

Halloween As A Consumption Experience

Stacey Levinson, Rutgers University

Stacey Mack, Rutgers University

Dan Reinhardt, Rutgers University

Helen Suarez, Rutgers University

Grace Yeh, Rutgers University

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, consumer research has broadened its domain of inquiry to incorporate an increasingly diverse set of consumption phenomena. Included among these more recently investigated topics are cultural festivals such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving and Halloween. Examining cultural festivities as consumption phenomena can provide novel insights into consumer behavior, because such festivals often make manifest the more general values underlying consumption. For example, Belk's (1987, 1989) inquiries into the celebration of Christmas made evident the commercialism and materialism present in aspects of this holiday. An analysis of adult consumers' narratives about the meaning of Christmas detected both sacred and secular consumption themes (Hirschman and LaBarbera 1989). A gift store ethnographic study conducted by Sherry and McGrath (1989) revealed the gift-buying customers associated with the holiday, as well as the enlarged role women play in fulfilling Christmas consumption rituals. Similarly, the consumption rituals and meanings surrounding Thanksgiving have been extensively documented by Wallendorf and Arnould (1991).

Our interest in the present study focuses upon the festival of Halloween. As Belk (1990) notes, Halloween in several respects appears to represent oppositional consumption patterns as compared to Christmas (and Thanksgiving as well). For example, there is no communal family meal, rather children independently go from house to house in search of candy. In contrast to the openness and informality of interactions during Christmas and Thanksgiving, Halloween is characterized by secretiveness and the formal "masking" of personal identity.

In the present inquiry we present an ethnographic account of the Halloween consumption experience. The use of an interpretive method such as ethnography is "intended to provide a rich portrait of the phenomenon so that the reader not only learns inputs and outcomes but also gains an understanding of the texture, activities, and processes occurring (Belk, Sherry, Wallendorf 1988)." It is the hope of the researchers that this inquiry will spur further research on Halloween consumption activities and consumer research on American holidays in general.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the history and background of the Halloween festival. Methodological and interpretive issues are addressed within the second section. The third section describes the various ethnographic sites used to construct the interpretation. This section is further divided into retail Halloween stores and actual festival sites visited prior to and during Halloween. Emergent themes are discussed in the fourth section.

The History of Halloween

Few Western holidays have a more paradoxical history than Halloween. Halloween is the eve of one of the most important feasts of the church year--All Hallows Eve--solemnly observed by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans (Hatch 1987). In many countries of Western Europe, such as France, Spain, and Italy, Halloween is observed as an austere religious occasion with extra masses and prayers at the graves of deceased relatives and friends; but in the British Isles and, especially in the United States, Halloween is primarily regarded as a night of merry making, superstitious spells, fortune telling games, and pranks (Hatch 1987). Thus, Halloween is a curious mixture of the religious (sacred) and the secular (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; Hirschman 1988).

In the second century B.C., the Celtic order of Druids ended the year on October 31. The Celts believed that on October 31 the Lord of the Dead assembled the souls of all those persons who had died in the previous year; the spirits of the departed were allowed a brief visit to their relatives. The departed souls would play tricks, so the Druids attempted to appease them with sanctices (Hatch 1987). This tradition was continued in medieval Europe, where black cats were sacrificed in ritual acts, in the belief that they were disguised witches.

During the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV placed Halloween on the church calendar, decreeing that the day and vigil be generally observed to honor numerous martyrs and, eventually, saints on a common day (Hatch 1987). By the end of the 15th century, Halloween was believed to be the gathering time of unsanctified spirits. Many believed that witches flew on broomsticks accompanied by their black cats and that the Prince of Darkness mocked the feast of the saints with unholy rites (Hatch 1987). These beliefs continued during the Colonial period in America, culminating in the campaign against witches in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 (Hatch 1987). Halloween folk customs continued to flourish in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and parts of England well into the 18th century, where pranks and mischief on October 31 were common in rural areas of the British Isles.

Nevertheless, widespread observance of Halloween appeared relatively late in the United States. Most of the early settlers, the majority of whom were Protestant, did not observe Halloween. In pioneer days, Halloween practices were scattered and regional until the great Irish immigration in the 1840's. The Irish brought with them not only the religious observance of Halloween, but also their folklore remnants of Halloween which included the traditional mischief (Hatch 1987). By the late 1800's, Halloween had become a national observance in the

United States, characterized by games, divinations, parties, and especially the children's custom of going "trick-or-treating" dressed in masks and costumes.

By the 20th century, Americans became less tolerant of pranks, which often descended into vandalism (Hatch 1987). Community Halloween festivals, sponsored by local merchants, civic groups, and schools (especially PTA's) have done much to curtail the formerly widespread vandalism. The folk vitality of witches, divinations, and the black arts have long receded into the past. But the decline in its significance has not affected small children, who still enjoy ringing door bells and shouting "Trick-or-Treat" (Hatch 1987).

The Role of Costumes

Perhaps, the most visible part of Halloween as a consumption festival is the number and variety of costumes worn each year. Costumes, like clothing, are powerful social communicators (McCracken 1988, Solomon 1983). Much consumer research on clothing over the last ten years has centered on the symbolic value and social meaning of clothing (Solomon 1983). It is not our goal here to discuss this literature in depth, but only to advance three concepts that are important to note in the study of Halloween. A costume is a *transformation* device that allows the individual to change his or her own identity (Dichter 1964). The choice of a costume allows the chooser, (who is not always the wearer), a form of *self-expression* and *creativity*. The self-expression enables the chooser to express his or her own individuality to those around him/her. Creativity allows one to strive for *exclusivity* of the costume and therefore establish the individual's unique identity.

