

INTRODUCTION

Why hello there! And welcome to our first ever “I Am Not a Costume” zine. Our team has created this collection of resources, discussions, and definitions to complement our costume campaign.

We would like to begin by acknowledging the land that our campus and community resides on. Wilfrid Laurier University, as well as the communities of KW and Brantford reside on traditional Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee and Attawandaron (Neutral) territory. This land (along with the rest of Turtle Island i.e. North America) was occupied by settlers over generations of colonial acts such as state sanctioned oppression, violence, murder, and the attempted control of Turtle Island’s indigenous peoples. Control mechanisms such as the creation of reserves, the Indian Act, residential “schools”, the theft of children from their families, stolen resources and ingrained stereotypes in the settler population, has allowed a situation where the history of this land is not commonly discussed. And when it is, the violent and oppressive nature is often left out. We at LSPIRG believe that it is not only important to say the names of the nations who historically resided on this land, but to also take critical action to change our relation with each other and the land. We promote discussions about what decolonization and reconciliation might look like and, to the settler population (which includes many of us at LSPIRG) we promote discussions about the history of how we got here, how our presence can impact our surroundings, and how our privilege can allow us to reinforce colonial attributes. This area of Turtle Island is subject to the Two Row Wampum Treaty (an agreement between Haudenosaunee and Europeans that signifies two vessels – a Haudenosaunee canoe and a European ship – traveling down the river together, parallel but not touching the other) and the Dish With One Spoon Treaty (to acknowledge the fact that we all eat out of the same dish [all depend on the same land and water]. This means we are responsible to make sure the dish is never empty [to take care of the land and the creatures we share it with], and to never take more than what we need). We are all treaty peoples, and we all have a responsibility to uphold those agreements of peacefulness and non-interference).

WHAT IS THIS CAMPAIGN?

...AND WHY DO WE DO IT?

LSPIRG's "I Am Not a Costume" campaign aims to draw awareness to the problematic nature of many Halloween costumes. We know that most folks do not pick out a costume with the intention of being racist or transphobic. But regardless of intentions, it can still perpetuate harmful stereotypes and justify more aggressive and violent situations.

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?

It's possible because racism and transphobia is ingrained into our history. It has been built of generations of oppression over some groups by groups who have traditionally deemed themselves as superior.

We acknowledge that this discrimination is a lived reality for many individuals on a daily basis. So as a side note we would like to stress that these conversations should happen all year round – not just during Halloween.

We organize this campaign in order to have a dialogue on campus and in the community, to talk about race and trans issues in a critical way. Halloween should be safe and enjoyable for everyone (and not just a privileged few who do not have to worry about their culture or identity being used during a holiday with the central themes of fear, sexiness or humor. This Halloween, we would like to remind our fellow students and community members to be mindful of their choice in costumes, how they could impact others, and how it could reinforce current systemic oppressions.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

CULTURES ARE NOT COSTUMES



ALICIA BIGCANOE

Settlers (predominantly white European settlers) do not have to think about cultural appropriation on a daily basis. This is due to the fact that European culture has never been systemically criminalized, mocked, demonized or oppressed.

WHAT IS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

There are likely many ways cultural appropriation could be defined, as it can look different in many situations. Sometimes being written off as “honoring” or “flattering” the group being appropriated. For the sake of keeping things short enough to fit in a zine, cultural appropriation can be summed up as a dominant (or oppressor) group “borrowing” from marginalized groups.

Let’s get one thing straight. Sharing cultural aspects is not a bad thing. It can actually be a very effective way to show and teach outside groups about a specific culture. Where things get sticky is when the exchange is not consensual.

It is okay to think another culture is beautiful. But in order to really show you care, there needs to be respect and understanding. Instead of assuming that one is entitled to try on a culture simply because that find it intriguing.

“BUT IT DOESN’T HURT ANYONE – IT’S JUST A JOKE.”RIGHT?

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Thinking we have a right to use another cultures dress or tradition as “just a joke” is getting into some very oppressive territory. Because that is often the exact reason why it is being used. Cultural appropriation has its roots in a privileged group misrepresenting and disrespecting oppressed groups. The originators rarely get credit but always deal with the consequences.

When the Indian Act was created in 1876, it made illegal many First Nation practices, ceremonies, dances, medicines, and dress. People lost their lives or were imprisoned for practicing their culture or speaking their language. Shortly after, the residential school system was created.

