

The Internet Isn't All Rainbows:

Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations

Final Report

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ABSTRACT (97 words)

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.

Notes of Appreciation

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Land Acknowledgement

ODLAN is based in Tkarón:to (Toronto), which is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabek, Huron-Wendat, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Wisdom2Action started in Kjiptuk (Halifax) in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia), the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Settlers and the Mi'kmaq have lived in this territory under the provisions of the Peace and Friendship Treaties since 1725.

It is important in the spirit of reconciliation to acknowledge that we live and work on Indigenous land. Wisdom2Action and ODLAN are committed to decolonizing both digital and physical spaces and stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations.

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Glossary and Key Terms

2SLGBTQ+ is an acronym that refers to Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning people, as well as anyone who is not straight/heterosexual or cisgender.

Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that people without disabilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require “fixing” and defines people by their disability.

BIPOC is an acronym that refers to Black, Indigenous, and people of colour/racialized people.

Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cyberbullying is when an individual or group uses technology (e.g., text messages, defamatory websites, email, direct messages) to harass, intimidate, or harm another person.

Disinformation is false or misleading information that is intended to influence public opinion about specific topics and/or issues.

Doxxing (or doxing) is the act of publicly disseminating someone’s information via the internet, often with the malicious intent of encouraging other people to harass, stalk, intimidate, threaten, and/or commit violence against their target. Personal information can be deduced and collected by examining the targeted individual’s digital footprint, which includes photos, email address, 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.

Grooming refers to the process of an adult establishing an emotional relationship with a minor for the purpose of sexual abuse. Anti-2SLGBTQ+ activists often misuse this term to vilify 2SLGBTQ+ people who interact with children, such as the drag performers who host drag queen story time.

Lateral violence is harm perpetrated by a member of a marginalized group against another member of that marginalized group. One example is white LGBTQ+ people’s racism in 2SLGBTQ+ spaces.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is meant to deceive.

Online hate is content posted and shared online that is rooted in hatred of a group based on race, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, or other marginalized identities. Online hate can be text-based (e.g., comments, posts, direct messages, emojis) and/or media-based (e.g., images, videos, animations, voice recordings).

QTBIPOC is an acronym for queer and trans Black, Indigenous, people of colour

Queerphobia is a broad term that includes homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia. The term “queerphobic” encompasses all forms of discrimination and hatred directed at the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

PWD stands for people with disabilities.

Racism is the belief that some racial groups are superior to others because of their traits, characteristics, or qualities. In Canada, white people occupy the majority and dominate societal systems, which affords them socio-political powers that Black people, Indigenous people, and racialized people do not have.

RCMP is the acronym for Canada’s national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Swatting is an event where an individual makes a phone call to emergency services with a false claim of an emergency, such as a hostage situation or bomb threat. The intention is to have the targeted person(s) or organization(s) harassed, harmed, and/or humiliated by the police.

TERF stands for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. TERFs identify as feminists but exclude trans people from their vision of feminism, and they often actively work to limit or take away trans rights under the guise of protecting women, though only cisgender women. TERFs often target and spread hate about trans women, and they sometimes use the term “Gender Critical” (GC) to describe themselves.

TGNC is used in this report in reference to a focus group for Trans, non-binary, Two Spirit, genderqueer, agender, gender non-conforming people.

Transphobia includes any negative attitudes or behaviours directed toward transgender people because of their being trans.

White settler colonialism occurs when foreigners enter and claim Indigenous territory as their own and replace the Indigenous population, often with force and in violent ways. In Canada, white settler colonialism is a continuing societal practice that condones the repression and genocide of Indigenous Peoples and cultures.

Executive Summary

Anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate is on the rise across Canada. The manifestations of hate are experienced by queer and trans people and organizations both in the physical world and in online spaces, the latter of which is the focus of this report. This report has been prepared to convey the findings of a stakeholder engagement led by Wisdom2Action Consulting Limited (Wisdom2Action or W2A) on behalf of the Ontario Digital Literacy and Access Network (ODLAN) as part of the “Possible Practices for Protecting Organizations from Queerphobic Online Hate” project.

After ethics approval was received, the W2A team recruited 17 leaders of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations from across Canada to participate in six focus groups, including one in French. During the focus groups, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions exploring the ways their organizations had experienced queerphobic online hate as well as the ways they have tried to deal with that hate. Afterward, the focus group transcripts were analyzed for emergent themes. Effort has been made to further position the findings of this paper with a review of the literature related to queerphobic online hate.

The findings from the stakeholder engagement included explanations about the forms through which online hate was experienced, the rationalizations used for the hate, contributing factors that they have been able to identify, as well as the impacts of the queerphobic online hate. Participants identified a variety of forms through which queerphobic hate appeared online including comments on organizational social media pages, hate filled emails, statements made during virtual events, postings on public sites (i.e. those that are not owned or managed by 2SLGBTQ+ organizations) as well as threats to escalate online hate to in-person violence. By way of the rationalizations for the hate expressed online, participants identified

fallacious arguments about protecting children and (cisgender) women, pseudo-scientific beliefs, religion and culture, far-right politics, lateral hate, trolling as well as motivations that were not clearly identifiable. Anonymity, days of significance or statements of support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, attention from outside regular networks, anti-2SLGBTQ+ celebrities and influencers, as well as online dis/misinformation were all seen as contributing factors. As we explored the responses to questions about the impacts of queerphobic online hate, the following themes emerged: mental health of 2SLGBTQ+ organizational staff and volunteers has been affected, 2SLGBTQ+ youth are also affected, and the work that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations can do on behalf of their communities is affected because their time is consumed responding to the hate they experience.

Themes that emerged related to strategies to deal with queerphobic online hate included some that focused on prevention and others focused on response. Other themes related to support strategies and measures that are needed when the online hate shifts offline to physical and/or in-person violence. By way of prevention, participants identified the need to limit the information available on social media and who has access to public-facing accounts. Similarly, to reduce exposure, access to email being received from the public needs to be limited with controls applied using membership-only access and participants in virtual events being vetted or only admissible if already known to the organization. Some participants have limited the release of information to external media sites until after events have occurred. These strategies highlighted tensions in using best practices to limit queerphobic online hate, namely that restricted access can limit some experiences of hate while also limiting access to community members. Additionally, limits in collaborating with other organizations have been used to protect the other organization

from experiencing hate but to the detriment of strengthening organizational ties.

In response to hate, themes that emerged from the analysis show that some organizations have opted to block individuals and accounts on social media while others have used some situations as ‘teachable moments’ noting the contextual variables for small rural communities that are able to identify promoters of hate and respond through personal contact(s). The relationship between expressions of online hate through social media and in-person violence also factored into organizational responses. Digital filters and creating lists to track email accounts are response mechanisms used by many 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, as well as monitoring and ejecting problematic participants from virtual events. Some organizations also directly contact media outlets in response to dis/misinformation on their sites.

In response to the impact on individuals, 2SLGBTQ+ organizations are building strategies for safety as well as shutting down channels of access to personal information. Three tensions emerged in the analysis of the strategies that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations used. The first was that some organizations are only just developing policies and practices despite the significance of the issue and duration of its existence. The second is the relationship between online hate and the experiences of violence and hate in-person. The final tension related to the balance between work and life and between safety and the need to disconnect from professional (or voluntary) endeavors on behalf of the community.

The analysis of the focus group transcripts also enabled the identification of needs and gaps that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations are experiencing related to queerphobic online hate including related to digital literacy, best practices in preparing and responding to the rise in anti-

2SLGBTQ+ hate, structural supports that are needed to fulfill those best practices such as insurance and training, alongside mental health support for workers and volunteers, underpinned by a need for collaboration between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and other stakeholders like independent activists, and building more inclusive 2SLGBTQ+ communities that welcome individuals with intersecting marginalized identities.

Beyond demonstrating that queer and trans organizations are bearing the brunt of the rise in anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate online, the project has developed a set of recommendations, and suggested ways to operationalize them. The recommendations include:

- Develop and implement resources to build capacity amongst 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to prepare for and respond to experiences of queerphobic online hate
- Support 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and leaders in the development of their online presence in a way that fosters community engagement and minimizes incidents of online hate
- Develop digital literacy supports to fill the existing deficits amongst 2SLGBTQ+ organizations
- Establish mechanisms of mutual support/aid between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to share lessons learned and ways to mitigate queerphobic online hate
- Establish collaborative mechanisms between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations for advocacy to reduce the burden on any single organization and address systemic shortfalls including related to publicly funded mental healthcare, and
- Enhance the resources, services, and support available to staff and volunteers, including better and more accessible mental health supports.

Some limitations were experienced in developing this report. First by way of our stakeholder engagement, despite efforts to engage French participants, we had a limited number who chose to participate. Likewise, even though the project was qualitative in nature, the overall number of participants was low compared with the 2SLGBTQ+ population in Canada and the organizations that represent the diverse communities of 2SLGBTQ+ people. Effort was made to ensure there were discussions about the intersections of marginalized identities and queerphobic online hate during the focus groups. Throughout the report we have highlighted where community-specific findings occurred. However, the data was not substantial enough to create separate, stand-alone sections about the impacts or mitigation of queerphobic online hate against specific marginalized communities or individuals with lived experiences. Finally, we acknowledge some technical issues between the French and English sessions, namely that the transcription tool used (Otter.ai) does not function in French and is not calibrated to nuances in non-English accents. We were able to use the closed captioning function in Zoom and facilitator notes to address the limitations of these tools.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the project

The research project on which this report is built, aimed to understand how 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Canada experience queerphobic online hate and violence, and how organizations can mitigate these incidents.

