

# Can straight actors play gays?

by Phyllis Chesler



**This cannot be happening** spontaneously, this must be part of a plan, a funded strategy of sorts. Cancelling the classics, cancelling books that critique Islamic practices and the aggressive tactics of the transgender cult; challenging professors on how they teach race and gender identity – and on whether or not they present “sex work” as sexual slavery. Let’s not forget the incessant swarming, bullying, and firing of Jewish students from committees and Jewish professors on campus if they dare to express any pro-Israel views. Non-Jewish professors as well.

Now this: A “star” writer, [Russell T. Davies, opposes](#) “casting straight actors in gay roles.” Come again? Does this mean that gay actors can *only* play gay characters? And that straight actors can only play straight characters? That only African,

Hispanic, Asian or native American Indian actors can play African/Hispanic/Asian/Native American Indian roles – and that they absolutely *cannot* play white roles? Even in costume dramas? Talk about balkanization and ghettoization and the law of unintended consequences! Are “cisgender” male actors no longer allowed to play “cisgender” female roles and vice versa? *Quel Horreur!* Does this mean that all drag queens and transsexual performers must be shut down for impersonating the opposite sex? Or another sex?

And here I thought that acting was about... well, acting. Taking on a role that is not yourself. That is the art of it all. This madness will not stop at sex, sexual preference, or gender identity. Will actors soon be vetted in terms of their political beliefs? Or private lives? Should Vanessa Redgrave, an ardent critic of Israel, really have been allowed to play the role of a Holocaust victim?

Let me go further. We have already seen writers castigated and even cancelled for daring to write about an ethnicity not their own. Must writers only write about themselves and their own experiences lest they be savaged and silenced as “cultural appropriators?”

Where will this idea end? Shall we burn Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* because he wrote so well about a woman? Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* because he did the same? George Eliot because she wrote so masterfully about both men and women? What do we do about Virginia Woolf who was bisexual and yet who wrote about *Mrs. Dalloway* who was not?

A gay friend insists that so many gay actors have been “playing” straight for so long that they indeed *can* play both gay and straight roles far better than straight actors can play being gay. I am not sure this is true. Not all gay people who’ve had to “pass” to survive can act on stage or screen, not everyone is a great actor or performer. Also, everyone in the theater and cinematic worlds have known full well who was

and who wasn't gay. There have always been gay dancers, directors, musicians, composers, conductors – and actors. Now, it is all far more out in the open. We, the audience get to know this information too, irrelevant though it may be.

I must note that, other than a handful of female directors and actresses over fifty, that no one else is arguing loudly enough for more roles for women, and for women of all ages, not just girl-women who look like perennial teenagers, but women who look like our grandmothers too.

I fear that the times are against this way of thinking, that I am a relic, that all those who agree with me are fading into the past. Still, this balkanization of our culture, our civilization, is as dangerous as the COVID-19 virus; perhaps even more so.

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