

Intergroup Toleration and its Implications for Culturally Diverse Societies

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As many nations experience increases in their cultural and religious diversity, there has been a strong emphasis on finding ways to best manage the challenges that come along with such increased diversity. Over the past few decades, many governments, policy experts, and academics have highlighted the importance of *toleration* of group difference as an approach to managing diversity. Intergroup tolerance emphasizes citizenship and individual freedom to define and develop one's own identity and way of life, thereby offering a crucial space for religious and cultural diversity. Intergroup tolerance is sometimes seen as the opposite of prejudice or even equivalent to openness and embracing diversity. Yet tolerance is, first and foremost, spoken about in the sense of tolerating someone doing something that you really do not agree with, or towards whom you actually have negative feelings. A diverse, equal, and peaceful society does not require that we all like each other, but it does mean that people must at least tolerate one another. The main thing is that all people are given the right to live their lives according to their own discretion.

Tolerance is not an easy matter because it requires self-control and there are always limits and also possible dark sides to it. Not everything can and should be tolerated and this implies that people should be able to critically question each other and they need to set standards for what is permitted in society. Tolerance may also hamper the movement towards a more just society by making the majority feel complacent about the standing of minority groups and reduce their willingness to address structural inequalities. As tolerance may be considered a strategy for justice

and minority protection, it may also demotivate people to engage in actions that challenge existing disadvantages. Moreover, tolerance may reinforce the power asymmetry between the group 'tolerating' from the group 'being tolerated'. Such an asymmetry can lead the group that is an object of toleration to feel a reduced sense of well-being and self-esteem if they perceive their group as merely being 'tolerated' by the majority.

To encourage tolerance, successful policies need to set norms and stimulate the willingness and ability to disagree and put up with differences. In doing so there are several issues that should be carefully considered.

- The focus should be on concrete cases or situations rather than abstract principles. It is one thing to agree, for example, with the ideal of freedom and equality, and something quite different to agree with the actual enactment of those ideals with regards to specific dissenting out-group practices.
- Presenting dissenting beliefs and practices in moral terms makes toleration more difficult.
- Tolerance is not a global construct, but depends on whom, what, and when people are asked to tolerate dissenting beliefs and practices, and principled reasons rather than prejudicial attitudes can underlie non-acceptance.
- Perspective taking and intercultural interactions should be stimulated because they can promote a better understanding of the specific reasons behind dissenting practices and beliefs.
- It should be recognized that tolerance is much more vulnerable than intolerance: it is easier to convince tolerant people to give up their tolerant attitudes than to persuade intolerant people to become more tolerant.

- The possible dark sides of toleration discourses and policies should be recognized including the negative implications that these may have for intergroup relations and the psychological well-being of those that are tolerated.
- Authorities, politicians, and policy makers play an important role in setting toleration norms and building inclusive institutions and egalitarian citizenship regimes.

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