Halloween: An evolving American consumption ritual

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Halloween is a little studied consumption holiday that is in several significant respects a minor image of the other major American consumption holiday: Christmas. In the contemporary American Christmas celebration adults wear costumes (of Santa Claus) and extort good behavior from children with threats that rewards of durable goods will be withheld (Belk 1987, 1989). In contemporary Halloween celebrations, American children wear costumes (often of “evil” beings) and extort treats of nondurable goods from adults with threats of property destruction. In Christmas rituals the extended family meets for a day of feasting (on wholesome foods) with a traditionally religious focus. In Halloween rituals children leave home and family to join other children for an evening of pranks in order to obtain unwholesome sweets in a decidedly nonreligious atmosphere. In Christmas rituals gifts are exchanged within the family and such is personally and lovingly acknowledged. In Halloween rituals non-family members provide gifts to masked and anonymous children who pose a vague menace. What accounts for this opposing symbolism? What is Halloween all about? How is it changing? What do Halloween costumes and iconography represent? And what do contemporary celebrations of this holiday tell us about consumer behavior.

In this paper I attempt to answer such questions using a combination of secondary data and both quantitative and qualitative primary data. The paper is a work in progress and is based on primary data collected over the past two Halloweens in a city of one million people in the western United States. Participant observation was used to study a variety of child and adult Halloween practices including fairs, parades, costume contests, trick-or-treating, parties, dances, and a race for costumed runners. Depth interviews were conducted with both children and adults and a written questionnaire was administered to undergraduate university students. The observations and interviews were recorded both verbally (fieldnotes, journals, tape recording) and visually (photography, videotaping). A variety of secondary sources were consulted in popular literature and the literatures of a variety of social sciences. Relevant topics in these literatures include fears, nightmares, play, games, children’s stories, sex role socialization, rites of passage, liminality, mysticism, magic, masks, costumes, decoration, legends, myths, fairy tales, horror movies, performance, drama, Halloween history, American holidays, the ritual calendar, and related holidays in different cultures.

Besides relying on multiple sources of evidence, a deliberate attempt was made to avoid a priori theorizing and to continuously cycle between the primary and secondary sources as new interpretive themes emerged. Beginning with participant observation and emersion in Halloween celebrations, the project has developed via an interactive and continuous process of theory formulation, application, modification, and expansion (see Belk, Walthardt, and Sherry 1989). What began as a simple investigation of the solicitation, acquisition, and consumption of candies by children, soon became an investigation of the mysteries of a rich and evolving social ritual involving children, adults, and community.

AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Certain aspects of Halloween can be traced, through surviving remnants, as far back as prehistoric Celtic celebrations of Samhain (variants: Saman, Samain, Samuin, Samhainn). Winkler and Winkler (1970) suggest that Samhain celebrated the harvest and was influenced by Egyptian and Babylonian harvest festivals, but Frazer (1959: original 1890) argues that Samhain was instead a pastoral festival marking the time of bringing the herds back from pastures to their winter stables. In addition to being a seasonal harvest or herding festival, Samhain was a Celtic new year’s festival and a day of the dead involving Celtic ancestor worship (Ward 1981). Samhain was the Lord of the Dead (the term also means “summer’s end”) and sacrifices made to him included human sacrifice by the Celt’s Druid priests (Myers 1972). A survival of this Halloween practice in Europe substituted black cats to be burned in the wicker cages that would have contained criminals or captives before the Romans banned human sacrifices in 61 A.D. (Linton and Linton 1950). On Samhain night the ghosts of the dead emerged and violated their old homes. Witches and hobgoblins with more orgastic, mischievous, or malevolent intent also roamed the earth. Fires were lit, in part to scare these ghosts and witches away with their purifying flames (Myers 1972). These associations with spirits, the dead, debauchery, and evil remain attached to contemporary Halloween celebrations.