The project was led by the Ontario Digital Literacy and Access Network (ODLAN) to shed light on how non-profits and charities that serve 2SLGBTQ+ communities become targets of online harassment by conducting in-depth focus groups with these organizations. In analyzing data from the focus groups, this report has identified incidents of online hate and offers recommendations and strategies that Canadian organizations who serve 2SLGBTQ+ communities can use to confront and mitigate queerphobic violence, both online and in-person. Accompanying this report are online resources made available through ODLAN that Canadian non-profits and charities can use to address queerphobic online hate that targets their organizations and 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Wisdom2Action Consulting Limited (Wisdom2Action or W2A) was hired by ODLAN in December 2022 to facilitate focus groups with leaders of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations as part of the research project titled, Possible Practices for Protecting Organizations from Queerphobic Online Hate. ODLAN worked with Dr. Christopher Dietzel to apply for ethics approval from York University. Following ethics approval in February 2023, W2A led six focus groups in March and April of 2023, which included five in English and one in French. This report summarizes the findings from the focus groups and thereby can be used to assist 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and communities to better prepare and respond to queerphobic online hate.

A draft of this report was shared at two virtual roundtables, held via Zoom, facilitated by the Wisdom2Action team on 7 June 2023. The virtual roundtables were held in English and French and enabled participants to reflect on the findings shared in the report.

1.2. Ontario Digital Literacy and Access Network (ODLAN)

ODLAN's mission is to remove digital literacy and access barriers. It is a resource hub that connects individuals and organizations with solutions to bridge the digital divide in 2SLGBTQ+ communities. ODLAN works with service providers to develop digital strategies that address the challenges marginalized communities face when accessing online services. Online resources, tools, and social services allow individuals to access social gatherings, educational training, community care networks, current events, and medical services. ODLAN's approach is to offer the training and possible solutions for addressing the digital divide in 2SLGBTQ+ communities and other under-served populations.

For more information about ODLAN, visit: www.odlan.ca

1.3. Wisdom2Action (W2A)

W2A is a consulting firm with a social enterprise commitment that works with non-profit and governmental organizations as well as other businesses to facilitate positive change and strengthen communities in gender justice and 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, children's rights and youth engagement, and mental health and substance use. W2A was founded in 2011 as the Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Network (CYCC) at Dalhousie University through the federal government's Networks of Centres of Excellence Knowledge Mobilization program. It operated as CYCC until 2018, when it then became Wisdom2Action. W2A's work has evolved over the years, having initially focused on youth mental health. Its services now include: research and knowledge mobilization, capacity building and organizational development, and community and stakeholder engagement.

For more information about W2A, visit: www.wisdom2action.org

2. Literature Review

Online hate is a rising problem, especially against people who are part of marginalized groups, like members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. For example, a 2017 systematic review of 27 studies from Canada, the United States, Europe, and Australia found that as many as 3 in 4 LGBTQ youth may be subjected to cyberbullying (Abreu & Kenny, 2017). More recent studies have similarly found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are more likely to experience cyberbullying than their straight peers (Cosma et al., 2023; Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Mkhize et al., 2020).

Trans people are more likely than cisgender people to experience online harassment (Powell et al., 2018). One study found that 57% of trans people are targets of harassment, discrimination, or violence on social networking sites, with 17% being targeted very frequently, frequently, or occasionally (Hamison, 2016). In Canada, the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces found that transgender Canadians were “much more likely” than cisgender Canadians to have experienced unwanted behaviour online (Jaffray, 2020, p. 13).

Online hate can have negative impacts, including mood swings, depression, anger, loneliness, stress, anxiety, fear, sleep disturbances, and panic attacks (Duggan, 2017; Hawdon et al., 2014; Nyman & Provozin, 2019; Oana Ștefăniță, 2021). These negative impacts can lead to alienation, isolation, and feelings of powerlessness, which can make people vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups (Oana Ștefăniță, 2021).

Online hate can fuel offline violence as well. For example, in the United States 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 (Alfonseca & Said, 2023; Elassar et al., 2022). Drag

queen story hours have also become targets of harassment and violence in both Canada and the United States (CBC News, 2023; Hempel, 2022; McGinn, 2023; Romero, 2022; Tensley, 2022) as people promote the false narrative that queer and trans people “groom” and sexually abuse children. During Pride month in 2022, 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 right-wing, anti-2SLGBTQ+ groups (Montpetit, 2022). In Quebec in 2023, a drag queen story hour was forced to move to a secret location because of safety concerns (CBC News, 2023).

Online hate targets not only 2SLGBTQ+ people, but also people who are members of other marginalized groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC), with BIPOC 2SLGBTQ+ people being particularly targeted. Racialized Canadians are almost three times more likely than white Canadians to have experienced racist, sexist, or homophobic comments or content online (Abacus Data, 2021). The 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces found that 62% of Indigenous sexual minorities experienced “inappropriate behaviours online” compared to 35% of non-Indigenous sexual minorities (Jaffray, 2020). Thus, for 2SLGBTQ+ people who are also BIPOC, they can be targets of and experience intensified hate.

Like racism, ableism can manifest online and can cause harm to people with disabilities. In Canada, Joseph (2022) reports that “youth with disabilities are 70 percent more likely to directly experience online hate” (p. 18). The 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces found that 46% of sexual minority Canadians with disabilities experienced “inappropriate behaviour” online compared to 25% of sexual minority Canadians without a disability (Jaffray,

2020). Moreover, online ableist hate appears to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Russo & Grasso, 2022).

Recognizing that online hate happens on their platforms, social media companies are increasingly offering protective features like blocking, reporting, disabling comments, and choosing who can see a post (Shaw, 2022). However, features like these put the onus on the individual experiencing online harm rather than the social media platforms or people perpetuating such harms. Moreover, these features may not be effective or helpful for 2SLGBTQ+ people, especially for racialized 2SLGBTQ+ people. In an Australian study on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ people's use of online dating apps, Farrell (2021) found that many participants were reluctant to report abuse to the platform because they thought nothing would be done, and those that did report abuse received "generic feedback and no outcome" (p. 348).

Because hateful online content contributes to online and offline violence and can result in serious psychological and physical harm, a better understanding of online hate in Canada is an urgent priority. However, there is a lack of research on 2SLGBTQ+ people's experiences of online hate. Additionally, most studies on this topic are not based in Canada and do not take an intersectional approach. Moreover, there is little attention given to how 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations can support 2SLGBTQ+ people who experience online hate. In fact, in preparing this literature review, we could not locate any research that investigates how Canadian non-profits and charities that serve 2SLGBTQ+ communities experience and deal with online hate. This report, *The Internet Isn't All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations*, responds to these needs by taking an intersectional approach to investigate the queerphobic online hate that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Canada experience.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to uncover the queerphobic online hate that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Canada experience and explore how they can better mitigate these incidents. Working with Dr. Christopher Dietzel, ODLAN applied for and received ethics approval to conduct this research, from York University in February 2023.

3.1. Focus Groups

W2A recruited participants for five weeks, beginning in March 2023. Contact was made with 82 stakeholders (individuals and organizations) inviting them to participate in the focus groups and/or share information about the focus groups with their networks. The stakeholders were identified in collaboration with ODLAN. Of the 82, 52 were Anglophone and 30 were Francophone.

To promote inclusion and accessibility, W2A arranged for ASL and LSQ interpretation to be available during the focus groups. However, no participants required the services. W2A also contracted three trained counselors to ensure that participants had support available to them during and after the focus groups given the difficult topic(s) discussed. One counsellor was present during each of the focus groups.

W2A facilitated six focus groups with a total of 17 participants. The focus groups were designed to be inclusive of the breadth of diversity represented within 2SLGBTQ+ communities across Canada and provide a safer context of engagement for people who are marginalized. The six focus groups included:

Focus group	Language	Sessions held	Number of participants
Black, Indigenous, people of colour/racialized 2SLGBTQ+ people (BIPOC)	English	1	3
Trans, non-binary, Two Spirit, genderqueer, agender, gender non-conforming people (TGNC)	English	1	3
2SLGBTQ+ people with disabilities (PWD)	English	1	2
Open to all 2SLGBTQ+ people (Open English)	English	2	4 and 3
Open to all 2SLGBTQ+ people (Open French)	French	1	2

3.2. Socio-Demographic Information

Before each focus group, participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding their socio-demographic information. Participants were representative of many sexual orientations, genders, age groups, geo-political regions, community types, racial and ethnic identities, ability and disability statuses, and religious affiliations and beliefs. The socio-demographic data of participants was as follows:

Socio-Demographic Category		Frequency (out of 17)
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual/Pansexual	3
	Gay	5
	Lesbian	1
	Queer	7
	Uncertain/Questioning	1
Gender	Agender	1
	Cisgender	9
	Gender Diverse	1
	Gender Non-Conforming	1
	Non-Binary	1
	Trans	4

Socio-Demographic Category		Frequency (out of 17)
Age Group	18-29 years	4
	30-55 years	12
	55-75 years	1
Geo-Political Region	Alberta	2
	British Columbia	3
	Newfoundland and Labrador	1
	Ontario	8
	Quebec	2
	Yukon	1
Community	Urban	12
	Suburban	3
	Rural/Remote	1
	Northern	1
Racial/Ethnic Identity	Black	2
	East Asian	1

Socio-Demographic Category		Frequency (out of 17)
	Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis)	1
	Latino/Latina/Latinx	1
	Levantine/West Asian/Middle Eastern	1
	Southeast Asian	1
	White/Caucasian/European	11
	Prefer Not to Answer	1
Disability Status	Disability	6
	No Disability	9
	Unsure	2
Religious Affiliation or Belief	Agnostic	1
	Atheist	5
	Indigenous Spirituality	1
	Indigenous Spirituality (not Indigenous to North America)	1
	No Religious Affiliation or Belief	8
	Uncertain	1

3.3. Transcription and Thematic Analysis

Otter.ai and Closed Captioning on Zoom were used to transcribe the focus groups. Following each focus group, W2A reviewed and corrected inaccuracies in the transcripts. The result was a near-verbatim version of transcripts for use in analysis.