METHOD

Our research team consisted of four women and one man. Subsets of two researchers selected various Halloween stores and festival sites to investigate in detail. We adopted a modified version of Sherry and McGrath's "one-researcher-one-site" principle. First, due to time constraints we felt that immersion in separate field sites would generate more detail. Second, we wanted to keep interference with the daily life of the stores at a minimum (Sherry and McGrath 1989). Therefore we triangulated across sites through regular discussions of our observations and interpretations.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of Halloween as a consumption experience, the researchers had to balance their competing interests as former participants and as researchers when observational settings were chosen. In accordance with the researchers' background, observational settings were selected based on typical Halloween interaction points of middle class, suburban families as well as settings that would provide the research team with a multifaceted view of the Halloween experience. These settings were divided into two categories: retail stores where consumers purchased Halloween paraphernalia in order to participate in the consumption experience and festival sites where the participation occurred.

The stores and sites were patronized mainly by upper-middle class consumers. A smaller representation came from the lower-middle class. The study began in mid-October and ended on October 31, 1990. Unlike other holidays such as Christmas, Halloween does not allow for significant post-holiday investigation (Sherry and McGrath 1989). Stores were observed 3 to 4 times at hour-and-a-half intervals. Festival sites were observed between 1 to 3 hours according to site time constraints. The stores and festival sites are located in suburban communities in the northeastern United States. Collection of data occurred through observation, participation, interviewing, and photography. Data were recorded both in field notes and journals.

Retail Stores

During the course of the study, we visited four retail stores -- Everything Halloween, Party City, McCrory's and Lynn's Hallmark. These are described below:

Everything Halloween

Everything Halloween is one of many stores crowded into a suburban shopping mall. It rents its space temporarily for the Halloween season. After Halloween it is transformed into another seasonal specialty store. As the name implies, Everything Halloween contains different types of accessories to make the holiday complete.

Ambience Upon entering the store the consumer is greeted by a mechanical vampire in a cemetery setting. Eerie howls emanated from the tombstones. One is immediately immersed into the Halloween atmosphere. The 13,000 square feet of selling space overwhelms the customer with merchandise. Items are found hanging from the walls, display cases and centrally located islands. Consumers throughout the store frequently handle the props, as they are easily accessible.

Merchandise Everything Halloween has a wide variety and deep assortment of goods. The merchandise ranges from accessories to fully complete costumes. Packaged items include masks, wigs, make-up, stockings, and colored hairspray. Also available are fake fingernails, swords, pitchforks, and eye patches. Clown, monster and animal costumes are among the few disguises available for children. Adults can choose from jailbirds, vampires, bellydancers, and french maids. Prices range from a few dollars to one hundred dollars.

Party City

Party City is one of five stores located in a strip mall on a state highway in New Town. It exclusively carries items appropriate for a party including streamers, balloons, paper plates, and invitations. As holidays approach, sections of the store are dedicated to specialty merchandise.

Ambience Due to the importance of sales during the Halloween season, Party City dedicated a third of its store to Halloween goods. Merchandise filled the shelves, ceilings and walls. Salespeople helped customers try on costumes. Creaking doors and monster howls were heard throughout the store.

Merchandise Party City had an extremely large assortment of costumes. Instead of displaying the actual costumes, small pictures of the ones available are hung on the walls. Consumers choose a costume from these pictures and a salesperson then retrieves it from the storeroom. In contrast, accessories are openly displayed in large boxes for consumers to choose from, including fake blood, clown shoes, necklaces, and press-on-nails. Prices range from a few dollars for accessories to fifty dollars for a complete costume.

McCrorry's

A third retail site was McCrorry's, a well known discount chain store located in the Caravelle Square Mall. This particular store is approximately the size of a small supermarket, or 26,000 square feet. It sells everything from clothes to housewares to toiletries to candy. As with other retail establishments, McCrorry's has sectioned a large area specifically for Halloween merchandise.

Ambience The store displays several eye catching signs showing passers-by the sales and low prices McCrorry's has to offer. From the window sign, it is obvious that Halloween is approaching. The entrance is filled with candy displays, reminding customers of the advent of trick-or-treaters. From the appearance of the store it is evident that the costumes have been rummaged through repeatedly.

Merchandise For children, costumes consist of a plastic or fabric body cover and a hard plastic mask. These include cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and the Ninja Turtles. Adult costumes featuring a Devil and a French Maid, among others, are constructed of flimsy fabric. Accessories, such as costume make-up and colored hair spray, are also offered to complete self-designed costumes.

Lynn's Hallmark

Lynn's Hallmark, which is also located in the Caravelle Square Mall, is a few stores down from McCrorry's. It is a specialty store known for its high standard of quality, featuring exclusive greeting cards and gifts.

Ambience Lynn's Hallmark, gives a feeling typical of any Hallmark store - a comfortable, at home, cozy feeling. Everything in the store from the layout, merchandise, and salespeople notify the customer of its high quality image. When a holiday approaches, it is evident by the specialty decorations and the goods filling the store.

Merchandise There is a wide variety of goods ranging from glittery masquerade masks to baby diaper covers with ghosts on the backside. Consistent with the store's image, much of the merchandise is geared toward party favors in attractive colors and designs. Many items emphasize safety features such as ease of visibility and breathing. The masks are constructed of a soft cushiony material to prevent children from hurting themselves. Other merchandise available emphasizing safety includes glow-in-the-dark necklaces and light sticks.