There may also have been precedents for trick-or-treating and Halloween costumes in Samhain celebrations. James (1961) reports that in Gallic celebrations of Samhain, the skins of slaughtered animals were worn as a disguise to invoke the spirits of sacred animals and that this masquerade feature continues to survive in the Scottish Highlands. According to Myers (1972) banquet tables were prepared for visiting ghosts and after the feast the ghosts were led out of town by costumed villagers. Harvest beggars are also thought to have asked for food and traces of a masked procession that asked for contributions in the mysterious name of “Muck Olla” survived into historic periods (Linton and Linton 1950, Ward 1981). In Christian times, this practice became transmuted into soulng (in which special soul-cakes were solicited) and eventually into children’s balling (“a penny for the Guy” (Fawkes) in England and trick-or-treating for candy in the U.S.).

Jack-o’-lanterns are another practice that derives from Irish customs and perhaps those of their ancient Celtic forbearers. Irish children have long hollowed out potatoes, turnips, and rutabagas, made carved faces on them, and placed lit candles inside (the pumpkin appears to be an American modification). The related folktales involve a trickster figure: a miserly drunkard Irishman named Jack. He twice tricked the Devil if he would retrieve an apple from a tree for him before they departed for Hell. When the Devil climbed the tree, Jack used his knife to carve a cross on the trunk, thus barring the Devil from descending. This
time Jack let the Devil down only after he promised never to claim his soul again. When Jack did die and was barred from Heaven, he appeared at the gates of Hell, only to be refused admittance and doomed to wander the world forever (as an undead figure). As he was leaving, the Devil threw him a live coal which he placed inside the turnip he had been eating, making the first jack-o’-lantern (Tulجة 1987).

Despite the rise of Christianity, Samhain practices continued for hundred of years in the British Isles. Eventually the Christian church realized that it was more effective to try to take over pagan holidays than to oppose them. In order to co-opt the festival of the dead, in 835 Pope Gregory IV designated November 1st, Samhain, as “All Hallows” (“All Saints”) Day. “After all, the saints themselves are dead people” (Stibra 1948). The church also imitated the massing by encouraging parades in which people dressed as their favorite saints (Myers 1972). However, this attempt to quash Samhain failed and led to the addition of “All Souls” Day on November 2nd (first created by Abbot Oddo of Cluny in 998) to the Catholic calendar by Pope John IX in 1006. While more successful, since other dead besides the saints could then be celebrated, remnants of Samhain can still be seen on October 31st, Halloween's Evening or Hallowe’en.

Halloween was known by American colonists, but wasn’t celebrated in the United States until after 1840 when the great Irish potato famine resulted in a large number of Irish immigrants (Santino 1983). Some of the Halloween games of the Irish such as bobbing for apples have survived, while others such as roasting nuts and fortune telling have largely disappeared. Linton and Linton (1950) trace the origin of pranks to the Irish belief that the “little people” come out to do mischief on this night and place the height of Halloween vandalism in the late 1800s (similar patterns appear in part of Canada-Walden 1987). They also suggest that Halloween has since become a degenerate holiday that has lost much of its original significance, a view echoed by Rook (1985). Stone (1959) questions whether the holiday has any meaning for children and suggests it may be more for the amusement of adults.

The historical predecessors of Halloween explain some icons and historical vestiges of the holiday, but they do not explain why it continues to be a popular American and North American holiday, despite it’s lack of clear meanings to participants. Nor do these historical predecessors seem to account for some of the recent changes in Halloween celebrations. One of the most dramatic of these changes is the curtailment of trick-or-treating due to tales of poisoned candy, razor blades in apples, and hallucinogenic drugs placed in treats (e.g., Airisworth 1973). In the past two decades such fears caused parents to prohibit or limit their children’s trick-or-treating, have led hospitals to offer free x-rays of Halloween goodies, and has led Brian Sutton-Smith (1983) to suggest that instead of edible sweets, Halloween treats be restricted to “small gifts, small toys, personal parcels, or greeting cards.” And yet, such stories of razor blades, poison, broken glass, and pills are urban legends with no basis in fact (Grider 1984, Best and Horiuchi 1985). The tales are spread both orally and by the media (Best 1985), and are fervently believed. But with the exception of one father who was convicted of killing his eight-year-old son by feeding him trick-or-treat candy faced with cyanide, other reports of contaminated treats turn out to be hoaxes and rumors. Best and Horiuchi (1985) found that such stories in the popular press peaked in 1989-1997 and again in 1992. They suggest that the first peak is a reflection of displaced U.S. anxiety due to the Vietnam war and domestic riots, and that the second is a result of widely reported poisoned Tylenol murders in the Chicago area that year. Besides lessening Halloween trick-or-treating, these tales may also be causing an increase in institutionalized (i.e., controlled) substitute activities such as parties and “spook houses” (Grider and Wentworth 1984, Magliocco 1985). Beginning with the 1978 John Carpenter film, Halloween, several dozen horror films have been produced that attract particularly big audiences and rentals just before and during Halloween. These too represent another institutional alternative or addition to prior American Halloween traditions.

