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Unmasking Racism: Halloween Costuming and Engagement of the Racial Other

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Abstract We explore Halloween as a uniquely constructive space for engaging racial concepts and identities, particularly through ritual costuming. Data were collected using 663 participant observation journals from college students across the U.S. During Halloween, many individuals actively engage the racial other in costuming across racial/ethnic lines. Although some recognize the significance of racial stereotyping in costuming, it is often dismissed as being part of the holiday's social context. We explore the costumes worn, as well as responses to cross-racial costuming, analyzing how "playing" with racialized concepts and making light of them in the "safe" context of Halloween allows students to trivialize and reproduce racial stereotypes while supporting the racial hierarchy. We argue that unlike traditional "rituals of rebellion," wherein subjugated groups temporarily assume powerful roles, whites contemporarily engage Halloween as a sort of "ritual of rebellion" in response to the seemingly restrictive social context of the post-Civil Rights era, and in a way that ultimately reinforces white dominance.

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In 2003, Louisiana State District Judge Timothy Ellender arrived at a Halloween party costumed in blackface makeup, afro wig, and prison jumpsuit, complete with wrist and ankle shackles. When confronted with his actions, he noted wearing the costume was "a harmless joke" (Simpson, 2003). In 2002, Massachusetts-based Fright Catalog marketed and sold the Halloween mask "Vato Loco," a stereotyped caricature of a bandana-clad, tattooed Latino gang thug, while retail giants Wal-Mart, Party City, and Spencer Gifts began sales for "Kung Fool," a Halloween ensemble complete with Japanese kimono and a buck-toothed, slant-eyed mask with headband bearing the Chinese character for "loser" (Hua, 2002; Unmasking Hate, 2002). Additionally, there have been several Halloween party-related blackface incidents documented at universities across the United States over the past several years.[1] White college students have donned blackface and reenacted images of police brutality, cotton picking, and lynching at such parties, invoking degrading stereotypes and some of the darkest themes in our nation's racial past and present.

Collectively, these incidents indicate that Halloween may provide a unique opportunity to understand contemporary racial relations and racial thinking in the U.S. Although the gendered implications of Halloween costuming have been examined (Martin, 1998; Nelson, 2000; Ogletree, Denton, & Williams, 1993), to our knowledge, there has not been any empirical investigation into the ways in which race is engaged during this holiday. Given the relevance of a sociological study of holidays (Etzioni, 2000) and what very little work has critically addressed Halloween as a social phenomenon reflective of the broader society, the current research uses empirical data to address how racial concepts are employed during Halloween.

Halloween as a uniquely constructive space for engaging racial concepts

Holidays have been theoretically described as socializing agents, acting on members of the society to reinforce shared beliefs and reaffirm commitments to values (Durkheim, [1912] 1995; Etzioni, 2000). While many holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, are thought to directly enforce shared commitments, holidays such as Halloween arguably serve as tension-management holidays. Such holidays fulfill the socialization process *indirectly*, by managing the tensions that result from close conformity to societal mores and their concomitant behavioral prescriptions (Etzioni, 2000).

Similarly, "constructed" events such as Halloween, New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras, have also been examined as "rituals of rebellion" – culturally permitted and ritually framed spaces where the free expression of countercultural feelings are tolerated, and protected to some degree by the agents of the official culture (Gluckman, 1963; Yinger, 1977). As described by Gluckman, these ritually bounded periods allow for the reversal of social roles, wherein subjugated groups temporarily assume positions of power. This temporary inversion is thought to act as a safety valve for sentiments of injustice. As such, rather than permanently alter hierarchies, rituals of rebellion tend to paradoxically strengthen and reinforce the social structure, norms, and roles they seek to deride.

The temporary suspension of hierarchies within the social order has also been described by Bahktin (1981, 1984) in his work on the carnivalesque. Similar to rituals of rebellion, Bahktin described Carnival as a time and space wherein a temporary disruption of social

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[1] Among others, examples of incidents include: Auburn University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Tennessee, Syracuse University, Trinity College, University of Louisville, Kentucky, University of Mississippi, Whitman College and Swarthmore University (Finley & Yoste, 2001; Lipscombe, 2002; Matthews & Test, 2002; Nelson, 2002a, 2002b; Petley, 2003; Redden, 2006).

routines, structure and order often occurred, with revelers playing with symbols of higher authority and making fun of those in power. Bahktin recognized that the inversion was temporary, but optimistically argued that it created the potential for societal renewal and regeneration through counter-structural critique.

As a holiday that allows individuals to "let off a little steam" from the routine of everyday life, Halloween's potential for social disruption is similar to that for rituals of rebellion and the Carnival (Rogers, 2002, p. 163). Indeed, Rogers argues that Halloween was eventually promoted to national status in the U.S. in part because it fostered a context for social inversion during the mid- to late-nineteenth century era, when other holidays became more institutionalized and focused on the values of family, home, and respectability. As Skal (2002) contends, the tradition grew that for one night each year, individuals could enjoy "a degree of license and liberty unimaginable – or simply unattainable – the rest of the year" (p. 17). Both historically and contemporarily, this context of free license often creates the impression among revelers that all potential for insult is suspended. When considered collectively, alongside the holiday's ritual costuming and social setting, Halloween's historical and contemporary license set the stage for the easy engagement of racial concepts.

Halloween ritual costuming: Role-taking, role-making

Donning costumes has become a ritual component of the Halloween tradition in North America (Nelson, 2000; Santino, 1994). Over half of all U.S. consumers celebrate Halloween in some way, with sixty percent reporting that they will costume for the holiday (The Macerich Company, 2005). Several studies suggest that most college students participate in some form of costuming – whether donning store-bought or homemade costumes (McDowell, 1985; Miller, Jasper, & Hill, 1991, 1993). Indeed, "dressing up" according to one's "fantasy" is very much a part of the release afforded by the holiday and consumers spend millions of dollars each year on Halloween costumes (Belk, 1994; Rogers, 2002).

Halloween allows masqueraders to step out of their everyday roles, opening up a wide range of personas for adoption, if only temporarily. Indeed, even when costumes do not disguise their actual identity, playing different roles remains a major part of the appeal of Halloween among college students (Miller et al., 1991). Significantly, adopting new roles through costume is not merely about *playing* different roles, but may also involve *constructing* and defining those roles. As McDowell (1985) suggests, costuming is about creating inhabitable representations of the "Other" – that is, "metaphors that can be carried about on the mobile human frame" (p. 1). If one adopts this definition, it becomes clear how powerful the experience of costuming across racial or ethnic lines can be in creating, resurrecting and communicating generic and negative ideas about a "racial other" – those persons of color, particularly African Americans, defined in negative contrast to white normativity.

