

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Online Hate: Key Terms

Learning Objectives

In this module, we provide definitions of different forms of online hate, including online harassment, doxxing, swatting, misinformation, and disinformation. We will go through examples of each of these forms of online hate and discuss how they have been used against 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the colonial state of Canada. By the end of this module, you will have a deeper understanding of the tactics used by those who carry out online hate and be better positioned to consider the potential dangers anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate poses to your staff, board members, volunteers, service users, and organization.

Content Warning

This module includes explicit discussion of online hate targeting 2SLGBTQIA+ people in so-called Canada, with a focus on trans women who have been targeted. The discussion includes references to misgendering, deadnaming, self-harm, sexual assault, and police violence.

We encourage you to move on to the next module if engaging with this material doesn't feel like the right thing for you.

If you decide to continue with the module and need support, you can find resources in our resources section at the end of this module.

Definitions

Online hate is content that is posted and shared on the internet that is rooted in hatred of a group based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, immigration status, disability, age, or other marginalized identities.

Online hate can be text-based (e.g., comments, posts, direct messages) and/or media-based (e.g., images, videos, animations, voice recordings). We use online hate as an umbrella term that includes various types of hateful activity on the internet, including online harassment, doxxing, swatting, misinformation, and disinformation.

Online harassment, sometimes referred to as **cyberbullying**, occurs when an individual or group uses technology (e.g., text messages, defamatory websites, email, direct messages) to harass, intimidate, or harm another person.

In early 2023, trans activist Fae Johnstone was subjected to an online harassment campaign after being featured in Hershey Canada's International Women's Day campaign "HER for SHE." Johnstone was one of five women chosen to participate in the campaign but, because she is trans, right-wing activists called for a boycott of Hershey's. Within an hour of the campaign

going live, Johnstone was attacked by far-right leaders across North America, including Tucker Carlson, Ben Shapiro, Michael Knowles, Matt Walsh, and many others. She was subjected to slurs, threats, and encouragement to self-harm. Johnstone had photos of herself from pre and early transition shared widely, multiple memes were made of her, and her deadname was publicly disclosed by Matt Walsh on a video seen by over 100,000 people. Johnstone described some of the hate she experienced: “I’ve had my deadname outed by Matt Walsh on his show. I’ve been called a pedophile, groomer, t****y and f*g too many times to count. I feel violated and traumatised by this experience.” Johnstone recognized the campaign against her as part of a broader attempt to remove trans people from public life.

Doxxing is the act of publicly sharing someone’s personal information via the internet, often with the malicious intent of encouraging other people to harass, stalk, intimidate, threaten, and/or commit in-person violence against their target. Personal information can be deduced and collected by examining the targeted individual’s digital footprint, which includes photos, email addresses, phone number, home address, job information, family information, IP address, and more. While doxxing can expose someone’s identity, their contact information, and their physical location, this information can also be used to discern passwords, security questions, and other logins for online accounts. The purpose of doxxing is to intimidate people and scare them in an attempt to stop them from doing what they’ve been doing, such as attending protests or creating inclusive spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

In early 2020, the Edmonton-based nonprofit LGBTQ+ gym QueerFlex was forced to permanently close after doxxing attacks by the far-right group Patriot Pride Canada Wide (now renamed Defend Canada), which the Canadian Anti-Hate Network labels as a hate group. Patriot Pride Canada Wide posted the names and social media profiles of staff and the address of the gym on Patriot Pride Canada Wide’s website, with the caption “you can run but you can’t hide.” QueerFlex was an affordable, inclusive, and body-positive gym that had no mirrors, scales, or calories counters. Patriot Pride Canada Wide labelled the founder of the gym a “far Left Extremist [who] has opened up a training compound for domestic terrorists.” The far-right hate group doxxed both gym staff and clients, leading the non-profit board to decide to temporarily close the gym out of concern for the safety of staff and clients. The gym subsequently resumed personal training sessions, but the lack of revenue while the gym was temporarily closed created an untenable financial situation that resulted in the board making the difficult decision to close the gym permanently. This case shows that in addition to psychological harm, doxxing can cause financial harm to 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations.

Swatting is an event in which an individual contacts emergency services with a false claim of an emergency, such as a hostage situation, death threat, or bomb threat. The intention is to have the targeted person(s) or organization(s) harassed, harmed, and/or humiliated by the police. Because of the prevalence of police violence, it is also possible that swatting could result in police killing the person being targeted, particularly if that person is Black, Indigenous,

racialized, and/or in a mental health crisis. In the United States, people who have been swatted have been shot and killed by police when they arrived.

In 2022, trans activist Clara Sorrenti was swatted by harassers who sent threats to London, ON city councillors saying Sorrenti was going to kill them. She had previously warned London police that she could be the target of swatting, but police disregarded this and arrested her at gunpoint as a result of the death threats that had been made in her name. She was later released without being charged. The harm of the arrest was intensified by the transphobia of London police officers who misgendered and deadnamed Sorrenti throughout the process. Sorrenti filed a human rights claim against London Police Services, which included her allegation that a police officer “groped her breast and said, ‘yep, it’s a she.’” Sorrenti later left Canada for Ireland for a few months to escape the harassment, but continued to be doxxed and faced additional swatting attempts in Europe, showing how the ubiquity of the internet can make swatting attempts very difficult to escape. Like many swatting incidents, Sorrenti has acknowledged that the purpose of the swatting she’s experienced is to intimidate her into silence so that she stops advocating for trans people.

