

## Tramp or Treat: When good girls can be bad

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In the hit teen flick *Mean Girls*, a lifetime of African home-schooling leaves Lindsay Lohan's character, Cady, clueless about things that go bump 'n' grind in the night on a North American Halloween.

"In the regular world," she muses, "Halloween is when children dress up in costumes and beg for candy. In *Girl World*, Halloween is the one night a year when a girl can dress like a total slut and no other girls can say anything about it. The hard-core girls just wear lingerie and some form of animal ears."

"Unfortunately," Cady adds as she walks into a party dressed as a snaggle-toothed zombie bride, "no one told me about the slut rule."

Cady could have spared herself the embarrassment by thumbing through a Halloween flyer or strolling through a costume shop. Sexy girl get-ups are everywhere, especially as this weekend's Halloween parties approach.

At Motions 1, Mark Rivard's Howard Avenue costume store, there's enough vinyl to rival a vintage record store. The glossy plastic-like fabric is the main material in pre-packaged "Nurse Feelbetter" and "Sexy Scout" costumes. Low-cut devil suits and trappy cop outfits line the sale walls. Belly dancer and prostitute costumes hang on the rental racks.

Still, "I actually scaled my sexy stuff way back after the sex shops starting carrying them," Rivard says. Now stores like Aren't We Naughty on Dougall Avenue sell sexy Halloween costumes a rack or two over from porn DVDs and sex toys.

Rivard says his sexy-costume seeking clients range in age from 19 to 40, but there's concern risque Halloween garb is becoming especially popular with teens and preteens looking to express their inner tarts without being labeled prostitutes-in-training.

"That's true," says Michelle Faoro, a 19-year-old University of Windsor nursing student. "No one is going to say anything to you."

Faoro remembers classmates at her high school, Holy Names, tailoring their uniforms to dress as slutty schoolgirls or simply picking their trashiest outfits and going as a "ho" for Halloween.



Teen queen Regina George, played by Canadian actress Rachel McAdams, is pictured here in her Playboy bunny Halloween costume from the hit movie *Mean Girls*.

"Nothing is wrong with it if you're just dressing, not acting it out," says Faoro, who planned to dress as Pocahontas and party at the Loop this weekend.

But, she says, some girls take the slut rule too far.

"I know some people will really take advantage of it. Even if it's Halloween you still look trashy if you're dressed like a slut."

The real problem with the slut rule, says Lyn Mikel Brown, a women's studies professor at Colby College in Maine, is that it's being peddled to younger and younger girls.

"Halloween for kids is traditionally a time where you can be anything or create any kind of possibility and we've narrowed it down to sexy, hot girls," says Brown, also the co-author of *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers' Schemes*, due out in April 2006.

In a section on the sexy Halloween phenomenon, Brown and her co-author lament the way marketers have ingrained the slut rule in pre-pubescent girls.

An online survey of 600 girls they conducted last year elicited responses like this one, from a 10-year-old: "I wore a devil outfit (for Halloween) because it was simple and looked really sexy on girls." Brown's research also turned up a raft of sexy costumes, like divas, Barbies and cheerleaders in kids' Halloween catalogues and costume stores.

While Brown understands older teens and adults are free to indulge their sexy sides on Halloween, she says it's unfortunate that's the only image being sold to young girls.

"It's the only fantasy they can have on Halloween."

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