Significance of the social context

Goffman's (1959) frontstage/backstage dramaturgical analysis provides a useful framework for considering the way in which Halloween costuming rituals operate as social performances between actors and their audiences. Indeed, McDowell (1985) found that college students in his sample "thrived" on the reactions provoked by the "prop" of their costumes. Stone (1962), too, stresses the social requirement in playing the role of the other while costuming. He argues that while one must first *dress out* of his or her own role and into the other, the significance and meaning of such a performance is acquired only through the collusive interplay between the

costumer and her or his audience. Halloween's social license permits and endorses a blending of the inherent contradictions of frontstage and backstage performances. In addition, it creates a unique collusion between actor and audience in which typically hidden backstage behaviors are celebrated in the frontstage through the use of humor and play.

Significantly, the goal of Halloween humor and play is often achieved at the expense of a target, for example, an individual or group that is mocked. While a costume may represent an ultimately aggressive judgment about its target, the joking nature of this practice makes acceptable the sharing of information, which in its unadulterated form might be considered unacceptable (Freud, 1960). Because both masquerader and his or her audience identify the humor as the principal feature of the costume, they are able to circumvent any judicious assessment of the negative images of the racial other being shared. It is for precisely these reasons that humor is such an effective tool in communicating racist thoughts, particularly in the contemporary post-Civil Rights era where open, frontstage expression of such ideas is considered socially taboo (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dundes, 1987; Feagin, 2006; Picca & Feagin, forthcoming). Collectively, individuals' behavior in the social setting is reinforced, encouraging both the continued reproduction of racially prejudiced ideas, as well as an uncritical appraisal of them.

Racial relations and Halloween

Examining both Halloween and racial relations in the U.S. requires a historical lens that considers the unquestionable relationship between the two. Children's antique Halloween costumes remain some of the most popularly collected items from the Jim Crow era (Pilgrim, 2001). For example, Sears' 1912 "Negro make-up outfit" allowed children to "play at being a 'Negro'" and was described as "the funniest and most laughable outfit ever sold" (Wilkinson, 1974, p. 105). To be sure, today's popular caricatures extend a long history of blackface minstrelsy and racist iconography, reconstructing deep-seated ideas of white superiority against the clear contrast of black inferiority (Feagin, 2000, 2006). This history is replete with numerous empirical examples to support Stone's (1962) general assertion that acting out the role of the other allows individuals to develop and enhance conceptions regarding their own attitudes and roles as differentiated from the adopted role. Although occasionally less explicit, today it would appear that cross-racial costuming often serves the same purpose in accenting the goodness of whiteness through the relational devaluation of the racial other as did the minstrel shows of old. Caricatured imitations of people of color, as in costuming, are written off as harmless joking, but the method of parody seems to be nothing less than an updated version of the same old show.

It is important to entertain the argument offered by some researchers, who suggest that rather than simply reifying prevailing societal beliefs, Halloween presents the opportunity to advance new beliefs and stimulate change (Etzioni, 2000; Grider, 1996; Yinger, 1977). In some respects this premise may ring true; Rogers (2002), for instance, suggests that much of contemporary Halloween celebration has oriented itself toward reaffirming the values of feminist and gay cultures. However, given the long legacy of racism in the U.S. and the ways in which it continues to structure "the rhythms of everyday life" today, it is important to discover how American holidays – particularly Halloween – remain sites where racial concepts and images are passed down and racist actions occur (Feagin, 2000, p. 2; Litwicki, 2000; Pilgrim, 2001; Rogers, 2002; Skal, 2002). In light of the notable examples described above, an examination of the current relationship between the Halloween costuming ritual and the social reproduction of racism is a critical undertaking.

Participant observation journals

The current study uses data collected from two samples of college students, who contributed a total of 663 individually-written participant observation journals on racial events. The initial sample comes from the third author's dissertation project on backstage racial events among undergraduate students across the U.S. (Houts, 2004). Modeling the pioneering qualitative research of McKinney (2000), Miller and Tewksbury (2001), and Myers and Williamson (2001), using journals to gather data offers a unique alternative to survey and interview methods for studying racial views, attitudes, and actions. This original sample was collected between the spring of 2002 to the summer of 2003, with the majority of journals being written during the fall semester of 2003. As a result, Halloween costumes and experiences emerged as a recurring theme among the racial events recorded.

Stimulated by Halloween as a potential racial event, a supplementary sample was gathered during the fall 2004 semester among a demographically similar group of undergraduate students. This theoretical sample – a non-representative sample collected with the primary goal of capturing themes and developing an analytic framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) – was collected from students at a single, large Southeastern state university. Students in this sample were asked to specifically address Halloween as an event of sociological interest with regard to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, and age. Like the first sample, these students received both oral and written instructions on how to do participant observation (while maintaining anonymity of those they observed) while writing their reactions and perceptions in their journals the two weeks before and after Halloween. Specifically, students were instructed to record the "what," "where," "when," and "who" of their observations – while indicating the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the people around them. Importantly, all students were assured that "even 'no data' is data" in sociology to encourage writing about even the most mundane, everyday events around this time.[2] For our analysis, we included as data both these observations and students' own reflections.

Participants and locations

The original sample included the journals of 626 white students, 68% of whom were white women and 32% white men. While Houts actually collected journals from a larger sample of 934 that included students of color, her primary analytical focus was limited to white respondents' journals. It is from this subset of 626 white students' journals that the Halloween theme was initially coded, and our subsequent analysis of Hout's original data for the current project also utilized these journals exclusively. The majority of students in this sample were between the ages of 18–25, although there were many students in their late 20s and 30s, and a small minority of students in their 40s and 50s. Despite aggressive efforts to collect journals from a geographically diverse sample of U.S. college students, the majority of these 626 journals came from five colleges and universities in the Southeast (63% of the sample). Additionally, 19% of the students were at schools in the Midwest; 14% were in the West; and 4% were in the Northeast. Students came from both small and large schools; private and public schools; and in both rural and urban settings in 12 states.

The supplementary "Halloween-only" theoretical sampling yielded 37 additional journals collected and approved for use by participating students. Seventy percent of this sample was

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[2] Students in both samples were offered the "extra-credit" opportunity to engage in unobtrusive participant observation, recording their notes in journals. To ensure voluntary participation, students were told they could participate in the journal writing, but without having their journals used as data.

women, 30% men. As in the first sample, the majority of students were between the ages of 18 and 25, with only one student in her late 20s. By race, nearly half of the participants self-described as white American/Caucasian, nearly 19% Hispanic/Latino/a, close to 11% African American/black American, nearly 13% Asian American/Pacific Islander, and just over 8% multiracial. Numerically, 19 students in our supplementary sample were people of color, and thus only 19 of our 663 total participants (3%). Unlike the original geographically inclusive sample, this smaller, theoretical sample included students from just one of the Southeast universities included in the original sample. Given the collection methods described, most of the students in our sample attended schools in the Southeast.

