

## **Understanding Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Online Hate**

### **Learning Outcomes**

In this module, we describe the common features of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate and discuss the rationales used by people who perpetrate anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate. We also discuss factors that contribute to hate against 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofits. By the end of this module, you will have a better understanding of what anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate looks like, how it is rationalized, and the factors that contribute to it.

### **Content Warning**

This module includes descriptions of how people who post anti-2SLGBTQIA+ content online justify their hateful beliefs, including the desire of some to eradicate 2SLGBTQIA+ people from society. There is discussion of pedophilia, grooming, violence, transphobia, trans exclusionary radical feminists, religious and cultural beliefs, racism, and prejudice against asexual and aromantic people.

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.

### **Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Hallmarks of Hate**

The Canadian Anti-Hate Network is an independent, nonprofit organization made up of Canada's leading experts and researchers on hate groups and hate crimes. In a webinar they did with ODLAN, The Canadian Anti-Hate Network identified the four most common "hallmarks of hate" used against 2SLGBTQIA+ people, communities, and organizations. The hallmarks of hate were created to differentiate between hate speech and robust political discourse. There are 11 hallmarks of hate in total, and the Canadian Anti-Hate Network identified these 4 as those that are most commonly used in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate speech:

1. The first hallmark of hate is when the target group is presented as seeking to harm vulnerable members of society (e.g., children, women). As it relates to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate, queer and trans people are positioned as wanting to harm children, either by sexually abusing them or by turning them trans or queer. The trope of the predatory gay has existed for over a century and as trans people have become more visible, the focus has grown to include and sometimes shifted entirely towards trans people. Trans women bear the brunt of this hateful trope. Additionally, people are increasingly arguing that trans inclusion policies (such as allowing trans people to use the bathroom that best aligns with their gender) threaten women's safety. Again, trans women, who are often

accused of being deceitful or lying about their gender, are the primary targets of these hateful campaigns.

2. The second hallmark of hate is that the target group is depicted as inherently dangerous. For example, because some people think queer and trans people are seeking to harm children, they are framed as inherently dangerous and evil. This happens by taking the general beliefs many people have about individuals who actually sexually abuse children and projecting them onto queer and trans people. Another example is how 2SLGBTQIA+ people are seen as a threat to the family structure because of the range of relationships many people in our communities value—some of these relationships are sometimes called chosen families. As queer ways of relating are becoming more accepted, the supremacy of the heterosexual nuclear family in Canadian society is being challenged. There is a belief that if society is not structured around the heterosexual family, society will collapse, so queer people are seen as a danger to society.
3. The third hallmark of hate is that the messages communicate the idea that nothing but the banishment, segregation, or eradication of the target group will save others from the harm being done by this group.
4. The fourth hallmark of hate is that violence is promoted as a tool to address issues presented by the existence of the target group.

These hallmarks of hate can help you determine if online content constitutes hate speech under Canadian law. Even if it does meet the definition of hate speech, the legal options available to individuals and organizations are limited, time-consuming, and expensive. We discuss the legal options that exist in more depth in Module 6.

You can access the Canadian Anti-Hate Network's webinar on anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate, "We Go Where They Go: And Other Antifascist Axioms for Queer Community Defense" on ODLAN's YouTube Channel (linked in the resources section).

### **How do people justify online hate targeting 2SLGBTQIA+ people and organizations in the colonial state of Canada?**

In 2023, ODLAN conducted a research project to explore how staff at 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits experience and address online hate. Our final report, "The Internet Isn't All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations," outlines a variety of ways people who post hateful content rationalize the hate they perpetuate against 2SLGBTQIA+ people, communities, and organizations. Here, we explain some of these rationales:

1. People who post hateful content say they want to protect children from being sexualized or "groomed" by 2SLGBTQIA+ people, calling 2SLGBTQIA+ people pedophiles. Grooming refers to the process of an adult establishing an emotional relationship with a minor for the purpose of sexual abuse. Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activists often misuse this term to vilify 2SLGBTQIA+ people who interact with children, such as teachers and the drag performers who host drag queen story times. Our research participants told us that this narrative sometimes comes from unsupportive parents of trans youth. This rationale

aligns with two of the hallmarks of hate presented above: presenting the group as seeking to harm vulnerable members of society and presenting the group as inherently dangerous.