The team reviewed the data and identified emergent themes that occurred multiple times or related to similar comments made by participants during the focus groups. Identifying emergent themes followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach for thematic analysis, which "is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" such that "it minimally organizes and describes [a] data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). The themes were compiled into a document and then the transcripts were coded using the themes that had been identified. Each theme is described in the "findings" sections below and organized by each topic/question, illustrated using quotes from the participants.

4. Findings: Online Hate

The following themes emerged from the analysis of data collected from the focus groups. The themes are summarized below, and participant quotes are provided to demonstrate each theme. While we offer a range of quotes from across the focus groups, it is important to note that participants in the PWD focus group requested that they not be quoted directly. To respect this request, their quotes are paraphrased.

4.1. Forms of Online Hate

Focus group participants talked about diverse forms of queerphobic online hate that they, or the 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations they work for, have experienced. Notably, participants highlighted the different platforms and pathways through which the online hate was communicated, and they emphasized that online hate has the risk of escalating to in-person violence.

Participants also noted that online hate happened both against individuals and organizations. Some participants shared that they had primarily seen hate directed towards staff and community members who are most visible due to their role within the organization or the community, while other participants reported that they primarily saw hate directed towards organizations. One participant in the TGNC focus group, who had previously experienced hate against their organization shared: “If it [hate] were to go personal and to individuals, we will be in a pretty interesting situation because...right now just the only safety is that it’s not coming directly to the staff”.

4.1.1. Hate on Social Media Pages

Across all focus groups, participants shared experiences or anticipation of queerphobic online hate directed to their organization, individual staff members, and/or volunteers through the organization’s social media platforms, whether

in the form of public comments or private messages. For example, a participant in the TGNC focus group sarcastically said, “we are very popular on social media”. In the Open French session, a participant elaborated on the forms of hate they receive on social media, sharing, “We see emojis, transphobic comments, vulgar things”.

Many participants shared that the hate they receive on social media is not organized and tends to be sent by individual actors or “trolls”. For example, one participant in the Open French session said, “We have a lot of trolls”. When asked how they identify “trolling”, a participant from an Open English session explained, “We consider a troll someone who seems to want to cause pain, hurt, or make threats”.

In an Open English session, a participant shared that they have “received weird follows on [the organization’s] social media accounts by accounts affiliated with PPC [People’s Party of Canada], or clearly anti-trans”. Knowing that content was being seen and potentially under surveillance of hateful actors was a source of concern for this participant.

A participant in an Open English session, who works for a small, grassroots organization located in a rural community, shared that they more typically see online queerphobic hate arising on the social media platforms of local groups that they frequently collaborate with rather than their own. They explained: “Recently we had an event with [another local group], which has way more followers than [our] Instagram does. So, people tend to engage with the library page or another collaborator’s page more so than ours”.

4.1.2. Hate Through Email

In an Open English session, two participants spoke about the experience of receiving

transphobic hate through email. They said that these email interactions began with someone impersonating a community member in need of support or phishing for information about the resources available for trans and gender diverse community members. When they received a response, these actors would then pivot to share anti-queer or anti-trans messages:

“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.”

- Participant from Open English session

From what the participants shared, it was unclear whether these actors intended to gather and share information to inform further hateful activities. One participant in this Open English session said that these emails raised significant concerns about the infiltration of queer and trans spaces and the need to protect information that could be weaponized against queer and trans communities.

4.1.3. Hate During Virtual Events

Three participants spoke about experiencing queerphobic online hate during their organization’s virtual events or programming. Notably, a participant said that their organization frequently saw high levels of hateful activity targeted towards the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the event hosts, and their organization during publicly live-streamed webinars. This included hateful language as well as reporting of the live-stream session.

One participant shared that they have been ‘Zoom-bombed’ and have since implemented registration for Zoom events as a preventative measure. Another 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 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.

4.1.4. Hate on Public Sites

Participants explained that their organizations have been impacted by biased or explicitly hateful content and mis/disinformation posted to mainstream or far-right media platforms. One participant from the TGNC session shared that they saw queerphobic hate on community channels used by their organization’s service users that the organization does not have the ability to mediate:

“There’s the additional element to receiving online hate through... channels that are not mediated by the school but adjacent to the school. Like discord groups for classes and stuff sometimes are where students will experience that kind of hate coming from other students.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Participants emphasized that queerphobic online hate could manifest in a variety of ways, including purposefully crafted articles made to mobilize hate or spread mis/disinformation as well as hateful comments made on news stories relating to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Occasionally, these articles directly named 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations, and in other scenarios, they served to fuel further queerphobic online hate against 2SLGBTQ+

communities and the people who serve them:

“I think one thing that I have not heard thus far is dis and misinformation... I’m talking about purposely crafted this information 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.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

4.1.5. Physical Threats and Escalation to In-Person Hate and Violence

Participants reported receiving physical threats online. They were concerned about the possibility that these threats could happen and escalate to in-person violence. Participants received threats through social media, occasionally made implicitly through emojis. For example, one participant shared that their organization has received comments on social media that include gun emojis. When discussing strategies to respond to online hate, this participant shared:

“The recommendation from Facebook is always that we try to have a conversation about our differing opinions. And I’m like...I mean, this was a gun threat, but that’s okay. I don’t think this person wants to talk to me.”

- Participant from TGNC session

When asked to share their perspectives on their experiences of online hate compared to their cisgender peers, participants of the TGNC session shared that they tend to see online hate directed towards trans and gender diverse people more frequently escalating to physical threats and in-person hate and violence:

“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.”

- Participant from TGNC session

This participant also shared that cisgender people:

“don’t feel that same thing. But what they do say they feel is fear. More fear when they see transphobic hate towards their trans friends than they do when they see hate towards their cis friends... The concern of it being actually turned into real physical violence is really amplified...In terms of the actual cyber violence, it’s pretty similar across the board, it’s just that it doesn’t end at cyber violence is what we’re finding for the trans community.”

- Participant from TGNC session

4.2. Rationalization of Online Hate

Participants highlighted that the rationalization behind the queerphobic online hate they have experienced has not always been clear. However, they did call attention to a number of notable rationalizations and discourses that are used to frame or justify queerphobic online hate, which are outlined below.

4.2.1. Protecting Children

Much of the hate that participants spoke about could be linked to a discourse of protecting children. Specifically, participants reported that people who spread hate or mis/disinformation often justify their position by claiming that they intend to protect children from being sexualized or “groomed” by the 2SLGBTQ+ individuals or organizations. As a participant in the TGNC session stated, “the ‘groomers conversation’ has come up over and over again”.

One organizational representative in an Open English session shared that they received “social media comments on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook calling [them] groomers, pedos [pedophiles], and accused of sexualizing children”. In the TGNC session, a participant

from an organization that serves trans youth and their families, said that they also see this narrative espoused by unsupportive parents of trans youth. They shared, “Sometimes it comes from in[side] the house... Not all the caregivers that we work with are as affirming of their children as we would like and the times that we have received some issues have been through caregivers”.

4.2.2. Protecting (Cisgender) Women

Several participants described how people online can leverage Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF) politics to claim that trans folks’ existence and inclusion poses a threat to cisgender women’s rights and safety.

One participant from the BIPOC focus group drew a parallel between the justifications of online hate and TERF politics in Britain:

“One thing that is particular about the form of hate we’ve received is that it’s more analogous to British TERF-type hate rather than American religious based transphobia. So, I’m pointing that out because most often here it’s based on quote, unquote protecting women and other such debunked myths, oftentimes used by quote, unquote false feminists.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

4.2.3. Pseudo-Scientific Beliefs

Participants shared that they have seen out of date studies, highly biased research, and misleading statistics being used to corroborate harmful claims about or against 2SLGBTQ+ people. A participant in an Open English session highlighted how this approach is used by bad-faith actors to justify debate around 2SLGBTQ+ community members’ identities and rights. For example, a participant in the Open English session shared that they have seen people online “using stats about detransition as proof that trans people [are] a social contagion.”

Another participant, in the PWD session, shared that they often see scientific beliefs used to reinforce a gender binary.

4.2.4. Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Participants shared that they have seen religious-based arguments mobilized against queer and trans people. As one participant in an Open English session recounted, “One group is stating that God has been taken out of government and schools, and that is why 2SLGBTQ people need to be stamped out”.

For example, a participant in the Open French session shared, “It interests me to know who it is and often I see that often it’s men, married, Christian profiles etc.”.

One participant in the BIPOC session talked about religious references embedded in hateful online comments targeting drag queens in their community, and they asserted that these references were unfounded. Specifically, they explained:

“The reasons for their hate, this goes beyond the Bible. And I know as someone who grew up in a fundamentalist environment, I read the Christian Bible fairly often and I’m fairly familiar with its contents, and none of the things that they claim are part of said Bible actually really align with where they’re going.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

In addition to religious rationalizations, one participant in the PWD session said that cultural understandings of queer and trans identities also play a role in rationalizing the hate that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and communities experience. For example, they shared that they have seen people justify queerphobic online hate by stating that queerness and transness are Western concepts.