Halloween Festival Sites

In addition to making observations at retail stores, we also observed the celebration of Halloween at five sites.

Caravelle Square Mall

Halloween Show "Halloween Spooktacular"

At 3:30 pm, October 31, 1990 in the Caravelle Square Mall, thirty costumed children aged 3-6, and their mothers gathered to watch the "Halloween Spooktacular", sponsored by the Caravelle Square Mall store owners. The stage was a haunted house. A magician's assistant in costume appeared for the performance and introduced the show. The magician, dressed in a tuxedo and white face, wearing a bone through his head, did magic tricks for the audience. After about 20 minutes, the magician went backstage. The assistant gave the audience trick-or-treating safety tips, such as: "always go out in groups", "cross streets at the corner" and "never eat candy until your parents check it first". Then the magician did a few more tricks and a costume contest was held. The two winners, who wore a jack-in-the-box and bride costume, received a \$35 and a \$20 gift certificate good at any store in the mall. After the show, the children went trick-or-treating from store to store.

At 7:00 pm there was another show. The format was the same except Everything Yogurt, a frozen yogurt store, gave a free yogurt to each child in costume. At this performance, there was a much larger crowd of about 100 children aged 5-11 and their mothers and fathers. After the show most children ate the provided yogurt; few went trick-or-treating in the mall.

New Bridge Pumpkin Carving Display

Along Route 615 in New Bridge, is a large farm owned by Bob Spinelli. Each year Bob and his family put together what they call the "Nite of the Jack-O-Lantern." His family and friends carve out 800 pumpkins and display them in the field alongside the road. Bob's children dress up in costumes and greet the parents and children who come to see his display. Bob receives pleasure from entertaining neighboring families and putting smiles on children's faces. People are intrigued by the seemingly infinite number of pumpkins. The event has become so popular that police are now required to direct traffic. Bob recently has opened up a stand to sell Halloween paraphernalia in order to subsidize the cost of the presentation.

Trick-or-Treating

To observe trick-or-treating, a female researcher (in costume) accompanied her female cousin and four of the cousin's girlfriends (age 11) on Halloween. The trick-or-treating observed took place after school from 4:00-6:30 pm, in the town of Kent which is located in the central part of the state. Kent, population 21,723 is comprised of upper middle class families predominantly of Jewish ethnicity. This year the town council had imposed a 6:00 pm curfew for children trick-or-treating. If accompanied by an adult over 20 years of age, children were permitted to stay out later. The trick-or-treating observed took place in one of the many housing developments in Kent. In this development, there were approximately 75 trick-or-treaters ranging in age from 5-13 years. Smaller

children were accompanied by adults even in the daylight. Older children (aged 10-13) toured in groups without a chaperone. About half of the houses approached had no one home. Several homes were decorated with some type of Halloween paraphernalia such as pumpkins, pumpkin leaf bags, and Halloween window posters. Two police cars were observed patrolling the development during the course of the evening.

Halloween Parade and Party at St. Peter's School

A male and female researcher observed a class of 19 first graders at a middle class Catholic elementary school in New Town. The principal had previously granted permission to the researchers to observe the class. Halloween was treated as a special day for the children with a parade and party planned. An extra long lunch hour gave the children the opportunity to go home and change into their costumes and allowed the parents time to come home from work and bring their child back to the school. At school, preparation was underway for a Halloween parade through downtown New Town. The children assembled in the street for their short trip through New Town while parents videotaped, took photographs, or watched their progeny from the sidewalk. The children proudly pranced through New Town with a police car, marching band, and color guard leading the way.

Upon their return, the children raced into the school knowing what was waiting in their classroom. While they were gone, parents had decorated the classroom and distributed candy to the desks of each child. On each child's desk was neatly placed a small bag of candy, a juice box, pumpkin napkin and a large Halloween cupcake. As the class ate, the teacher informed them that safety was the most important concern in celebrating Halloween. The teacher read them a list of safety rules and told the children that some of the parents had a surprise, a Halloween game which helped the children with letter recognition. Each child was rewarded with a Halloween mug and a rubber skeleton. The school bell rang and a stampede of Ninja Turtles, princesses, and other assorted characters poured out of the tiny school and onto the streets of New Town. Trick-or-treating started immediately with a flood of children arriving at the residential houses nearest the school.

Brock Farms Garden Center

The Brock Farms Garden Center was observed by a female researcher acting as a passive observer. Brock Farms is a garden center located on Route 6 South in New Town. The premises consist of a building in which fertilizers, tools, and other garden accessories are sold, a greenhouse which contains plants and flowers, and a large outdoor area with shrubs, trees, and lawn ornaments. On the day visited, Brock Farms was decorated with Halloween icons, and a witch and a pumpkin stood next to its outdoor sign. On the roof of the building was a large inflated pumpkin and scarecrow. The front of the building was decorated with pumpkins, scarecrows, and skeletons. A gift section inside the building had been transformed into a Haunted House. To the left was a graveyard with skeletons and tombstones that led to the entrance. Eerie howls and spooky noises played on a

loudspeaker. Upon entering the Haunted House, one is struck with the overabundance of Halloween paraphernalia, featuring devils, skeletons, and vampires; bats flew across the room; smoke wafted through the air. A table carried candles of various types: ghosts, pumpkins, and witches. A mechanical Esmeralda the Fortune Teller with a crystal ball was reduced from \$1299 to \$899. Another table had ceramic pumpkins costing \$9.99-\$16.99.

