

## We need to embrace the progression of language

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The word "retarded" is one of the more controversial terms you'll hear as you walk through the halls of LGHS. Opinions regarding this word's offensiveness are genuinely divided. Many students use it colloquially as a synonym for 'stupid' or 'dumb.' Others are quick to chastise those students for using the term, and are happy to explain why the r-word is offensive to many people.

Generally, those who are more politically correct and crusade against the r-word are considered more enlightened on this issue, while the high schoolers who use the term in everyday conversations without second thought are perceived as ignorant. While this may be true in many cases, I would like to offer a voice of dissent against those who righteously denounce the casual use of the r-word. The word "retarded" should not be considered highly offensive because the change in its meaning is simply an example of the natural evolution of language, the medical community is in the process of abandoning the term, and its usage in casual conversations is not malicious.

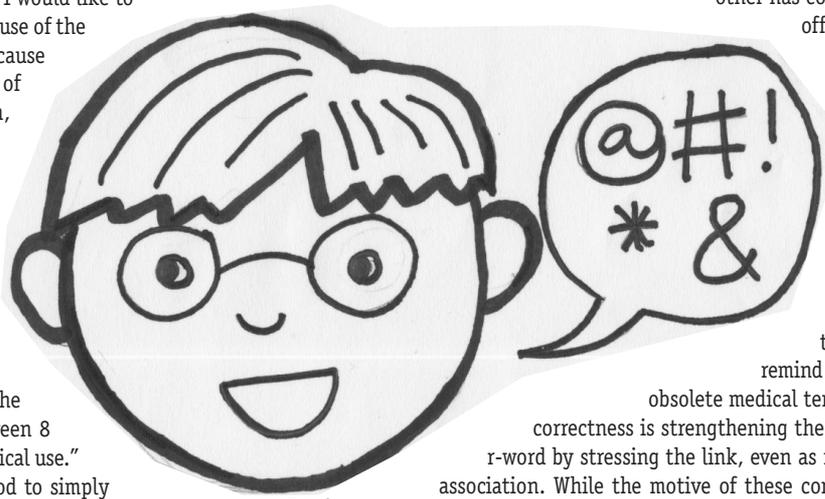
Over the last several hundred years, medical terms for mental handicaps have changed as the terms are adopted into the vernacular and eventually grow to have new meanings, rendering the original terms offensive in a medical context. The nature of language is dynamic, and medical terms are inevitably borrowed for conversational usage. Though teenagers have only witnessed this change firsthand in the evolution of the r-word, it has in fact been going for generations. In the Online Etymology Dictionary, the entry for the word "moron" reads: "1910, medical Latin... Adopted by the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded with a technical definition 'adult with a mental age between 8 and 12;' used as an insult since 1922 and subsequently dropped from technical use." Today, the word "moron" is not frequently used, but it is now understood to simply refer to an unintelligent person. I posit that it would be hard to find a person who still considers the term 'moron' offensive. More familiar to modern youth is the word 'idiot.' According to the American Heritage Medical Dictionary, the word "idiot" means "a person of profound mental retardation having a mental age below three years... The term belongs to a classification system no longer in use and is now considered offensive." The apparent pattern is that words which were formerly associated with mental disabilities can develop new meanings over time; furthermore, society does not insist on finding these words perpetually offensive. Evidently, a word is not permanently tied to a single definition assigned to it at a certain time. Otherwise, we would all have been educated by now about the offensiveness of the i- and m-words and the ignorance of those who continue to use them.

Perhaps the argument that the r-word should be reserved exclusively for medical use would be more persuasive if the medical community was as steadfastly determined to ban the colloquial use of the r-word as are the advocates of political correctness. In reality, however, the medical community has proved to be very flexible, adopting new terms such as "mentally challenged" or "intellectually disabled" as the term 'medically retarded' became offensive due to its dual meanings as both a casual word for stupid and

a medical term for the disabled. In 2006, the organization formerly known as the American Association on Mental Retardation changed its name to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. In its FAQ, it states that "while intellectual disability is the preferred term, it takes time for language that is used in legislation, regulation, and even for the names of organizations, to change." In 2010, President Barack Obama signed Kosa's law into effect. This law replaces the term 'medical retardation' with the term 'intellectual disability' in federal laws. Though some organizations still use the r-word in a medical context, the overwhelming trend is the abandonment of the term 'medical retardation.'

