



Young Canadians  
Pushing Back  
Against Hate  
Online



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Written for MediaSmarts by:  
Kara Brisson-Boivin, Ph.D.  
Director of Research  
MediaSmarts



MediaSmarts  
205 Catherine Street, Suite 100  
Ottawa, ON Canada K2P 1C3  
T: 613-224-7721 F: 613-761-9024  
Toll-free line: 1-800-896-3342  
[info@mediasmarts.ca](mailto:info@mediasmarts.ca)  
[mediasmarts.ca](http://mediasmarts.ca)  
[@mediasmarts](https://www.instagram.com/mediasmarts)

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# Executive Summary

This report is based on responses gathered in an online survey with over 1000 youth ages 12 to 16 years old from all regions across Canada, designed to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of young Canadians with casual prejudice or ‘cultures of hatred’ online, as well as to determine the motivations and external factors that may influence their decisions whether or not to push back against hate online.

**Witnessing and engaging in casual prejudice online is a common experience among youth and most youth say casual prejudice hurts their feelings. However, many youths do not respond when they see casual prejudice because they are afraid that it will make things worse and because they don’t know what to say or do to make a difference.**

## Spaces and Platforms

- The most popular platforms for youth are social networks, messaging apps and video sharing sites (over **seven in ten** youth use all three platforms) and most youth (**seven in ten**) use these at least weekly. Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube were the top five most consistently reported platforms where youth witness and engage in casual prejudice.

## Attitudes Towards Casual Prejudice

- Most youth (**seven in ten**) say casual prejudice hurts their feelings, think that casual prejudice is more common online than offline (**eight in ten** youth), and say that it is important to do or say something in response (**eight in ten** youth). However, most youth (**six in ten**) say it is easier to talk about casual prejudice in private rather than in public.

## Enabling Factors for Pushing Back

- The top two preferred methods of responding to casual prejudice by young Canadians are: stopping communication or blocking the person responsible and talking to their parents.
- We asked youth a series of questions about what would make them more likely to push back against casual prejudice online. These questions can be grouped into six factors that would positively influence or enable youth to push back: platforms, consensus, anonymity and control, examples, empathy, and audience.
- Youth say they would be most likely to intervene or push back for reasons related to: *empathy* (**seven in ten youth**) or if someone they knew told them what happened hurt their feelings, if the *platforms* they use have clear rules and tools to report unacceptable

behaviour (**seven in ten youth**), and *consensus* (**six in ten youth**) or if they thought that most people agreed with them.

## Barriers to Pushing Back

- We asked youth a series of questions about why they decide not to push back against ‘cultures of hate’ online. These questions can be grouped into five factors that would negatively influence or act as barriers to young Canadian’s pushing back: efficacy, cohesion, norms, context, and moral disengagement.
- Most youth (**five in ten**) say they are less likely to do something or push back when they see casual prejudice because they don’t know what to do (*efficacy*). Additionally, very few youth (**two in ten**) think that they don’t have a right to say anything, that everyone gets picked on equally online, or that casual prejudice doesn’t matter.

## Experiences of Casual Prejudice

- Most Canadian youth have seen casual prejudice at least ‘sometimes’ on the online platforms they use (**four in ten** on Twitter and YouTube, **five in ten** on Instagram and Snapchat, and over **six in ten** on Facebook), while one-third of youth who use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube say they witness casual prejudice ‘often’ or ‘very often’.
- Not a single youth participant indicated that they had *never* witnessed casual prejudice on Facebook.
- About one quarter of youth who have witnessed casual prejudice on the top five platforms they use say that they do something about it ‘often’ or ‘very often’. While about one-half of youth say they have never engaged in casual prejudice, **one in ten** admit to engaging in casual prejudice often.

## Key Messages and Implications

**The results of this study are a call to action for parents, educators, policymakers, and technology and platform developers to prepare, engage, and empower Canadian youth to push back against hate online.**

- Youth need to be supported in developing the skills and knowledge required to be able to recognize when something is and is not prejudicial online and youth need to be provided with clear examples of *how* they could potentially respond to casual prejudice online.
- Youth need to feel that their opinions and experiences with pushing back against hate online matter and will be taken into account by those with decision-making capabilities whether that is policymakers, educators, or platform designers.
- Young Canadians need to feel empowered and confident that their actions will make a difference.

- Policy interventions should bolster the digital literacy opportunities afforded to young Canadians in their classrooms, their homes (with their parents/guardians), and within their wider communities both online and offline.
- Education interventions should incorporate resources on online hate or online casual prejudice into curriculum, lessons, and programs at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Parents need to feel confident that they can help their children recognize the signs and symbols of hate online and support their children to intervene in safe and respectful ways.
- Platforms and technology companies have a responsibility to create and design clear rules for what is considered acceptable behaviour on the platform as well as transparent and easy to use reporting mechanisms for flagging unacceptable behaviour and countering hate online.
- When youth feel better **prepared** to recognize and respond to hate online they are more likely to **engage** in healthy debate as well as contribute to the norms and value setting on the platforms they use and are **empowered** to push back against 'cultures of hatred' modelling (especially for their peers) empathy for others and ethical digital citizenship.

# Introduction

## Cultures of hatred online

In its early days the internet was often hailed as a free marketplace of ideas, where everyone’s views and ideas could be shared and compete on an equal footing. Today it is, for most of us, an essential tool for accessing information and services, but its value as a means of sharing ideas – as a vehicle of civic engagement and debate — has in many ways declined. Today’s digital media are fully networked, placing each user and consumer at the centre of an infinite web of connections and interactions, allowing content to be shared with any number of people on a multitude of online platforms.

Unlike the largely isolated online communities found on the pre-Web and “Web 1.0” internet, today most social interaction takes place on a handful of large platforms: social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, video-sharing sites such as YouTube, or multiplayer online games such as Minecraft or Fortnite. Both content and users move seamlessly between these platforms, though, with the result that while individual communities can form and develop their own social norms within each platform those values can be easily influenced by those of other communities. Because a community’s norms are largely set by the most committed 10 percent of members<sup>1</sup>, the connections between networks means that small groups of powerfully committed individuals and communities can have a significant impact on the values of much larger communities and platforms. The values or norms of online communities are not only important for (especially young) people’s perceptions of the social consensus within those spaces, but also for the values people themselves conform to and inevitably spread as they share content online. Additionally, the connected, networked nature of online communities—and the potentially limitless pools of recruits and targets this provides—permits both formal and decentralized hate movements to make hate speech appear to be more acceptable in online spaces.



⋮ **A COMMUNITY’S NORMS**  
⋮ are largely set by the most  
⋮ committed 10 percent of  
⋮ members.  
⋮

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<sup>1</sup> Xie, J., Sreenivasan, S., Korniss, G., Zhang, W., Lim, C., & Szymanski, B. K. (2011). “Social consensus through the influence of committed minorities.” *Physical Review E Phys. Rev. E*, 84(1).

Youth don't have to encounter overt hate speech to be exposed to hate online. In fact, much more common are *cultures of hatred*<sup>2</sup>: communities in which racism, misogyny and other forms of prejudice are normalized. For example, many online environments—especially those popular with adolescent boys— have fairly high 'baseline' levels of racism, sexism and homophobia. Not only do these communities and platforms become unfriendly and sometimes unsafe environments for members of targeted groups but hatemongers will often 'troll' mainstream sites, making hateful comments to provoke a reaction from some people and/or elicit sympathetic comments from others.<sup>3</sup> Exposure to online prejudice and hate can have much more serious effects than simply making people uncomfortable or unwelcome: studies<sup>4</sup> have shown that experiencing discrimination online can cause stress, anxiety and depression.

## Youth perspectives

MediaSmarts' *Young Canadians in a Wired World (YCWW)*<sup>5</sup> research has established that while more than three-quarters of Canadian youth feel it is important to speak up when they encounter hateful content online, nearly half choose not to because they feel "it's not my place to say anything." The barriers to young people speaking out identified in that research are young people's fears of disrupting social harmony or social cohesion ('rocking the boat') with their friends and family, by challenging what appears to be the values of the group, and drawing unwanted attention to themselves. These concerns are not limited to speaking out against hate or prejudiced speech, or similarly severe issues such as cyberbullying: in more recent MediaSmarts research<sup>6</sup> youth expressed an absolute prohibition against posting or sharing *anything* political, controversial or even overly personal for fear of drawing attention to themselves.

If young people remain primarily motivated by the desire to preserve social harmony and social cohesion within the various communities that they are a part of, they are very likely going to be influenced by what they perceive to be the consensus in those spaces. Additionally, if prejudiced speech is not met with opposition, it is easy for the majority to perceive these views as the defaults of the community even if they do not personally hold them. In other words, when

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<sup>2</sup> MediaSmarts (2019). Deconstructing Online Hate. <http://mediasmarts.ca/online-hate/deconstructing-online-hate> March.

<sup>3</sup> Tynes, B., Giang, M., Williams, D., and Thompson, G. (2008). "Online Racial Discrimination and Psychological Adjustment Among Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Health*. (43) (6): 565

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Steeves, V. (2014). "Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Encountering Racist and Sexist Content Online." MediaSmarts. Ottawa. 1-25.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, M., Steeves, V., Regan Shade, L., Foran, G. (2017). "To Share or Not to Share: How Teens Make Privacy Decisions about Photos on Social Media." MediaSmarts. Ottawa: 1-47.

hate online goes unchallenged, young people may believe that intervention is overreaction; when ‘cultures of hatred’ are masked as consensus, and the behaviour is not seen as harmful, the majority of witnesses do not believe intervention would be worth the risk of social exclusion.<sup>7</sup>

However, there is evidence that relatively small efforts to push back against hate speech can be successful if they are seen as coming from within the community.<sup>8</sup> Further, research by Chaudhry and Gruzd (2019) and Kearney (2019)<sup>9</sup> has shown that contrary to what communication theorists call the ‘spiral of silence’—where with increased social pressure people may conceal their views when they think their views are in the minority—a vocal minority today are in fact comfortable with expressing unpopular views on social media platforms.

## Research aims

This project seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of young Canadians with casual prejudice online, as well as to determine the motivations and external factors that may influence their decisions whether or not to push back against hate online. While our past research and resources have focused on young people’s exposure to more extreme content – typically material produced by organized hate movements, or directed towards an identified target with an intent to harm – in this report we asked youth about their experiences with prejudiced acts or content that are performed or created largely by peers, are not directed towards a present target, and where either there is no clear intent to harm or where causing harm is not the *primary* intent. (See the Methodology section for more details on how this concept was defined for participants.) We chose this topic in order to examine the relevance of previous MediaSmarts’ (YCWW 2014) research findings regarding the prevalence of social harmony, social cohesion, and a desire to remain anonymous as the major barriers to young people speaking out, especially in light of the recent social research<sup>10</sup> which indicates that even small efforts to challenge the consensus can have significant impacts on motivating others to push back against hate online.

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<sup>7</sup> Dickter, C.L. and Newton, V.A. (2013). “To Confront or not to confront: Non-Targets’ evaluations of and responses to racist comments.” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. (43): 262-275.

<sup>8</sup> Rasinski, H.M. and Czopp, A.M. (2010). “The effect of target status on witnesses’ reactions to confrontations of bias.” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*. (39)(7): 856-869.

Zou, L.X. and Dickter, C.L. (2013). “Perceptions of racial confrontation: The role of colour blindness and comment ambiguity.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. (19)(1):92-96.

<sup>9</sup> Chaudhry, I. and A. Gruzd (2019). “Expressing and Challenging Racist Discourse on Facebook: How Social Media Weaken the ‘Spiral of Silence’ Theory. *Policy and Internet*. (9999): 1-21.

Kearney, M. in Riley, C. (2019). “*The whisper room: Moderates on Twitter are losing their voice* MU researcher finds social media might be artificially exaggerating political polarization.” Retrieved April 4, 2019. From: <https://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2019/0403-the-whisper-room-moderates-on-twitter-are-losing-their-voice/>

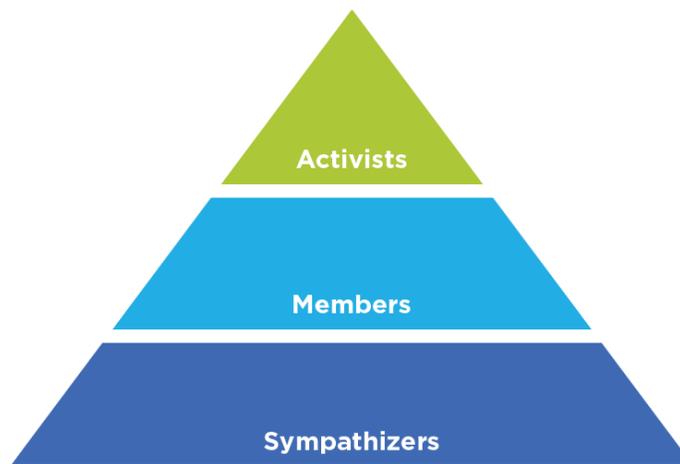
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, concentrating on casual prejudice in peer interactions online provides us with an opportunity to contribute to knowledge and comprehension of youth group dynamics in the context of online hate movements and processes of radicalization.



**SMALL EFFORTS TO CHALLENGE**  
the consensus can have significant impacts on motivating others to push back.

There has been a significant amount of research<sup>11</sup> on individuals who have been radicalized or are actively involved in extreme violence towards members of certain groups.



Researchers<sup>12</sup> have classified these individuals as being at the top of the radicalization pyramid, or 'activists', and for good reason, since the consequences of violent extremism include widespread social instability and insecurity. However, there is far less research on individuals who occupy the bottom of the radicalization pyramid or 'sympathizers'—individuals who are experimenting with radical views or may be persuaded by the values of 'cultures of hatred'.

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<sup>11</sup> For examples see:

Stephens, W., S. Sieckelink, H., Boutellier. (2019). "Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. 1-17.

Khosrokhavar, K. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. The New Press. New York.

Neumann, P. (2016). *Radicalized: New Jihadists and the threat to the west*. I.B. Tauris & Co. New York.

<sup>12</sup> McCauley, C. and S., Moskaleiko. (2008). "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. (20) (3): 415-433.

(While some researchers, including Clark and Moskalenko themselves<sup>13</sup>, have questioned the value of this model in analyzing the process of radicalization, it remains a valuable model for discussing the makeup of existing hate groups and movements.) Recently, radicalization researchers<sup>14</sup> have criticized an over-reliance on secondary sources—only 20% of articles and reports provide new data and only 3% use primary, empirical sources—and a focus on lone actors or radicalized individuals paying little to no attention to group dynamics within radicalization processes. According to Dr. Bart Shuurman<sup>15</sup> (leading scholar on radicalism and counter-radicalism); researchers need to re-phrase the radicalization question from: ‘why the one?’ to ‘why the many?’ This project aims to do that by analyzing the spaces, platforms, factors, attitudes and experiences of young people with regards to casual prejudice on the internet, in order to identify the ways in which hate can be normalized – and opposition to it *de-normalized* – in online communities.

Not only does this research provide new data with a much needed focus on youth and the online sphere but it does so through empirical, first-hand accounts from young people themselves. Moreover, this research is important since seemingly low-level or benign casual prejudice feeds the online cultures and group dynamics in which youth are normalized and desensitized to hate and this in turn allows for targeted and more extreme acts of hate to be possible.

Building on previous MediaSmarts’ research, this study carries out the following research aims:

- **Understand** the attitudes and experiences of young Canadians with casual hate speech online.
- **Determine** the motivations and external factors that influence their decisions whether or not to speak out or intervene.
- **Collect** baseline data on young people’s understandings of and experiences with online radicalization and casual prejudice in their day-to-day lives.
- **Inform** policy and develop evidence-based programs and interventions to empower youth to push back against hate in online communities.

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<sup>13</sup> McCauley, C., & Moskalenko, S. (2017). Understanding political radicalization: The two-pyramids model. *American Psychologist*, 72(3), 205-216.

