These associations, then, and not the chemical properties of the drink, gave Coke an advantage in the marketplace.

It is also interesting to consider the ways in which the frontal part of the brain is connected to the pleasure center. There is a dopamine link by which the front part of the brain projects and activates the pleasure centers. This is probably why Coke was liked more when the brand was known—the associations were more powerful, allowing the part of the brain that represents these associations to enhance activity in the brain's pleasure center. This should be good news to any ad agency, of course, because it means that the bright red can, swirling script, and the myriad messages that have come down to consumers over the years (such as "Things go better with . . .") are as much responsible for our love of Coke as the brown bubbly stuff itself.

EXPECTATIONS ALSO SHAPE stereotypes. A stereotype, after all, is a way of categorizing information, in the hope of predicting experiences. The brain cannot start from scratch at every new situation. It must build on what it has seen before. For that reason, stereotypes are not intrinsically malevolent. They provide shortcuts in our never-ending attempt to make sense of complicated surroundings. This is why we have the expectation that an elderly person will need help using a computer or that a student at Harvard will be intelligent.* But because a stereotype provides us with specific expectations about members of a group, it can also unfavorably influence both our perceptions and our behavior.

*There is a nice T-shirt on sale at the MIT bookstore that reads "Harvard: Because not everyone can get into MIT."