Data analysis

Journals were analyzed using a grounded theory methodology for qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although journals were evaluated for relevant racial themes in regard to the costumes, rituals, and celebrating of Halloween, there was no preexisting coding scheme applied, remaining true to the emergent nature of qualitative research requiring that categories of analysis be shaped by the data (Loftland & Loftland, 1995).

Halloween license: Setting the stage for engagement with racial concepts

One of our primary arguments is that Halloween provides a uniquely constructive space for engaging race, in part because of the holiday's intuitive license, such that revelers assume the right to do, say, and be whatever they want. Indeed, college students in our sample consistently described Halloween as a holiday affording them freedom and a license to "take a break from" or even "defy" social norms. As one student observed of her friend's enjoyment of holidays like Halloween, "He calls them 'breaks from reality where he can just go wild'" (white female). In addition, for many college students, the freeing experience of Halloween costuming is intimately tied to breaking from their everyday roles as one student shared: "Halloween is a way for people to see themselves as something different and uninhibited, if only for a day. Instead of being tied by how they expect others to interact with them" (Hispanic/Latino male). Such comments suggest that being "tied" to a certain identity in everyday life creates limits and inhibitions that one feels compelled to abide by, and for which Halloween provides an appropriate release.

For students, costuming also represents a liberty to experiment with new personas. One male student, who identified himself as a routine female impersonator, noted his own intrigue regarding the way which cross-dressing "becomes socially acceptable on this one holiday." For him, performing as a "character" is "fun and exciting," similar, in his estimation, to what Halloween must be for "non-gay, non-transsexual, non-transvestites who get to play and explore that within themselves, JUST THIS ONCE, of course" (white male). Somewhat ironically, while students describe Halloween as an opportunity to step outside and disregard societal norms, this defiance is made possible only because the norm for Halloween is to do just that. In this way, Halloween creates a figurative "disguise" that allows revelers freedom:

> Halloween is a very social and freedom-eliciting moment in the year. Those who are even the most consistent in their style and attitudes can become different. I guess it is the excuse of dressing up in wild and crazy things and playing a role you normally wouldn't which appeals to people's imaginative freedom. Everyone's being weird and having fun and no one will think it is too out of context if I'm being strange myself. (Asian American/Pacific Islander male)

It would seem that this release is an experience that students not only enjoy, but perhaps feel they need in order to deal with the inhibitions of everyday life, as the above student added this final statement to his thoughts, "We should have more holidays like Halloween."

Within the "safe" space formed by Halloween license, college students often take up the opportunity to engage race through the costuming ritual. Many students documented incidents where they or someone they knew considered, observed, participated in and/or discussed costuming across racial or ethnic lines. For one student, failing to take advantage of the holiday in this way represented an opportunity missed: "I saw my friend John[3] who dressed up as a Buddha. I found it a bit silly he chose to dress up as something Asian when he was already Asian" (Asian American/Pacific Islander male). The remainder of our findings details what emerges when students engage race through costume.

Stereotyping as the predominant guide in cross-racial costuming

While students discussed and employed cross-racial costuming in a variety of ways, our analysis of journals reveals the near universal guide of racial stereotype in directing their efforts. Student commentary suggests that capturing race, both "physically" and "behaviorally," is the core criterion for determining cross-racial costuming success and as a result, most portrayals play to stereotypical ideas about the racial other. Our analysis of this phenomenon within the journals led to an emergent typology, such that the cross-racial costuming discussed, described and engaged in by our participants tended to fall within three categories: celebrity portrayals, "role" portrayals, and generic/essentialist portrayals. In some respects, these "discrete" types capture overlapping concepts. Most critically, all three types rely on stereotype to guide their portrayals. As such, it is useful to conceptualize these categories as something of a continuum in this regard.

Celebrity portrayals

In some cases, cross-racial/ethnic dressing occurred as a function of students masquerading as celebrities, television/movie personalities, and otherwise notorious individuals. For instance, one Asian American woman recorded seeing a black man dressed as the white rapper, Eminem. Another white woman found two white male friends "covered in black paint from head to toe" in preparation for their costuming as Venus and Serena Williams, describing the scene as "the funniest thing [she] had seen in a long time." Yet another student wrote of dressing with two friends as "Charlie's Angels." She, a white woman, dressed as Asian American actress Lucy Liu's character; Stacy, her African American roommate, dressed as white actress Cameron Diaz's character; and, another friend, Tina, who is white, dressed as white actress Drew Barrymore's character.

While in these instances dressing across racial lines would appear to be required solely as a function of the chosen personality, the attention devoted to properly capturing the celebrity's race was in most cases intentional and elaborate. Notably, this respondent recorded that while Tina's costume would be "easy" because she was white (like her character), Stacy would have to borrow a long-sleeved upper body leotard "to hide her skin color." Additionally, she detailed the need for further makeup, "We are going to put makeup on her [Stacy's] hands and face to try and make her look Caucasian. For my costume the girls are going to do my makeup, particularly my eyes to try and make me look Oriental." From this detailed

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[3] All names represent pseudonyms.

narrative, matching one's skin color appears to be more important than wearing a similar outfit or portraying an Angel's demeanor.

Interestingly, even among students attempting to portray famous people or personalities, students suggest that the "success" of the costume is principally determined by how well the race of the individual is captured. Students frequently evaluated cross-racial costuming on this basis of how convincing masqueraders were in portraying their "new" race, to the exclusion of other evaluations regarding believability. For example, one student wrote that an Asian man who had dressed as one of the Blues Brothers happily reported to her that "at the party he went to several people thought he was white and did not recognize him" (white female). Following her own Halloween celebrating, this same student recorded the following:

> An Oriental male . . . was dressed as President Bush. One of the really good costumes was this black male, also in his twenties, who dressed as Osama bin Laden. He really looked like he was Middle Eastern. (white female)

Addition of the singular remark regarding what she considered a "really good" costume stands in contrast to the lack of such validation for the Asian male's impersonation of President Bush.

