

Identity Issues: Probing Woke Culture

We are all different and all unique, and I try to treat everybody as an individual rather than stereotyping them as belonging to some group. I do my best to treat everyone with the same respect I'd like them to extend to me. But I confess to being un-woke and not understanding the logic behind some aspects of woke culture and identity issues.

I'm focusing on two of those issues here, prompted by [this article](#) in *The New Yorker*.

The article begins by talking about cultural appropriation, relating a story about a blue-eyed singer dressed in Jamaican carnival garb, which apparently is cultural appropriation. Why is it "cultural appropriation" to admire and adopt the fashions that originated in a different culture? If this is cultural appropriation, would it not also be cultural appropriation if someone of African descent wore a suit and tie—a fashion that originated in Europe? Why should dressing a certain way be celebrated when done by some people and the object of criticism when done by others?

Cultural appropriation seems to apply to clothing, but not to music, as far as I can tell. Blues music has its origins in African American culture, but many white blues musicians are highly respected. Meanwhile, there is a push to increase the number of [minority musicians in symphony orchestras](#), which is not considered cultural appropriation even though the orchestra repertoire is heavily European in its origins.

The main focus of *The New Yorker* article is not about cultural appropriation, however, but about people misrepresenting their race. The article focuses mostly on a George Washington University history professor who claimed to be Black, but as

others discovered more about her background, was pushed into confessing she “assumed identities within a Blackness that I had no right to claim.”

The article also mentions Rachel Dolezal, the woman who headed the NAACP chapter in Spokane, Washington, until 2015, when she was outed as actually being white.

What seems illogical to me, an un-woke observer of woke culture, is that it appears that it is acceptable and commendable for people to be able to choose the gender with which they identify, but is unacceptable to choose their racial identity. People can grow up identifying themselves with one gender, and at any point in their lives can decide they now identify with a different gender. Not so with race. Why?

People decide they want to change their gender identity and have major surgery to alter their body to more closely conform with their new identity, all supported by woke culture. But, if someone changes their hair style to one typically identified with a different race, that is labeled cultural appropriation. Why?

One possibility could be that people want to identify with a race that is perceived to have advantages other races don't have. Despite sustained moves toward racial equality, “white privilege” still exists. But that doesn't apply to the two cases mentioned in *The New Yorker* article, because both individuals who were mentioned were trying to shift their identities from white to the marginalized and disadvantaged identity of Black.

They were both white women, and if they said they now identified as men, woke culture would accept and embrace that identity change. But woke culture strongly rejected their attempted change in racial identity.

As contradictory as these (and other) aspects of woke culture

appear to me, I try to treat everybody as an individual and everybody with respect. We are all unique and all different. Don't take anything I've said here as a criticism. I'm just making an observation about aspects of contemporary culture that seem to embody obvious contradictions.

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