

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Online Hate: Facts and Figures

Learning Outcomes

In this module, we outline existing research on anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate, including the effects of online hate and statistics about the prevalence of online hate in our communities. Because anti-2SLGBTQIA+ ideologies are intimately connected to and dependent on other hateful systems—like racism, white settler colonialism, and ableism—racialized, Indigenous, and disabled 2SLGBTQIA+ people are subjected to a disproportionate level of online hate. We present data from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and Statistics Canada that shows this disproportionate impact.

Note on Identity-First Language

We recognize that there is debate within disability justice communities and organizations about whether to use identity-first language (disabled people) or person-first language (people with disabilities). In these modules, we are using identity-first language because our values at ODLAN are rooted in community-based practices that recognize the personal as political. However, we understand that that is not always the case for everyone, and sometimes people and other organizations prefer to use person-first language. You can read more about this debate in the article by Molly Callahan, which is linked in our resources section.

Content Warning

This module includes discussion of the mental health challenges that can result from online hate, including PTSD, depression, and suicide. We also discuss the role of racism, white settler colonialism, ableism, and misogyny in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. Finally, there is discussion of in-person violence against 2SLGBTQIA+ people, including gun 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.

Limitations of Existing Research

This module is based on a review of academic scholarship and statistics on anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. There are significant gaps in the existing research. The vast majority of this research focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people, with little attention to how Two-Spirit, trans, and non-binary people experience transphobia and queerphobia in online spaces. Some of this research that is focused on sexual orientation discrimination online also relies on binary understandings of sex and gender, which perpetuates transphobia and erases nonbinary identities. Additionally, there is very little discussion of how racism and colonialism intensify anti-

2SLGBTQIA+ online hate for Black, Indigenous, and racialized people, or of how ableism intensifies anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate for disabled 2SLGBTQIA+ people. There is a clear need for additional research that better reflects the diversity of experiences that 2SLGBTQIA+ people have with online hate.

Online Hate: Effects

Despite these limitations, research has shown that online hate can have serious negative impacts on health and wellbeing, including:

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anger
- Loneliness and isolation
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sleep disturbances
- Panic attacks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

Cyberbullying Research

In addition to the limitations we already listed, most online hate research has focused on **cyberbullying**, which is only one form of online hate, so we don't yet have a full picture of the effects of online hate. In this scholarship, researchers have defined cyberbullying as the use of technology (e.g., text messages, defamatory websites, email, direct messages) by individuals or groups to harass, intimidate, or harm another person. We also use the term online harassment to describe this form of online hate.

Studies have found that 2SLGBTQIA+ people are more likely to be subjected to cyberbullying than their straight cisgender peers. In 2017, Roberto Abreu and Maureen Kenny reviewed studies from Canada, the US, Europe, and Australia and found that as many as 75% of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth have been subjected to cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has serious negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Low self-esteem
- Suicidal thoughts
- Suicide

Reflection

What resources does your organization have access to that can support staff who encounter online hate?

What resources do you think your organization should have in order to better support staff encountering online hate?

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept that is used to describe how different forms of oppression—like racism, sexism, classism, queerphobia, and transphobia—are connected and impact one another. Since at least the 1800s, Black women have been theorizing the connections between racism and gender-based discrimination, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal scholar, coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 to critique US anti-discrimination law for its failure to support Black women. You can learn more about how Crenshaw understands intersectionality in her TED Talk, linked in our resources section.

The connections between different forms of oppression are apparent in how anti-2SLGBTQIA+ ideologies have operated and been institutionalized in the colonial state of Canada. In other words, anti-2SLGBTQIA+ ideologies are based in white supremacy, settler colonialism, ableism, and misogyny. For example, eliminating sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous societies was central to the white settler colonial project of Canada. Disabled people have also been dehumanized and institutionalized in Canada, and erasing the sexuality of disabled people has been part of this process of dehumanization.