While cross-racial celebrity costumes tend toward the seemingly more "innocuous" end of the range – focused primarily on embodying the physical attributes of real "characters" while attempting to capture race as the most important or salient feature – it is important to remark on celebrity portrayals that involve distinctly more behavioral and stereotypical prescriptions. Consider the following student's recollections regarding a dinner conversation he had with friends over their ideas for Halloween costumes:

> My friend, who is white, well educated, and comes from a prominent upper-class family, immediately told us his plans. He planned on being 'The Black Girl from [the movie] Coyote Ugly.' He then elaborated, 'All I'll have to do is paint my skin and smell bad, oh and it'll help if I act like I don't know how to swim.' Everyone got a good laugh out of it. (white male)

It is not clear whether this young man's comments are solely meant to communicate a joke rather than his actual plans for costuming; yet what is distinctive about this disclosure is that the young man draws on a celebrity identity ("The Black Girl from Coyote Ugly" being African American actress/model Tyra Banks), but reaffirms strictly raced conceptions of that identity, essentially negating her personhood. In other words, it would appear that it is fundamentally critical to capture race in cross-racial costuming not only in the most obvious "physical" way, through skin color, but also through behaviorally prescribed ways such as smelling "bad" and acting like one cannot swim, two degrading stereotypes of African Americans.

"Role" portrayals

One student responded to a friend's use of blackface paint, saying, "[His] outfit would be perfect if he went out and stole something before we left" (white male). Costumes such as this are indicative of racial "role" portrayals, and highlight attempts to embody race through the use of demeaning stereotypical notions about people of color. Unlike celebrity portrayals however, "role" portrayals have no person-specific or "real" reference, leaving much room for white imagineering of racial others.

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Mass marketing of items such as "Vato Loco," "Kung Fool," and numerous pimp, thug and American Indian-themed costumes suggest the prevalence of racial caricatures in the larger culture. Rather than purchasing ready-made costumes, however, most journals documented students employing their own creativity in fashioning stereotypical cross-racial/ethnic identities, a finding that echoes McDowell (1985). Particularly plentiful were descriptions of "gangstas," "thugs," pimps, and Mafiosos. While some might contend that such representations are not fixed to one particular race or ethnicity, in reality they are typically connected to stereotypical racial caricatures, a finding supported by the students' journals.

As such, when whites costume in "ghetto" dress (with low-slung baggy pants and thick gold chains) or as pimps (complete with gold teeth, afro-like wigs, and velvet suits) they are arguably attempting to parody stereotypical images of blacks, even if they do not make use of blackface. Many students were clear about this in their responses: "one of my white friends, Eric, wanted to be a ghetto pimp. He defined ghetto as acting or being black" (black female). Another student's journal echoes this theme in more detail:

> The theme (of the fraternity party) was 'thug holiday'…my friends and I were wondering what we were supposed to wear…. I was the first to admit that the image that popped into my mind when I thought about a 'thug' was a modern-day rapper wearing baggy jeans, big gold chains around his neck, and a football jersey…. Missy was laughing when I was describing what I thought we should all wear. She said, 'so basically we should dress like black rappers.' We were all laughing at the thought of us, three preppy white girls, dressing as what we had just described. (white female)

According to her later journaling, this young woman, her friends, and by her account "everybody (at the party), without any exceptions" costumed as they had discussed. Although she does not report the use of blackface, the party's theme invoked images that in her own words "thoroughly involved race," and in particular made reference to blackness.

Similarly, another white student, Jim, saw two white male friends at a costume party wearing basketball jerseys, sweat pants and gold chains, drinking malt liquor and smoking "Black 'N Milds, which are little cigars." When he asked them what they were, they replied "Niggas," and expressed surprise that this was not obvious given their outfits and that "Malt liquor is the drink of blacks and they almost always prefer to smoke Black 'N Milds." These examples illustrate that whether individuals are explicit about their targets or not, such costumed caricatures intend to convey racially stereotypical, degraded ideas. Collectively, the journals reveal that the targets of such caricatures were most typically African Americans.

The student journals make clear that the frames for stereotypical racial images, like those conjured by the above students, are readily accessible in the social minds of individuals. One respondent wrote of a friend, Ken's, last minute decision to attend a costume party. His girlfriend "took Ken into his room and closed the door. Twenty minutes later, Ken the dead mafia godfather walked out" (Hispanic/Latina female). These two individuals were able to spontaneously create a costume based on an ethnic stereotype, suggesting that such ideas are readily present and available for use in the minds of such would-be costume creators. Students seek out and fulfill the generic requirements of these imagined images of racial and ethnic groups with relative ease, and with a disturbing level of unthinking.

In some cases, racial "roles" also led to advice regarding how costumes might best be carried out and what costumes were considered appropriate for others. For instance, in response to his plans to dress as an "old-school basketball player," a white student, John, was told by a white friend "that if I really wanted to play the part of a basketball player I would have to paint myself black… 'Everyone knows that niggers are the only ones that can play basketball, other races don't stand a chance'" (white male). This example is notable

for the fact that John's friend placed a racial role atop John's original costume idea, in essence "racing" a formerly "unraced" conception. Indeed, this excerpt also highlights the importance of a context of social interplay for manipulating personal conceptualizations and reproducing racism.

In another journal, an African American male student, Adam, detailed his visit to the local costume store on Halloween. Having made his decision to shop for costumes so late, he sought help in the busy store with the following result:

> I asked an employee to help me out. He points me to the section with costumes for pimps and playas. So I said, 'Are these the only costumes available?' He says 'you wouldn't want the other ones man, they're really dorky, stupid, white people costumes, you need something cool, after all, black dudes don't wear no bullshit like that.' Now, the employee is white, and I'm laughing to myself thinking 'Wow, I guess black people have to maintain a certain level of stereotyped "coolness" no matter what the occasion is.'

The white employee here felt secure and free to limit the range of Adam's costume options, based on what he thought he knew about black people, and black men in particular; notably, the advice of John's friend was similarly driven. For Adam, his experience represented the way in which racially stereotyped thinking is "even evident in a fun-loving holiday like Halloween."

Generic/essentialist portrayals

While stereotypical cross-racial costuming most often drew on caricatured images of the racial other, a number of students described costumes that represented completely generic representations, such that simply portraying "race," usually blackness, was considered costume. Such portrayals represent the most extreme employment of stereotypes guiding cross-racial costuming. This type reverberates within the excerpt referring to "The Black Girl from Coyote Ugly." Although those familiar with popular culture will recognize the student's reference as Tyra Banks, his comments leave her absent a name and personhood – she is generically defined as black, smelly and unable to swim (with an infantilizing gender reference, "girl").