EMERGENT THEMES

Commercialization

Due to the commercialization of such holidays as Christmas and Easter (Belk 1987, 1989), it was perhaps inevitable that Halloween would follow. Retailers and manufacturers, always searching for novel markets, have discovered that Halloween offers such an opportunity. For example, Sun Hill Inc., a holiday product merchandiser, after twelve years of successful Easter product launches, needed to find expansion opportunities elsewhere. Sun Hill first tried the glutted Christmas market and "got our heads beat in" (Grimm 1990). When brainstorming about possible pumpkin products, the company executives decided, "Nobody is going to put another pumpkin out in their yard unless it's the biggest one they ever saw." Thus, the jack-o'-lantern leaf bags were created. With six million units sold since August, (fifteen million dollars in retail sales) the future of this innovative new Halloween product seems quite promising (Grimm 1990).

In addition to merchandisers that specialize in holiday products, others in the marketing channel are taking advantage of the trend towards the commercialization of Halloween. Halloween merchandise has always been prevalent in such traditional retailing institutions as Hallmark, Spencers and Caldor. With the high degree of marketability of Halloween, these retailers are becoming overshadowed by specialty stores such as Everything Halloween. The store markets itself as a "one-stop Halloween Shopping Center", with convenience its most salient attribute. It has emerged as a dominant competitor within the Halloween industry.

Even seasonal retailers such as Brock Farms Nursery are trying to capitalize on profitable out-of-season opportunities. Brock's haunted house, which contained everything from ceramic pumpkins to ghost candles to mechanized devils, effectively capitalized on consumers' desires to appropriately accessorize their celebration of the festival.

Halloween commercialization is not only evident in the retail sector, but is also present among consumers as well. For example, each year Bob Spinelli and his family organize a pumpkin carving display on their farm. With over eight hundred jack-o'-lanterns, the Spinelli's pumpkin festival attracts huge crowds of parents and children. Adjacent to this altruistic endeavor, the Spinelli family sells Halloween paraphernalia. Even though the Spinelli's create this jack-o'-lantern display for charitable

reasons, they also do so in hope of realizing a financial profit.

Perhaps the most blatant examples of Halloween commercialization are the marketing efforts of some beer manufacturers. Brewers need to generate additional sales in October, traditionally one of their slowest months (King 1989). As a result, brewers have been looking toward the Halloween festival in an effort to boost beer consumption. For instance, Miller Brewing Company now sells its Lite brand with special glow-in-the-dark Halloween labels. This past season Coors was promoted in stores and bars by a character called Count Dracula. Anheuser-Busch spent 1 million dollars on its "Fright Night" campaign and gave away free paper masks to bar patrons (King 1989). As Christine Lubin, a representative of the National Council on Alcoholism, says, "Beer companies try to make drinking a part of the [Halloween] celebration (Farhi 1989)." Thus, from its inception as a sacred festival in Europe, Halloween in North America has evolved into a secular event driven by commercialization.

Enforcement of Gender Roles

A second emergent theme was that of gender roles, which were apparent in many aspects of Halloween consumption. Evidence for this is provided by examining the various costumes available to the different age groups. Each of the party stores visited was found to have the costumes segregated into three basic groupings. The first grouping was pajama costume sleepwear for toddlers two to four years old. Such costumes included Devil, Bunny, Pumpkin, Circus Clown, and Yellow Chicken. These costumes were basically genderless as either sex could wear them. The second grouping was for ages five to eight years and provided gender separation in contrast to the first group. Such costumes included Mouse Girl, Pirate Boy, Devil Boy, Lil' Red Riding Hood, and Child Princess. These costumes were very gender specific and clearly alerted the consumer as to which gender was to wear them. This was evident in the costume titles which included the word "boy" or "girl." For example, there were not just pirate costumes, but rather Pirate Boys. In addition, costume characters were offered that were clearly male or female such as Princess. The last grouping was targeted at pre-teens. For girls this included French Maid, Suzy Starlet, Slave Girl, Cover Girl, and Rock Star. Costumes for boys included GI Soldier, Greaser, Cowboy, Law Enforcer, and Combat Hero. In this age group the genders were segregated not only in their themes but also in their design. The girls' costumes were quite skimpy, even sexy. They featured short skirts, lace, sequins, and bright colors. The girls depicted on the package also wore a lot of makeup. In contrast, the boys' costumes were not skimpy, and the boys in the pictures were fully clothed. Their costumes were mainly in dark colors, such as black and khaki, and the themes were of a male nature, that of the hero type. Overall, it is apparent that as the child's age increases, costumes move from androgynous to gender specific. This pattern was also present in Belk's (1990) Halloween study.

In addition to costumes enforcing gender roles, it is also apparent that both parents and peers socialize children into "appropriate" gender roles. One researcher observed this overtly in the Everything Halloween store. As a mother and daughter were shopping for a Halloween costume, the girl exclaimed, "Mom, I want to be a Ninja Turtle!" The mother responded, "No honey. That's a boy's costume." Often when parents dress up a young son and daughter, they have them dress as the same theme; the son as the male part and the daughter as the female counterpart. For example, one researcher observed a Mickey and Minnie Mouse pair. Another researcher saw a Tarzan and Jane.

