

Chapter # 21

RESISTANCE TO THOSE HARMFUL COMMENTS: How Métis youth resist and cope with online hate

Johanna Sam¹, Michelle Dusko Biferie¹, Daniel Gallardo¹, Sabrina Forcier², Rachel Hussey¹,
Claire Hein-Salvi¹, Haoyu Zhao¹, Jennifer Shapka¹, & Jan Hare¹

¹University of British Columbia, Canada

²Yorkville University, Canada

ABSTRACT

Understanding how Indigenous youth cope with negative online experiences remains largely unexplored. In this study, the concept of the *warrior*, as articulated by Alfred (2005), serves as a metaphor for resilience, strength, and courage. The objective of this study was to honour the voices of Indigenous youth and to understand how they navigate the challenges of online hate as "warriors" in a digital world. All four participants self-identified as Métis or First Nations and resided in British Columbia, Canada and were between the ages of 18 to 21 years of age. In sharing circles, youth created an online empathy map to collaboratively develop a persona or narrative representative of their experiences. The 'Online Warrior' identity involved standing up for oneself, practicing self-care, and using social media to promote positive messages about Indigenous culture and people. Indigenous youth actively engaging in cultural revitalization by defending and honoring their Indigenous ways of knowing. Study findings highlight the need for support from emotional connections with family and peers. A need for educational support to help navigate online life in a balanced way and the importance of social and emotional learning programs that emphasize community, cultural identity, and resilience were also emphasized.

Keywords: Indigenous methodology, online hate, social and emotional development, adolescents.

1. BACKGROUND

Indigenous youth are increasingly turning to digital spaces to explore their identity and build community. Yet, these same spaces are sites of risk, where racism and colonial ideologies continue to circulate unchecked. While literature on adolescent cyberbullying identifies problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), such frameworks often fail to capture Indigenous youths' holistic ways of coping, which interweave relational, community, and cultural supports. In what ways do Indigenous youth experience and cope with online hate? *Online hate* is defined as "any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of characteristics such as race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or political affiliation" (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021, p. 1). Through internet and social networks, online hate can be "repeatedly, systematically, and uncontrollably" directed toward marginalized groups due to power imbalances in digital spaces (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021, p. 1).

High levels of ethnic victimization among adolescents were risk factors for low levels of positive peer relations, school bonding and school motivation (Strohmeier & Gradinger, 2024). Recent Canadian statistics show that 71% of youth aged 15 to 24 have encountered online hate, substantially higher than the national average of 49% (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Although many studies describe general risks and coping strategies for youth exposed to online hate (Ng, Chua, & Shorey, 2022; Hutson, Kelly, & Militello, 2018), these frameworks often overlook the relational, intergenerational, and culturally resurgent practices that promote resilience among Indigenous youth. This high prevalence was especially concerning for Indigenous youth whose social media use was closely tied to oral traditions and relational forms of connectedness (Rice et al., 2016). For instance, online hate directed toward Indigenous people often took culturally specific forms, such as defacing digital images of deceased kin and sharing them on social media (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). This study addresses a gap in the literature by exploring online hate experienced by Indigenous adolescents in British Columbia, Canada.

1.1. Colonial Legacies and Online Hate in Indigenous Adolescents' Digital Lives

Positioned within broader exploration among Indigenous young people, this study specifically centered on Métis adolescents. This distinction-based approach recognizes the traditions, identity and historical experiences of Métis people in Canada (Paul, Monchalin, Auger, & Jones, 2023), which may shape their technology use. Throughout the paper, the terms *Métis* and *Indigenous* were used to situate the study among Indigenous peoples while also connecting to the contexts in Canada. Paul et al. (2023) found that Métis individuals, particularly women and Two-Spirit persons, are disproportionately exposed to racism and exclusion in both online and offline contexts. This discrimination, rooted in social determinants of health factors such as racism and colonization, often increase biopsychosocial-spiritual wellbeing concerns (Czyzewski, 2011).

The impacts of online hate extend beyond devices and technology, contributing to increased rates of hate crimes, discrimination, and gender-based violence (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). These cyberdeviant harms are especially detrimental to adolescents, who may suffer from greater internalizing and externalizing problems (Wachs et al., 2022a; Brewer et al., 2023). Despite these known risk factors, few studies have explored how Indigenous youth navigate and cope with online hate (Broll, Dunlop, & Crooks, 2018). This is critical oversight, given that Indigenous youth frequently use social media to reclaim and celebrate their identities, which are a powerful form of cultural resurgence (Molyneaux et al., 2014). Indeed, their coping strategies in the face of online hate remain underexplored. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining online hate experiences and coping mechanisms of Métis adolescents. By exploring Indigenous youth experiences, the present study extends cyberbullying literature, highlighting culturally resurgent strategies that interweave relational support, intergenerational teachings, and Indigenous epistemologies.

This research was especially timely considering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) Call to Action #62, which urges educators to bring Indigenous ways of knowing into the public education system. This call emphasizes the importance of working with Indigenous people in ways that respects their knowledge systems. Similarly, the Government of British Columbia (2019) enacted legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), requiring educators to create culturally safe environments and raise awareness about the enduring impacts of colonization. In online contexts, this may mean facing the challenge of "settler gaze" or dismissing non-Indigenous audiences scrolling social media with hostility often experienced by Indigenous youth (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous youth in digital spaces is a vital step toward addressing these historical and ongoing social injustices.

