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Adolescence, race, and ethnicity on the Internet: A comparison of discourse in monitored vs. unmonitored chat rooms

Brendesha Tynes[a,b,*], Lindsay Reynolds[a,c], Patricia M. Greenfield[a,c,*]

[a]*Children's Digital Media Center, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA*
[b]*Department of Education, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA*
[c]*Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA*

Abstract

Scholars have argued that the Internet could bring about the realization of an electronic global village, with no race, gender, infirmities, or the social problems that often accompany these physical indicators of difference. In this study, we explored this issue by conducting content and discourse analyses of online conversations about race and ethnicity in teen chat rooms. A key focus of our research was to compare the racial and ethnic discourse in monitored vs. unmonitored teen chat rooms. Contrary to the claims of Internet scholars, we found that race and ethnicity were frequently mentioned in teen chat: 37 out of 38 half-hour transcripts had at least one racial or ethnic utterance. While most references had a neutral or positive valence in both monitored and unmonitored chat rooms, chat participants, nonetheless, had a 19% chance of being exposed to negative remarks about a racial or ethnic group (potentially their own) in monitored chat and a 59% chance in unmonitored chat. Statistical analysis indicated that racial or ethnic slurs were significantly more frequent in the unmonitored than in the monitored chat rooms. These findings suggest that, in the absence of social controls, such as a monitor, negative intergroup attitudes can surface. The implication is that more attention needs to be paid to reducing prejudice in both online and offline contexts.
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Keywords: Race; Ethnicity; Prejudice; Chat rooms; Internet; Monitor; Adolescent; Discourse; Intergroup relations

* Corresponding authors. Children's Digital Media Center, UCLA, Los Angeles, LA 90095-1563, USA.
E-mail addresses: btynesb@ucla.edu (B. Tynes), Greenfield@psych.ucla.edu (P.M. Greenfield).

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1. Introduction

Scholars have argued that the Internet could bring about the realization of an electronic global village (Negroponte, 1995; Ess, 2001) where there would be no race, gender, or infirmities. The social problems that often accompany physical indicators of difference would also disappear. Though visual signifiers of race may be absent, recent research on adults has shown that across a range of online communication settings (Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002; Kang, 2000; Kendall, 1998; Nakamura, 2002), race takes on a linguistic form. Once made visible through electronic text, race has been found to be central to the culture of computer-mediated environments, and many of the social norms and ills that exist offline are often reproduced in adult online communities (Burkhalter, 1999). In using the term culture here, we refer to the shared norms, meanings, and activities that are co-constructed through online interaction. Despite the increasing availability of data on the racial dynamics of adult online communities (e.g., Bailey, 1996; Ebo, 1998; Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 1999; Nelson, Linh, Tu, & Hines, 2001), we know very little about the racial experiences of adolescents online.

Computers have become an essential component in the adolescent cultural toolkit. This may be attributable, at least in part, to the fact that they belong to the "Net-Generation": a generation of people reared with, and at times by, interactive media (Tapscott, 1998). These youth range in age from toddlers to those in their mid-20s and are said to use the Internet for most everyday activities, including shopping, playing games, learning, and communicating. A new youth culture is emerging as a result, one that Tapscott argues will foreshadow the world teens will create when they reach adulthood. Considering youth culture on the Internet and the importance of group identity and in-group/out-group relations during adolescence, this study investigates these relations in a popular social milieu where teens hang out online: chat rooms.

In exploring teen chat, we focus on race and ethnicity. Race is used to refer to individuals or groups defined on the basis of physical criteria and ethnicity to those defined on the basis of cultural criteria or geographical area (Van den Berghe, 1978). For the purpose of simplicity, "race" or "race-related" will often be used as an umbrella term where either applies. We take a discourse analytical approach (Edwards, 2003; Wodak & Reisigl, 2003) and view these categorizations as created, negotiated, and performed by participants through their talk. Rather than administering a scale that would attempt to capture participants attitudes about race or their potential to act based on these attitudes, these aspects are approached analytically, as factors that would be evidenced in talk. Since it has been argued that racial prejudices are acquired and shared through everyday conversation (Van Dijk, 1992) and that identities are interactionally formed (Mama, 1995), analyzing discourse should offer a clear glimpse into these processes.

In an early study of electronic communication among adolescents, they were found to be more egalitarian than adults in their interactions (Tapscott, 1998). Racial conflict was virtually nonexistent. Thus, it was argued that teens were more intellectually open and inclusive than their predecessors (Tapscott, 1998). It should be noted, however, that this study was conducted in the early stages of Internet proliferation when fewer people of color were online. The present study tests these assertions at a time when more adolescents of color have access to the Internet to determine whether there is, in fact, a general "acceptance of diversity" in the interactions of adolescents.

Indeed, Tapscott's thesis concerning inclusiveness seemed to contradict what we know about adolescent peer groups, the fact that they become more segregated at this stage. In a recent review of literature on children's developmental understanding of ethnicity, Quintana (1998) points out that an ability to assume a group perspective develops during adolescence. Along with this ability comes

increasing segregation between groups. Participants in Quintana's own work reported that it was easier to develop friendships with in-group members than with those belonging to out-groups. Would online societies of teens be different?