Such gender socialization carries into adulthood and even contaminated the researchers. At a costume show in the Caravelle Square Mall, a researcher saw a child dressed in a pink bunny costume. The researcher said to the child's parents, "Your daughter looks so cute." The parents responded, "Thanks, but that's our son." Due to the researcher's socialization, she instinctively assumed that the child in the pink costume was female. From the evidence cited, it can be concluded that the enforcement of traditional gender roles during Halloween is perpetuated by parental preference and further reinforced by costume manufacturers.

Self and Self-Image

As children become older, their costumes, like their clothing, serve as powerful social communicators, especially to other children. Within our observations the age group of 7-12 is where the individualistic experience of Halloween begins. Children in this age group have more of a say as to what they are going to wear, where they are going to go trick-or-treating, and who they are going to go with. We found that children of this age group want to dress in similar costumes and trick-or-treat together. This occurs because children want peers to accept their social selves.

Children also have a strong need for affiliation and belongingness; they desire love and acceptance from their social world. The need for acceptance from peers was evocatively demonstrated by one of the trick-or-treaters we observed. This trick-or-treater was dressed as a member of a professional football team. But, she and her friends were dressed as infant versions of the players similar to "Baby Muppets." The trick-or-treater pulled the researcher aside before she began her quest for candy. She asked, "Do you think people will recognize who we are? Do we look like 'Baby Giants'?" The researcher was not sure, so, she suggested that the girls write the player's name on a piece of paper and tape it on their backs. Therefore, their costume "identities" would be recognized. The trick-or-treaters were concerned with performance risk; the consequences of a product that did not perform, behave, or appear as planned or promised. The performance risk here was that the costumes would not be recognizable (DeVault and String 1989).

Tremendous peer pressure exists at this age to conform to group norms. Children do not want to be stigmatized by association with an unpopular

character. The researcher observed an incident where one girl would not walk down the street. Instead, she walked in the opposite direction. When the researcher asked the girl where she was going, she responded, "I don't like that street. I like the houses down there better." The researcher asked another trick-or-treater why the girl would not walk down the street. She said, "She's afraid of the 'cool kids' will see her, see the 'big shots' are down there". The trick-or-treater defined a 'big shot' as "someone who is older than us and thinks they're cool". The researcher noted that the "big shots" were trick-or-treating without costumes. Eventually, the girl was coaxed to walk down the street with the others. When they encountered the "big shots", she was intimidated. She wrapped herself in a blanket in hope of concealing her costume. Her goal was to disassociate herself from the group she was with. The trick-or-treater justified her actions to the researcher by claiming, "I'm cold."

College and high school students also want to be accepted by their peers and try to accomplish this by dressing in similar costumes. When a group of eight college roommates was asked if they had considered dressing up, they responded, "We want to dress up as a group." They had made a list of themes which included all eight of them. Their choices included Santa Claus' reindeers and Snow White and the seven dwarfs. In the end some of the girls decided not to dress up, so none of them did. A group of high school girls was observed at Everything Halloween saying, "As long as we go as the same thing that will be cool." Performance risk is reduced when a group of people dress together, instead of the individual dressing by himself/herself.

Costumes allow children to express their individuality by allowing them to pick out their own costumes. It also fosters creativity. The child can adopt a variety of identities, utilizing them as an outlet to exhibit self-aspirations or to imitate role models. At St. Peter's grade school, a little girl was overheard saying, "I want to be a cheerleader just like grandma. She was one when she was little." Party store managers also stated that children were buying costumes which represented their aspirations. For example, girls in elementary school were observed buying cheerleading costumes since this was something they aspired to be in high school.

Costumes can also act as a reinforcement of a couple's identity by emphasizing the fact that they are a couple. In Party City, a couple was observed examining costumes which were complements. They selected Napoleon and Josephine, a readily identifiable couple.

Vicarious Consumption and the Extended Self

Belk (1988) suggests that we are what we have, i.e., possessions contribute to our sense of self. This he terms the Extended Self. Consumers learn, define, and remind themselves of what they are by their possessions. We seek to express ourselves through possessions and use material possessions to seek happiness, remind ourselves of experiences, accomplishments, and other people in our lives, and

even to create a sense of immortality after death. In addition to the use of commonly purchased consumer goods as possessions comprising the extended self, Belk considers several frequently used but seldom researched types of possessions: collections, money, other people, pets, and body parts.

Parents' sense of self also is shaped by their possessions. In most Western cultures, children are viewed and treated as possessions by their parents (Belk 1988). Our laws concerning adoption, in vitro fertilization, and divorce all consider the child a possession that should be awarded to some group or person. Children, therefore, as possessions enhance and define the extended self of their parents (Belk, 1988). Children provide parents with a strong vehicle to advance their own happiness, to remind them of their own experiences (nostalgia), and to live on forever (immortality). The manner in which parents do these things is through vicarious consumption.

Veblen (1899) noted that one can vicariously consume through one's dependents, so that their consumption enhances one's own extended self (Belk, 1988). The concept of vicarious consumption in 1899 is not much different than that of today. We gain in self esteem from the ego enhancing consumption of those who are part of our extended selves. If our friend lives in an extravagant house or drives an extravagant car, we feel just a bit more extravagant ourselves. The success of a spouse, who is seen as an extension of the self, raises one's self esteem in much the same way as personal success (Belk, 1988). Similarly, the accolades and attention a child receives for a costume at Halloween raises the parents' self-esteem.

Three sub-themes were constructed from the ethnographic evidence using the concepts of vicarious consumption and extended self. These sub-themes were redundant across sites and researchers.

