

On the privilege of not experiencing online hate speech

As a semi-active young adult user of different social media I can't help but come across hate speech. Ranging from the comment section of public news outlets (German Tagesschau) to personal Instagram accounts of queer folks the occurrence of hate speech is manifold and individually cruel but at the same time following established structures. In this essay I will present my thoughts on the logic and mechanisms behind hate speech and how it is linked with privilege.

A privilege is a certain type of advantage held by a specific group of people. Privileges are produced by power relations and systems of oppression and discrimination like white supremacy, patriarchy and many more. Holding certain privileges does not negate potential hardships but exempt people from certain types of vulnerability or discrimination.

I think that the privilege of not experiencing (online) hate speech can be part of other privileges such as white privilege, cis privilege, straight privilege, or others. Then, it is maintained by the same discourses that – more or less subtly – uphold and cement systems of oppression. Those discourses are led by the privileged groups benefitting of the oppression, those with the power to control the discourse and the power of interpretation. At the same time hate speech can reinforce sexist, ableist or classist (etc.) discourse ad act and be wielded as a tool of oppression. Using hate speech to target and drive people off platforms, mainstream opinions are upheld. This can reinforce the cycle of hate and contribute to the radicalisation of people and spaces.s