

- What are the facts that contradict America's Jacksonian identity, according to Starobin?
2. How have "the imperatives of power . . . eaten at the fiber of popular democracy" according to Starobin (paragraph 14)? In what way did the Cold War mask this change?
 3. Starobin takes the reader on a "brief tour of the world" beginning halfway through the essay (paragraph 25). Why does he present this international perspective? What does the reader learn on this "tour of the world"? How is the tour meant to reinforce the points made in the previous section of the essay (see questions 1 and 2)?
 4. Starobin asks the question, "Are we destined to be disliked, resented, envied, or feared by all the world's larger powers?" (paragraph 41). One of the underlying assumptions of his essay is that Americans should care about what the rest of the world thinks of America. One example he uses to support this idea is his claim that Chinese "disenchantment" with American culture has led China to strengthen its ties with Europe in preference to the United States (paragraph 32). With a classmate, preferably someone whose culture or nationality differs from your own, write an essay explaining why Americans should, or should not, change their behavior in order to attract trade or secure other benefits of international acceptance.
 5. Investigate foreign opinions about America's position or behavior on a current issue with international consequences. Choose one or two examples of strong approval or disapproval, as reported in foreign newspapers and, perhaps, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey. Explain who expressed the opinion, why, and whether you believe that the opinion was justified.

DEIRDRE N. McCLOSKEY

Yes, Ma'am

*Deirdre N. McCloskey was born Donald McCloskey in 1942, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As Donald, McCloskey earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in economics at Harvard University and became a professor at the University of Chicago and the University of Iowa as well as a scholar noted for taking a sometimes controversial cross-disciplinary approach that combined economic theory and practice with history, philosophy, and rhetoric. In the mid-1990s, after years of internal struggle, McCloskey—who had been married for three decades and had two children—began the process of a gender change, resulting in complete gender reassignment surgery in 1996 and a new identity as Deirdre N. McCloskey. Now a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago and at Erasmus Universiteit in the Netherlands, McCloskey has published a second edition of *The Rhetoric of Economics* (1998, originally published in 1985), *If You're So Smart: The Narrative of Economic**

Expertise (1998), and *How to Be Human*—though an Economist (2001); continues to co-edit the highly regarded series *The Rhetoric of Inquiry*; and has expanded her scholarly work into the field of gender studies. Her highly personal *Crossing: A Memoir* appeared in 1999 to much critical acclaim.

Clients contemplating a sex change are generally required by their physicians to live life as a member of the opposite sex for a year or more before gender reassignment surgery, and even after surgery they must continue to adapt physically to their new identity. In the following chapter from Crossing, McCloskey describes her early attempts to assume a physical identity that strangers would accept as that of a woman. She also considers the gestural differences between women and men and the hostility directed at those perceived to be cross-gendered.

It's hard to pass. You just try it, Dee would say. I mean really try to pass as the opposite gender, not just put on a joke dress and a lampshade hat for the Lions picnic. You'll be surprised at how many gender clues there are and how easy it is to get them wrong. Scores of them, natural and unnatural, genetic and socially constructed.

No, hundreds. Women stand and sit at angles. Men offer their hands to shake. Women put their hands to their chests when speaking of themselves. Men barge through. Women look frequently at nonspeaking participants in a conversation. Men don't look at each other when talking. Women carry papers and books clutched to their midriffs, men balance things on their hips. Women smile at other women when entering their space. Men never smile at male strangers. Women put their hands on their hips with fingers pointing backward. Men use wide gestures. Women frequently fold their hands together in their laps. Men walk from their shoulders, women from their hips. And on and on.

Dee watched other women in her culture for characteristic gestures and practiced them on the spot. *The way the hands gesture together, as though in a little dance. The way the fingers lie up the arm when the arms are crossed. Standing with feet in a ballet pose. Pulling your hair from under a coat just put on.* (It was some time before her hair was long enough to make that feminine gesture useful.) Years into her transition she could amuse herself in a dull moment in a mall or airport by breaking down other women's gestures and trying them out. Like square dancing: hundreds of calls.

Rest one elbow on the back of the other hand, laid horizontally across your middle, the free hand stretching vertically to frame your face from the bottom, palm out. In touching your face, which you should do frequently, hold the hand in a graceful pose. For situations such as display at the dinner table, learn the hand pose used in ballet—fingers arched and separated, middle finger almost touching the thumb. Pinky up, but not too much, since it's an obvious parody of the ladylike. Overacting evokes the theatrical tradition of drag. Try to create a somewhat splayed effect with the fingers, angled up, instead of masculine cupping. When shaking hands—don't be the first to offer—use no strong grip, and