- (1) Children are viewed as possessions at Halloween time. They are dressed up and displayed for the self-satisfaction of the parents.
- (2) Parents, mainly through costume selection, live vicariously through their children. The parents' views are either directly or indirectly impressed on the child's choice.
- (3) Parents view their children as a reflection of themselves. A child's actions are a direct reflection on the parent.

These three sub-themes exist subtly between parent and child all year round, but, during Halloween, they are more evident and outstanding. Many children are treated like dolls that are to be dressed up and displayed to other doll dressers for their admiration and envy. Some mothers turn Halloween costume contests into Halloween costume competitions, and their desire to win at all costs rivals that of fathers at Little League baseball games. The notion of Halloween being a time for children to innocently disguise themselves to acquire free candy is lost in the heat of the battle for the prize of best costume. This

was vividly evidenced at the Caravelle Square Mall's Halloween Show and Costume Contest.

Annie is seven years old and dressed in an elaborate jack-in-the-box costume. She had a court-jester-like costume beautifully designed and handmade. Around her was the box which, too, had beautiful designs placed on it that matched those of the costume. "My mom made me the costume and she said I had to wear it. I wanted to be something else." Annie looked sad in the costume. When asked to take a picture, Annie's mother sung out a "yes" and boasted that she had spent days making the costume for her little girl.

The only satisfaction that Annie received from her mother's costume was when she won first prize. A hundred people clapped and cheered. Annie had won a \$35 gift certificate, yet she still looked sad. In front of the stage stood Annie's mother beaming for all to see. It was Annie's mother who had won the contest and the gift certificate at the expense of her child's own happiness. Another researcher observed an even more poignant example:

Walking through the Caravelle Square Mall, I noticed a large TV stand on wheels that apparently had a fish tank attached to it, judging from the seaweed on and inside the tank. Curiously, as I approached the tank, I saw something move inside. As I stepped closer, the owners of the tank turned it toward me. A sign read "Our Pet Goldfish." Inside the tank to my surprise was a small child whose movement was restricted by a large goldfish costume. The costume covered the child from head to toe with only his face visible.

These parents had dressed their child up like an animal and were now treating him like one. The child thrashed around in the tank trying to break free from the costume much like a dog does when covered by a blanket. The child screamed and cried. He tried to get out of the tank only to learn that the tank walls were too high for him. After a while, the child was released from his cage, and his parents entertained questions on the design from other interested parents. Asked for a picture by a bystander, the parents quickly dumped the child back into the tank. The child wailed out and sobbed uncontrollably until the mother said, "Be a good boy and let the nice woman take the picture."

At Halloween some parents take the opportunity to live vicariously through their children as a way of reliving their own past. Parents' nostalgia was the driving force behind some of the costumes children were wearing.

Becky was in first grade and was dressed in a 1920's flapper costume. "Mom wanted me to be a flapper because when she was young she was a flapper too." Becky's mom stood beside her playing with and fussing over her costume

while Becky appeared disinterested. (St. Peter's School)

Becky was one of many children, who when quizzed why they chose that particular costume, replied, "Mom wants me to be _____." The children were like puppets through which their parents briefly tried to relive their own youth.

The selection of the costume was the easiest and best way that a parent could live vicariously through a child. Since the parent was paying for the costume, he or she had a lot of say in what was or was not purchased. Parents used two tactics to persuade youngsters to choose the costume the parent wanted: direct intervention and indirect intervention. By way of *direct* intervention, the parent would, through praise, elevate one costume above the rest and point out limitations or faults in the rest of the selection. This tactic did not appear to work too well. Only young children could not see through the parents' attempt to influence choice. Perhaps the ultimate example of *indirect* intervention was when the parent made the costume. Once the costume was made, the child had to wear it. Other parents influenced their children's costume choice indirectly by taking their children to costume stores that had costumes consistent with their own tastes. The price, the selection, and the quality of the costume varied depending on the store. Some elicited the help of salespeople and even the child's own friends to influence the child's choice.

John was eight years old. "I want to be a pirate, mom." It was obvious his mother did not. She called over a salesperson and asked her to show John the popular costumes. After some coaxing from the salesperson, John chose to be Batman. When John's mother went to pay for the costume, John put the pirate's patch on and swung a sword happily before leaving. (Party City)

In line with the extended self, parents see children and their actions as a reflection of themselves. In Asian cultures, children often are used to signify their parents' aspirations. As noted by one of the researchers, who is Asian, children are raised to understand that they represent the parents and that the child's actions speak for them. This traditional Asian concept has started to become more prevalent in the United States. The concept started in the upper class families and has trickled down the United States class structure (Devault and Strong 1989).

Children's Halloween rituals, as well as their costume selection, made manifest the theme of the child as a reflection of the parent. Children were instructed by their parents on proper Halloween etiquette. One rule was not to run up the lawn, but rather to use the sidewalk. The reason given for doing this was because "Daddy doesn't like it when other kids do it, so we shouldn't." Parents fear that other parents will notice their child's actions, and they will be viewed negatively. A child observed at Party City wanted to buy a Michael Jackson mask, but his mother

insisted that he buy something else. The boy's mother did not want the child to be associated with the "feminine, negative" image that many believe Michael Jackson has. Although the child pleaded, his mother chose something else. Her fear was that through the child's choice of a mask, the social values attached to it would be transferred to her (e.g., McCracken 1988).

