

Remember Contact Hypothesis

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A film can be a powerful tool used to deliver messages, ignite emotions, and change people's thoughts and perspectives. In the movie *Remember the Titans*, this fact is no exception. In this film, we have the opportunity to explore the true story of a southern high school in the middle of 1971 desegregation. There is strong social commentary throughout the film that focuses on racism, prejudice, and tolerance. The tactics used to unite the team is an example of how effective contact hypothesis strategy is when used correctly.

Remember the Titans is a movie about T.C. Williams High School and the legal forcing of both the school and the community to integrate. These legal remedies only further accelerate tensions between Blacks and Whites within the community. The film depicts this integration and shows how this high school did this successfully within its football program. It displays the racial tension and hatred felt on both sides of the racial divide and the struggle of forced integration. The success of the football program illustrates that racial differences can be embraced despite the attitudes of prejudice all around.

Contact hypothesis is a strategy that allows for individuals to remedy their prejudicial ideas of a negatively perceived group. (Blaine, 2017, p. 250) The strategy suggests that through physical contact, individual's negative beliefs lessen when exposed to members of the stereotyped group. (Blaine, 2017, p. 250) There are, however, several conditions that must be met for the strategy to be successful. According to class lecture, there are four prerequisites required for success: Personal interaction, representative member, equal status, and cooperative activities. These prerequisites are performed exceptionally efficiently throughout this film. Personal interaction is established from the very beginning, starting the first day of football camp. Coach Boone, who is appointed by the school board as head coach, immediately makes

the boys ride and room with a teammate of the opposite race. He then forces them to get to know each other by requiring a report about a team member of another race or they will continue with three-a-day practices. Additional personal interactions occur among the boys themselves after practice in the locker room. Their locker room bonding is solidified with the telling of “yo mama” jokes and enjoying popular music together. Later in the movie, they also collaborate on a special entry dance and “warm-up” before each game. A representative member of the stereotyped group must be a typical example of that group and not considered an exception among the group (Blaine, 2017, p. 251). Status is also a prerequisite for this strategy to work. Members of both groups must be equal for their interactions to have lasting and effective results. Boone does this by treating the boys as equals from the very beginning. They are not treated differently, nor are any players favored over others because of their race. This is a hard concept for Coach Yoast, the former head coach who is now working under Coach Boone, as he regularly coddles the Black players after being publicly corrected by Boone. The last of the prerequisites is cooperative activities. This is an ongoing process for the team as they train, practice, work out, and even get into trouble together. After all their hard work, they have the chance to celebrate together as they continue to win football games.

The film’s plot conveys many powerful points. The greatest of these is the use of Julius and Gary. Both Julius and Gary are representative members of their groups. They are the driving force behind the success of the team’s cohesiveness. These two are the first players to show cooperation and comradery; having a tremendous effect on the rest of the team. I like to call this the “Gary and Julius Affect,” or GJA. They are an example of the extended contact strategy that, we know from lecture, is a considerably effective strategy when a person’s bias is reduced just by seeing someone else have a positive interaction with a member of an outgroup.

Because of the GJA, the team is exposed to the positive interaction between the boys and the attitude of acceptance is contagious as it spreads across almost the entire team. Gary's mom also accepts Julius because of the relationship between the two boys when, at first, she did not want anything to do with Julius. There is also Emma, Gary's girlfriend, who is favorably impacted by the GJA as she extends a hand in friendship to Julius.

While the GJA is quite effective in the storyline, there are some aspects of the film that could have been improved to more effectively convey the movie's message. This film is often described as heart-warming on Netflix and critic descriptions. While indeed being a feel-good movie, it does not accurately capture the atmosphere of the deep south during desegregation. The diluted prejudice the movie projects does not show the ugly nature of racist attitudes in the 1970s. It fails to touch on the true horror of the era leaving out the gruesome sense of violence, rape, and murder that went unpunished by southern justice systems. I feel that if the complete truth was portrayed, then it would have made the movie's message much more powerful. I believe that because this was a Disney production, it was impossible to include such ugliness as it would be uncharacteristic of most Disney films.

The contact hypothesis is an effective strategy to bring diverse groups of people together. By following the protocols of the strategy: promoting personal interaction, using representative members, creating equal status, and facilitating cooperative activities, one can ensure that a program will be successful. Thankfully, *Remember the Titans* is a shining example of how these strategies can encourage, even the most combative groups, to join together and embrace each other's differences. While the movie created a beautiful illustration of acceptance and comradery, it also undermined the ugly reality of racism at the time and gave it a heavy dose of sugar coating. Despite the film's flaws, the movie was enjoyable and indeed heart-warming.

References

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