

Tootsie Film Summary

Tootsie by Sydney Pollack

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Context

Tootsie is the story of Michael Dorsey and his transformation to becoming a woman. Michael can't get a job as an actor because he is so hard to work for, so he decides to pretend to be a woman to get a part on a soap opera. Michael wins the part, and for months, he plays the role not only of the character in the show but also of Dorothy Michaels, the actress. Eventually, he falls in love with his colleague, Julie Nichols and risks his whole career by revealing himself on a live show, so he can win her love.

Director Sydney Pollack made a name for himself first as an actor and later as a director and producer. With *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* Pollack garnered his first Oscar nomination as a director. Later he also directed *Three Days of the Condor*, *Bobby Deerfield*, and *Absence of Malice* before directing *Tootsie*. Pollack uses his talents as an actor to successfully direct his actors to create an unforgettable film in *Tootsie*.

Dustin Hoffman became famous in 1967, with the part of Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate*. He has also played in *Midnight Cowboy*, *Alfredo, Alfredo*, *Papillon*, and *All the President's Men*. Hoffman played a variety of roles and was convincing and talented in almost all of those roles. Thus, he was the perfect candidate to play the combined role of both Michael Dorsey and Dorothy Michaels. Only the most talented actor could manage such a change of roles in the same film, and Hoffman plays his part well.

Jessica Lange's first lead role was in Dino De Laurentiis' 1976, film *King Kong*. The film received terrible reviews, and Lange did not appear in another film for three years. In 1981, though, Lange gave an amazing and classic performance in Bob Rafelson's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Her career skyrocketed from that point, and she gave a memorable performance when she portrayed Frances Farmer in the film *Frances*. With her performance in *Tootsie*, Lange finally won a well-deserved Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. That same year, she was also nominated for an Oscar for her leading role in *Frances*.

In 1982, Bill Murray was still a mostly unknown actor. He gives an exceptional performance in *Tootsie*, playing Michael's best friend and roommate. However, he did not get his big break until two years later when he starred in *Ghostbusters*. Murray shows his skills in this film and helps to bring life to Michael's problems with friends.

Tootsie was nominated for a staggering ten Academy of Awards but won only the Best Supporting Actress award for Jessica Lange. The other nominations were as follows: Best Actor in a Leading Role, Dustin Hoffman; Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Teri Garr; Best Cinematography, Owen Roizman; Best Director, Sydney Pollack; Best Film Editing, Fredric Steinkamp and William Steinkamp; Best Music, Original Song, Dave Grusin (music), Alan Bergman (lyrics), and Marilyn Bergman (lyrics) for the song "It Might Be You;" Best Picture, Sydney Pollack and Dick Richards; Best Sound, Arthur Piantadosi, Les Fresholtz, Rick Alexander, and Les Lazarowitz; and Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen for Larry Gelbart, Murray Schisgal, and Don McGuire.



Summary and Analysis

Tootsie opens as we see a man putting on a fake mustache and preparing for a part. Then, we see students performing in front of their class as Michael Dorsey, their teacher, coaches them. A moment later, we watch Dorsey audition for a part on a large, empty stage. He goes through multiple auditions and is rejected for many parts, but he continues to teach his acting students throughout the process. Michael tells his students that they must find ways to work, even though unemployment as an actor in New York is ninety-five percent; he finds a way by being a waiter at night.

Michael and his roommate, Jeff, walk home, and Michael is greeted by friends with a surprise birthday party. Michael visits with his guests, some of whom he hasn't met before this night. Michael walks his friend, Sandy, home and stays to help her practice for her audition the next day. He finally gets her to perform well after making her angry and tells her he will join her at the audition the next day.

At the audition, Sandy is told that she is not right for the part. She decides that she is going home to San Diego. Michael tries to get her to change her mind. Michael learns that a part he wanted has been given to someone else, so he goes to see his agent, George Fields, who was supposed to get him an audition for the part. Fields tells Michael that he can't get him a part because he has a bad reputation. Michael is desperate to find a part, so he can produce his roommate's play. No one wants to work with Michael because he argues with everyone. Later that day, we see Michael dressed as a woman walking down the street.

