

Medusa on Maalox



One of the most gag-inducing social experiments of recent times has been skinny celebrities going undercover in fat suits to help us understand what it's really like out there for overweight women. Tyra Banks, host of the "you-go-girl" Tyra Banks Show, spent hours with a team of stage makeup professionals who transformed her from supermodel to chubby-chaser's delight, replete with voluminous belly and multiple chins. Then, Ms. Thang hit the streets with a hidden camera and guess what happened? People weren't nice! Say whaaat? People are nicer to famous supermodels than fat girls? Say it isn't so.

Slouching slacktress Gwyneth Paltrow donned a fat suit in the film *Shallow Hal*. As with Banks' anthropological field work, I'm sure Ms. Paltrow yearned to share a deep message with society about the importance of inner beauty.

I wonder what would happen if a curvy lady went undercover as Tyra or Gwyneth...

I hit the streets behaving like a self-important, intellectually vacant, cliché-spewing supermodel and it was strange; people sort of rolled their eyes and walked away. Then I transformed myself into a slump-shouldered, whining, marginally-talented movie star who sighed too much and went on and on about how the English are so much more cultured than Americans, and would you believe it? Those who normally find me charming avoided me like a leper.

I'm of fan of letting people tell their own stories. Author Judith Moore offers a brutal account in her memoir *Fat Girl*. A life experience isn't an outfit you put on and take off. If these ladies really want to know how the world treats women of substance (that's my new PC term for *overweight*-pass it on!), they can pull their index fingers out of their throats, give Atkins their middle fingers, and find out. Truth is only a Twinkie away.

Saying that, and being completely dichotomous (i.e. *I just said I hated it, now I'm gonna do it!*), I wondered what it would be like to inhabit another body and walk around gauging people's reactions. Since fat suits, black face, and faux disabilities are all insulting, I considered the one unifying experience all people face: aging. With the exception of Walt Disney's cryogenically frozen head, everyone is taking baby steps towards the grave.

Fashion magazines have looks for the twenties, thirties, forties, and, in rare cases (a once-a-year bone thrown to septuagenarian subscribers) fifties. After that, in fashion terms, you are dead. No sassy sixties, sultry seventies, elegant eighties, naughty nines, or horny hundreds. Once you are past the advertiser's target demographic, your only choice is to pull a Georgia O'Keefe, move to a desert outpost, get craggy, and wear black sheaths with a single massive chunk of turquoise hanging from your neck. My mother asserts old age "is a disease we all catch." With that in mind, I decided to strut around Oshkosh in an old suit.

I studied older lady style and saw a lot of gorgeous women. Some were tailored in the latest urban looks, some sweet hippie mamas in natural fibers, or hearty housewives in efficient jeans and t-shirts, or silver-tressed and stunning as silent screen stars. OK, there were one or two who looked like they got dressed in blenders, but finally, I hit upon a style I liked: The Feisty Floridian.

I wanted to look like someone's wise-cracking grandma. The kind of gal who smokes Virginia Slims, plays canasta, and wears jewelry with jogging ensembles. She goes to church, but she also swears and is quick with a backhand. She sports massive spectacles, like two sliding glass doors over her eyes.

My name would be Marjorie. I picked an ash-blond wig and purchased a spry nylon sweat suit in purple and aqua. The jacket featured rococo designs and giant clam shells. For some reason the head of Medusa was printed on the fabric. I went to the grocery store, a local restaurant, and a quick mart. I was ignored.

I had received a free soda at the restaurant a week earlier, but Marj had to pay. I usually crack wise with the bag boys, but Marj was just offered help out with her groceries: no jokes, no fun. Despite my flamboyant outfit, semi-obnoxious personality, and wild wig, I felt invisible.

Disclaimer: Maybe I was being giddy and weird in costume and what I perceived as being ignored was actually polite avoidance.

It wasn't a scientific study, but anecdotal evidence is enough to say this: be nice to older women, look them in the eyes: they still have sex drives and relevant thoughts. Pay homage to wisdom and life experience. She was once you or the girl you were hot for in high school.

Look at what you are wearing right now. One day it will be passé. It will seem ridiculous to the young. It will be the equivalent of a sweat suit with huge hideous clam shells and the head of Medusa.

TRIED: I tried on a tie with an oxford, then felt like a dork so I just wore the oxford, then I felt even dorkier in a plain oxford so I took it off and put on a t-shirt. Sometimes you have to know when something is just not working for you. (This simple truism goes for relationships too.)

TRUE: Red lipstick with a blue base = beautiful. Red lipstick with an orange base = yellow teeth. Red lipstick with sparkles = coke whore.

TIRED: Men, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but your toes are funky. As the season starts to change, I beg of you, keep those knarled, corn-encrusted feet in a decent pair of shoes. Sandals and flip-flops are not for you!

TRENDY: Accessorize any outfit with a knowing wink and a stiff drink.