Although an estimated 93% of U.S. households with children under age 12 still participated in trick-or-treating last year (Neuhaush 1988), another trend in Halloween celebrations is a shift to more adult activities (Demarest 1983, USA Today 1988). Costume shops report a rapidly growing market for adult Halloween costumes. Clubs, bars, hotels, museums, and other institutions are beginning to sponsor large parties for costumed adults, and Halloween is reported to be the second biggest U.S. adult party night after New Year’s Eve. Washington, D.C.’s Georgetown closes down its streets for a wild adult Halloween celebration and New York’s Greenwich Village Halloween Parade draws hundreds of thousands of adult participants and spectators (Miller 1987, New Yorker 1988). Parades like the Greenwich Village and San Francisco Polk Street Halloween events draw substantial participation from the gay community who turn out in drag and flamboyant costume (O’Drain 1986).

Why is the U.S. Halloween changing in these ways? Why does a holiday that seems detached from its historical rationales continue to be celebrated? What functions does Halloween serve and does it serve different functions for males and females, children and adults, and children of different ages? What is the role of Halloween in the family, neighborhood, and larger community? Why costumes, and why particular types of costumes? Why do we frighten ourselves with “Halloween movies?” To begin to answer these questions, it is useful to first consider some of the primary data of this study.

STUDY 1: THE GHOSTS OF HALLOWEENS PAST AND PRESENT

The first study sought descriptive data on Halloween activities from U.S.-born senior undergraduate business students (64 males and 64 females). These students were asked to describe how they spent the most recent Halloween (the data were collected in January), how they spent Halloween when they were teenagers, and how they spent Halloween as pre-teens in grade school. There is no room to present verbatim responses (although see others in Airisworth 1973, Hunter 1983, McDowell 1985, and Moss 1986), but these responses were coded into categories as summarized in Figures 1, 2, and 3 for the three age periods involved in the questions.

Pre-teenage Halloween activities by these students showed little variation. Eighty-five percent of females and 87% of males reported trick-or-treating as their primary activity. Another 7% of each sex reported that they went to parties primarily. And the remaining 8% (females) or 6% (males) reported either no activity or one of a variety of other activities (scary movies, pranks, costume parade, making Halloween decorations, or participating in Halloween activities at school) as the major focus of their Halloweens. As seen in Figure 2, this pattern changed considerably during teenage years. Only 14% of females and 18% of males reported trick-or-treating and only 4% and 6% respectively reported being in
The brothers. Another part of their Oedipal interpretation killing and eating of the father by the brother horde. The products of another set of psychoanalytic interpretations have been offered by children are perceived, as with the greatest role in selecting costumes for preschool dressed in various death masks such as skeletons, out dressed in cute or animal costumes than death motifs. In part of this argument, that Halloween involves a repressed than compelling. In one view Halloween enacts our repressed fear of death. Several psychoanalytic explanations of Halloween have also been offered important in a largely industrial society.

Some Rejected Prior Interpretations
WF 8--I'm going to be a skeleton. I like them.
BM 3--A dinosaur, because it's on TV. A big dinosaur-Rex. It has sharp teeth.
WM 6--Dracula...because I like him because he's scary and cool. I like really beautiful.
WF 7--I'm going to be Lady Lovelylocks. Il's this girl who has pixie-tails all stuffed with towels and not comfy.
WM 6--I want to be a wizard 'cause they can do magic like make bats and castles .