1.2. Emotional Wellbeing, Coping, and Indigenous Youth

Coping strategies in adolescence are often categorized into two developmental functions: *problem-focused coping*, which aims to change the stressful situation, and *emotion-focused coping*, which seeks to regulate emotional responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). As social media becomes integral to young people's daily life, the concept of empathy is central to how cyberaggressors and victims experience online interactions. That is, empathy may involve young people's ability for perspective-taking, empathetic joy, and empathic stress in online settings (Segura, Estévez, & Estévez, 2020). Study findings indicate that deficits in empathy are associated with higher rates of cyberaggression (Segura et al., 2020). Intervention studies show mixed results with some studies report improvements in self-efficacy and empathy, while others find little to no reduction in cybervictimization or mental health problem outcomes (Ng et al., 2022; Hutson et al., 2018). Yet, developmental frameworks often overlook Indigenous peoples' worldviews of holistic wellbeing, which center the interconnectedness of individual, community, and land. Research suggests social networking sites can support Indigenous youth in reclaiming identity and traditional teachings amid colonial aggression (Molyneaux et al., 2014). In one study, nearly 80% of Indigenous participants reported using social media to celebrate their culture, highlighting its role in cultural resurgence (Molyneaux et al., 2014). Despite this promise, little is known about how Métis youth, in particular, cope with online hate in culturally resurgent ways. This study seeks to understand Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing to explore the online experiences of Indigenous youth.

1.3. Indigenous Resilience: Online Warriors and Indigenous Storywork

The concept of the *warrior*, as shared by Alfred (2005), was used in the present study as a metaphor for Indigenous resilience, strength, and courage. In many Indigenous cultures, the warrior was a protector – someone who faces adversity with bravery and upholds community values (Louie, 2021). Past research drew on the Indigenous metaphor of the “new warrior” to examine how Indigenous youth experienced and responded to educational challenges (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Their new warrior experiences showed that racism shaped their schooling, and they relied on Indigenous cultural strengths and supports, such as family and community, to address the inequalities they encountered (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). In the current study, the *online warriors* metaphor was applied Indigenous adolescents who navigate the challenges of online hate and cyberaggression. To be an online warrior was not only to endure harmful digital encounters but to actively resist and transform the narratives that target their identities. This framing allows Indigenous youth to share their experiences in ways that reflect both the harm they face and their roles as agents of resistance and empowerment. It also emphasizes the importance of collective identity and relational resilience, as youth see themselves as connected to a larger effort to uplift others in online spaces.

This research is grounded in *Indigenous Storywork*, an Indigenous methodology developed by Archibald (2008), which offers a culturally resurgent framework for involving Indigenous youth and their stories. Storywork is guided by principles of respect, reciprocity, reverence, responsibility, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. It affirms oral traditions as a method for knowledge transmission, healing, and identity among Indigenous people. In this study, online Sharing Circles, a cultural practice of gathering in safe, egalitarian, communal spaces, were used to involve Indigenous youth. Storywork may enable Indigenous youth to express how they cope with online hate in ways that honour and respect their voices and storied epistemologies. This approach highlights the importance of strength-based,

Indigenous methodologies to explore how Indigenous youth navigate online hate, bridging cyberbullying research with Indigenous knowledge systems.

1.4. Study Aim

The aim of this study was to centre the voices of Indigenous youth and explore how they navigate online hate as *warriors* in a digital world. This research was guided by two questions: 1) What types of online hate do Indigenous youth experience; and 2) How do Indigenous youth conceptualize being a "warrior" to cope with online hate? Through these questions, the study sought to highlight the challenges Indigenous youth faced online and the strategies they use to cope with adversity.

2. METHODS

2.1. Positionality Statement

This study was shaped by a team of Indigenous and allied researchers working within a relational paradigm grounded in Indigenous oral protocols. Our team included professors, assistant professors, PhD and MA students from the Faculty of Education, spanning Human Development, Learning, and Culture; Language and Literacy Education; Counselling Psychology; and Educational Studies. One team member is a proud nonbinary mestizx from Mexico. We are united by a commitment to social justice, youth wellbeing, and the co-creation of culturally safe digital spaces. Our diverse positionalities, as educators, scholars, and community members, informed all stages of the research. Reflexive thematic analysis was guided by principles of Storywork, centering Indigenous youth voices in the meaning-making process.

2.2. Participants

Participants met the following eligibility criteria: they were between 18 to 25 years of age, proficient in English, and users of technology. Four Métis youth, aged 18 and 21, were recruited from British Columbia (B.C.), Canada. Three resided on the mainland of Southern B.C. region and one on Vancouver Island. All participants identified as young women; three identified as bisexual or pansexual and one as heterosexual.

2.3. Data Collection

The study was conducted in partnership with the Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC). The research team engaged in discussions with the MNBC Provincial Youth Manager and the Youth Events and Communications Coordinator to share the study's purpose and obtain governance approval. Recruitment was led by MNBC through digital outreach (e.g., email listservs and social media) and further promoted during in-person Métis community gatherings and events (e.g., word of mouth). In alignment with Indigenous relational ethics, informed consent was offered orally or in writing, with oral consent documented by recording the date, time, and location (CIHR, 2015). Ethical approval was obtained from a university behavioural research ethics board (certification: H21-02364). Each participant received a \$40 gift card in recognition of their time and contributions to the Sharing Circle.

