

In our comment streams people often cause offence by writing things they would never say face to face. More often than not such comments are discriminatory, intentionally or otherwise.

For this reason we take a very hard line on discrimination: a comment that takes unjust aim at a group of people is going to go and stay gone. Even comments that teeter on the edge of discrimination won't be tolerated - removing them is how we aim to foster a safe and constructive commenting community.

As I find myself explaining why discriminatory comments have been moderated more often than I'd like, I thought it might help to provide some general guidance on how we define discrimination and weed it out.

What is discrimination?

There are three types of discrimination that stand out in The Conversation comments; **direct discrimination**

,
hate speech
and
victimisation
.

Direct discrimination is probably the easiest to point out. The statements tend to be blunt, outing a person on particular grounds and attempting to restrict their voice on The Conversation.

You comment on an article, voicing your opinion. Someone replies that because you're a man, your words mean nothing.

You say the article isn't worth reading because it's written by a woman who is just preaching her own opinion

A person of Islam faith comments on a piece about the Cronulla Riots - he's told by commenters he wouldn't understand the complex issue.

And it's not just attacks on the grounds of race, age and sex that constitute discrimination. Discrimination can be towards age, carer or parental status, disability, employment, race, religion, level of education, gender identity and sexual orientation and marital status.

Discrimination can also be directed at someone with personal association with someone who has, or is assumed to have, one of these personal characteristics.

It can even be directed at physical traits.

Hate speech

Hate speech is not a new phenomenon. According to the Washington Post there were [2.6 million tweets](#) during last year's presidential election "containing language frequently found in anti-Semitic speech."

Hate speech is an attempt to abuse a public space to push one's own discriminatory agenda - everything from essay-style rants to one-sentence attacks.

Victimisation, or victim-blaming

The popularity of commenting forums have transformed the way we understand and experience online victimisation, according to UNSW senior lecturer in criminology [Alyce McGovern](#).

One example is victim-blaming on social media after the Kardashian robbery. According to McGovern, after the incident Facebook and Twitter users argued Kardashian "got what she deserves." Someone even suggested "maybe she will cover herself up now."

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Written by Molly Glassey, Audience Development Manager, The Conversation

And that's classic victimisation - blaming a person for the harm that befell them. Some other examples include:

She was wearing a short skirt so she deserved it.

She was much in control of the situation as he was.

He shouldn't have put himself in that situation.

When in doubt...

The rule of thumb I use for diagnosing discrimination or deciding whether a comment profits a piece at all is:

1.

Imagine there is a teenage student reading the comments for an assignment.

2.

What do you think this student would think of the particular comment? Would you be *proud* to have your comment referenced in their assignment? Does your comment add value to their research? And most importantly, could your comment in some way offend or confuse the student?

3.

Now imagine the student is a part of a marginalised community. How would you answer these questions now?

But Molly, I have a right to free speech

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Yes, you do, but you don't have the right to have your comments published on The Conversation. The Conversation is a website that aims to inform readers by tapping into academic expertise. We see our comment streams as an extension of that mission. We reserve the right to select only the comments that will advance discussion and further inform our readers.

And even if we didn't reserve the right to edit comments, free speech has never been an unfettered right. As Oliver Wendall Holmes wrote: "The most stringent protection of freedom of speech would not protect a man falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing panic..."

For us weeding out comments that will cause hurt or offence is a no brainer. We want voices of reason to guide readers through our material. Before you comment, pair your intellect with sensitivity. A discussion worth fostering should never resort to attacks of any kind.

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Read more <http://theconversation.com/im-not-a-racist-but-how-we-monitor-discrimination-75694>