



U. Arizona Students find that 'Words Hurt'

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(Arizona Daily Wildcat) (U-WIRE) TUCSON, Ariz. -- Members of University of Arizona's Theta Nu Xi multicultural sorority want students to know that words can hurt.

Theta Nu Xi's second annual "Create a Hate Free Zone" forum addressed the negative effects stereotypes and derogatory language can have on all groups of people.

"A lot of people don't realize how what they say can affect other people," said Priyanka Gupta, president of Theta Nu Xi.

About 90 people attended Thursday night's forum in the Modern Languages auditorium. The forum lasted almost three hours.

The three speakers at the forum addressed stereotypes based on many different factors, including race, gender and sexual preference.

A panel discussion with students, staff and members of the Tucson, Ariz., community followed the speakers' presentations.

Panel members included representatives from multicultural organizations, greek life and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

"We wanted it to be applicable to all groups of people," Gupta said. "We wanted to look at it in a really broad sense."

Speaker Brian Shimamoto, assistant director of multicultural education and advocacy for residential education, said stereotypes on campus are more common than people realize.

"We experience them as easily and as often as we breathe the air around us," he said.

Shimamoto noted that many people use derogatory language on a daily basis without realizing that it is offensive.

He said many people use phrases like "that's gay" or "that's retarded," not thinking that they might hurt someone.

"We want people to think before they speak and before they act about how they might affect other people," said Gupta, a molecular and cellular biology and business economics junior.

Speaker and panel member Cathy Busha, director of Wingspan, Tucson's GLBT community center, urged those at the forum to state their feelings when they hear language they find offensive.

"Letting others know you find it offensive can be really powerful," she said.

Shimamoto added that not saying anything only perpetuates a stereotype.

"Your silence is your acceptance," he said.

Gupta said she has experienced conflicting stereotypes because of both her culture and her affiliation with a sorority.

Gupta said generalizations based on stereotypes hurt everyone involved.

"You've placed a label on someone when you listen to a stereotype," she said. "It prevents you from really getting to know a person for who they are."

She said raising awareness of stereotypes is the first step to stopping them.

"A lot of it comes from people not knowing about other cultures," she said.

Students who attended the forum said it made them look at stereotypes from a different

perspective.

"A lot of people don't realize certain things are stereotypes," said Rachel Ogundi, a pre-nursing sophomore. "If people aren't aware, they're not going to make a change."

Communication senior Annette Peru said she was glad the event brought the subtle nature of stereotypes to light.

"I thought there was so much to gain from it," she said. "If you ignore things like this, you're just perpetuating the cycle that's already there."

<!-- Photos Begin -->

photo1: 12412_01_1_1.jpg

photo1 credit: Heather Fauland

photo1 desc: Panel speaker Jomar Jenkins, an undeclared junior, addresses a question at the Create a Hate Free Zone forum Thursday night in the Modern Languages building.

photo2:

photo2 credit:

photo2 desc:

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