The data so far indicate both similarities and differences. Research on electronic communication in unmonitored or unmoderated, asynchronous online contexts (such as discussion boards and email exchanges) has shown that high school and college students often mention their own race and request the race of their conversational partners (Whitaker & Hill, 1998). Such conversations could be a means of looking for a partner of the same race. However, these discussions are held in the company of a diverse population of chat participants, which would not be the case in segregated groups offline. Further analysis is needed to determine whether the function of mentioning race and requesting the race of others is for the purpose of including or excluding members of different ethnic groups. We will use discourse analysis to address this issue.

Other research has indicated that Tapscott's conclusions concerning adolescent inclusiveness online may not be correct. Students engage in high rates of "cross-cultural misconduct" (Whitaker & Hill, 1998), including negative stereotyping in online settings. Older adolescents participating in discussion boards about diversity and affirmative action, for example, use emotionally charged, often aggressive language in their posts to fellow participants (McKee, 2002).

Some preliminary observations in December 2000 indicated that negative racial attitudes were also present in teen chat, but that adult monitoring might eliminate their expression (Greenfield, 2000). It appeared that communication about racial issues was taking on a different form when an authority figure—in this case a monitor—was present. This possibility was in line with studies of adults, which show that positive racial attitudes may be over-reported and negative ones under-reported when an experimenter—in some instances, of a particular ethnic group—is present rather than absent (Evans, Garcia, Garcia, & Baron, 2003; McConahay, Hardee, & Butts, 1981). In this study, we therefore compared the race-related discourse practices of adolescents in monitored and unmonitored contexts in order to see whether the monitor as authority figure succeeds in reducing negative racial language.

Most past studies of interracial dialogue among adolescents from diverse backgrounds have been conducted in asynchronous online environments and in semistructured, educational contexts. Participants in these studies were brought together specifically to discuss racial and cultural issues. In contrast, the present study explored teen chat rooms, a synchronous format. These online spaces were explicitly created for a particular age group, but had no specific topical focus. In these chat rooms, we examined how and how much the subject of race was broached. Rather than concentrating solely on negative language, positive features of adolescent racial discussions will be highlighted.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Though it is difficult to ascertain the age, gender, and other demographic variables of teens in chat rooms, many participants were reported to be between the ages of 13 and 17. Participants were encouraged by the monitored Internet service provider not to give out personal information. This did not preclude them from doing so, however. Identities of the participants were often forged through their screen names and their discourse. Teens would often ask the age, sex, and location (A/S/L) of other

participants (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield & Tynes, 2004; Tynes, 2003). When responding to an ASL request, at times, they added their race. Based on these responses, we found that teens from various racial groups participated in the discussions, with the most prominent groups being whites, blacks, and Latinos.

2.2. Research sites

We compared monitored and unmonitored chat rooms from two of the most popular teen sites.[1] Adolescents were able to engage in everyday conversations with people they met from within the US and abroad. Topics of discussion included a wide range of adolescent developmental concerns and interests, from issues of sexuality to their favorite musical artists. Because the chat rooms were not created specifically for discussions of race, when the issue was raised, it emphasized its significance in the daily lives of chat participants.

The critical distinction between monitored and unmonitored chat rooms in our study is that only the monitored rooms had a trained adult host supplied by the chat service provider and a list of rules by which participants were expected to abide. These rules were often referenced during chat conversations:

1. Do not harass, abuse, or threaten another member. If you disagree with someone, respond to the subject, not the person.
2. Do not use hate speech. Hate speech is unacceptable, and we reserve the right to take appropriate action against any account using the service to post, transmit, promote, distribute, or facilitate distribution of content intended to victimize, harass, degrade, or intimidate an individual or group on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.
3. Respect the context and intended audience of the online areas you visit. Many services and communities carry additional standards. It is your responsibility to review and abide by those standards and to ensure that your activity, language and electronic transmissions are appropriate for any particular area. What is appropriate in some areas or contexts may not be appropriate in others.
4. Do not impersonate any person, business, or other entity. Doing so in an attempt to deceive, harass, or otherwise mislead another member is forbidden. You may not pretend to be an employee or representative of this service or its affiliates.

In the monitored chat rooms in our study, language that is deemed sexually or politically offensive frequently results in the perpetrator being "evicted" electronically from the room. In the unmonitored chat rooms in our study, there are no such consequences, as no host is present and no official rules of conduct exist.

In the monitored chat rooms, the hosts are responsible for monitoring multiple rooms simultaneously. Thus, during our data collection the host occasionally announced to one room that he or she was leaving to monitor another room. Several times when this occurred, the room became what we call functionally unmonitored. We considered a room functionally unmonitored if 51% or more of the total utterances from a session occurred when the host was not present and the participants acknowledged this fact before the race-related discourse began. In total, there were 22 unmonitored (including 2 functionally unmonitored sessions) and 16 monitored chat sessions in our analysis.

[1] To protect the anonymity of the service providers, we do not list the actual names of the chat sites.

2.3. Data collection

The chat rooms were visited for 30-min intervals or the length of time necessary to obtain 15 pages of room activity. The data were collected from April 14 to June 1, 2003, and samples were taken from every hour that the chat rooms were open, which was daily from 12 to 9 PM Pacific Time. Although the unmonitored chat rooms were open 24 h a day, the samples were taken from the hours that the monitored rooms were open. This was done to ensure comparable samples.