2. Some people who post hateful content about 2SLGBTQIA+ people use ideas from Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERFs) politics. TERFs identify as feminists but exclude trans people from their version of feminism, and they often actively work to limit or take away trans rights under the guise of protecting women, though they only include cisgender women in their definition of women. TERFs often target and spread hate about trans women in particular, and they sometimes use the term “Gender Critical” (GC) to describe themselves. Online, TERFs say trans rights threaten women’s rights because they don’t believe that trans women are real women. TERFs argue that gender-segregated spaces, such as bathrooms, sports teams, and prisons, need to be segregated based on sex assigned at birth. TERFs are particularly concerned with keeping trans women out of women’s spaces and advocate for laws that require trans women to use men’s bathrooms and be confined in men’s prisons, where, like all women, they are at increased risk of sexual assault and other forms of violence.
3. People who post hateful content targeting 2SLGBTQIA+ people use pseudo-scientific beliefs based on out-of-date studies, biased research, and misleading statistics to justify anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. For example, a research participant shared that they have seen people online “using stats about detransition as proof that trans people [are] a social contagion.” Detransitioning refers to the discontinuation or reversal of a gender transition. Another participant shared that they often see pseudo-scientific beliefs used to reinforce the gender binary.
4. Religious beliefs are sometimes used to justify anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. For example, one participant in the BIPOC session explained how religious references are sometimes embedded in hateful online comments targeting drag queens in their community.
5. In addition to religious rationalizations, some people who post anti-2SLGBTQIA+ content argue that queerness and transness are Western concepts and, therefore, shouldn’t be accepted as a part of their own culture.

Sometimes the rationalization for the hateful comments is unclear in the comments themselves. Participants told us that doing additional research, such as reading the poster’s profile, can help explain why they are participating in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate.

In addition to these rationalizations, lateral hate is also used against 2SLGBTQIA+ people, communities, and organizations. This occurs when 2SLGBTQIA+ people engage in hateful actions against or make hateful comments about other 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Examples include:

-a generational divide about what queerness and transness should be. One research participant told us: “A lot of comments or Google reviews specifically that we get sometimes are from queer folks, but they’re from an older generation that are like mourning what our space used to be or ... critiquing what it is now and a lot of that is mostly transphobia and like ‘everyone on the staff is non binary’ or like ‘it used to be, the

space used to be this this this' which is for the most part white, cis, gay men I find that sort of rhetoric coming from."

-racism and transphobia. A research participant shared: "Even within the community, you always have like anti-trans hate being pushed forward by like, quote unquote the rest of the Rainbow, and even transmisogyny being propelled by trans people by like, you know, non transgender and trans people and also just different forms of racism also perpetuated by white trans people."

-aphobia (prejudice against asexual and aromantic people) was identified as another form of lateral hate within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as one participant highlighted: "I'm part of the community, so I have the right to criticize what's going on in the community. There was also this kind of rationalization of discourse. Let's say there, it was against aromantics, but it can be against trans people, against gays, but it seems like being part of the community gives some people the right to be hateful."

## Reflection

What sort of justifications have you seen protesters using when arguing that teachers should be required to out students to their parents if they use a different name or different pronouns than their parents know about?

Justifications can include:

1. Religion
2. Pseudoscientific beliefs
3. Parental rights
4. Protecting children from being sexualized

While trying to debate topics like transphobia or white supremacy with far-right activists is unlikely to be productive, some of their ideas are becoming more mainstream and are increasingly being positioned as "common sense." If your organization released a statement in opposition to provincial policies requiring teachers to out students to their parents and someone questioned why you weren't supporting parental rights, what do you think a productive response might be?

## Research Report

For more on this topic, we encourage you to read our full report, "The Internet Isn't All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations," which is linked in the resources section.

## 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>

Canadian Anti-Hate Network's webinar on anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate "We Go Where They Go: And Other Antifascist Axioms for Queer Community Defense":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubzsPmyL8as>

Hallmarks of Hate Used Against 2SLGBTQ communities, developed in collaboration with The Canadian Anti-Hate Network: <https://odlan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Most-common-hallmarks-of-hate-used-against-2SLGBTQ-community.pdf>