Sharing Circle. Participants engaged in a two-hour Sharing Circle held via an online video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom). The research team collaborated with participants to determine a suitable time for the session. At the outset, consent procedures were reviewed, and a permission to video and audio record the discussion was obtained. Facilitation was led

by three researchers (one doctoral student, one master's student, and one faculty member), who rotated roles across activities. Each activity was introduced with a clear explanation of its purpose with guidance provided as needed. To maintain confidentiality, participants were informed that they would be assigned pseudonyms. The session was opened and closed by the MNBC Provincial Youth Manager, adhering to oral protocols. The Sharing Circle followed a semi-structured format to foster dialogue, reflection, and collective storytelling (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Sharing Circle Activities.

Topic areas	What youth will do	Time
Opening the Sharing Circle	Participant Informed Consent	30 minutes
	Land Acknowledgements and MNBC welcome	
(Zoom waiting room enabled)	Research Team Introductions Respectful Sharing Circle Protocols	
	Introductions Ice-Breaker Group Activity	
Participatory Design Activity	Online demographic questionnaire	40 minutes
	Create Persona Story	
Break		10 minutes
Mobile app design	Demonstrate Qualtrics survey app	25 minutes
	Circle discussion on how to be inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing on the survey app and in data collection	
Break		5 minutes
Closing the Circle	Know-Wonder-Learned Chart activity	10 minutes
	Thank you and \$40 online gift card preferences	

The session commenced with an interactive icebreaker activity, followed by a brief online questionnaire that consisted of two sections: (i) demographic information and (ii) online experiences and device use. Following the questionnaire, an online empathy map was employed to gain insights into the lived experiences of Indigenous youth, with the objective of collaboratively developing a persona or narrative representative of their experiences.

The *persona story* was a collective storytelling technique that synthesizes participants' insights into a fictional yet relatable character embodying shared experiences, challenges, and aspirations (Sam, Richardson, & Currie, 2022). This technique allows researchers to explore complex adolescent behaviors and attitudes in a more accessible, trauma-informed

manner to understand participants' experiences. In this study, the persona story was intended to reflect the collective experiences of Indigenous youth in online spaces.

Research team members introduced a Miro board, an online collaborative whiteboard tool, to facilitate the visual construction of the persona story. To ensure accessibility and protect participant privacy, research assistants input the information shared verbally by participants, eliminating the need for participants to create their own Miro accounts. Participants were invited to contribute demographic characteristics (e.g., name, age, gender, family life) that would embody the persona. The empathy map was organized into multiple quadrants, each labeled to capture sensory aspects of the persona's experience: "How do they spend time online," "How have they experienced someone being mean online," "How are they a warrior," "What do they see," "What do they say," "What do they do," "What do they hear," "What do they think," and "What do they feel?"

At the conclusion of the Sharing Circle, participants engaged in a debrief discussion facilitated by a learning assessment. A *K-W-L chart* graphic organizer was comprised of three columns: the first column (K) represented participants' prior knowledge about online interactions; the second column (W) inquired about what participants "Wanted" to learn regarding the Online Warriors topic; and the third column (L) prompted participants to reflect on what they had "Learned." The research team systematically compiled a master list of all participant responses from the Sharing Circle discussion to capture the collective insights generated during the session.

2.4. Data Analysis

Analysis was led by the Primary Investigator and supported by Graduate Research Assistants, who examined the full dataset. We used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to interpret data, guided by Indigenous methodologies particularly cyclical, relational, and iterative processes of data meaning making (Kovach, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted as an active and interpretive process rather than a mechanical coding exercise. We began by immersing ourselves in the transcripts, listening to and reading participants' words with attention to emotion, story, and nuance. Initial coding was conducted inductively and flexibly, with codes reflecting both semantic and latent meanings related to our research focus. We then moved iteratively between codes and the full dataset to construct potential themes captured meaningful patterns of shared experience. Themes were reviewed, refined, and redefined through collaborative discussion, with attention to relational and Indigenous ways of knowing of the stories shared. Our reflexive engagement recognized that meaning was co-constructed through our analysis, shaped by our diverse positionalities, and the commitments we bring as education and health researchers. The final themes are presented with illustrative quotes, honouring the voices and experiences of participants.

3. RESULTS

The use of persona stories during the Sharing Circle created a culturally safe and imaginative space for participants to explore experiences of online hate while maintaining confidentiality. Grounded in relational storytelling, the persona framework paired with an online empathy map supported participants in sharing their insights with depth and intention. This method encouraged focused reflection while also allowing participants to speak indirectly about personal experiences through the shared lens of a fictionalized Métis youth. The persona of Sara emerged as a central narrative figure, embodying collective themes and

emotional truths drawn from participants' contributions. Their story is presented in detail to reflect the layered perspectives shared by participants to honor the generative potential of co-created Storywork. Verbatim excerpts from the Sharing Circle are included throughout to foreground participants' voices and to illustrate themes that were generated from the analysis.