2.4. Procedure

The selected monitored and unmonitored teen chat rooms were entered at a scheduled time, and the researcher remained there for 30 min (or until 15 pages of transcript were collected) as a passive observer not interacting actively with other chat room participants. If another chat room participant (more than likely the host) addressed the researcher by saying hello, she responded by saying hello in return. No other comments were acknowledged and the researcher made no attempts to engage any of the participants in conversation. This was done to ensure that the researcher had no influence on the type of conversations that transpired.

The second author cut and pasted the chat from the site into a MS Word file. Then, each transcript was imported into Nud*ist, a software program that allows users to analyze qualitative data quantitatively. The transcripts were then coded as follows.

Content

1. Self-identification: implicit or explicit reference to the self based on physical characteristics, race, or ethnicity. Implicit references indexed race by describing physical features (e.g. blonde hair and blue eyes).
2. Racial reference to others: explicit reference to or about a racial or ethnic group.
3. Race-related run: a discussion of race or ethnicity by two or more participants; must be three or more lines.
4. Race-based partner selection: explicit requests for a mate on the basis of race or ethnicity.
5. Racial in-group formation: explicit searches, requests, and responses of people of a particular racial or ethnic group.

Valence: One of the codes below was applied to utterances receiving one or more of the above five codes.

1. Positive: an utterance in which race or ethnicity is mentioned without prompting and the reference is constructive, that is, marked by acceptance, approval or affirmation by the "speaker."
2. Neutral: an utterance in which race or ethnicity is mentioned in response to another participant's request and the reference is constructive, that is, marked by acceptance, approval, or affirmation by the "speaker."
3. Negative: an utterance that derogates an individual or group on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Valences were usually judged on the basis of the content of utterances in the first five categories. When valence was difficult to determine on the basis of content alone, the responses of others to

utterances in categories 1–5 were also taken into account. Neutral codes were judged as such because they were responses to others' questions. Because the participant is merely responding to the request of another, it was impossible to tell whether the quality of the utterance was positive for the respondent, and so we (conservatively) categorized it as neutral. Other than the distinction of either being self- or other-initiated, positive and neutral references were similar.

For reliability coding, 8 transcripts or 20% of the total of 38 were coded by the first two authors. Reliability for coding valence, the only variable analyzed quantitatively, was assessed by the kappa statistic. It was based on race-related utterances to which both raters gave a content code. The kappa for valence judgments was .75, considered excellent by Bakeman and Gottman (1986). Following reliability coding, most disagreements were resolved, and the second author went on to code the rest of the transcripts.

Once frequency counts were completed in Nud*ist, a database was created in SPSS. Each transcript represented one case, that is, independent unit, in the quantitative analysis. A between-samples *t*-test was performed to compare transcripts from the monitored vs. unmonitored chat rooms. A within-samples *t*-test compared the quantity of negative language to the quantity of neutral and positive language, summating across these two highly similar categories. The Nud*ist database was also utilized to identify qualitative examples for the discourse analysis.

3. Results

Using content analysis, we first present quantitative data on positive, neutral, and negative racial discourse, examining the differences between monitored and unmonitored chat rooms. Using discourse analysis, we next present qualitative data on the types of race-related discourse—including self-identification, racial reference to others, racial in-group formation, race-related run (or discussion), and race-based partner selection—adolescents engaged in as they communicated online. Last among the qualitative results, we use discourse methodology to analyze the processes by which monitoring influences adolescent conversations.

3.1. Frequency of positive, neutral, and negative race-related discourse in monitored and unmonitored chat rooms

In our corpus of data, there were 38 transcripts of adolescent conversations. Of these 38, 37 had at least one racial utterance. The mean number of racial utterances in each transcript, that is, within a half-hour of chat, was 8. However, there were 9 transcripts with 10 or more utterances, positively skewing this number. The median (5) is a more accurate depiction of how often race was discussed. Both calculations suggest that race was a common topic of conversation.

We found positive racial utterances in 87% of the 38 transcripts, neutral in 76%, and negative in 47% of the 38 transcripts. As shown in Fig. 1, the percentage of positive and neutral utterances for both the monitored and unmonitored chat rooms was similar. In spite of the fact that there was no monitor in the room, positive and neutral language predominated in the discussions. When positive and neutral utterances were combined and compared to the number of negative utterances, the frequency of positive/neutral racial utterances was significantly greater than the frequency of negative racial utterances (matched-pairs *t*-test, $t = 4.89$, $p = .000$).

