

# Madame butterfly

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



Ali Appelbaum WGST 199-01 Professor Uman March 16, 2008 Society puts a strong focus on individuals who experience the act of cross-dressing to create an identity for themselves. The act of cross-dressing helps a person to feel comfortable with themselves because they are able to gain a sense of independence, confidence, and individuality. In the play *M. Butterfly*, by David Henry Hwang, constructing an identity is made through the character Song. By looking at Song's appearance in *M. Butterfly*, we can see that clothing and disguise constructs an identity.

The play, *M. Butterfly* uses the character Song to show the audience how cross-dressing is common, and can make one's personality. Song cross-dresses from an Asian male, to an Asian female. Throughout the play Song plays the role of a female but expresses herself in a more confident, and independent way as an Asian female. This is because Song has had a gender cross to a woman, she is able to demonstrate these qualities in her new identity she has formed. *M. Butterfly* is about a French diplomat, Gallimard and his love attraction for Song.

Gallimard feels as though he's never been in love, and has a hard time relating to women, until Song comes along. Song, playing the romantic role of Gallimard's lover takes charge without Gallimard realizing a male was really wooing him the whole time. Song possesses traits of a female, which gives her confidence to pursue her relationship with Gallimard until he's fallen in love. In the end, Song reveals herself for the man she is, but continues to act with more confidence and independence as a woman than as a man.

In the play, you can see that disguise constructs an identity through the character Song. During a scene, Gallimard comments on Song's feminine appearance and the other women he sees in China. Song responds to Gallimard, " Please. Hard as I try to be modern, to speak like a man, to hold a Western woman's strong face up to my own... in the end, I fail. A small, frightened heart beats too quickly and gives me away. Monsieur Gallimard, I'm a Chinese girl. I've never... never invited a man up to my flat before.

The forwardness of my actions makes my skin burn" (1. 11 Hwang). This quote shows that Song possesses traits as a female and is proud. Although Song is a male, he has built himself a female identity from disguise.

Confidence is expressed in Song's remarks by telling in conversation how she believes she is more knowledgeable than Gallimard. Song also makes sure notice is taken of her delicate and pretty appearance. Song remarks back to Gallimard, " Your history serves you poorly, Monsieur Gallimard. True, there were signs reading " No dogs and Chinamen. But a woman, especially a delicate Oriental woman—we always go where we please. Could you imagine it otherwise? Clubs in China filled with pasty, big-thighed white women, while thousands of slender lotus blossoms wait just outside the door? The clubs would be empty. We have always held a certain fascination for you Caucasian men, have we not? (2. 4 Hwang). Song has shown to her audience that she has a strong confidence about the female body and face. She explains to Gallimard that her new identity, a delicate Oriental woman, is always welcomed in society.

Song also feels a sense of power because although she is a man working for the Chinese government, she feels comfortable in her feminine identity. A conversation between Song and her advisor Comrade Chin demonstrates how Song has created an identity for herself in disguise. When Song is in quarters where she can act like man, she still acts in a feminine order, rather than a masculine tone. Chin asks Song, “...Is that how you dress like that?” (2. 4 Hwang). Song responds by saying, “ Like what, Miss Chin?” (2. Hwang). Chin remarks with what he believes is reality by saying, “ Like that dress! You’re wearing a dress. And every time I come here, you’re wearing a dress. Is that because you’re an actor? Or what?” (2. 4 Hwang). Song reveals her identity by saying, “ It’s a... disguise, Miss Chin” (2. 4 Hwang). This conversation between Comrade Chin and Song shows the audience that Song is aware of the fact that she is a male, but possesses more of an interest in the feminine personality and ways of life because she is more confident.