

# BSU's fashion show sets precedent for student activism



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As polarizing a figure as NBA superstar LeBron James is in the realm of barbershop conversations and Twitter debates, President Donald Trump incomparably proved this past fall that he is the current “king” of divisiveness.

Even James agreed, only adding fuel to the fire of controversy.

Instead of mimicking Michael Jordan's numerous Sports Illustrated covers of either an action shot on the hard wood or posing with the Larry O'Brien trophy, LeBron took a different approach when the illustrious magazine crowned him the 2016 Sports person of the Year in December. Donned in a cream suit, James wore a safety pin over his lapel, an accessory that symbolizes safety and protection against minorities and women — groups Trump had offended during the gritty campaign season.

James has been outspoken of his disdain for Trump. He stood with Hillary Clinton at rallies and even suggested he may not visit the White House should the Cleveland Cavaliers win another championship. With his subtle statement on the cover of one of the United States' most renowned magazines, he emphasized that strategically wearing clothing could send a powerful message.



Student models pose during the Black Student Union's fashion show on April 22.

PHOTO BY SUBMITTED BY CAMERON JACKSON

Two weekends ago, Elon University's Black Student Union did the same thing — and did it masterfully.

Their annual fashion show — themed “A Different World” — frequently emphasized the role of African-Americans in today's political climate, addressing the many negative stereotypes and offering encouragement moving forward.

The event was planned by sophomore Kenneth Brown Jr., the special event coordinator for BSU, who said he wanted people to leave the show feeling empowered and energized. Dashikis, “My Black is Solid,” T-shirts and a specific call to action in the five selective scenes: “For Change,” “Voices of the Culture,” “For the Culture” and “An Array of Excellence,” intuitively hammered home messages of resilience and poise in the face of adversity. The show also included multimedia

elements. On a video wall adjacent to the runway, videos of President Barack Obama's, “I, too, am America” speech and a #Black-BoyJoy monologue played during the breaks between scenes. One of the more powerful moments occurred when models resisted the urge to raise their fists when “Hands Up” by Vince Splice played.

The effects were well received by the audience. Brown, who changed his major from communications to human services this year, said he wanted to do everything possible to tell a great story.

The show did exactly that.

As someone who's written frequently on this topic, I've seen a repetitive rut in how situations revolving around race relations can be handled. People don't want to talk about it. But when people do want to talk about it, their message is that we need to talk about it

more. It's a never-ending cycle. No action is really taken. This fashion show was a breath of fresh air because it put a creative spin on how to handle this issue. An unorthodox showcase with underlying messages added to the overall effect and made it enjoyable. I never saw myself going to a fashion show. I never saw myself writing about one.

But this was different.

College students normally want to take to social media to exhaust their problems or frustration. But BSU's systematic approach to a problem that can be fiercely debated was impeccable. In the recent past, students from across the nation have chosen alternative methods — some that only increase the divide between the problem. Blaming others, quickly making assumptions and then acting impulsively are common.

This wasn't.

“As a younger generation, we have taken these concepts and made them our own,” Brown wrote in the fashion show program. “We have an obligation to take the world by storm and, despite the challenges we face, we make the most out of every situation.”

As an African-American male, seeing the show made me feel hopeful. It proved that sending messages can be as elaborate or as simple as you want — but it can be done creatively if someone puts their mind to it.

Now, BSU has set a precedent for other students and organizations in the future.

And like LeBron, BSU did it with a little more than a few accessories.

## Jokes about disabilities are never OK



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A few weeks ago, I visited my boyfriend at University of Illinois for a long weekend. Months ago, he told me he got tickets for us to go see Daniel Tosh on his college tour. I didn't know much about him, especially what he was up to nowadays — neither did my boyfriend — but we both remembered his popular show that was comedy gold for adolescent boys. What could go wrong?

We walked into the State Farm Arena and I looked around and was immediately struck by the lack of diversity — not much different from Elon University — but still of note. The audience was filled with both students and locals.