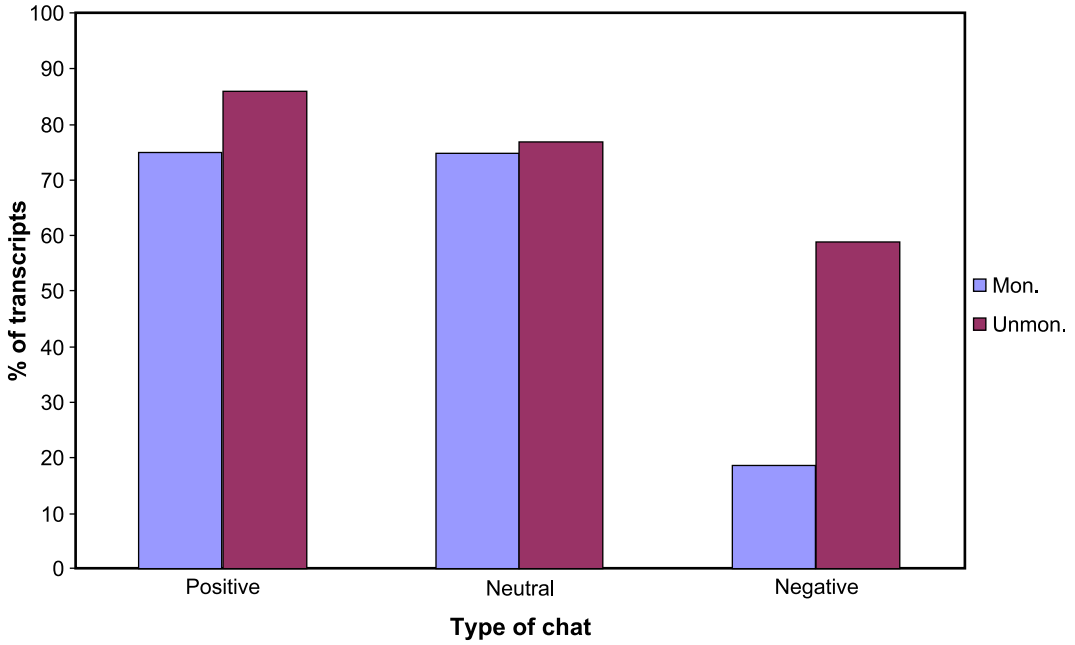

Fig. 1. Difference in race-related discourse in monitored vs. unmonitored chat rooms.

Despite the overall predominance of positive and neutral racial references, negative references occurred in almost half (16 to be exact) of the 38 transcripts. When comparing the quantity of negative language in monitored and unmonitored chat, however, we found significantly more negatively coded racial discourse in the unmonitored chat rooms (independent-samples t-test, $t = 2.37$, $p = .02$). Three of the 16 monitored chat rooms, compared with 13 of the 22 unmonitored ones, had negative race-related discourse. In other words, participants had a 19% chance of being exposed to negative remarks about a racial group (potentially their own) in monitored chat rooms and a 59% chance in unmonitored chat (see Fig. 1).

Based on traditional societal norms regarding race, one might expect that these negative remarks would be directed toward people of color, including blacks and Latinos. There was evidence in these data, however, that white teens were as likely to be victims of racial attacks as people of color. Of the total negative utterances, Latinos received 16, whites 13, blacks 8, biracial teens 2, and Native Americans 1. It should be noted that the high number of negative utterances for Latinos and whites was a result of two extended negative discussions regarding these two groups. When the total number of negative discussions (rather than utterances) was calculated, Latinos, whites, and blacks were more comparable, receiving 5, 7, and 6 instances, respectively.

3.2. Types of race-related discourse

In discourse analytic approaches, researchers often focus on how participants represent shared knowledge in a given society. In our data, "common sense" notions of race are represented in both the statements participants made and in the questions they posed (Edwards, 2003). The cultural resources

constituting racial ideological practices, including the ways participants construct identities for themselves and others, are also clear in these utterances (Wetherell, 2003).

To facilitate transcript reading, we have eliminated utterances that did not pertain to the conversation. Line numbers have been placed in front of each utterance and appear here just as they do in our transcripts. These line numbers were added when the transcript was placed in the MS Word file. A line space between utterances indicates that these are two separate examples and do not represent connected discourse. Where there is no line space between utterances, but there is a gap in the numbers between adjacent utterances (e.g., between 105 and 113, below), the adjacent utterances constitute connected discourse that has been interleaved with other simultaneous conversations going on in the chat room (cf. Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003). Screen names have been changed just enough to protect the identity of the chat participants but without losing the essence of the name.

Typical examples of each category were selected. We begin our analysis with examples of how participants build ethnic or racial identities for themselves online.

3.2.1. Self-identification

One of the first practices observed was related to how participants chose to use race in their self-descriptions. In the examples below, participants transformed the traditional way of identifying self in chat culture—A/S/L or age, sex, and location—to include their race.

30. YourBaby: hey any one wanna chat witha hot 13/f/oh blond hair blue eyes 5'2 im me

277. Atlboy: AD: 16/M/GA BLK, SINGLE AND LOOKIN', LADIES IN MY CATEGORY, PRESS 88 IF INTERESTED OR IM ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Yourbaby, apparently in order to get a chat partner of the opposite sex to send her an instant message (IM, private online conversation), described herself as a hot 13-year-old from Ohio who is blonde and blue eyed. Similarly, Atlboy said that he is a 16-year-old male from Georgia who is black (BLK). While Yourbaby's identification was more implicit (blonde and blue eyed), Atlboy explicitly wrote BLK as one would in a personal advertisement. In fact, he noted at the beginning of his utterance that his line is an "AD." These two forms of self-representation were common throughout the transcripts. Whites were more likely to use implicit forms of identification, indexing their race with words like tan, blonde, and blue eyed and people of color used more explicit forms. This may be indicative of the fact that whites, because they are in the majority, take their racial group membership for granted (McIntosh, 1988) and therefore do not feel the need to express it explicitly. There were several cases, however, of whites explicitly identifying themselves as in line 128 below.