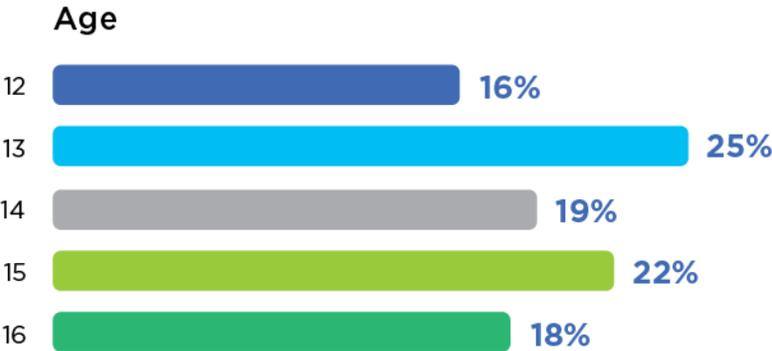
<sup>14</sup> Shuurman, B. and Q., Eijkman. (2013). “Moving Terrorism Research Forward: The Crucial Role of Primary Sources.” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hauge*. (4)(2).

<sup>15</sup> Shuurman, B. (2018). “Progress and Pitfalls in Research on Terrorism.” *Partnering in Practice: Preventing Social Polarizations*. CPN-PREV. Edmonton. November 30- December 3.

# Research Methodology

In August 2018, MediaSmarts hired Environics Research Group to conduct an anonymous, online survey with 1000<sup>16</sup> Canadian youth ages 12 to 16 years old across Canada. Participants and their parents were provided information about the study, including that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and consent was obtained from both youth participants and their parents. MediaSmarts created the research design and survey instruments while Environics managed recruitment of participants, distributed the online survey, and conducted analysis of results under the direction of MediaSmarts. Data was collected between October 16, 2018 to December 18, 2018.

Participants were chosen from the general population, across all provinces and territories and they were primarily English (74%) and French speaking (23%). 50% of participants identified as female, 49% as male, and 1% as other (which includes trans, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary youth). The majority of participants identified as straight/heterosexual (91%) and 76% of youth identified as European-Canadian.<sup>17</sup> Participants were divided relatively evenly across the five age categories of 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 years old.



In this report, the following terms are used to refer to subgroups of the population of Canadian youth studied:

- **Youth:** young people 12 to 16 years old

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<sup>16</sup> This report is based on 1007 completed survey responses.

<sup>17</sup> For a full report of participant demographics see the appendix on pages 65-66.

- **Boys:** self-identified male children
- **Girls:** self-identified female children
- **Younger youth:** young people 12 to 13 years old
- **Older youth:** young people 14 to 16 years old
- **Straight:** youth who identify as being heterosexual or straight
- **LGBTQ+:** youth who identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, or identify as having another type of sexuality
- **White:** youth who identify as being of European descent or White
- **Visible minorities:** youth who identify as being of non-European descent or non-White

In this report, results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Labels for values less than or equal to three percentage points are not shown in stacked bar charts.

## Defining casual prejudice

Youth were given the following definition of the term casual prejudice before they encountered sections of the survey which used the term:

By **casual prejudice** we mean when people use words or say things that are negative towards a particular group but are not aimed at a particular person who is present.

Examples of things that would be casual prejudice:

- Someone playing a computer game jokingly calls a team-mate a rude word for gay people, to make fun of them after a bad game.
- Someone who is not Black posts lyrics from a song that has a rude word for Black people.
- Someone sees a video that makes fun of gay people, then shares the video with their friends.
- Someone who is not Asian posts a photo on a social network of themselves from a Halloween party in a ninja costume, with their face and eyes made up to make them look Asian.
- Someone shares a meme that uses a picture of someone with Down syndrome, to make a joke about something in the news.
- People playing an online game decide not to allow someone with a female avatar and username to join their team. They say it is because they think women don't take the game as seriously as men do.

## Group level analysis

Given that this project also seeks to examine the group dynamics in which youth are normalized and desensitized to online hate, we made use of segmentation analysis or cluster analysis techniques. The objective of cluster analysis is to assign particular observations to groups (or segments) of the larger sample with similar characteristics who may exhibit similar behaviours so that comparisons (and contrasts) may be made across the segments or groups. Dividing the sample into groups allows us to develop refined group-specific insights from the data.

In this study, segmentation analysis was based on the spaces and places that youth occupy online. Specifically, participants were asked to report whether or not, in the past week, they had interacted with other people online in:

- messaging apps (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp)
- social networks (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)
- online multiplayer games (e.g. Fortnite, Minecraft)
- video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)
- other content sharing sites (e.g. Wattpadd, DeviantArt)
- online forums (e.g. Reddit, Minecraft Forum)
- live-streaming platforms (e.g. Twitch, TikTok)
- entertainment sites with comment sections (e.g. Teen Vogue, GameFAQs).<sup>18</sup>

Based on this data, youth were divided into three groups based on their use of different kinds of sites and apps: **Explorers, Socializers, and Minimalists**.

Our analysis found that the best predictors of group membership are their use of online forums, messaging apps, and entertainment sites.

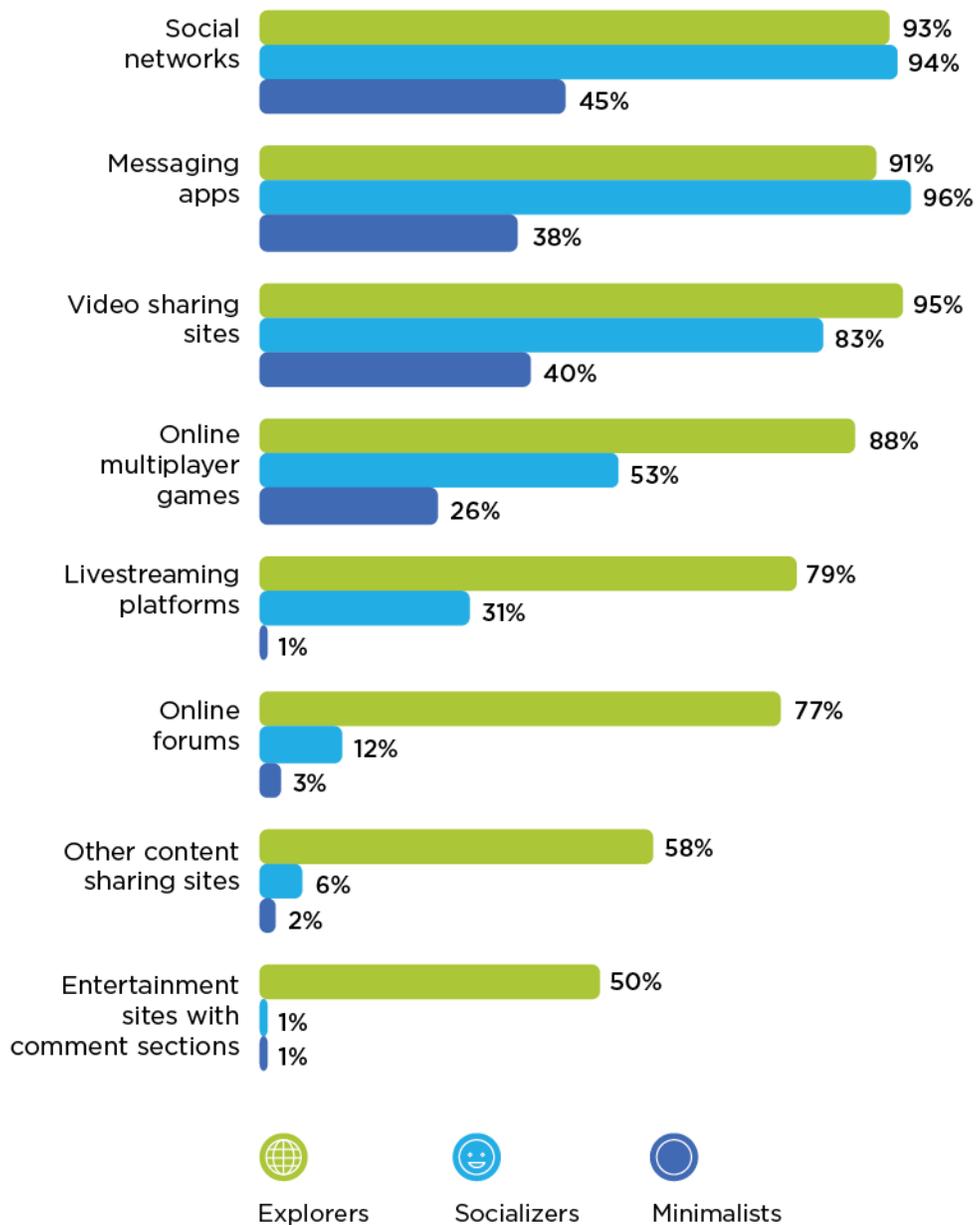


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<sup>18</sup> Note that often the examples youth gave for the platforms they engage on were in the prompts that we provided so this ought to be taken into consideration when interpreting these results.

- Almost all **Explorers** and **Socializers** use social networks, messaging, and video-sharing sites while use is much lower among **Minimalists** on all platforms.

### Use of sites/apps

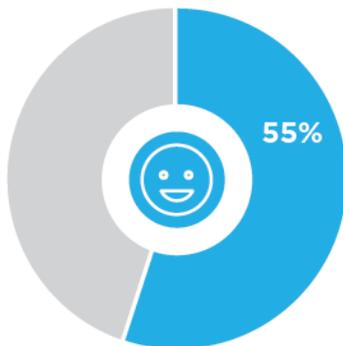


## Explorers



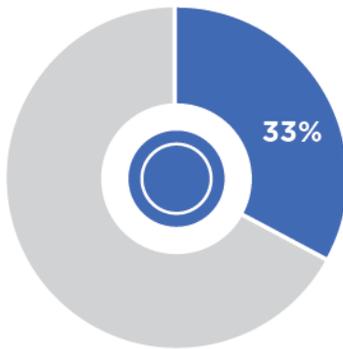
**The smallest group, comprising one in ten youth, Explorers use the biggest variety of sites and apps, and are most frequently affected by casual prejudice online.** Explorers also have, by and large, the highest use of sites and apps. In addition to social sites, messaging, and video-sharing, most play online games, visit live-streaming sites, and read online forums. Six in ten Explorers are boys and they tend to be older (61% are 14 to 16 years old) rather than younger youth (39% are 12 to 13 years old). 66% of Explorers are White while 36% identify as visible minorities (compared to 76% and 21% respectively in the total sample.)

## Socializers



**At more than one half of youth, this is the largest group. Most Socializers use social media, messaging, and video-sharing sites and they are less affected by casual prejudice than Explorers but more affected than Minimalists.** Almost all Socializers use social sites, messaging, and video-sharing sites. While about one-half play online games, few use other types of sites. At 53% female, Socializers are more likely to be girls than the other segments and like the Explorers, more are older (60%) rather than younger youth (40%). Socializers are slightly more likely to identify as White (79%) than as visible minorities (25%).

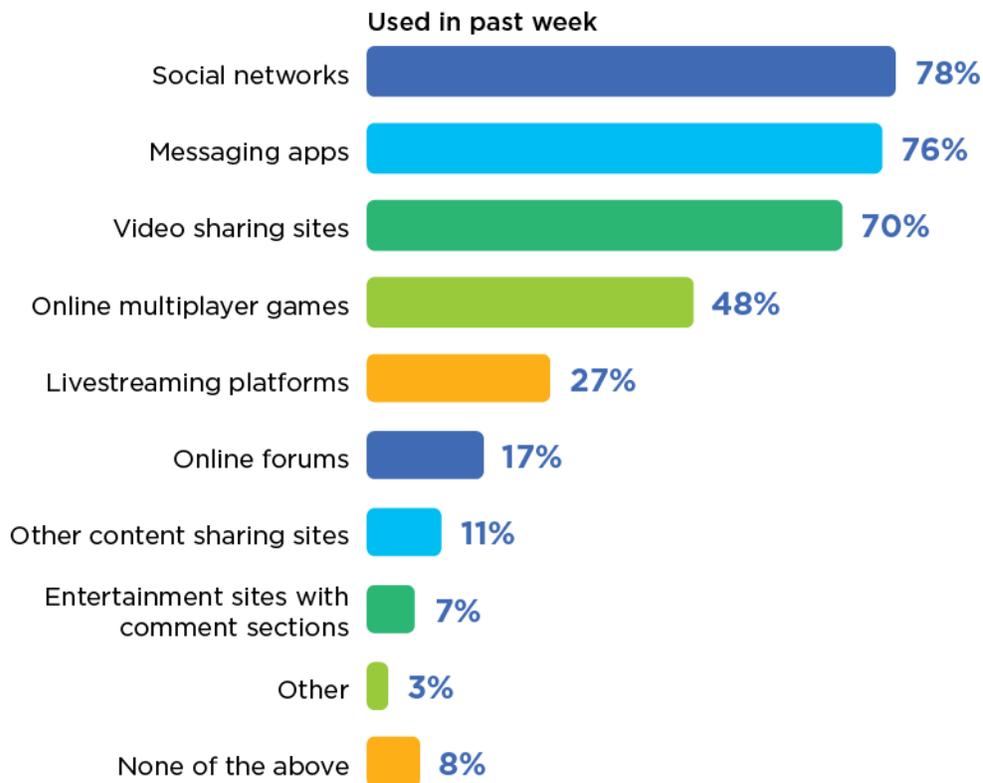
## Minimalists



**Three in ten youth are Minimalists who use sites and apps at the lowest rates, and are least affected by casual prejudice.** About two in ten have not used any type of site or app in the past week. Less than one-half of Minimalists use either social sites, messaging, and video-sharing sites, and just one-quarter play online multiplayer games. The differences in gender are subtle 51% of Minimalists are male and 48% are female and like both Explorers and Socializers more Minimalists are older youth (55%) rather than younger youth (45%). Like in the other two groups, more Minimalists identify as White (75%) compared to visible minorities (23%). However, compared to Explorers and Socializers, Minimalists are the least likely to identify as a visible minority.

# Spaces and Platforms

We asked youth to identify on which platforms they were interacting with other people most regularly on, to give us a sense of where youth were witnessing or engaging in casual prejudice online.<sup>19</sup> The most popular platforms for youth are social networks, messaging apps and video-sharing sites (see figure below) and most youth use these at least weekly. Seven in ten youth (or more) use social networks, messaging apps, and video-sharing sites at least weekly, while about one-half use online multiplayer games. Use of live-streaming sites, other content sharing sites, and entertainment sites with comment sections is less common among youth. Fewer than one in ten youth have not used *any* type of sites or apps in the past week and almost one-half use three or four weekly.

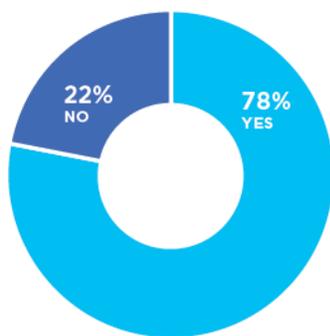


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<sup>19</sup> Youth were asked to report whether or not, in the past week, they have interacted with other people online in; messaging apps (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp), social networks (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter), online multiplayer games (e.g. Fortnite, Minecraft), video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), other content sharing sites (e.g. Wattpad, DeviantArt), online forums (e.g. Reddit, Minecraft Forum), livestreaming platforms (e.g. Twitch, Musical.ly), and entertainment sites with comment sections (e.g. Teen Vogue, GameFAQs).

Girls are most likely to use social networks, messaging applications, and live-streaming platforms while boys are most likely to use online multiplayer games, forums, and sites with comment sections. Older youth are most likely to use social networks, while younger youth are most likely to use online multiplayer games. Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to use social networks, messaging applications, and other content sharing sites, compared to youth who identify as straight. Compared to youth who identify as White, youth who identify as a visible minority are most likely to use live-streaming platforms, online forums, and other content sharing sites.

## Social networks

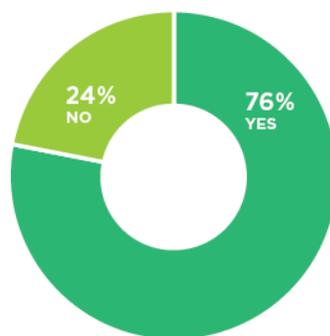


Eight in ten youth use social networks. Instagram (64%), followed by Facebook (50%) and Snapchat (50%), are the top networks mentioned.