place your hand sideward into the other person's. Check your hair frequently. Play idly with your jewelry. Check your clothing (a set of gestures that women's clothes require more often than men's, or else you stride out of the ladies' room with the back of your skirt up around your behind). Always stand more on one foot than the other. Stand with your legs crossed (a youngish gesture, this). Never stand manlike with feet parallel and legs spread wide. Angle your feet when you stop at the corner before crossing. Rest with hands together, not sprawled all over like a man's. When sitting cross your legs, either knee over knee angled to one side (never lower leg crossed horizontally over the knee, like the Greek boy in the statue removing a splinter) or to one side beneath the chair ankle over ankle. Never slouch when you sit. Stick your rear end solidly into the back of the chair, and never stretch your legs out, crossed at the ankles. Keep your knees together when you sit—"close the gates of hell" used to be the misogynist joke about it—which is easier if your knees are naturally angled inward, as girls' and especially women's are. If your feet are not crossed when sitting, keep your legs together from feet to knees. "Take up less space" is one formula; another is "keep your wrists loose," and still another "keep your elbows close to your body," this one imitating the effect of a female angle in the elbow, a piece of biology. But the formulas are hard to apply, like formal grammatical rules. Imitate, imitate, the way girls learn it. Deirdre was congratulated three years into full time: "Last year your motions were a little abrupt; now they are convincingly feminine." The gesture language is probably imitated with the same ease and at the same age as the spoken language, and like the spoken language it is hard to learn as an adult. Little girls act different from little boys, independent of the slight structural differences in their bodies. By age ten many girls even know the secret smile.

Much of behavior is gendered. A lot of it is culturally specific and variable from person to person. European men cross their legs in a way that in America is coded as feminine. American soldiers in Vietnam would sneer at what they read as femininity in their Vietnamese allies and enemies: "They're all queer, you know." Mediterranean and Middle Eastern women make broader gestures, not the little dance of hands that upper-middle-class women in America use. The gender clues figure in any culture in an abundance that only a gender crosser or Dustin Hoffman preparing for *Tootsie* can grasp.

Of course if you are *aiming* to be funny then you want to be read, even if you are skillful at giving appropriate gender clues. Passing is not at issue. The Australian comedian who has developed the character "Dame Edna" is good at it. Without a leer or a nudge, he simply *is* the absurd Dame and sometimes spends hours in character, yet of course his audience knows. Miss Piggy of the Muppets is similar. She is gloriously who she is, yet everyone knows it's cross-speaking—her voice is always that of a man using falsetto. Getting read is part of the joke.

If you are not trying to be funny, you do not want to get read. Really, you don't. A sincere but detected attempt to jump the gender border from male to female—and no joking about it—creates anxiety in men, to be released by laughter if they can handle it or by a length of steel pipe if they can't. A 1997 survey

claimed that 60 percent of cross-gendered people had been assaulted. Deirdre knew a gender crosser who had been beaten by four young men outside a bar even in peaceful Iowa City. The director of Gender PAC noted that "RuPaul is funny so long as she stays in a television studio. But try walking to the subway and she'll be a grease spot on the sidewalk before she makes it home." (If a female-to-male crosser was read by men maybe he would be regarded as cute, or rational: after all, it's rational to prefer to be a man, isn't it? Like the daily prayer by Orthodox Jewish men thanking God for not making them women. On the other hand, Brandon Teena, a pre-op female-to-male thief outed by the Falls City, Nebraska, police department was raped, complained about it to the police, who did nothing, and the next week in 1993 was murdered. Not by women.)

The anxiety is weirdly strong. A standard routine in the movies is that two men are forced to sleep with each other by circumstances (oh, sure), and then one of them dreams that he's sleeping with a woman. The other man, horrified by the amorous advances, rejects them violently, and the awakened dreamer is ashamed. The routine enacts over and over again the male anxiety about being homosexual, much less being a woman, and the violent reaction the anxiety arouses. With this threat of violence in mind, Donald's sister had given him her own pepper spray. The pepper spray, though, wouldn't be much good against a steel pipe.

Women who read a crossdresser are not violent, but frightened and indignant. Who is this guy? What's he up to? Deirdre knew from being a woman on trains late at night in Holland or walking by Dutch cafés in the summertime or living later in the less demonstrative but more dangerous environment of America that women have daily experiences of men in fact being up to something, often something sexual, often enough something dangerous. At first it was flattering, the knocking on windows of the *eetcafé* as she went by, the propositions to come into the jazz club and have a drink. Then it was tedious or frightening. Women experience dangerous men all day long and are on the alert. The alertness is not male bashing, merely prudence in the company of people with greater upper-body strength and the inclination to use it, intoxicated by lethal fantasies about What She Really Wants. Women who read a gender crosser are putting her in this category of dangerous men. To be read by women is utterly demoralizing. After all, the gender crosser is trying to join the women, to pass as one, and instead they are treating her like a man, maybe nuts, probably dangerous, definitely another one of those bloody *men*.

On all counts it is better for a gender crosser to pass rapidly to the other side, and making the crossing rapid ought to be the purpose of medical intervention, such as facial surgery, and social intervention, such as counseling on gender clues. Women acquainted with a gender crosser sometimes think of her interest in facial surgery as vanity. Natural-born women have no problem passing as women. "You're silly to want operations," says a woman out of a face with pointed chin, no browridges, high cheekbones. Deirdre's mother declared that getting electrolysis, which she regarded as merely temporary, was "vain." But a nose job or a facelift or electrolysis that will make a gender crosser passable will also make her less likely to

be scorned or raped or killed—at any rate at no more than the shocking rates for genetic women. Deirdre knew a not very passable gender crosser in tolerant Holland who had been raped three times. It is merely prudent to pass.

