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WHO WE ARE :

OPINION: LOOK BEYOND COMMUNITY STEREOTYPES TO SEE THE TRUTH

Opinion column by Victoria Falcon, Design Editor

Given our location, our predominate culture, and some of the history within our neighborhoods, we are a community that is easy to pick on. We are constantly labeled with stereotypes that are tired, hurtful, and inaccurate of the reality each one of us lives. People seldom take a deeper look at the reasons we are perceived in such negative light, and spend even less time trying to see the positive underlying truths about our community.

While opinions from outside sources plague a community from the outside looking in, the stereotypes and opinions don't carry weight once you know the real stories of the real people. Most people form ideas of this community based on surface aspects, and fail to see how certain situations play a part in our socio-economic status. Labels of "poor" and "ghetto" are thrown at us because of where our community is geographically located. Inside Loop 410, we have limited space for growth, leaving less opportunity for economic development, meaning this community has less due to factors that are out of our control. Profiled as "cholos", "thugs," or simply receiving an unpleasant glare when informing someone of where you attended high school are all sad situations this community has faced. While we have a strong blend of multicultural people who bring so much life to our community, these terms are used because we happen to be a campus whose population is largely made up of racial minorities, and racial judgment recycles many stereotypes. Most people only see the titles and fail to hear our stories, so all they know is we are economically disadvantaged, and somehow less-than because of the perception of our economic class and race.

Where people fail to see past a fixed mindset is where they refuse to learn, and refuse to be wrong. Most people will never see the good things people do in this community, and what kids in the high school are accomplishing, despite their toxic environment. We have a lot of good people in this community, who are smart, capable, and do not fall under the stereotype applied to them. Although we do have many good people who aren't "cholos" or "thugs," we are also not ashamed of the people who live the complicated, difficult realities that are labeled that way. What people don't realize is that those "thugs" are real people who are living through rough times, and when you make light of their lives, you are judging people that have seen unbearable pain, trying to live and do better. This just continues to hold them down in that place.

When kids from Warren were punished for making fun of people at Holmes and dressing as "cholos," they thought it would be a funny joke because of the constantly stereotyped campus. Many students from Holmes were upset with the inaccurate representation of them as individuals. But what if there are students on campus who actually dress like that? What may seem ridiculous to some is the truth for others.

We stand by our belief that it is a culture, and just as it is insen-

sitive to make fun of a culture of Hindus who wear bindis, or a culture Muslims who wear hijabs, it is judgmental and ignorant to make fun of urban kids who sag.

People from this community have been fed these negative ideas often for their entire lives, and instead of trying to help the area, even people within the community perpetuate a hurtful cycle of profiling and stereotypes. Most people, including kids, in this community have been taught that they are bad. This has a domino effect of unconscious self-hate, and they struggle to validate their lives.

Stereotyping pits the community against itself. A lot of those who don't fit into the stereotype visibly, disown their community and view themselves as better-than. It is disheartening knowing people are eager to leave, and begin to hate the community that brought them up due to stereotypes. It shouldn't be a matter of whether we have good people too, not just "thugs." Everyone should be equally upset with the fact that there are people trying to bring down our community as a whole. Although some didn't experience as harsh a story as others, it doesn't take away what this community has rooted in us all. Because of this community, we all have some self-doubt.

Even if you are a student going to college, you will still always wonder if you are good enough, just the same as the kid your same age who lived rough thinks they aren't worth much. We share similar fears, and we all have to get out of the same hole dug for us. In the case of our community, the saying "Less is more" will continue to ring true.

Because of this community we are: humble, loving, caring, respectful, diverse, and above all else, real. We are real people, with real and riveting lives. The stories behind these people will be some of the most shocking, and in the same breath, beautiful, stories ever heard, if only people would make the choice to look past stereotypes, and begin to root for this community and the lives within it.

Despite what is said and believed about this community, we want everyone to remember one thing: success stories aren't about people who had the odds in their favor, they're about people who had life against them and fought hard to make it out of the hole they were born into.

If you want to be a part of the change to minimize stereotypes about this community, simply start up a conversation with someone who would seem to be an unlikely friend, find your favorite parts about this community and amplify those ideas, listen, lend a helping hand, learn what it means to have empathy, and share the stories of the wonderful people and things that happen here every day. If you have a story or example of the good things our community and campus offer, we encourage you to send us a letter about it through email to holmesjournalism@gmail.com or in person in A102d.