104: soul456: thats why white people get a bad rep
105. soul456: they cant just chill
113. lilmiss: huh what about white people?
128. lilmiss: I white and proud of it y

In response to Soul456's derogatory remark about white people (lines 104 and 105), Lilmiss defended her race. In this defense, she identified herself as white. Though research offline has consistently shown

that race is less salient for whites (Phinney, 1989, 1992), in our data, this was much less the case. White adolescents' interaction with people from varying cultural groups who were explicit about their racial or ethnic identity prompted them to think about and explicitly express their own racial identity.

3.2.1.1. Racialized screen names. In addition to announcing their race, adolescents identified themselves racially by using descriptive screen names. Screen names were chosen by the user and functioned to identify a chat participant without using his or her real name. Some of the participants' screen names had explicit racial references, such as "CrazyLatinaGirl" or "Black Power12." Other screen names like "AZ_Blondie" or "CaramelBabe" indexed race through their descriptions of physical features, including hair color and skin tone. It should be noted that gender played an important role in racial referencing in the screen names. It was often a secondary component of the names, as in "CrazyLatinaGirl" or "CaramelBabe," that further described and reconstructed adolescents' physical self (see Subrahmanyam et al., 2004).

The use of either explicit or implicit references to race in screen names proved to have an effect on how these participants were treated. In one instance, a user with the screen name "Black Corduroy01" was mislabeled as black. This participant was threatened for calling another participant a "snappy cracker" (line 106). Apparently angered by the fact that a black person made this comment, Starlover responded by saying "corduroy u wanna get beat to death" (line 124) and "ur black in a white man's world my friend." (line 134). Corduroy later clarified his racial background by stating "i'm not blak" (line 179) and "im Italian" (line 245). A similar case of mistaken identity occurred when "DarkHottieMyst" was called white (line 661). He retorted "I have african american blood in me you dumbass," (line 662) "I neva' said I was white" (line 669) and "if you didn't notice my sn [screen name] says DARK in it" (line 674). Participant responses to racialized screen names suggest that they are meaningful symbols that may guide participant behavior. These symbolic expressions of selfhood appear to, at times, be read (or misread) as representations of the physical self and at other times misread as not having real significance at all. For example, participants failed to read the meaning of "Dark" in DarkHottieMyst's screen name. When screen names are read as racially significant, however, they were often the starting point for both positive and negative constructions of race to take place.

3.2.1.2. Multiple racial identities. The following examples represent an unexpected finding related to participants who reported that they were biracial (or bi-ethnic). With the exception of the three-lined excerpt from Truefeefee, which appears last, they are single, positive utterances chosen from various transcripts to show how participants were able to express and take pride in the multiple aspects of their identities.

510. LilV4life: ANY GUYZ WANNA CHAT WIT A BLK/RICAN GURL IM ME ILL BE WAITIN

92. Jasmine: ya, I'm puerto rican & Mexican

112. Preciousguera: anyone here wannnnnnnnna chat with a cute mexican armenian cutie

558. truefeefee: BLACK PRIDE

559. truefeefee: COLOMBIAN PRIDE
560. truefeefee: BLACK AND HISPANIC PRIDE

In these examples, there are a wide range of biracial or bi-ethnic combinations including black and Puerto Rican (line 510), Puerto Rican and Mexican (line 92), Mexican and Armenian (line 112), and black and Colombian (lines 558, 559, and 560). Participants often fronted their multiple heritages as a positive aspect of their identity in addition to using them as a means to attract interlocutors.

3.2.2. Racial in-group formation

The majority of participants in our transcripts reported that they were between the ages of 14 and 16, around the age at which explorations into group identity take on heightened significance (Phinney, 1989). It follows from this research on group identity in offline contexts that participants would identify and form in-groups. Below are two examples of this practice from two different transcripts.

Example 1

203: i_am_misunderstood: how many blacks here?
206: cee_lok: i'm black

Example 2

245. Chicana4Life: ne spanish pepole in here press 888
246. AnGeLyC: 888

In the first example, I_am_misunderstood was interested in how many black people were in the room. Cee_lok replied by saying "i'm black." In the second example, Chicana asked a similar question but was looking for Spanish people. AnGelyC responded in line 246 by pressing 888.

Whereas offline, there are strict boundaries between groups, online boundaries become much more fluid (Poster, 1998). I_am_misunderstood, Cee_lok, Chicana, and Angelyc could have isolated themselves and gone into instant messenger, but they, like other participants, did not always do so. They identified in-group members and often continued communicating with one another within the broader chat context in full view of others. In this way, they both maintained conversations with the larger group and left themselves open for others to participate in their conversation. Remaining with other participants could have benefited those participants outside of the racial group. The knowledge they gleaned from other groups' conversations may have broken down preexisting cultural barriers.

3.2.3. Race-based partner selection

Participants used race to differentiate chat partners as well as to find members of the opposite sex for potential dating liaisons. This trend mirrors research on relationships offline which shows that most people in the US choose to enter relationships with people of their own racial group (Blackwell & Lichter, 2000). In the next example, Championz searches the room for black girls.