At the audition that Sandy went to before, Michael shows up and introduces himself as Dorothy Michaels. He gets into the audition, since his agent is George Fields. As he goes on the set, he is told that he is not right for the part. He goes off on the director in a sweet, Southern accent. As he reaches the elevator, Mrs. Marshall stops him and brings him back to audition for the part. After dropping a few papers, he meets a beautiful woman who turns out to be Julie Nichols. He is interested, but since he is representing himself as a woman, he cannot show his feelings. Michael gets the part, and they let him know that Fields will be receiving the papers that afternoon.

As Michael leaves, he runs into Fields, who does not recognize him at all. He then goes into the restaurant and sits down with Fields. Fields is amazed by the transformation, and Michael tells him that he just got a job. Michael then convinces Fields to loan him some money, so he can buy some new clothes for his life as a woman. Later that evening, Michael and his roommate, Jeff, discuss his new role. Michael is terribly worried about what Sandy would say if she knew the director rejected her for the part and then cast him. He decides to tell her that a family member died and left him money. Now, he can put up the money to produce Jeff's play, which has a perfect part for him in it.

While he waits for Sandy to get ready, Michael begins trying on her clothes. When Sandy walks out, he tells her that he really wants her, and they end up having sex. She



is afraid that this will change their relationship, but he assures her it won't. The next day, he dresses up as a woman to get ready for his new role. Jeff helps him get ready, and he goes to the set for his first day. As he walks into his room, he meets April, who is wearing nothing but her underwear. Michael watches from the side as the scenes are taped. Michael is nervous to discover that he must kiss the doctor, played by John Van Horn, in his first scene. Michael tries to talk to the director about the scene, but he is put off.

When taping the scene, Michael takes over and changes the way he does the scene. Although everyone is happy with the change, they do warn him to talk to Ron, the director, before changing anything else. Van Horn approaches him and applauds him on the good work before kissing him, something Van Horn is well-known for. Julie invites Michael to get a drink with her and the director, but he declines. Jeff and Michael talk that night, but Jeff is becoming frustrated with Michael's refusal to answer the phone because the call might be for Dorothy. Michael avoids his date with Sandy, but they keep seeing each other over time.

As Michael keeps playing his new part, he continues to change the scenes as needed. However, no one seems to care anymore when he changes the part to suit the character. They have to take time one day to shoot a few scenes over, but as he gets ready to leave, Julie asks him to come over and practice lines that night. Michael tries to find something suitable to wear, and Jeff becomes a little concerned over his thought on women's clothing.

At Julie's, Michael discovers that Julie has a daughter named Amy who is fourteen months old. Julie asks about Dorothy's love life, and Dorothy explains that she has never been married. Michael then asks for more information about Ron and asks how Ron treats her. Julie explains that she tends to go for the worst guys. After dinner, they practice lines for the next day, and then they discuss the difficulties of being a woman in the 1980s.

Michael finally shows up at Sandy's late because of the time he spent at Julie's. Sandy confronts him about the fat woman she saw go into his apartment earlier that day. Sandy reveals that she is still angry about the soap audition. She hates the new person they hired and thinks the woman is terrible. Michael is disturbed by the news, and he begins taking his part to a whole new level, trying to make his character stronger. As the character becomes more popular, Michael is constantly stopped on the streets for autographs and photos. His character is becoming one of the most popular women on daytime television.

Michael meets with his agent, George Fields, who Michael tries to convince that he could do more jobs as Dorothy Michaels. George explains that he cannot put in a word for Michael to get more parts as a woman. Michael and Sandy go to a party with George, but Michael is shocked when Julie walks in. Michael goes outside and introduces himself to Julie; he tries to come onto Julie just as she told Dorothy she'd want to be treated, but he is quickly rejected. However, soon after, Julie invites Dorothy to join her at her father, Les's, house for the holidays. The same day, Dorothy finally



yells at Ron for calling her "Tootsie" all the time. Michael cancels plans with Sandy, so he can go to Julie's for the weekend. Jeff tries to convince Michael not to go on the trip, but Michael goes anyway.