Consider two non-celebrity examples: one young woman recalled a discussion over costumes prior to Halloween, "We were all getting dressed up and one person said that they wanted to paint themselves black and wear a diaper and be a black baby" (white female). Another young woman recalled her and her boyfriend's interest in simply costuming "as a black couple" (Native American/white female). While it is not known whether these individuals actually decided to cross-racially costume, what is significant is the non-descript nature of the costumes suggested. We might imagine that individuals actually choosing to costume as the nonspecific "black person" would actively engage in some type of stereotypical behavior in assuming the role of their costume. In any case, it would appear that such generic ideas represent whites' most fundamental attempts to strip all unique identity from people of color, to reveal race as the only relevant marker of those they claim to represent in costume. It is also significant that all generic representations in our sample referred to blackness. Arguably, generic and essentialist portrayals such as these tap into the most debased of representations, invoking the historical and archetypal consideration of the racial other in the white mind – that of the inferior black (Feagin, 2000, 2006).

Collectively considered, each cross-racial costume type helps us understand how such costumes serve as vehicles for transmitting racial judgments about people of color,

particularly in light of the fact that stereotype guides each to a greater or lesser degree. From the relatively "innocuous" celebrity portrayal, to the "role" portrayal, to the fundamentally degrading generic/essentialist portrayal, cross-racial costuming represents the effort to create inhabitable representations (McDowell, 1985) of the racial other and to indeed, engage costume as a metaphor for those depictions.

Responses in the Halloween context

The journal writing opportunity provided a regular way for students to reflect on the cross-racial costuming and other racialized Halloween rituals ongoing during this time. Students' compelling reflections serve as some of the most interesting points for analysis. For example, one student, observing the tendency of "ethnic costumes" to reflect stereotypes, posed the rhetorical question, "are these stereotypical costumes offensive, or merely observing that there are differences between people that can be parodied?" (white female). This was a concern addressed both explicitly and implicitly by other students, and indeed, how they responded formed a basis for thematically organizing students' reflections.

Active participation/unquestioning support

Moving beyond rhetorical theorizing about the potential to offend on Halloween, several students' reflections reveal a great deal of decidedness about cross-racial costuming. For most students, notions of sensitivity or social or political correctness should be put aside for the holiday, as cross-racial costuming is afforded by the Halloween license for fun. Students adhering to this rationale unsurprisingly invoked the racial other in their own costuming, or provided minimal critique of those who did. As such, this line of thinking served as a justification for cross-racial dressing. Dressing up for a day, "as anything . . . or anyone you want" is entitled by the holiday: "Consciously, I can't think of a time when I have placed a limitation on Halloween costumes or decorations based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class or even age" (white female). Similarly, another white woman wrote, "Halloween is a holiday in which people like to believe that the lines of race and gender are blurred, with no one truly caring exactly where they lie." She appears confident that her belief is universal, and as such, concerns about choosing a gendered or racially offensive costume need not be entertained.

Indeed, other journals echo that while not necessarily universal, for most Halloween license is a "given," and extends to cross-racial costuming, such that invoking ethnicity and race has "no bounds" (black female). Unlike other days of the year, Halloween affords individuals the right to reveal one's "true self" through "disguise" as another (in many cases, as our data show, a racial other). Ironically, this freedom from self-correction takes form in interesting ways. For example, in writing of a white friend who dressed as a Rastafarian, Josh recognized that while his friend may have "broken norms," he had not gone too far:

> . . . because this is Halloween and anything goes. Normally dressing up as people from other cultures, such as the Rastafari, would be considered some sort of racism or people might be offended . . . This is the great thing about Halloween, people can go all out and be whoever they want to be, without having to worry about what people will think or who will be offended. (white male)

This excerpt highlights that students understand the potentially invidious nature of this type of costuming, but feel comfortable "playing" with racial ideas and roles on Halloween because

they can get away with it within the holiday context. Clearly, students carry these caricatured ideas in their consciousness, but withhold them from public frontstage expression, having learned, as a result of political correctness or other means, to do so.

Halloween serves as a cultural space where the need to self-correct, or to be corrected is suspended, and the otherwise (at least publicly) abhorrent becomes tolerated, even celebrated. Indeed, as the student above asserts, Halloween is "great" *because* worries of offending are suspended on the holiday. Whether or not in fact true, many students, and in particular white students, believe it to be. This is evident in the numerous reports of cross-racial costuming and the invocation of degrading beliefs about people of color, often without any critical reflection – even when given the opportunity to do so through the journal writing exercise. As we discuss in depth later, students of color were much less likely to give cross-racial costuming a Halloween "pass," as seen in several examples of firm objections to such "celebrating."

Among students who uncritically embrace cross-racial costuming, a belief in the "fun factor" of dressing across racial/ethnic lines emerges. Frequently, students who emphasize the fun of costumes translate that impression into an equation where humor "trumps" offensiveness – in other words, as long as a costume is perceived as funny, onlookers should take no offense, as this student's recollection demonstrates:

> Tonight I went to a costume party and the whitest kid I know was dressed up as a rapper. Baggy jeans, backwards hat, gold chain, whole deal. He did such a good job overplaying it that no one was offended, they just found it comical. It was hilarious to see him greet the black kids at the party. (white male)

Like other students, this individual understands the potentially offending nature of cross-racial costuming (although he does not explicitly say that his friend went as a "black" rapper, it becomes implicit in his racialized account); however, he assumes it will be negated as long as individuals "play up" the humor potential of the costume and convey the experience as merely a joke. The alleged hilarity of the "whitest kid" greeting the "black kids at the party" averts a potentially offensive situation according to the narrative. Seen through the eyes of this young white writer, the description of this interaction overemphasizes the social requirement of racial joking – that both sides appear to receive it as a joke. Conveniently, objections that may have been entertained by the "black kids," or anyone else for that matter, are effectively erased with the conclusion that "no one was offended" because of the successful ways in which the costumer was able to so humorously appropriate notions of blackness and rap. Even without invoking the use of blackface makeup, this narrative highlights the ways in which racialized images are constructed in the white imagination, speaking to the various boundary negotiations that occur during the holiday. We are left with the easy sense that racial harmony is restored – injustice and offense are averted – all thanks to the cleverness of the "whitest kid" and his ability to make stereotyping comical. One must ask if this event was not so comical, would this respondent's writing be any more critical?

Consider another excerpt that speaks to the social negotiation over humor, boundaries, and audience through an interesting contrast. A white respondent wrote the following:

> Today I talked to one of my best friends, Alexis, about her costume . . . She is a 22-year-old African American. She said that she was going to be a Haitian refugee for Halloween. She joked about it endlessly, about how funny it was going to be. (white female)

This example is notable because at first glance it seemingly offers a case where cross-racial costuming is uncritically endorsed by a person of color along the "fun factor" line. However,

the journal-writer adds that her friend also had a more serious underlying aim for her costume – "she said she also wanted to make a political statement about the fact that Cuban refugees are allowed to seek asylum but Haitian refugees aren't." We cannot be sure whether the white writer has a deep understanding of this political aim given her lack of analysis. It does appear, however, that her black friend's costume choice is significantly influenced by a political message she hopes to communicate. The humor is *in* the political message, rather than serving as a tool for bypassing offensiveness so that she can communicate stereotypes. In negotiating the boundaries of that construction, we must consider who her audience for that message will be. We can imagine it will include other politically minded people who will "get" her message. Even if this is not the case, because she has announced it as a "political statement" she wants to "make," she will most likely be clear about this intention with whomever she comes in contact.

