COURSE TITLE: Gender and Communication  
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INSTRUCTOR: Ms. Margaret Garmon  
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ASSIGNMENT TITLE: *Tootsie*: Analysis and Identification of Gendered Communication

Assignment Project Description: The purpose of this assignment and paper was to analyze and identify the gender communication concepts and theories in the movie, *Tootsie*. *Tootsie* stars Dustin Hoffman where he adopts a new identity as a woman to land an acting job. Though analysis of the supporting actors/actresses in this movie were included in this paper, the main focus was Dustin Hoffman (Michael Dorsey & Dorothy Michaels.) We were to recognize the similarities and differences as he switched genders throughout the movie. We were to note what these similarities/differences meant, showed, and revealed in relation to the concepts learned in class. Lastly, we were to watch closely and write about the interactions and conversations both Michael and Dorothy had with authorities, and how they differed. It was important to tie in outside scholarly research to explain from a gendered communication aspect what was happening throughout the movie.

Reflections: I value this paper because the assignment strayed away from the normal research a topic and write a paper on it format. This different approach of critically writing a paper after watching a movie caught my interest and excitement from the very beginning. I remember feeling very motivated, yet it did force me stay more in tune while watching a movie compared to when I would casually watch one. Looking back, I do wish I would have written more notes while watching the movie as many minor (yet extremely important) details were missed and/or forgotten. It is so fascinating to have depicted and picked out so many gender communication concepts from a movie and create a well rounded, identification paper.
Tootsie: Analysis and Identification of Gendered Communication

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Gender and Communication

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Group A: 100 points (25 points each) Answer ALL FOUR in this group:

1. Throughout the movie *Tootsie* we see Dorothy Michaels eliciting the masculine persona over the feminine. With this masculine persona, she takes on the attributes that of masculine speech. According to Wood (2011), these masculine communities Dorothy speaks in regard talk as a way to accomplish concrete goals, exert control, preserve independences, entertain, and enhance status. Dorothy’s conversations include characteristics of proving herself and negotiating prestige. For example, this idea of accomplishing concrete goals and exerting control is seen through her actions in the workplace; when she first auditioned, to practicing with the cast on set, to the end where she reveals her true sex and identity. Dorothy exerted control on set when she would constantly and continuously change the words of the original script to her own. Or, perhaps the scene where Dorothy is talking to Ron Carlisle in Julie’s apartment constitutes as her exerting control verbally, through this masculine speech. As Dorothy (Michael) goes through life as a woman, she (he) undergoes a lot of thoughts and realizations. Originally, Dorothy thinks that being a women would be no problem at all, however as time as a women goes on she realizes that it is actually very difficult being a women. She realizes the many challenges women face including sexual harassment and stereotyping in the workplace. As Dorothy’s success escalades, she becomes more and more popular, ultimately serving as a feminist icon to the public.

“A beautiful, vulnerable actress, who becomes Dorothy's best friend. Under her friend's influence, she stands up for herself and breaks up with her two-timing boyfriend” (Gelbart, 2009, para 4). Julie Nichol’s gender role can be summed up in this one sentence. Julie undergoes some changes throughout the movie, though she primarily is
the soft-spoken character that builds a very strong relationship with Dorothy Michaels. Through this relationship, Julie breaks free from her innocent and vulnerable self that was ultimately hurting her. Julie begins to self-disclose more and more to Dorothy that serves as a starting point to her breaking free. This movie portrays that Julie needed this Dorothy best friend in order to overcome her fear, anxiety, and vulnerable attributes.