New Society

For children across the country, Halloween is a significant festival. It is fun, thrilling, and exciting. However, it is also a day of concern for adults, particularly those who are parents. Halloween was once a "free for all" when children were allowed to go trick-or-treating until late at night, wearing virtually any costume they could get away with. In recent years it has become evident that Halloween is a holiday that can not be taken as lightly as it once was (Belk 1990). With the festivities of Halloween comes also a great deal of responsibility to take precautions for the safety of participants.

Two factors appear to serve as the driving forces behind this concern. One is the perceived omnipresence of violence and danger in modern society. The other factor stems from changes in family structure due to dual wage earning families. The growing fear for safety escalated eight years ago, "when the chilling news broke that seven people had died from Tylenol capsules laced with cyanide" (Kleinfield 1989). As a result of the infamous Tylenol scare, Halloween rituals were drastically revised. Some towns outlawed trick-or-treating that year and many parents forbade their children to leave the house. Similarly, with the increasing level of working mothers, the community has taken extra measures in enforcing safety for the children.

The researcher who participated in the trick-or-treating ritual was able to witness the various safety precautions taken, as well as the increase of working mothers in the town of Kent. When passing by each house, an orange sign was seen hanging on the front door which could be seen from a distance. These had been distributed to every house in the community by the Kent Township Police. The signs stated restrictions that were believed to be in the best interests of both the trick-or-treaters and their parents. It noted that children could not participate in trick-or-treating past 6:00 pm unless accompanied by someone 20 years of age or older. This safety measure was enforced by the presence of police cars patrolling the town. In addition, some working mothers took turns accompanying groups of children in order to provide constant supervision.

Halloween has also become a holiday for compromising. As a result of the curfew, children often became frustrated. Many did not want to be chaperoned and found it embarrassing. From this, compromises were born. In one instance, a group of youngsters were observed trick-or-treating although it was completely dark. They appeared to be alone, but following them very slowly was their mother in a car. She remained far enough away, so that they were not

embarrassed by her presence, yet close enough so that she was assured of their safety.

Another illustration of community involvement were efforts to detect tampering with distributed treats. Parents were aware that some people place sharp objects and dangerous chemicals in candy or cookies. As a safeguard, candy screening centers were located in each municipality so that all candy could be checked. In some areas, hospitals offered free x-ray programs to assure the safety of Halloween candy.

Retailers have also responded to parents' concerns about safety. McDonald's coupons have become a popular treat given out on Halloween. This helps McDonald's market itself and also lessens parents' fears. Some retailers carried costumes that were targeted toward working mothers whose safety concerns were heightened; these costumes were designed to maximize the child's safety in the mother's absence. Yet there was a trade-off -- increasing the safety of a costume increases the price.

Ultimately, it is the children who most directly encounter the negative aspects of Halloween. With the increase in working mothers, the percentage of households providing candy has dropped considerably. The researcher trick-or-treating in Kent observed a child's reaction to empty houses. After the third empty house, the researcher said, "They're probably not home". The child responded, "They pretend they're not home." Children are extremely disappointed when they encounter this situation. They feel that they have been let down by the adults. They cannot accept the idea of a dual career household, especially if their own mother does not work. However, there are individuals who understand the importance Halloween plays in a child's life. While accompanying her children trick-or-treating, one mother distributed candy to children passing by. She explained, "I feel bad that I can't be home to give out candy to the kids because I want to take my own kids trick-or-treating." She felt obliged to bring the candy along with her. Thus, the mother was able to satisfy both her safety concerns and the need to participate in the trick-or-treating ritual.

The Halloween Script

Over the years, children develop a Halloween script. This script is learned from older siblings, friends, schoolmates and parents. Before a child leaves the house, the parent often instructs the child on proper Halloween etiquette. The researcher who observed trick-or-treating in Kent was told three rules by the children. First, "never run up the lawn. Instead, walk up the driveway." Second, "do not bang on the door. Ring the doorbell or knock softly." Third, and most importantly, "always say 'thank you,' even if you do not like what you have received." When one of the trick-or-treaters ran up someone's lawn, the rest of the group quickly reprimanded him. Other rules that are understood by trick-or-treaters are to carefully cross streets, to stay in groups, and to walk-not-run from house to house.

While trick-or-treating, children form a comradery with other groups of trick-or-treaters.

When one group approaches an empty house, they are quick to inform others not to go there. When groups of children meet on the sidewalk they tell each other which houses are "good houses", i.e., those which pass out desirable treats, and which houses are "bad houses", which give out less desirable treats. It is also common for children to trade candy. For example, the researcher in Kent observed several children dumping their bags of candy onto the sidewalk and bartering for more desirable candy. Later in the day, the children would decide which "good houses" to go back to for more of the desirable treats. To ensure that the "good houses" would not recognize them, the children would wait until it got dark to return. Some children even went to the extreme of switching costumes in the bushes.

The Halloween script does not end with the trick-or-treating. When they return home, the children find an open area in their house where they can dump out their candy. The child's parent then examines each piece of candy and throws out any pieces that appear tampered with. The child then sorts out the treats, usually counting how many pieces of candy and how much money was collected. The average amounts we observed collected were 28 cents and sixty-seven pieces of candy. The candy is then proudly displayed on the floor for the family to see. After displaying their collections, the children next decide which pieces of candy they will consume immediately, which are to be saved for later, and which pieces will be discarded (see also Belk 1990).