“When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”

John A. MacDonald - 1879

TRANS MISOGYNY

First of all – let's start off with some terms.

CISGENDER: identifying with the gender that was assigned to you at birth.

TRANSGENDER: not identifying with the gender that was assigned to you at birth. Some identify with another gender (i.e. assigned male at birth but identifying as female) while others identify with neither prescribed genders (i.e. gender non-binary or gender neutral – along with many other potential identifications). Some non-binary folks identify as trans while others do not choose to use the term in regards to themselves.

[gender can be a confusing conversation – we suggest checking out resources to see what folks outside of the cis community are saying about it]

TRANSPHOBIA: the discrimination of transgender people based on their gender expression or perceived negative stereotypes.

MISOGYNY: the hatred and denigration of women and the characteristics that are deemed to be feminine.

TRANS MISOGYNY: the combination of these. It is discrimination directed towards trans women (or those who are deemed to be trans women) through individual and state sanctioned violence.

The criminalization of cultural practices was a strategic method of colonization. Its goal was (and still is) to disconnect people from who they are. It's what has been referred to as "cultural genocide".

Modern examples take the form of – but are not limited to - lack of resources, using indigenous stereotypes as mascots, criminal stereotyping of people of color, European based beauty standards being forced on people of color, and widespread misrepresentation in the media [i.e. Latinx individuals being portrayed as lazy and uneducated at best and violent drug lords at worst].

We cannot pretend this power imbalance doesn't exist. And we must think critically about wearing cheap and unrealistic representations of entire groups of people while said groups face real consequences due to the same stereotypes and oppressions.

Our goal is not to shame anyone out of wearing or enjoying certain things. But listening to the people of the culture you are interested in shows you have an honest respect and understanding for something that is not your own.

BECAUSE THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
SHARING AND TAKING

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Race is also a factor as much of the violence disproportionately affects trans women of color.

Trans actresses such as Jamie Clayton and Laverne Cox have recently taken the world by storm. But the reactions to Caitlyn Jenner transitioning in the public eye shows we still have a way to go.

Trans people face violence, criminalization, dehumanization, ridicule, higher suicide rates, and sexualization. So far in 2016 – 23 trans identified people have been murdered in the US (as of Sept.2016). There is no record of lost lives in Canada as the government still does not include transgender people in its hate crimes data.

Gender is complex. We get that. Even within the LGBTQ+ community, the conversation about non-cis identifiers are lacking. It makes it even harder to explore different gender related topics when there are so few conversations around it.

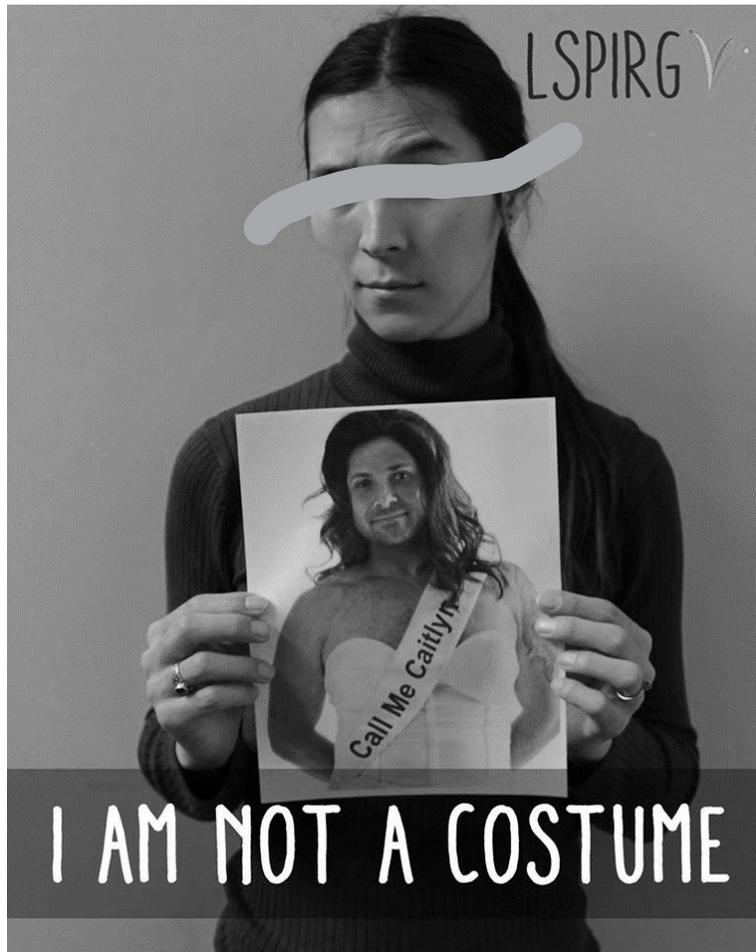
BUT

This does not justify making a joke out of people who are facing serious and life threatening consequences for simply being themselves.

