

Staff Editorial

It's a culture not a costume

Cultural appropriation is complicated. We get it. Who's to say that dressing up as a gangster is alright but Mulan crosses a line?

About the only thing that everybody can agree on is that black face (and the less commonly criticised "yellow face") is bad. Though undoubtedly, somebody will miss the memo on that one too.

We would like to add another unconditional rule: don't use an entire culture as your costume. That means you'll have to set aside your "Mexican" poncho and sombrero, even if you think it would be super funny. Name a specific Mexican figure from the past or present and we can talk.

The truth is, if you are white, it is not your job to decide whether your costume was crafted with sensitivity or not. As a member of the historically favoured culture, there is a power balance at play which is not always apparent. To assume one can accurately assess whether their own costume is an appropriate depiction of another's culture is a facet of this historic and ongoing power imbalance.

Your parodying of a culture as a costume is not an homage or a sign of your respect. It is simply distasteful at best, deeply offensive at worst.

When you dress up as a culture, you channel all the existing stereotypes about that people group and consolidate them into a gross display of your indifference towards actual issues of race relations.

Would your Halloween be incomplete if you didn't anger at least one culture? There are better ways to spend your time than planning costumes that will make your other white friends laugh at the expense of a minority group.

These are not issues that begin and end on October 31. As the fashion industry and celebrities seek new frontiers, the styles and symbols of other cultures are appropriated, often with little deference or acknowledgment of their origin. Kylie Jenner notably posted a picture on her Instagram of her "birthday braids" – cornrows.

No statement was made of the historical significance of this hairstyle or its significance to the black identity. It would misunderstand those who fight for civil rights to believe that white women wearing corn rows as a fashion statement helps black women who are still not allowed to wear this traditional, and functional, hairstyle at their places of work.

We recommend that you play it safe this Halloween day and weekend. When you're putting on your costume, take into consideration the message it might send to people around you.

Letter to the editor

The New Trier News does not normally publish anonymous letters. However, after meeting with this student, we decided to keep the letter anonymous to protect their safety.

I'm writing to the editors of the New Trier News in order to articulate my strong disagreement with the sentiments expressed in the Staff Editorial article entitled "Give Credit Where Credit's Due."

This article begins with a thesis: "New Trier is an inclusive institution," and continues on by pointing out things such as the inclusion of a clause into syllabuses no one reads, the introduction of gender studies into the curriculum of the class that Trevians take the least seriously (health), and the introduction of unisex bathrooms.

To be clear, none of these are bad ideas. However, with the exception of unisex bathrooms, I seriously doubt that these have made a substantial positive impact on any LGBTQ+ identifying Trevians. They certainly haven't changed anything for me. As a closeted male bisexual, the implementation of these policies hasn't changed the environment of New Trier for me. I would still not be comfortable coming out at New Trier.

The article mentions that although there is homophobia at New Trier, many more Trevians are allies to the queer community. This might be true in some circles, but as a guy who participates in a sports team, rampant and casual homophobia is not the exception: it's the norm. No action by the supposedly pro-LGBTQ+ administration has changed that.

Even worse than their inaction is their self-congratulating. Thinking that their putting signs up that say "we accept everyone" has done nothing to curb my fear of exiting the closet. Their repeated assurances that what they are doing is even mildly impactful works to isolate me and presumably others like me; there is no supportive community at New Trier, because instead of working to create one, the administration acts as if they've already done so.

The article also criticizes "those who seek to generalize the LGBTQ experience." This is an odd criticism to me, considering the nature of the editorial, which actively generalizes the LGBTQ experience. For those already uncloseted or those who have never struggled with their sexuality, it may be hard to truly understand the struggle of somebody like me, and I understand that. But to completely gloss over the idea that people like me exist perpetuates the ignorance that makes New Trier what it is: an unsafe and uncomfortable place for many of its LGBTQ+ students.

The joy of learning a foreign language

by Arjun Thakkar



Despite our different backgrounds, there exists a great unifier, one that helps us reconcile our differences. That commonality is language.

Through communication, we learn, we talk, we laugh, and, most importantly, we express ourselves.

Learning a language, even for the first time, is a process of trial and error. As a result, when inexperienced children are speaking, they're focused on what they're saying because of their limited vocabulary.

As we grow older and more experienced, we don't think as much about the nitty gritty parts of language because they have become second nature. Unless you live in a house where you have to speak a different language, it's preferable to be comfortable within a language that we already know.

It's that unfamiliarity, though, that I find makes learning a foreign language so captivating.

