Impacts of Online Hate on 2SLGBTQIA+ Nonprofit Staff

In this module, we draw on our research on online hate targeting Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits. We describe the forms of online hate 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff are subjected to and discuss factors that 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff told us contributed to an increase in online hate. We also share resources that can support you in finding safer ways to engage with technology, including social media platforms and Zoom.

Content Warning

This module includes descriptions of online hate 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofits have been subjected to, including threats of physical violence and transphobia.

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.

What does online hate targeting 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits look like in the colonial state of Canada?

2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff we spoke to for our research identified the following characteristics of the online hate they experience:
- Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate can be directed at individuals and organizations.
- Online hate tends to be directed at the most visible people.
- Some 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits receive online hate primarily from trolls. A troll is someone who posts content online with the intention of harming others.

What forms of online hate do 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits in Canada receive?

The participants in our research project told us:
1. Some of the online hate 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits receive comes from social media, including public comments and private messages. Right To Be, a nonprofit that aims to end harassment in all its forms, developed social media safety guides for Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook which you can find in the resources section.
2. 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits in Canada receive hate over email. For example, one research participant described an email they received from someone who was impersonating a 2SLGBTQIA+ person and trying to get information about community supports, which eventually raised concerns about the infiltration of queer and trans spaces. This participant told us: "We did get an email recently that was sort of like that, where someone was asking what resources we had for trans folks. And then I sent them

some basic stuff and they replied something about keeping men out of women's sports like something out of left field."

3. Virtual events 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits host are subjected to online hate, for example through Zoom bombing. A research participant shared that a group in their region had hosted a virtual, paid workshop which was attended by an anti-trans influencer and academic who later released a recording of the session including information about the facilitators and participants. This occurred despite having a registration process in place, given that the infiltrator impersonated a member of the target audience for the session. The research participant shared that this practice of infiltrating and recording queer spaces has become more common in the United States, but that this is the first time they were aware of this tactic being used in Canada. You can find a Zoom Safety Guide in the resources section.

4. 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits are subjected to online hate in online public spaces, for example in the comments sections on news sites. Articles are crafted to mobilize hate and/or disinformation and hateful comments are posted on news stories about 2SLGBTQIA+ people, communities, and organizations.

5. Sometimes the online hate 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits receive includes physical threats. Physical threats are more likely to be directed against trans and gender non-conforming people, communities, and organizations. A research participant from the trans and gender non-conforming focus group told us: "One thing that I will say that we've noticed is that the only difference in the cyber violence [experienced by the cis and trans communities] is that it is translating to real violence towards the trans community, not the cis community… We serve primarily trans youth and they will be the first to tell you that if you experience hate online, you're going to experience worse hate, physical hate, in the school."

What contributes to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate?

When we asked staff at 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits what contributes to online hate, they identified:

1. Anonymity and a lack of consequences for online hate can embolden people who send or post hateful content.

2. 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits received an influx of hateful comments when they posted on days of significance. A participant from the trans and gender non-conforming focus group shared: "I think what happens is that, more often than not, the hate that we see is targeted at those who are, you know, LG, and then everybody afterwards is targeted with those forms of hate. You know, we see on, you know, bi visibility day we see biphobia, we see aphobia on aromantic and asexual visibility days. And we see transphobia during the times when we had our vigil and when we had, it just recently passed was, Trans Day of visibility… And, yeah, we get the targeted attacks on those days. And more often than not, it's those parts of the community that haven't been as accepted by the hegemonic parts of our society."

3. 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofit staff told us that making formal statements online on issues impacting 2SLGBTQ+ communities or responding online to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ events has increased the level of online hate they and their organizations received.

4. 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits are more likely to be subjected to online hate when their content or work is made visible outside of their usual network, for example when they boost posts or receive support from public figures. One research participant told us: "I find that if I boost your post or create like a social ad that's going outside of our followers or outside of people that already like our page, that is when that sort of like hate speech is, or I guess that like invites folks who don't follow us to comment, and that's when I find those those comments or even like private messages." A participant from the trans and gender non-conforming focus group shared that "A lot of time that we get 'shit', for lack of a better term … there are a few local, very out and proud queer politicians in [our region] that are very supportive of us and really attend our events and they always post about how they're supporting us and that always leads to a flood of conservative hate."

5. 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff told us they saw an increase in online hate when anti-2SLGBTQ+ celebrities or influencers visit their region.

6. 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff told us that misinformation and disinformation contributes to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. As one participant in the BIPOC session stated, "I think one thing that I have not heard thus far is dis and misinformation … I'm talking about purposely crafted disinformation even to the point of being op-eds and TERF blog articles that are written in order to specifically misinform about certain things in order to, you know, chip away at someone's credibility."

Reflection

Based on what you've learned, when do you think your organization is most likely to receive anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate?

What steps can your organization take to better prepare staff for incidences of online hate?

As you respond to these questions, please keep in mind that there is no "correct" answer. Our intention is to create space for you to think through the material and build connections between the information we've presented and your own work in your organization.

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

Research on impacts of online harassment in the workplace:
PEN America Survey (2017): https://pen.org/online-harassment-survey-key-findings/

Committee to Protect Journalists (US & Canada, 2019): https://cpj.org/2019/09/canada-usa-female-journalist-safety-online-harassment-survey/