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By Morgan Hutcheson | mhutcheson@radford.edu

With Halloween being around the corner, I urge students to avoid ill-judged party costumes. October, in particular, is an important month to be mindful and respectful of the cultures around us.

Oxford Dictionary defines cultural appropriation as “The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.”

Scholars argue that cultural appropriation is a by-product of imperialism, which is the maintenance of an unequal relationship between two states based upon subordination.

The oppression inflicted on a society leads to extracting everything of value to its culture. Their differences are suppressed only until the dominant culture decides to deem certain aspects desirably ‘exotic’ and ‘edgy.’

Minorities within society that may experience prejudice throughout the year, see those who have discriminated against them (intentionally or not) then dressing as them in mere celebration of Halloween.

Cultural appropriation is an extension of oppression. Dressing in such costumes is treating aspects of a culture as free for the taking. This was similar rationale states used against the marginalized to steal land and resources.

These offensive Halloween costumes are often last-minute buys, bought for the supposed benefit of the party-goer.

Be careful of mainstream stores that exploit honorable cultural clothing to create thoughtless dress up. This is simply for capitalists to feed off of the Halloween money-making frenzy at the expense of the minority.

Those selling and buying this throwaway fashion are not considerate of the history and

struggle of a culture. These heedless costumes perpetuate stereotypes while creating so-called trends that will last until the next Fall.

Simply put, cultural appropriation is taking elements of a culture without permission.

Some argue cultural appropriation is 'political correctness' gone too far. Perhaps by attacking those who step outside of their own cultural experiences, we hinder the world's ability to develop a cross-cultural understanding. However, the majority of offensive Halloween costumes are not hair-splitting claims of cultural appropriation, it is a plain grasp of an often oppressed culture for an all-too-easy fancy dress option.

We, as students, must encourage cultural appreciation instead. Appreciation is an invitation by a culture to try learning from and valuing its differences to our own.

Let us support a genuine interest and empathy toward other cultures. By learning more about other cultures, we are less likely to appropriate. Building an understanding will allow us to recognize what will be taken as disrespectful by the people of that culture. Plus, what will be embraced.

Or even try learning more about our own culture and celebrate something unique in ourselves.

More often than not, those who culturally appropriate do so without the intention of harming anyone. Yet, it is not enough for students to plead ignorance on what may be incredibly offensive to their peers. It is time to be conscious of appropriating costumes. As we swap costume ideas across the lunch table, we are prepared to raise the issue with those around us. This does not need to be done in a finger-wavey manner, I am sure most friends will be open to learning and change.

I will avoid providing fellow students with a list of costumes that would be deemed unacceptable. We, of course, all have the freedom to make our own choices, I will, however, encourage careful-decision making.

Halloween should be a time for people to come together and explore their creativity.

Celebrate an appropriation-free Halloween and cultural appreciation all year round.

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