Dubious curiosity/questioning support

Similar to the student who pondered whether the stereotypes evoked on Halloween were offensive or realistic, a number of students expressed dubious curiosity and questioning support for cross-racial costuming. Responses in this group reflect a sense of ambivalence, with students appearing less confident about the social permissibility of cross-racial dressing. However, critical thinking about doing so is often coupled with statements that invalidate the offensiveness of the practice, as the following quote demonstrates:

> We were all talking about what we should dress up as for Halloween. My boyfriend's friend Mike (22-year-old white male) is having a huge costume party and my boyfriend thought it would be fun to go as a black couple. I think it would be really fun and funny to do that but I'm afraid that black people would be offended. I don't get offended when people dress up as "Indians" for Halloween and I don't see why black people would care if we dress as black people. I asked my mom what she thought and she said we choose another costume because even though it's silly, black people probably would be offended and we shouldn't do things that could hurt someone's feelings intentionally. (Native American/white female)

Notably, as discussed in reference to generic/essentialist portrayals, this young woman and her boyfriend entertain no other defining feature to their costume, other than they go as a "black couple." While she recognizes such costumes might offend black people, she discredits their potential "silly" objections, particularly given her estimation that masquerading in this way would be both "really fun and funny," a clear return to the theme of the "fun factor" litmus test. Interestingly, we also note that relying on her identity as a racial minority, in one sense, led her to give pause in contemplating the issue, but in another sense served as validation for cross-racially dressing as a generic "black couple."

  Another fine exemplar of dubious curiosity and questioning support is the woman from above who attended the "Thug Holiday" fraternity party with her two friends. In addition to detailing their costumes, this student added the following reflections on her experience:

> The theme of the social thoroughly involved race, and thus was somewhat inappropriate. Of course the themes to Greek parties are supposed to be fun and good spirited. However funny this theme was, maybe it could be offensive to African Americans who considered themselves far from 'thugs.' (white female)

Perhaps as a result of the journal assignment, this student attempts to address the perspectives of those outside her personal "lens," and yet she participated in the experience nonetheless. In addition, although she is challenging the idea that humor trumps offensiveness to some extent, she implies a new standard – that intention trumps outcome. Significantly, this standard has been codified into U.S. social structure, perhaps most importantly through the institution of law (Flagg, 1993; Haney López, 1996).[4] For our respondent above, the intention-over-outcome standard insulates her from a deeper evaluation of her own role, as well as that of her friends and the fraternity at large, in reproducing and reaffirming racist stereotypes through their actions. Collectively, the dubious curiosity of such responses reflects not a fundamental concern with the racism of cross-racial costuming, but rather a concern over whether the practice can pass the censors of political correctness in the Halloween context. They do not object to cross-racial costuming; it is a problem of others, and deciding whether to consider that becomes the primary focus, and the basis for the rhetorical questions posed.

Firm objection – Antiracism versus white supremacy

Finally, we reach the other end of the pole – those responses grouped as firm objections to cross-racial costuming. For one student who posed a similar rhetorical question regarding cross-racial costuming offensiveness (albeit in a biracial frame) the answer was clear: blacks and whites dressing as the "other race" represented a way to "mock each other" (multiracial male). While his analysis represents a form of "equal opportunity racism" and neglects the stereotypical and highly degrading ways in which people of color are often portrayed by whites, it does represent a firm belief that the practice is offensive.

Given the disturbing abundance of negatively racialized incidents in our sample, it is important to acknowledge those students who expressed their own or detailed others' antiracist thinking regarding cross-racial costuming. Typically these students chose not to cross-racially costume, or to critically evaluate this practice based on beliefs that it is offensive and degrading to people of color. One of the most hard-lined excerpts was the following:

> I saw the most disturbing thing tonight. I went with a group of friends to a Halloween party. As we were leaving, I saw two white people, a male and a female, standing outside the other party who were dressed in blackface, as what I can only assume was their rendition of Jamaicans. I could do nothing but stand there with my mouth, literally, open. I was so shocked. I have never seen anything in person as horrifically blatantly racist and offensive as I found that to be. Who comes up with an idea like that? I don't know if they were doing it as a joke or what their costume purpose was, but I don't find that funny at all. (white female)

This student's objections are unequivocal, and while circumstances did not really allow for her to take antiracist action based on her beliefs, we might imagine that she would attempt to interrupt what is to her clearly racist, for instance, if a friend of hers were to consider

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[4] For example, in racial discrimination cases, a legal finding of discrimination will be rendered only if intent to discriminate can be proven (Flagg, 1993; Haney López, 1996). As MacKinnon (1989) contends, the litmus test which biases intent over outcome near universally results in privileging the dominant group, if for no other fact than that their interpretation and world perspective is codified into the standard for judging intent, for judging what a reasonable person would do, indeed, for setting the litmus test at which we begin.

cross-racially costuming. Unfortunately, while a number of white students expressed antiracist concerns about cross-racial costuming, only a few shared that they had verbally challenged others about offensive costumes. Because many of the writers were recounting incidents with friends, they often seemed compelled to excuse their comments and actions, and engage in diffuse, light challenges, which may or may not have been perceptible to those they were directed at, as the following quote illuminates:

> While my friend Greg was putting on black face paint for his costume, Luke made the comment that he looked like a 'scummy nigg' and that people are going to think he's trying to rob them . . . I didn't comment on it at the time . . . I couldn't forget about it all night, partly because I had this assignment on my mind when it occurred . . . I know that the reasoning behind his making such a comment was in trying to get a laugh out of the people who were present. Most of the people just gave him a dirty look and stared at him in silence . . . and I am sure that Luke realized how racist and stereotypical his statements were upon seeing the reactions of those who heard them. (white male)

This student has no difficulty recognizing these statements for what they were – "racist and stereotypical" – and indeed, it appears that the journal-writing project encouraged a deeper reflection on this incident than might ordinarily have occurred. However, rather than challenging his friend in a direct way, he remains concerned but verbally non-sanctioning. Criticism here is offered via dirty looks, stares, and silence – forms of challenge that may or may not actually reach the target and mark the comment or action as problematic. The social setting, which could have facilitated an antiracist deconstruction of what occurred, was instead transformed into a space where this group of white students, reluctant to lead any firmer confrontation, ended up avoiding any explicit challenge of the racist reproduction of stereotypes and white supremacy.

