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A photograph of three men in dark suits and ties running towards the camera. They are holding a wide red ribbon that stretches across the frame. The man in the center is looking forward with a determined expression, while the man on the left is smiling and looking to the side. The background is a bright, slightly blurred outdoor setting.

# **CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY**

**OPPRESSION & JUSTICE (FALL 2013)  
LAURA GUIDRY-GRIMES**

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# LET'S SYNTHESIZE CLASS IDEAS THUS FAR...

- ▶ What are some morally problematic Halloween costume choices?
  - ▶ What might perpetuate stereotypes or mimic demeaning portrayals of oppressed or vulnerable social groups?

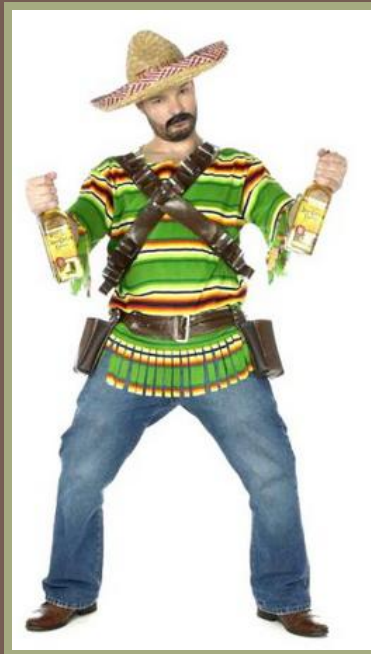


EXHIBIT A...

be CAPTIVATING

TOP WOMENS COSTUMES ▶

COSTUMES  
STARTING AT

\$12.99



# EXHIBIT B...

## be FEARLESS

TOP BOYS COSTUMES ▶



COSTUMES  
STARTING AT  
**\$999**



# EXHIBIT C...

## be GIRLY

TOP GIRLS COSTUMES ▶

COSTUMES  
STARTING AT  
**\$9.99**



# BOYS & MASCULINITY

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- ▶ Would you negatively judge parents who did not teach their sons to follow masculine norms?
  - ▶ What if they taught their sons to *violate* those norms?



# "NO SISSY STUFF"

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- ▶ “invoking unrealistic expectations that men are by nature stoic, unemotional, aggressive, and interpersonally detached” (Tarrant 62)
  - ▶ ‘Straight-acting’ for the sake of social and sexual acceptance
    - ▶ E.g., cat-calling, avoiding male contact/PDAs
  - ▶ What are ways in which men *and* women perpetuate this norm, intentionally or not?
  - ▶ How might this anti-sissy, straight-acting performance be **harmful** to men, women, and gender relations?
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# PERFORMING MASCULINITY

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- ▶ Not biologically or socially destined for masculinity to look any particular way
- ▶ “Being a man takes a lot of work [...] And performances take an awful lot of practice” (LeMaster, qtd. in Tarrant 64)
- ▶ Dualisms and mapping of masculinity onto heterosexual, non-feminine norms **limit options** for men
- ▶ Self-policing and policing by/of other men
- ▶ How might the constraints behind masculine performances be morally damaging?
  - ▶ Are individual men under a moral obligation not to perform stereotyped genders?





# DETERMINISM

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- ▶ **Biological determinism:** everything significant about our physical and mental traits and behavior are completely or primarily explainable in biological terms (genetics, reproductive abilities, brain chemistry)
- ▶ **Social determinism:** everything significant about how humans function and behave are completely or primarily explainable in social/political/institutional terms
- ▶ Can be extreme or more moderate
- ▶ Problems with determinism in any form:
  - ▶ Reductionistic
  - ▶ Loss of free will, agency, moral accountability



# DETERMINISM, GENDER, & SEX

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- ▶ Determinism leads to conclusions that men must be masculine; women must be feminine; gender roles and battle of sexes are inevitable
- ▶ Loop:
  - ▶ “what is *normative* (i.e., what is prescribed) is translated into what is *normal*” (Tarrant 70)
  - ▶ What is normal is viewed as inevitable, normatively desirable
  - ▶ Reinforced stereotypes
- ▶ “some people are more *gender-y* than others [...] there’s no rigid, hard-and-fast thing called masculinity or femininity” (ibid. 75)
  - ▶ **Sexual continuum**
  - ▶ **Is this point compelling?**



# MALE PHYSIQUE

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- ▶ Preoccupation with building powerful form
  - ▶ Sign of socioeconomic privilege if the body does not need to be a source of power for a man
- ▶ Bodily manifestations of hyperaggressiveness, hard, tough, domineering
  - ▶ Institutionalized in sports
- ▶ “a trap for men, boxing them into a restricted, unhealthy style of manhood and masculinity” (Tarrant 81)



# SHAME/FEAR SPIRAL

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- ▶ “These messages can present a real danger when they limit guys’ options for exploring what they want to do and who they want to be” (Tarrant 85)
- ▶ Role strain → fear → shame → fear ...
- ▶ Dissociation from feelings and from dependency relations as “way out” of spiral
- ▶ How could society reverse machismo culture without being overly paternalistic? Are there certain practices or institutions that you think need to be revolutionized or overhauled to get men out of these binds?



# CLOSING THOUGHTS ON GENDER

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- ▶ **Are masculine norms *oppressive* to men?**
    - ▶ As Frye notes, we do not want ‘oppression’ to cover all types of limitation or harm.
    - ▶ Masculine norms have more societal value than feminine norms, but...
    - ▶ Are men exploited, marginalized, powerless, victims of cultural imperialism, or under threat of violence in virtue of being men?
  
  - ▶ **Should the goal be to build up positive and empowering views of masculinity and femininity?**
    - ▶ Or should we be trying to break down dualisms?
    - ▶ Or should we try get rid of gendered meaning/systems altogether?
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A group of four men in business suits are running across a field, holding a red ribbon. The man in the center is the most prominent, with his arms outstretched. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text 'QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?' is overlaid in the center in a bold, orange, 3D-style font.

**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

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