Sandy Lester remains stagnant throughout the movie and therefore can be identified as a static character. However, this static character is extremely neurotic with a lot of self-esteem and self-concept issues. In the beginning we see Sandy lose a great opportunity that directly relates to her passion. She fails to receive the acting part in a soap opera due to her overbearing feminine quality. Additionally, this is in part due to her own issues where she has a fear of speaking to men in a way. She is afraid to stick up to the man who watched her as she auditioned. According to Baker (2000), including static characters in a role is not a bad thing. This “change in identity” factor has been brought up quite a bit recently, but does not always need to occur. In any case, this factor has brought up the distinction between the terminology of characterizations, one including static. “A static character, in this vocabulary, is one that does not undergo important change in the course of the story, remaining essentially the same at the end as he or she was at the beginning” (Baker, 2000, para 1).

Additionally, her own issues hinder her relationship with Michael. Their sexual relations are caused by her fragile feelings. Sandy is a fragile character, and remains static throughout the movie portraying the neurotic and weaknesses of women.

2. Michael Dorsey, Jeff Slater, Ron Carlisle, and Leslie “Les” Nichols are all the primary masculine figures throughout the movie, and they each display unique qualities
of this through various interactions. First, when looking at Michael Dorsey, we can take note of his chauvinistic qualities. According to Dictionary.com (2011), this term can be defined as; a person who believes one gender is superior to the other. Or, we can also look at chauvinistic in a simpler way as being macho and male centered. Michael uses this quality when he learns (as Dorothy) what Julie wants guys to say to her. This macho, male centered, slick quality actually does not help his relationship with Julie as he goes to a party and says the same thing to Julie (as Michael.) He sees Julie at a party and bluntly says to her face that he thinks she is attractive, and asks her if she wants to do it. Michael superior gendered quality backfires as Julie throws her drink all over him.

Jeff Slater, roommate and best friend of Michael Dorsey is very full of himself. He is proud of his work, and just goes with the flow of things. Though respectful of women, they are not his main concern. As for Leslie “Les” Nichols, we see this respecting of women quality shine. His traditional, old school view of the genders overrides his desire to conform to the new in age issues and meanings of gender. These new in age issues including people wanting to be like the other gender. He says that you are who you are, and that that’s it. You should be happy with who you are. “In the old days, it was so simple: Men hunted and women raised the kids. Then we moved out of caves, invented gender studies, and learned a bit about genetics. Now nothing is clear-cut” (Taylor, 1991, para 1). This idea of gender studies directly correlates with Leslie’s perception and thinking. There are no chauvinistic qualities to express, rather indifferent and simplistic.

Lastly, there is Ron Carlisle who is seen as the unfavorable role model within the movie. This persona is created through his acts of sexual harassment, and his actions
toward his girl friend, Julie Nichols. His qualities are very condescending, and
disrespectful toward females. Condescending, because he told this smart-ass attitude
around over his head. He walks around the soap opera set with is macho, manly, and
chauvinistic vibe. For example, when he nicknames Dorothy, she gets mad, yet does not
change his actions but rather continues calling her the name. His only response to her ill
feelings is, “Christ Dorothy.” His unfavorable, disrespectful, and overbearing
characteristics are perceived as a great gender inequality though. We can fully understand
this by the standpoint theory. “Standpoint theory compliments symbolic interactionism
by noting that societies are made up of different groups that are organized in social
hierarchies” (Wood, 2011, p. 58). Ron, a part of the unfavorable masculine gender group,
expresses these qualities by which he knows how to act and perform.
3. The act of self-disclosing between Dorothy and Julie is prevalent throughout the
movie *Tootsie*. For example, Julie self discloses to Dorothy her issues with her boyfriend,
Ron Carlisle. She tells Dorothy that she is very unhappy with her relationship with Ron,
and that he doesn’t treat her well at all.

When you analyze the majority of Julie’s self-disclosures, an interesting common
attribute reoccurs. This attribute ties in with gendered close relationships, and
specifically, gendered patterns in committed relationships. According to Wood (2011),
long-term love relationships are influenced by four primary dimensions. They include,
expressing care, needs for autonomy and connection, responsibility for relational
maintenance, and power. Additionally, “For many women, ongoing conversation about
feelings and daily activities is a primary way to express and enrich personal
relationships” (Wood, 2011, p. 219). All of these disclosures Julie gives to Dorothy
include the underlying meaning that they are in an intimate relationship. However, Julie sees Dorothy as just a best friend. It is interesting to think how Julie is actually very attracted to Dorothy.