While expressed antiracism was the exception and not the rule among white students, students of color were more universal in their critique of cross-racial costuming, as well as in their willingness to challenge others, particularly when they observed highly stereotypical portrayals. It is important to give voice to the frustration and hurt they expressed, as well. One Latina woman skeptically attended a "ghetto party" with a black friend. As she detailed:

> When we arrived at the party we were shocked at what we saw. First, we did not see one black or Hispanic person. Blonde hair, blue-eyed kids were walking around with aluminum foil on their teeth, bandanas on their head, fur coats, big huge earrings, and shirts that said 'Project Chick' or 'Ghetto Fabulous.' . . . when I was younger my family was pretty poor and our living situation was very bad. We lived in what people refer to as the 'ghetto,' and it wasn't fun and it sure wasn't what those kids were portraying it to be. They were glamorizing it and at the same time almost making fun of it. My friend was insulted because this is how a lot of white people view black people and it is sad that this is true. (Hispanic/Latina female)

Another black woman wrote that after an initial amusement with the cross-racial costumes of white students she witnessed wore off, "something felt not right with me. I don't think it was the fact that white people were impersonating African Americans, but it was more of how they were impersonating them" (black female). Sadly, as has been documented, costumes portraying people of color rarely, if ever, deviate from the principle guide of stereotype, and as such, it is hard to imagine this woman ever experiencing a costume portrayal of her race that "felt right."

Similar to the dubious curiosity/questioning support category, there is a contingent of objecting responses that reflect confused ideas about just what is offensive about cross-racial

costuming, as opposed to reflecting antiracist beliefs. Consider the experience of one woman:

> As we were discussing costume ideas, a white 24-year-old male made a comment about what he was going to dress up as. He said 'I'm going to be a porch monkey.' I've heard the term 'porch monkey' numerous times but I never really paid attention to the way people used it. I asked him what he meant by him dressing as a porch monkey. He said that he was going to be a nigger. I then asked him why he used the term porch monkey. He said, 'Haven't you ever noticed how niggers are always sitting on their porch drinking their forties?' (white female)

In recounting the discussion over this "role" portrayal, this young woman goes on to communicate an objection; however, her final reflection suggests that she is not conflicted about the stereotypical representation of African Americans *per se*, but rather the choice of words used to describe such a costume – "I couldn't believe that he could use the terms he did and act like it didn't even bother him. Is it that hard for people to use the term black person?" (white female). Extending this logic, it would appear that in this student's eyes, such a costume is only troubling when we employ explicit racist epithets to label it. We must consider whether she and others present would have maintained a group comfort level had this man "correctly" defined a "porch monkey" as a black person, rather than a "nigger."

Collectively, these narratives reveal the boundary negotiations over deciding what is offensive and what is not. When stereotyping and race talk remain in the safe and slippery terrain of color-blind "now you see it now you don't" ideology, cross-racial costuming appears more acceptable. However, when events that have been more definitively deemed racist occur (e.g., dressing in blackface, using the "n-word"), a seeming contemporary racial relations line is crossed, and we find more frequent attempts at antiracist thinking and action by white students.

Another excerpt provides a similar example of confused antiracist critique, and extends the discussion of firm objections to cross-racial costuming further – however for different reasons altogether. Todd, a white student, described his group of friends' consideration of cross-racially dressing as the Harlem Globetrotters:

> My roommate suggested that we all be members from the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. He said we would all wear big, black afro wigs, their jersey, and a boombox to carry around. All the guys on the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team are black though, but none of us really cared except for Chip. He said it was against his moral values to degrade himself and go as a black person for Halloween. We tried convincing him, but he would not listen to us. We asked him why it would be degrading and he gave us a bunch of crappy answers. I guess he was brought up by his parents to think that black people are no good and the only thing they are good for is slavery. It is amazing to me to hear that people still believe this way and are brought up like this. Anyway, we kept our idea of being Harlem Globetrotter basketball players and everybody loved our costumes. (white male)

This excerpt is notable for several reasons. Foremost is the rigid rejection of cross-racial costuming by the writer's friend, based on its offensiveness, ironically not because of its racist nature, but rather because it would be a moral degradation of himself as a white person. We must, however, draw attention to Todd's clear rejection of his friend's explicitly racist thinking, while he and his other friends entertain and actually carry out a costume based on racial stereotypes about African Americans.

Aside from the Harlem Globetrotters jerseys, which would be clearly appropriate for these costumes, these young men decide that they should also wear "big, black afro wigs"

and carry a "boombox," neither of which are relevant to the Harlem Globetrotters, but are rather stereotypical conventions employed to convey the blackness of the players. Indeed, incorporating a "boombox" into a costume intended to portray basketball players is somewhat ludicrous, and marks this excerpt another clear example of the primary concern with playing up race as the dominant feature of cross-racial costumes. In reference to confused critique, it would appear that Todd can recognize the explicitly racist rearing of his friend, Chip, but is unable to recognize the racialized messages he has internalized in his own life.

Aside from providing another example of the confused critique of some whites, the above example introduces the theme of firm objection to cross-racial costuming on the basis of white supremacy. Among other such firm objectors, one white female student detailed a conversation with her white friends about "three white girls dressed as the Supremes" at a Halloween party they had attended three days earlier. Their discussion involved how "wearing that crazy fro hair would have been so hot and uncomfortable," chronicling the ways in which dressing the part of African American women would be subjectively unattractive, therefore unappealing. Like the quote above, we see that invoking the racial other is avoided not for antiracist reasons, but because it defiles these students' notions of themselves as white, an identity that assumes favorable attributes. In this way, a significant paradox is revealed that whites who reject cross-racial costuming, as well as those who embrace it may both reflect racialized motives, whether cognizant of them or not.

Conclusion

While Skal (2002) suggests that "tasteless" Halloween costumes might simply represent an extension of Halloween's historical pranking tradition, it is perhaps more fitting to draw on a different relic from Halloween's historical tradition – that of departed spirits returning to wreak mischief and even harm. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) documents, the societal norms of the post-Civil Rights era have disallowed the open expression of racial views. In this way, for many, Halloween has become a culturally tolerated, contemporary space for the racist "ghost" to be let out of the box. Indeed, our findings support the thesis that Halloween's combination of social license, ritual costuming and social setting make the holiday a uniquely constructive context for negative engagement of racial concepts and identities.

While our respondents reflect an oversampling and concomitant overrepresentation of data from the Southeast region of the U.S., nationwide marketing of racist costumes like "Vato Loco" and "Kung Fool," and local news stories and editorials documenting similar occurrences at universities around the nation suggest that we should not simply dismiss this as a "southern phenomenon." Additionally, even if this trend is ultimately revealed as uniquely "southern," that does not discount the need to analyze how it reinforces the racial order. We thus urge future research to investigate if and how such practices vary nationwide, and what such a variance might mean.

