

**Mueller, Jennifer, Danielle Dirks, and Leslie Houts Picca. 2007. "Unmasking Racism: Halloween Costuming and Engagement of the Racial Other." *Qualitative Sociology* 30:315-335.**

**PRIMARY ARGUMENT:** The authors argue Halloween is a unique space that combines social licensing, ritual costuming and social settings and results in many Americans (specifically college students) choosing to engage in costumes based on races other than their own, often playing into racial stereotypes.

### **IMPORTANT DEFINED CONCEPTS**

- Rituals of Rebellion: Events which allow for the temporary and conditional removal of some restrictions on actions which are considered to be against the norms of the society and in doing so paradoxically reinforce the dominant social structure.
- Cultural Tourism: the practice of temporarily adopting elements of another culture, without engaging with its historical and social significance
- Backstage and Frontstage Behavior: A framework from Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, where whites typically perform tolerance in public (frontstage) but engage in racist talk and behaviors in private (backstage); Halloween allows backstage racism to emerge in public.

### **PRIMARY FINDINGS**

1. There were three distinct categories defining cross-racial costuming engagement. One was celebrity portrayals, where students dress as celebrities, television/movie personalities, and others. The second one was "role" portrayals, with costumes based on stereotypes and "roles", such as a "ghetto pimp" or a "gangsta". The third was generic/essentialist portrayals, which would be exemplified in a white couple wanting to dress up as "a black couple," less based directly in stereotypes but likely the costumes would implement stereotypes to be clear what they were.
2. There was only a minority of white students who had some objection to others engaging in racist cross racial costuming, yet their opposition to this was usually only voiced when they perceived the racial.
3. Students of color recognized this racism much more and were more likely to make objections to it than white students. They were also less likely to engage in cross-racial costuming.
4. Racialized costuming is not limited to the US Southeast, but is evident nationwide, challenging the idea that such practices are regionally specific.

**KEY QUOTE:** "With respect to race, we would argue that the holiday provides a context ripe for reinforcing existing racialist concepts. In particular, it provides an implicitly approved space for maintaining the privilege that whites have historically enjoyed, to define and caricature African Americans and other people of color in degraded and essentialist ways." (333)

**QUESTION:** This article is from almost twenty years ago. I am curious to know what this study would look like if performed/recreated at American colleges in the current political and social climate, and what will have changed in terms of opinions of what is "okay" to do and what is not "okay" to do.