



Is Drag Sexist?

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There's no denying that not everyone likes drag, just like not everyone likes broccoli. But is it simply a matter of taste, or is there more to it than that? Many people find drags fascinating, otherworldly beings. Others think drag is clichéd and tacky, or disturbing and confronting. While others claim it's a sick, sexist parody of women. Could that be so?

From the right there is criticism of drag from people like Mary Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney.

"Why is it socially acceptable for men to put on dresses, make up and high heels and act out every offensive stereotype of women (bitchy, catty, dumb, slutty, etc.) but it is not socially acceptable for a white person to put on blackface and act out offensive stereotypes of African Americans?"

Is drag no more than 'girlface'?

From the feminist corner people such as Meghan Murphy also raise questions. 'Why is it cute or funny or entertaining for men to mock women via drag? Why is it not considered to be a form of cultural appropriation... men (who benefit from male privilege) who appropriate femininity as a form of entertainment?'

I think that's a misunderstanding and over-simplification of what drag is. To me, the single defining characteristic of drag is its subversion of gender. Drag questions the

relationships between 'male' and 'masculine' or 'female' and 'feminine' like no other art form does.

Drags do that by distorting their own gender expression, which can be a courageous step. It takes balls to be a woman!

I think the real craziness is how strictly we cling to what we think of as manliness or womanliness. Drag just magnifies that absurdity.

Drag artistry can also involve a woman playing a man (a drag king) or even playing a drag queen (a faux or lady queen). It can also be a transwoman dragging up (a titty queen), or it can encompass androgyny, gender-bending or even a trashy bearded queen like me. This isn't female cultural appropriation or a disrespectful satire of womanhood. It's a blurring and mockery of the strict gender roles we're all squeezed into, like a too-tight corset that not everyone finds comfortable.

Yes drags can be sexist sometimes, just like society sometimes is. Some drag terms like 'fish' really need to be retired or re-defined as soon as possible. But that's a reflection of ubiquitous misogyny, not an issue unique to drag queens.

Femininity and masculinity belong to both women and men and this is a powerful statement that drag is making. That it makes some people nervous is something that deserves a good roasting every now and then.