

You don't need to tell me you don't agree

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This happens often. Before someone quotes or highlights or refers to another person's remarks, they preface it with, "I don't agree with everything but ..." then proceed to say something that they liked. I hear it in conversation with others, I see it on social media, and I read it in books. In fact, the sentiment has been systematized into a legal disclaimer: "the words and opinions expressed here are their own, and do not represent an endorsement."

When I was editing a chapter of [my book](#), I noticed I had employed the same tactic. I was making an argument that we can learn from pop culture, specifically, from comedians. Then I said it:

"We don't have to agree with everything they say but ..."

I read it over, paused, highlighted it, and pressed delete. Perhaps it seems harmless, but I think there is a subtle message behind this simple phrase that is indeed harmful. Here's why I think we should strike the disclaimer from our vocabulary.

**Which one of us agrees on everything with any other single person?** No one! Certainly, many of us share similar passions and congregate according to common interests, it's only human to interact with those who you resonate easily with. But if you dig deeper, or you spend enough time together, it isn't long before one discovers there are indeed some, if not many points of disagreements with those we are in relationship with. **It is the beauty of autonomous free will that we are allowed to choose differently when it comes to personal opinions and ethics.** If there is anything we can all agree on, it's that none of us agree with everything, which renders the above disclaimer irrelevant, unnecessary, and meaningless.

**If we are honest with ourselves, adding the phrase is a form of social insurance.** We want to protect ourselves from the risk of being associated with certain things this person represents. I know it was true in my own example. I was referencing some very irreverent comedians in my book about church and I feared

offending nice, church folks who may frown upon the work of these pop culture icons. Although I believe sensitivity to our conversation partners is a good thing, it seems disingenuous to benefit or consume the words of someone while slipping in a disclaimer basically discrediting other aspects of their personality. **It is incredibly uncomfortable for us to give space for someone else's ideas with no strings attached.** We want to engage with them but only at arm's length.

"I don't agree with everything but..."

The power of association, of tribes, of communities, is so strong that we take extra measures to ensure boundaries are clearly marked, compelling us to insert disclaimers even in casual conversation. **We are fearful of being grouped with the "wrong" crowd** as perceived by the person we are speaking with.

I do not think this is a healthy way to dialogue. I think it is a sign of disrespect to curate someone's ideas, extracting it from their whole selves with all of their complexities and personhood. If someone were to quote something from one of my blog posts, but add that they didn't agree with everything I said, I would feel a pang of exclusion, a boundary line marked against me. Not because I expect people to agree with 100 percent of what I say, but precisely the opposite. People should assume we don't all agree but still be willing to engage one another in spite of that. I want people to appreciate my ideas (or to disagree with them) in the context of a relationship. It only seems fair I treat others the way I would like to be treated.

We can dialogue with people as people, other human beings with different personalities, life experiences, and ideas. We can celebrate common ground without erecting walls or drawing boundary lines. We can connect without disclaimers, embracing the whole of our conversation partner along with her ideas. **Let's base our conversations with one another from a place of shared humanity instead of basing it on fear by association.**

Next time, pause before adding the disagreement clause. We know you don't agree with everything. Tell us what you do agree with, and let's just be OK with this bit of common ground.

*Originally posted at [Brandt's blog](#)*