Gender Socialization and Children's Halloween Costumes

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October 25, 2021

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Abstract

This content analysis activity allows students to examine the role that mass media and consumer culture play in children's gender socialization. More specifically, students analyze the gendered meanings within marketing materials for children's Halloween costumes. Though the holiday provides individuals with the opportunity to "try on" and "play" a role that is different and outside-of-the-everyday, studies have shown that Halloween costumes tend to be gender-typed in stereotypical, limited ways. Instructors should provide an overview of this previous research and then give students their own sample of costumes to analyze. The set of 40 costumes (names, descriptions, and images) analyzed in this activity was compiled in the fall of 2018 from Walmart.com. Students code the costumes, making note of if/how the costume names,costumes, models, and descriptions are gendered. They list the adjectives used to describe the costume andthe potential costume-wearer, and they are also asked to assess whether the model's pose is "active" or "passive." After coding each costume, they identify patterns in their findings. As a class, instructors lead students in a discussion about their findings, how they compare to those from previous research, and what can be learned from content analysis research such as this.

Details

Subject Areas: Sex and Gender

Resource Types: Class Activity

Class Levels: Any Level

Class Sizes: Any

Usage Notes

This activity was developed for an introductory sociology course at a regional public university. However, I have also used it in an upper-division Sociology of Gender course, and it could be equally well-suited for a Research Methods course. I have used it in classes with 15-40 students, but it could easily be implemented in larger classes. Before starting the activity, instructors should introduce the concept of gender socialization, along with reviewing findings from previous research on the gender-typing of children's Halloween costumes (Nelson 2000). They should then give a brief overview of the content analysis task before putting students into groups of three to four people. Instructors may want to adjust group sizes based on the time they have available, as larger groups should be able to complete the task more quickly. Instructors should encourage groups to review the coding instructions together but then divide the labor of coding. After independently coding a subset of costumes, group members should discuss findings from the whole sample and respond to the provided summary questions. Instructors conclude the class session by leading students in discussion about their findings. No matter the group size, instructors should allow 45-75 minutes for the activity (including the introductory lecture/instructions and the follow-up discussion). See

expanded usage notes for more details on implementing this activity.

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

Explain how the marketing of Halloween costumes may contribute to the process of gender socialization.

Analyze costume names, descriptions, and images and identify ways that gender stereotypes are reinforced and challenged.

Differentiate between what can and cannot be learned about gender socialization and stereotyping based on content analysis research. Explain how other research methods can be used to answer different types of research questions.

ASSESSMENTS

In response to a written assessment question, students can explain the concept of gender socialization and how the marketing of Halloween costumes can contribute to this process.

In discussion and/or in response to a written assessment question, students can identify how costume names, descriptions, and/or images are often gendered in stereotypical ways. Students can also identify ways that those stereotypes are challenged.

In discussion and/or in response to a written assessment question, students can articulate what can and cannot be learned about gender socialization and stereotyping from content analysis research.

Resource Files

PDF
PDF
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