COSTUMES CHOSEN BY MALES AND FEMALES
WM 6--I want to be a wizard 'cause they can do magic like make bats and have their own castles .
WF 5--A fairy princess, because I didn't like the costume that my Mom gave me...a pumpkin all stuffed with towels and not comfy.
VM 3--A bumblebee because the penguin is too big for me to wear.
WF 7--I'm going to be Lady Lovelylocks. It's this girl who has pixie-tails in her hair; she's really beautiful.
WM 6--Dracula...because I like him because he's scary and cool. I like scary things.
WF 5--A bride--because it makes me happy.
BM 5--A dinosaur, because it's on TV. A big dinosaur-Rex. It has sharp teeth.
WF 8--I'm going to be a skeleton. I like them.

INTERPRETATIONS
SomeRejectedPriorInterpretations
As has already been noted, historical explanations of Halloween no longer seem very applicable to the American Halloween. In a largely urban society, celebrating harvest and the return of the flocks no longer have much meaning even as nostalgic anachronisms. Halloween is also no longer our New Year celebration as it was for the Celts and has remained for some Celtic descendants until very recently. It could still be that Halloween marks a seasonal change, but it is a quarter day and not an equinox or a solstice. Furthermore other temporal markers such as Labor Day, the start of School, and Christmas or New Year's are closer to marking seasonal changes and these changes are also less important in a largely industrial society.

Several psychoanalytic explanations of Halloween have also been offered that seem less than compelling. In one view Halloween enacts our repressed fear of death by symbolically sacrificing our children in order to mollify the spirits of the dead (Sterba 1948). While the first part of this argument, that Halloween involves a repressed fear of death, may have some merit, it is not as plausible that we offer our children as symbolic sacrifices by sending them out dressed in various death masks such as skeletons, ghosts, and zombies. Parents play the greatest role in selecting costumes for preschool children, and are much more likely to select cute or animal costumes than death motifs. In addition, when "real" death threats to these children are perceived, as with the poison candy and razorblade-in-the-apple legends, parents attempt to protect their children from these threats.

Another set of psychoanalytic interpretations have been offered by Fraiberg and Fraiberg (1950). They suggest that Halloween is a symbolic totem feast which enacts the Oedipal killing and eating of the father by the brother horde. The products of the harvest are sacrifices at this feast and their consumption also represents the possession of the women by the brothers. Another part of their Oedipal interpretation involves the symbolism of the
Emerging Interpretations
The Nature of Contemporary Halloween Celebrations. Caplow, et al. (1982) note that Halloween is in several ways the antithesis of other U.S. holidays. If the witch is the central figure of the holiday, she may be considered the inversion of the American mother figure. Her size, ugliness, age, nocturnal preference, and malevolence also stand in opposition to the traits of Santa Claus, Cupid, and the Easter Bunny who reign during other major U.S. holidays. They also suggest that Halloween is an anti-festival that burlesques Easter by replacing the resurrection with ghosts and skeletons and burlesques Thanksgiving by turning the edible pumpkin pie into a horrific jack-o’-lantern. While Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrate family, Halloween mocks it. Caplow, et al. (1982) conclude that “...at Halloween, nonpersons imitating nonbeings demand and receive nonmeals from nonrelatives in a nonneighborly way.” (Caplow, et al. 1982, 232-233). Thus Halloween is an antifestival, and is specifically anti-home, anti-family, anti-nourishment, and anti-religion.