4.2.5. Politics and Far-Right Ideologies

A couple of participants noted that queerphobic online hate is tied to and influenced by far-right politics. One participant in the BIPOC session said, “The far right seems to have shifted their attention from anti-vax, COVID kind of angst, to all of a sudden it’s the queer community that’s responsible for the unraveling fabric of society”.

Another participant in the BIPOC focus group drew attention to the interplay of gender, race, and immigration status and how politics reflect the hate espoused against those who embody intersecting marginalized identities. They shared:

“There’s a lot of anti-immigration sentiment in [the province], which oftentimes plays into how people are treated around the province like for example, you can most likely expect less folks to support for example, a trans woman of color who was born outside of the country, versus you know, a white trans woman born in Canada, so there’s a lot of racism there.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

4.2.6. Lateral Hate

Lateral violence within the 2SLGBTQ+ community was identified as a contributor to queerphobic online hate that organizations serving 2SLGBTQ+ people have experienced. One participant in an Open English session noted that they have seen a generational divide within the 2SLGBTQ+ community:

“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.”

- Participant from Open English session

Other participants emphasized that transphobia is not uncommon amongst the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community, and that queer spaces are often unsafe for racialized community members due to lateral violence against BIPOC community members. As one 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.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

Aphobia (prejudice against asexual and aromantic people) was identified as another form of lateral hate within the 2SLGBTQ+ 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; finally; in a subdued way.”

- Participant from Open French session

4.2.7. Trolling and Unidentified Rationalizations

As noted above, trolling was identified as a common practice against organizations serving 2SLGBTQ+ people, and a participant from the TGNC session explained how they think “trolls” rationalize their behaviour:

“I think justification comes in, like not seeing it as a threat. ... doing this because, I don’t know, they get some sort of enjoyment out of that and using that as justification that they’re not being serious. But I think that kind of ignores that constant impact of that being over everybody’s heads constantly.”

- Participant from TGNC session

However, participants were not always able to identify how the hate directed toward 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations was rationalized. Instead, some said that hate is opinion-based and consists of generalized, uninformed comments against 2SLGBTQ+ communities. As one

participant from an Open English session shared, “no one is quite explaining like where their viewpoint is coming from, but it’s often a very uneducated one. It’s a lot of blanket statements”.

In some cases where rationalization has not been made clear, staff have investigated the social media profiles of the people directing the hate toward them. Upon doing so, they have been able to identify beliefs that may be underpinning the queerphobic messaging.

4.3. Contributing Factors

Generally, participants reported that queerphobic online hate is on the rise in their communities. They identified a number of factors and activities that may influence or increase the level of queerphobic online hate directed toward organizations serving 2SLGBTQ+ people.

4.3.1. Anonymity

Participants reflected on the role that online anonymity plays in enabling hateful conduct. One participant in the PWD session shared that anonymity and the lack of consequences for online hate appears to embolden people to speak in hateful ways.

4.3.2. Days of Significance and Statements of Support for the 2SLGBTQ+ Community

Participants shared that when their organization posts on social media to recognize days of significance for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, they typically see an influx in hateful comments and direct messages. As one participant summarized:

“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.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Another participant from the TGNC session shared that making formal statements online on issues impacting the 2SLGBTQ+ community or responding online to distressing events that have occurred in the community, has led to an increase in them being targeted.

4.3.3. Attention from Outside their Regular Networks

Participants reported that when their content or work is made visible outside their usual network, they tend to receive increased levels of queerphobic online hate. Sometimes their effort to expand their reach is intentional, whether they are boosting a post or advertising an aspect of their work outside of their usual followers. As one participant stated:

“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.”

- Participant from Open English session

Sometimes, 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations become more visible to the broader community by receiving public support from community leaders. While this support is well intentioned, it can still lead to an increase in hate against the organization. As one participant shared:

“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.”

- Participant from TGNC session

4.3.4. Anti-2SLGBTQ+ Celebrities and Influencers

Participants noted that when anti-2SLGBTQ+ celebrities or influencers visit their region, they experience an increase in queerphobic online hate. One participant from the TGNC session shared, “we do get people who come to the school who have, let’s say, beliefs that are against us as a community and as human beings. And yeah, that will always increase the amount”.

4.3.5. Online Mis/Disinformation

Finally, participants shared that online mis/disinformation about queer and trans communities or the organizations that serve them fuels queerphobic online hate. In some cases, disinformation underpins the hate that organizations’ experience. As one participant in the BIPOC session stated, “a starting point oftentimes begins with purposely crafted slander and speech, which instigates further hate”. Through this example, we see the acknowledgement of mis/disinformation being the basis of online hate against queer and trans organizations and people.

This participant noted that disinformation played a role in much of the hate that they experienced both as an individual and as a representative for different organizations. This has included lies about the actions and/or intentions of queer and trans people and organizations. Previously this participant was subject to a disinformation campaign targeting both themselves and their organization. They shared:

“I’m talking about purposeful crafted misinformation, 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...chip away at someone’s credibility.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

4.4. Impacts of Online Hate

Participants spoke about a number of impacts that queerphobic online hate has on 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations and the 2SLGBTQ+ community, including on people’s mental health, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and the organization’s work with the community.

4.4.1. Impacts on Mental Health

Participants highlighted the negative mental health impacts that 2SLGBTQ+ community members experience when they come across hate on their organization’s online platforms. As one participant from an Open English session shared, “[queerphobic hate’s] presence on our platform can negatively impact the mental health of community members who witness it”.

Participants also explained that queerphobic online hate has an impact on the mental health of staff and volunteers working with 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations. As a participant in an Open English session highlighted, “the mental health of the staff takes a huge hit by having to bear witness to online hate on our platform”.

Oftentimes, those working at 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations are members of the community themselves. The queerphobic online hate they witness in their professional lives has a deep impact on them personally. As one participant shared:

“I find that I see it in my personal life, because it’s also related to my personal life and identity, and when I see the comments, it’s hard. I wonder if I should say something. The separation between professional and personal life is difficult for me.”

- Participant from Open French session

This mental health impact can be heightened for staff and volunteers who may be retraumatized by the queerphobic messaging that they or their organization receive. A participant in the TGNC session provided an example of the possibility for re-traumatization:

“It... puts our staff in a really weird position where they’re kind of forced to hear like day

in and day out how they're grooming children and just are kind of expected to just kind of like move along with their day and just delete it and carry on and like those are really, really, really, really damaging viewpoints especially because so many of us have lived experience. So, when you're accusing somebody that may be, you know, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse of grooming other children...it's like constant trauma for our staff."

- Participant from TGNC session

This sentiment was echoed in the PWD session, with participants raising concerns about the impacts of navigating online hate while managing trauma or pre-existing mental health challenges.

Overall, participants emphasized that addressing negative mental health impacts was a key motivator for mitigating the presence of queerphobic online hate on their organization's accounts and pages.

4.4.2. Impacts on 2SLGBTQ+ Youth

Participants shared concerns regarding the impact of queerphobic online hate on 2SLGBTQ+ youth, particularly trans and gender diverse youth. One participant from an Open English session, who works closely with trans youth and their families, shared, "In terms of impact on communities, a lot of fear and concern among trans folks and particularly youth and their families."

This was echoed by a participant in the TGNC session who emphasized just how challenging it can be for trans and gender diverse youth to encounter queerphobic messaging online. They shared that, "at a point where you're deeply questioning and deeply fighting for your authenticity, to have that constantly questioned across the world is a challenging space, I think for many of our young people".

4.4.3. Impacts on Organization's Work with the 2SLGBTQ+ Community

Participants spoke about the administrative drain caused by addressing, countering, and

even preventing queerphobic online hate. The effort needed to develop and act on prevention and response strategies takes valuable time and energy away from 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations' work with the community and increases the workload of staff and volunteers who, in many cases, have limited hours or capacity from the outset. As one participant from an Open English session shared, "I know [monitoring and deleting hateful comments on social media] adds more work to us dealing with it from a more admin side too".

If an organization has received an influx of queerphobic hate over email, it can also impact their ability to connect with the communities they serve. This was highlighted by a participant in the Open French session, who said, "if we get a lot of hate, it's going to block our communications. People in the community won't be able to get the information we want".

Participants asserted that for organizations that have an advocacy mandate, concerns about staff and volunteer safety can limit their capacity to undertake public-facing advocacy. They emphasized that public-facing efforts, such as in-person events and public activities, can increase targeted hate against them or their team members. Moreover, such concerns can greatly impact the organizations' ability to advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ rights and issues. As highlighted by a participant from an Open English session, "it creates a tension between advocacy and avoiding the public spotlight".

Finally, queerphobic online hate can have a significant impact on 2SLGBTQ+ organization's staff and volunteers' motivation. The ongoing effort to mitigate and manage online hate can lead to burnout:

"...when we feel that our community or that we're directly experiencing this kind of hatred. It's very demotivating and it becomes difficult to carry on working as if nothing had happened..."

- Participant from Open French session

5. Findings: Strategies

5.1. Prevention Strategies

Participants shared strategies to prevent queerphobic online hate. In general, they spoke about the importance of having dedicated communication departments or professionals skilled in public relations, especially within large organizations.

5.1.1. Social Media

Participants shared some strategies to help prevent queerphobic online hate on their organization's social media accounts. Two participants spoke about deleting accounts on social media platforms that are more difficult to moderate. They also mentioned the need to limit their social media engagement to platforms that are safe(r) and more likely to provide support and/or meaningful solutions when queerphobic online hate manifests:

“I think a big security measure that I would do is limit our online presence to specific social media sites that I know are going to be... a little bit less hostile... Places like Reddit or Twitter, which lack the will or support to be able to limit hate, I think would be places I wouldn't want our organization to be. I would stray closer to things that yeah, like are less harmful, not, not harmful, because there exists these things everywhere. But places where we can have a little bit more support.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Other participants shared that they limit who has access to their social media accounts. Some did this by keeping their social media accounts private and only inviting community members into the space. Some also talked about blocking users who seem to want to cause pain, hurt, or make threats.