Materialism

When it comes to candy, size matters. Children rated houses based on the size and quantity of candy received. While trick-or-treating in Kent the researcher noted that the children were thrilled when they received Sips Juice Boxes at one of the houses. The juice box is quite large and heavy when compared to other treats. The children were pleasantly surprised and labeled the house a "good house". "Good houses" supplied children with unique treats such as the juice box, while a "bad house" passed out smaller, more common treats, such as a small lollypop. What emerged was a hierarchy of candy. The trick-or-treaters would dump their candy onto the sidewalk and rate it. After carefully ranking it, the children then determined each candy's trading or bartering value. For example, if a child did not like peanut M&M's, he would trade it to a child who did. In return, he sought to acquire a candy that he liked. Each child's candy ranking scale appeared to be unique.

As in other commercialized holidays, such as Christmas, Halloween teaches children how to receive i.e. "take," but not how to give. At most of the homes, an adult or a child too old to go trick-or-treating passed out the candy, while young children were the recipients. The joy of giving appeared overshadowed by the thrill of receiving something for nothing. In fact, even high school aged teenagers would go out trick-or-treating in order to "take" candy. Although they could not resist the temptation of free candy, the high school trick-or-treaters only

went out at night, so as not to damage their social image.

Overall, the children appeared to seek immediate gratification. While some were satisfied by sweet candy, others were satisfied only by money. With the influx of working parents, money or gift certificates, such as McDonald's gift certificates, are commonly given out instead of candy. This saves parents' time and it is also safer. At St. Peters, Kent, and the Caravelle Square Mall, children went into a fervor over money. At St. Peters, most of the children polled said they preferred money over candy. When one boy in a pirate costume was asked what he wanted to get, he jumped wildly around waving his arms and exclaimed, "MONEY! MONEY! MONEY!" In Kent, the trick-or-treaters enthused over McDonald's gift certificates, and in the mall the children proudly lined up for the costume contest in hopes of winning gift certificates. Children appear to prefer money and gift certificates, because these gifts permit them to choose exactly what they want. In short, they give them buying power, something which is lacking in a piece of candy. The ancient sacred meanings of Halloween appear to now be overshadowed by its secular meanings. The children at St. Peters, for example, thought that they had November 1 off to eat their candy, unaware that it was actually All-Saints-Day.

CONCLUSIONS

The ethnographic examination of consumption festivals such as Christmas, Thanksgiving and Halloween can reveal underlying cultural values and social processes. The present examination of Halloween suggests that a formerly religious festival has evolved into a modern day celebration of material gratification and identity creation/extension. The ritual aspects of the festival appear to be centered upon the purchase of costuming props and the receipt of money and sweet treats. The "masking of self" aspects of the costume rituals were also found to serve parents' needs to reinforce their own social identities through their children. Children were, in some cases, treated as semiotic objects appropriate for communicating their parents' public selves. Costumes were also used to communicate and reinforce what were viewed as appropriate gender roles.

Consumption festivals, because of their vivid and heightened realities, may make manifest values which are hidden in the mundane aspects of everyday consumer behavior. It is hoped that the present inquiry into Halloween has brought to light some of the social currents which run through our culture.

REFERENCES

- Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, September 1988, pg 139-157.
- Belk, Russell W. (1989), "Materialism and the Modern U.S. Christmas," in *Interpretive Consumer Research*, ed. Elizabeth Hirschman, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, pg 148-167.

- Belk, Russell W. (1990), "Halloween: An Evolving American Consumption Ritual," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 17, M.E. Goldberg, G. Gorn and R.W. Polloy (Eds.), Association for Consumer Research: Provo, Utah, pg 508-517.
- DeVault, Christine and Brian Strong (1989), *The Marriage and Family Experience*, 14th edition, West Publishing Company, New York, pg 92.
- Dichter, Ernest (1964), *Handbook of Consumer Motivations: The Psychology of the World of Objects*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Farhi, Paul (1989), "Brewing Up More Spirits," *The Washington Post*, October 31.
- Grimm, Matthew (1990), "Sun Hill Harvests the Halloween Market With Pumpkin Bags," *Adweek's Marketing Week*, October 29, 1990, pg 12.
- Hatch, Jane M. (1987), (ed.), *The American Book Of Days*, New York, The H.W. Wilson Company.
- Hirschman, Elizabeth C. and Priscilla A. LaBarbera (1989), "The Meaning of Christmas," in *Interpretive Consumer Research*, ed. Elizabeth Hirschman, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, pg 136-147.
- King, Thomas R. (1989), "Brewers Hope for Treat From Promotion Tricks," *The Wall Street Journal*, B1, October 5.
- Kleinfield, N.R. (1989), "The Weird, the Bad and the Scary," *New York Times*, October 15.
- McCracken, Grant (1988), *Culture and Consumption*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- O'Neill, Catherine (1989), "Ghostly Good Fun, the Safe Way," *The Washington Post*, October 31.
- Sherry, John F. and Mary Ann McGrath (1989), "Unpacking the Holiday Presence: A Comparative Ethnography of Two Gift Stores," in *Interpretive Consumer Research*, ed. Elizabeth Hirschman, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, pg 148-167.
- Silverstein, Stuart (1989), "Fright Night Goes Upscale," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28.
- Solomon, Michael (1983), "The Role of Products as a Social Stimuli: A Symbolic Interactionism Perspective," *Journal Of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10, December 1983, pg 319-392.
- Wallendorf, Melanie and Eric J. Arnould (1991), "We Gather Together: The Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.18, June, forthcoming.