The building of Julie and Dorothy’s relationship throughout the movie is definitely enhanced by the depth of their self-disclosures. This idea is highlighted by the social penetration theory. According to ChangingMinds.org (2011), “As relationships develop, they penetrate deeper and deeper into private and personal matters. This exposes vulnerabilities, so trust has to be developed along the way” (para 1). We see these qualities come out of their disclosures, and ultimately result in Dorothy trying to kiss Julie. Dorothy (Michael) is so attracted to Julie, yet Julie is shadowed by her (his) outward appearance and is taken back. Overall, we see these self-disclosures build a strong friendship at first, but by the end an intimate relationship.

4. As the development of both the relationships of Michael and Sandy, and Michael and Julie pervade, there are similarities and differences that are interesting to be aware of. In the relationship of Michael and Sandy, we see them both complicate matters through their own issues. We see Sandy take on two different feminine characteristics that ultimately add to this complicated, unsteady relationship. These feminine characteristics could also be referred as acting upon two stereotypical concepts. According to Wood (2011), these include the mother stereotype, and also the iron maiden stereotype. We see the mother type in Sandy, as she is nurturing and caring towards Michael. For example, when he is sick she offers to make him chicken noodle soup, and leaves his place immediately so he can rest. We see the caring side come out when she repeatedly forgives Michael for not answering her calls, or when he stands her up. Though in
reverse, Michael could also be the one to blame to the result of this complicated, unsteady relationship. Though they are dating in the beginning, he quickly changes efforts with her as he becomes infatuated with Julie. He begins ignoring her phone calls, avoiding her at all cost, and he also stands her up on dinner dates. Although these actions were not intentional, they were however created through his own making, and own mistakes. Unfortunately, he brought them on upon himself through his own mistakes. Instead of choosing to admit his true identity to Sandy, he lies and expresses his desire to have sex with her. This is the scene where Sandy catches Michael in her bedroom half naked. From this point, their relationship is unhealthy and unbalanced, and the communication becomes more complicated. There is really no development in their relationship, except for the lies built upon lies.

I do not believe Michael and Sandy could ever make their relationship as friends ever work. The impact of successive lies, and self-issues among each person is too great to overcome. Michael’s acting part became a huge roadblock that ultimately demolished their any chance.

Both relationships can be seen as extremely complicated, but the way in which Michael and Julie’s is, is different. Their relationship deals with the underlying secret of Michael being Dorothy as well. As time goes on, Michael becomes more and more attracted to Julie, and Julie becomes very close to whom she thinks of as a good friend. The point where their relationship takes a dramatic turn is when Michael (Dorothy) attempts to reveal his true identity as a man. However, Julie thinks he is expressing his love to her, and that he (she) is a lesbian and in love with her. Michael and Julie could
make their relationship work as a couple in the future with a lot of hard work. However, it is important to note that Julie will be the one in control of the relationship.

**Group B: 30 points (15 points each) Answer any TWO questions from this group:**

1. Dorothy Michael’s and the taxi scene in the movie serves as a relevant issue when identifying and analyzing cultural and gender issues in relation to aggressive, assertive, and nonassertive behaviors between the female characters. When Dorothy and her soft voice tries to flag down a taxi the driver ignores her, but when Dorothy uses the Michael Dorsey voice with aggression, the taxi driver makes an immediate stop. Gender inequality is seen here as it displays that men get what they want through their automatic attribute of assertiveness. Additionally, Dorothy has to build up her aggressiveness in order to get the role in the soap opera. It was not until she demonstrated a little act on Ron Carlisle did she get through to him that she was fit for the role. Ron expresses that she is not fit, as she is too gentle. Dorothy then performs the stunt of kneeing him, and grabbing him with assertion. It was at this point where Ron was somewhat slapped in the face, and he realized that perhaps she was fit for the part. However, it should not have been necessary for Dorothy to have to engage and promote such an act.