The show began with Tosh himself, and I'll admit he was funny at first. He definitely made some off-color jokes that I have grown up knowing were not okay, but it quickly became evident to me that not everyone has had the same upbringing.

Throughout the show he welcomed up a few guests who were mostly writers from his show.

After a succession of pretty funny acts, Tosh introduced another comedian who in so many words, he said “would cross the line.”

And cross the line he did.

“Why does everyone with Down Syndrome have the same haircut?” he said.

I looked at my boyfriend and began

to cry.

I cried because I immediately thought of my five-year-old brother, Carter, who happens to have Down Syndrome, sitting at home watching “Moana.”

That was the beginning to a bit that lasted for what felt like hours, but in actuality, lasted about three minutes. The comedian continued by saying: “Thank you — all of you who laughed — for keeping it real. Everyone who didn't, you're going to hell because you're kidding yourselves.”

I won't repeat the entirety of his bit, because he doesn't deserve it and neither do I, but as it concluded I turned my body back to face the stage. Tosh returned and supported the comedian's decision to tell that particular joke because he had apparently been hesitant to do so in past shows.

In that moment, I didn't know what to do. Should I stand up and scream? Should I walk out? I regrettably did neither, but in an attempt to make up for that, I decided to write about it.

People need to stop using physical characteristics or, in this case, someone's diagnosis as the butt of their jokes.

Why, in 2017, is it still acceptable to make fun of people who are different? Why did this man and everyone in the audience who laughed think this was funny?

It's not funny.

Just like it's not funny to call someone “retarded.” Using that word is not only outdated, but it's also offensive to anyone who has any sort of cognitive disability or delay. It discredits the efforts of so many men and women who are working every day to prove

themselves in a world that has continually ignored or discouraged them.

Carter is one funny little guy, but it sure has nothing to do with his Down Syndrome.

A question I have been asking myself over the past few weeks is: Why was this comedian hesitant to do this bit before? Why did he choose this night to tell it?

It has seemingly become the norm to pick on “the underdog” or the voiceless. Whether it be our new president mocking a reporter with a physical disability on television, or this comedian making a joke at the expense of my brother and all those like him.

His joke, and the laughter that followed, was evidence of a deeply rooted problem in our society where it has been deemed OK to view people with disabilities as the “other” or those worthy of being mocked.

Especially under our current administration, the culture of bullying and name-calling has become overwhelmingly prevalent. This is a problem that needs to be addressed head on.

I am certain this comedian wouldn't say that joke to the face of someone with Down Syndrome, but he makes the joke because he sees those men and women as a group that is weaker than he is. A group outside of “the norm.”

I am in no way speaking for everyone with Down Syndrome — as they can certainly speak for themselves — but I am speaking in defense of my little brother and the people like him. And I always will.

Be advocates for one another, and speak out against hateful and ugly language that is used to disparage others.



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Sigma Phi Epsilon's response to ENN's coverage of racial slur incident

Dear Elon University community,

Our fraternity wants all students at Elon to feel welcome at our events and within our membership. We have worked hard to build an inclusive fraternity that is sensitive to one another's differences. So when our former chapter president, senior Owen Gaffney used a racially divisive term in reference to another student, senior Austin Meekins, it confused and hurt so many of us.

In a moment of anger, Gaffney chose the most hurtful word he could find, and he unfortunately succeeded in causing deep pain. Gaffney has apologized to Meekins, and he has apologized to our entire membership. He has resigned from his position as president and has faced a standards hearing within our chapter. We believe he is truly remorseful, but we intend to do all we can to ensure our chapter is a safe and supportive environment

for all of our members.

I am serving as president and will be helping our brothers continue to address this head on. This incident does not represent who we are as a student organization and as members of the Elon community. We are committed to earning back the trust of our peers, faculty and staff. If any students have questions or concerns, I am always available to talk to them. My email is below.

Additionally, I want to address inaccuracies about the story that is being reported. Meekins was never barred from entering a party, and certainly not because of his race. Gaffney and Meekins were in an ongoing disagreement over academic standards, which Gaffney believed would have prevented Meekins from attending the function.

We will earn your trust back, Elon.

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