### Youth most likely to use social networks:

- **Girls** (83% vs. 73% of boys)
- **Older children** (81% vs. 74% of younger children)
- **LGBTQ+** (97% vs. 77% of those who are straight)

## Messaging apps

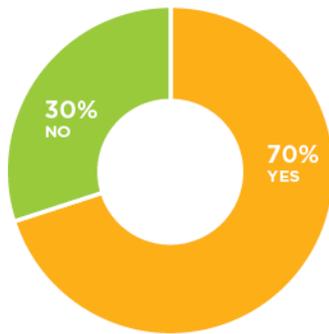


Three-quarters of youth use messaging apps. Instagram (37%), Facebook (37%), Snapchat (33%) and Facebook Messenger (29%) are most commonly mentioned.

### Youth most likely to use messaging apps:

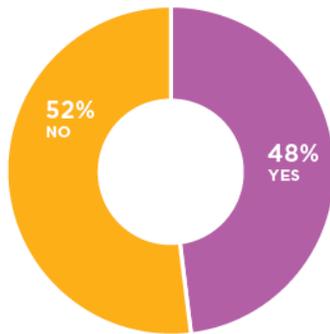
- **Girls** (80% vs. 73% of boys)
- **LGBTQ+** (87% vs. 76% of those who are straight)

## Video-sharing sites



Seven in ten youth use video sharing sites. Of those, virtually all mention YouTube (99%). **Responses are consistent across demographic groups.**

## Online multiplayer games

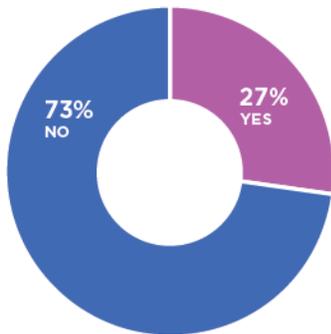


One-half of youth play online multiplayer games. Fortnite (54%) and Minecraft (44%) are the top mentions.

### Youth most likely to use online multiplayer games:

- **Boys** (66% vs. 31% of girls)
- **Younger children** (54% vs. 44% of older children)

## Live-streaming platforms

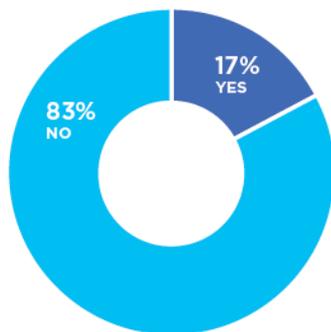


One-quarter of youth say they have used live-streaming platforms in the past week. Twitch (41%) and Musical.ly (30%) are mentioned most often. (Since this survey was conducted Musical.ly has been purchased by rival live-streaming platform TikTok.)

### Youth most likely to use live-streaming platforms:

- **Girls** (30% vs. 23% of boys)
- **Visible minorities** (31% vs. 25% of those who are White)

## Online forums

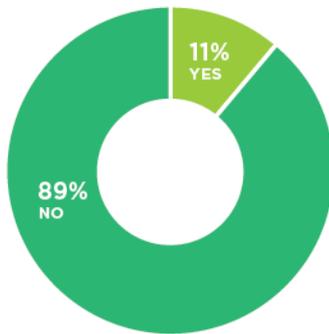


Just under two in ten youth say they have used online forums in the past week. Reddit (47%) and the Minecraft Forum (35%) are the top mentions.

### Youth most likely to use online forums:

- **Boys** (23% vs. 11% of girls)
- **Visible minorities** (24% vs. 15% of those who are White)

## Other content sharing sites

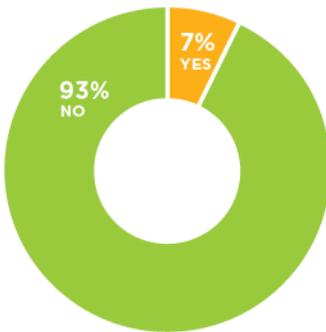


One in ten youth say they used other content sharing sites in the past week. Of those, Wattpad (36%) is most often mentioned.

### Youth most likely to use online content sharing sites:

- **LGBTQ+** (22% vs. 10% of those who are straight)
- **Visible minorities** (17% vs. 9% of those who are White)

## Sites with comment sections



Just under one in ten say they used entertainment sites with comment sections in the past week. Teen Vogue (18%) and GameFAQs (18%) are the top mentions.

### Youth most likely to use sites with comment sections:

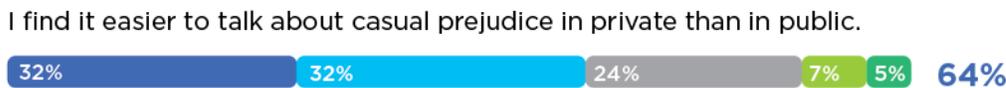
- **Boys** (9% vs. 5% of girls)

# Attitudes Towards Casual Prejudice

As a starting point for understanding young Canadians attitudes towards casual prejudice online we asked youth a series of questions about their views. Most youth agree that casual prejudice ‘hurts their feelings’; however more girls (83% vs. 76% of boys) and LGBTQ+ youth (88% vs. 79% straight) are most likely to agree that casual prejudice ‘hurts their feelings’. Almost all youth think that people are more likely to say prejudiced things online compared to offline; similarly, 79% agreed that it is important to say something about casual prejudice so people know it is wrong, almost precisely the same number as agreed with that statement in MediaSmarts’ *Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase III study*. But girls (84% vs. 75% of boys) are most likely to agree that it’s important to say something about casual prejudice so people know it’s wrong. Two-thirds of youth agree that it’s easier to talk about casual prejudice in private rather than in public.<sup>20</sup>

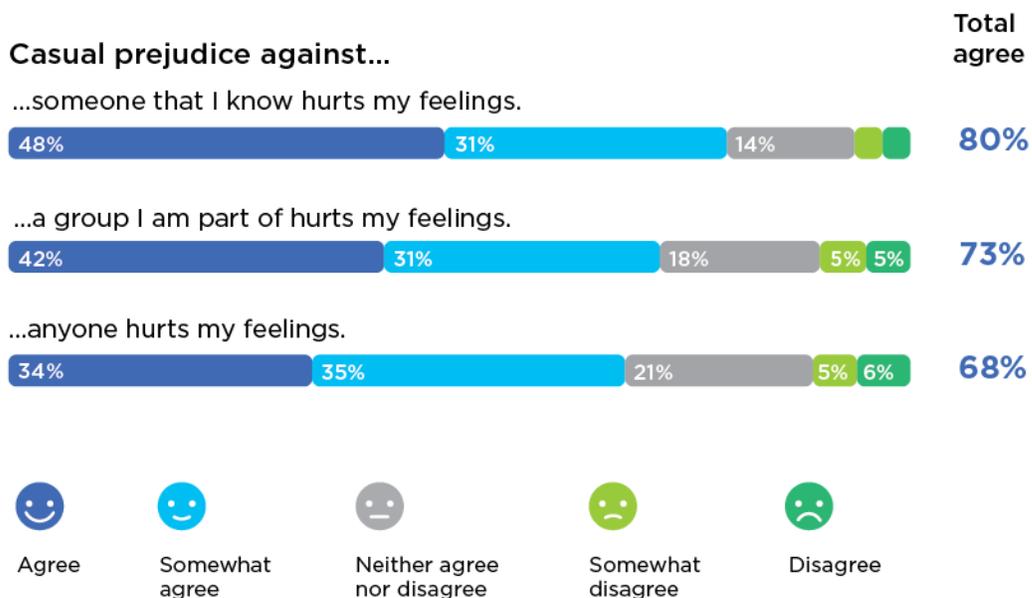


**79% AGREED**  
 that it is important  
 to say something  
 about casual  
 prejudice so people  
 know it is wrong.



<sup>20</sup> This finding replicates a similar finding from MediaSmarts’ (2015) study on Young Canadians experiences with online bullying where 77% of young people responded that they would comfort the target of bullying privately. See Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). “Young Canadians’ Experiences with Electronic Bullying.” *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.

While eight in ten youth agree that casual prejudice against someone they know hurts their feelings, seven in ten agree that casual prejudice against *anyone* hurts their feelings.



LGBTQ+ youth (87% vs. 72% straight) are most likely to agree that casual prejudice against ‘a group I am a part of hurts my feelings’. Girls (73% vs. 64% of boys) are most likely to agree that casual prejudice against ‘*anyone* hurts my feelings’.

The relatively small difference between reactions to acquaintances, other members of a group participants are a part of, and strangers is interesting because it contrasts with the ‘empathy cliff’ observed in MediaSmarts research on non-consensual sharing of sexts<sup>21</sup> and, in particular, witnessing cyberbullying<sup>22</sup>: participants in both of those studies were much more likely to say they would either share a sext, and much less likely to say they would intervene when they witnessed cyberbullying, in relation to a stranger than anyone they knew personally.<sup>23</sup> This

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, M., Mishna, F., Okumu, M., and J. Daciuk. (2017) Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth. MediaSmarts.

<sup>22</sup> Craig, W., Johnson, M., and J. Li. (2015). Young Canadians’ Experiences With Electronic Bullying. MediaSmarts.

<sup>23</sup> 20% of participants in our study on non-consensual sharing of intimate images said they were likely or very likely to share sexts of a stranger, compared to 13% who would share one of a classmate and 9% who would share one of a close friend; 37% of participants in our study on witnessing cyberbullying said they would be likely or very likely to intervene if they witnessed someone they did not know personally being cyberbullied, compared to 61% who would defend a schoolmate and 89% who would defend a close friend.

suggests that youth in general see casual prejudice as a *social* issue more than a *personal* one, whose rightness or wrongness is not strongly determined by one's relationship with the target.



· **YOUTH IN GENERAL** see  
· casual prejudice as a social  
· issue more than a personal one.  
·

Interestingly, the finding that most youth (79%) *think* that it is important to say something about casual prejudice so that people know its wrong corresponds with recent research<sup>24</sup> that indicates people are in fact comfortable with expressing unpopular views on social media platforms. However, thinking that it is important to say something and actually doing something about it (pushing back against hate online) are two different things. We uncover the likelihood of young people intervening or speaking out as well as the motivators behind this (in)action in the following sections on enablers and barriers to pushing back against hate online.

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<sup>24</sup> Chaudhry, I. and A. Gruzd (2019). "Expressing and Challenging Racist Discourse on Facebook: How Social Media Weaken the 'Spiral of Silence' Theory. *Policy and Internet*. (9999): 1-21.

# Enabling Factors For Pushing Back

## Preferred courses of action for pushing back

We asked youth when they do something about casual prejudice, what they prefer to do (their preferred response/action).<sup>25</sup> We also asked youth a series of questions about what would make them more likely to push back against casual prejudice online using a Likert scale: “**I would be more likely to do something (speak up, report it to the platform, speak privately with the person responsible, etc.) when I see casual prejudice if...**” We grouped these questions into a series of factors—each of which will be discussed in turn—that positively influence (or enable) young Canadians to push back against casual prejudice online. We also used an open-ended question to allow youth to provide us with courses of action outside the provided list if they thought we missed something. Lastly, our segmented analysis demonstrates which groups of youth (Explorers, Socializers, or Minimalists) are more likely to use particular strategies for intervening.

Overall, while no single method of responding to casual prejudice stands out, the most common responses among youth are to: stop communicating with or block the person responsible, talk to their parents about how to handle the situation, show disapproval by not engaging, and privately tell the person responsible to stop.



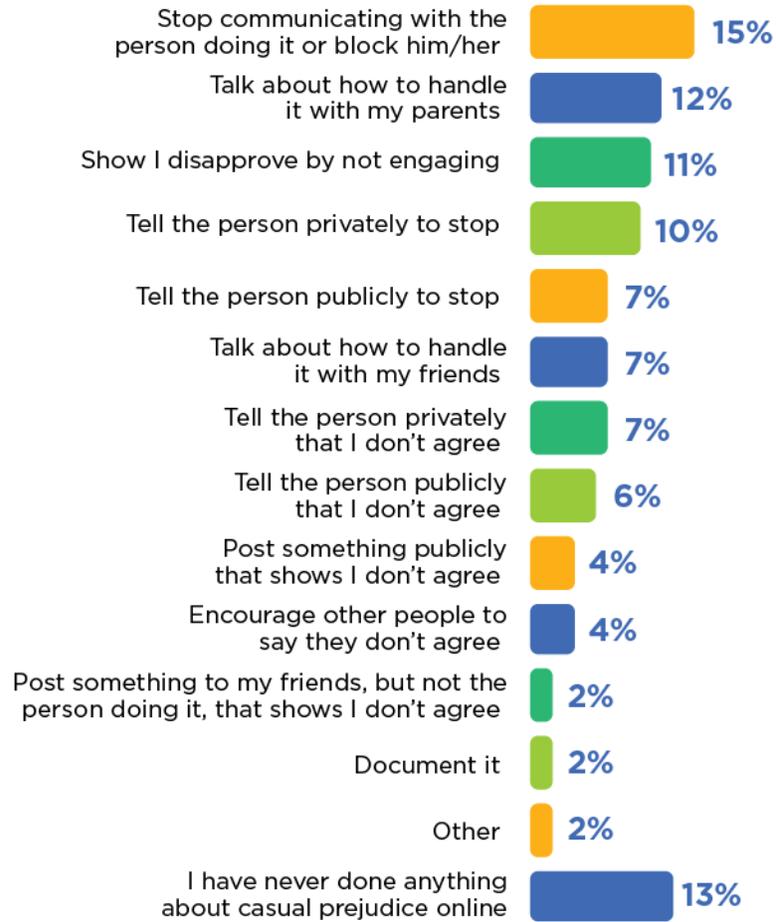
### THE MOST COMMON RESPONSES

among youth are to: stop communicating or block the person responsible and talk to their parents.

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<sup>25</sup> Youth were provided with a list of 14 responses to witnessing casual prejudice: talking to their parents/friends, document it (e.g. screen shot), stop communication and/or block the person, tell the person publicly/privately to stop, tell the person publicly/privately that I don't agree, post something publicly/privately (to friends) that shows I don't agree, encourage others to say they don't agree, show disapproval by not engaging, I have never done anything about casual prejudice online, other (open-ended).

## Preferred response to casual prejudice



White youth (16% vs. 11% who are visible minorities) are most likely to stop communication or block the person responsible while girls (14% vs. 10% of boys) and younger youth (17% vs. 8% who are older) are more likely to talk to their parents about how to handle the situation. Research<sup>26</sup> in the field of prejudice indicates that younger youth are more likely to oppose in-group norms and stereotypes. However, our research challenges these findings since older youth (11% vs. 8% who are younger) are most likely to privately tell the person responsible for the prejudice to stop.

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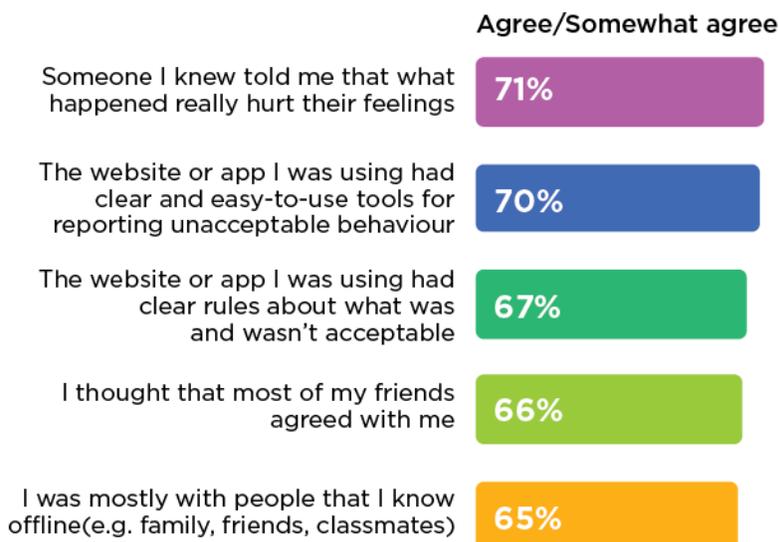
<sup>26</sup> See: Mulvey, K.L. and M., Killen. (2015). "Challenging gender stereotypes: Resistance and exclusion." *Child Development*. (86) (3): 681-694.

Regarding the factors that influence youth to act or intervene, youth are most likely to do something about casual prejudice for reasons related to empathy (knowing that what happened hurt someone), having clear rules and tools for reporting on platforms, consensus (if they thought their friends were in agreement with them), and audience (if they were interacting with people they mostly knew offline and not only in an online context).