   As stated in our class textbook, “…social aggression is usually indirect, even covert. It takes forms such as spreading hurtful rumors, excluding a girl from groups, and encouraging other to turn against a particular girl” (Wood, 2011, p. 179). The above statement directly relates to how Sandy Lester expresses her aggressiveness and assertiveness. Instead of the typical physical aggression associated with men, we see Sandy using this social aggression to elicit her anger. For example, Sandy expresses to Michael how she thinks Dorothy should not have received the part in the soap opera. She
continues her opinion of this with nasty, mean, and hurtful words about Dorothy directly. She claims that Dorothy is fat. This indirect, social aggression Sandy elicits comes full circle in representing her own, internal state of self-esteem issues. She uses this aggression of putting down women with words as a way of dealing with her own insecurities.

Sexism is unfortunately commonplace when it comes to women and the workplace, and is seen distinctly throughout *Tootsie*. Just like all of the other women on set, the sexist, insensitive director Ron Carlisle creates a nickname for Dorothy Michael’s as well. Names of “Tootsie” and “Toots” were mostly used but others occurred as well. Though used on set on a daily basis, Ron uses Dorothy’s nicknames to an extreme. On that particular day, Dorothy snaps, and becomes angered by this name and lets Ron aware of it. With aggressiveness in her voice, Dorothy directly comments back by explaining that “Tootsie” is not her name. Rather she has a name, and that name is Dorothy Michael’s. She even verbally spells it out loud, letter by letter to him. Dorothy doesn’t stop there, but continues her rant by telling Ron that she has a name too, just how John is always John, and Tom is always Tom. Though Dorothy lays it all out on the table, her feelings are not enough to change these actions by Ron. He continues to use the nickname. Sexism in the workplace is too strong, and too prevalent for it to change.

According to Tiscall (2011), some statistics estimate that about 72% of women workers have experienced sexist bullying at work, while 85% of women workers believe that there is a bias towards males in their workplaces. We obviously see here the prevalence of this detrimental issue of sexism in the workplace, and why Ron is not affected by Dorothy’s words, but instead continues to use the nicknames.
3. From the very first scene where Sandy Lester and Michael Dorsey interact, it is clear to see how Sandy’s self-concept interferes. She is an extremely self-conscious character that stalls and unfortunately weakens the strength and development of a relationship between Michael and her. For example, Michael does everything in his power to psych up and put a little bit of spirit in Sandy to help her get the acting part. Or, we also see Sandy weakening the relationship when she talks about Dorothy to Michael. She puts down Dorothy (Michael) with nasty and mean comments. Though she may actually believe what she is saying, I think she is doing so because of her own insecurities, and to just make her feel better about herself by not getting the part.

Sandy’s’ helplessness limits her ability to get what she wants. Michael and Jeff however have this take-charge attitude that allows them to get what they want and strive for. Sandy’s actual potential is stopped through this overbearing characteristic of hers of being defenseless. She succumbs to Michael’s words, and believes anything he or Jeff Slater says whether it is a lie or not. If Sandy didn’t lack this helplessness attribute, then maybe she would be able to build a persona like Michael and Jeff.