463. Championz: all black girlz hit 444
465. Caramelbabe: 444

466. Phattygurl: 444
468. Candy: 444
471. MEaLILqt: 444

In line 463, Championz's asked all black girls to hit 444. The black girls in the room then responded by pressing 444 in lines 465, 466, 468, and 471. Although there are numerous responses to Championz's request, he does not acknowledge them in the chat room and does not contribute to the conversation for over 40 lines. One explanation for this behavior is that he contacted one of the girls via instant messenger and spoke with her privately. As instant messages are private, it is impossible for us to view that communication.

3.2.4. Racial reference to others and race-related runs

In this section, we combine racial reference to others and race-related runs because the latter is often an extended version of the former. As noted previously, most of the language in the unmonitored and in the monitored chat rooms was either positive or neutral. Since, for the most part, the neutral utterances were responses to other people's requests for racial information, the race-related runs comprised positive and neutral comments. In the following race-related run from an unmonitored chat room, participants discuss their ethnic identities. It exemplifies much of the positive racial or ethnic discussions and at the same time shows how each of the five race-related discourse practices may be transmitted to other participants.

51. Pootoo: IM JAMAICAN
53. BBtazernova: Im polish
56. Redsfan: im American
58. MAMAS: me too
59. Pootoo: IM JAMERICAN
61. Leolions: ANY GIRLS THAT ARE IRISH ARE PART IRISH IM ME
62. Stargazer: im american 2!!
64. BBtazernova: i am polish and Norwegion
67. MAMAS: im hispanic/latina
68. The one man: im colombian

Pootoo began the discussion by proclaiming that she is Jamaican in line 51. Once Redsfan said that he is American, she then clarified her statement by asserting that she is Jamerican, a combination of Jamaican and American. Other participants followed suit and imitated Pootoo by stating their ethnic group, at times in the exact same fashion (lines 53, 56, 62, 64, 67, and 68).

Imitation is central to processes of cultural transmission. It allows cultural members to be apprenticed into cultural practices (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993). Here, participants were apprenticed into ideational and linguistic practices. This excerpt is a snapshot of one of the ways in which peers passed on culturally relevant knowledge to other members in the chat room. The practices participants engaged in around issues of race involved activities that were uniform across each of the transcripts, suggesting that these activities were shared among the individual chatters and therefore constituted a general culture of teen chat. This also implies that participants socialized one another into racialized discourse practices.

3.2.5. The role of monitoring

A main focus of this study was to examine how a monitor may influence the nature of race-related conversations by comparing monitored vs. unmonitored chat rooms. The quantitative results in this paper showed that monitoring influences the nature of conversations in online chat. Here, we provide qualitative examples of how this is done. In the following example, a participant is thrown out of the room for what is considered by the host to be disruptive behavior.

163. Puffty: YOU NO WAT I HATE WHEN WHITE BOYS ACT BLACK
177. HOST: Puffty, to avoid further disruption, your chat has been suspended for 10 min. Please use this time to review [chat rules].

Puffty indicated that she hates it when white boys act black in line 163. The host, apparently viewing this as violating chat rules, electronically evicted her. When participants were asked to leave, the host would ask them to review the rules of conduct. In doing so, both the violator of the rules as well as bystanders in the room were made aware of the rules of conduct, what types of language violates those rules, and that their actions have potential consequences.

When the monitor leaves, however, there is no authority present to enforce the rules. In these instances, participants were allowed to go unchecked, and more negative comments were made during this period. Because it is clear to chat participants whether the monitor is present (his or her screen name appears in a box on the right hand side of the screen), some participants may have tried to avoid being removed from the chat room by only making negative comments when they were sure that the monitor was unavailable.

An example of this practice appears below in a race-related run or discussion from a functionally unmonitored chat room. Batgrl, jasmine, and other participants are engaged in a discussion about Batgrl's racial background, which includes several negative comments. This conversation started only after the host announced he was leaving the room (line 32) and this fact was acknowledged (line 38).

31. LadyBoog: FOOT3BALL WUZ UP?
32. HOST: Folks, I am heading to another chatroom for a short time. Please remember to use NOTIFY and the IGNORE feature if necessary. I'llbe back soon! :)
33. Sgcrazy: 333
34. Shortgirlie: 14/f/oh–IM me @ wiggles to chat
35. Foot3Ball: MY BROTHER HAS THE CD
36. LadyBoog: HEY
37. BatGrl: OH THAT SONGS TITE
38. YellowBanana: The HOST is gone. . .!
39. BatGrl: YAH
40. Foot3Ball: I KNOW
41. Jasmine: batgrl are u white or something
43. BatGrl: NO I AINT WHITE
49. Jasmine: then what are u
73. LadyBoog: SHE ASIAN
75. BatGrl: I AINT PAKINSTAN EITHER
76. BatGrl: OR AISAN

77. LadyBoog: THEN U ALBINO
78. TacoPeacock: hispanic. . .?
79. BatGrl: NO
94. BatGrl: TACOPEACOCK TELL THE PEOPLE WAT I AM
100. TacoPeacock: BatGrl is Hispanic
101. TacoPeacock: HISPANIC