**YOUTH ARE MOST LIKELY** to do something about casual prejudice for reasons related to empathy.

### Factors that influence intervention



Girls (74% vs. 67% of boys) and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ (85% vs. 70% straight) are most likely to score high on the empathy factor ('someone I knew told me that what happened really hurt their feelings'). Younger youth (71% vs. 63% of older children) are more likely to score high on the consensus factor (if they thought their friends were in agreement with them) and girls (69% vs. 63% of boys) are most likely to score high on the audience factor (I was interacting with people that I know offline such as family, friends, and classmates).

### Platform

One of the most important factors for enabling youth to push back against online hate involve the spaces and places young people occupy online. These platforms can send powerful messages about community norms and values in a number of ways. Most obviously, they can

draw attention to the rules that users are expected to follow, either through a formal document such as a Community Standards or a more informal one such as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). How influential those are is likely dependent on how firmly they are enforced, how consistently, and how promptly. One of the open-ended responses proposed empowering users as administrators, an approach some online games have taken<sup>27</sup>, suggesting that **“if you report a certain number of people [you] get to have administrative rights after accurate reports of inappropriate behaviour.”**

Platforms also send messages about norms and behaviour through their functions and architecture, and while youth may not be consciously aware of these effects they nevertheless respond to them: participants in MediaSmarts’ study on photo-sharing, for example, perceived Snapchat and Instagram as having very different expected norms of behaviour due to posts on the former being automatically deleted by default, while on the latter they remained on a user’s platform unless intentionally deleted.<sup>28</sup> The features and design of a platform can also both reflect and have an impact on diversity and equity issues: “The typical advice for growing the audience for an app is for a creator to start with people they know... The implications of this are obvious when we consider that most founders of tech startups in America are white, and the average white American has only one black friend.”<sup>29</sup>



: **PLATFORMS ALSO**  
 : **SEND MESSAGES**  
 : about norms and  
 : behaviour through  
 : their functions and  
 : architecture.



: **70% OF PARTICIPANTS AGREE**  
 : that they are more likely to do  
 : something if the platform had  
 : easy-to-use tools for reporting.

The architecture of the site and whether or not it had clearly stated rules and values had the largest impact: 70% of participants agree that they are more likely to do something if the platform had easy-to-use tools for reporting inappropriate behaviour, while 69% said

that clear rules about what was and wasn’t acceptable would make them more likely to intervene. 63% said they would be more likely to intervene if they knew that users *had* been punished for unacceptable behaviour, showing the importance both of stating rules clearly and enforcing them consistently. Responses are consistent across demographic groups.

<sup>27</sup> See for example Maher, B. (2016). “Can a video game company tame toxic behaviour?” *Nature*, 531(7596), 568-571. doi:10.1038/531568a

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, M., Steeves, V., Regan Shade, L., Foran, G. (2017). “To Share or Not to Share: How Teens Make Privacy Decisions about Photos on Social Media.” MediaSmarts. Ottawa: 1-47.

<sup>29</sup> Dash, A. (2016, January 06). Toward Humane Tech. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/humane-tech/toward-humane-tech-23a20405681a>

## Platform

The website or app I was using had clear and easy-to-use tools for reporting unacceptable behaviour

**Total agree**



The website or app I was using had clear rules about what was and wasn't acceptable



I knew the website or app had punished users for unacceptable behaviour



Agree



Somewhat agree



Neither agree nor disagree



Somewhat disagree

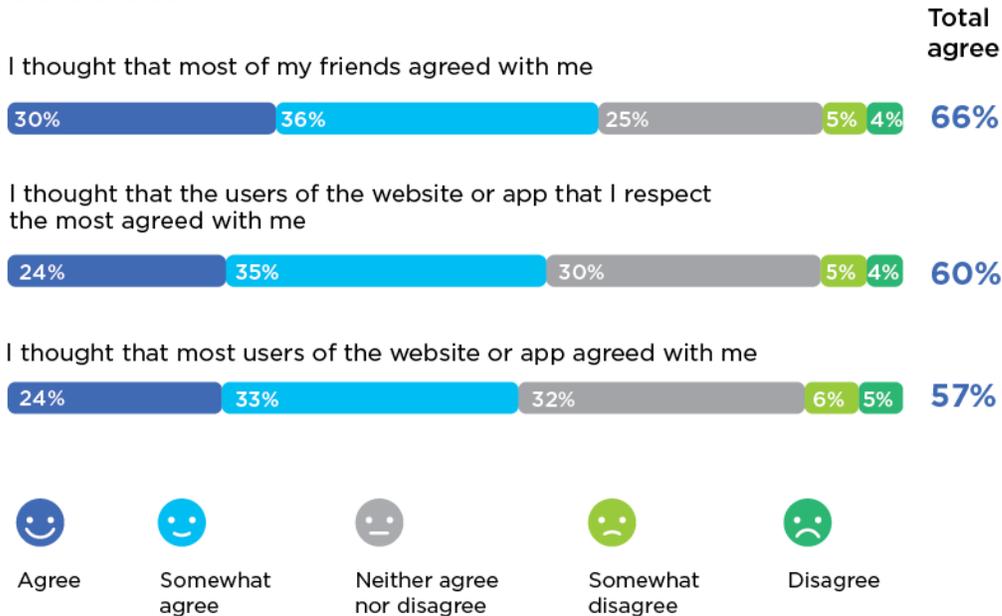


Disagree

## Consensus

Another important factor enabling young Canadians to push back against casual prejudice online is consensus or 'knowing that others agreed with me.' More than one-half of youth are more likely to do something if they thought that other users agreed with them, and even more so when they think most of their friends agree with them. Responses are consistent across demographic groups.

## Consensus



What is perhaps most interesting about these findings is that participants reported relatively little difference in impact between the opinions of friends (66%), users whom the participant respects (61%) and users in general (57%). Similar to the identity of the target, this points to casual prejudice being seen as a general social issue rather than a personal one, and confirms our previous research findings<sup>30</sup> regarding the importance of social cohesion and social harmony factors in youth pushing back against casual prejudice online. It is important to young people that they maintain their social capital with both their peer groups and other platform users and that they are not noticeably ‘rocking the boat’ by directly challenging the perceived norms and values of the group.

## Anonymity and control

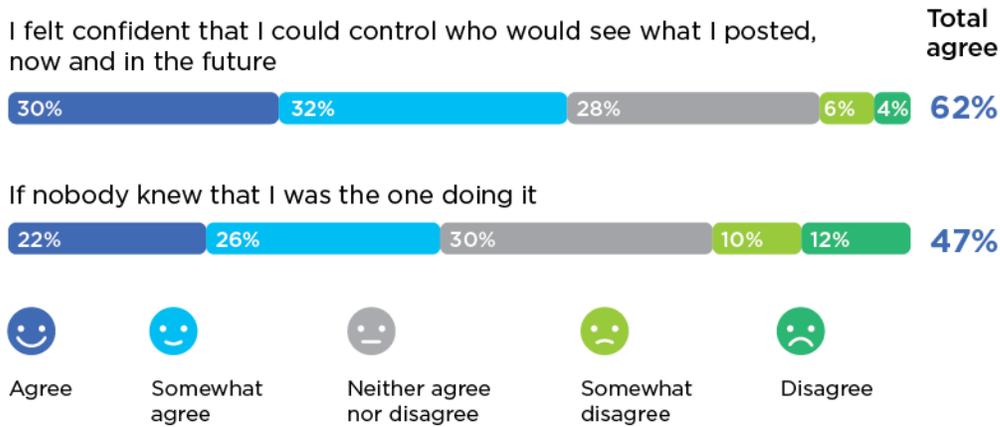
Perhaps because they have grown up with the reality of a fully networked internet, in which content can be effortlessly copied and distributed, young Canadians have a strong desire to

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<sup>30</sup> Steeves, V. (2014). “Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Encountering Racist and Sexist Content Online.” MediaSmarts. Ottawa. 1-25.

control what happens to material that they post.<sup>31</sup> This holds true when it comes to intervening against casual prejudice: almost two-thirds of participants (62%) said that they would be more likely to intervene if they could control who would see what they posted. Giving youth the ability to make reports anonymously, which has been identified as a best practice in bullying prevention,<sup>32</sup> was selected by a smaller but still significant number of participants (47%) as something that would make them more likely to push back against online prejudice. Responses are consistent across demographic groups.

## Anonymity and control



If youth-focused intervention tools and strategies are to be successful they will have to consider the importance of allowing the intervener to remain unknown and, in particular, to control who sees their post at the time of posting but also in the future; it also provides further evidence of the important role played by the features and architecture of platforms, since these largely determine how much control users have over what happens to their content once it is posted.

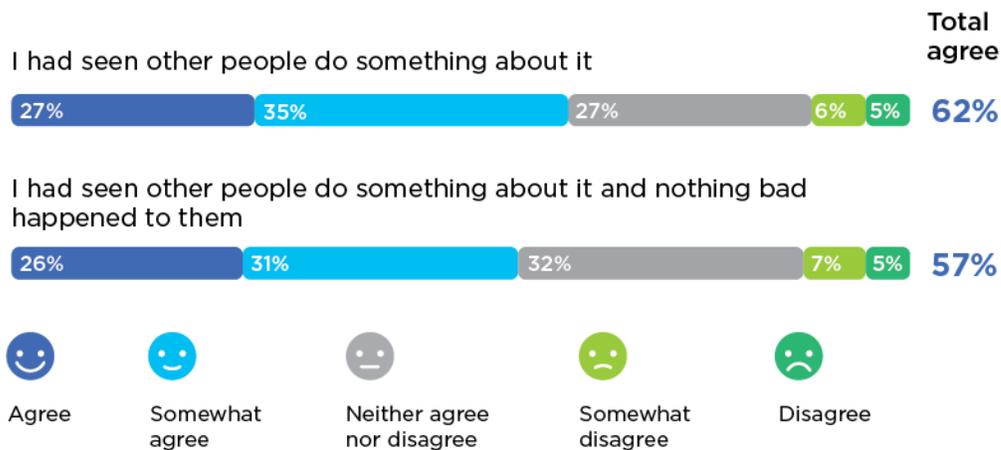
<sup>31</sup> Johnson, M., Steeves, V., Regan Shade, L., Foran, G. (2017). "To Share or Not to Share: How Teens Make Privacy Decisions about Photos on Social Media." MediaSmarts. Ottawa: 1-47.

<sup>32</sup> Felix, E., Green, J. G., & Sharkey, J. D. (2014). "Best practices in bullying prevention." *Best Practices in School Psychology: Systems-Level Services*, 245-258

## Examples

Witnessing positive examples of pushing back against online prejudice—other people intervening in situations of casual prejudice—is a factor that would enable a young Canadian to push back themselves. Six in ten youth say they would be more likely to do something about casual prejudice if they had seen other people do something.

### Examples



While most youth scored in the mid to high range on this factor, girls were most likely to agree that they would intervene if they had seen other people doing something about prejudice and if nothing bad had happened to those examples of people who pushed back. Simply seeing someone else do something about it was more of an influence (62% agreed) than seeing someone do something without anything bad happening to them (57%), suggesting that fear of reprisals or other negative consequences is not one of the most significant factors – a striking difference with MediaSmarts research on witnessing cyberbullying, where fear of making oneself a target was the top barrier to intervention by a significant margin.<sup>33</sup> However, several respondents did identify a fear of possible consequences in the open-ended response:

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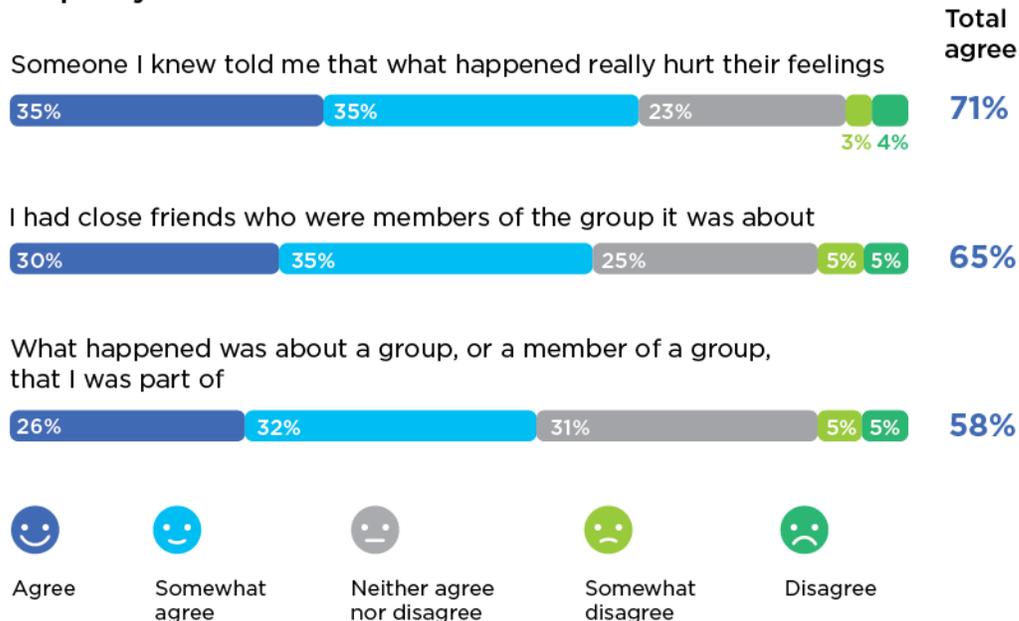
<sup>33</sup> Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). "Young Canadians' Experiences with Electronic Bullying." *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.



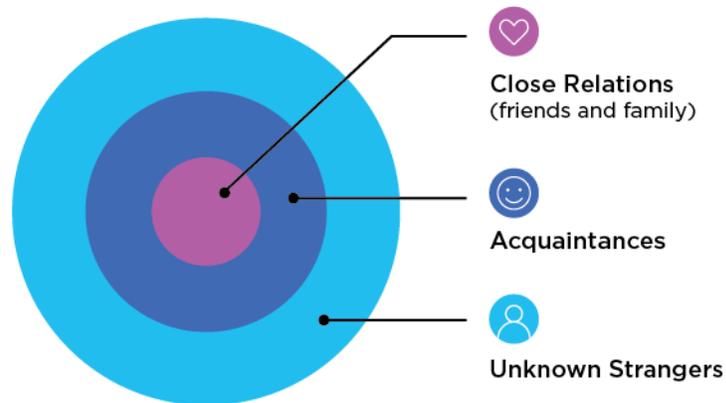
## Empathy

Empathizing with different groups experiencing online prejudice was a primary factor influencing young Canadian's decisions to push back against casual prejudice. Youth are more likely to do something if someone they know told them that what happened hurt their feelings. Girls and LGBTQ+ youth are most likely to be influenced by empathy factors in their decisions to push back.

### Empathy



Previous MediaSmarts' research on online bullying<sup>34</sup> and non-consensual sharing of sexts<sup>35</sup> has also found that empathy was a primary factor in motivating young Canadians to speak out against both bullying and the non-consensual sharing of sexts. However, in the case of bullying and sexting knowing the victim personally was closely correlated with intervention<sup>36</sup>, while – as we saw when looking at attitudes towards casual prejudice – youth are fairly likely to intervene against casual prejudice even if the target or victim is an unknown stranger within a group



that they identify with. In other words, the concentric circles of empathy—moving from close contacts or relations to an unknown stranger— are much closer in the case of online hate (than in bullying or sexting) and more youth are willing to take a stance against ‘cultures of hate’ online regardless of whether or not they know or can identify a target. This is particularly important since casual prejudice is often not directed at one particular target, and other research<sup>37</sup> in the field has found an ‘in-group bias’ on assertive bystander intervention intentions

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, M., F., Mishna, M., Okumu, and J., Daciuk. (2018). “Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth.” *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-54.

<sup>36</sup> For example, in the case of sexting more participants said they would be likely or very likely to share strangers’ sexts than those of a close friend or schoolmate. In the case of bullying, 99% of youth said they would intervene if a family member was the target, 89% if the target was a close friend, 84% if the target was a dating partner, 62% if the target was a student at their school, and only 37% if the target was unknown.

<sup>37</sup> See: Abbott, N. and L., Cameron (2014), “What makes a young assertive bystander? The effect of intergroup contact, empathy, cultural openness, and in-group bias on assertive bystander intervention intentions.” *Journal of Social Issues*. (70) (1): 167-182.

