

Response to recent media reactions to Tourette Syndrome. Written by a Tourette Association of Texas Support Group Leader (who also has TS).

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I sat on my couch this evening sobbing.

Not just emotional — I mean full, chest-aching tears — as I scrolled through the comments after the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards in London.

I couldn't stop reading them. Comment after comment. "He should've controlled it." "He should've known better." "He should've stayed home."

Every single one felt like it was aimed directly at me.

Because I don't just see a viral clip. I see a man living with Tourette's in one of the most high-pressure rooms imaginable. I see the fear. The adrenaline. The loss of control. The humiliation that probably washed over him in real time.

And I see myself.

Here's what people are missing: sometimes with Tourette's, words come out that we would never choose to say. They don't reflect our beliefs. They don't reflect our character. They're not intentional — they're symptoms.

For those who don't understand, this is called coprolalia. And when I say the words come out without warning, I mean it. There is no pause. No filter. No chance to stop it. Just the awful realization after it's already been said — and then the shame, the embarrassment, the wanting to disappear.

I'm speaking from the heart because I live with this. I have Tourette's. I have been the person who said the N-word. I have been the person who shouted the F-word in public places, in crowds, in moments where it was completely inappropriate and completely unintentional. I know the panic. I know the heat rising in your face. I know what it feels like to want the ground to swallow you whole.

I stopped going to church for almost a year because I couldn't control what came out of my mouth. While everyone else was saying "Amen" or "Praise the Lord," I was yelling something offensive. Not because I wanted to. Not because I believed it. But because Tourette's doesn't ask for permission.

It's also important to say this: hearing someone scream out the N-word is deeply painful and uncomfortable. It carries history. It carries trauma. I'm not pretending otherwise. I'm not minimizing that.

I can hold two truths at once — that the word is painful and carries real history, and that Tourette's is not intentional.

But what matters is how we respond to that discomfort.

I can imagine what it felt like to yell it out — because I have. And it was awful. Horrific. The kind of moment that makes you want to disappear.

I can't imagine what it felt like to be the two men standing on that stage when it happened. I have no doubt they were uncomfortable. Anyone would be. But they handled it with such grace. They didn't lash out. They didn't make a scene. They paused, gathered themselves, and continued. And I applauded them for how they responded in the moment

That's the difference.

We sometimes confuse "I'm uncomfortable" with "You shouldn't be here." And those are not the same thing.

And here's something else people are missing: the reason that man was there in the first place was because a film was made about him and his life with Tourette's. He was being recognized. Honored. Included.

But instead of compassion, I saw people saying, "If he knew he might say something, he should've just stayed home."

If that's our solution — stay home — what are we really saying?

What are we telling ourselves when someone's disability makes us uncomfortable?

What are we telling our future selves?

What are we telling our children?

That inclusion has limits?

That compassion only counts when it's convenient?

That people with neurological conditions should shrink themselves so the rest of us don't have to feel uncomfortable?

What are we teaching each other?

If our response to discomfort is to tell someone with a disability to stay home, then we're not choosing compassion — we're choosing our own comfort.

And if we're never willing to be uncomfortable, how do we grow? How do we learn? How do we become more compassionate?

Tourette's is not a choice. It is not a character flaw. It is not a reflection of someone's morals. It is a neurological condition. And the person experiencing it is often suffering far more than anyone watching.

Before you comment. Before you judge. Before you say someone "should've just stayed home."

Ask yourself what kind of world you want to live in.

Because none of us chose this.