

MY CULTURE IS NOT YOUR COSTUME

RESOURCE GUIDE

DEFINITIONS

Culture: Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Cultural Appreciation: Understanding histories of oppression and marginalization surrounding the particular object/practice/tradition and gauging the appropriateness of your actions in relation to this history

Cultural Appropriation:

- Involves the use of one culture's elements by a group or individual who does not belong to that culture. The adoption of these elements from another culture typically occur without the consent of the people who belong to that culture and who have been seen as "lesser" from the dominant population.
- Cultural appropriation is generally applied when the subject culture is a minority culture or somehow subordinate in social, political, economic, health, ability, or military status to the appropriating culture.

Cultural Exploitation: Aspects of marginalized/colonized cultures that are taken and used by a dominant/colonizing culture in such a way as to serve the interests of the dominant (examples include but are not limited to monetary means, enforcing stereotypes, and/or failing to give credit to and recognize the original culture, history, and experience).

When cultural artifacts or symbols are reproduced or used as substitutes for existing culture it can be detrimental or harmful to those who belong to that culture.

Institutional Power

- The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others.
There is an inherent responsibility by those who have power to acknowledge their privilege when participating in a culture or stepping into an identity that they do not hold.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Privilege: Operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups.

TIPS FOR ADDRESSING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

1. Self-work

- If you don't know what cultural appropriation is, look it up. Read some articles and watch some videos on different views and experiences surrounding cultural appropriation. We have provided a few resources below to help springboard this self-work. Be open-minded. If this is new for you, try to listen for understanding.

2. Engage in dialogue

- Bring up subjects like cultural appropriation with your friends, classmates, and the Community Assistants in your building after you do some self-work. See what their views are and share your own knowledge and experiences.
- Dialogue is collaborative and about people working together to find a common understanding. It is about exploring, listening, and re-examining your positions, values, and assumptions.

3. Examine your own practices

- *Check yourself and those around you.*

Questions to consider when preparing your costume for themed events and celebrations:

- Is my costume intended to be funny? Is it funny because it is making fun of real people, human traits, or cultures?
- Does my costume attempt to represent or mock a culture that is not my own?
- Does my costume perpetuate stereotypes, misinformation, or historical and cultural inaccuracies?
- Does my costume packaging include the following words "traditional", "ethnic", "colonial", "cultural", "authentic" or "tribal"?
- Would I be embarrassed or ashamed if someone from the group I am portraying saw me wearing this?

If you answered “YES” to any of these questions, you should seriously RECONSIDER a different costume. You may wear the costume for a day, but many people are affected by the “social stigma” associated with “fun” costumes every day.

4. Pause before Posting on Social Media

- Social media posts are never private and HUMOR/irony/sarcasm does not come across as intended on social media.
 - Pause and check yourself and others’ costumes and poses before you post your photos on social.

5. Be an advocate

- *Stand up for each other and this community.*
 - If you see a costume is offensive, start a conversation with that person and share what you know about cultural appropriation and how it can be harmful to members of our community. Keep yourself safe first in these conversations. Consider the timing, be mindful of the environment, and who is around before engaging with someone about this issue.

While we believe in free-speech and expression, as educators, it is our duty to inform you that your actions can have a negative impact on others. We advise that you choose a costume that is not hurtful or offensive to one’s culture or identity.

FACILITATOR QUESTIONS FOR CULTURAL APPROPRIATION PROGRAMMING

- What types of cultural appropriation have you witnessed during Halloween or for themed parties or celebrations?
- Culture is constantly developing and changing. Do you think it is possible for cultures to evolve without appropriating, or is it necessary? How does cultural appreciation and exchange contribute to this?
- How can people demonstrate cultural appreciation and avoid cultural appropriation?
- Can you think of a time you may have culturally appropriated another culture without intending to?
 - What was your relationship to the culture you were taking from?
 - What do you now understand about the power disparities in place that allowed for this appropriation to occur?
 - How did it make you feel when you learned that your behavior was cultural appropriation?
- Tips and considerations when preparing for themed events and celebrations:
 - Is my costume intended to be funny? Is it funny because it is making fun of real people, human traits, or cultures?
 - Does my costume attempt to represent or mock a culture that is not my own?
 - Does my costume perpetuate stereotypes, misinformation, or historical and cultural inaccuracies?
 - Does my costume packaging include the following words "traditional", "ethnic", "colonial", "cultural", "authentic" or "tribal"?
 - Would I be embarrassed or ashamed if someone from the group I am portraying saw me wearing this?
 - Another important thing to remember is that social media posts are never private and humor/irony/sarcasm does not come across as intended on social media.