While on the farm, Michael (as Dorothy) learns a lot about farming and has a great time with Julie, her father, and Amy. We watch as Michael falls more in love with Julie, as he watches her with her family. Michael acts as if he's almost ready to tell Julie the truth, but Ron calls. After Julie goes inside, Les and Dorothy cuddle up together. Michael is obviously uncomfortable with the scenario, but he can't seem to change the fact that Les is interested in him. Julie goes to bed, but Les offers to stay up and talk to Dorothy. They talk about the relationships between men and women and how people shouldn't try to be more like the opposite sex. Les shares his feelings that a relationship is the most important part of life. Michael quickly excuses himself and avoids anymore flattery and attention from Les. Julie is still awake when Michael goes upstairs, and they talk about Les and Julie's mother. Julie tells the story of picking out wallpaper with her mother and how her mother encouraged her to choose the daisies and rosebuds because of their promise of happiness and a future. She made millions of plans looking at those flowers and waiting for the roses to open.

After they return to the city, Dorothy receives chocolates from Julie's father. Dorothy is then called to Rita's office, and she tells her how impressed she is with her performance. Dorothy has been picked up and will be kept on for the next year. Michael calls George to complain, but George tells him that he cannot tell everyone that he's not a woman. He would disappoint millions of American women, and the network would be embarrassed. That night, Julie calls Dorothy to get moral support to break up with Ron. Dorothy is staying with Amy while they go out, and she is disturbed to discover that Les is on his way up. As Julie gets ready, Ron tells Dorothy that all women like him, and he doesn't understand why Dorothy doesn't like him. Ron tries to explain his situation to Dorothy, but she doesn't buy it. Julie and Ron leave, and Michael discovers how difficult taking care of a baby can be. Amy cries for hours, but she is finally asleep by the time Julie gets home.

Julie tells Dorothy that she is sad about the breakup. She is afraid that she is going to be alone. Julie explains that she is thankful to have Dorothy as a friend, but she has never felt lonelier, since she now wants something she can't have. Michael leans in for a kiss, but Julie moves away. Michael tries to explain the situation to Julie, but her dad calls. Julie tells Dorothy that Dorothy has to see Les again and let him down gently. They go out to dinner that night, and Les proposes to her. Michael leaves the restaurant quickly, but when he arrives home, John Van Horn is waiting outside his apartment. He sends him home, but John starts serenading him from the street. Michael invites John in, and John reveals his feelings for Dorothy. Thankfully, Jeff walks in just in time to save him, and John leaves.

Michael tells Jeff about his night. Sandy shows up at the door a moment later. Michael runs around to get out of his costume, so Sandy won't find out about his role. She is mad that he hasn't returned her calls, and he gives her the chocolates that Les sent. However, she finds out that the chocolates are really from a guy named Les. She asks



whether Michael is gay and begs for the truth. Michael tells her that he's in love with another woman. She begins screaming that she does not want to be lied to. She says their friendship is officially over and then she leaves.

At 2:00 in the morning, Michael shows up at George's office to try to convince him to get Michael off the show immediately. As he tries to explain the situation, George realizes just how confusing things have gotten. At the set, Dorothy brings a gift for Amy to Julie. Julie is upset about her feelings for Dorothy, and Julie plans to explain the situation to Les. Julie thanks Dorothy for her influence in her life, but she also tells her that she can't see her anymore, since it wouldn't be fair. She says, "I really love you, Dorothy, but I can't... I can't, love you."

As Michael shoots the next scene live on television, he, as the character Dorothy, thanks his co-workers for their party. He finally decides to set the record straight on the screen. He begins to make up a new story for his character that makes her coming to the hospital be part of an attempt at revenge for the way she was treated. He reveals that he is the brother, who decided to take his sister's place. Suddenly, he takes off his costume, and everyone watches in shock. At the commercial, Julie walks over and punches him.

Later that day, Michael strolls alone through the park. We see that he has finally gathered the money to produce Jeff's show. One day, Les shows up at a nearby bar, and Michael reintroduces himself. Michael tries to hand back the ring, but Les becomes angry because of the deception. Michael tries to explain that he only took the job for the money, but he now realizes he loves Julie. Les is seeing a new woman, and Michael asks about Julie.

One day as Julie is leaving the studio, she sees Michael waiting for her outside. He follows her down the street and tells her that he went to see her father. Michael asks if he can call Julie sometime, and he tries to explain that he never meant to hurt anyone. He apologizes, and she says, "I miss Dorothy." He replies, "You don't have to. She's right here, and she misses you. Look, you don't know me from Adam, but I was a better man with you as a woman than I ever was with a woman as a man. You know what I mean? I just got to learn to do without the dress. I mean, at this point in our relationship, there might be an advantage in me wearing pants. The hard part's over, you know, we were already good friends." She says, "Will you loan me that little yellow outfit?" They walk off together, laughing and enjoying each other's company.