I'll be the first to admit that it can be irritating to comprehend what

others say in a different language. I grew up in a family that speaks Gujarati, an Indian language that I can listen to all day yet still struggle to speak.

Whenever I attempt to speak in Gujarati with relatives, they defer to my parents to figure out what I'm trying to tell them. Not the best feeling to need a third party to translate for you.

While my experiences with Gujarati have been iffy thus far, I can say that the opposite is true for Spanish.

Unlike English, I have to be more deliberate in a non-familiar tongue like Spanish, which makes it satisfying to grow over time. That extra thinking is what I enjoy most about the language.

I recall wanting to buy candy at a young age and asking my mom what to say to the man behind the counter. After she laughed and told me, I memorized her words and practiced over and over.

It's the same process that occurs in learning a new language, albeit at an older age. We memorize certain useful phrases like "May I go to the bathroom," and ideally they become ingrained in our memory and part of daily vocabulary.

When I say something in English as I intended to, it's nothing special because that's expected, whereas in Spanish I'm anticipating an error or two, making it all the

more gratifying to successfully say what I wanted.

Call me a try-hard or a nerd if you want, but I get a real kick out of trying to maintain a conversation in a different language, especially if it's something new and difficult.

I find that explaining something complex in simpler words, like I have to in Spanish, can clarify the situation and make it easier to wrap my head around it.

That appreciation extends into other media as well, like reading Spanish stories and listening to Spanish music. And no, that doesn't mean my favorite song is "Despacito," although I do recommend "Yo No Me Doy Por Vencido" by the same artist.

While listening to music in a language we're not fluent in, we hear bits and pieces, typically words that we know or that sound similar.

Every time I listen to a song by Juanes or Residente, I learn a new word that I then apply into my Spanish work and thinking, enhancing the language.

This might sound weird, but I hope I never become fluent. If I do, it'll become commonplace and lose its many unique charms and quirks.

Another language is definitely not for everyone. I get that it's frustrating.

But please, in a new language, don't be like the p in pterodactyl: silent.

The controversy behind contraceptives

Michelle Yurovsky



So, talking about condoms is pretty awkward.

It's a touchy subject for some, and hilarious to a sad amount of others. Regardless, we should be able to talk about and have access to contraception without the stigma associated with them.

Aside from a semester of health sophomore year, it seems to me that there really is no other emphasis on the importance of contraception.

There is also an undeniable sense of discomfort when health teachers talk to sophomores about sex and condoms. It's not the program, it's some of the kids. It is just a shame that, at least in my class, most of us chose to goof off.

The students of New Trier take part in a nine week sexual education program. Although this is already more than what most schools have, this alone is not enough to raise awareness about the importance of protection.

Condoms need to be available at New Trier because let's face it, just because you tell someone to get them, it does not mean they will.

According to the Chicago Sun Times, "24 more of Chicago

Public Schools' 106 high schools will make free condoms available for their students." Why shouldn't New Trier do the same?

The CPS schools have a program in place that distributes condoms to the students. The program is part of a broader teen pregnancy prevention initiative.

With sexual education being such a big component of the sophomore year curriculum, it would make sense to have condoms present so that students could safely and effectively learn how to use them, while also having access to them.

I am convinced that if teenagers received condoms in school, rather than from friends who have had them in their pockets for who knows how long, they would be more willing to use them.

With the closing of the Angles clinic, there are even less options for where students can go to get condoms while avoiding those interactions.

If the nurse's office just had them available by the Band-Aids, everyone would have an easy and comfortable way to stay protected.

According to the Chicago Tribune, in May of 1998 Evanston Township High School gained the board's approval to distribute condoms to students who had their parents' permission. The school's superintendent said he believed that the program was necessary to reduce teen pregnancy and provide education to students.

Although that is not necessarily the case here, and while teen pregnancy is at an all time low, it is still important to encourage sexual education and promote awareness.

It is impossible to deny that a percentage of students are sexually active. Though pregnancies are at an all time low, STIs are on the rise.

According to the Center for Disease Control, "STDs are a persistent enemy, growing in number, and outpacing our ability to respond."

Condoms should be accessible to high school students for free. It makes much more sense to have access to condoms at our school and not use them, than be too embarrassed to buy them and have unsafe sex.

Opponents of the proposal argue that providing condoms to students would encourage sexual activity and promiscuity. Some argue that providing students with contraceptives would give them a false sense of security about sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies.

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a health research and policy institute, schools in major cities did not experience a rise in students who are sexually active when condoms became available.

It is high time for New Trier to join Evanston and have condoms available for students.

The New Trier News

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