Cross-dressing: Movies versus reality
Introduction

- **Concept**
  - Contrast movie views of cross-dressing with personal experiences with the female fashion world as a late newcomer

- **Topics**
  - Movies and cross-dressing
  - Cross-dressing in reality
  - Fashion observations
  - Female culture
  - Conclusion
Cross-dressing is done for **career advancement** by straight people in *Tootsie*, *Mrs Doubtfire* and *Victor, Victoria*.

- In *Tootsie* (1982), Dustin Hoffman’s character cross-dresses to get a job as an actor in a soap opera.
- In *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), Robin Williams’ character cross-dresses to get a nanny job to be closer to his children.
Movies and cross-dressing

- Cross-dressing is done for **fantasy expression** by gay people in *Paris is Burning* (1990)
- They dress as they dream they could be (movie stars), or wish they were (executives, officers)
Movies and cross-dressing

- Cross-dressing in the movies is often shown for humor value
  - Men trying to dress like women: don’t shave their legs, wear heavy shapeless bland clothes and tacky wigs, and exaggerate the pitch of their voices above falsetto
  - Women dressing as men tend to be more convincing visually, but walking and mannerisms are hard to master
Cross-dressing in reality

- Cross-dressing done to **extreme** is not threatening to the general public; it looks theatrical, so a drag queen or someone going to a party in obvious drag is amusing & harmless
Cross-dressing in reality

Cross-dressing that looks more *realistic* or subtle can be seen as very threatening to the public

- It blurs the lines of masculine vs. feminine gender expression
- Genuine cross-dressing, e.g. based on having a strong feminine gender identity, *attacks that binary divide*, and is more likely to evoke confused and/or hostile reactions
- The gender queer and gender fluid are even more attacked for not being M or F or even moving from one to another
  - You’re **not playing the game at all**, questioning the game itself

At the level of sex, intersexed people can be seen as confusing and threatening for similar reasons
Cross-dressing in reality

- Street reactions to realistic cross-dressing include:
  - Obvious prolonged staring
  - Extremely loud laughter
  - Outbursts such as “What The F***?!?”
  - Repeated rhetorical questions or inaccurate disbelieving fashion statements, e.g. “He’s wearing a dress.”

- I’ve already had moments of wondering how well I could defend myself physically given the limits of my current outfit
  - E.g. glad I was wearing flats instead of heels so I could run away or better stand my ground
Fashion observations

- Men’s clothes have three dimensions: style, fabric, and color
  - It’s okay for one of these to be feminine, but no more
  - Hence a pink polo shirt (color), a silk dress shirt (fabric), a white blousy pirate shirt (style), or even a kilt (style) are all acceptable, but a silk kilt would be right out
- As I started buying misses’ clothes, I started with buying maxi skirts and dresses on eBay
  - I told myself “I’m a feminist, I won’t have to shave my legs.”
  - Women’s clothing sizes (odd vs. even dress sizes, panties, bras) are largely inexplicable; what’s wrong with inches?
Women’s clothing and fashion are far more complex than men’s

- Coordinating tops and bottoms and shoes and hair and makeup and jewelry and accessories oh my!

Consider choices in neckline alone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men’s</th>
<th>Women’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt (jewel neck?)</td>
<td>Men’s styles plus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collared dress shirt</td>
<td>Ballet neck, Boat neck,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank top</td>
<td>Bateau neck, Sweetheart neck,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polo shirt</td>
<td>Scoop neck, Halter neck,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turtleneck</td>
<td>V-neck (many depths),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewel neck, Keyhole neck,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U-neck, Strapless, Square neck,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mandarin collar, Sabrina neck,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cowl neck, and more!</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I never realized that the tops of my shoulders had been suppressed in men’s clothing.

Women’s tops & dresses often gather below the bust line; makes perfect sense but I never appreciated it before wearing them.

High heels are really painful after 2-3 hours.
- Clearly they were not designed by a woman!
- But they do make your calves look better, and make you taller.

Skirts feel a LOT shorter than they really are.
- Very ... exposed.
You learned fashion and makeup and what it is to be a girl or woman from your family and peers over decades of growing up. I didn’t.

- Cover your chest! (after some arbitrary age)
- Keep your knees together!
- Lift a long skirt before walking upstairs
- Smooth your skirt before you sit down (my favorite)
- Females never allow gases to leave their bodies. Ever.

Shaving used to take me 30 seconds, now it takes 30 minutes.
Female culture

- Makeup is a whole universe unto itself
  - My mom hid in the bathroom to put on makeup and was the only female at home, so I literally never saw makeup applied as a kid
  - In cartoons I only saw ‘MAKEUP’ as a punch line for H.R. Pufnstuf
- Imagine my surprise to discover how many types of makeup products exist just for the face:
## Female culture – face makeup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Face</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Lips</th>
<th>Men’s world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Mascara</td>
<td>Lip gloss</td>
<td>Chapstick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powder</td>
<td>Eyeliner</td>
<td>Lipstick</td>
<td>Sunblock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tinted Moisturizer</td>
<td>Eye shadow</td>
<td>Lip liner</td>
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<tr>
<td>BB/CC creams</td>
<td>Eyebrow pencil</td>
<td>Lip plumper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>False eyelashes</td>
<td>Lip stain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concealer</td>
<td>Concealer</td>
<td>Lip balm</td>
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<td>Blush</td>
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<td>Bronzer</td>
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<td>Luminizer</td>
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<td>Toner</td>
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22 categories of products (female) versus two for men
Female culture

As we saw in *The Devil Wears Prada*, makeup can produce strikingly different images.

- It can truly ‘put on a face’ like a mask or subtly draw attention to one’s natural beauty.
Movies use cross-dressing for humor value, career advancement, and to express life dreams

Real cross-dressing reveals a lot about our society
- Women’s fashion is wildly more complex than men’s, due to many more choices and much higher expectations
- Women have to be much more aware of their bodies in order to pick the best makeup and clothing to complement them
- Women’s fashion is mostly aimed at being sexy, often at the price of vulnerability
- Female culture is often under attack, physically (vulnerability in skirts, painful heels) and emotionally (street harassment)
Any Questions?

FASHION STUDENTS

what my parents think I do

what society thinks I do

what my friends think I do

what I think I do

what I really do