Most teenagers who make an offhand comment to their friends about being 'so retarded' have no feelings of malice towards those with intellectual disabilities. These people have no more of a desire to offend those with disabilities than the teens who tell their friends that they're 'acting like idiots.' The difference between these phrases is that one has had the element of time to dull its offensiveness, while the other has come onto the vernacular scene more recently. The offensiveness of the word is tied only to the closeness of its association with a real mental disorder.

The r-word is deeply ingrained in the vocabulary of millions of people, a group made up in large part by high school students. The medical community has realized this and abandoned the term. The United States government has realized this and made laws to use alternate terminology. Now, the group mainly responsible for the prolonged association of the word 'retarded' with intellectual disabilities are the politically correct campaigners who remind people as often as they can about the increasingly



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obsolete medical term that the word is tied to. The cause of political correctness is strengthening the ties between the intellectually disabled and the r-word by stressing the link, even as medical groups and lawmakers try to escape this association. While the motive of these concerned citizens is understandable, their awareness campaigns are having the opposite of their desired effect: more people will be offended by the r-word for a longer period of time. In the end, the result will be the same as it has again and again in the past. The r-word will become an accepted word and lose its offensive connotation, and someday a similar controversy will emerge about the use of the word disabled, or the d-word, as people begin using that term in an offensive manner.

To clarify, my intention is not to encourage the use of the r-word by my peers or by anyone else. However, I do think that in the wake of the changes in medical and legal terminology, as well as the widespread and casual use of the r-word, a reassessment is in order by those who seek to reinforce the fading link between the r-word and the intellectually disabled in attempts to maintain the word's offensiveness. Those who use the word 'retarded' conversationally should not be made to feel as if they have perpetrated a hate crime. This is out of proportion with the word's offensiveness in the era of Rosa's Law and the term 'intellectually disabled', and it is ultimately a regressive position that slows down the natural evolution of language through which the r-word will eventually offend no one.

(Sources: The Online Etymology Dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary, Disability Scoop)

## Racist vines aren't okay

by Sean Clark  
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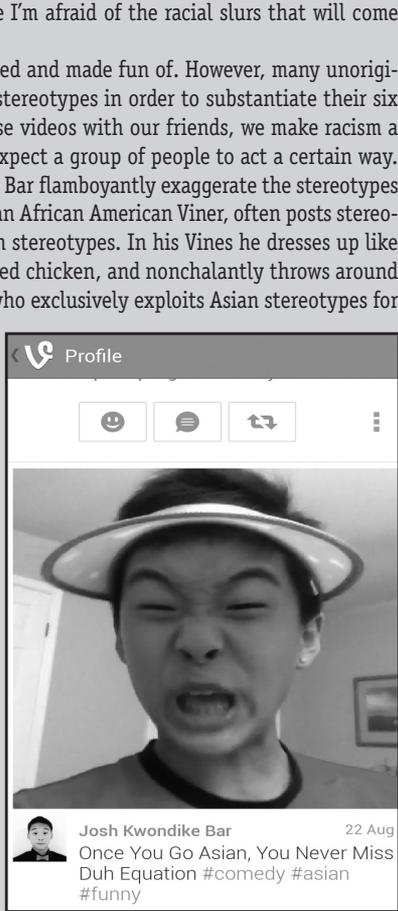
Over the past few months I have been absorbed into the new social media craze that is Vine, a new app that lets smartphone users create six second videos. At first, it was my guilty pleasure. I would obsessively scroll through the popular page and laugh until tears came out of my eyes, but recently the videos that have the most "likes" and "reVines" use racism as a cheap punchline.