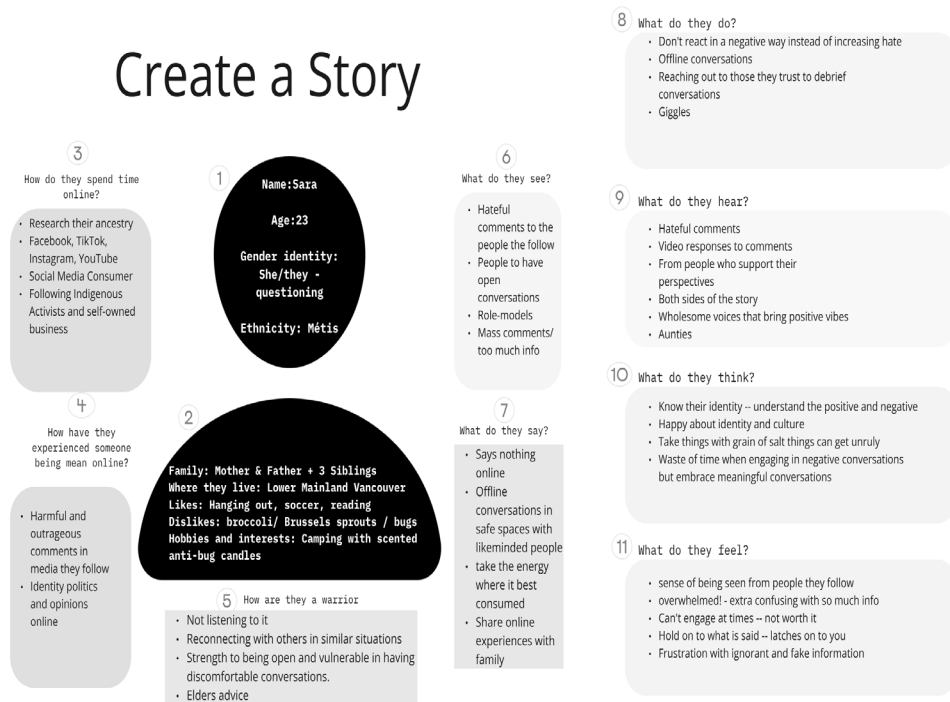
3.1. Findings from Persona: Sara's Story

Figure 1 shows Sara who identifies themselves as a 23-year-old Métis female. Although she goes by the pronouns of, she and her, Sara is questioning her gender identity and also goes by they and them. They live with their family consisting of three siblings, mom, and dad who reside in Southern British Columbia in the city of Vancouver. Sara likes hanging out, playing soccer, and reading. They dislike broccoli, brussels sprouts, and bugs. One of their hobbies and interests include camping with scented anti-bug candles. When online, they spend their time on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. They enjoy researching their Indigenous ancestry online. Sara follows Indigenous activists and Indigenous self-owned businesses on social media. They mostly consume social media rather than create content. While engaging online, they have experienced people being mean by coming across harmful and outrageous comments in the social media accounts that they follow. They witness problematic identity politics and opinions online, for instance they may be cyberattacked about their "Indianness." This includes them seeing hateful comments directed at the Indigenous people, communities, and groups that they follow on social media. They hear hateful comments and video responses to comments on social media. Sara will seek out people who support their perspectives online. Their social support were wholesome voices that show positive vibes, including family members like their Aunties and Elders. Sara was a warrior against these mean online interactions by not listening to the comments, connecting with others in similar situations, seeking Elders' advice, and gaining strength through being open and vulnerable to having uncomfortable conversations with others regarding difficult topics. They see role-models and other trusted adults being open to having these difficult conversations about online interactions. They do not say anything online, rather, they save their energy where it can be best utilized. Sara has these conversations offline with likeminded people and their family members. Likewise, they do not react in a negative way that could increase hate. Instead, they chose to have offline conversations to debrief with adults and peers who they can trust while laughing it off. They know about their Indigenous identity and culture. Sara embraces her Indigenous identity and culture. They understand both the positive and negative, take things with a grain of salt, and know things can get unruly online. They do not waste their time engaging in negative conversations, rather they embrace meaningful ones. However, Sara sometimes feels overwhelmed and confused with all the information readily available online and cannot engage in online interactions. They cannot help but latch on to online hate. Sara gets frustrated with ignorant and fake information. Overall, Sara feels it is not worth it. Sara has a sense of being seen from the trusted adults and peers as well as the Indigenous activists they follow online.

The persona story illustrated the complexities of both positive and negative online experiences faced by Métis youth. Participants described multiple manifestations of online hate, including derogatory comments targeting Indigenous social media accounts, the circulation of harmful video content, and weaponization of identity politics by anonymous users. These experiences were not perceived as isolated from offline life; rather, participants expressed a sense of continuity between their digital and physical realities. In response to online harms, they emphasized the role of familial and peer relationships as key sources of support. Reconnection with Indigenous knowledges through stories, teachings, and

community practices were also identified as a vital strategy for restoring balance, coping, and strengthening resilience in the face of online adversity.

Figure 1.
Persona Story of Sara.



3.2. Online experiences and device use questionnaire findings

Participants described their online habits through a questionnaire exploring device use, social media engagement, and digital content consumption. All four participants reported having sufficient data for their online usage. Three indicated that they spend somewhat more time on their devices than their friends and peers, with social media representing a substantial portion of their activity. Two participants stated that 50% of their online time is dedicated to consuming content on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, while the other two participants reported spending a smaller proportion of their time on these activities. All participants indicated that they allocate either some (50%) or no time (50%) to uploading, sharing, or posting personal content (e.g., photos, videos, or information about others) on social media. All participants reported spending either no time (50%) or some time (50%) engaging in online gaming with others. Three participants (75%) reported spending most or all of their online time watching television shows or movies.

