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Commentary

Why Dressing Up for Halloween Is Wearing Thin

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WeNews commentator

Women are helping to fuel a spending spree in adult Halloween costumes this year. After giving the escapism urge some serious thought, Kimberly Gadette says she won't be buying that FBI Girl costume after all.

Editor's Note: The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's eNews.

(WOMENSENEWS)--We're less than one week away from Halloween and I'm scared.

The National Retail Federation reports that Americans are going to play dress-up to the tune of \$3.29 billion this year, a 5.4 percent increase from last year. And the freaky thing: Per the federation, B1Gresearch and Shopping.com, it's the adults that are jamming into stores and onto Internet sites looking for the perfect outfit. Shopping.com currently reports an 84 percent increase in sales from 2004.



Kimberly Gadette

The top costumes include hot witches, hotter vampires and monsters dripping with blood and gore. Fantasy for Adults Only representative J.R. O'Neill says that the chain has almost run out of this year's FBI Girl, a tight-fitting, black vinyl suit that would have made J. Edgar Hoover look like, well, J. Edgar Hoover--on one of his many cross-dressing days.

What's behind the mania for adults, especially women, to pull on other threads? Every day is a costume ball of sorts. Whether the role is soccer mom, corporate she-devil, Saturday night hottie or church lady, women know how to dress for the play, replete with appropriate make-up, hair and accessories. Far from walking wardrobe malfunctions, we're smart. We're trained. We've had Barbies.

But come this Oct. 31, America is rallying to the mask like never before. (I, for one, keep fantasizing about that FBI Girl outfit.)

Why? It's escapism, pure and simple. Between weather disasters, cancers and wars, there's enough woe out there to make us want to stick our respective heads into a trick-or-treat bag. By hiding away from our troubles for even just a day, maybe those troubles will take a little trip. A Mutation Vacation.



Escapism is Eternal

Escapism has been around as long as there was a lion, a Christian and a coliseum . . . and people had an afternoon to kill.

The urge to "forget all your troubles, c'mon get happy" was especially prevalent in the Depression, when America escaped to the movies. People with no money, jobs or food somehow managed to rustle up a few pennies to sit in the dark, their psyches enveloped and nourished by celluloid.

Most popular was the Busby Berkeley musical, where gorgeous chorines danced across the screen to tuneful melodies, their bodies transformed into virtual kaleidoscopes of color and light. The other favorite was the classic horror film, in which Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff became latter-day Halloween favorites with their Frankensteins, Count Draculas, Mummys ad nauseam.

Monsters and hotties, hotties and monsters. Beauty and the Beast. Fay Wray and King Kong. Charlize Theron and her very own "Monster." Like tricking and treating, they go together.

Sunday Lessons

A study of the recent front page sections of Sunday's national newspapers finds the same frightful pairing.

In one article, the Pakistan quake death toll is set at 38,000, with another 62,000 injured and more bodies yet to be discovered under the rubble. The accompanying picture shows a dying woman in a tent that had room for only six beds. Directly below: An ad depicting a raven-haired beauty sporting a rose-patterned, sheared beaver coat, part of the new fur collection at Bloomingdale's.

An article on the bird flu explained that it had just spread to Romania, threatening a worldwide pandemic. Directly beneath this article was a pouting model, the picture of insouciance, posing in a leopard-skinned hat and full-length fur that was 30 percent off!

A picture showing pallbearers at Arlington National Cemetery carrying a coffin with the remains of 12 troops mixed together stated that nearly 100,000 soldiers have yet to be identified by the Pentagon. Next to this photo--in addition to the usual diamond ads including one that read, "Drop Dead Gorgeous"--there was also an ad for Positive Changes Hypnosis. A pretty woman, now thin and happy, boasted, "My Husband Can't Keep His Hands Off Me!"

In all of these cases, you couldn't do any better if you were actively trying to offend the dead.

Horrible-Beautiful Breakfast Mix

We get fed our "horrible" with a side of "beautiful" every morning, right along with our eggbeaters. We see poverty-stricken peoples next to gaunt models. (At least they all have starvation in common.)

We want the news, but we can't take the news. So when it gets too rough, our eyes are diverted to pretty things. Beautiful women, shiny jewelry, fast cars. The assumption is that, in the end, we are all just material girls whose mental equipment keeps us happily programmed for diversion and distraction.

But it doesn't work. In fact, we feel terrible when we read the article and even worse when we look at the ads and realize we will never be as thin, beautiful, rich or oblivious to the world around us as those women in their perfect masquerades.

In the end, escapism goes nowhere.

I guess the FBI Girl get-up won't quite fit my sensibilities after all.

And if any of the heirs of William Randolph Hearst are reading, I beg you: Please stop mixing the gorgeous with the grotesque in the newspaper pages I peruse at the breakfast table.

The decaf is monstrous enough.

Kimberly Gadette is a humor writer based in the Portland, Ore., area. With an M.F.A. from University of California, Los Angeles, her writings entail an in-depth dismemberment of politics, sex, dating and life with four ill-mannered dogs.

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