

# Flip the Script on Halloween

A Collaboration Between The Wellness Resource Center, The SARC, and The Butler Center



## **“To Costume or Not To Costume?” that is the first question.**

Although the costume, decoration, and haunted house industries might want us to think that dressing up for Halloween is a given, the reality is that we each make a choice about whether to dress up in a costume or not. In deciding whether to dress up or not, we might ask ourselves the following questions:



- **Do you find dressing up in costume to be fun?**
  - Many people have fond memories of past Halloween costumes or Cosplay experiences. For them, the answer is likely to be a resounding “YES!” For others, it’s just not that fun to dress up in a costume. And that’s OK.
  - Although “everyone else is doing it” isn’t a great reason to make decisions in our lives, being part of an experience with others can be an important part of the fun.
- **Do you enjoy the creative process of imagining, designing and pulling together a costume?**
  - Creating a Halloween costume can be a fantastic creative outlet. You can learn about different sewing or construction processes. And, it can feel nice to have others demonstrate their appreciation of your creativity and effort.
- **Are you interested in exploring a new or emerging personal identity?** Halloween provides an opportunity to publicly explore an identity that we think we might have, or that we haven’t yet felt comfortable sharing with others. This can be an important step for some people as they work to figure out who they are, and how they want to show up with others.



## **If you’ve decided that Costuming is for you, the questions below can help you develop your costume ideas.**

In addition to the fun and self-exploration that dressing in costumes can help us achieve, most of us are also interested in how other people will respond to our costume. Because Halloween costumes are often heavily influenced by cultural and media narratives, it’s important to better understand those influences so that we can more closely match our intentions to the impacts we have on others. For instance, exploring the dominant narratives and the counter-stories about a topic or identity sheds light on who and what is represented or not. When we identify what narratives we are implicitly accepting, we can make choices about whether those narratives are actually consistent with our beliefs, values, and goals. We can also better understand how others may see our representation of the narratives we choose to embody.



## What is your goal with your costume?

- **Funny:** Ask yourself:
  - **Is the humor based on putting others down, or on making fun of real people, traits, or culture?**
  - **Will your behaviors be part of what makes the costume funny? If so, is that you will be enacting stereotypical behavior or embodying a caricature?**
  - **Are you trying to satirize something?** Satire uses humor, irony, and exaggeration to expose and question things that are visible, but often taken for granted, such as corruption and hypocrisy.
    - Check out this site for an example and analysis of when satire worked:  
<http://www.upworthy.com/rape-jokes-werent-funny-until-this-feminist-website-made-a-bunch-of-them>
- **Scary:** Ask yourself
  - **Is the fear you're hoping to instill based on real forms of violence, stereotypes of violence in particular communities, or exaggerations of real human traits?** It's important to be aware of how our presence in a space can affect others. If your costume is "about" some real form of violence, it can be triggering or re-traumatizing for people who have had those experiences. Not only can it bring up memories or feelings about that real experience for others, developing a costume on these bases often ends up minimizing the traumas of real people.
  - **Is the scary thing you're hoping to embody something that you're actually afraid of?** Confronting our fears and taking them down to size by dressing as them can feel very empowering, leaving us feeling more capable of managing that scary thing in the future. We just want to make sure we're also considering our impact on others (see above).
- **Beauty:** Ask yourself
  - **What standards of beauty are you considering for your costume? What statement does your costume make about what is considered beautiful? About who is considered beautiful?**
  - **Is your costume empowering? Are you wearing this costume in order to feel empowered? Do you feel like your beauty is the only place where you can feel empowered? If so, it might be worthwhile exploring other areas of your identity and life that can lead to feeling empowered.**
- **Historical:** Ask yourself
  - **Do your costume ideas perpetuate misinformation or cultural inaccuracies?**
- **Cultural:** Ask yourself
  - **Is your costume idea perpetuating stereotypes, appropriating cultural identities in ways that try to minimize cultural differences, or put down another culture?**
- **Honoring:** Ask yourself
  - **Who are you trying to honor (i.e., a character, a person, a role, a culture)?**
  - **Is your costume really honoring?** Considering both your representation of who/what you're trying to honor, and how your representation might be perceived by others is important here; considering the perception of and impact on those who hold that identity is key.
  - **How are different identities (your own & the "honoree") incorporated into the costume?** Just as in life, intersecting identities complicate the representation and impact of a costume, so it's important to consider the impact of this, too.

**Check out these resources for learning more about cultural appropriation:**

Franchesca Ramsey's [7 Myths about Cultural Appropriation Debunked!](#)

Arah Iloabugichukwa's [Black is King, Beyonce is not.](#)