Characters

Michael Dorsey/Dorothy Michaels, played by Dustin Hoffman

Description

Michael Dorsey is a struggling actor who can't seem to get a job no matter how hard he tries. He ends up teaching acting classes to other struggling actors as he waits for his agent to find him a job. One night he helps his friend, Sandy, prepare for an audition, and she comments that he makes a better woman than she does. After she is turned down for a role the next day, Michael meets with his agent, George Fields. He is told that he cannot get a job in town because he is notoriously difficult to work with.

Michael becomes angry, dresses up as a woman, and wins the role that Sandy auditioned for. Michael is now Dorothy Michaels, the famous star of a daytime soap. As a woman, he becomes friends with his colleague, Julie Nichols, with whom he eventually falls in love. However, no one knows that Dorothy is really a man, so he must keep his feelings secret. Finally, he gets tired of the lies and reveals himself on live national television.

Analysis

Michael is a complicated man and a perfectionist. Since he wants his roles to be perfect, he is always changing the scripts or complaining to directors that the scripts should be changed. His perfectionism makes him hard to work with and eventually keeps him from getting jobs. However, as Dorothy, he is able to get away with these actions, and he becomes a popular star.

As Dorothy, Michael represents a woman who knows what she wants and isn't afraid to go after it. He is strong and independent and women all over the world admire him. However, he learns how difficult being a woman really is as well. As he falls in love with Julie, he is able to understand her better because of his experience, but his hidden identity makes their relationship impossible. Michael finally takes his life into his own hands and declares his identity live on national television.

Julie Nichols, played by Jessica Lange

Description

Julie Nichols is the actress playing a daytime soap opera heartthrob. She plays a beautiful nurse in the show, and in real life, she is dating the director of the show. He is



unkind to her and treats her more like a servant than a girlfriend. Julie also has a one-year-old daughter, who she loves very much.

Until Dorothy comes along, Julie feels like she is mostly alone in the world. Besides the companionship of her daughter, her father, and her negative relationship with Ron, Julie has no real friends. When she meets Dorothy, she feels that Dorothy is a godsend. The two get on well, and Julie finally has someone in whom she can confide.

Analysis

Julie is an easy-going, but lonely young woman. Between her career, her daughter, and Ron, Julie has no time for herself or friendships. She spends the majority of her time at work and has created no lasting relationships with the people on the set--at least not until Dorothy came along.

Julie begins to rely on Dorothy as an example of how to live her life. Julie feels that Dorothy's way of taking charge of situations and people will come in helpful in her own life. Julie begins to act like Dorothy, and her first step is to break up with Ron. Julie begins to find herself throughout the movie, and we eventually see that she has grown into a strong, caring woman.

Sandy Lester, played by Teri Garr

Description

Sandy is Michael's friend, who he helps practice for the part Michael eventually gets. The two sleep together once, and, after that, their friendship is a bit awkward. Sandy feels as though she is being brushed off, but Michael simply doesn't want to hurt her feelings by telling her that he got the part she couldn't get.

Analysis

Sandy is a temperamental but sweet girl. She is trying to make it as an actress but is having no success. When she sleeps with Michael, she is concerned that everything will change, and eventually she flies into a rage when she thinks he is seeing another woman. Sandy comes to understand his reasoning after she knows the truth, and the two continue to work together in Jeff's show.

Ron Carlisle, played by Dabney Coleman

Description

Ron is the director of the show, who is always after every woman. He is actually dating Julie, but he cheats on her all the time. When Michael first meets Ron, he is sent away, but he stands up to him and eventually Michael/Dorothy gets the part.



Analysis

Ron is an egocentric, pig-headed man. He believes that he is always right, and he takes advantage of everyone around him. Ron cares nothing for Julie, but he keeps dating her for her looks.