BESIDES...HOW IS THAT EVEN CONSIDERED FUNNY?!

When it comes to gender identification, the best option is to always ask how someone identifies. If they give you an answer you are not familiar with – ask questions in a respectful manner. Or do research on your own.

And please don't dress up as Caitlyn Jenner. Trans people are people – not costumes.



WHAT TO ASK BEFORE BUYING A COSTUME.....

- ✓ Is the costume based on a culture, race, or ethnicity that is not your own? If it is, there is a good chance it's problematic.
- ✓ Is the costume based on making a joke about gender identity and the trans community (i.e. "Call me Caitlyn" costumes)? What are the intentions of this costume? At whose expense is the joke coming at?
- ✓ Would you wear this costume around the group of people it is intended to represent?
- ✓ What harmful stereotypes are being reinforced in this costume? Why are those stereotypes being viewed as sexy, funny, scary or entertaining?

LAST MINUTE COSTUME IDEAS

JUST REALIZED YOUR PLANNED COSTUME IS SUPER PROBLEMATIC? NEED A QUICK ALTERNATE COSTUME? WE GOT YOU.

Leaf Blower

Go find a leaf outside, attach it to a string and clip it to your hair. Blow it when people ask what you are.

Peter Pan

Name tag that says "Peter" (unless your name is actually Peter then you are already set). Carry a pan from your kitchen around.

Magic 8 Ball

Wear all black and attach a white circle with the number 8 in the middle to yourself. Answer every question with "Yes definitely", "Very doubtful" and "Ask again later".

Ceiling Fan

Carry around signs exclaiming "Go Ceilings Go!"

THESE ARE NOT YOUR ONLY OPTIONS. IN FACT THERE ARE TONS OF NON-PROBLEMATIC COSTUMES OUT THERE. GET CREATIVE NOT OPPRESSIVE.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE SOMEONE WEARING A PROBLEMATIC COSTUME

"CALLING IN". If one of your friends (or even a stranger) shows up at a Halloween party wearing a racist costume, it might create a tense situation to point that out in front of a large group of people.

"Calling in" instead of "calling out" is a situation where we approach a sensitive topic gently and with patience. And often in a private setting as opposed to a public one.

[We are *not* advocating that people should not get angry at oppression. Privilege and oppression have hurt and killed many people, and anyone who has been impacted by it has the right to feel strong emotions. In many situations, "calling out" in a public setting can help folks reclaim power and hold others accountable.

"Calling in" is merely another option].

Ask yourself – do you have the emotional capacity to have this conversation right now? It can be a draining situation to approach and there is no shame in acknowledging that you need help or would rather not do it at all. An alternative is to ask another person – perhaps an ally – to help explain the situation. As an ally – this is a very good thing to keep in mind as the weight of explaining privilege and oppression often falls on the shoulders of those who are deeply affected by it.

If you know the individual well, you might know that some forms of communications are more comfortable than others (*i.e. text or private facebook message as opposed to in person*). Mention the specific action and why it is hurtful or oppression. Some folks might not know, and that's okay.

Provide links to articles, youtube videos, or even book suggestions.

Coming at the information at our own speeds can also be very helpful.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Undoing Privilege – Bob Pease
The Inconvenient Indian – Thomas King
Settlers – j. Sakai
Teaching to Transgress – bell hooks
Red Skin, White Masks – Glen Sean Coulthard
even this page is white – Vivek Shraya

VIDEO

Decoded MTV with Franchesca Ramsey
Kat Blaque (Youtube)
The 13th (Netflix Documentry)

FACEBOOK

Sacred Stone Camp (#NoDAPL)
Black Lives Matter
Everyday Feminism
Red Rising Magazine

You are not alone. If you have faced violence or oppression this Halloween season and are looking for some support (or just to chat) please reach out to LSPIRG or the DEO. Contact info found on back cover.

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