Gulker, J.E., A.Y., Mark. and M.J. Monteith. (2013). “Confronting prejudice: The who, what, and why of confrontation effectiveness.” *Social Influence*. (8)(4): 280-293.

Palmer, S.B., L., Cameron, A., Rutland, and B., Blake. (2017). “Majority and Minority ethnic status adolescents’ bystander responses to racism in school.” *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*: 1-7.

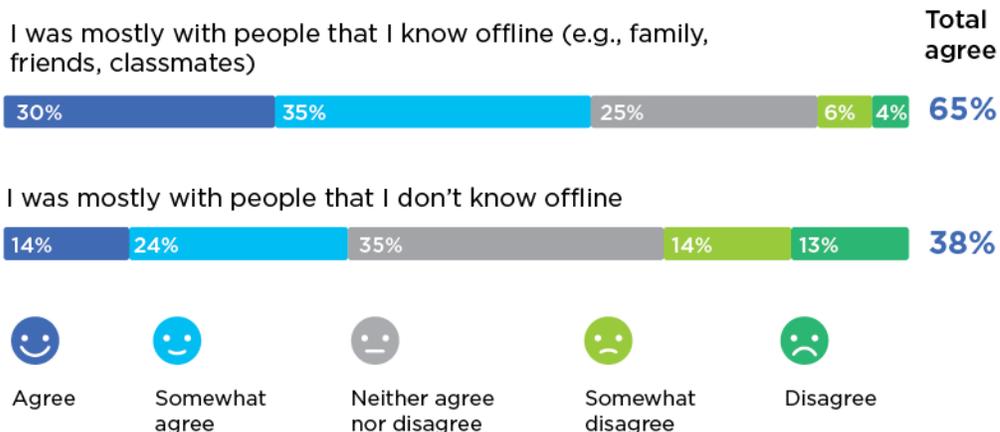
among young people. Our research challenges this in-group bias, demonstrating that most young Canadians believe online prejudice against anyone is wrong.

The strongest factor, however, is not related solely to *who* deserves our empathy, but *whether* casual prejudice online causes genuine harm: 71% agreed that they would be more likely to intervene if someone they knew told them that what had happened really hurt their feelings. As we will see when considering barriers to intervention below, the question of harm—and, in particular, the *intent* to harm – is a key one for many youth in deciding whether or not to intervene.

## Audience

Young Canadians are also influenced by *who* is with them when they decide whether or not to push back against casual prejudice online. In other words, young people’s offline connections to online platform users (if they were going to see them at the dinner table, in the classroom, or on the soccer field) influences their decision to intervene in situations of casual prejudice. More youth are likely to take action when they see casual prejudice if they were mostly with people they know offline.

### Audience



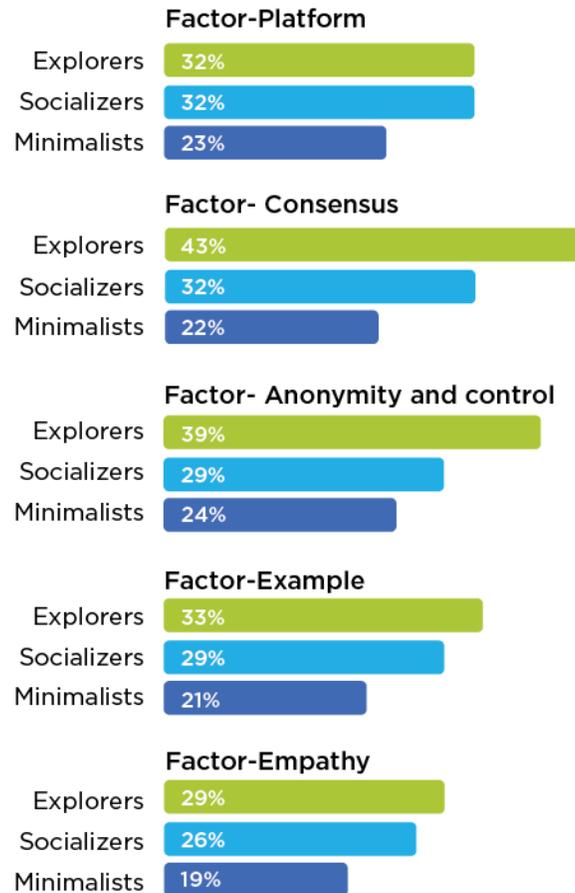
These findings are interesting since studies of online activism<sup>38</sup> have found that youth are less likely to speak out because they are worried about the possible consequences of their social spheres coming into contact. In the case of online casual prejudice, young Canadians are in fact motivated to intervene by the interaction of their offline social spheres (or contacts) in the online spheres or platforms they engage in. In other words, youth are more likely to speak out if their offline and online social spheres (or contacts) overlap.

## Group analysis

We also examined the effectiveness of these enabling factors from the perspectives of our three groups of platform users: Explorers, Socializers, and Minimalists. **Explorers** are most likely to highly rate consensus and anonymity as enabling factors in their pushing back. While no particular factor stood out for **Socializers**, they most highly rate platform and consensus as enabling factors in their pushing back. **Minimalists** are the least likely to be motivated by any particular factor although they most highly rate anonymity and platform as enabling factors in their pushing back. However, out of all three groups **Minimalists** are least likely to highly rate consensus, platform, example, and empathy factors as enabling their intervention.

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<sup>38</sup> See: Czopp, A., and M. Monteith (2013). "Confronting prejudice (literally): Reactions to confrontations of racial and gender bias." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. (29)(4): 532-544.  
Mulvey, K.L. and M. Killen. (2015). "Challenging gender stereotypes: Resistance and exclusion." *Child Development*. (86)(3): 681-694.  
Poteat, V.P. and Vecho, O. (2016). "Who intervenes against homophobic behaviour? Attributes that distinguish active bystanders." *Journal of School Psychology*. (54): 17-28.



**Explorers** are most likely to intervene or push back against casual prejudice. **Two in ten** Explorers do something about casual prejudice.

**Socializers** are less likely than Explorers and as likely as Minimalists to push back against casual prejudice. **One in ten** say they do something or push back frequently.

**Minimalists** are also less likely than Explorers to intervene and like Socializers **one in ten** say they do something or push back against casual prejudice frequently.

# Barriers To Pushing Back

## Reasons why youth do not push back

We asked youth a series of questions about why they decide not to push back against ‘cultures of hatred’ online using a Likert scale: **“I sometimes decide not to do something when I witness casual prejudice because...”** We then grouped these questions into a series of factors—each of which will be discussed in turn—that negatively influence or act as barriers to young Canadian’s pushing back against casual prejudice online. Again we used an open-ended question to allow youth to provide us with barriers outside of the provided list if they thought we missed something. Like with the enabling factors, our segmented analysis demonstrates which groups of youth (Explorers, Socializers, or Minimalists) are most impacted by barriers and least likely to push back against hate online.

Overall, most youth do not do something when they witness casual prejudice online for reasons related to a lack of knowledge regarding what to do. About one-half of youth say they sometimes decide not to do something because they are afraid it will make things worse and that they don’t know what to say or do to make a difference. Almost as many youths say they have often seen people they know encourage casual prejudice by laughing or joining in. However, just one quarter of youth say they feel like they don’t have a right to say anything or they think that everyone gets picked on equally online.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The reasons that youth gave for not pushing back against online prejudice are almost identical to the responses we’ve seen with online bullying research (see Joyce et al. 2015). In the case of online bullying: “youth are not fully convinced that their concerns about electronic bullying will be taken seriously, or that adults will be helpful. They worry that intervening will make things worse for the target, or turn themselves into targets and they are not always sure if it’s their role to intervene.”  
Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). “Young Canadians’ Experiences with Electronic Bullying.” *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.



Girls (56% vs. 48% of boys) are most likely to agree that they are afraid it will make things worse. Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ (61% vs. 46% straight) are most likely to agree that they don't think people will listen to them, while boys (51% vs. 42% of girls) are most likely to agree that they are often not sure if the person really meant it. Again, contrary to research<sup>40</sup> in the field of online hate, age was not a key demographic factor in determining whether young people sometimes decide not to do something about casual prejudice. In other words, older youth were just as likely as younger youth to be impacted by barriers to pushing back against online hate.



**AGE WAS NOT A KEY DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR** in determining whether young people sometimes decide not to do something about casual prejudice.

Very few youth (only two in ten) say they decide not to push back against casual prejudice because they think casual prejudice doesn't matter. Still, three in ten youth said that 'if people were really hurt by casual prejudice they would say something.' Similarly, three in ten youth said

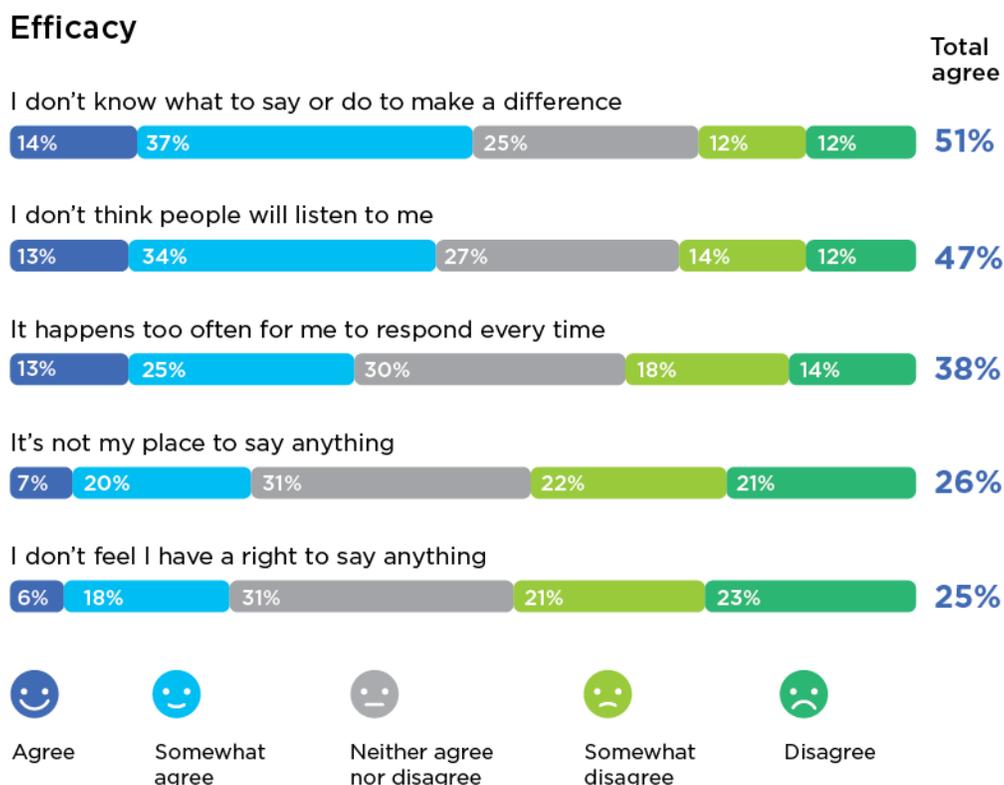
<sup>40</sup> Mulvey, K.L. and M., Killen. (2015). "Challenging gender stereotypes: Resistance and exclusion." *Child Development*. (86) (3): 681-694.

they sometimes decide not to push back because ‘groups they are a member of are often targets of casual prejudice too,’ absolving them of the duty to intervene.

Open-ended responses regarding the barriers to young Canadians pushing back against online prejudice generally fell within the factors already provided and ranged from: powerlessness or a feeling that people’s opinions won’t be changed by speaking up, to fear and anxiety about social consequences, to apathy and/or candid admissions that people do not see casual prejudice as an issue.

## Efficacy

One of the greatest barriers to young Canadians pushing back against online hate is *efficacy* or their ability to produce the desired result of challenging the consensus by speaking up. About one-half of youth say they don’t know what to say or do, or that they don’t think people will listen to them, while one-quarter of youth say they don’t feel they have a right to say anything at all. Responses are consistent across demographics groups.



Our findings regarding efficacy, aligned with other casual prejudice studies<sup>41</sup>, indicates that efficacy becomes a barrier for intervention if youth believe that pushing back will not change the perpetrator's behaviour and/or result in direct (and meaningful) action on the part of platforms. The role of platforms is again underscored by the most frequent response, 'I don't know what to say or do to make a difference'; while this undoubtedly applies to interpersonal conversations as well, it seems likely that the lack of obvious, easy-to-use tools for reporting misconduct contribute to this concern.

Several of the open-ended responses shed some light on this barrier:

*"The big thing is recognizing it at the time. Too often it goes by so fast, it is over before you realize what just happened, then it seems awkward to revisit the issue."*



*"It is so common I really don't usually notice it."*

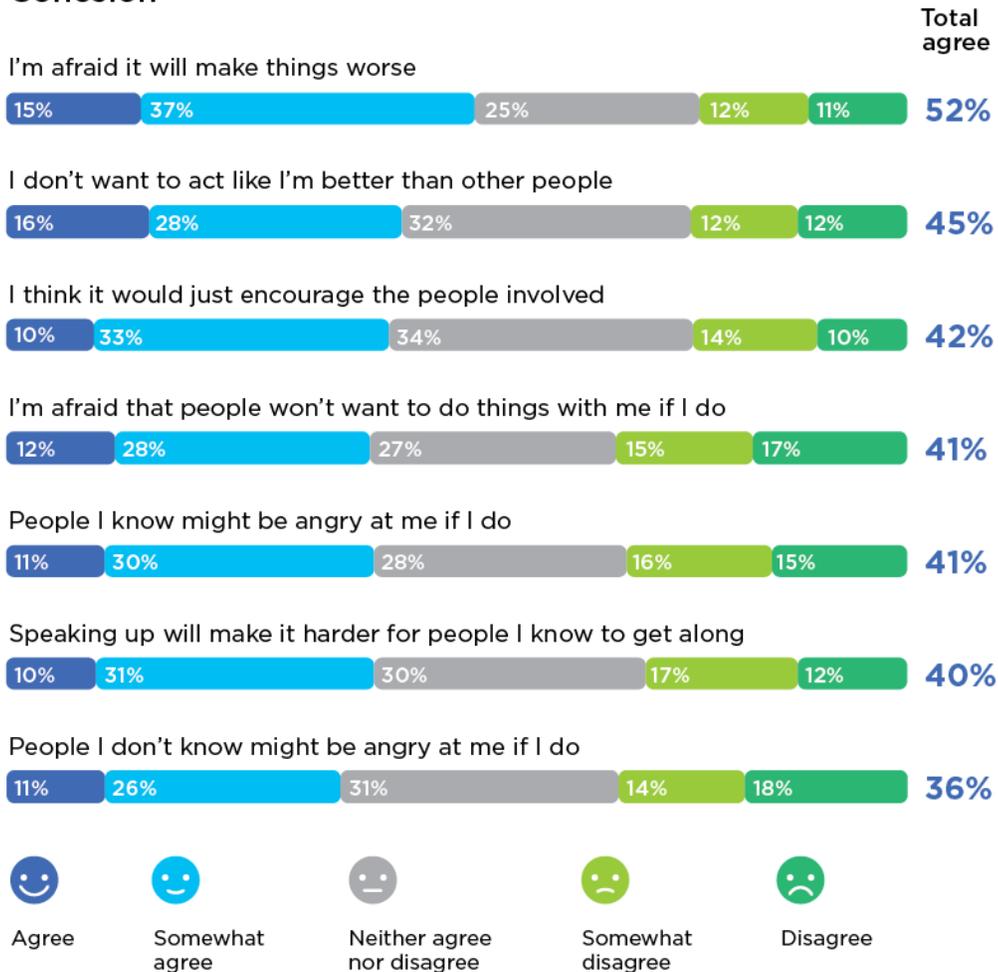
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<sup>41</sup> See: Dickter, C.L. (2012). "Confronting hate: Heterosexual's responses to anti-gay comments." *Journal of Homosexuality*. (59) (8):1113-1130.  
Morrison, M.A., L., Jewell, J., McCutcheon, D.B., Cochrane. (2014). "In the face of anti-LGBQ behaviour: Saskatchewan high school student's perceptions of school climate and consequential impact." *Canadian Journal of Education*. (37) (2).

