

That's Not Alright With Me

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Over the past year, the media has brought attention to a number of celebrities, politicians, comedians, and coaches who have made very public and very offensive racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic comments. The power of language is clearly evident by the pain and outrage caused by such comments. It seems that, even today, public figures in our country struggle to show respect for all people.

While it is easy to point the finger at public figures, the true challenge lies with our own introspection and awareness of our own 'backyard.' People hear and sometimes make comments that mock, degrade, or demonstrate ignorance about people from different backgrounds. This happens on the quad, in residence halls, in the cafeteria, and many other places. Sometimes these comments are malicious, and other times are products of ignorance, but the effects are profound. These words impact not only the targeted group, but everyone who hears the words as well. They reinforce stereotypes, biases, and prejudices, and undermine the dignity of all human beings.

How do we develop a campus culture that practices pluralism, celebrating differences and providing mutual respect? It starts at home, and with something as basic as the words we say. How do we respond when we hear someone say something that is prejudiced? Many people are stunned and respond in silence, but there is a better way. Challenging offensive comments takes courage, but makes a huge statement about what you will and will not tolerate, and can educate someone about the impact of their words. Make a decision to challenge yourself to be more aware of the language you use and the (in)sensitivity it shows members of other cultural groups. Choose to confront offensive humor and slurs, and be open to feedback if someone shares with you that something you said was hurtful.

Challenging biased language is an important part of building a respectful culture where people from all cultural groups and worldviews are valued.

For more information about challenging biased language, visit the webpage for the Anti-Defamation League,

http://www.adl.org/education/bias_language/resources.asp