

Understanding the derogatory power of the t-word

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Lorraine Cook /THE REVIEW

The Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for the LGBTQ community, tracked 21 fatal attacks against transgender people in 2015. While 21 deaths was the highest number yet recorded, statistics for 2016 are close to surpassing it, with 20 people lost as of this month.

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While it has only been a week since Milo Yiannopoulos caused an uproar with his campus appearance, the lasting effects of his visit continue. Following the Unity Fair and protests from the trans community and their allies, one important word has been absent from the campus conversation: the “t-word.”

The t-word, “tranny,” was displayed across posters last week in promotion of Yiannopoulos’ event. The posters, which bore the statement “Trannies are Gay,” left many students who identify within the trans community offended. However, many studies on campus were ignorant of the derogatory nature of the term.

Senior Jay Alston, the president of Haven, the university’s LGBTQ Registered Student Organization, shed light on the history of the term.

“Like all words, it means different things to different people,” he said. “But to me it is a derogatory slang word referring to transgender people, or people who are perceived to be transgender or drag queens whether they would identify or not.”

Alston also expressed his frustration with how the university handled the matter.

“While it got to the point of them saying, ‘We don’t approve of posters being posted without our knowledge,’ it didn’t really hit the point of what the poster said, signified or meant,” Alston said.

Alston also explained how the use of the word triggers a level of anxiety within the trans community and states the word embodies an “escalation of violence.”

“The second we normalize a word that dehumanizes somebody, you’re taking away a part of their humanity which will lead in violence — leading up until murder in some cases,” Alston said.

Violence against the transgender community has been a growing problem. The Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for the LGBTQ community, tracked 21 fatal attacks against transgender people in 2015. While 21 deaths was the highest number yet recorded, statistics for 2016 are close to surpassing it, with 20 people lost as of this month.

Junior Marc Hinte, a resident assistant for the all-gender living learning community, sees the word as “horrifying.”

“People don’t realize words have so much power,” Hinson said. “Words can lead to thoughts and actions that can become violence or microaggressions and macroaggressions.”

Alston said he hopes that incident promotes awareness of the word’s damaging meaning.

“The use of the word is othering,” Alston said. “‘You’re not going to fit into this box’ it’s a negative spiral and it shouldn’t be that way.”

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