HOW TO RESPECTFULLY ADDRESS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- Use I-statements
- Make it a teaching moment. The individual may not know that what they were wearing is offensive.
- Call people in instead of calling people by critically challenging the idea not the person.
 - Ask if they've considered that their costumes may be perceived as offensive to some people.
 - Ask the person to examine the consequences if they proceeded with wearing it and the message it sends about who they are and what kind of person they might be.
 - How do you think that [insert marginalized group] would feel about your costume?
 - What made you choose to dress as X this year?
 - Are you worried that people are going to get angry at you for wearing that costumes?
 - Have you seen what people have been saying online about people who dress up as X?

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

SOURCE

- Think first about the source culture. Is this a culture that has been historically discriminated against, oppressed, or exploited? If, so you should reconsider wearing another costume.
- Are the people/the culture from whom this imagery, item, or custom comes benefitting?
- Are you buying this directly from the community? Does your participation in it benefit the community?
- Has the source community invited you to share in this? This could look like you being invited/requested to dress in traditional attire for a friend's celebration or event.

SIGNIFICANCE

- What is the significance?
- Is it an everyday object, or something of major cultural significance or something sacred?
- Is it be used to make something or someone feel more sacred or meaningful?
- What is its original meaning? Is it represented here? Is it lost, demeaned, or made fun of?

SIMILARITY

- How similar is it to the original?
- Is it portraying the original in a cartoonish or trivial way? Is it demeaning or degrading?
- Is it taking just a piece of an image, custom, or practice out of context

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION RESOURCES

Articles

- 34 Ridiculous Chinese Character Tattoos Translated:
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/ridiculous-chinese-character-tattoos-translated#.lgKN03nzq6>
- The Body is Not an Apology: <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/you-dont-have-an-excuse-cultural-appropriation-power-dynamics-and-historical-context/>
- Cultural Appropriation: A brief discussion and overview
<https://anthropologyrocks.wordpress.com/2014/02/25/cultural-appropriation-a-briefdiscussion-and-overview/>
- Digital Blackface:
<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs>
- Essay on Cultural Appropriation:
<http://www.aihfs.org/pdf/8-1-16%20Cultural%20Appropriation.pdf>
- A Much Needed Primer on Cultural Appropriation:
<http://jezebel.com/5959698/a-muchneeded-primer-on-cultural-appropriation>
- NPR Cultural Appropriation is in fact indefensible:
<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/06/28/533818685/cultural-appropriation-is-infact-indefensible>
- NY Times in Defense of Cultural Appropriation:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/opinion/in-defense-of-cultural-appropriation.html>
- What's Wrong with Cultural Appropriation:
<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/06/culturalappropriation-wrong/>
- Urban Outfitters Sells Tapestry 'Eerily Reminiscent' of Holocaust garb:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/10/urban-outfitters-sells-tapestry-eerily-reminiscent-of-holocaust-garb/>
- Native Appropriations:
www.nativeappropriations.blogspot.com
- Answers for White People on Hair, Appropriation, and Anti-Racist Struggle:
<http://azinelibrary.org/trash/dreads.pdf>

Podcasts

- In Theory – Cultural Appropriation:
<http://www.intheory.us/episodes/2015/6/24/episode-3-culturalappropriation-ugh-1>
- What Not to Wear on Halloween:
<https://www.stuffmomnevertoldyou.com/podcasts/what-not-to-wear-on-halloween.htm>

Videos

- 7 Myths about Cultural Appropriation DEBUNKED: <https://youtu.be/KXeJdHrGOul>
- Don't Cash Crop On My Cornrows: https://youtu.be/O1KJRRSB_XA
- Neil deGrasse Tyson's nephew drops the mic on cultural appropriation: <https://youtu.be/y3qrwflbfo>
- White People Whitesplain Whitesplaining: <https://youtu.be/N-p8dOqf3P4>
- White Party - A Lesson in Cultural Appropriation: <https://youtu.be/lpx3fKn4G3U>

REFERENCES

A much-needed primer on Cultural Appropriation:

<https://jezebel.com/a-much-needed-primer-on-cultural-appropriation-30768539>

Cultural Appropriation, Guided Questions to Ask:

<http://schadavis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Cultural-Appropriation-Resource-Sheet-Oct-2014.pdf>

Ethical Unicorn, Sustainable Living and Social Justice: How to have the Cultural Appropriation Conversation this Halloween.

<https://ethicalunicorn.com/2018/10/30/how-to-have-the-cultural-appropriation-conversation-this-halloween/>

Ohio University, Students Teaching about Racism in Society (STARS), “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume”:

<https://www.ohio.edu/orgs/stars/Home.html>

University of Denver, Housing and Residential Education, “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume”:

<https://www.du.edu/housing/diversity/notacostume/>