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Racial Stereotyping and Transgender

Embedded Cultural Ideas of Masculinity and Femininity Based on Race

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This is a sensitive subject but one that I've been confronted with for a while, so I thought I'd write this piece and see the response.

My inherently "feminine" race prevents me from ever transitioning "fully" into an ideal of white masculinity

I've been thinking a lot about how racial stereotyping and ideas about race, colour (ha-ha) our ideas about gender, transitioning and becoming.

I thought I was square with my issues with race and ethnicity until I started transitioning in Sydney. Along with transitioning came overt and subtle messages, comments and expectations about what it is to be a male and how male one can be, and what those markers are. After a while it clicked with me

that there is, very much alive and well, a gradation of racial groups that equates with a gradation of masculinity and femininity.

Effectively, it is the old idea of Orient v. Occident. The East is feminine and the West is masculine. (East) Asian M.T.F.s are the most "successful" transgender people because they have fine skin, little body hair and small build.

The number of times you would have heard of tourists returning from Thailand, for example, commenting on how convincing the drag queens and M.T.F. transgender people were on the stage and on the street.

It is still less jarring to see a white man with an Asian woman than an Asian man with a white woman.

I believe this all relates to an underlying scale of races, where Asian races are inherently feminine when compared with Caucasians.

I was also disturbed when watching "Japanese Story" with Toni Collette, where she becomes the lover of a Japanese "salaryman". Their sexual interactions involve his taking a passive role while she "wears the pants" in the relationship. Indeed the first time they have sex we see Toni's character taking off a pair of pants while the Japanese man lies modestly in bed under the covers, waiting for her!

Keep going in that mode and there is the comparison to African/black races as hyper masculine (measured again, of course, against white masculinity): you have stereotypes of black studs, the big black dick, the sexualisation of black women as being hyper aggressive/sexual, etc.

I have a feeling if there were a comparison for the sales figures of black dildos in sex shops as compared to "skin" coloured (i.e. pinky peachy) dildos, black dildos would come out tops.

Similarly, Hispanic/Southern European masculinity as compared to Northern European/Anglo-Saxon masculinity. The Latin Lover, the fiery Italian temptress, etc.

So how does this impact on F.T.M.s? Well, I would say it impacts a lot. For myself, as an East (well Southeast) Asian F.T.M., I get the converse of what Asian M.T.F.s would receive in terms of transition. My inherently "feminine" race prevents me from ever transitioning "fully" into an ideal of white masculinity. And since Australian culture is still overtly white and Anglo and Christian, the expectations of transition, the visuals of transition, still accord with those same white and Anglo ideals. When a "successful transition is measured in terms of a beard, drastic change in skin texture, body odour and body hair, for example, I fall short.

I have come to realise that my own expectations of transitioning had these markers in place long before I even had my first dose of testosterone. I realised how dangerous it was for my self-esteem to have a white ideal of masculinity in my head and not to know it.

Anyway, I guess I'm interested to know whether there are any other Asian/non-Anglo/non-Australian F.T.M.s and guys out there with similar experiences, as well as knowing what white Australian F.T.M.s and guys think about these issues.

I'm not saying "you are racist!" but racist ideas are embedded in cultures and some racist ideas are embedded here. So it's less a matter of what you think, but rather, why do you think it?

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