

Christopher Davis: The Paradox of Tolerance In Online Spaces

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Created 21/07/2019 - 9:13am

Submitted by Roy Schestowitz on Sunday 21st of July 2019 09:13:02 AM Filed under [OSS](#) [1]



In online spaces, "tolerance" refers to who you allow in the community. To be tolerant means to allow people from all walks of life into your space, regardless of race, sexual or gender identity, or other factors used to marginalize people within society. To go further, a good community should do more than tolerate them, but let them know that they are welcome and that they will not be marginalized within the community.

A person is marginalized when they are abused for their identity, or made to feel less important because of it. In real life, this manifests as workforce discrimination, housing discrimination, police brutality, and many other forms of oppression that make it so that the value of a victim's life and livelihood are less important than the oppressor's. In an online space, marginalization is more subtle. It would be if a black person saw someone use the "n word" or worse, is called one without repercussion. It would be if a trans woman had to deal with someone saying that they are "men trying to invade women's spaces". It would be if a woman in general had to deal with men making sexual remarks and unwanted advances. These things all make the victims uncomfortable, and the lack of action taken can make them feel unimportant.

Some communities like to think of themselves as "perfectly tolerant". This means that they would tolerate people that take actions to make marginalized people uncomfortable. When a community does this, they are actually being intolerant, and enabling abusers.

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