

THE ART OF PASSING: THE INTERPLAY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN FACIAL FEMINIZATION SURGERIES

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Background: For many transgender individuals, passing as cisgender is important as it predicts their future prospects in circumstances such as housing and employment. However, the ability to pass and the act of passing both carry many conflicting attributes. Specifically, under a radicalized context, passing is often highly contingent on one's race, ethnicity, and racialized "ethnic features". Hence, there is a struggle to negotiate the intersection of one's racial identity in order to pass for one's affirmed gender identity in many non-white people.

Objectives: This presentation explores the conflict of race, ethnicity, and passing in the transgender community through the lens of a particular group of gender affirming surgeries: facial feminization surgeries (FFS). Particularly, this presentation explores the edification of whiteness in the standardization of what is a desirable feminine aesthetic.

Methods: Through a literature review analysis, this presentation will explore and analyze the means by which FFS became a codified tool for creating and edifying a feminine aesthetic. From its origins with Dr. Douglas Ousterhout, this presentation will demonstrate how FFS evolved into a restrictive and racist tool for gender affirmation and passing.

Results: Literature analysis revealed that FFS was indoctrinated through both Eurocentric anthropologically informed ideas and values and then codified within biomedical and surgical science communities through the standardization process implemented by Dr. Douglas Ousterhout. It was discovered that this process almost exclusively used idealized white features and body forms to inform the "scientific" ideal of the feminine form.

Discussion: The standardization of femininity and femaleness as viewed through surgical construction is rooted in whiteness. This has implications on acceptance in transgender and hegemonic spaces. Through surgical intervention, "passing" is reified under a white lens. This brings up questions of how we see cis-gendered femininity as well as how restrictive of a path gender affirmation currently is.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify some of the ways in which the feminine form was standardized in FFS surgeries
2. Interpret some of the ways whiteness is embedded in the standardization of the feminine form as delineated by Dr. Douglas Ousterhout.