## Cohesion

Another major barrier to youth pushing back against online hate is *cohesion* or the desire to maintain social capital (or harmony) especially with ones friends and peers. The cohesion factor measured whether youth decide not to do something because they are worried how it would be perceived by others. Youth expressed fears of: social exclusion, of escalating conflict, of becoming a target themselves, and of creating rifts among their friend groups. One-half of youth say they are afraid speaking out will make things worse, while four in ten youth said that they do not want to act like they are better than other people. Responses are consistent across demographic groups.

### Cohesion

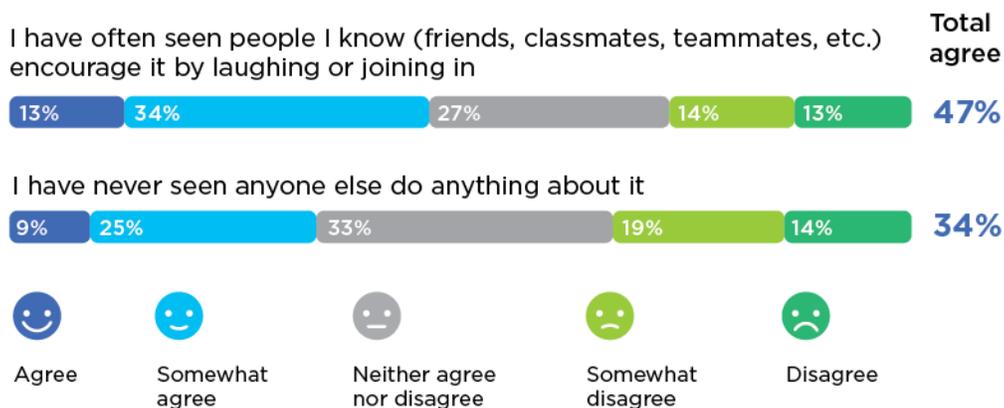


While these results regarding the cohesion factor are not as strong as previous MediaSmarts' research on bullying or sexting<sup>42</sup> our findings confirm our hypothesis that cohesion is a relatively significant barrier to pushing back against online hate with four in ten youth expressing concern for triggering a negative reaction (backlash) from others (friends, peers, platform users). A similar number of participants in this study (52%) worried about making things worse by intervening as had the same concern in our study on witnessing cyberbullying (53%).<sup>43</sup>

## Norms

Another important factor in why youth may decide not to push back against online hate is whether or not they see casual prejudice as a common social value, or *normalized* within the online places and spaces (the platforms) they engage in. About one-half of youth say they sometimes decide not to do something because they've seen people they know encourage it, while one-third say they've never seen anyone else do anything about it. Responses are consistent across demographics groups.

### Norms



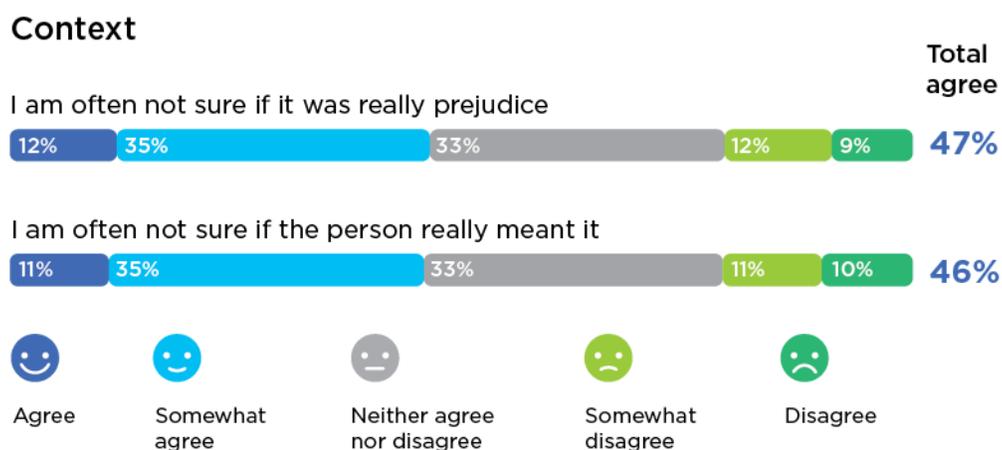
<sup>42</sup> See: Johnson, M., F., Mishna, M., Okumu, and J. Daciuk. (2018). "Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviour and Attitudes of Canadian Youth." *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-54.  
 Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). "Young Canadians' Experiences with Electronic Bullying." *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.

<sup>43</sup> Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). "Young Canadians' Experiences with Electronic Bullying." *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.

Our findings regarding the normative factor are aligned with our previous work on ‘cultures of hatred’ and the importance of social consensus or environments where casual prejudice is accepted (or perceived) as a social norm and remains unchallenged. The normative factor is further supported by our findings regarding the prevalence with which youth witness causal prejudice on the platforms they engage in (at least sometimes).<sup>44</sup>

## Context

*Context*, or knowing whether or not what was said, posted, or shared was in fact casual prejudice, or whether or not the person responsible actually meant it, is another barrier to young Canadians pushing back. About one-half of youth say that they’re not sure if what they witnessed was prejudice, or if the person ‘really meant it’. Responses were consistent across demographic groups.



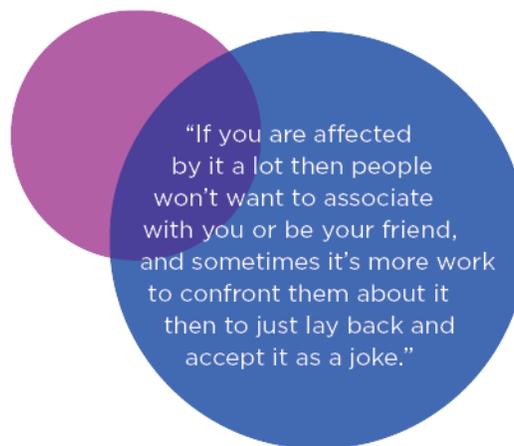
Four in ten youth agree that context is a barrier to their intervening in casual prejudice; and knowing whether or not something is prejudice, or was meant to be prejudicial, is directly related to young people’s sense of confidence or efficacy in pushing back against ‘cultures of hatred’ online.

These concerns may be particularly relevant to casual prejudice online due to the absence of normal cues to empathy, such as tone of voice, facial expression and body language. These

<sup>44</sup> These results can be found in the following section on youth experiences of casual prejudice online.

“empathy traps” of online communication can make it difficult to determine a person’s intent and, in some cases, provide a cover of irony to disguise genuine hate: for example, the stylebook for the White supremacist website *The Daily Stormer* instructs would-be writers that “the unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not.”<sup>45</sup> In less extreme cases, this aspect of digital communication allows bystanders to more easily grant the benefit of the doubt to those engaged in casual prejudice and, because the reaction that prejudice by its targets is not visible, to discount the harm done to them (as observed in the section on Empathy above.)

This combination can lead to a social pressure not to admit that one is harmed by casual prejudice, as one participant stated in the open-ended response:



## Moral disengagement

While all of these barriers could be considered a form of *moral disengagement*, we wanted to specifically measure whether youth decide not to do something because they can easily find reasons to justify or excuse the behaviour. Four in ten youth say they think it is people joking around, or that people sometimes look for an excuse to be offended, and one-quarter of youth say everyone gets picked on equally online. Aligned with previous MediaSmarts’ research<sup>46</sup>,

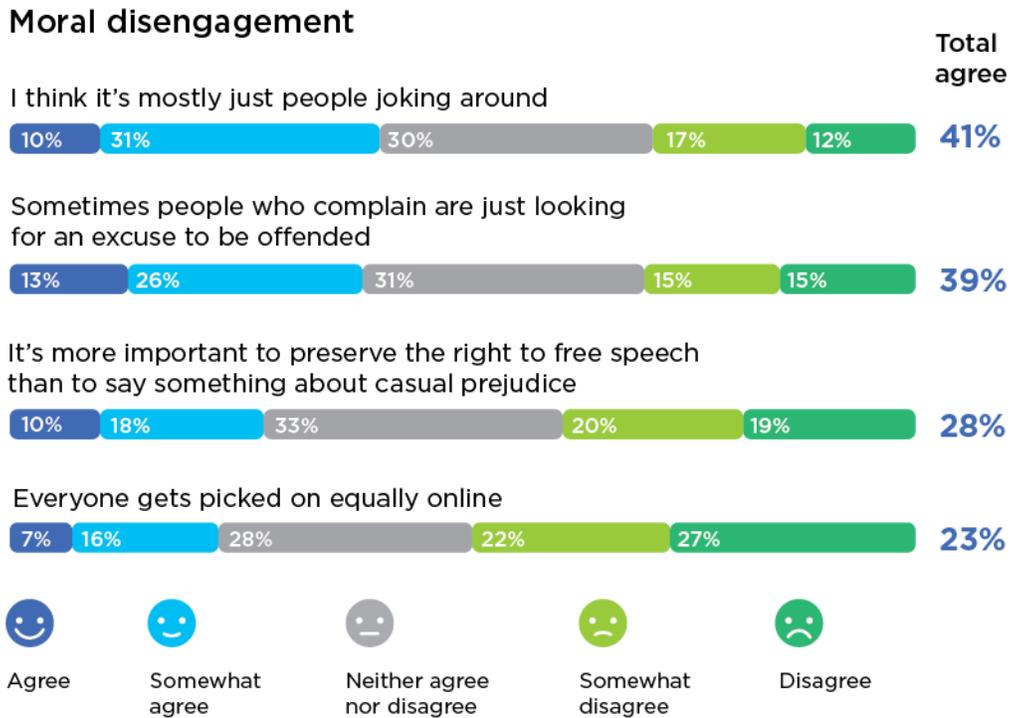
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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Feinberg, A. (2017, December 14). “This Is The Daily Stormer’s Playbook.” Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide\\_n\\_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2)

<sup>46</sup> See: Johnson, M., F., Mishna, M., Okumu, and J. Daciuk. (2018). “Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth.” *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-54.

Joyce, L., W. Craig, and M. Johnson. (2015). “Young Canadians’ Experiences with Electronic Bullying.” *MediaSmarts*. Ottawa: 1-28.

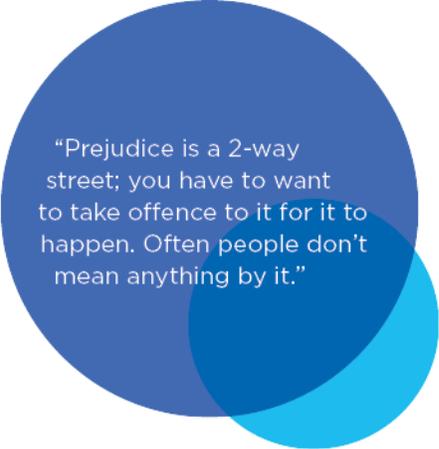
and research in the field of online hate,<sup>47</sup> boys are most likely to score higher on this factor or use moral disengagement strategies to excuse casual prejudice online.



Four in ten youth agree that ‘it’s mostly just people joking around’ and ‘people who complain are just looking for an excuse to be offended’. Similarly, many of the open-ended responses provided by youth fall into the moral disengagement factor particularly around the idea that people are ‘mostly just joking around’ or too sensitive:

<sup>47</sup> See: Hunt, C.J., V. Piccoli, A., Carnaghi, L., Di Blas, M., Bianchi, L., Hvastja-Stefani, G.M., Pelamatti, and C. Cavallero. (2016). “Adolescents’ appraisal of homophobic epithets: The role of individual and situational factors.” *Journal of Homosexuality*. (63)(10): 1422-1438.

*“Sometimes it is just people having fun. Stop being offended or turn off the computer.”*



“Prejudice is a 2-way street; you have to want to take offence to it for it to happen. Often people don’t mean anything by it.”

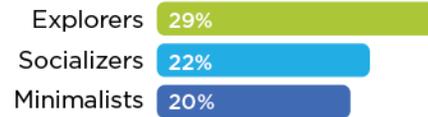
*“Social media is toxic and creates an environment of recreational outrage where people are too quick to crucify someone based on an arrangement of letters on a screen, and too slow to engage in real conversations about what those letters mean.”*

## Group analysis

As was done with the enabling factors, we examined the impacts of the barriers from the perspectives of our three groups of platform users: Explorers, Socializers, and Minimalists. **Explorers** are most likely to say that they sometimes decide not to do something about casual prejudice for reasons related to cohesion, context, and moral disengagement barriers. While no particular factor stood out for **Socializers**, they most highly rate context and cohesion as barriers to their intervention. **Minimalists** are the least likely to say they sometimes decide not to do something about casual prejudice, however, they most highly rate context and norms as barriers to their pushing back.

## Group analysis

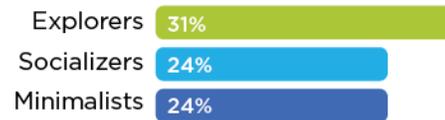
### Factor-Efficacy



### Factor-Cohesion



### Factor-Norms



### Factor-Context



### Factor-Moral Disengagement



**Explorers** are most likely to be impacted by barriers followed by **Socializers** while least likely to be impacted by barriers are **Minimalists**.

# Experiences Of Casual Prejudice

## Witnessing casual prejudice

We asked youth to tell us how often they witness casual prejudice in the online spaces where they interact with other people. We had the youth list the top three platforms (websites or apps) that they use most often, and tell us how often they witness casual prejudice there.<sup>48</sup> We also asked youth how often they do something about casual prejudice when they witness it on the platforms they indicated.<sup>49</sup>

Most youth have witnessed casual prejudice at least sometimes, while just one in ten say they do something about it frequently. Across all platforms, one in ten youth, and one-quarter of LGBTQ+ youth, witness casual prejudice



: **MOST YOUTH** have witnessed  
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: while just one in ten say they do  
: something about it frequently.  
:

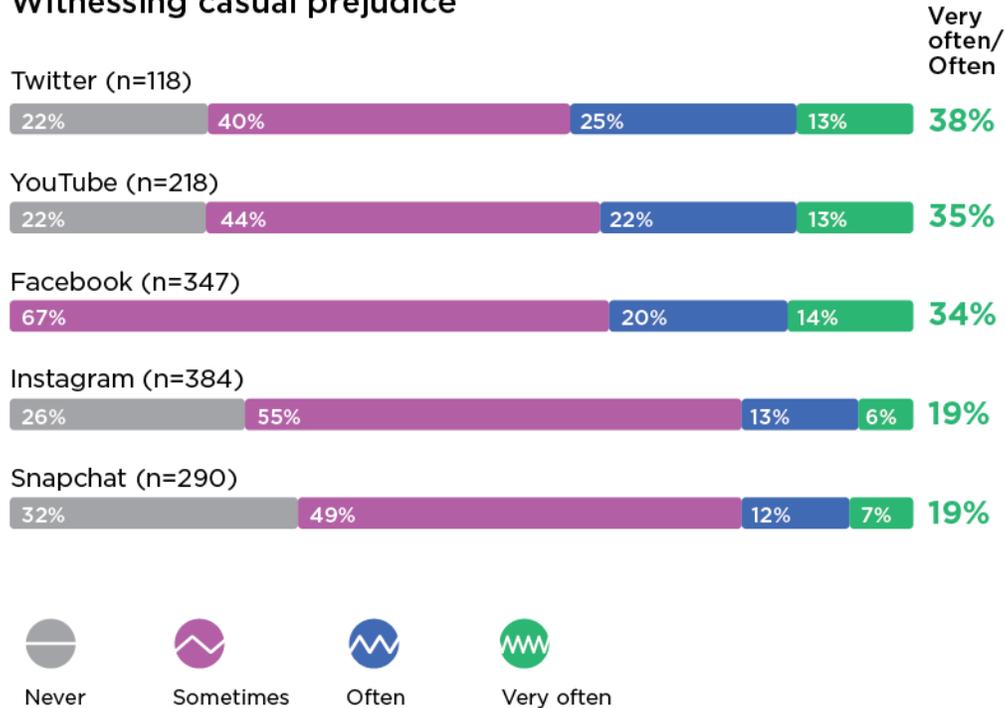
frequently while four in ten report witnessing it infrequently. One in ten youth say they frequently do something about casual prejudice, while one-half do not. One-quarter of youth who use the top five reported platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat) and have witnessed casual prejudice, say that they do something about it often or very often.

