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HATE SPEECH ON COMMERCIAL TALK RADIO PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A PILOT STUDY

by

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In October 2008 the Federal Bureau of Investigation released its most recent set of annual hate crime statistics. Of the 8,999 single-bias hate crime offenses in 2007, two-thirds (66.5 percent) were motivated by race and ethnicity/national-origin biases, a number that has remained more or less constant since 2003. Also little altered is the fact that anti-Black bias still accounts for more than half of offenses motivated by race and ethnicity/national-origin biases and for the largest share of total offenses (36.4 percent).

Yet change is evident: among offenses motivated by ethnicity/national-origin bias, the percentage of offenses based on anti-Hispanic bias has risen steadily, from 42.8 percent in 2003 to 61.7 percent in 2007 (FBI 2008). This increase may be linked in part to the media: about 64 percent of Latinos report that the immigration debate has negatively affected their lives (Pew Hispanic Center 2007). This statistic led us to ask whether the media plays a role in the persistence of hate speech and hate crimes. In 1992 Congress directed the National Telecommunications and Information Administration

(NTIA) to study speech that advocates or encourages hate crimes. The NTIA's 1993 report establishes a definition of hate speech, but does not establish a scientific methodology to quantify hate speech (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993). To better assess the presence of hate speech in the media, we developed a research method to quantitatively evaluate the occurrence of hate speech in one particular media sector: commercial talk radio. This brief reports on a pilot study that will be completed in the spring of 2009.

THE PILOT STUDY

We chose radio for our study because it has the greatest penetration of any media outlet (print, broadcast, or digital), reaching 90 percent of Americans each week, and we focused on talk radio because the news-talk format is the predominant radio format in terms of dedicated stations nationwide (over 1,700). We decided to look specifically at conservative talk radio, which accounts for 91 percent of total weekday talk radio programming (Halpin et al. 2007).

Three programs were selected for the pilot study: Lou Dobbs's *The Lou Dobbs Show*, Michael Savage's *The Savage Nation*, and John Kobylt and Kenneth Chiampu's *The John & Ken Show*. Each represents a different type of commercial talk radio. Lou Dobbs is an example of a high-profile host who broadcasts on multiple media platforms (radio and television). *The Savage Nation* is a prominent example of popular syndicated

Table 1. Analysis of Hate Speech from *The John & Ken Show***EXAMPLE**

"And this is all under the Gavin Newsom administration and the Gavin Newsom policy in San Francisco of letting underage illegal alien criminals loose" (from the July 21, 2008, broadcast).

TARGETS

Vulnerable group: foreign nationals (undocumented people).
Social institutions: policy and political organizations (city policy and mayor's office).

FALSE FACTS

The sanctuary policy preceded Gavin Newsom's tenure as San Francisco's mayor, and neither Newsom nor the sanctuary policy supports "letting underage illegal alien criminals loose."

FLAWED ARGUMENTATION

Guilt by association is used to make the hosts' point. Undocumented youth and those who are perceived as their endorsers at the institutional level are stigmatized by being associated with criminality.

DIVISIVE LANGUAGE

Criminalized undocumented youth and their perceived validators (Gavin Newsom and the sanctuary policy) are depicted as a threat to San Francisco citizens, setting up an "us versus them" opposition.

ANALYSIS

The language depicts the hosts' targets (undocumented people, city policy, and Mayor Gavin Newsom) as dangerous, criminal, and collusive. In addition, the focus of that policy (undocumented people) becomes reduced to "underage illegal alien criminals."

talk radio. *The John & Ken Show*, which originates from KFI AM in Los Angeles and has a national listenership, represents successful local-market talk radio.

The research method that we developed to evaluate the presence of hate speech employs qualitative content analysis, which allows larger themes to be identified through the examination of patterns within the research data (see Barrett 2007; Mayring 2000). Five trained readers (undergraduate and graduate students) examined the transcript of one forty-minute uninterrupted segment from each of the three programs; all programs were broadcast in July 2008. The readers coded and, working in conjunction with the investigators, analyzed the transcripts, then produced a conceptual map that illustrates the relationship between sources and targets—basically, who says what to whom and for what purpose.¹ To ensure high levels of interrater reliability, the readers relied on a consensus method to determine which items represented instances of hate speech.

Based on the conceptual map, we developed categories for targets of and types of hate speech. These categories are

based on the NTIA's definition of hate speech as either (1) "words that threaten to incite 'imminent unlawful action,' which may be criminalized without violating the First Amendment"; or (2) "speech that creates a climate of hate or prejudice, which may in turn foster the commission of hate crimes" (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993).