Immediately after the host's departure is acknowledged, the negative language began. Before this acknowledgment, the conversation centered around music (lines 35 and 37). Participants acknowledge that the host was gone (lines 38, 39, and 40) and then immediately began antagonistic questioning of Batgrl's identity (lines 41, 49, and 73). Based on Batgrl's grammar and style of writing, other participants surmised that she was white and asked her if she was "white or something" in line 41. Apparently aware of the low status whiteness had in this conversation, she indicated her own aversion to being mistaken for white by saying, in all caps, "NO I AINT WHITE" in line 43. Participants went on with their questioning (as in line 49). For several lines, they attempted to guess, naming different racial groups, including Asians (line 73). Later in the transcript, a participant correctly guessed that BatGrl was Hispanic (lines 100 and 101). This interaction exemplifies the previously noted finding that whites were just as vulnerable to racial attack as people of color. It should be noted, however, that racial dynamics between groups that exist offline may make the ways in which these attacks are experienced qualitatively different.

In the next example, taken from the unmonitored chat rooms, we show a more "traditional" example of negative language. This excerpt is representative of the types of negative language one might find in offline settings. Bigbootygirl is vehemently attacked. We only present a portion of this transcript, but the interaction went on for about 30 min.

21. bigbootygirl: where'd the racist fucker go
23. gaanas49: no where
24. chulischick: SORRY EKE NO ME GUSTAN LOS RASISTAS
27. gaanas49: right here u f u c king mexican
29. cinsea: RIGHT HERE DUMB MEXICan
429. bigbootygirl: why does everyone hate me cuase i'm mexican?
439. gaanas49: cause your mexican
440. gaanas49: duh

Here, Bigbootygirl seemingly has witnessed Gaanas49's racially problematic comments prior to our entering the chat room. Apparently, there was a slight pause in his attack and the victim questioned "where'd the racist fucker go" (line 21). Another participant joined in and together they interactively spew out their racial epithets, one inciting the other to be increasingly vitriolic (lines 27 and 29). In an effort to quell some of the negative language, Chulischick, said "SORRY EKE NO ME GUSTAN LOS RASISTAS" or "SORRY, EEK! I DON'T LIKE RACISTS" (line 24). "EKE" was apparently used to emphasize her disdain for racist language. Since the comment was made in Spanish, however, it is unlikely that the two perpetrators understood this statement. Cinsea, in line 29, went on to invoke a stereotype of an uneducated Mexican. In this case and in several other instances in our transcripts, many forms of racial hostility and negative stereotypes that may exist offline was recreated in teen chat on the Internet.

4. Discussion

4.1. Racial identity

Because these chat rooms were not created for discussions of race but for general, teen-related issues, the high frequency of race-related discourse confirms that race is salient in teen life online (Tynes, 2003; Greenfield, Gross, Subrahmanyam, Suzuki, & Tynes, in press). Our results indicate that race is one component of the adolescent focus on defining oneself and one's peers in terms of larger social groupings. In the absence of the physical information that one would have in a face-to-face encounter (see Subrahmanyam, Greenfield & Tynes, 2004), participants in teen chat use text to give and receive information about each other's racial and ethnic identities. In face-to-face interaction, race can remain implicit. In the disembodied and anonymous public forum of an online chat room, it must be made verbally explicit. This is probably a major reason for the frequency of race-related discourse in teen chat rooms.

Biraciality was one particularly interesting aspect of the representation of racial or ethnic identity in our teen chat rooms. Perhaps because racial group membership was constructed through text and not based on physical features, exclusion criteria seemed to be less severe than they would be offline. Biracial children often report being excluded from one or both of the groups to which they belong because of their phenotype (Winters & DeBose, 2003). These teens are often asked to choose one of their racial heritages and renounce the other. On the Internet, their physical characteristics are not visible. Perhaps as a result, teens can move in and out of conversations with each group. What is most promising for this finding is that biracial children are not forced to choose one culture with which to identify. They also no longer have the pressure of not appearing white, black, or Latino enough. They can "belong" in both, or, in the case of multiracial children, all, of their racial or ethnic heritage groups.

4.2. Race and the peer group: In-group/out-group relations

We know from Quintana's (1998) research that children find it easier to make friends with people from their own group. Even when they are in structured settings where integration is institutionalized, children find ways to be with their own group in more social settings such as the playground (Fishbein, 2002). In the absence of physical indicators, participants in our teen chat rooms used verbal markers of race as common ground on which to start conversations. Having this piece of information about a chat partner appeared to create a degree of comfort—in some cases, enough to invite these participants into intimate conversation through instant messenger. It also allowed adolescents to attach particular attributes to group members.

We found that many of the boundaries that may exist offline between groups are more fluid online. At the developmental stage when segregation is increasing in offline settings, racially diverse groups of teens come together online. Though they try to find their own racial group to form smaller groups or to engage in conversations with members of particular racial groups, it is significant that they do so in the presence of others. In school, in contrast, one group cannot normally overhear (or participate in) the conversation of another.

4.3. The Internet and racial equality

Bailey (1996), one of the first to study race in cyberspace, discussed how the Internet's affinities toward certain groups necessarily silence other voices, languages, and vernaculars. Bailey went on to

note that this was now changing dramatically and that cyberspace was "more open to the free play of subcultures than it ever was" (p. 40). Eight years after these observations were published, we find that groups previously underrepresented on the Internet and therefore silenced (e.g., blacks—from both the US and the Caribbean—and Latinos—from places as diverse as Mexico and Puerto Rico) are now a strong online force. Members of these groups, along with whites, make race relevant in their conversations using various strategies including self-representation, seeking chat partners of a particular racial group, and, at times, engaging in violent attacks on other chat participants in an effort to express ideologies about and superiority over other ethnic groups.

