Collaboratory Against Hate (CAH) Working Group 2 (WG2): Educational Interventions for Youth

Executive Summary of CAH WG2 Activities

It is well documented that children around the world develop biases based on ethnicity and race. Children come to represent the socially constructed notions of 'ethnicity' and 'race' as relevant categories for making predictions about individuals, interpreting ambiguous evidence, and making friendship choices. These early developing biases give rise to racial/ethnic prejudices that persist into adulthood and cause harm to individuals and communities through discrimination, social exclusion, and violence. Therefore, it is critically important to understand not only how ethnic/racial biases develop during childhood, but also how they can be changed with experience and learning. Working Group 2 within the Collaboratory Against Hate aims to bring together a diverse group of researchers (with regards to research expertise and methods of inquiry, as well as lived experience) to tackle this important issue.

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Prepared by Anna Fischer

Co-Chair Working Group 2
Associate Professor
Psychology
Carnegie Mellon University

The Collaboratory Against Hate: Research and Action Center at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh aspires to develop and support innovative multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and cross-university research aimed at understanding how extremist hate is generated, how it circulates in online and real-life spaces, and how it polarizes society and provokes harmful and illegal acts, especially toward communities of color and other minoritized groups. We seek to develop effective interventions to inhibit every stage in the creation and growth of extremist hate groups and to minimize their destructive consequences.

www.collabagainsthate.org

1. Research Agenda

The Collaboratory Against Hate brought together a multi-disciplinary group of researchers broadly interested in the development and assessment of interventions for youth that can reduce and/or interrupt the development of ethnic/racial prejudices. The group began meeting during the Fall 2021 semester and discussing alignment among research interests. As a result of these meetings, Working Group 2 focused on three distinct projects in 2022-2023: The TikTok project, The Digital Games project, and the NextGen project. Collectively, these projects address the following research questions: Can we develop an effective intervention to prevent viral spread of racist content on social media by young people? Can we use educational video games to reduce racial stereotypes about performance in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) in youth? Can we develop an effective intervention for youth to promote awareness of systemic racism in the U.S. and self-efficacy in taking action to combat racism? These three projects are described in more detail below.

1	The TikTok Project
2	The NextGen Project
3	Digital Games Project

1.1 The TikTok Project

Extremist messages of hate are unfortunately present in everyday digital interaction on social media platforms. While hate groups have found ways to actively spread extremist political and cultural ideologies online, much of hateful content on social media is disguised. Instead of overt messaging, extremist views are catching users' attention through more subtle, seemingly innocuous elements. Adolescents are avid consumers and creators of social media content. In fact, social media could be considered a critical developmental context due to its influences on youth's perception of reality and daily interpersonal relationships. Adolescence is a developmental period when knowledge of social systems is still developing, along with cognitive and socio-emotional skills related to perception, awareness, and empathy. Therefore, adolescents maybe vulnerable to unwittingly spreading hateful content and racist sentiments because they either do not understand the connection of racist sentiments to extremism or they dismiss it as an inevitable part of participation in social media. In light of these growing concerns, it is critical that we determine ways to help social media users to identify and decode hateful elements within trending content.

The TikTok project was designed to answer the following research questions: (1) How can we identify and classify audiovisual racist elements in viral TikTok videos? (2) What are users' motivations to participate in viral creation and redistribution of such content? (3) How can we educate users about and prevent (un-)intentional creation and distribution of racist TikTok content?

Towards addressing the first research question, the research team created two data dashboards each with 6,000 TikTok videos based on keywords related to anti-Black racism and to anti-Asian racism. The team then developed a coding scheme for this dataset and identified 102 videos that contained anti-Black racism. Coding the data set for elements of anti-Asian racism is in progress. Key outcomes of Phase I of the project is the finding that (1) racism is often disguised as humor in TikTok videos and (2) racist content is often generated by combining audio, visual and text elements in ways that avoid detection and removal via standard algorithms.

Towards addressing the second research question, the research team conducted a qualitative interview study with 40 students at CMU and Penn West (ages 18-25). The team is in the process of developing a coding scheme to analyze the interviews. The insights from this qualitative analysis of interviews with TikTok users will inform the design of an educational intervention that is the focus of the third research question. The team has shared the preliminary findings from this project at three national conferences.

