



Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 1 Peter 4: 8-9

In a conversation with one of my kids, I labeled something as cultural appropriation. She stopped me and asked, "What even is cultural appropriation?" She went on to tell me a story of a girl from her school telling her that she couldn't learn a middle eastern dance, because it would be "cultural appropriation." That is not my idea of cultural appropriation at all. In fact, the dictionary definition is:

The *unacknowledged* or inappropriate adoption of customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

Based on this definition, I am very sure that learning a middle eastern dance from a middle easterner in order to participate at a middle eastern party is not in anyway cultural appropriation. On the other hand, there are some things that are clearly cultural appropriation. One of the best examples is Bo Derek wearing corn rows in the movie 10 in 1979. At that time (and even in some places today), it was the norm for employers to implicitly, and even explicitly, forbid African braids in the work place. Bo Derek had her hair done in an African style and was celebrated for the beauty of it. Subsequently, many white women had their hair done this same way not in appreciation of African culture so much as a desire to look like Bo Derek. Her use of the hairstyle did not make any discernible change in the acceptance of the hairstyle for black people in society. In this case, white women took on a piece of African culture that black people themselves couldn't have for themselves.

Even with a working definition and some clearcut examples of what is and what is not cultural appropriation, there are a lot of questions in the gray area. For example, which of these qualify as cultural appropriation:

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| Dream Catchers | Spirit Animals | Dread locks |
| Gospel music | Ebonics | Yoga |
| Christian Seders | Kimonos/Saris | Halloween Costumes |

The correct answer is that they all *could* be. It would be great, if we could just have a checklist, but, like most things in life, it's more complicated than that. Questions of power dynamics and giving credit where credit is due each factor heavily. The truth of the matter is that the question of cultural appropriation is often very subjective. And, I would argue, as Christians desiring to follow such scriptures as the quote above, we can best decide by listening to those that originated the cultural practice. If people of African descent say, "Don't do dread locks," then the love of Christ demands we honor their wishes. If people of Asian descent say, "Don't wear saris or kimonos as Halloween costumes," then, again, the love of Christ demands we honor their wishes.

Of course, it can be embarrassing – maybe even shaming – to hear that we have offended someone unintentionally. It's especially galling, if it is something we have always done. I've experienced it more than once, but I have found that apologizing and stopping the offensive behavior goes a lot farther toward maintaining a good relationship than trying to defend my choices.

Even with my original example of my kid being denied the opportunity to learn that middle eastern dance. She didn't pitch a fit and demand to be included in the group of immigrant teenage girls. She let it go and went about her life. If she can do that, then those of us who are grown-ups can probably do it too.