Sandy is immediately dismissed from her audition because she is told that she is too feminine. She does nothing to change that thought by the directors, but instead walks away taking it straight to heart. Dorothy and her character in the soap opera would be an excellent role model for Sandy. She needs to watch and learn from her verbal actions, nonverbal actions, and communications styles. In other words, “...social learning theory claims that individuals learn to be masculine and feminine primarily by imitating others and getting responses from other to their behaviors” (Wood, 2011, p. 51). This term of social learning theory is exactly what Sandy should follow, in hopes of changing herself
for the better. By imitating and learning from Dorothy, Sandy could develop attributes similar to Dorothy’s to better her persona. These attributes include aggressiveness, high self-esteem, and conforming to specific situations. If Sandy could develop the concept and term of androgyny, like Dorothy has, she would better her self. This term androgyny means, “Combination of qualities society considers both masculine and feminine. Androgyny’s people tend to identify with and enact qualities socially ascribed both to women and to men” (Wood, 2011, 319). They are both nurturing and assertive, both strong and sensitive. This variety of characteristics would help Sandy find herself.

**Group C: 20 points (10 points each) Answer any TWO questions from this group:**

1. Leslie “Les” Nichols envisions a relationship with Dorothy that is very traditional, and close to the views he knows and believes about gender. He holds the view that women are entitled to everything except one thing. That one thing includes being a man; he expresses that all women want to be men because they think that men are all equal, but says that they are not. He says that there was no talk about what women and/or men was, it was just the fact that you just were the gender that you were. He notes that there is all this talk about what it would be like being the other sex, but tells that you just are not, so you shouldn’t think that way. His perception is summed up in one statement when he says, “you are what you are.” His perception brings about two differing concepts that apply directly to gendered communication. According to Wood (2011), the terms of gender and sex have distinct meanings, yet people tend to use them interchangeably. Sex is a designation based on biology, while gender is socially constructed and expressed. Specifically, gender is where Leslie’s thinking and perception is foggy, and not clearly understood by him due to his generation. As society has many gender issues in
development and actions, Leslie under looks them and believes that who you are is whom you are. We can sum up this belief through the concept of gender constancy, or in other words, a person’s understanding that he or she is a male or female and this will not change. Therefore, the relationship he envisions is one of no barriers or bridges to knock down, and/or face.

4. “But I was a better man with you, as a woman than I ever was with a women, as a man.” According to Adler (2005), this quote suggests that he sees himself, women, and life from a new perspective, and that he is willing to make some changes. Serving as one of the last couple lines of the movie, this dialogue from Michael Dorsey sums up his whole realization of his two gender roles. He admits to his understanding of how women are treated, but also mistreated. He learns lessons of mainly empathy, as Dorothy encountered many situations of being treated badly, and stereotypically. Michael realizes the struggles women face such as things as little as picking out an outfit, to sexual harassment.

I absolutely think that Michael is a better man for having lived as a woman. With this first hand experience of being a woman, his eyes were opened to the many issues women face in the world. For example, Michael originally lacked an emotional appeal, sensitivity, and caring to others. After he plays the role of Dorothy, we see these attributes shine throughout his personality, which in result help him in certain situations. Even George Fields notices something different about Michael, and asks him what it is. He asks why Michael all of the sudden starting caring about what others feel? This new, developed, and profound characteristic does make him a better person. We see this occur when Michael apologizes to both Julie, and her dad. These acts and lessons of both
compassion and concern better Michael as he is now more aware, understanding, and compliant to both sexes.
References


http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/social_penetration.htm


http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chauvinist


http://www.dramatica.com/story/analyses/analyses/tootsie.html


http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/gender


Extra Credit Question for 5 points:

- I would choose Robin Williams to play Dustin Hoffman. Robin Williams did an excellent job dressing as a woman as well. His actions were superb in *Mrs. Doubtfire*.
- I would choose Reese Witherspoon to play Jessica Lange. She could definitely portray this sensitive, self-disclosing part of Julie Nichols.
- I would choose Jennifer Aniston to play Teri Garr. Jennifer has played vulnerable, and neurotic parts in other movies, so I believe she could do the same as Sandy Lester.
- I would choose John Slattery to play Dabney Coleman. His smartass actions in *Madmen* could mimic very well in *Tootsie*.
- I would choose Robert De Niro to play Charles During. He has a wide range of qualities, but could definitely pull off the old school type as Leslie.