1.2 The NextGen Project

Extremist hate is a rising problem worldwide. One of the root causes of extremist hate is structured ignorance, or the idea that the world can appear quite different to individuals based on their position within social structures. In the United States, structured ignorance has contributed to lack of awareness of the omnipresence of systemic racism in modern American society and we are experiencing a clash rooted in structured ignorance that is increasingly tearing the fabric of our nation. For instance, at the same time as a number of states declared racism a public health crisis, other states potentiated structured ignorance by enacting legislation forbidding any discussion about race, racism, or inequity in public schools. Addressing these concurrent and interwoven crises will require multi-pronged solutions. The NextGen project was designed to address structured ignorance through a community-based intervention for youth that fosters (1) critical reflection (i.e., critical analysis of racial inequalities) and (2) motivation for action (i.e., perceived capacity to affect change and engage in actions that can affect change) with a focus on anti-Black racism in the United States.

The NextGen project consists of two phases. In Phase I, the research team developed a novel theoretical framework for the intervention and designed interactive learning materials. Specifically, we designed six learning videos to help children understand (1) the connection between the past and present manifestations of anti-Black racism in the U.S.; (2) the contributions of Black Americans to their own liberation and many facets of U.S. society including science, education, arts, politics, and sports; and (3) and the shared responsibility we have to take action against racism. We also designed conversation prompts and scaffolds to facilitate discussion of

the information presented in the videos. Finally, we designed a battery of six tasks to measure pre- to posttest changes in children's emotional state, children's understanding of past and present manifestations of anti-Black racism in the United States as well as accomplishments and contributions of Black people, and motivation for action.

In Phase II of the project, the research team piloted the novel framework and learning materials with 26 racially diverse youth ages 8–18 at three different communities in the Pittsburgh area: Brookline Teen Outreach, Penn Hills Library, and Three Rivers Village School. Data analyses are currently in progress, but our preliminary findings suggest that the learning experience (1) is engaging, affirming, and appropriate for being administered in mixed age, mixed race, and mixed gender groups in community settings; (2) does not negatively impact participants' emotional state, and (3) may improve participants' knowledge of important events in Black history and present time. The research team was invited to present the preliminary findings of the NextGen Project at the annual Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit in 2023.

Continued work on the NextGen project is made possible through a recent $50,000 award from The Fine Foundation. The next steps for the research team include making adjustments to the learning and assessment materials based on the outcomes of the pilot testing, continued collaboration with established community partners, and forming new community partnerships to deliver the anti-racism learning experience to more youth in the Pittsburgh region.

1.3 Digital Games Project

The role of academic stereotypes in youth's competence beliefs and academic achievement becomes salient during early adolescence. In particular, African American adolescents often report that they are aware of racist beliefs regarding who can be good at STEM, and they may even endorse these stereotypes when ascribed to them personally. The Digital Games Project was designed to help combat racial bias and stereotypes toward African Americans using a role-playing digital game. Playing digital games allows the player to take the perspective of someone else by metaphorically walking in that person's shoes during gameplay. Research has found that taking the perspective of another can induce empathy, which in turn can improve a person's attitudes towards other individuals and stereotyped groups. Additionally, a workshop facilitated by teachers in conjunction with the game place experience, can help youth acquire declarative knowledge related to racial biases towards increasing their bias literacy.

The Digital Game Project consists of two phases. In Phase I, the research team recruited students at the Entertainment Technology center at CMU to (1) co-design the digital game called "Power Core Values" and (2) a facilitator's guide for a workshop to accompany the game. In Phase II of the project, the research team piloted the game and the workshop with a group of 16 racially diverse 8th graders from the Northgate School District. Preliminary findings suggest that from pretest to posttest participants improved in their awareness of racial privilege and perceived awareness of experiences of discrimination with regards to self; there were no changes in perceived awareness of experiences of discrimination with regards to others and no changes in empathy.

2. Conclusion

Members of Working Group 2 within the Collaboratory Against Hate established several cross-disciplinary collaborations to explore how racial biases can be changed with experience and learning. Progress of Working Group 2 suggests fruitful research directions for the future. The biggest challenge and opportunity for Working Group 2 is ensuring that voices of researchers who belong to groups directly experiencing the impacts of racism being studied are sought out and welcomed in the setting of research agenda, choosing appropriate research methods, and evaluating impact.