The trend right now is to make a video comparing two different stereotypes. I cannot go on Vine without seeing a plethora of videos showing someone saying "White people be like," "Black people be like," and "Asian people be like." These Vines are not criticized by viewers because the racist implications are not extreme, but the hints of relaxed bigotry promote a culture that accepts racism. I can no longer go on the Vine popular page in public because I'm afraid of the racial slurs that will come out of my phone.

Racism is a serious issue that should not be belittled and made fun of. However, many unoriginal Vine comedians have resorted to racial slurs and stereotypes in order to substantiate their six seconds of internet glory. As we laugh and share these videos with our friends, we make racism a laughing matter. These videos passively teach us to expect a group of people to act a certain way. Famous "Viners" such as King Bach and Josh Kwondike Bar flamboyantly exaggerate the stereotypes that apply to the minority they belong to. King Bach, an African American Viner, often posts stereotypical videos that enforce negative African American stereotypes. In his Vines he dresses up like a "gangster," robs white people of watermelon and fried chicken, and nonchalantly throws around the n-word. Josh Kwondike Bar is an Asian teenager who exclusively exploits Asian stereotypes for a cheap laugh. In his Vines he wears a visor, squints his eyes, and says things in an unrealistic and exaggerated Chinese accent. The Asian stereotypes he makes light of include bad driving, squinted eyes, and intelligence. Viners should take responsibility for the harm their videos cause to every minority.

Subtle racism is an issue that is becoming more and more prevalent in our generation. Vine did not start subtle racism, but it has made it more accessible to youth. It's a sad fact that racist jokes get more attention than innocent jokes. Because of this, desperate comedians disguise their prejudice in the name of humor.

Supporting racist Vines will only encourage the creators to make more of them, further enforcing stereotypes. Even if racism is accompanied by a few laughs, it is still racism and it is still prejudice. Racism is so deeply rooted in our society that it is now affecting the language and humor we use every day, and that is not a culture that I want to be a part of.



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## Problems are never trivial

by Rheagan Rizio  
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In high school, it's easy to get caught up in your own workload. Homework, grades, and test scores become your life, and everything else takes a backseat. It's easy to think that you're

the only person in the world who is struggling. Although seems like your friends' problems are insignificant, it is see things from their perspective and not dismiss them because you think that you do not have time for their trivial issues.

Your friends have as many problems as you do. It may not always seem like it, but they're probably struggling just as much as you are. It is important to recognize this, and to be considerate of your friends. If they're in a bad mood or having a bad day, don't just get angry, try to empathize with them. They could be having personal problems, something could be wrong at home. You just don't know, and you won't know unless you ask.

Put yourself in their shoes. How would you feel if you were upset and your friends just blew you off to do other "more important" things? If you were unhappy about something, it's likely that you would want your friends to take notice and ask you

what's wrong. When we're little, we're taught to "Treat others the way you would like to be treated." It's still important to follow this advice, now more than ever, because of our teenage tendency to rely on peers more than parents.

You can't look at your friend's problems from only your point of view. Everyone is different, and everyone thinks differently. Something that may not seem that major to you might be extremely important to your friend. Your personal feelings about the matter are not important, what's important is that it matters to your friend. Even just knowing that you are there, and that you are willing to help them out if need be, could be enough to get them through whatever they are going through. And if they come to you to vent to you, don't make fun of them for their issues or ignore them because you don't think you have time for them. Listen to what they have to say, and only offer your advice if they ask for it.

It may seem like a weird thought now, but high school won't last forever. When these four years end, your exact grades on particular tests won't matter. Your class ranking won't be what you remember. But your friends and the memories that you make with them will stay with you forever. If you trivialize their issues and never listen to them, then you're not being a real friend. Humans are naturally social. They need others, and they rely on them. Friendship is a two-way street. You need to be a friend before you can expect friendship in return.

