

Body politics: Foot binding in the united states

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Foot binding in the United States is not illegal. In America, Chinese immigrants may practice the tradition of binding their own feet. However, feminist opposition to the custom demonstrates some racist implications. Feminist scholars and activists have denounced high heels as a symbol of immobility and male control; and they have burned their braziers. Yet, many dye, perm, relax, and damagingly style their hair to live-up to their expectations for beauty. Expectations are undoubtedly shared by a patriarchal culture. Average expectations conjured by typical perspectives may be the result of shared pain. Nevertheless, patriarchal culture singularizes standards for beauty. Many feminists may criticize Chinese women while orating with transformed hair (e.g., cover greying heads). They may justify their hair color choices (e.g., blonde) by claiming that they have chosen their natural hair colors from childhood. This further plays into the patriarchal premise that women are inferior and should be controlled, like dependents. Relaxing and perming suggest racial non-complicity. Foot binding appears to be more radical than identity compromises, but it is not. Aggressive hair-identity fabrication damages hair and foot

binding damages feet. Only a political perspective that interiorizes hair to feet would label foot binding as worse than hair damage.

Hair is associated with race. Patriarchal oppression of women and racist attitudes manifest when feminists claim that hairstyling is impermanent, and therefore less detrimental or critical. While some foot binding may be private, an American woman's hair may be social. Her mutability announces patriarchy and racial confusion and appropriation to every person viewing and touching her damaged hair. Feminists, who change their hair for nonracist or unpatriarchal reasons, such as for fun or to rebel, may sympathize with foot-binders; and therefore, not criticize Chinese culture or women's choices and appearances. Feminists advocating on behalf of Chinese women, who have been pressured to bind their feet, should also consider how to save American children from pressure to damage their hair. Although it may be an affront to liberalized Constitutional interpretation, feminists should advocate for laws protecting children that can overcome free speech rights and parents' right to raise their children.

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