sub>03</sub> There will be a difference how the salesperson will promote the product X between a black potential customer and a mestizo potential customer, because in this condition race matter.

## **Methodology**

During a two months period indirect observations were made of salespersons promoting various products on the isles of various large shopping malls in the San Juan Metropolitan area. The names of the companies and the products are omitted since they were not approached as a measure to avoid a rehearsed or planned behavior hiding the real conduct of the salesperson.

The salespersons were not aware that they were observed and record was kept of the way they conducted the promotion effort. The study was conducted at different times and days for short periods of time, no longer than 2 hours. The rationale is to observe as many different salespersons as possible making it as random as possible. The kiosks observed were related in terms of the products promoted. Two factors were observed bypassing of black and mestizo customers for white customers. For example, in one occasion a black customer was approaching the kiosk and the salesperson didn't make any effort to give the black customer the promotional literature. Immediately a white customer approached the same kiosk and the salesperson advanced towards the customer and gave it the promotional literature.

The metrics used are 1) the number of black and mestizo customers bypassed, 2) the time spent with customers once they are engaged in the promotional exchange, and 3) if any other behavior associated with discrimination was observable (i.e. comments, gestures, etc.).

The experiment is was very simple, a subject of mixed race, with some Caucasian features mixed with African features, dark skin and curly hair although his nose and lips is Caucasian, walked towards the salesperson always ahead of someone whiter than him or walked behind a black customer. The objective was to walk directly and close by the salesperson to obtain a promotional leaflet without asking for promotion. As a comparison method the same observation was made from afar observing other mestizo customers walking in the same pattern. Mall visits were made between 11 a.m. and 9 p.m. from Monday through Saturday at random dates for a period of 8 weeks or two months. Averages of 5 kiosks per visit were observed on two visits per week.

**Results**

A total of 10 direct observations were made per week and 10 afar observations were also made per week for a total of 80 direct observations and 80 afar observations. In total 42 salespersons different were observed of those 32 were females and 8 males. The ages of the salespersons was not recorded, however a fair age speculation is that they were all less than 40 years of age with the median age around 23 years. We did encountered only two black salesmen and one black saleswoman. We also found that 4 of the salesmen were white and two were mestizos. We found that 24 of the saleswomen were white and seven were mestizas. An interesting note is that the black saleswoman was working behind the kiosk counter. Tables 6 and 7 depict the result of the avoidance observations.

**Table 6**  
Direct Observation of Avoidance by Salesperson

	Female Salesperson	Male Salesperson	Total
Customer			
White	4	1	5
Mestizo	16	8	24
Black	42	9	51
Total	62	18	80

Apart from the direct and afar avoidance observations we recorded length of time the salespersons spent with the different customers. A total of 26 customers (10 blacks, 8 whites and 8 mestizos) were observed and it showed that the salespersons spent more time with the white customer than with the black or mestizo customer.

**Table 7**  
Afar Observation of Avoidance by Salesperson

	Female Salesperson	Male Salesperson	Total
Customer			
White	1	4	5
Mestizo	14	6	20
Black	44	11	55
Total	59	21	80

The observations also showed that saleswomen engaged in the one on one conversation spent much less time with black customers and mestizos than with white customers. Table 8 depicts the results of the observations.

**Table 8**  
Time Spent with Customers by Salesperson

Customer	Female Salesperson	Male Salesperson	Total
White	186 minutes	34 minutes	220 minutes
Mestizo	110 minutes	17 minutes	127 minutes
Black	59 minutes	18 minutes	77 minutes
Total minutes	355 minutes	71	1124 minutes

### Discussion of Results

A total of 10 direct observations were made per week and 10 afar observations were also made per week for a total of 80 direct observations. In total 40 different salespersons were observed, of those 80% were females and 20% males. The age of the salespersons was not recorded; however a fair age speculation is that they were less than 40 years of age with a median around 25 years. We did encounter that only 7.5% of the sales force was black, 5% salesman and 2.5% saleswoman. The distributions between the salesmen were 50% white, 25% mestizos and 25% black. The distributions between the saleswomen were 75% white, 21.9% mestizas and 3.1% black. Definitely that is not proportional with population in Puerto Rico. An interesting note is that the black saleswoman was working behind the kiosk counter. The following tables depict the results of avoidance observation.

### Frequency Analysis

The frequency in the direct observation reflects that the 12.6% of the people in the sample were white, 51.9% were mestizos and 35.4% were black. 61.2 % of the people were attended and just 38.2 % of the people were not attended for the sales purpose. That means that the people were ignored or avoided. Finally 68.9% of the observation registered was made for female salespersons and 31.1% were made for male salespersons.

### Cross tabulation

The 80.8% of white people were attended and just 19.2% were not attended. That means that the sales force aboard four of each five white prospect. When you compare this sales effort with sales effort made with the mestizos, the difference is not significant statistically, for the mestizos those percent are 77.6 and 22.4, respectively. Those percentages are totally different when you compare whit the treatment for the black prospect. The sales force just attend 30.1% of the black prospect and avoid 69.9% of the black prospect, that mean that the sales force aboard 1.5 of each 5 black prospect. The nature of the observational study doesn't let us know why that happened, but definitive those differences are significant when you compare the results by race.

We made a correlation analysis between race and avoidance level. At 99% of confidence the result was 0.422 of correlation. That means a moderate direct correlation between race especially if you are white, and the dispositions of the sales force to approach you like a prospect.

When also apply the regression analysis and the results compare with the results of the correlations analysis. Those shows a regression line with a positive scope between been white and receiving more sales effort or attention.

The frequency in the afar observation reflects that the 16.7% of the people in the sample were white, 47.6% were mestizos and 35.7% were black. 63.8 % of the people were attended and just 36.2 % of the people were not attended for the sales purpose. That means that the people were ignored or avoided. Finally 61.4% of the observations registered were made for female salespersons and 38.6% were made for male salespersons.

The 85.7% of white people were attended and just 14.3% were not attended. That means that the sales force aboard, more than four of each five white prospect. When you compare this sales effort with sales effort made with the mestizos, the difference is not statistically significant; for the mestizos those percent are 80 and 20, respectively. Those percentages are totally different when compared with the treatment for the black prospect. The sales force just attend 32% of the black prospect and avoid 68% of the black prospect, that mean that the sales force aboard just 1.5 of each 5 black prospect. The nature of the observational study doesn't let us know why that happened, but definitive those differences are significant when you compare the results by race.

We made a correlation analysis between race and avoidance level. At 99% of confidence the result was 0.447 of correlation. That means a moderate direct correlation the same as direct observation.

About the previous results we can't reject both  $H_{01}$  and  $H_{03}$ , but we can reject  $H_{02}$  showing a difference in avoidance level, between white and mestizos.

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