

Is 'More Diversity' Really the Answer to Racial Problems?

With all of the racial tension lately, is diversity really the answer to our racial problems?

This seems to be the solution that the San Francisco Police Department favors at a time when it is under scrutiny for [racist text messages](#) among its officers. As Paul Elias reports for the Associated Press, "San Francisco's police chief said Friday that he has ordered that all officers finish an anti-harassment class" and that the police department "is attempting to diversify its officers."

Other people question whether anti-harassment and diversity trainings are effective, and if intentionally diversifying workers only facilitates greater interracial animosity.

For better or worse, decades of social science research offers some complicated answers. Two professors from Northwestern University and Tufts University recently published an [article](#) on race relations in the 2016 Annual Review of Psychology. The first point they make is that different racial groups experience diversity differently:

"A black perceiver is likely to view a group that is 70% white, 20% black, and 10% Asian as more diverse than is an Asian perceiver. In addition, racial minorities are more likely than whites to require diversity at both high and low levels of an organization's hierarchy in order to consider it diverse."

They go on to report that diverse groups may initially suffer from low group morale and cohesion, but that their performance

on various tasks is typically more creative and practical than homogenous groups, due in large part to the type of information exchange that occurs in the diverse group.

Over time, members of diverse groups also tend to see improvement in their racial attitudes. Yet, this outcome depends on the presence of certain social conditions, such as members from different racial groups having equal status, similar goals, and support from authority figures—reflecting what sociologists call the “contact hypothesis.” Enough contact under the right social conditions results in positive intergroup relations.

Consequently, the San Francisco Police Department may be onto something. The officers of different racial backgrounds are equal in occupational status, have similar professional goals, and experience support for interracial cooperation and interaction from their chief of police.

Diversity may not be the most comfortable intergroup solution to racial problems, but it’s likely to be an effective one in the long run.

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