Misinformation and **disinformation** are two terms that are often used to describe the weaponization of information. While similar and related, these two terms are different. **Misinformation** occurs when false or inaccurate information is spread, regardless of the intention to mislead. In contrast, **disinformation** occurs when untrue information is intentionally spread to cause harm. It’s not always possible to determine if the person or organization posting this untrue information knows the information is untrue, so it’s not always possible to differentiate between misinformation and disinformation.

Misinformation and disinformation have been spread around *Bill 94, Keeping 2SLGBTQI+ Communities Safe Act, 2023*, which is currently being considered by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The bill proposes the creation of “2SLGBTQI+ community safety zones” in which acts of intimidation are prohibited within 100 meters of the safety zone, with a \$25,000 penalty for anyone who commits an act of intimidation within the safety zone. Right-wing social media accounts have spread misinformation and disinformation that the bill would impose a \$25,000 fine on anyone who misgenders someone or participates in anti-2SLGBTQ+ protests. A Twitter user wrote “Anyone deemed ‘transphobic, homophobic or offensive’ would face prosecution and a \$25,000 fine” in a tweet that was shared more than 6,000 times. A widely circulated Facebook video included that statement “CANADA JUST MADE IT ILLEGAL TO PROTEST AGAINST THE LGBT!” This untrue information serves the interests of the far-right in Canada by fuelling the narrative that 2SLGBTQIA+ people have a disproportionate influence on Canadian politics and are pressuring people, especially youth, to be 2SLGBTQIA+. While some of the original

posters were likely knowingly spreading untrue information, which is disinformation, others may have believed the untrue information they saw and reposted it, which is misinformation.

You can learn more about misinformation and disinformation in CIVIX’s news literacy videos, which are linked in the resources section at the end of this module.

Activity

To test if you can identify online misinformation or disinformation, we encourage you to try CIVIX’s News Literacy “FakeOut” Game, which you can find at: <https://newsliteracy.ca/fakeout/>

The game is linked in our resources section at the end of this module.

Mental Health Resources

1. TransLifeline | Trans Lifeline provides trans peer support | (877) 330-6366 (operates 24/7)
2. Réseau ACCESS Network | Sudbury, Ontario | Provides: Case Management, Counseling, Psychiatric Services and more for ALL age groups | 705.688.0500 or 1.800.465.2437
3. CAYR Community Connections | Newmarket, Ontario | Provides: Crisis support services, Harm Reduction and more | 1-800-243-7717 | Off Business Hours Support Line - 1-855-310-COPE (2673); or 905-953-5412
4. Sexual Health Infoline Ontario (SHILO) | free and anonymous counseling services for ALL Canadians | 1-800-668-2437 (Mon-Fri 10 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.; Weekends 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.)
5. Toronto PFlag | Provides: Confidential Support Line for ALL ages | open 9AM-9PM 7 days a week | 416-406-637

Resources

ODLAN & Wisdom2Action’s research report, “The Internet Isn’t All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations”:
<https://odlan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Mitigating-Online-Hate-ODLAN-Full-Report-Digital.pdf>

Fae Johnstone’s webinar on preparing for transphobic online hate campaigns:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cSQO_Y_2Ps

CIVIX News Literacy Resources: <https://newsliteracy.ca/videos/>

CIVIX News Literacy “FakeOut” Game to test if you can identify misinformation:

<https://newsliteracy.ca/fakeout/>

References

Billson, C. (2023, March 16). Trans woman who starred in Hershey’s advert left “traumatised” by “tsunami” of transphobic hate. *Pink News*.

<https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/03/16/hersheys-advert-trans-woman-backlash/>

Brice-Saddler, M., Selk, A., & Rosenberg, E. (2019, March 29). Prankster sentenced to 20 years for fake 911 call that led police to kill an innocent man. *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/03/29/prankster-sentenced-years-fake-call-that-led-police-kill-an-innocent-man/>

Kelety, J. (2023, April 10). Posts distort proposed LGBTQ “safety zone” bill in Canada. *AP News*.

<https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-canada-bill-lgbtq-777684926093>

Khan, A., & Simon, A. (2022, August 31). Twitch streamer and transgender activist doxxed in Northern Ireland after leaving Canada. *Global News*.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/9097654/twitch-streamer-and-transgender-activist-doxxed-in-northern-ireland/>

Snowdon, W. (2020, February 12). Edmonton LGBTQ gym targeted in “malicious” online campaign closes down. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/queerflex-lgbtq-gym-edmonton-doxing-1.5460939>

Wakefield, L. (2020, February 15). LGBT gym forced to permanently close its doors after months of harassment by far-right hate group. *PinkNews*.

<https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/02/15/lgbt-gym-online-harassment-doxxing-abuse-hate-group-far-right-queerflex-edmonton-canada/>

Wang, K. (2023, April 23). Doxxed Twitch streamer, trans activist files human rights complaint against London, Ont. police. *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9645121/clara-sorrenti-human-rights-complaint-london-police/>

Wyton, M. (2020, February 12). LGBTQ gym to permanently close months after online harassment campaign. *Edmonton Journal*. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/lgbtq-gym-to-permanently-close-months-after-online-harassment-campaign>