The far-right draws on the racist, ableist, misogynist, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ ideas that were used to justify the establishment of the Canadian state as a white settler colony and infuses them conspiracy theories and misinformation to justify their anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, white supremacist, anti-immigrant, ableist, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ beliefs and actions. For example, far-right activists often claim that the white race is under attack and advocate for the reestablishment of a white ethno-state in Canada (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022). Some on the far-right see 2SLGBTQIA+ people as contributing to the supposed attack on the white race because of the idea that white LGBTQIA+ people are at least partially responsible for the low white birth rate (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2023; Warsi & Hastings, 2022). The far-right, and increasingly more mainstream right-wing politicians, are also drawing on ableist beliefs in an attempt to remove trans people from public life by arguing that trans people only think they're trans because they are mentally ill. These beliefs are being used to put new transphobic laws into place, such as one being considered by Arkansas in which trans people under 18 would only be allowed to access gender-affirming healthcare if they have “no other mental health concerns” (Arkles, 2023, para. 2).

Because racist, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, ableist, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hatred are combined in far-right ideologies, queer and trans people who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, and/or disabled are more likely to be subjected to online hate. The prevalence of transphobia within far-

right spaces also means that trans people are targeted by online hate more frequently than queer cis people.

- The Canadian Race Relations Foundation found that, due to the intersections of racism, sexism, and homophobia, racialized Canadians are almost three times more likely than white Canadians to be targeted by hateful comments or content online
- Statistics Canada found that 62% of Indigenous sexual minorities experienced “inappropriate behaviours online” compared to 35% of non-Indigenous sexual minorities
- Statistics Canada found that 46% of sexual minority Canadians with disabilities experienced “inappropriate behaviour” online compared to 25% of sexual minority Canadians without a disability

These statistics demonstrate how racism, colonialism, ableism, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ ideologies intersect such that racialized, Indigenous, and disabled 2SLGBTQIA+ people experience disproportionate levels of online hate.

Reflection

Are there ways that your organization uses an intersectional lens when working to address anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate? If not, how do you think your organization could apply an intersectional lens to its response to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate?

If you're unsure, we'd suggest reading “5 Ways the LGBTQIA+ Movement Fails at Intersectionality” by Alan Pelaez Lopez, linked in our resources section, and then trying again to answer the question.

Offline Hate

In addition to the serious negative health and wellbeing effects of online hate, which disproportionately harm Indigenous, racialized, disabled, and trans 2SLGBTQIA+ people, **online hate can fuel offline violence.**

For example, in Colorado Springs in 2022, a person who frequented a white supremacist website and used homophobic and racist slurs online targeted the Latin night at the queer bar Club Q, killing 5 people and injuring 25 more.

Drag queen story hours have also become targets of harassment and violence in both Canada and the United States as people promote the false narrative that queer and trans people “groom” and sexually abuse children. During Pride month in 2022, and since then, libraries across Canada were subjected to homophobic comments and threats of violence, both online and over the phone, for hosting drag story hour events, and library staff associated with the events were doxxed by anti-2SLGBTQIA+ groups. In Quebec in 2023, a drag queen story hour was forced to move to a secret location because of safety concerns.

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

Callahan, M. (2018, July 12). Unpacking the debate over person-first vs. identity-first language in the autism community. *Northeastern Global News*.

<https://news.northeastern.edu/2018/07/12/unpacking-the-debate-over-person-first-vs-identity-first-language-in-the-autism-community/>

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Lopez, A. P. (2016, December 19). 5 ways the LGBTQIA+ movement fails at intersectionality. *Everyday Feminism*. <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/12/lgbtqia-fails-at-intersectionality/>

Nash, J. (2018). Feminist theory workshop keynote. Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies Department, Duke University. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jy-akUNqvg8>

Nash, J. (2019). *Black feminism reimagined: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press. (You can access the introduction to the book for free here: <https://carleton.ca/fist/wp-content/uploads/Jennifer-Nash-Black-Feminism-Reimagined-intro.pdf>)

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>

Abstract: Anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate is on the rise across Canada. To better understand queerphobic online hate, its impacts, and the efforts used to address it, ODLAN partnered with Wisdom2Action, to engage leaders of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in a consultation process consisting of a series of focus groups. The Internet Isn't All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations summarizes the findings of the consultation, organized by the themes that emerged during the analysis of focus group transcripts. A brief literature review has been included. The report also provides a set of recommendations in response to its findings.

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