Typically, racial minorities and other marginalized groups are victims of racism and whites are perpetrators. Rarely does one hear of accounts that are the other way around. Online, we find a "no respecter of persons" unwritten policy at work, in that whites are equally vulnerable to racial attack. This shows that racial hierarchies that may exist offline can be subverted on the Internet.

4.4. Teen chat: A culture of inclusion or underlying racism?

A major goal of this study was to determine whether Net-Generation culture is more accepting of diversity. We found that there were equal amounts of positive and neutral language surrounding issues of race in monitored and unmonitored chat rooms. The fact that this does not change in the presence of a monitor suggests that the Net generation can be more inclusive. Whereas when race is discussed or performed in adult online forums, it is often reported to be negative (Burkhalter, 1999; Nakamura, 2002; Kang, 2000; Glaser et al., 2002), adolescent discussions, for the most part, were positive in nature.

The overwhelmingly positive racial discussions in these data coupled with the frequency of race-related utterances suggest that race is salient and that it is openly discussed. The taboo often associated with discussing race may be dissipating. Though the utopian ideal of a raceless online society does not exist, we argue that we are approaching what might potentially be more advantageous: a time where diversity is valued and a common topic of discussion. Since talking about race has been noted to reduce prejudice (Burnette, 1997), this is an essential component in the promotion of healthy race relations.

In spite of the fact that the bulk of the racial discussions were either positive or neutral, problematic racial attitudes and behaviors do persist. We found significantly more negative language in the unmonitored than in the monitored contexts: 19% of the monitored transcripts and 59% of the unmonitored had negative language. This finding suggests two important conclusions. (1) The presence of the monitor exerts social controls on racial language and dramatically changes the quality of the interactions. (2) Negative racial attitudes often surface in the absence of perceived social control to the contrary.

Participants in this study used the terms racism and prejudice to describe the negative language they witnessed. Fishbein (2002) makes a distinction between prejudice—a negative attitude—and discrimination, which is acting negatively toward another person. Simply having negative attitudes does not guarantee a person will act on those attitudes. In fact, only relatively weak correlations have been found between attitudes and behaviors (Fishbein, 2002). In the case of chat rooms, however, the two are inseparable. Derogatory remarks about a group both reflect a negative attitude and are harmful behavior. Not only do members of the target group have to process these negative statements, but other participants in the chat room have to as well. Participants in unmonitored chat rooms could be exposed to this type of language several times in 1 day. One participant witnessed 16 negative comments about her group which included insults to her intelligence, a death wish ("die fucking mexican"), and several

racial slurs. This is consistent with reports of adults which show that being a victim of racism is a common, sometimes everyday occurrence for people of color (Essed, 1991).

In early literature on conflict and the Internet, scholars posited that one of the reasons that conflict persists on the Internet is because of a lack of established social norms and rules of politeness (Carnevale & Probst, 1997). In the case of the monitored chat rooms, there are established rules of participation. Still, as evidenced in the negative language viewed qualitatively in the transcripts as well as quantitatively in the statistical analysis, we see that conflict among groups continues. When participants are aware of an authority figure who can enforce rules and that there are consequences for their actions, then and only then do they change the nature of their talk. This suggests that perhaps rules of participation are not responsible for engendering or ameliorating conflict. Instead, it may be the presence or absence of particular social actors within those communities that tempers behavior.

Researchers of prejudice have argued that the more negative racial attitudes and practices that Americans held prior to the Civil Rights Movement are less likely to be expressed today (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). In actuality, social desirability has made it less likely that these negative attitudes and behaviors (termed "old fashioned" racism) would be captured in surveys (Evans et al., 2003) or self-report measures. Moreover, surveys often measure only attitudes and not actual racist behavior. In our data, there were several examples of explicit, "old fashioned" expressions of prejudice. In the presence of a monitor, these practices went underground but did not disappear. Although the Internet does create a radically different way of communicating race, a good deal of work remains before we are free of negative racial attitudes and the expression of those attitudes.

A reason for the persistence of racially problematic attitudes is that many adolescents are still reared in racially segregated environments and do not have enough opportunities to develop friendships with people from other racial groups. This leaves much of their education about various racial groups to the media and academic environments that devote specific weeks or months to racially diverse groups. When adolescents are able to develop cross-cultural friendships offline, however, research has shown that such friendships positively affect their racial attitudes (Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997). For this reason, there should be more spaces created where adolescents can develop friendships both on- and offline with people from different cultures. Monitors should be present at all times in online settings to facilitate healthy virtual discussions of race and the building of virtual friendship.

In our teen chat rooms, participants co-constructed their cultural ideals about race for both themselves and others, often socializing one another (at least in the short term) through discourse practices. We were able to describe the valence and nature of these practices by analyzing actual conversations. In doing so, both positive and negative aspects of racial discourse were evident. This research underscores the value of studies that use talk to explore adolescent development on the Internet.

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