The only part of this characterization that might be questioned is the “nonneighborly” quality of Halloween. While the pranks believed to be characteristic of Halloween in the late 19th century and the vandalism associated with Devil’s night in the Detroit area are indeed nonneighborly, Stone (1959) found that trick or treating youngsters had little intention of delivering tricks and indeed did not know what constituted a trick. While the current data suggest some incidence of pranks during teenage years, the extent and severity of these tricks were generally quite limited. While there remain some elements of mischievousness in Halloween celebrations, it cannot be said that treats are truly extorted from those whose houses are visited. Rather, in an opposite sense, trick-or-treating and neighborhood holiday decoration provide a sense of community (Brown and Werner 1983) and demonstrate to children that the world outside the immediate family is kind and acts as a quasi-family. As Sutton-Smith (1983) observes:

We say to our children, in effect, that your neighbors are to be trusted. They are nice people. If you go up to their scary door along their scary path dressed up as a scary person, nevertheless they will treat you nicely and give you candy and food (p. 64).

As one informant (WM 10) put it, “If we bring up all those scary things at least once a year, maybe they won’t scare us as much.” Freud (1961; original 1920) also suggested that children use games that involve the things they fear most in order to gain some control of these terrors. Horror movies may serve much the same function.

Functions of Halloween for Young Children. There is also another sense in which a foiling of context prevails for the child at Halloween. It derives from the attitude of the child leaving family and joining masked friends for a dark foray in search of candy treasure. The spirit of liminality is enhanced because “a touch of sin and evil seems to be necessary tinder for the fires of communism.” (Turner 1969, 183). Turner notes that child trick-or-treaters occupy a position betwixt and between the living and the dead and their masks and disguises provide them with the anonymity needed for a rite of reversal in which the weak become powerful, like the highwaymen whom they sometimes imitate. Shalek (1973, p.16) suggests this reversal is necessary to relieve pressure because children remain the one repressed group that has not yet rebelled in our society. But Turner’s brief application of his liminality formulation to Halloween fails to note several additional elements of the process: the chaos of Halloween as anti-structure, the liminal Halloween season bridging summer and winter and allowing witches and demons to slip between this seam (Ward 1983), the archetypal struggle between light and darkness at this time of year (Burland 1972), trick-or-treating with comrades as a pilgrimage and a self-imposed rite of passage, children-—like gays, hippies, and freaks—as marginal people, and the adolescent as nonperson hovering betwixt and between childhood and adulthood.

The essential liminal nature of the trick-or-treat pilgrimage is recounted by Ann Masko (Hunt 1983) I have added liminal characteristics specified by Turner (1972) in brackets:

Group members were allowed to examine treats between stops, but it was frowned upon to sample them [asceticism]. Members were allowed to remove their masks while in transport because of the discomforts of breathing through them, but were not allowed to remove the essential costume [uniform clothing]. Facial disguises had to be replaced before entering a householder’s property [transition; ritual preparation]. Under no circumstances were members to reveal their true identity to the householder when in his presence [anonymity; obedience]. And the group had to travel as a unit; that is, the male members were not allowed to move ahead of the females [equality; absence of rank; self-sufficiency]. All of the rules served to reaffirm group solidarity and to ensure an orderly progression through the itinerary [communitas; ritual] (p. 40).

For the young child Halloween may thus be seen largely as a sacred pilgrimage. An implicit function served by children’s jointly going out into the night, is mastery of fear. It might seem strange that children would dress up as scary monsters and visit spook houses in order to master fears, but this is the very way these fears are met (Ballot 1988; Magliocco 1985). In these contexts fears are met in a controlled situation with safety highly likely; they are bracketed in time and space. For preschool children, both fear mastery and costume-imported sex roles are generally supervised by parents or older siblings, making the initial experience a pilgrimage with guides.

Functions of Halloween for Adolescents. For adolescent children, one social function of the trick-or-treat ritual is to socialize children to acquisitiveness, possessiveness, and gluttony. One informant (WM 12) explained his Halloween procedures this way:

Get all the candy you can when trick-or-treating. Take the candy home, and dump it all onto the table or floor. Separate the good candy bars (Snickers, Mars, Three Musketeers) into separate piles from the rest. Also separate the other candy into suckers, gum, etc. Examine everyone’s candy and the one with the most good candy has won. Eat the good candy first, and protect your stash from others. The ethos expressed here was fairly common, especially among grade school age males. Younger children showed confusion between Halloween and Christmas and sometimes spoke of Halloween trees with candy under them and leaving treats out for spirits in the evening (seemingly inspired by leaving treats for Santa, rather than similar Samhain practices, as even older children had only vague and often mistaken ideas about the origins of Halloween). Stone (1959) has also noted this consumer (rather than producer) orientation of Halloween.
Another function of Halloween for adolescent children is to aid in exploring sexuality. While prepubescent children may properly regard themselves as children and postpubescent children properly regard themselves as adults, children going through puberty and menarche are uncertain. One interpretation of the horror films popular in this age group at Halloween is that these films help express these feelings of confused identity (Evans 1975, Hogan 1986). As Evans observes:

The adolescent finds himself trapped in an unwilled change from a comparatively comprehensible and secure childhood to some mysterious new state which he does not understand, cannot control, and has some reason to fear. Mysterious feelings and urges begin to develop and he finds himself strangely fascinated with disturbing new physical characteristics—emerging hair, budding breasts, and others—which, given the forbidding texture of the X-rated American mentality, he associates with mystery, darkness, secrecy, and evil (1975, 126).

Fiedler (1978, p. 28) adds that children wonder “whether they are beasts or men: little animals more like their pets than their parents.” With such a view it becomes more understandable that the half-human/half-animal form of monsters like the wolfman and Frankenstein’s monster should hold a special fascination as their bodies are contorted and transformed. Similarly, the special fondness of dracula for blood has been seen as symbolizing menstruation. The monthly timing of these attacks (at full moon) offers further support of this interpretation. Another interpretation that ties more closely to the teenage horror films of the 1970s and 1980s involves cautions against sexual promiscuity. In films like Halloween, the heroine/survivor is a teenage female virgin, while those who die are sexually active (Neale 1984).

Besides their sexual significance, horror films evoke Halloween through the use of masks. Adolescents then adopt these same masks and costumes for their own Halloween masquerades—e.g., Michael from Halloween, Freddy Krueger from Nightmare on Elm Street, Jason from Friday the 13th, The Phantom of the Opera, and others. The films also involve the boundaries between wakefulness and sleep, fantasy and reality, human and nonhuman of which have liminal parallels in both nightmares and Halloween (Hartmann 1984). Horror is also created by creatures that violate taboos through pollution, dirt, ambiguous forms, and other threats to an ordered and clearly categorized world (Prince 1988). The chaos and inversion of these films is very parallel to the chaos and inversion of Halloween, so that the fascination of these films during Halloween (but not during “purifying” holidays like Easter) is not at all surprising. The functions served by these movies are not unlike those more prominently served by fairy tales and ghost stories in the past—they express the collective anxieties of adolescents (e.g., Bettelheim 1976).

Functions of Halloween for Adults. For adults, the increased participation in Halloween celebrations appears to serve still different functions. The mask and carnival atmosphere of Halloween that allow children to invert the power structure, master fears, and by taking on different identities, allow the adult to transcend normal rules of propriety and relive the normal tensions of social order. Some historical carnival celebrations have disappeared or substantially changed their character including the Roman Satumalia, Hilari, and the festivities of Kalends, the medieval feast of fools, and Christmas mumming in various locales (e.g., Abrahams and Bauman 1978, Davis 1982, MacGowan and Rosse 1923). Surviving carnival festivities besides Halloween include New Year’s Eve celebrations, Carnival in Brazil, Trinidad, and several other predominantly Catholic areas, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Shrovetide in Finland, St. Peter festival in Columbia, and St. Martin’s Day in parts of Denmark and the Netherlands. Reversal rites also survive in certain activities like “monster” car-crushing trucks and diabolism derbies (Jewett and Lawrene 1978). There appears to be a widespread and longstanding need for such a festival. The symbolic inversion of carnivals may involve debauchery, drunkenness, homosexuality, transvestism, and generally a spate of play, tricks, and taboo-breaking rule violation (Babcock 1978, Da Matta 1984, Huizinga 1970 [original 1955]). These traits accord well with the gay drag parades, the adult parties, and the drinking activity associated with the contemporary Halloween.