In terms of social media engagement, three participants (75%) maintained some public profiles across various platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube). One participant had over 1,000 followers on their most popular social media site, while the other three had follower counts ranging from 200 to 500. All participants expressed no desire for additional followers. Three participants reported knowing all of their followers in person

on their most popular platform, while one participant indicated familiarity with approximately half of their followers.

Participants provided text responses to an open-ended question, “How have you tried to cope with others being mean online? Please share.” One participant noted, “Spending time off my phone. Sharing stories with my friends and hearing I’m not the only one.” Another participant stated, “Only having followers that I know [or] have met.” A third participant reported, “Ignore it. Not using Facebook/Instagram often.” Another participant shared that being an Online Warrior means, “Knowing how to take care of oneself and using the internet in a way that we need (either not using it, or using it often), but just using it in a way that benefits our individual needs.” One participant described being an Online Warrior as follows:

Posting and sharing anything online that makes you happy, no matter if you know someone might be rude. When you see other people being rude online, you stand up for them because that little bit of support can mean a lot to someone. If you do accidentally offend someone online, apologize for it and make sure to avoid doing it again. Spreading good messages and understanding the impact your media has on others.

Participants characterize an Online Warrior as someone who was mindful of how online behaviors (e.g., posting, internet use, and comments) affect their own feelings and those of others. This conceptualization suggests that Online Warriors utilize technology and the internet to promote positive content and support within online communities. These findings illustrate the proactive role Indigenous adolescents play in supportive digital spaces while balancing their wellbeing in the face of online negativity.

3.3. Know-Want-Learned Chart Findings

A review of participants’ responses during the debrief activity revealed that they have “grown up online.” There was little distinction between online and offline life; instead, technology was seamlessly integrated into their daily lives. Participants indicated a familiarity with social media to consume content, such as memes, and expressed a desire to follow Indigenous rights advocates and learn about Indigenous knowledges through online platforms.

Participants expressed concern about how to assist others in coping with online hate, particularly where they “cannot walk away from hurtful” expressions of racism and political hate speech. They grappled with the challenge of maintaining balance as a form of self-care, discussing strategies such as implementing screen time limits and social media restrictions.

Participants reported learning from the Sharing Circle that they are “not alone in what [they] are feeling.” They recognized the importance of seeking out trusted adults and peers as online and offline support systems for engaging in vulnerable conversations. Participants acknowledged that not all online experiences are negative, actively seeking out and engaging with positive Indigenous social media accounts that foster a sense of community. Table 2 provides an overview of the insights shared by participants, reflecting their collective experiences and strategies for navigating the complexities of online experiences.

Table 2.
K-W-L Chart.

K What did I already know about the topic?	W What do I still wonder about the topic?	L What have I learned?
• Grew up online (e.g., funny memes, personal relaxing, know people who following) • How bad online communities can me (including Indigenous social media account comments) • Grew up online whole life and know do not take it personally • Indigenous people advocate for youth and share activism online	• How to respond to people and educate people • Take care of self and one's energy • How much is it worth it to engage (e.g., fake fun lives online) • Living it every day and cannot walk away from hurtful cyberattacks on our identity • Balance engaging when to respond to hurtful comments but also not feeling responsibility to take on everything (e.g., balance with scree time - restrictions, how to cut down screen time?)	• Not alone in what you are feeling and what we have gone through • Find people with similar opinions to have vulnerable conversations and support systems • Not worth my time and/or energy • Not everything online is negative • Find Indigeneity • Other people have similar online experiences • There are people who care

4. DISCUSSION

Findings from this study highlight the resourcefulness of Indigenous youth in navigating and coping with online hate. Participants marshalled a range of strategies that involved both physical and psychological distancing from harmful content, including taking breaks from social media and refusing to engage with cyber-aggressors. A key concept that emerged was the notion of the *online warrior*, which participants used to describe their acts of agency, resilience, and Indigenous knowledges. This identity was not only about self-preservation but encompassed the responsibility to stand up for oneself and one's community, to practice self-care, and to use digital spaces for affirmation and celebration of Indigenous peoples. Unlike prior studies on cyberbullying, this chapter highlights how Indigenous youth actively mobilize intergenerational support and community networks in real time to counter online hate, an approach not previously foregrounded in the literature. Together, these findings emphasize that digital spaces function simultaneously as sites of vulnerability and cultural resurgence for Indigenous youth. Study findings show that

Indigenous youth use digital spaces to express community care, resistance, and identity affirmation.

Previous research shows that youth who use active coping strategies were better able to mitigate the emotional effects of online victimization (Poh Chua et al., 2022; Peker & Yalçın, 2023). In alignment with this, our findings demonstrate how participants leaned on emotional support from family, peers, and community as protective factors. Indeed, these emotional support factors may act as buffers against online hate (Bedrosova et al., 2022). Many participants in the current study spoke of reconnecting with their Indigenous culture and knowledges as part of their strategy to cope with online hate, often describing this process as advocacy. This extends prior research by showing that cultural resurgence strengthens not only identity affirmation but also functions as an active psychological regulation strategy that intertwines community supports with digital engagement. These findings align with Price and Dalgleish (2010) work showing that social media can function as a tool for Indigenous cultural resurgence, allowing youth to reconnect with traditions and languages in meaningful ways. Our research adds to this body of work by providing a persona story of how Indigenous youth blend problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in the face of online hate, showing the interconnectedness of cultural pride, community belonging, and digital literacy. Our findings further indicate that how youth mobilize problem-focused, emotion-focused, and culturally resurgent coping strategies simultaneously, highlighting a unique intersection of traditional knowledge with contemporary digital behaviour.