Another strategy shared by participants was to keep social media accounts publicly visible but to

restrict or turn off certain functions, like the ability to leave comments or send direct messages. Such an approach helps them minimize online hate and allows the organization to focus on sharing essential messages and content with the community:

“The one thing that came to mind, especially when it comes to social media, is turning off comments, turning off DMs, or even if... if conversation is desired, limiting the amount of comments per post.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

5.1.2. Email

Participants did not discuss many strategies to prevent queerphobic emails. However, they did speak about minimizing the contact information that was shared online to limit the amount of hate sent directly to staff members' email addresses.

5.1.3. Virtual Events

Participants described a number of ways that 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations can prevent queerphobic online hate from surfacing in virtual programming. One participant suggested that organizations should use memberships to filter out people who might perpetuate online harm. Their organization had an application process for all their programs to determine membership, and this allowed them to vet anyone who would attend their programming and ensure they are genuinely interested. They explained:

“So, personally, I'd definitely say also just in terms of organizational memberships to try and use that as a way to gatekeeper you know, TERFs and transphobes out in order for the rules to already be, you know, stacked in our favor. I think all queer organizations should review their bylaws more to make sure they're make sure like say persons who wish to abuse you know said status,

like those who only get a membership to harass people at an AGM, like those people are quickly removed before, before they can cause too much damage.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

For organizations that do not use memberships, participants recommended that staff vet people who register for their virtual events to mitigate the potential of hateful actors infiltrating the space. It was also recommended that organizations review their bylaws to ensure there are policies and practices in place so staff can quickly remove people who harass others during virtual events and prevent harm to facilitators and event attendees.

5.1.4. News and Media

One participant shared that they successfully prevented queerphobic media coverage of their organization’s events and programming by crafting positive news stories to be released after the events took place. The participant saw this strategy as a way to take control of the narrative and limit the potential for negative news or media attention prior to the event taking place.

5.1.5. Individuals Working in 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations

Participants were concerned that when their organization is targeted by an online queerphobic campaign, their staff and volunteers would be targeted individually. To prevent this, participants recommended limiting what information is publicly available about the organization’s staff and volunteers, including both personal details and contact information.

Participants noted that staff and volunteers have different levels of comfort with how much of their personal information is shared. They recommended organizations work with each person to identify their comfort level, including

what information could be shared online. They also suggested organizations be open to checking in with those individuals over time and amending what details are shared if the person’s comfort level shifts.

Another participant spoke about the use of virtual private networks, or VPNS, as a strategy to keep individuals safe from threats of ‘doxxing’ and ‘swatting’. They shared:

“We had to have a discussion as a team around VPNs and how do we protect ourselves at home and those kinds of things and and it’s, it’s scary, let alone trying to figure out how we keep our in-person events safe, but it’s just keeping ourselves safe.”

- Participant from TGNC session

5.1.6. Tensions Related to Best Practices in Preventing Online Hate

A couple tensions emerged as participants discussed their suggestions for preventing queerphobic online hate. First, participants recognized that prevention strategies can restrict the reach and impact of their work with the 2SLGBTQ+ and allied communities, thereby limiting the visibility of their organization and creating barriers to 2SLGBTQ+ community members’ awareness and access to services or programming. One participant emphasized that this approach can make it more challenging for their desired service users to engage with them.

Participants who had experienced online hate reported that they avoid collaborating with organizations that have not been targets of queerphobic online hate. This avoidance was because they were concerned that the collaboration could increase the risk of online hate for the other organizations. However, participants noted that this avoidance resulted in missed opportunities, such as not meeting the needs of marginalized communities:

“We recently did a talk at one of the affirming churches in the area and...because we went there they got bombarded with a little bit of hate. So it’s like, I always feel like... we’re always balancing how do we support these organizations that like need the support and don’t have enough manpower and are representing all of these like marginalized communities? But how do we do it without, like... bringing my haters to find you?”

- Participant from TGNC session

5.2. Response Strategies

Participants presented a vast array of strategies for responding to the various forms of queerphobic online hate that they have experienced or could experience in the future. Some overarching strategies suggested included:

- establishing a committee to address outdated policies and procedures, involving individuals with experience and expertise in dealing with threats and harassment
- involving the board of directors in developing policies to address online hate
- creating a matrix that can be used to assess each incident based on risks and impacts and delineate clear and appropriate responses to different types of incidents
- tracking tactics used by hateful actors and their impacts, and
- regularly updating policies and practices to respond to the changing landscape of queerphobic online hate.

In the following sections, additional strategies are presented, including strategies specific to social media, email, virtual events, and news media. Participants also offered suggestions for how to protect individuals working in 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and discussed tensions related to best practices.

5.2.1. Social Media

Most frequently, participants shared that their organization monitors its social media accounts to remove queerphobic online hate and block people who spread hateful messages to prevent further harm. As one participant shared:

“Our policy is just to delete [hateful social media comments] and block them because we like our social media platforms to at least in theory, be sort of an extension of the safe space that is our physical space. And so we try our best to just erase those things from happening.”

- Participant from Open English session

The process of blocking hateful actors differed across organizations. Some participants shared that they immediately block accounts who have engaged in hateful conduct, while others said that they give multiple, public warnings to these accounts to demonstrate action, clarify expectations for engaging with their social media, and display a consistent method of response. One participant explained that in some cases, it has been valuable for their team to maintain their ability to monitor the actions of individuals or groups that targeted them. In these instances, restriction was preferred over blocking because it ensured they could remain aware of what was happening. The representative of this organization explained:

“While we normally go to blocking folks right away, we have had somebody who seems to be organizing and so we’ve restricted them rather than blocking them because we can still see what they’re doing and no one else can see when they tag us in things. And so the community doesn’t know, but we know whether they’re working to organize something. And so it does take that extra labor for us to do that. But as a team, we’re very aware of who these one or two people so far for us, knock on wood, may be. And so we’ve done that piece of restricting... so that we’re aware of what’s going on, but it’s still not spreading throughout the community at least if they’re tagging us in those pieces.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Participants had different opinions on whether they should engage with people targeting their organization on social media, with many participants recommending non-engagement. One participant, inspired by offline activism, drew a parallel to a community coalition. They explained that activists who attend counter protests or go support 2SLGBTQ+ events, like drag story time, wear earplugs to avoid hearing hateful comments. This participant said that this helps them focus on providing support and solidarity rather than engaging with discriminatory and hateful actors.

In contrast, some participants said that they want to engage with the hateful actors, depending on the level of risk. They shared that this was a way to create a learning opportunity and reinforce the norms of their online community. However, they also highlighted a strategy for minimizing confrontation and delivering a clear, consistent message. These participants recommended avoiding personal arguments and responding on behalf of the organization, ideally from the organization's social media account, rather than from a personal one:

“Often people look for confrontation and we don't play. The argument is personal, and we try to avoid the personal to stay on behalf of the organization, which is difficult because sometimes you want to respond.”

-Participant from Open French session

Participants explained that in rural areas, there is an opportunity for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to engage more directly with people who cause harm. In rural communities, the people leaving hateful comments or sending direct messages do not have the same level of anonymity. Interestingly, this can create opportunities for meaningful engagement and repair. As one participant from a rural organization shared:

“[Our region] is pretty small. It's 6000 people. So there is that level of you know, like, recently, kids were commenting on something and the board literally went to their house and said 'did you know that your kid is doing this?'”

- Participant from Open English session

Regarding threats of physical violence made on social media, participants suggested gathering evidence and seeking recourse. They emphasized that such approaches were critically important for their protection and if they decided to lodge a formal complaint with the authorities:

“If it's something that's the point where it's violent, like it's messaging of like, I heard in the call before I had to leave, you know, the use of like gun violence or any kind of like physical harm to somebody, as much as I don't agree with police officers, I would probably go the route of informing our local RCMP about you know that the uprising or the scene of violence coming towards our work and therefore endangering individuals.”

- Participant from Open English session

“We screenshot anything that is a threat and keep those on a secure section of our database.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Cognisant of the many ways that organizations can experience hate on social media, several participants suggested keeping a tracking matrix, like in an Excel spreadsheet, to track each incident, monitor its severity, and consider factors like potential risks and impacts. A matrix can also provide a clear and consistent guide on how to respond to different incidents. One participant shared that their organization has begun following this approach:

“When I look at our policies, our policies are relatively new when it comes to a lot of our social media and the way that we're currently working is, depending on the level of harassment, it changes how we approach it. So, if it is something where it's someone saying something that's derogatory or inappropriate or violent, we take different actions.”

- Participant from Open English session

5.2.2. Email

When discussing how to respond to hateful emails, participants recommended adjusting email settings to filter accounts that use specific terms or language. Participants also recommended deleting inboxes that are continuously targeted or receive a high volume of hateful emails.

As was the case with social media, participants suggested using a matrix or a spreadsheet to track hateful emails and see what has been reported. A participant in an Open English session said, “I have a folder where I store like these bad emails that we get, but there are actually not that many of them”. While several participants explained that they track their reporting of hateful emails, one participant shared that they do not typically find reporting hateful emails to law enforcement to be helpful. In the words of a participant from the BIPOC session, “when it comes to receiving emails, that gets kind of tricky because reporting these instances to local law enforcement isn’t always successful. There’s not always movement on it. It’s not always taken seriously”.

