

Cultural Appropriation

Culture is defined as the beliefs, ideas, traditions, speech, and material objects associated with a particular group of people.

Appropriation is the illegal, unfair, or unjust taking of something that doesn't belong to you.

Cultural Appropriation: “Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc.”¹

- It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a **minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways**
- Cultural appropriation has consistently affected Black and Indigenous communities.

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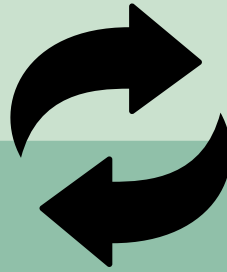


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Cultural Appropriation

Here are 4 distinct ways cultural appropriation can manifest itself:



1. Cultural Exchange

Cultural Exchange: the **reciprocal exchange** of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures that are roughly equal in terms of power and dominance.²

- Examples include two-way flows of music and visual arts.
- In its ideal form cultural exchange involves a balance of this reciprocal flow

2. Transculturation

Transculturation: This form involves taking and **combining elements of multiple cultures, making it difficult to identify and credit the original source.**³



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Here are 4 distinct ways cultural appropriation can manifest itself:

3. Cultural Exploitation

Cultural Exploitation: the **appropriation of elements of a subordinate culture by a dominant culture** without substantive reciprocity, permission and/or compensation.⁴

- This is most commonly understood and referred to as cultural appropriation.

4. Cultural Dominance

Cultural Dominance: This includes the **imposition of elements of a dominant culture onto a subordinated (marginalized, colonized) culture**. This includes situations in which the dominant culture imposes their beliefs, values and/or culture on a subordinate culture.⁵

- Examples include residential schools in which the dominant culture (Anglo-Canadian culture and religion) were forced upon Indigenous children.



Why Cultural Appropriation is Dangerous

Cultural appropriation can have disastrous effects on the integrity of an exploited culture because it can **improperly depict the culture from which it is drawn.**⁶

Cultural appropriation also allows individuals of a dominant culture to **profit financially or socially from the heritage and labor of oppressed and marginalized communities.**⁷

Cultural appropriation **disregards the origins and significance of what is being taken**, and embraces the products of a subordinate culture while reinforcing or **ignoring the prejudice experienced by the people who originated it.**⁸

- Members of majority groups can adopt elements of a minority culture without consequences while members of the minority group face backlash for the same cultural element.

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6. Rogers, 2006

7-8. Britannica, 2023

Why Cultural Appropriation is Dangerous Cont.

Cultural Appropriation can **oversimplify the culture** of a minority group or treat the culture of a minority group as a **joke**.⁹



Cultural appropriation can also **separate a cultural element of a minority group from its original meaning**.¹⁰

For example, in 2013 at the American Music Awards, Katy Perry performed as a geisha to the song “unconditionally.”¹¹



Perry described her performance as a homage to Asian culture.

However, Asian Americans disagreed with this assessment, declaring her performance “yellowface.” They also objected to the song choice, “Unconditionally,” for reinforcing the stereotype that Asian women are passive.

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9-10. Britannica, 2023

11. Nittle, 2021

The Fine Line between the Cultural Appropriation and Appreciation

There is significant discourse on cultural appreciation vs cultural appropriation.

Cultural appreciation can be described as a way of honoring another culture through exploration and seeking an understanding as a way to honor that culture, beliefs, and traditions.¹²

Whereas **cultural appropriation dishonors or demeans a culture.**

Appropriation

- Dehumanizes oppressed groups
- Takes without permission and/or compensation
- Perpetuates stereotypes
- Ignores meaning and stories behind the cultural elements

Appreciation

- Celebrates a culture in a respectful way
- Asks permission, provides credit and offers compensations
- Elevates the voices and live experiences of members of a cultural group
- Rooted in allyship and the learning of stories and meanings behind cultural elements

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Questions to Explore

Do you feel as though you are appropriating a culture? As yourself these questions.

Why am I doing/wearing this? Is it out of genuine interest? Is it something you feel called to do? Or, does it simply look appealing and trendy?

What is the source? For material items such as artwork, was it made by someone from that culture? Has that individual given permission for the item to be sold?

How respectful is this work to the culture? Would people from that group object to the piece of art or to it being sold to outsiders?

Am I perpetuating a stereotype that might hurt those who belong to this culture?



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