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<sup>48</sup> On a scale of very often, often, sometimes, and never.

<sup>49</sup> On a scale of very often, often, sometimes, and never.

## Witnessing casual prejudice



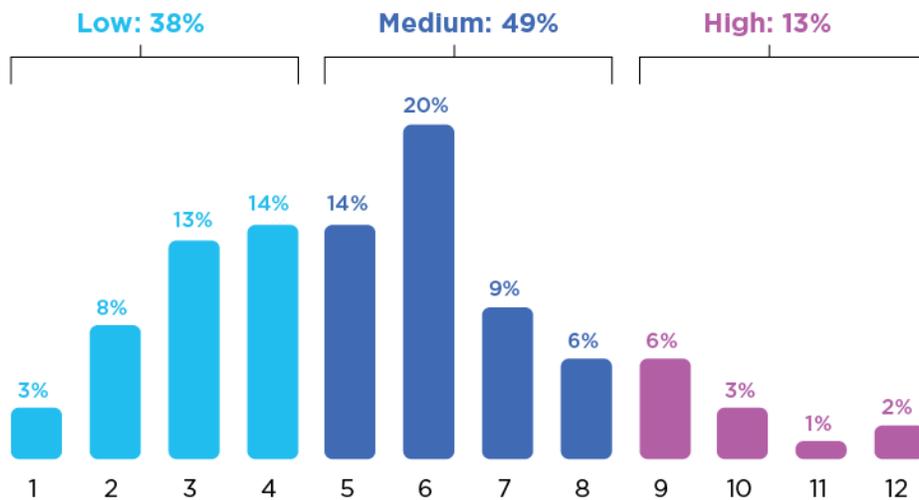
One-third to four in ten youth say they witness casual prejudice often or very often on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, while two in ten say the same for Instagram and Snapchat. Notably, no one who uses Facebook says that they have *never* seen casual prejudice on that site.

We created a scale to measure how often youth witness casual prejudice based on the top three platforms youth indicated they use most often, and how often they witness casual prejudice on each. Scores for each platform were added together to produce this scale, where a score of one means never witnessing prejudice, and a score of 12 means very often witnessing casual prejudice across the three platforms.



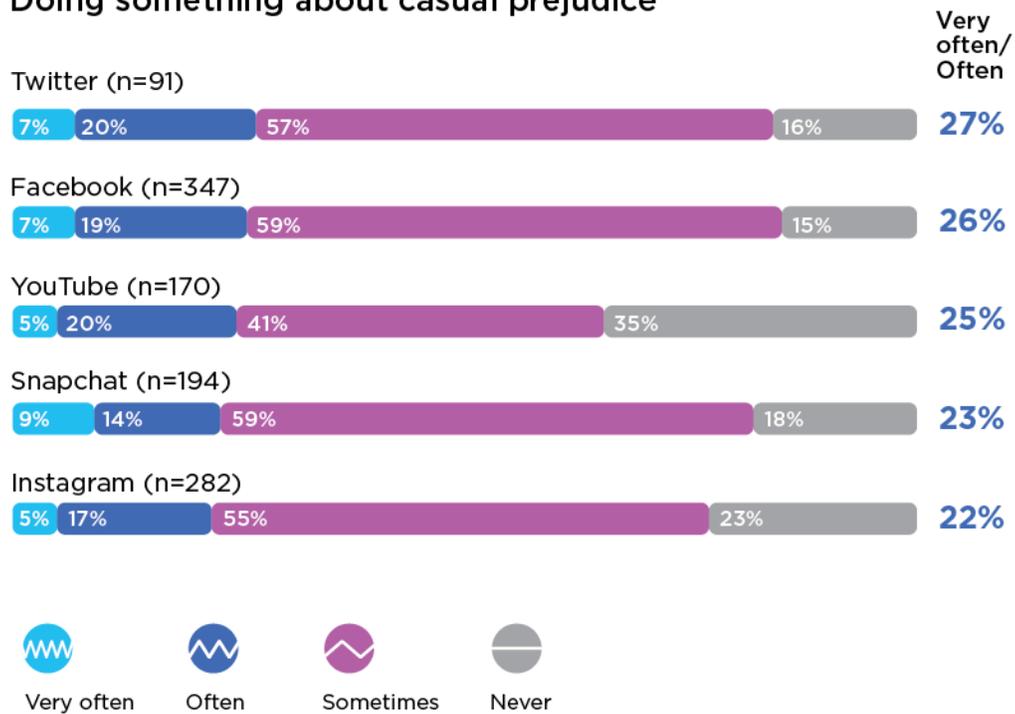
NO ONE WHO USES Facebook says that they have never seen casual prejudice on that site.

## Witnessing casual prejudice scale



Overall, one in ten youth say they often witness casual prejudice on the platforms they use most frequently, while four in ten say they do not. LGBTQ+ youth (23% vs. 12% who are straight) are most likely to score high on the witnessing casual prejudice scale. There is no relationship between age and how often youth witness casual prejudice with most youth (12 to 16 years old) falling just below midway on the scale with a score of five. About one-quarter of youth who have witnessed casual prejudice on the top platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat) say they do something about it 'often' or 'very often'.

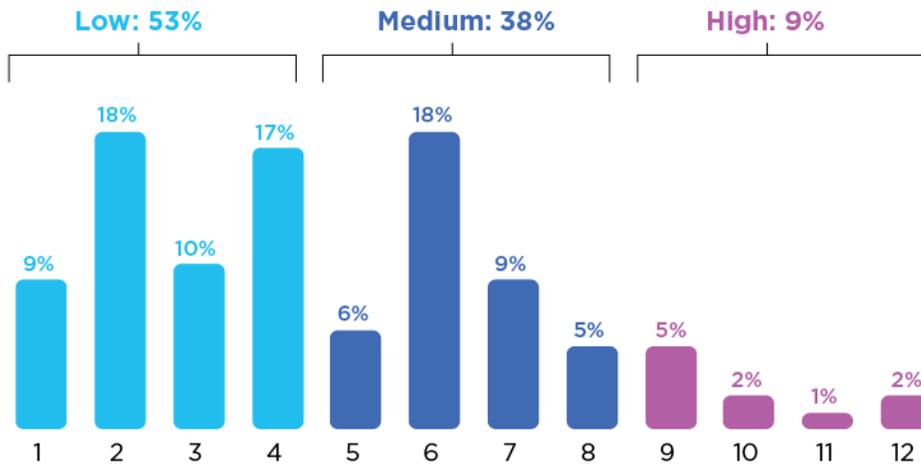
## Doing something about casual prejudice



Out of the top five platforms provided by youth, YouTube was the platform where youth were *least* likely to do something about casual prejudice with a third of youth saying they never do anything on YouTube and four out of ten youth saying they only sometimes do something about casual prejudice on YouTube.

We created a scale to measure how often youth do something about casual prejudice based on the top three platforms youth indicated they use most often, and how often they do something about casual prejudice on each, if they had witnessed it. Scores for each platform were added together to produce this scale, where a score of one means never doing something about casual prejudice, and a score of 12 means very often doing something about casual prejudice across the platforms.

## Doing something about prejudice scale



Overall, just over half of youth do not do something about the casual prejudice they witness on the online platforms they use most frequently, and just one in ten say they do something often. Responses are consistent across demographic groups. There is no relationship between age and how often youth do something about casual prejudice with most youth (12 to 16 years old) falling just below midway on the scale with a score of between four and five.

## Engaging in casual prejudice

We asked youth to tell us how often they have been a part of casual prejudice online (by posting, sharing something or forwarding something, liking or up-voting something, or encouraging someone).<sup>50</sup> We had youth list the top three platforms (websites or apps) they use most often and how often they have been a part of casual prejudice there.<sup>51</sup> We also asked youth how often



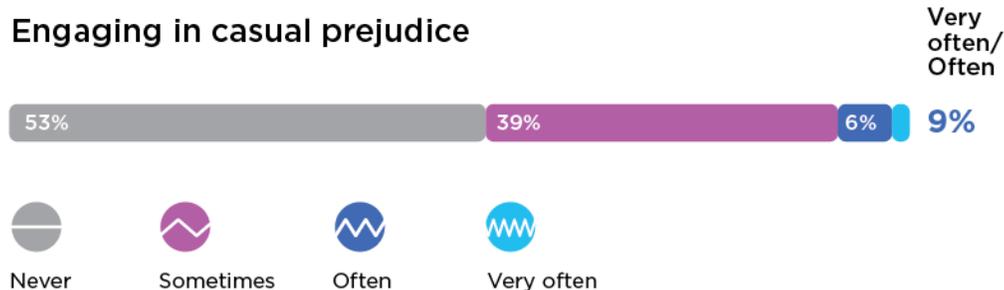
**JUST OVER ONE-HALF** of Canadian youth say they have never engaged in casual prejudice, and one in ten admit to doing so often or very often.

<sup>50</sup> On a scale of very often, often, sometimes, and never.

<sup>51</sup> On a scale of very often, often, sometimes, and never.

they do something about casual prejudice when they are also engaging in it on the platforms they indicated. Finally, we asked youth if they have ever been a part of casual prejudice online *why* they did it.<sup>52</sup>

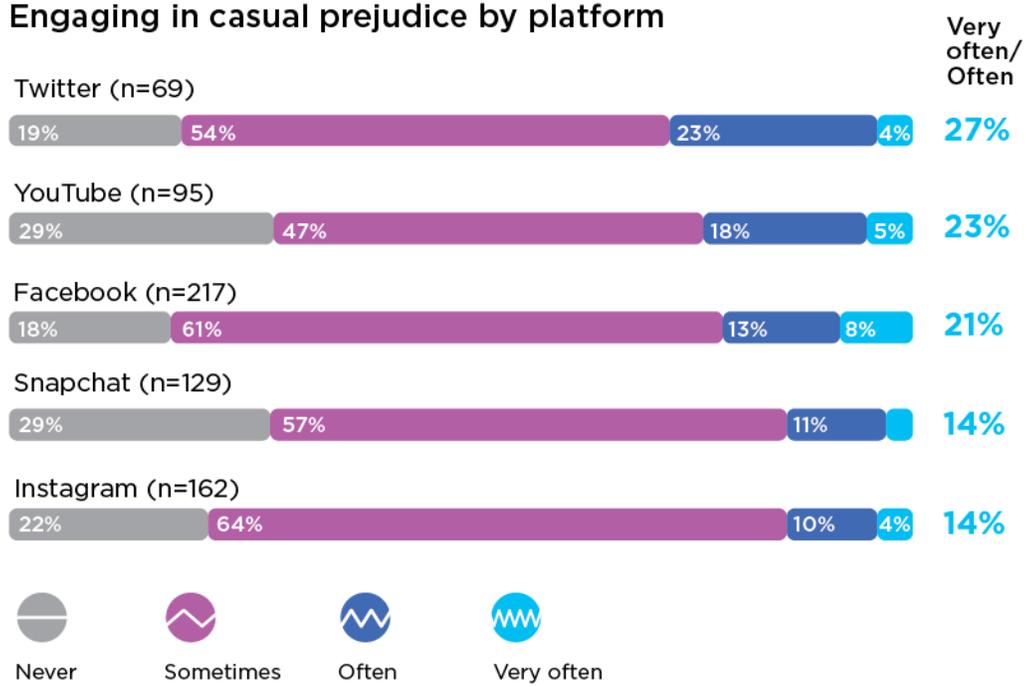
Just over one-half of Canadian youth say they have never engaged in casual prejudice, and one in ten admit to doing so often or very often.



Of youth who engage in casual prejudice online, older youth (10% vs. 6% who are younger) are most likely to engage in casual prejudice often or very often. Among youth who have at least sometimes been a part of casual prejudice online, about two in ten say they often do something about the casual prejudice they witnessed.

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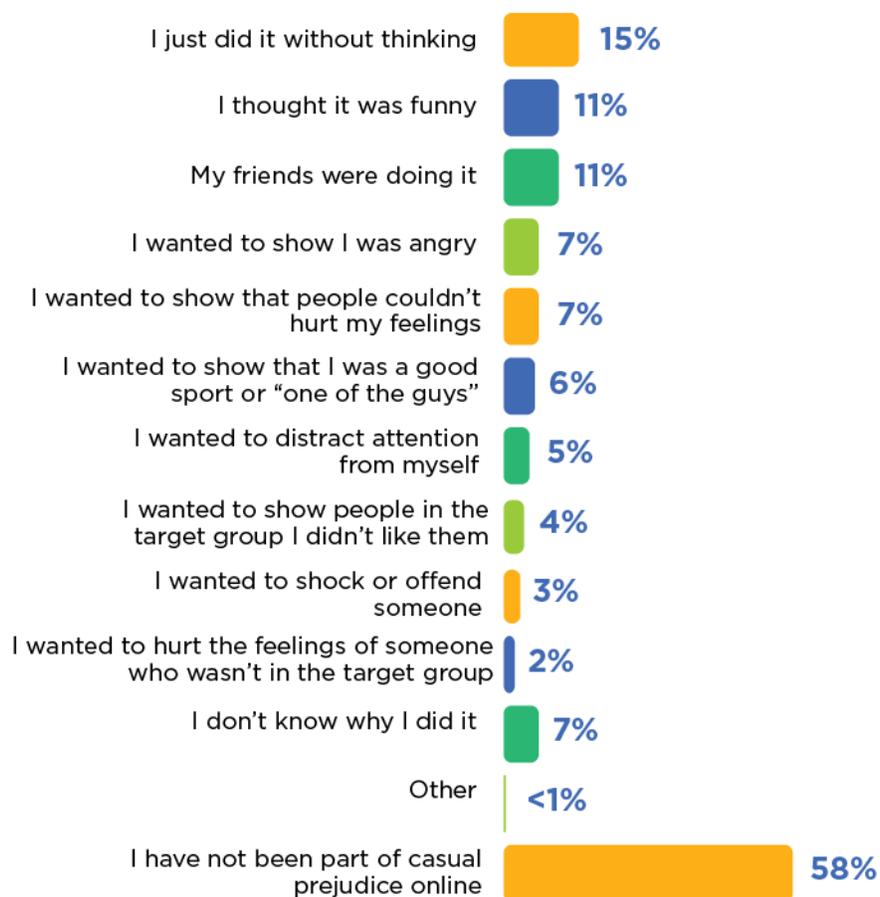
<sup>52</sup> Youth could check all answers that were true for them at different times from a list of 13 options: I thought it was funny; my friends were doing it; I wanted to show I was angry; I wanted to hurt the feelings of someone who wasn't in the target group; I wanted to show people in the target group I didn't like them; I wanted to shock or offend someone; I wanted to distract attention from myself; I wanted to show that I was a good sport or 'one of the guys'; I wanted to show that people couldn't hurt my feelings; I just did it without thinking; I don't know why I did it; I have never been a part of casual prejudice online; other (open-ended).



Of youth who admit to taking part in casual prejudice at least sometimes, over two in ten who use Twitter, YouTube, or Facebook say they've often or very often been a part of it, while just over one in ten who use Snapchat or Instagram say the same.

The most common reasons youth gave for why they engaged in casual prejudice are because they did it without thinking, they thought it was funny or they saw their friends doing it.

## Reasons why youth engage in casual prejudice online



Boys (13% vs. 9% of girls) are most likely to say they thought it was funny. Older youth (9% vs. 6% of younger children) are most likely to say they wanted to show they were angry. While boys (8% vs. 3% of girls) and older youth (7% vs. 4% of younger children) are most likely to say I wanted to show I was a good sport or 'one of the guys'. The top reasons for engaging in casual prejudice (I did it without thinking, I thought it was funny, my friends were doing it, and I wanted to show that people couldn't hurt my feelings) were similar across the five major platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter.

Overall, we uncovered a moderate correlation between how often youth witness casual prejudice and how likely they are to take part in it. In other words, the more often youth witness online casual prejudice the more likely they are to engage (or perpetrate) casual prejudice

themselves. This, again, points to the key role of perceived group norms in relation to youth and casual prejudice online.



: **THE MORE OFTEN**  
: youth witness online  
: casual prejudice the more  
: likely they are to engage  
: (or perpetrate) casual  
: prejudice themselves.