Lastly, participants suggested that, depending on the amount of queerphobic emails an organization receives and their capacity to respond to emails, an organization could consider issuing a statement to the community to let them know that there may be a delayed response.

5.2.3. Virtual Events

Regarding responding to online hate during virtual events, participants recommended having a moderator monitor all streams of engagement, such as the chat or question-and-answer functions and remove people engaging in hateful conduct. One participant shared that while streaming/webinar platforms may allow you to ban the use of specific words, hateful actors will adapt their spelling or use coded language to bypass these restrictions. They emphasized that such issues amplify the need for a dedicated moderator at virtual events.

5.2.4. News and Media

Participants mentioned a few strategies that organizations may consider if they are to be mentioned or targeted through queerphobic articles shared through news outlets and mainstream media. For example, one participant in an Open English session emphasized the importance of making a public statement to counter any mis/disinformation that directly targets, or could negatively impact, their organization. They shared, “When possible, we... respond publicly when stories arise outside of our moderation controls”.

Other participants spoke about the importance of preventing further harm by following up with media outlets. They recommended requesting the removal of any information or details that could be used to target a staff and/or volunteers. Participants also said that the organization should communicate with members of their community about potential risks related to being named in a hateful media article.

5.2.5. Individuals Working in 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations

Participants called attention to a number of strategies that can be used when responding to queerphobic online hate that targets individuals involved with 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, including when a staff member is targeted. One participant focused directly on physical safety and recommended instating a buddy system:

“For a security measure, I probably would make sure if someone is looking after our social media or is also... being targeted themselves because someone knows that they are our social media kind of person. I would make sure that they have a buddy system as much as possible. So, like if they’re leaving our space and say, if they have to take a bus, to make sure that someone is always with them.”

- Participant from Open English session

A participant from the TGNC session recommended limiting the amount of publicly

available information about that staff member and shutting down channels where they could receive hate. They shared, “We would lock down items. If it’s their personal social medias, we would talk about what they want to do to put privacy pieces. I encourage all my staff to keep their social medias private if possible”.

Generally, participants viewed hate against individuals working in 2SLGBTQ+ organizations as warranting an organization-wide response. This was particularly true for smaller, more grassroots organizations with few staff and volunteers. For example, for an organization composed of a couple of staff members and a few volunteers, any strategies to support the individual being targeted would necessitate the involvement of the majority, if not the entire team.

5.2.6. Tensions Related to Best Practices in Responding to Online Hate

There were a few tensions that emerged around best practices for responding to queerphobic online hate. Many participants explained that their organizations were only just beginning to look at their policies and practices and trying to figure out how to deal with the surge in online hate. Some participants spoke about challenges in deciding if, or when, their organization should engage, and they recognized that deleting hateful messages and comments prevents opportunities for dialogue, learning, and repair. However, they reiterated the fact that engaging with hateful actors can create an administrative drain, heighten the risk of violence, and may not result in a meaningful or productive discussion. For example, a participant in the TGNC session said:

“Previously, I mentioned that there was disagreement in our organization as to what the response should be. And I think if someone has the capacity and they think that they are able to be that person to engage with these people and try to you know, whether the goal is to show our community that we’re not going to put up with this, or the goal is to show these people that they’re not they aren’t allowed to do this in these spaces. If there is someone that has that capacity,

then that is fantastic. I’ve always been against it because I do not have that capacity in me to do that and I would not want to force anybody to be in that position who does not think that they can have that capacity.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Another tension also arose related to reporting threats of physical violence, with many participants saying that they feel hesitant about engaging the police. In fact, many participants shared a lack of trust in the police due to an ongoing history of violence and harm against 2SLGBTQ+ people. Some participants acknowledged that they did report online hate to the police because they did not see any alternative and because they wanted to create an official record of the hate their organization received. One participant in the BIPOC session shared that they have engaged in productive collaboration with police in the past when working to prevent the escalation of online hate to in-person violence at events. Notwithstanding, participants felt significant apprehension about police engagement. Mistrust of the police was particularly present amongst participants who worked with QTBIPOC or trans people:

“I can definitely echo what [participant] is saying re [my city’s police] and specifically our organization and specifically queer folks and folks of color. Yeah, I just don’t think that would be an option I would go with but I’m kind of stumped like policy-wise, or yeah, security measure-wise.”

- Participant from Open English session

“At this point, it’s either our volunteers that are all queer and trans people themselves that are watching social media waiting for their community to get threatened. Or I have to rely on a system that has historically not been helpful and is still not being helpful. And like my eggs kind of go all in the basket of people that have never helped us in the past. So, it’s kind of this precarious, like situation where it’s like, we’ve had to... reach out to the police, which is literally our nightmare because that’s not what we want

to do but... at this point, we don't know what else to do."

- Participant from TGNC session

Lastly, participants discussed the challenges with setting work/life boundaries and not overburdening staff with the task of moderation. One participant suggested that organizations should provide their staff with work phones, but that could impede separating their personal life and their work, especially since dealing with online hate can be so pervasive. As one participant from TGNC explained, "A lot of us aren't really familiar with setting up boundaries to begin with. And learning those things has been like a real roller coaster to, you know, try to figure out how we can help each other". Another participant talked about potentially hiring an external team to manage the organization's social media accounts, thereby reducing the burden and impacts on their staff. However, in sharing this, they highlighted that relying on external support would be a significant financial cost and would mean a loss of control and ownership over their organization:

"We have talked about...finding a team and paying them to take over our social media pieces. One as a small non-profit, the cost of that is nothing that we can afford, but then it's also handing over your public voice is also very challenging on some of those pieces."

- Participant from TGNC session

5.3. Support Strategies

Participants offered suggestions for supporting those affected by queerphobic online hate. Specifically, they gave recommendations for supporting staff, volunteers, and community members.

5.3.1. Support for Staff and Volunteers

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers who are impacted by queerphobic online hate was a key priority for participants. As one participant shared:

"Yeah, a lot of where my mind is going it's like, how to best care for folks that are dealing with it [queerphobic online hate] most directly in the organization. Whether that means providing them with like therapy or having like a counselor come on site."

- Participant from Open English session

Participants highlighted a need to take an individualized approach to supporting staff and volunteers that creates the space and flexibility needed to respond to each person's capacity and needs. This was a high priority for participants in the PWD session, who recognized that people with disabilities may have different capacities to address and cope with queerphobic online hate and experience heightened personal impacts as compared to their able-bodied peers. They recommended checking in regularly with the staff responsible for moderating hate in order to gauge capacity and impact and making any necessary adjustments to support staff in doing only as much as their body allows.

While individual accommodations and support strategies are needed, participants also highlighted the need to create space for group discussions amongst staff and volunteers to navigate the impacts of queerphobic online hate, particularly if hate is being experienced across the organization.

Participants also highlighted the role that knowledge can play in supporting staff and volunteers who are impacted by queerphobic online hate. As one participant reflected, understanding the tactics that hateful actors use online and how the organization can respond to them can be empowering and mitigate some of the anxiety and worry generated by these experiences.

Online queerphobic hate can prompt organizations to consider building safe(r) physical spaces, particularly if they receive threats of physical violence. For example, when asked to consider what an organization should do if they fall victim to a targeted campaign of online hate, participants spoke about the importance of holding their events in secure

locations to prevent the potential escalation of in-person violence. As one participant shared:

“I’d probably change up how we’re doing our events. I probably wouldn’t do them off site. I probably do them only on site because I know that that’s a lot safer than being in a place that we’re not sure about all of the escape routes and stuff like that.”

- Participant from Open English session

5.3.2. Support for Community Members

As we witness a rise in queerphobic online hate, 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations desire resources for community members that address physical safety and mental health. One participant in an Open English session shared, “We have created a community working group to address physical safety and mental health and are currently strategizing on actions”.

Focus group participants were also mindful to not engage in activities and partnerships with community organizations that may contribute to an influx of hate targeting community members. This was particularly true for mainstream organizations who had considered partnering with organizations serving the QTBIPOC communities. As one participant shared:

“I don’t want them to come over and go to like, you know, our friends over at another organization or one of the racialized you know, organizations that’s serving like, queer people of color... I almost feel like I have a responsibility to like kind of take, we take what we can to avoid everybody else kind of having to take it, you know. So, it’s kind of like an interesting balance between like, how do we protect our staff, but also how do we protect these other organizations that are probably going to get it like 400 times worse than we are if these people find out they exist.”

- Participant from TGNC session

Expanding on the need for supporting community members, some participants said that they are

exploring possible strategies for preventing in-person hate and violence at community events. One participant provided an example of the considerations they, and similar 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, have made when planning in-person events for community members:

“Pride organizations are now asking themselves do we have to hire outside security? You know, do we have to have people on the ground, can we create a marshaling team, like have actual community marshals surrounding the event in order to counter any kind of incident that might take place at an event like that?”

- Participant from BIPOC session

6. Findings: Needs and Gaps

A number of needs and gaps were identified as a result of the analysis of the focus groups data. The needs and gaps outlined below reflect what more can be done to address queerphobic online hate. Specifically, promoting digital literacy, developing best practices, improving structural supports, enhancing mental health support, and fostering collaborations can help 2SLGBTQ+ people and the organizations that serve them.

