

Title: Identifying Hateful Language

Age/Grade: 10-12th grade

Length: 40 minutes

In this lesson, students will:

- Understand the psychology of in-groups and out-groups.
- Understand and be able to distinguish between examples of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination and how they relate.
- Understand how the internet can aid and grow hateful sentiments and perpetration.
- Gain skills in recognizing online hate
- Gain coping mechanisms for responding to and preventing online hate.

Overview:

People are spending more time online now, than ever. Youth are increasingly active online, putting them at increased risk for encountering hate online. With 57% of youth being exposed to hateful content over the course of a month, we know that online hate is becoming a more and more prevalent aspect of the online experience our youth are having - with it existing in both their everyday online lives (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) as well as the less popularly visible echo chambers of hate communities. However, while youth do recognize some of the risks they encounter in the online space, the prevalence is regularly discounted. Additionally, it is natural to simply pass over harmful content, unaware of the potential consequences of even passive exposure to harmful online materials. This lesson will focus in part on developing the students' understanding of the underlying roots to hateful thinking and the propensity for these ideas to grow in both the offline and online environment. Further understanding the causes and consequences of online hate will empower students to more successfully cope following exposure to online hate and help mitigate its risk for both themselves and others.

This lesson seeks to address to following questions:

- What are in-group and out-group biases?
- What does online hate look like?
- How and why does hate spread online?
- What risks does online hate pose?
- What are possible ways to respond to online hate?

Materials:

- Writing utensils
- Blank paper
- Whiteboard
- 2-sided handouts

Introduction - In-groups & Out-groups

5-minutes

To introduce the concepts of in-groups and out-groups, students will be assigned by instructors to two groups based on a random common trait (for example, those wearing tennis shoes and those not, or shirt color, etc.). The trait that distinguishes the two groups will be unknown to the students, thus they will have to figure out what trait has determined the group that they are a part of. Students will be instructed to then discuss as a group and write down a few ideas on how everyone in their assigned “in-group” are similar, as well as how the other “out-group” may be different, ideally showcasing how easy it is for in-groups and out-groups to form, and often along arbitrary or superficial lines. The students will also then be asked to discuss why they think they were grouped together and if they feel they would like to be judged based on these arbitrary characteristics. Connect the reason chosen for breaking up the groups to what can happen in the real world when people are broken up into groups based on certain traits.

We will draw on student responses to begin a conversation about what the characteristics they provided are examples of. We will connect this back to the concept of identity. We will then open a discussion into the concepts of following key terms:

In-Groups - A group with which one feels a sense of solidarity or community of interest and identity.

Out-Groups - A group that is distinct from one's own due to a difference in interests and/or identity

Bias - prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair, unfounded, and unjustified.

Othering - view someone (or a group of people) as being alien to oneself because of who they are.

The instructors will introduce or re-affirm these terms for the students, connecting this with the activity and providing real world examples as well.

Discussion - Othering & Hate Online

7-Minutes

Ask the students if they can give any examples of in-groups and out-groups in society and how this has or could result in othering of an out-group. These can be examples they may have learned in history class or in their day-to-day lives.

Historical examples:

- Nazis othering and atrocities against the Jews
- US othering Japanese-Americans during WW2 (e.g. Japanese internment camps)
- The othering of Asians at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Non-Historical examples:

- Refusing to have a conversation with someone because of the school they go to.
- Verbally attacking someone because of their religious beliefs.
- Refusing to work with someone on a school project because of their race.

Once the students give examples, briefly outline the in-groups and out-groups of each - or do this while they are being mentioned by the students. Then, link this to the first activity, asking how the students would feel if they were excluded or attacked because of some arbitrary trait like the color of the shirt they were wearing, or more tangible examples like the color of their hair.

You want to challenge the students to identify how these groups are formed and also what these groups can lead to. Make clear that these are natural social breakdowns and they aren't necessarily *bad*, but they can, at times, promote a growth in othering thinking and feelings. This will lead into a discussion about how we might not even realize we feel more or less comfortable when interacting with certain groups of people in certain situations.

Transition - In-groups/Out-groups → The Language We Use

3-Minutes

When we build and design our in-groups (some more explicitly formed than others), the way we talk about and to the out-group (or groups we don't identify with) can change.

Some examples are overly hostile and aggressive - examples like the use of hateful slurs or equating certain people to animals like we have seen historically and personally as well. Others are not as explicit but they suggest certain ideas and thoughts to those that are victim or exposed to that content which can have an immense impact on them as well. Ask the students if anyone can think of examples where we might hear subtle statements meant to diminish an out-group from time to time, online or offline?

NOTE: be prepared to have simple examples that you might have heard day-to-day back in high school.