Les Nichols, played by Charles Durning

Description

Les Nichols is Julie's sweet father, who is lonely after his wife's death. Finally, he meets Dorothy and believes that his wishes for a new mate have finally come true. However, when he is rebuffed by Dorothy and then when he discovers that Dorothy is Michael, Les is very hurt. He manages to get over the deception and wishes Michael the best in pursuing his daughter.

Analysis

Les is the kindest and most forgiving character in the film. He falls in love with Dorothy, but when he discovers that she is Michael, he ends up forgiving him. Although he is mad, he appreciates how much Michael cares for his daughter. In the end, he ends up giving Michael his blessing to win his daughter's heart.

Jeff Slater, played by Bill Murray

Description

Jeff is Michael's patient and brilliant roommate. Jeff has written a play with a perfect part for Michael, but they don't have enough money to produce it. Michael's deception all begins by trying to get the money. Jeff recognizes that Michael has gotten himself into a bind, but he tries to help him as much as he can.

Analysis

Jeff is a faithful friend even when Michael's crazy idea to pretend to be a woman begins going all wrong. Jeff tries to help Michael fool everyone, including their mutual friend Sandy. Through thick and thin, Jeff helps Michael.



George Fields, played by Sydney Pollack

Description

George Fields is Michael's agent who tells him that he can't get a job in the town because he is too hard to work with. George is shocked when Michael gets a job, but he also realizes the predicament they are in.

Analysis

George is a smart businessman. He works hard as an agent and understands the city and the business well. When Michael tries to find a way out of his contract, George realizes that it will ruin them both if the American public finds that they were fooled.

John Van Horn, played by George Gaynes

Description

John Van Horn plays the doctor on the show, who is always after all the girls. In real life, he is the same kind of person.

Analysis

John Van Horn is an aging man who keeps trying to prove how young he is. Van Horn tries to seduce the younger women on the show so that he feels youthful. However, he ends up falling for Dorothy because she refuses to have anything to do with him.

April Page, played by Geena Davis

Description

April is the first person Dorothy meets on the set. Michael is shocked to walk in the dressing room and find April half-naked in the room.

Analysis

April is a fun-loving, caring girl who is kind to Dorothy as she begins work on the show.



Themes

Love Appears In Many Places

Love's unpredictability is a common theme in literature and film. The funny thing about love is that you never know when and where it is going to show up. Michael Dorsey was simply going about his life when he won the part of an administrator on a soap opera. On the show, he meets Julie Nichols, a beautiful young woman who plays a nurse on the show and who is dating the director of the show in real life. As Michael plays not only his role in the show, but also his role as actress Dorothy Michaels, he begins to find out that love can find you anytime, anywhere.

As Dorothy, Michael befriends Julie and becomes her closest confidante. When she decides to break up with Ron, he is there. When she wants a friend to come home for the holidays with her, he is there. Michael and Julie become close, but he finds that he is falling in love with her. However, she doesn't know his feelings because she believes that he is a woman. When they finally do reveal the feelings to each other, Julie admits that she can't allow herself to feel that way because she is not a lesbian. Michael tries to reassure her, but she is disturbed by the turn of events. Finally, Michael realizes that he cannot bear to lose Julie just because of the part he plays on the show, so he reveals his identity on a live taping of the show. Julie is angry about his deception, but finally Michael wins her heart by revealing that he never meant to fall in love with her or to hurt her.

Relationships Take Precedence

Money. Money is both a blessing and a curse. Money helps and hinders. Michael presents himself as a woman named Dorothy Michaels in order to win a part on a soap opera and make money to finance his roommate Jeff's play. Jeff has written the perfect part for Michael, and Michael is desperate to make the money needed to produce the play. Michael's primary goal as he begins his double life is to make money. Little does he know that the money he makes and the life he leads could cost him everything that he holds dear.

Michael loses much of his life and friendships when he takes the job as Dorothy Michaels. The only people who know about Michael's deception are his roommate, Jeff, and his agent, George Fields. He can't tell Sally because she didn't get the part, so he ends up losing any chance of a relationship, or even a friendship, with her. Additionally, he has to hide his identity from Julie and the rest of the cast, since Dorothy has become a role model for millions of women. The viewers would be devastated to learn that they had been fooled and publicly humiliated. Finally, however, Michael realizes that relationships must take precedence over money.