6.1. Digital Literacy

Participants emphasized the importance of digital literacy, recognizing it as a skill that can help mitigate queerphobic online hate. Notably, they spoke about wanting more knowledge about the security policies and reporting practices of social media platforms. They explained that this knowledge would strengthen and streamline their approach to preventing and responding to queerphobic online hate. One participant shared:

“One resource that would be really helpful would be to know what platforms have what policies to respond to this kind of thing. So like, what tips the scale for Facebook? ... because sometimes reporting and then getting back that I should just have a conversation is like defeating... so I’m like, I’d rather just not let you know Facebook if you’re not going to care. So it’s kind of like what tips that scale for Facebook to kind of intervene? Same with other platforms... what are their policies on those so we know who we should even bother with and who it’s just going to be exhausting?”

- Participant from TGNC session

A participant in the TGNC session spoke about wanting a clearer understanding of what makes networks secure and how to safely use web-based platforms for work. When asked how they would like to learn more about these issues, one participant shared, “I think some sort of training

around how to keep yourself safe. How to keep your phone safe, your home network, your things may be outside of the workspace”.

Participants also highlighted difficulties identifying the intent behind online behaviour that may be interpreted as queerphobic or that spreads misinformation. This presents a challenge for organizations that may wish to block trolls while creating ‘teachable moments’ for those engaging in well-intentioned but harmful behaviour. In response to this challenge, participants desired a stronger understanding of the tactics that hateful actors use to target 2SLGBTQ+ organizations online, such as setting up malicious internet bots or the use of deep fake technology. This knowledge would support 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in identifying people or bots that will be unlikely to engage in good faith or at all. One participant concluded:

“What I’d say we need first and foremost is maybe a kit or something. So, folks can recognize hate, and make sure they’re able to tell apart who are the trolls from well-intentioned so the trolls can be taken off.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

Participants further recognized the need to improve their knowledge of dominant misinformation and disinformation narratives that underpin or fuel queerphobic online hate. They acknowledged that learning to recognize these narratives and ‘dog whistles’ is crucial to effectively responding to and countering harmful mis/disinformation related to the queer and trans communities.

6.2. Best Practices

Most participants shared that their organizations have developed formal and informal policies and practices to respond to the hate they have received, but they said that they are unsure if their current approach(es) would align with best practices.

Despite this, a number of participants were uncertain about what constitutes best practices for preventing and responding to queerphobic online hate. Many also said that they were eager to access information and training on best practices. For example, one participant emphasized that they are currently not aware of where to access information on best practices:

“I don’t know where I go for training or resources for this kind of stuff. I’m going from the standpoint of like, what I would do personally. I don’t know if that’s necessarily best practice... what is out there that I don’t know that I could be accessing?”

- Participant from Open English session

Making best practices accessible to volunteers was also indicated as a priority. Given that volunteers’ involvement with organizations is typically informal, intentionally sharing information with them is an important way to maintain their safety and prevent negative outcomes. As one participant shared:

“I think it would be helpful for [volunteers] to actually have best practices for engagement because sometimes a bit of a firestorm is created inadvertently and you know, from the best of intentions, but I think a lot of the volunteers definitely need you know, a bit of like how to engage safely themselves as well because when people practice allyship, and it obviously is coming from a very, you know, very caring place, either they’re putting themselves sometimes really out there as a target or inadvertently putting the organization as a target when we weren’t even necessarily brought up. So, so definitely best practices for volunteers for just how to keep themselves safe online as well. Not just us [the staff].”

- Participant from Open English session

6.3. Structural Support

Participants stressed that many 2SLGBTQ+ organizations are small with few staff and/or they rely heavily on volunteers. They have limited funding and time to develop and implement policies or arrange security measures, such as cyber insurance:

“None of this [training or resources for staff] exists right now because it’s really just me and at the moment, it’s faster for me to just do it than to try to train a volunteer to manage this kind of thing.”

- Participant from Open English session

“I think just across the board, a lack of staff and a lack of time to develop that sort of specific policy is the main culprit of why that’s not in place.”

- Participant from Open English session

Expanding on this, participants highlighted that any best practices must consider the realities of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in order to be successfully implemented:

“When creating resources and best practices, you do have to consider who’s using them as well. Like if you’re like [our organization] where there’s me, versus you know, an organization that might have 10-20 employees then we’re somewhat looking at different scenarios as well.”

- Participant from Open English session

There are also structural issues at play that allow for queerphobic online hate to occur in the first place, and a lack of systemic support from larger, more powerful institutions shifts the burden to small, underfunded 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to mitigate hate. Participants asserted that both governments and social media companies need

to take meaningful action to address online hate and work to ensure the safety of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and the organizations that serve them:

“Regardless of the policies we develop, my organization can’t stop me from being doxxed, my organization can’t stop me from receiving threats outside of work or on my personal, and even going private they can... find ways sometimes to get at you. So I think part of it is, we need a larger systems change and accountability from social media platforms”

- Participant from TGNC session

Participants stressed the importance of having resources for addressing queerphobic online hate as well as threats of physical violence that are independent from the police. The need was a significant point for many participants who recognized the historic and ongoing violence that police perpetrate against 2SLGBTQ+ communities. As one participant in an Open English session shared, “I would like to see options for protection from possible threats that don’t involve the RCMP or police.”

6.4. Mental Health Support

Participants highlighted the need for meaningful, accessible, and low barrier, mental health support for staff and volunteers who are impacted by queerphobic online hate. As one participant shared:

“A policy change that... I would implement is ensuring that staff, volunteers, community members have access to mental health support and making that access as barrier free as possible, so either no cost or low cost, but ensuring that, [if anyone has received hate], that they’re able to access support in a way that is just and equitable for them.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

That said, another participant shared that these supports are not always covered by 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations due to funding constraints

and limited health benefits:

“In terms of resources, access to mental health and a therapist, given that sometimes with benefits is not always covered. It’s super important to have individual access.”

- Participant from Open French session

6.5. Collaborations with Organizations and Stakeholders

Participants emphasized the value of collaborations in addressing and preventing queerphobic online hate. For example, participants said that collaborations amongst organizations, board members, and the broader community, could help them moderate online platforms and reduce the burden on staff. They also shared that connecting with networks of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations for guidance and support would be a key step should they experience queerphobic online hate:

“We are a member of the Enchanté network and also of Centrelink. So [if we were experiencing a targeted campaign of online hate] I would probably reach out to both of them and see who has samples of policies and things that we could start to look at and develop our own.”

- Participant from Open English session

In fact, participants saw an opportunity for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to collaborate in tracking and identifying trends, including examples of queerphobic online hate and effective strategies for prevention and response. One participant shared:

“Maybe there’s some kind of I don’t know database of this kind of information, like if people have already done the work to come up with it that we can sort of look at and borrow from. That would be super helpful.”

- Participant from Open English session

Similarly, another participant said that they would like to see:

“Some sort of resource available to non-profits that kind of identifies maybe accounts or organizations and how they work with regards to organizations who are specifically using online hate as one of their tools, or like individuals if individuals are fairly prolific in that. If there was some sort of database or resource that would facilitate us knowing that and being able to identify them before they’re actually able to do that, I think that would be great.”

- Participant from TGNC session

While participants did not offer suggestions in terms of how to address hate or discrimination within the queer community against those with intersecting lived experiences of oppression, these concerns indicate a need to build safer spaces to ensure that all community members receive equitable support when experiencing queerphobic hate.

6.6. Intersectional and Anti-Oppressive Communities

Across multiple focus groups, participants noted that existing 2SLGBTQ+ spaces are not always safe or welcoming for all community members. In particular participants highlighted that trans women and racialized queer and trans community members face discrimination within broader 2SLGBTQ+ spaces due to transmisogyny and/or racist behaviour, policies, and/or practices.

A participant in the BIPOC session shared concern that racialized 2SLGBTQ+ community members may not receive the same public support as their white peers when targeted by queerphobic hate. They discussed an incident that occurred in their community, in which a white drag queen was facing hate and community members rallied behind them. Upon reflection, this participant shared:

“Something that doesn’t get talked about often in queer spaces is what is actually happening within the queer community and the hate that happens within the queer community...If it was a performer who wasn’t white, I do think there would have been a different response. So conversations do need to be had to clean up our own house. In addition to having further conversations about how the rest of society views the queer community.”

- Participant from BIPOC session

7. Discussion

This project uncovered the ways in which 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Canada have experienced queerphobic online hate. Notably, all participants had been targets of queerphobic online hate, which was either directed at them as individuals or against the organization they represented. Online hate was received via social media, email, and live during online events, as well as on public sites not owned or managed by 2SLGBTQ+ organizations. In some cases, online hate escalated to in-person violence.

Participants explained how people rationalized or justified their queerphobic online hate, which included pseudo-scientific beliefs about gender, religion, and culture as well as fallacious arguments about protecting children and (cisgender) women from a perceived threat from queer and trans communities. Participants also identified far-right politics, lateral hate, and trolling as rationalizations for queerphobic online hate. In some cases, the rationalization behind queerphobic online hate was unclear and 2SLGBTQ+ organizations wondered why they were targeted.

Our analysis revealed several factors that may increase the risks of queerphobic online hate. 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in our study experienced more queerphobic online hate when they promoted their work outside of their regular networks, posted content for days of 2SLGBTQ+ significance (e.g., The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia; International Trans Day of Visibility, Asexual Awareness Week), or made statements of support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Organizations reported experiencing higher levels of online hate because of dis/misinformation and anti-2SLGBTQ+ celebrities or influencers. Organizations also suspected that online anonymity emboldens anti-2SLGBTQ+ individuals to engage in hateful conduct online.