Some radical feminists object to gender crossing. They complain of the gender crosser that she (when they have the ruth to call her “she”) is adopting oppressive stereotypes about women and therefore contributing to society’s discrimination. The gender crosser, they claim, is pulling women back to the 1950s, white gloves and pill-box hats, lovely garden parties, and a *Leave It to Beaver* vision of a woman’s life.

There is little truth in the stereotype argument. The crossphobe who uses it ordinarily doesn’t know any gender crossers. A gender crosser with a job or career outside the home tries to keep it and does not in practice dissolve into a 1950s heaven of full-time cookie baking and teatime gossip. Far from becoming passive and stereotypically feminine, the gender crossers Deirdre knew often retained much of their masculine sides. The crossphobes mix up gender crossers with drag queens or female impersonators, whose shtick is indeed a parody of women—sometimes demeaning and stereotypical, though often enough loving and amusing. In 1958 the sociologist Harold Garfinkel described a gender crosser named Agnes. Latter-day crossphobes attack Agnes as “displaying rigidly traditional ideas of what a woman is” or having “stereotypical views of femininity” or “constructing an extremely narrow and constricted view of womanhood.” Agnes was nineteen, a typist, at the height of the feminine mystique. But no allowances: “I don’t support you in your effort to have an operation, because you have stereotypical views of what it means to be a woman.” Unlike all the other nineteen-year-old typists in 1958. (Agnes had the operation, and was fine, because Garfinkel and a psychiatrist named Stoller did support her.)

A gender crosser trying to be a woman must reproduce enough of the characteristic gestures to escape being read, and often—especially in voice—this is difficult. It becomes second nature, and a comfort to oneself even when alone. But if you fail you are classed with people stereotyping women. Or murdered. The crossphobe radical feminists are allies in hatred with the gay-bashing murderers of Matthew Shephard.

The complaint about stereotyping will be delivered by a genetic woman whose every gesture and syllable is stereotypically feminine. At seminars in which Deirdre was attacked for stereotyping she would reply with the same stereotypically feminine gestures or turns of phrase just used by the crossphobe—who had been practicing them since she was a little girl. This was Garfinkel’s point, that gender is something “done,” a performance, not an essence springing from genitals or chromosomes. Deirdre would say, “Of course I [putting her hand to her chest in the feminine way of referring to oneself, just used by the crossphobe] would never [doing a deprecating double flap with her hands in the style of American middle-class women] want to damage women by *stereotyping* [raising her voice in the falsetto of emphasis stereotypical of women, for instance the crossphobe attacking the genuineness of gender crossers].”

The passing worked better, slowly, each month, if she dressed carefully and worked at it. Each little acceptance delighted her. The signal was being called “mevrouw” in Holland, “ma’am” in America, “madame” in France, “madam” in England. *Yes: call me madam.*

She is getting up to leave a Dutch tram at Oostzeedijk, intent on how to make the transfer to the subway. *Let’s see: across there and down. Remember to watch for the bicycles.* The tram has almost stopped and she is pressing the exit button when she hears finally through her English thoughts and the haze of a foreign tongue, “*Mevrouw! Mevrouw!*” *It’s me they’re calling,* she thinks. *Oh. I’ve left a package.* She smiles in thanks and snatches up the package, slipping out the door as it closes, still smiling. They see her as “ma’am.”

At the grocery store she is accosted by a woman giving out samples of a Dutch delicacy. It doesn’t look very good. The woman babbles at Dee in Dutch, and Dee catches only the blessed “mevrouw.” She smiles and shakes her head no thank you and pushes the cart toward the canned goods.

In May in Paris with an economist friend, Nancy, who is visiting there for a year, she walks out of a hat store, wearing the lovely lace floppy number just purchased. An elegant Frenchman goes by and says with a smile, “Un beau chapeau, madame!” Deirdre’s French is poor, and she is still wondering if he could have said what she thought he had said when he politely repeats it in English over his shoulder as he walks on, “A beautiful hat, madame!” She would say when telling the story, “I could have kissed him. If he had proposed, I would have married him on the spot. Even though he was shorter.”

A month later she wears the hat (which can be worn only in Paris or at special events) to a daylong concert of classical music in the park in Rotterdam. Sitting at luncheon on the grass with some members of her women’s group, she feels particularly lovely. A Dutchman passes by and makes in Dutch the same remark the Frenchman had made, “A beautiful hat, mevrouw!”

The women’s group meets at a restaurant in Rotterdam. It is a year since she abandoned the male role. The waiter asks the “*dames*” (DAH-mez) what they want, including Deirdre without notice or comment. *One of the dames. Yes.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. In her opening paragraphs, McCloskey observes a number of “gender clues,” distinctions between the physical behavior and gestures of women and men. Are these distinctions borne out by your own observations?
2. At the end of paragraph 4, McCloskey claims that children early on learn gendered behavior through imitation. In paragraph 5, she makes the further point that gender-identified behavior differs from culture to culture. What do these ideas suggest about her views on gender?