A part of the license for such activity is granted by the use of costume and mask. The power of masks is to some degree shaped by the audience who assume that the wearer suspends all identity but that of the role (e.g., Hickey, Thompson, and Foster 1988). Although Abrahams and Bauman (1978) note that participants may be those given to bawdiness at other times as well, the mask, the presence of co-celebrants, and the tolerance and sometimes encouragement by the community all enhance such activity during the Halloween carnival.

What remains to be understood is why the current U.S. Halloween celebration seems to be shifting in emphasis from children to adults. Some clues may be found by returning to the razor-blade-in-the-apple legend and the Halloween horror films of the past two decades. Best and Horuchi (1983) suggest that the poisoned Halloween treats rumors have actually flourished because we felt surrounded by unaccountable threats with the U.S. loss in Vietnam, the Arab oil embargo, increased crime, the Tylenol poisonings, and increased reports of various forms of child abuse. By confining our fear to a narrower target (the Halloween sadist) and a single day of the year, the threat is contained and parents are able to take action against it by controlling their children’s trick-or-treating. But why the increase in adult Halloween activities? Noting some of U.S. society’s other reactions to a felt loss of control, Wood (1986) argues that the resurgence of horror films in the 1970s and 1980s is both an enactment of and a cathartic response to increased political, religious, and sexual repression due to the rise of conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and AIDS during this period. It seems likely that these same forces could account for the increased adult emphasis on Halloween as carnival release. While these interpretations remain tentative, they are also compatible with the earlier increase in horror films during the Great Depression and accounts that Halloween pranks were also much more in evidence during this period (e.g., Stone 1959).

If these interpretations are correct, the evolving course of the U.S. Halloween celebration may be tied to social forces that are quite volatile. Similar shifts in holiday control due to social forces have been detected in Brazilian carnival (Taylor 1982) and Philadelphia mumming (Davis 1982). Other U.S. holidays also evolve and change (e.g., Belk 1987, 1989), although they may have better articulated mythologies to anchor them, and thus change somewhat more slowly. While current emphasis is shifting in favor of adults, Halloween is multivalent and because of its ambiguity is able to serve children, adolescents, and adults in different ways and with different meanings. Its attractiveness is also shown in its recent infusion into the preColumbian Mexican Day of the Dead (El Día de los Muertos) ritual (Hernandez and Hernandez 1979). It seems clear that with several thousand years of
Halloween (Samhain) has a much deeper significance than dressing up or trick-or-treating. Read about 6 Samhain rituals and guides for your personal healing. And finally, after traditional Samhain rituals evolved into a somber Christian holiday, Halloween has now become a highly commercialized celebration. Now, this is not to say that I don’t love the tempting candy, vibrant costumes and spooky playfulness of the day. I actually love Halloween (it’s my favorite holiday), but I also know that it can be so much more meaningful. Having Celtic blood running deep through my veins and all the way through my ancestry tree, I honor Samhain as a time of the year to stop, ground myself, and reflect. I hope it can be for you as well.

Samhain: A Portal into th The American children’s ritual, Halloween, involves an emergent, active and complex process rather than unidirectional socialization of children by adults. Inversions of meaning are prominent in Halloween through: 1) adult support for inverted, anti-normative themes, and 2) a turnabout by which children gain ascendance through costumed trick-or-treating. The study is part of a larger program of study about children and holiday rituals, including Christmas, Easter, and the tooth fairy ritual (Clark 1995) and Halloween (Clark 2005). Corsaro and Johannesen (2014), based upon a study of Norwegian civic ritual and youth, also hypothesized that early exposure can have a “priming” impact. Although most Americans spend Halloween dressing up and trick-or-treating, other countries have their own celebratory rituals. Here are 12 Halloween (and Halloween-like) traditions from around the world. 1. Samhain // Ireland And Scotland. Adria Bates/iStock via Getty Images. Today, both Ireland and Scotland celebrate Halloween with bonfires, games, traditional foods like barmbrack, an Irish fruitcake that contains coins, buttons, and rings for fortunetelling. For example, rings mean marriage, while coins mean wealth in the upcoming year. 2. Día De Los Muertos // Mexico. See More