Michael risks everything to reveal his identity and give his relationships a chance. By changing the script, Michael automatically loses his job. He also risks rejection from Julie and the rest of the cast by revealing his true identity. But, Michael risks all to try to win Julie's love.

Differences Between the Sexes

Tootsie is a wonderful exploration of the relationship and the differences between the sexes. When Michael becomes a woman, he opens himself up to understanding the issues that women deal with on a daily basis. Before this experience, Michael was a stereotypical man who knew little or nothing about what challenges women face in their lives. However, once he becomes Dorothy Michaels, not only does Michael learn more about acting and dressing like a woman, but also he learns about the difficulties women face in their lives.

The differences between the sexes are shown through Michael's attitudes and actions before and after he portrays Dorothy. He completely changes toward women after he has been able to come to terms with and share the difficulties that they face on a daily basis. Viewers realize that coming to an understanding of others and their motivations and problems can happen more easily when you literally put yourself in their shoes for a time.

Michael feels he has become a better man as the result of portraying a woman and facing her challenges. Additionally, as he falls in love with Julie, Michael realizes that he also wants to be a better man because of Julie.

Style and Cinematography

Tootsie is a positive, uplifting, intelligent comedy from the early 1980s. Using plays on words and irony, the film gives viewers a good laugh for a couple hours. Although there are serious themes in the film, they are brought out by the comedy laced throughout the movie. Viewers never feel as if they are being lectured, but they do feel included in the humor and fun.

One of the most impressive parts of the film is the wardrobe and makeup. These departments did an excellent job, especially on Hoffman's wardrobe and makeup when he was playing Dorothy Michaels. Dustin Hoffman truly looks as if he is a woman when he plays the part of Dorothy Michaels. One amusing section occurs when Michael tries to decide which dress to wear to Julie's for their evening practice. Even though Julie does not know his true identity, he still wants to look good for her. He tries to explain to his roommate, Jeff, how to pick out a dress and how difficult it is to be a woman. After spending all that time dressed as a woman for the shooting of the movie, Dustin Hoffman probably didn't have too much trouble with those lines.

Comedy is the key to this film, which is all about hidden identities. Michael hides his new identity from everyone, including the woman he loves just so he can make money. Eventually, he discovers, as do many people, that money is not everything, bringing the farce to an end so that Michael can win his true love's heart. Pollack successfully uses comedy to help viewers focus on the more important things in life such as love, friendship and family. Hidden in the midst of all the confusion, viewers hear these lasting themes coming through loud and clear.



Motifs

Hidden Identity

Michael's hidden identity is the secret that the movie is constructed around. Through his experience portraying a woman, the themes of the film really shine through to the viewer. The whole world seems to be turned upside down for Michael after he begins pretending to be the woman Dorothy Michaels.

Michael finds that the most difficult part of having a hidden identity is all the lies that you are forced to tell. He becomes upset after falling in love with Julie because he either risks his job or her love. Suddenly, he comes to a point where he has to choose what is most important to him, and he chooses Julie.

Had Michael not had to deal with the extra problems caused by the secret identity, he might never have realized his love for Julie. Writers and artists have always been fascinated by this idea of having a secret identity, perhaps because people wish for such an identity so that for a short time, they can be someone totally different without suffering the consequences. However, Michael learns that having another personality is much more difficult than it seems.

Gender Roles

Tootsie spends a lot of time focusing on gender roles. The different perceptions by each gender and discussion of gender roles are used to help tell the story, while the story is also used to help present views on gender roles.

During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, gender roles in America were changing quickly. Women had entered the work force, and the feminist movement was in full swing. Women were trying to balance their careers, their desire for independence, and their need for romance. The balance seemed almost impossible to achieve, and women struggled daily to make it all work.

Michael's experience as Dorothy helps him to begin to understand the difficulties women were facing on a daily basis. Before, he treated women more as things to be used than as people, but after being Dorothy, he understood how terrible it was to be taken for granted and used by men. Michael's new understanding helps the viewer reach a similar understanding and gain a new perspective.

Concern For Reputation

Each character as appears to be extremely concerned about his or her reputation. Much of the film is characterized by one character or another becoming upset that a



reputation may be changed or ruined. Their concern for reputations helps to create a believable story in which everyone seems to be holding others at arm's length for safety.