A recurring theme in the present study findings was the importance of reconnecting with culture and seeking guidance from trusted adults—coping strategies that were central to how participants processed and responded to online hate. This study shows how participants interweave guidance from Elders, Aunties, Knowledge Caretakers alongside digital strategies, which connects Indigenous ways of knowing with online behaviour. This was evident in Sara's story, a Métis youth questioning their gender identity, who drew strength from both online and offline communities to navigate harmful online interactions. Sara's experience highlights how Indigenous youth balance social media use with cultural, relational, and community resources to balance wellbeing. Unlike broader trends where many young people hesitate to involve adults (fearing they may not understand digital complexities), Sara and other Indigenous young people actively sought out parents, Elders, Aunties, and Knowledge Caretakers.

These findings reflect relational, intergenerational approaches to help-seeking that challenge dominant assumptions within cyberbullying literature. They demonstrate how Indigenous youth draw on community-based coping strategies that reduce psychological harm, foster a sense of emotional safety, and maintain connection to culture. *Culturally resurgent resilience*, as illustrated here, is conceptualized as a form of resilience rooted in traditional teachings, relationality, and intergenerational kinship. Rather than being solely an individual skill, it emerges through participation in kinship networks, connection to Indigenous knowledge systems, and engagement with community values. Surrounded by affirming voices from family members and Indigenous activists on social media, Sara exemplified culturally resurgent resilience. Their story highlights the psychological impacts of online hate while showing community support and Indigenous knowledge systems foster identity safety, emotional regulation, and empowerment. Participants were acutely aware of the pervasiveness of online hate targeting Indigenous people. Indigenous youth face divergent challenges in this regard, as their online experiences are shaped by historical trauma and the ongoing negative impact of colonialism (Carlson & Kennedy, 2021; Paul et al., 2024). Feelings of isolation, overwhelm, and vulnerability were reported in the current study findings, echoing previous findings that link cyberhate to increased psychological stress

among marginalized youth (Wachs et al., 2022b; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Arshad-Ayaz, Naseem, & Hizaoui, 2022). Although the study focuses on resilience and coping, participants' encounters with online hate were intertwined with reported emotional impacts, including anxiety, distress, and increased vigilance while navigating digital spaces. Importantly, this study shows that Indigenous youth actively resist these harms by rejecting assimilationist narratives and engaging in cultural resurgence, positioning digital participation as a site of political, cultural, and psychological resilience. This aligns with Alfred's (2005) concept of the warrior – defined not by violence or confrontation but cultural strength, resistance, and responsibility. Participants described defining Indigeneity on their own terms and using digital tools to protect and uplift Indigenous people. This reframing of “warrior” situates online engagement as a contemporary form of Indigenous resistance and community care. Participants' actions indicate how identity-affirming digital engagement can counteract internalized harm and promote psychological resilience. These culturally resurgent strategies reflect experiences that are not typically captured in cyberbullying research, marking a unique contribution of this study.

Online privacy and platform awareness also generated as important themes. Participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the risks and benefits of digital engagement, often modifying their privacy settings and follower interactions to ensure emotional safety. Rather than responding to online aggression with confrontation, many chose to disengage from negativity and seek meaningful offline conversations with trusted individuals. Our findings were also consistent with other studies showing that Indigenous youth and their communities experienced a shared recognition of the harmful colonialist attitudes and associated trauma but also realized the potential to challenge hurtful narratives on social media and use digital spaces to promote discursive shifts and positive social change (Carlson & Frazer, 2020; Carlson & Kennedy, 2021). By linking these individual coping strategies to broader social and systemic implications, this study provides guidance on how platform providers, educators, and policymakers could ground interventions in Indigenous knowledges to reduce online hate. These findings point to systemic implications, particularly the need for digital platforms to attend to online hate specifically targeting Indigenous peoples, and to develop content moderation practices that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. Participants expressed a desire for greater educational support to help them navigate online environments in ways that protect their wellbeing. Consistent with UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes the role of education in responding to online hate speech, participants in this study called for curricula that reflect their lived experiences. The findings suggest a need for reimagined Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs that center Indigenous worldviews and directly address racism and exclusion (Goforth et al., 2024). This study emphasized that culturally resurgent, community-led SEL programs could serve as systemic interventions that go beyond individual coping and address structural roots of online hate. Such programs must move beyond universal frameworks by grounding in Indigenous pedagogies, land-based learning, and community-led approaches to digital citizenship. SEL programs that are community-led and culturally affirming could play an essential role in helping Indigenous youth develop strategies for resilience in both online and offline life. This implies that mainstream SEL models may be insufficient without Indigenous knowledges that honour land-based learning, collective responsibility, and relationality.

While the experiences shared in this study were situated within distinct cultural and geographic contexts, they highlight broader patterns of strength and resistance among Indigenous youth. Indeed, the perspectives of male and non-binary youth, youth from other Indigenous Nations, or those living in other regions may differ, highlighting the need for future research that incorporates diverse voices. Responses to online hate may vary across

Nations, geographies, access to technology, and community supports, highlighting the need for localized approaches. Future research could also explore the potential long-term psychological and social impacts of repeated exposure to online hate, as well as the influence of structural conditions such as platform types, data governance, and access to culturally resurgent services.