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Our initial findings are based on data from two of the forty-minute programs. Even using this limited sample, the qualitative content analysis produced rich results. Findings fall into two areas: targets of hate speech and types of hate speech.²

Targets of Hate Speech

Our analysis yielded no instances of the first kind of hate speech, which calls for "immediate unlawful action," but we did identify and develop categories for six distinct targets of the second kind, which creates "a climate of hate and prejudice." Three of the six represent vulnerable groups: foreign nationals, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals and institutions identified with a religious belief. The other three represent social

institutions viewed as being complicit with these vulnerable groups: policy and political organizations, the media, and the criminal justice system. A more extensive sampling from these programs might reveal additional targets of hate speech—for example, groups and institutions identified with a sexual orientation.

What is of note here is that the social institutions that were targeted were linked to specific vulnerable groups of individuals. An institution's perceived support for a vulnerable group was depicted as detrimental to society at large or to American values. Consequently, the vulnerable groups become coded as powerful and dangerous.

Types of Hate Speech

We identified four types of speech that, through negative statements, create a climate of hate and prejudice: (1) false facts, (2) flawed argumentation, (3) divisive language, and (4) dehumanizing metaphors (table 1). Below are the data, categorized by speech type, that were drawn from the two broadcasts. These eighty minutes of radio programming contained 334 instances of hate speech.³

- *False Facts.* False statements were extensively used to validate the hosts' points and to promote public opinion. We identified 33 instances where the use of simple falsehoods, exaggerated statements, or decontextualized facts rendered the statements misleading.
- *Flawed Argumentation.* We identified 77 instances of flawed argumentation. These were further categorized by flaw: *ad hominem* (34 instances), guilt by association (13 instances), hidden assumption or missing premise (12 instances), misrepresentation of opponent's position (6 instances), appeal to fear (5 instances), fallacious appeal to authority (4 instances), and innuendo (3 instances).

- *Divisive Language.* Social agents were frequently placed into an “us versus them” framework. We found 49 identifiable individuals and entities that were presented as antithetical to the talk show hosts’ worldview. These contrasted with 30 identifiable individuals and entities that represented the hosts’ worldview.
- *Dehumanizing Metaphors.* We identified 185 dehumanizing metaphors, which often evoked warfare, enemies, biblical characters, criminality, persecution, corruption, evil, animality, disease, and conspiracy. These metaphors were used to draw a contrast between a target and the talk show hosts, their guests, their audience, and/or the values and positions they represent.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this pilot study is to develop a sound, replicable methodology that can be used to establish the nature and extent of hate speech in the media. The study does not attempt to determine a causal relationship between hate speech in the media and the commission of hate crimes, and we do not aim to make more-general claims about the media or these programs, which would follow from a full-scale study. The pilot study will establish data-driven descriptive codes, or categories, and a baseline for future research.

The preliminary analysis reveals a systematic and extensive use of false facts, flawed argumentation, divisive language, and dehumanizing metaphors that are directed toward specific vulnerable groups. Thus far, the data show a recurring rhetorical pattern in which vulnerable groups were identified as antithetical to the core values attributed by the host to himself, his audience, and the nation. These groups were then linked to social institutions that were presented as complicit. In effect, target groups are characterized as a direct threat to the listeners’ way of life.

The final report will:

- Quantify and analyze specific instances of hate speech.
- Quantify and analyze both explicit and implicit calls to action against vulnerable groups.
- Identify and analyze the rhetorical patterns that utilize hate speech and explicit and implicit calls to action against vulnerable groups.

NOTES

Otto Santa Ana, associate professor in the UCLA César Chávez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, is a research consultant on this project.

1. Although the term *target* is associated with metaphor analysis, we use it to encompass various types of hate speech, including metaphors.
2. These results are preliminary and are subject to further analysis. The final report will provide

definitive figures for all three programs.

3. The final report will include a cumulative and comparative analysis of all three programs, together with detailed tables for the four types of hate speech.

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HATE SPEECH ON COMMERCIAL TALK RADIO

This policy brief presents initial findings from a pilot study on hate speech in the media. The goal of the study is to develop a research method for the quantitative evaluation of hate speech. The preliminary data reveal a systematic and extensive use of false facts, flawed argumentation, divisive language, and dehumanizing metaphors that are directed toward specific vulnerable groups.

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