One example of this concern for reputation is Ron. Ron is dating Julie, but he also wants to be free to date other women. His primary concern is that he needs to keep his reputation as a bit of a womanizer while he is young. He is also constantly worried about the reputation of the show and himself as director. Ron is willing to do anything, even hurt others, to make sure that both he and the show stay at the top of the ratings.

In another way, Michael begins the whole process of pretending to be a woman because of his reputation. He has gained a reputation of being difficult to work with that he doesn't like, so, Michael takes things into his own hands and gets a part as a woman. Michael is concerned about his reputation because he knows that he is a great actor and wants a chance to prove it to the world. Michael's concern for his reputation helps him, since he would otherwise never have met Julie; however, this concern is also what keeps him from revealing the truth to her for so long.



Symbols

Michael's Costume

Michael's costume for his assumed role of Dorothy Michaels symbolizes his desperation for money and his exploration of his feminine side. Michael is desperate to raise money so his roommate, Jeff, can finance his play, which has a perfect part in it for Michael. After discovering from his agent, George Fields, that Michael will not be able to get a job in the city as himself, Michael decides to dress up and impersonate a woman, so that he can try out for a job that his friend, Sally, was rejected for earlier the same morning.

Michael, concerned about money and his reputation, wins a job as a woman on a daytime soap opera. However, since he won the part while dressed as a woman, he is forced to keep the truth from everyone, including Julie, a colleague with whom he falls in love. The costume helps Michael get the role, but also it hinders him from telling Julie the truth. Michael is forced to deceive everyone he knows and loves, so that he does not lose the reputation he has built as Dorothy Michaels.

We also see that his costume is symbolic of his exploration of his feminine side. Michael begins to understand exactly what women go through on a daily basis after he wins the role as Dorothy. He begins to relate to women in an intimate way because he begins to understand their world and experiences many of the same feelings that women feel.

Les's Ring

Les's ring is symbolic of the great extent of Michael's deception. The simple fact that Les wants to propose to Dorothy allows the viewer to see just how far and how successful Michael's deception is. Michael has fooled everyone - his friends, his colleagues, and the rest of the country.

After Michael and Julie spend time in the country, Les begins to fall in love with Dorothy. Michael must skillfully maneuver around Les's attempts to seduce him. Michael quickly realizes that to tell Les the truth will hurt Les deeply, but that Michael cannot go on without having Julie in his life. When Les gives him the ring, Michael decides this is the last straw - he must tell the world the truth.

Michael tries to find a way to tell everyone the truth without hurting them, the show, or the American people. Thousands of women look up to Dorothy, and he does not want them to be disappointed. When the show ends up airing live one day, Michael uses this as his chance to tell the world the truth. Finally, all the deception leading up to Les's ring comes to an end. When Michael returns the ring to Les, the viewer sees his hope that forgiveness and love are right around the corner.

Amy

Amy is Julie's young daughter. She is symbolic of the double life that Julie has to live on a daily basis. Most women understand the difficulties found when trying to balance their lives as workers with their lives as mothers. Amy makes Julie's predicament all the more clear and understandable.

Without Amy, Julie would be a free young woman, but Amy ties her down. Julie adores Amy and being a mother, but she also misses the time when she could easily go out whenever she wanted. Since Julie is trying to make it on her own as a mother, she becomes a character that many women at the time could relate with. The number of single mothers was growing, but few characters in the entertainment industry reflected this trend.

Julie finds a way to balance her life between her daughter and her work. She also makes time for Ron, but he is very involved in his own life. Because of his selfishness, the viewer knows that Julie and Ron will never be together permanently; he would not want the added responsibility of being a full-time husband and father.



Essay Questions

What does Michael Dorsey do for a living and how does his livelihood contribute to his character?

Why does Fields tell Michael he can't get him a job and why?

How does Michael decide to find a job on his own?

What is the relationship between Dorothy and Julie?

Sandy and Michael have a relationship - what is it? Is Michael fair to their friendship?

Why doesn't Michael tell Sandy about his new job?

How does Michael finally reveal his true identity? Is this the best way to have done so? Why or Why not?

What kind of role does Dorothy take on in relationship to American women and their identities? Might the revelation that Dorothy is a man lessen the impact of the character on women viewers?

What does Les's ring symbolize?

What is the film saying about gender roles in America?

Bibliography

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