

WORDS MATTER

There are few greater weapons than that of words. They have an intense power unlike any other. They can build you up and tear you down in a single breath. I have always had a passion for writing, especially spoken word poetry, and I have seen first-hand how words can change someone's life. Words give you the ability to inspire a scene of peace, hope, and a bright future that's wide open, or to take an axe to the dreams of anyone unfortunate enough to listen. With great power comes great responsibility, yet many fail to use their words for good and lack the compassion required to yield such power.

The Words Matter: Free Speech on the University Campus video demonstrates a few key and common situations in which words can do harm, and shows the impact it has on the individuals used as target practice for someone else's hate and anger. Situations like those described in the video could be considered hate crimes - actively putting someone down based on prejudice - not in a physically violent manner, but in a way that leaves broken hearts and minds behind. While the First Amendment to the United States Constitution declares Freedom of Speech, the Fourteenth Amendment, every Civil Rights Act, and the Declaration of Independence state that all men are created equal, and by obligation, they should be treated as such. Especially in educational environments such as schools and universities, this behavior is unacceptable. The degrading of someone's confidence and self-worth is not something to be ignored, or used freely. It's one thing to respectfully speak your mind in a manner that kindly says, "I disagree," and another thing entirely to make generalizations, assumptions, and spit "You're inferior" at another human being. To implement my personal beliefs, God didn't create us as a beautiful, unique variety of individuals in His image just to watch us fight and tear each other down for our differences. We were created to love and appreciate each other in all our opposing glory, and to celebrate what makes us special.

It's hard to regulate what people say, and especially what they think, but the main cause of discrimination is a lack of education and understanding about the targeted people. I think students need to be educated about differing cultures, religions, and world views from a young age. If they are exposed to those differences when they are young, they will have time to digest the information, and pretty soon those around us with different skin colors, clothes, or opinions will be accepted as a part of the diverse world we live in. Social media is a whole new world, and one that is very hard to regulate. There are many social media outlets in which you can report and remove content, but in terms of preventing content from being publicized in the first place, it is nearly impossible. Maybe a type of filter could be established using artificial intelligence to weed-out negative and harmful comments. As far as universities go, precautions to any type of presentation should be taken, and the intentions of the demonstration or activity should be thoroughly evaluated. If the purpose is pure; to educate, show support, or build others up, then it should be approved; if not, it should be shut down.

You can't control what someone thinks or says, but if we work together, we can control the major influences they are exposed to, and show people from a young age that we are meant to celebrate our differences, and despite them, we are one. Love, kindness, and positive communication are universal, and they unite us all. In the wise words of Maya Angelou, "Hate. It has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has not solved one yet." Freedom means choice, and I often pray that that everyone will choose to use their words and actions for good. Until there is a common respect, love, and empathy for one another, the dream of world peace and equality will remain in the clouds.