

# So what is *hate*?

*By*

**Dr. Kimmika L. H. Williams-Witherspoon**

According to the Merriam dictionary, *hate* is defined as *an intense dislike of a person, group, community, place or thing*. Hate implies a strong aversion to something or someone, and denotes a hostile intention towards individuals or members of an opposing group.

In addition to hate-speech, *hate groups* traffic in violence, white supremacy, Mis/disinformation and normalizing violence against marginalized groups. According to the Southern Poverty Legal Center (SPLC), in just 2022-23, today, there are 523 recognized Hate Groups in America, compared to 488 such groups in 2021.<sup>1</sup> *Hate* is on the rise.

How is hate taught? In an article in *Psychology Today* (March 2021), William R. Klemm suggested that “Hate is something that can be triggered or taught” and the predisposition towards hate-behaviors can easily be identified.<sup>2</sup> Needing to let others know they are *wrong*, when those people don’t share the same ideas or ideology, codifying and categorizing *Others* and not being willing to hear other perspectives are all potential *Hate-behaviors*.

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<sup>1</sup> [splcenter.org/hate-map](https://splcenter.org/hate-map)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/memory-medic/202103/12-ways-we-teach-each-other-hate>

“Children learn prejudiced attitudes and beliefs from society: their families, teachers, friends, the media, and other sources of socialization.”<sup>3</sup> Children learn early by watching, viewing and then emulating the verbal and non-verbal messages that are being sent by those in authority around us.<sup>4</sup> *Difference* becomes associated with *fear*; and *hate* develops in direct response for those people who learn to fear the *Other*. In this climate, young people can quickly become radicalized? Hate begets hate. Racists beget even more racists and white supremacists traffic in racism, fear, hatred and violence. As Camp Siegfried playwright Bess Wohl said, “Ugly ideologies hide in plain sight.”<sup>5</sup>

But if hate is a behavior that can be learned, then it can also be unlearned. By talking to young people early about race and difference in America, those conversations, as difficult as they may be, makes young people aware of our many differences, rather than afraid of it.<sup>6</sup>

According to Bess Wohl, “The hate groups of today are the inheritors of Camp Siegfried.”<sup>7</sup> As hate groups burgeon and hate crimes steadily rise, we must begin to acknowledge and combat how we are taught to see race, racism, bias, and privilege. Raising awareness is our only real defense against unchecked hatred and violence. If *hate* is learned, with effort, it can surely be unlearned.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Krischa Esquivel et al.

<sup>5</sup> Bess Wohl, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGJW1VQo1Ts>

<sup>6</sup> Esquivel et al,

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/The\\_Role\\_of\\_Equity\\_and\\_Diversity\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_\(Esquivel\\_Elam\\_Paris\\_and\\_Tafoya\)/15%3A\\_The\\_Influences\\_of\\_Stereotypes\\_Prejudice\\_and\\_Discrimination/15.03%3A\\_Hate\\_is\\_Learned\\_and\\_Can\\_Be\\_Unlearned](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/The_Role_of_Equity_and_Diversity_in_Early_Childhood_Education_(Esquivel_Elam_Paris_and_Tafoya)/15%3A_The_Influences_of_Stereotypes_Prejudice_and_Discrimination/15.03%3A_Hate_is_Learned_and_Can_Be_Unlearned)

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