As we explored the forms of, rationalizations behind, and contributing factors to, queerphobic online hate, we developed an understanding of the impact that queerphobic hate has on 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, staff, and community members. We found that, above all else, queerphobic online hate negatively impacts the mental health and well-being of people who are exposed to it or responsible for mitigating its prevalence. In particular, participants expressed concern about the impacts on 2SLGBTQ+ youth, who are seen to be at greater risk than others. Participants discussed the impacts of queerphobic hate on their sense of security, sharing that in some cases they avoid public facing work within their communities due to worries of online hate escalating to in-person violence. Finally, the administrative costs incurred when trying to address queerphobic online hate has caused a significant negative impact on the work that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations can do within their communities. Overall, we found that queerphobic online hate has considerable negative effects on 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, staff, and community members.

2SLGBTQ+ organizations are aware of the need to protect and support staff, volunteers, and members of their communities from queerphobic online hate, and participants in this study offered recommendations for how organizations could promote the emotional and physical safety and well-being of people impacted by queerphobic online hate. One recommendation was for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to take an individualized, person-centered approach to ensure those impacted receive the help they need. Regular check-ins with staff and volunteers would help organizations to identify appropriate accommodations and support. Another recommendation was for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to facilitate group discussions when the entire organization is targeted so that staff, volunteers, and members of the community can come together in solidarity,

debrief, and discuss strategies for collective action. Participants recognized that community members can also be impacted by online queerphobic hate, so they recommended that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations explore opportunities to support the physical safety and mental health of their community members.

2SLGBTQ+ organizations have begun to explore and adopt strategies to prevent and respond to queerphobic online hate. Some strategies to prevent queerphobic online hate include: limiting the information available on social media as well as who has access to social media accounts by restricting individual users or making social media accounts private, limiting publicly available email addresses, vetting online event registrants prior to participation, releasing press stories about events after they have occurred, taking steps to prevent any escalation to in-person hate, and regularly updating policies and procedures based on the tactics used by hateful actors. Some strategies in response to experiencing queerphobic online hate include: assessing the severity and intention of the hate received and responding in turn by blocking user(s), deleting or requesting the deletion of comments, direct messages, emails, posts, or articles, implementing filters on emails or direct message platforms to limit the visibility of hateful messaging to staff or volunteers, documenting hate and reporting threats to authorities to prevent escalation, and monitoring in-person events following the receipt of physical threats made online.

Tensions emerged when considering the best practices for preventing and responding to queerphobic online hate within and across 2SLGBTQ+ organizations. Participants identified a series of compromises, contextual factors, and conflicting values, including: the compromise between restricting their online presence to prevent hate and its impact on their ability to reach 2SLGBTQ+ community

members, the desire to limit collaborations to prevent the spread of hate to new organizations without limiting needed collaborations to meet the needs of marginalized community members, tensions around when and why to engage with those spreading queerphobic online hate, apprehension about engaging with police to prevent the escalation of online hate to physical violence, and challenges in setting work/life boundaries, particularly when an organization is composed of a small group of staff or volunteers. These tension points suggest that a “one-size-fits-all” approach may not work for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations responding to queerphobic online hate.

During the stakeholder engagement that led to the development of this report, we provided closed focus group spaces for Black, Indigenous, people of colour/racialized 2SLGBTQ+ people (BIPOC), Trans, non-binary, Two Spirit, genderqueer, agender, gender non-conforming people (TGNC), and 2SLBTQ+ people with disabilities (PWD), as well as Francophone participants. We found that intersectionality is a factor in the experiences of queerphobic online hate. BIPOC participants recognized that queer spaces are often not safe for BIPOC individuals, who may not receive the same support from the 2SLGBTQ+ community as their white peers when they experience queerphobic hate. BIPOC participants also feared a heightened level of hate, and in some cases, they avoided taking on public-facing roles for fear of experiencing intersecting forms of racism and queerphobia. Similarly, trans participants identified that 2SLGBTQ+ spaces are not always inclusive or safe for TGNC community members. It was also noted that transphobic online hate may be more likely to escalate to in-person hate or violence than online hate targeting cis queer people. More than other participants, people with disabilities placed greater importance on taking a person-centred approach to support those impacted by queerphobic online hate.

People with disabilities also suggested that organizations should regularly remind staff and volunteers not to take on more work than they can handle and make necessary accommodations to respect the capacity of and support the well-being of people with disabilities who are targeted by queerphobic online hate.

Our research revealed overarching needs, and gaps that need to be addressed, to bolster the capacity of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to prevent and respond to queerphobic online hate. Participants emphasized the importance of digital literacy in identifying, understanding, and addressing queerphobic online hate, and they expressed the desire to learn how online platforms work and how to use technology to protect themselves against online hate. Mental health support and resources for staff and volunteers was identified as a critical gap. Collaboration between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and independent activists, as well as more inclusive and intersectional 2SLGBTQ+ communities were also recognized as issues needing attention. Lastly, while there were tensions regarding best practices, there is an urgent need for evidence-based and 2SLGBTQ+ specific strategies to prevent and respond to queerphobic online hate. These needs and gaps have informed the recommendations provided in this report.

This project examined instances of queerphobic online hate faced by 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and how organizations have been strategized to prevent and respond to queerphobic hate. As such, our findings allow for a deeper understanding of the strengths, limitations, and compromises present within current strategies. This understanding, paired with an awareness of the needs and gaps that 2SLGBTQ+ organizations face in implementing best practices, arms the community with knowledge to develop practical, effective, and adaptable strategies that bolster 2SLGBTQ+ organizational capacity to mitigate queerphobic online hate and prevent and respond to its impacts.

8. Recommendations

Following our focus groups with representatives from 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in Canada, we offer the following recommendations:

- Develop and implement resources to build capacity amongst 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to prepare for and respond to experiences of queerphobic online hate
- Support 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and leaders in the development of their online presence in a way that fosters community engagement and minimizes incidents of online hate
- Develop digital literacy supports to fill the existing deficits amongst 2SLGBTQ+ organizations
- Establish mechanisms of mutual support/aid between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to share lessons learned and ways to mitigate queerphobic online hate
- Establish collaborative mechanisms between 2SLGBTQ+ organizations for advocacy to reduce the burden on any single organization and address systemic shortfalls including related to publicly funded mental healthcare
- Enhance the resources, services, and support available to staff and volunteers, including better and more accessible mental health supports.

In pursuit of these recommendations, we call on all levels of government to provide funding that would facilitate the needed increase in capacity (e.g., human resources, technical skills, upgraded online security) for 2SLGBTQ+ organizations. It is also important to recognize the responsibilities of tech companies and social media companies to improve their policies and practices so that queerphobic online hate can be more effectively addressed on their platforms. Policy development should also occur

across different sectors of society, including within governing bodies, to ensure there is a coordinated, holistic approach to reducing risks of online and in-person harm. As such, we stress the value of public campaigns and call for educational initiatives that inform the public and diverse communities about the growing threat of violence against 2SLGBTQ+ people and organizations. We also strongly suggest developing training sessions and online modules that can be made available to community organizations. Educational resources such as these can foster the digital literacy of leaders, staff, and volunteers, and can help organizations prevent, mitigate, and respond to queerphobic online hate, mis/disinformation, and other harms.

9. Limitations

We recognize a few limitations with this project. First, our ability to engage French participants was limited. Future efforts to address queerphobic online hate should prioritize building bridges between English 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and French 2SLGBTQ+ organizations so they can learn from and support one another.

We encountered a few technical challenges when transcribing the data from focus groups, including:

- Otter.ai does not transcribe French
- Otter.ai is calibrated for English language accents and does not accurately (or has less accuracy) capturing non-English accents, and
- Closed captioning on Zoom does not provide a strong transcription function.
- As technology improves, future projects should explore more effective transcription software and prepare for potential linguistic challenges.

Effort was made to ensure there were discussions about the intersections of marginalized identities and queerphobic online hate during the focus groups. Throughout the report we have highlighted where community-specific findings occurred. However, the data was not substantial enough to create a separate, stand-alone section about the impacts or mitigation of queerphobic online hate against specific marginalized communities or individuals with lived experiences. This was in part due to the limited number of direct quotes available from the closed, community-specific focus groups.

Lastly, we recognize the rich diversity of 2SLGBTQ+ people and organizations, and we understand that the data collected from

our 17 participants may not capture or reflect the full range of experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ communities across Canada. Moreover, there may be other forms of queerphobic online hate that were not uncovered in our work. There is an urgent, growing need for research in this area, and we encourage future projects to build on this work and further investigate the ways in which 2SLGBTQ+ people and organizations experience online hate.

10. Knowledge Mobilization

Thanks to the input provided by participants, ODLAN has created social media shareables and other knowledge mobilization tools, which can be found on ODLAN's website and social media accounts. The knowledge mobilization products are also available on Wisdom2Action's website and/or on its social media accounts.

ODLAN and Wisdom2Action will officially launch this report on 4 August 2023 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto, Canada. The electronic copy of the final report will be available through both organizations' websites and distributed via email and social media shareables.

11. Conclusion

2SLGBTQ+ organizations are bearing the brunt of the rise in anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate. This project has enabled a better understanding of the ways in which that queerphobic hate is experienced online and the ways that hate has been rationalized. Moreover, the project has demonstrated the strategies used by 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to deal with the hate they experience while simultaneously highlighting the persistent needs and gaps required to make online spaces safer for queer and trans people.

Over the past five or so decades, notable social progress has occurred for 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canada. Nonetheless, at the present time, we're experiencing efforts to roll back equality rights for queer and trans people, underpinned by acts of hate, in-person and online. This project demonstrates how much more needs to be done to build 2SLGBTQ+ community capacity and digital literacy to ease the organizational pressures that are experienced when dealing with online hate, so that queer and trans organizations are better able to address their communities' needs.

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