



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 19, 2018

## The Bert and Ernie Homosexuality Debate Rages On

The debate over the sexuality of beloved *Sesame Street* characters Bert and Ernie rages on despite a statement by *Sesame Street* released in 2011 in which the television show officially deemed the two characters “asexual.”

In 2011, following the New York State Legislature’s passage of the Marriage Equality Act, the LGBTQ community fiercely campaigned for Bert and Ernie to be married to one another, prompting *Sesame Street* to release a statement in which the show declared that the two characters are merely good friends and have never been gay. In fact, the statement scoffed at the notion of interjecting sexuality and controversy into a children’s program featuring puppets, who, despite having human characteristics, are in fact puppets and, therefore, are incapable of sexuality:



Bert and Ernie are best friends. They were created to teach preschoolers that people can be good friends with those who are very different from themselves. Even though they are identified as male characters and possess many human traits and characteristics (as most *Sesame Street* Muppets™ do), they remain puppets, and do not have a sexual orientation.

Fast forward to September 18, 2018, when the debate was sadly resurrected by Mark Saltzman, a longtime writer for *Sesame Street*. Saltzman contends that Bert and Ernie are gay and were written that way purposefully, as the characters were based on his own relationship with Arnold Glassman, an award-winning documentary film editor.

In an interview with *Qeerty*, Saltzman said that those close to him knew of the parallels between Bert and Ernie and Saltzman and Glassman, claiming he personally identified more with Ernie than Bert.

“I look more Bert-ish. And Arnie as a film editor — if you thought of Bert with a job in the world, wouldn’t that be perfect? Bert with his paperclips and organisation?” he said. “And I was the jokester. So, it was the Bert and Ernie relationship, and I was already with Arnie when I came to Sesame Street.”

“So I don’t think I’d know how else to write them, but as a loving couple. I wrote sketches.... Arnie’s OCD would create friction with how chaotic I was. And that’s the Bert and Ernie dynamic,” he added.

Saltzman’s interview compelled *Sesame Street* to retweet its 2011 statement on Tuesday, reiterating once again that Bert and Ernie are not homosexual and do not have a sexual orientation.

Frank Oz, the man who actually created the Bert character, has also come forward to affirm that Bert was never created to be a gay character.



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“I created Bert,” says Frank Oz. “I know what and who he is.” And that isn’t gay.

Oz, best remembered for his work as the puppetmaster for the Yoda character in two of the original three *Star Wars* films, took to his Twitter account to reiterate his statement and to criticize the incessant need to sexualize Bert and Ernie.

“It seems Mr. Mark Saltzman was asked if Bert & Ernie are gay. It’s fine that he feels they are. They’re not, of course. But why that question? Does it really matter?” he tweeted. “Why the need to define people as only gay? There’s much more to a human being than just straightness or gayness.”

Predictably, Oz’s tweets were met with animosity by the LGBTQ community, who accused him of shaming them for attempting to see themselves in the *Sesame Street* characters.

“Why the need to define people as gay? Uh, because we exist. I’m gay. 100% gay,” said one follower. “Always have been, always will be. I’ve known since I was 7, and was told what the word meant. Yes, there are a lot of bi and pan people out there, but there are also A LOT of gay people.”

“You may have created him, but you don’t seem to realize or appreciate what he meant to thousands of little boys growing up,” wrote another. “You digging in your heels (and wrongly conflating romantic orientation with sexual orientation) with what seems like disgust is abjectly disappointing.”

Oz responded to the accusations with common sense: “The answer to ‘Why is heterosexuality obvious’, is that I’m only writing about a character I created and know. I’m not writing about all people.”

In other words, he created and wrote for the character and therefore knows Bert better than anyone else. Makes sense.

He added, “As I’ve written, it pleases me that people see themselves and others positively in those characters.”

But ultimately, Bert was not created to be a gay character and was never written as such.

Despite his reasonable approach to the debate, it’s unlikely that his words will conciliate anyone in the LGBT community.

*Image: [See-ming Lee via flickr](#)*



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