With respect to theorizing what activates the cross-racial costuming behavior of our respondents, it is useful to further draw upon the "rituals of rebellion" concept. Interestingly, although the Gluckman and Bakhtinian frameworks should predict the ample use of cross-racial costuming among people of color, it is not immediately apparent that students of color use Halloween as an opportunity to create costume performances that subvert the racial and/or social hierarchy. Even in the very few cases where cross-racial costuming among respondents of color did occur, costumes were most frequently celebrity portrayals, and none appeared to pose an indictment of whiteness *per se* (as particularly opposed to the clear degradation of blackness revealed). Only one, the African American student said to

be costuming as a Haitian refugee, attempted an explicit challenge, offering a quite critical commentary regarding the racial politics of immigration policy. We must recall, too, the more vocal antiracist critiques of students of color toward white cross-racial costuming. To be sure, the relatively small proportion of students of color in our sample limits our ability to fully explore this theme, and future research is needed to examine this phenomenon in greater depth.

In contrast, there does appear to be a unique, ritually rebellious form of performance that occurs among many white students. In the "colorblind" post-Civil Rights era, it has become commonplace for whites to express frustration and resentment toward color-conscious racial remediation programs, such as affirmative action (Feagin, 2000, 2006; Wellman, 1997). Both Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Wellman (1997) document the regularity with which whites employ anecdotal storylines regarding antiwhite discrimination and "reverse racism," despite the relative infrequency of credible, substantive, and supporting evidence. Similarly, many whites complain of the threat to free speech and censorship imposed by political and social correctness.

Although in truth white students occupy the dominant racial social identity group, we posit that many may entertain if not a sense of "oppression," at minimum a sense of normative restriction by a social code which prescribes "nonracist" frontstage presentations, and for which racialized Halloween "rituals of rebellion" afford some release. Recall, for example, one white student's praise of Halloween as "great" because it eliminates the need to worry about racial offense. For those whites who actively endorse the idea that whites are now victimized by the preferencing of people of color (e.g., in employment, admissions, etc.), Halloween may ironically signify a suspension of this imagined "hierarchy." Considered within the American socio-historical racial context, however, this white "ritual of rebellion" seems almost a harkening back to the Jim Crow period of more overt, often celebrated expressions of racism and white supremacy.

Picca and Feagin (forthcoming) have extended Goffman (1959) to theorize and empirically demonstrate the frontstage/backstage dichotomy of white racial behavior, uncovering that whites regularly behave in seemingly tolerant, non-racist ways when in the public frontstage, in contrast to the private backstage, where racist talk and behavior frequently occurs. Significantly, the results of our study suggest that Halloween is a space and time where white backstage behavior emerges, if only for the fleeting holiday moment, in the frontstage. Halloween is illuminating, then, for what it reveals not only of the images of people of color that live in the white mind, but also about the white backstage.

In addition, our data refute the idea that whites do not engage in public acts of racism in contemporary society. Indeed, some whites are engaging in nothing less than blackface performances, an inarguable throwback to the ubiquitous minstrelsy of the nineteenth century. While many other whites never step over the "threshold" into blackface, their stereotypical and essentialist portrayals must be charged with a striking similarity. Truly, are not "Ghetto Thugs," "Project Chicks" and "Niggas" just not-so-distant cousins of "Step-n-Fetchit" and "Mammy"? The characters may be different, but the consequences, if not the motives, are the same.

While some, like Skal (2002), may reduce the holiday engagement of racial concepts to a matter of simple Halloween "fun," this practice must be viewed within a greater framework. Seemingly playful and innocuous cultural practices, such as cross-racial costuming, should be considered within the sociohistorical and ideological context of the society, as a reflection of dominant group values and doctrines (Wilkinson, 1974). We must put aside the "fun" of costumes, which can distract from the subtle and not-so-subtle messages conveyed about people of color, and recognize that costumes provide a format for engaging commentary on

personal and social values (McDowell, 1985). Indeed, to render people into character pieces, they must already exist as characters in one's mind, and there are many social forces that drive our constructions of race and people of different racial groups toward such ends.

In revealing the ideological role that such costuming can play, and in light of our findings, particularly with respect to cross-racial costuming responses, we must also examine the needs left unfulfilled by contemporary approaches to multiculturalism and political correctness, some of which have become dogmatic. The confused critiques of many students reflect the ways in which we have become a society reproducing what Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to as "racism without racists." He suggests that research on racism in this color-blind era may lead us away from the idea that mere education will lead to racial tolerance, to question rather what education actually does and does not do and for whom, as well as to the other conditions that may be required for true impact.

Indeed, as Johnson (1997) points out, the social reproduction of racism does not require people explicitly acting in racially hostile ways, but simply those who will uncritically acquiesce in the larger cultural order. While our data indeed reveal the explicit intentions of some students to degrade blackness through costume, the majority of white respondents actively suspended their criticisms or behaved in wholly uncritical ways. It is highly significant that regardless of intention, each of these response "types" share the outcome of reproducing stereotypical racist images, thereby supporting the racial social structure. Even among the minority of white students who journaled firm antiracist objections, few extended their internalized criticisms of cross-racial costuming to offer explicit challenges within their social groups, a social silence that, too, empowers the structure of racial dominance.

This research suggests that at a minimum we must take up Feagin's (2006) call, and locate ways to encourage a deeper critical assessment of historical and contemporary racial oppression, acknowledging both the material and ideological consequences of this structure. Interestingly, the unconventional qualitative methodology of journal-collection not only reveals this need by demonstrating the transformed persistence of racism in the post-Civil Rights era, but also serves as a unique pedagogical and consciousness-raising tool as students reflect on experiences where they might have normally remained non-reflexive.

Rogers (2002) notes that while "Halloween is unquestionably a night of inversion," the holiday's context probably provides little substantial opportunity to actually challenge how society operates in a determined or sustained way – "At its best, Halloween functions as a transient form of social commentary or 'deep play'" (p. 137). 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. At its worst, contemporary cross-racial costuming bores a track deep into history, intimately connecting itself to the ugly practice of American blackface minstrelsy. Ultimately, the white privilege to racially differentiate supports both material and ideological benefits and disadvantages built into the systemic racial structure. In the United States this system has deep historical roots and is well-formulated and ingrained into the everyday rhythms of life. As such, Halloween social commentary which engages race can hardly be described as transient, and actually reflects the dominant racist ideology, coupling contemporary imaging with racist conceptualizations as old as the country itself.

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