## Group analysis

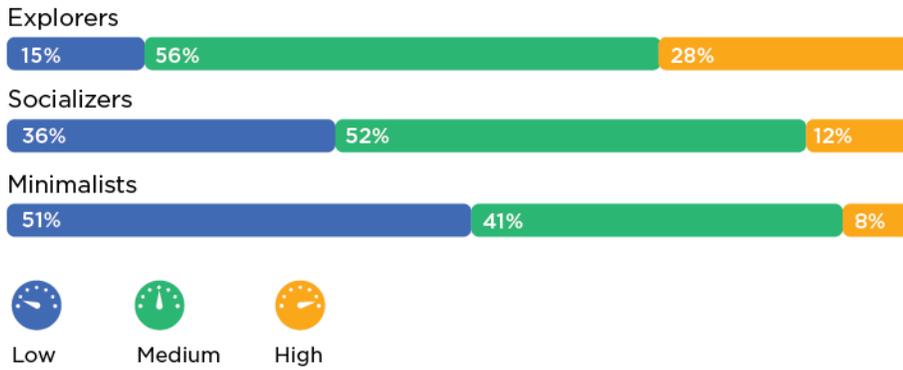
As with the enablers and barriers to pushing back we examined the experiences of youth—both witnessing and engaging in casual prejudice—from the perspectives of our three groups of platform users: Explorers, Socializers, and Minimalists.

**Explorers** are most likely to witness casual prejudice, to do something about it, and to be a part of casual prejudice. Almost three in ten Explorers score high on the witness scale while two in ten frequently do something about casual prejudice as measured by the do something scale. Two in ten Explorers say they have been a part of casual prejudice either often or very often.

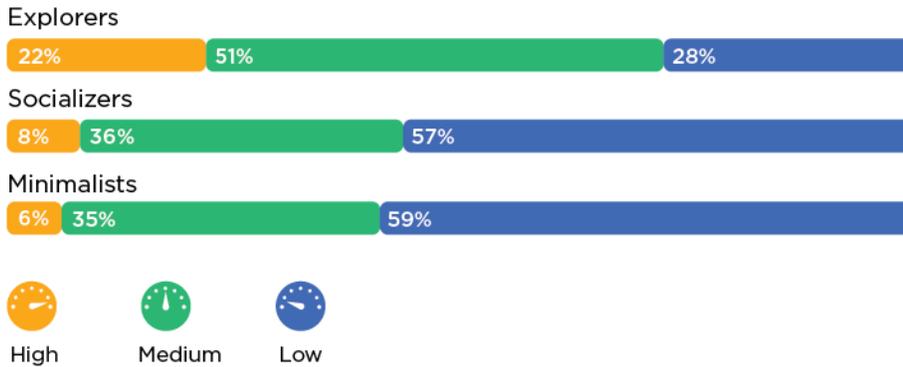
**Socializers** experience less casual prejudice than the Explorers, but more than the Minimalists. Just one in ten Socializer witnesses casual prejudice frequently, but one-half of Socializers witness a moderate amount of casual prejudice. One in ten Socializers say they do something about casual prejudice frequently. Less than one in ten say they have been a part of casual prejudice either often or very often.

**Minimalists** experience the least casual prejudice online. Fewer than one in ten Minimalists say they witness casual prejudice frequently, and one-half score low on the witness scale. Like Socializers, just one in ten Minimalists say they do something about casual prejudice frequently. As with Socializers, less than one in ten Minimalists say that they have been a part of casual prejudice either often or very often.

## Witnessing casual prejudice



## Doing something about casual prejudice



## Engaging in casual prejudice



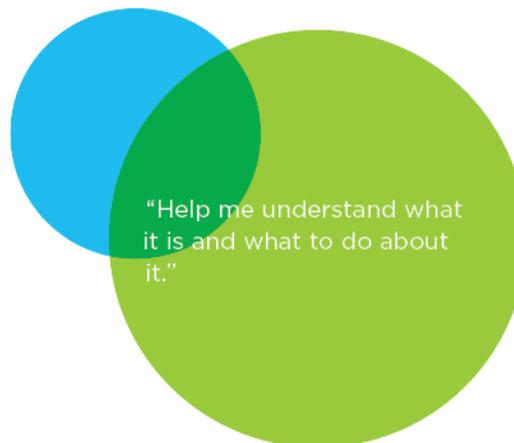
**Explorers** are most likely to witness, do something about, and engage in casual prejudice while **Minimalists** are least likely to witness, do something about, and engage in online casual prejudice.

## Key Messages and Implications

The results of this study are a call to action for educators, policymakers, parents and online platforms to prepare, engage, and empower Canadian youth to push back against prejudice online.

**Youth need to feel prepared to intervene in situations of prejudice or ‘cultures of hatred’ online.** Over half of youth decide not to do something when they see casual prejudice for reasons related to factors of *context* (not knowing if what they are seeing is in fact prejudice) and *efficacy* (not knowing how to respond). Youth need to be supported in developing the skills and knowledge to be able to recognize when something is and is not prejudicial online, and youth need to be provided with clear examples of how they could potentially respond to casual prejudice online. This is particularly important since a lack of perceived solutions, or courses of action, leads to a lack of efficacy which can itself lead to feelings of disillusionment and inaction, especially if youth are feeling overwhelmed by the volume of prejudicial encounters that they experience online.

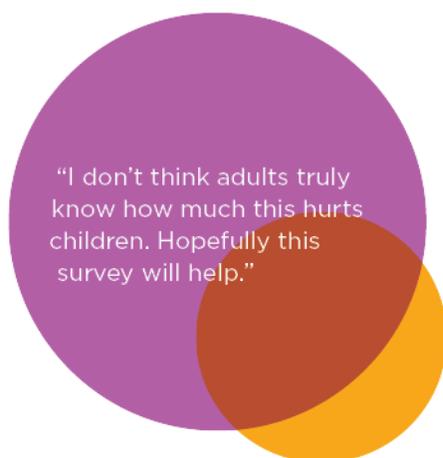
*“Sometimes I don’t understand why it’s offensive, like for a costume.”*



*“It happens more frequently than adults think.”*

**Youth need to be engaged in decision-making processes concerning pushing back against hate online in order for them to *fully* participate in the spaces and places (the platforms) they use online.** Not only do young Canadians need to feel that they have a right to push back against ‘cultures of hatred’ online, they also need to feel that their opinions and experiences matter to those with decision-making capabilities, whether it is policymakers, educators, or platforms. While most youth feel it is important to speak up when they encounter

casual prejudice online, many young people still feel that it is 'not my place to do so' and perceive intervention as primarily an adult activity. This becomes particularly problematic when youth become disappointed by the lack of seriousness adults give to the youth experience or when adults fail to include youth voices when making decisions about or when designing tools and processes for combatting casual prejudice online.



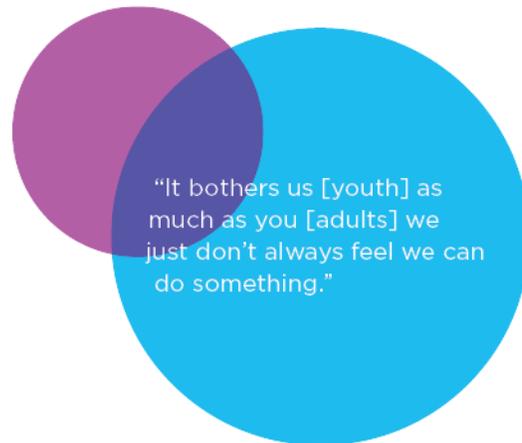
*“Yes, sometimes when you tell that a person said a bad thing about us, an adult response is to ignore it and do not get involved. As a kid I don't have the power to put a stop to it it's an adult's duty to put the stop to [online hate] or the platform provider should screen the comment before the person sees it.”*

**Youth need to be empowered if they are to effectively stand-up to or push back against hate online.** Young Canadians need not only to feel confident in their ability to recognize and respond to online prejudice, and that they will be heard and included in decision-making, but also that their actions will make a difference. Standing up to what is perceived to be the social consensus, norms, or values within a particular online community is a monumental task for young people, especially when social harmony and peer acceptance are incredibly important to a young person's sense of self, and their ability to maintain satisfactory peer relationships. Protecting the anonymity of young interveners, ensuring they *clearly* see the impacts of their actions (e.g. consequences for perpetrators of online hate such as being removed from platforms), while also acknowledging just how difficult it is to put oneself out there and take a stand, are essential to ensuring young Canadian's feel empowered to push back.

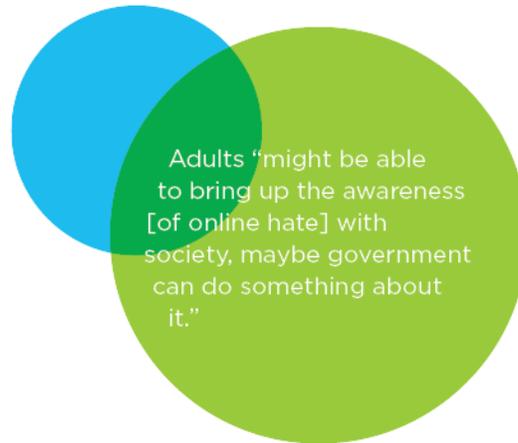
*Adults should know “that it is a real issue of today and we can’t just turn ourselves off of the computer world as we are the computer world and we have been born into it and we are very much affected by it.”*

*“You can start to believe those [hateful] comments. They are not easy to ignore.”*

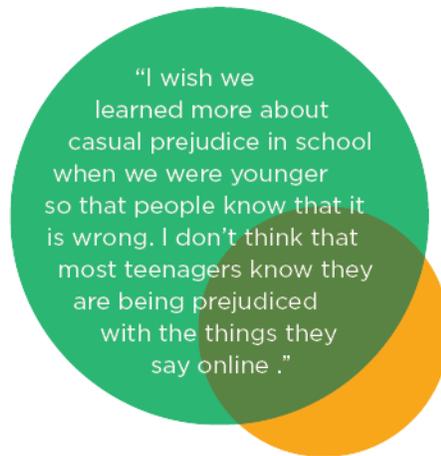
*“It is hard to take a stand. I feel immediately isolated.”*



**Policy interventions can prepare, engage, and empower youth to push back against hate online** by bolstering the digital literacy and digital citizenship opportunities afforded to young Canadians in their classrooms, their homes (with their parents/guardians), and within their wider communities both online and offline. Policymakers should include the voices and experiences of young Canadians in policy development and decision-making regarding how best to combat 'cultures of hatred' online. Policy interventions can also reinforce (for platforms and technology companies) the significance of transparent, easy to use, easy to navigate reporting mechanisms and procedures that will both encourage young users to engage in the value and norm setting within these communities, but also push back when those values are undermined or endangered.



**Education interventions can prepare, engage, and empower youth to push back against hate online** by incorporating resources on online hate or online casual prejudice into curriculum, lessons, and programs at the earliest possible opportunity. Classroom resources ought to include clear examples of what online prejudice or hate online is, and also include strategies for how to respond to and (dis)engage in situations of online prejudice. Further, youth need to be able to better recognize the difference between healthy debate and hate online and how best to respectfully engage in either situation.



**Parents/guardians also need to feel prepared, engaged, and empowered to support their children to push back against hate online.** Young Canadians want to know that they have a trusted adult in their life who will be open to discussing their experiences of online casual prejudice in non-judgmental and non-confrontational ways. Talking to their parents/guardians was the second most popular course of action among youth for dealing with casual prejudice

online. As such, parents need to feel confident that they can help their children recognize the signs and symbols of hate online and support their children to intervene in safe and respectful ways. Perhaps most importantly, young Canadians emphasize how they look up to the adults in their lives to model healthy debate and ethical digital citizenship.

*"Adults do it too and kids can see that and maybe see it as an example"*

*"Adults do it too on Facebook sites."*

*"Adults should set a good example."*

*"Adults should talk more about this kind of things with their kids and encourage them to confide if something like this happen to them or their friends."*



**Platforms and technology companies also have a role in preparing, engaging, and empowering youth to push back against hate online.** Specifically, technology companies and platforms have a responsibility to create and design transparent and easy to use reporting mechanisms for flagging and countering hate online. The strongest factors in enabling youth to push back against hate online were clear and easy-to-use tools for blocking users and content they deem to be unacceptable, and for reporting unacceptable behaviour, as well as clear rules for what is and is not considered acceptable behaviour, speech, and content on the platform—so that youth know exactly when these rules have been violated. However, this requires that technology companies and platforms are designing their terms of service, user agreements, community standards, rules of engagement/play, reporting mechanisms etc. in such a way that *youth* participants will understand and feel fully capable of participating in these practices and procedures if need be. In order to design youth-friendly tools and services, platforms and technology companies need to engage with youth to hear their perspectives and experiences,

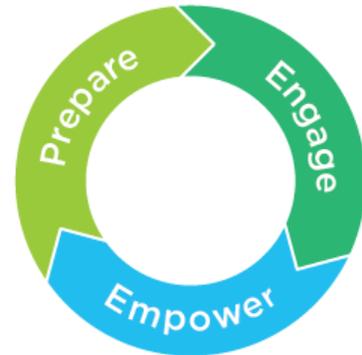
and include youth in the decision-making and design processes. Further, youth also want to understand the procedures that are in place for handling complaints and reports: six in ten youth want to know that the platforms they are participating in are taking action and being proactive.

*“I think people in authority...should know that there is a lot of this going on. More than they probably know. Companies are making these spaces and then not policing them. I see lots of newbies come into a space for fun and entertainment and get chewed up by the nastiness. Adults should monitor these spaces and make them safer. Every company that makes a space should be making it a SAFE space.”*



**More research** is needed that focuses on specific, understudied platforms. While our results indicate that youth witness high levels of prejudicial content on YouTube, for example, they also indicate that most youth never do anything on this platform. Previous research and knowledge of the platform would suggest that this is because of how difficult it is to report inappropriate content on the platform, but further research on this specific platform along with other primarily video-based platforms is needed. Similarly, while more than half of youth indicated they play online multi-player games (with Fortnite, Minecraft, Xbox Live, Roblox, and League of Legends being top games) and witness relatively high levels of prejudice, they rarely push back in these spaces and contexts. How easy and accessible it is to report inappropriate behaviour varies from game to game, but more in-depth research is needed to fully understand reporting behaviours of young gamers, especially since the gaming environment tends to include other players that are routinely *unknown* in the offline lives of players. The vast majority of research on hate online has focused on textual analysis (of chatrooms and social networking platforms) but more research is needed on platforms or technologies that are visual, immersive, and allow users to share content other than text.

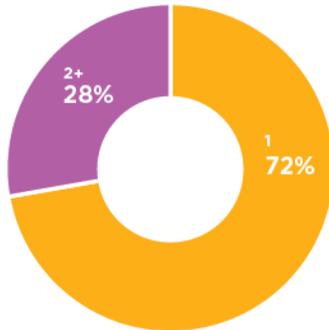
**MediaSmarts believes that consensus variance and counter-narratives are essential strategies for preparing, engaging and empowering youth to push back against hate online.** Introducing young Canadians to counter-narratives (perspectives other than the perceived dominant or traditional narratives) prepares them to respond to instances of casual prejudice online by providing clear examples of *how* they can respond, while also contributing to consensus variance—a multitude of perspectives or multi-partial views—regarding the norms, values, and beliefs held by platform users. Not only will counter-narratives and consensus variance help to combat the major barrier of efficacy, but they do so while appealing to major motivators such as empathy, social consensus, and social harmony. It is critical that we foster cultures of *encounter* rather than confrontation, where youth witness and engage in healthy debates, creating the spaces necessary for youth to develop their skills in recognizing the signs and symbols of hate online while also building their confidence to intervene. Counter-narratives and consensus variance create a positive feedback loop in which youth who feel better **prepared** to recognize and respond to hate online are more likely to **engage** in healthy debate as well as contribute to the norm and value setting on the platforms they use **empowering** them to push back against ‘cultures of hatred’.



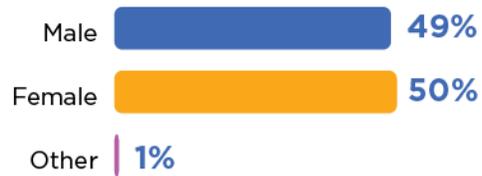
# Appendix

## Participant demographics

Number of children 12-16 years old cared for by guardian



Gender



Province of residence