While technology and social media shaped the lives of adolescents, participants emphasized that traditional teachings, family support, and community connections that were key aspects of culturally resurgent resilience. By drawing on family networks and Indigenous teachings, participants mitigated the emotional toll of online hate, affirmed their identities, and sustained a sense of safety and belonging. These findings call for educators, health professionals, and youth-serving systems to prioritize partnerships with Indigenous peoples rather than short-term or one-size-fits-all programming. Further, these study findings indicate the critical role of educators, health professionals, youth service providers, working in true partnership with Indigenous people to develop relational, culturally resurgent supports in response to online hate. This research advances understanding of the intersecting identities of Indigenous and gender-diverse youth and highlights their capacity to transform digital spaces as empowered online warriors.

4.1. Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the sample size was small and drawn from a specific region, which limits generalizability across diverse Indigenous Nations and peoples. Additionally, all four participants were young Métis women, and three identified as bisexual/pansexual; the experiences and coping strategies of male, non-binary, or youth from other Indigenous Nations may differ. Second, participants self-selected into the study, meaning those most willing to speak about online harm may differ from youth who experience these issues but remain silent or untrusting of research processes. Third, the study focused primarily on coping strategies and did not examine long-term psychological, social, or developmental impacts of repeated exposure to online hate. Finally, although digital spaces were central to participants' stories, this study did not analyze platform-specific mechanisms, algorithms, or privacy tools that shape youth experiences, an area that warrants future attention. Future research would benefit from multi-site, Nation-specific, and mixed-method designs that account for the diversity of Indigenous young peoples' digital experiences.

4.2. Conclusion

Indigenous youth in this study actively reshaped online spaces through digital self-protection, engagement with traditional teachings, and intergenerational support, turning them into sites of care, identity affirmation, and cultural resurgence. These findings advance scholarship on cyberbullying and digital resilience by showing how youth draw on relational, cultural, and intergenerational knowledge to resist online harm. The study also highlights the power of a persona story-based methodology for centering youth voices and Indigenous epistemologies, offering a model for future research that approaches digital experiences with relationality, cultural resurgence, and respect for lived experience.

The findings highlight that Indigenous youth navigate digital environments within broader socioecological and structural contexts, where support from family, Elders, and community networks interacts with digital platform policies and broader societal systems. This highlights the need for systemic interventions, including culturally resurgent SEL curricula, community-led digital literacy initiatives, and platform governance practices that attend to the experiences of Indigenous youth.

Indigenous youth in this study weave resilience, identity, and care for community into the digital spaces they inhabit, turning online worlds into sites of cultural resurgence. Through digital self-protection, uplifting traditional teachings, and intergenerational support, youth carry forward knowledge, nurture wellbeing, and uphold responsibilities to family, community, and culture. By centering Indigenous ways of knowing, relational practices, and storytelling methodologies, this research honors youth voices and offers pathways for better understanding adolescent digital engagement, socioemotional growth, and culturally resurgent approaches to mental health. These findings point to the importance of nurturing relationships with Indigenous peoples that are guided by reciprocity, relationality, and lived experience. Through these connections, youth are supported as they move through both the challenges and the possibilities of online life.

REFERENCES

- Alfred, T. (2005). *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. University of Toronto Press.
- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. UBC Press.
- Arshad-Ayaz, A., Naseem, M. A., & Hizaoui, H. (2022). Perspectives of Muslim and minority Canadian youth on hate speech and social media. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 17(1), 21-39. <https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29489>
- Bedrosova, M., Machackova, H., Šerek, J., Smahel, D., & Blaya, C. (2022). The relation between the cyberhate and cyberbullying experiences of adolescents in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 126, 107013. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.107013>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Brewer, R., Whitten, T., Logos, K., Sayer, M., Langos, C., Holt, T. J., Cale, J., & Goldsmith, A. (2023). Examining the psychosocial and behavioral factors associated with adolescent engagement in multiple types of cyberdeviance: Results from an Australian study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32(7), 2046-2062. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02586-0>
- Broll, R., Dunlop, C., & Crooks, C. V. (2018). Cyberbullying and internalizing difficulties among indigenous adolescents in Canada: Beyond the effect of traditional bullying. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11(1), 71-79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0163-y>
- Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2018). *Cyberbullying and Indigenous Australians: a review of the literature*. Macquarie University.
- Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2020). "They got filters": Indigenous social media, the settler gaze, and a politics of hope. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120925261>
- Carlson, B., & Kennedy, T. (2021). Us mob online: The perils of identifying as indigenous on social media. *Genealogy (Basel)*, 5(2), 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5020052>
- Castañó-Pulgarín, S. A., Suárez-Betancur, N., Vega, L. M. T., & López, H. M. H. (2021). Internet, social media and online hate speech. systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 58, 101608. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101608>
- CIHR. (2015). *Guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal people*. Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
- Czyzewski, K. (2011). Colonialism as a broader social determinant of health. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 2(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2011.2.1.5>
- Gelber, K., & McNamara, L. (2016). Evidencing the harms of hate speech. *Social Identities*, 22(3), 324-341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2015.1128810>
- Goforth, A. N., Nichols, L. M., Sun, J., Violante, A. E., Brooke, E., Kusumaningsih, S., Howlett, R., Hogenson, D., & Graham, N. (2024). Cultural adaptation of an educator social-emotional learning program to support Indigenous students. *School Psychology Review*, 53(4), 365-381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2022.2144091>

