An Open Letter to people who think that the words nerd and geek are insults

January 17, 2019

Dear those who decide to cruely yell “Nerd!” and “Geek!” at people in the hallways, the lunch room, or anywhere else they see fit,

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a geek as “an enthusiast or expert especially in a technological field or activity”, but also as “a person often of an intellectual bent who is disliked” ("Geek."). Being a nerd and a geek, which Merriam-Webster marks as synonyms, I am appalled that a respectable establishment like this dictionary can be mean to us ("Nerd."). I would love to think that this is only a problem with this definition, that everyone else uses the words nerd and geek as endearing terms. However, I know better, and I know when you’re called a geek and a nerd in the halls, it’s not meant to be a compliment.

But why not?

I want to call your attention back to the first definition from our good friend the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Now I don’t know about you, but the last time I heard the words “enthusiast” and “expert” they were not meant to be disheartening. Enthusiasts are fanatic people who are not going to give up on what they love. Meanwhile, experts are those who are considered the best in their field. The next part of being “in a technological field or activity” is also not a bad thing. If you’re amazing in a particular field, I’m pretty sure you have a bright career ahead of you.

For an example of a bright career, let’s look at Bill Gates. If you haven’t heard of him, a) have you been living under a rock?, and b) he co founded Microsoft. He is considered one of the most successful people to have ever lived, whether it be in regards to running Microsoft, or the charity he and his wife head, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He certainly is a computer enthusiast, and we can see through his work he is also an expert in that field. After all, he wrote his first software program at age 13, showing to all that you can never start focusing too early (“Bill Gates”). He continued to devote the rest of his life to his work, and if that’s not a nerd, then I don’t know what is.

And that does not mean I’m insulting Mr. Gates. In fact, he’s one of my role models, along with other successful nerds like Matt Colville, Chris Perkins, and Mark Rosewater. If you still haven’t got it, a nerd is just a group of people, a stereotype, just like a jock, a popular person, a drama kid, or any other group you find prevalent in the typical American high school. Have you ever been meanly called a jock before? I don’t think I have ever heard anyone that word as an insult, because it isn’t! Though if you have, I apologize, and sympathize with you. You finally understand our pain. But even if you’ve been insulted in a similar way, it’s no reason to do the same to others.

Maybe you're thinking that this word is some great original insult. We've never heard it before, and we will be shocked to have it yelled at us. Well that's not even close to right.

In fact, it's come to a point where me and my friends are starting to make fun of your insults. I opened the door last Sunday and my friend walked in and said "Hey nerd! Ready to play some Dungeons and Dragons?". And I was! We have heard these two insults so much that they have become rallying cries, in much the same manner as the song "Yankee Doodle" became an American classic. It was actually a song written by the British mocking the American revolutionists, and look where they turned out.

So next time you're walking through the hallways and see a likely target to make fun of, think back to what you're really calling them when you yell out "You nerd!" (though there's usually some profanity in there too, but that's a separate issue). You're calling them an individual who is dedicated to a task, and who won't give up until their goal is met. And to those of you who I still haven't convinced, next time you insult me, I'm gonna be thinking of Bill Gates, and I'm gonna respond with a firm "Thanks."

From,
A Nerd and a Geek

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