Make clear that the way we talk about and talk to each other can change when it is about our in-groups or out-groups. And while some of those changes might be perceived as benign, the way they might be perceived by the victim in those situations might have highly negative impacts.

Activity - Subtle Prejudice

15-minutes

Students will be broken into small groups (3-5 groups). These worksheets will have two sides, each with two columns on them. On the first side of the page, the left column has a collection of statements, ranging from subtle to more overt statements youth might be seeing and hearing in their day-to-day lives. First, the students will be asked to connect the phrases in column 1 with the victim's or bystander's possible interpretations in column 2. In this activity students will learn to identify subtle and more overt online hate and will be able to reflect on how the things they or others might say can have unconsidered/unintended connotations as well as discuss ways to phrase things that are less likely to reflect stereotypic assumptions and beliefs.

Statements	Underlying Harmful Meanings
"Is that your real hair"	Your culture/style are not the "norm"
"Stop being such a girl"	Girls/women are weak/emotional
"You should pick him to be on our team cause he's black"	Someone's worth and abilities are defined by their race
"Why do you sound like that?"	A culture/ethnicity different to mine is weird and an outsider.
"No homo"	Being or being perceived to be gay is not accepted by others

Once the students complete the first side of this worksheet, go through each example one-by-one by asking the groups what they connected each statement with the interpretation. As you go through the examples, ask the students how the underlying meaning of these phrases can be impactful on others. For example, how does the statement of "stop being such a girl" impact the people around you? How does this influence thinking?

Once completing this, transition the discussion about how these statements can grow and reinforce stereotypes (especially online) and how these can turn into prejudice and discrimination. Ask if anyone knows the definition for these phrases and how they may relate. To simplify the situation, explain that prejudice is a feeling of hostility toward someone due to a given characteristic; while discrimination is an action of hostility toward someone due to a given characteristic. At this point, now ask the students to flip their pages over and complete the next step of the activity, where they need to identify what phrases/situations are perpetuating prejudice or discrimination. Give the students a few minutes to discuss with their group and complete.

“Keep him out of our group. Nobody can understand him with that accent”.	Discrimination
“I’m not comfortable leaving my backpack alone since this school is full of ghetto thugs”	Prejudice
Someone’s locker is vandalized with gay slurs written across it.	Discrimination
“I can’t stand some of these gay kids in the class. I don’t want to be around them”	Prejudice
A student was beat up for speaking Spanish. The student who punched them yells “Speak English you’re in America now”	Discrimination

Once the students have time to finish the activity, do the same with the students, going through each one and discussing what each phrase/situation means, how it would be categorized, and the impact it is having on the victims and the bystanders to these situations.

As you work through these, you should also highlight actions we should be taking (i.e. coping strategies) to prevent these situations both online and offline. Discuss how reaching out to victims, standing up to perpetrators, reporting online situations, and promoting alternative/counter narratives are possible reactions to stop these risky/hostile situations.

Discussion - Stereotyping, Prejudice, Discrimination, and Hate

10-minutes

Once you complete going through each situation/phrase, you want to highlight how the situations above all connect.

Stereotypes → Prejudice → Discrimination/Hate

Above there are two examples of the phrases used in the first part of the activity that can lead to prejudice and discrimination – “the pathway of hate”. For example, from above:

“No Homo” → “I can’t stand some of these gay kids in class...” → Vandalized locker with gay slurs

“Why do you sound like that?” → “I never leave my backpack alone since this school is full of ghetto thugs” → A student was beat up for speaking Spanish because the person who hit them thought they were an immigrant.

What we have here is that the language used can (1) make people more comfortable with subtle stereotyping and (2) reinforce hateful language and ideas about perceived out-groups. This reinforcement can then grow prejudicial ideas and feelings, which will then lead to action on

those feelings. Make clear that this movement toward action and even violence in some cases is not something everyone undergoes, however we know that these stereotypes and the language used can grow prejudicial feelings and subsequently discriminatory action as well - especially in the online space - and that can lead to other potential harmful actions as well.

You must take time debriefing this activity and spending time explaining and examining the harm that this language can have on those victimized by it.

Also make clear that the internet has created a pathway of sharing hate online, where this content can: 1) begin online, 2) spread online, and 3) facilitate online hate.

Conclusion: Discussion

2-3 Minutes

To wrap up the lesson, we will focus on self-reflection for the students in recognizing these sorts of subtle prejudices in their day to day lives. Incorporate discussion how the use of subtly hateful phrases and statements are heightened online and may be even more prevalent than during face to face conversations. Additionally, we will encourage the students to think through how these sorts of prejudices can escalate along the pathway to hate and result in more overt hate and even acts of violence.