- Government of British Columbia. (2019). *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Retrieved from <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>
- Hare, J., & Pidgeon, M. (2011). The way of the warrior: Indigenous youth navigating the challenges of schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(2), 93-111.
- Hutson, E., Kelly, S., & Militello, L. K. (2018). Systematic review of cyberbullying interventions for youth and parents with implications for Evidence-Based practice. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, 15(1), 72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/wvn.12257>
- Kovach, M. (2021). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company.
- Louie, C. (2021). *Rez rules: My indictment of Canada's and America's systemic racism against Indigenous peoples* (1st ed.). McClelland & Stewart.
- Molyneaux, H., O'donnell, S., Kakekaspan, C., Walmark, B., Budka, P., & Gibson, K. (2014). Social media in remote First Nation communities. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 39(2), 275-288. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2014v39n2a2619>
- Ng, E. D., Chua, J. Y. X., & Shorey, S. (2022). The effectiveness of educational interventions on traditional bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 23(1), 132-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020933867>
- Paul, J., McQuaid, R. J., Hopkins, C., Perri, A., Stewart, S., Matheson, K., Anisman, H., & Bombay, A. (2024). Relations between bullying and distress among youth living in First Nations communities: Assessing direct and moderating effects of culture-related variables. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 61(3), 429-439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615221109359>
- Paul, W., Monchalain, R., Auger, M., & Jones, C. (2023). 'By identifying myself as métis, I didn't feel safe...': Experiences of navigating racism and discrimination among métis women, two-spirit and gender diverse community members in Victoria, Canada. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, 28(4), 244-251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13558196231188632>
- Peker, A., & Yalçın, R. Ü. (2023). Resilience levels of Turkish adolescents cyber-victims in social networking sites: The mediation roles of cyberbullying and active coping. *Current Psychology*, 42(22), 19286-19301. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04163-y>
- Poh Chua, S., Xiang Yi, T., Chin Choo, G. Y., Chee Seng, T., Tjin Ai, J. T., Sew Kim, L., & Lokithasan, K. A. P. (2022). Cyber-victimization among adolescents: Its relationships with primary appraisal and coping strategies. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 17(4), 334-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2021.2008077>
- Price, M., & Dagleish, J. (2010). Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people. *Youth Studies Australia*, 29(2), 51-59.
- Rice, E. S., Haynes, E., Royce, P., & Thompson, S. C. (2016). Social media and digital technology use among indigenous young people in Australia: A literature review. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 15(1), 81. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-016-0366-0>
- Sam, J., Richardson, C. G., & Currie, L. M. (2022). Application of Two-Eyed Seeing in adolescent mental health to bridge design thinking and Indigenous collective storytelling. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(22), 14972.
- Segura, L., Estévez, J. F., & Estévez, E. (2020). Empathy and emotional intelligence in adolescent cyberaggressors and cybervictims. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(13), 4681. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17134681>
- Statistics Canada. (2024). *Online hate and aggression among young people in Canada*. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240227/dq240227b-eng.htm>
- Strohmeier, D., & Gradingier, P. (2024). Longitudinal antecedents and consequences of ethnic, cyber and offline victimization. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 21(4), 540-559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2023.2271209>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://nctr.ca>

J. Sam, M. Biferie, D. Gallardo, S. Forcier, R. Hussey, C. Hein-Salvi, H. Zhao, J. Shapka, & J. Hare

- UNESCO. (2021). *Addressing hate speech through education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377658>
- Wachs, S., Machimbarrena, J. M., Wright, M. F., Gámez-Guadix, M., Yang, S., Sittichai, R., Singh, R., Biswal, R., Flora, K., Daskalou, V., Maziridou, E., Hong, J. S., & Krause, N. (2022a). Associations between coping strategies and cyberhate involvement: Evidence from adolescents across three world regions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(11), 6749. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116749>
- Wachs, S., Gámez-Guadix, M., & Wright, M. F. (2022b). Online hate speech victimization and depressive symptoms among adolescents: The protective role of resilience. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 25(7), 416-423. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2022.0009>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through an Insight Development Grant (no. 430-2021-00577). We extend our deepest gratitude to the Métis Nation Government in British Columbia for their guidance, partnership, and trust throughout this work. Their commitment to uplifting the voices and experiences of Métis youth grounded this study in community values and relationships, and we are honoured to walk alongside them in this research journey.

AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Full name: Johanna Sam, PhD

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: Michael Smith Health Research BC Scholar and Associate Professor, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Michelle Dusko Biferie, MPH

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: PhD Student, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia.

Full Name: Daniel Gallardo, MA

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Sabrina Forcier, MA

Institutional affiliation: Yorkville University,

Institutional address: 88 6th St, New Westminster, BC V3L 2Z7

Short biographical sketch: Master's student, Department of counselling psychology at Yorkville University. She is beginning her career as a psychotherapist and plans to attain a PhD in the future.

Full Name: Rachel Hussey, MA

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: PhD student, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Claire Hein-Salvi, BA

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: MA student, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Haoyu Zhao, MPH

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: PhD Candidate, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Jennifer Shapka, PhD

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: Professor, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.

Full Name: Jan Hare, PhD

Institutional affiliation: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education

Institutional address: Neville Scarfe Building, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Short biographical sketch: Dean, Faculty of Education, Professor, Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Canada.