Medical Means as Paths to Citizenship: Women’s Rights, Abortion, and Plastic Surgery in Brazil

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Introduction

In the past century, Brazil has made remarkable gains in terms of women’s rights. Despite this narrowing of the gender gap, women in Brazil still face inequality throughout the country. In 2010, the same year as the election of the first woman to the Brazilian presidency, the United Nations ranked Brazil 73rd out of 169 nations based on the Gender Inequality Index. Nonetheless, women in Brazil have not taken their inequality passively. Women in the early 1900s began working together to achieve suffrage as a first step towards equality, which they eventually gained in 1934. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the women’s movement began to finally take hold throughout the country with pushes towards more reproductive rights and economic parity. With the physical body as such a prominent component of Brazilian society as it provides access to a better life, women all around Brazil have used medical means to attain equality in society, economy, and politics. In this paper, I trace women’s use of plastic surgery and abortion as means for gaining equality in Brazil through what is called gendered citizenship. This will be done by detailing their histories, effects on the body, and on how Brazilians view them as rights. Namely by studying these two strategies, I argue that one can understand how women have been able to work around and within the system for equality.

Discussions of Brazilian Culture

When discussing the medical means by which women in Brazil attempt to achieve equality, there are many issues to focus on. For one, there is the overall concept of citizenship in Brazil, which needs to be understood outside of a Western context. There is also the topic

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1 This depicts the loss of achievement in a country due to gender inequality.
of women’s rights movements in Brazil. Furthermore, the discourse and research on both plastic surgery and abortion in Brazil are important in the overall conversation of women’s work for equality.

Teresa Caldeira provides insight into crime and punishment in Brazil relative to the treatment of the body and of individual rights. She argues that in Brazil the body is not protected or considered private in what she calls the unbound body. Similarly, James Holston details his coined concept of “differentiated citizenship,” which rejects the idea of universal citizenship. Instead, he argues that Brazilian people separate themselves into two different groups where their contrasts are highlighted. They define the other group as citizens despite both groups actually having citizenship. This comes from the idea that there are different levels of citizenship in Brazil, shown namely through race and class lines. Both of these works will be used heavily for a strong foundation of what it means to be a citizen in Brazil.

Women have worked through the scope of gendered citizenship within Brazilian society to achieve equality, and therefore, it is important to further understand Brazilian culture in regards to women’s rights movements in Brazil. For this, June E. Hahner provides a strong overview of the movements from 1850 to 1940 with an epilogue continuing to the later 1900s. This overview focuses on central figures in the movement like Bertha Lutz, the woman who worked for women’s suffrage. Furthermore, for the later 1900s movements, Hahner detailed how Brazilian feminists have worked together in the battle for reproductive

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2 Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paolo*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and the “unbound body” is the idea that the body is considered public domain. I will discuss this in more detail later in the paper.

3 This will be explained in further detail later in the paper.

rights. Hahner’s overview is strong and gives a solid history for understanding the women’s rights movement in Brazil.

Furthermore, I argue that there are the two medical means that women commonly use in their quest for equality: plastic surgery and abortion.

In discussions of plastic surgery and concepts of beauty in Brazil, some scholars have provided detailed works through fieldwork and interviews. Of these, Alexander Edmonds stands out as one of the important researchers on the topic. Edmonds discusses beauty and plastic surgery in Brazil. He explains why plastic surgery is prevalent in Brazil by focusing on the idea that beauty equates health and the existence of the right to be beautiful. Edmonds furthers this conversation with a focus on the idea of “aesthetic medicine,” or how beauty is combined with health in Brazil leading to blurred lines between reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. In a similar vein, Alvaro Jarrin’s dissertation places this conversation in a historical context by showing the influences of the neo-Lamarckian movement in Brazil on “beauty” as a cultural norm. These two scholars provide strong insight into understanding plastic surgery and beauty in Brazil. However, they could have furthered their analyses if they addressed more directly how these concepts led to women’s struggles to achieve equality and full citizenship.

Furthermore, like beauty and plastic surgery, abortion is another means by which women use their physical body for equality. Recent research on abortion in Brazil also helps understand this medical means in relation to gender equality as well as to the Catholic

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8 Alvaro Jarrin, “Cosmetic Citizenship: Beauty, Affect, and Inequality in Southeastern Brazil,” PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2010 and the neo-Lamarckian movement believes that an organism can pass on characteristics it achieved during its lifetime to its offspring.
Church. Keri Bennett focuses heavily on how women in Brazil have worked around the law system to have legal abortions through claims of anecephaly births, which has made Brazil one of the nations with the most claimed cases of this serious birth defect. Beatriz Galli continues this conversation by showing how Brazilian abortion law has affected women’s reproductive power and autonomy and has led to a substantial risk to women’s lives. Both the Bennett and Galli articles provide statistics and ways in which women have worked around the system for abortions. They also detail how abortion is heavily stigmatized. However, throughout both articles, there is an noticeable bias against the Catholic Church and people opposed to abortion. Maria Jose Rosado Nunes provides a different perspective into the abortion and reproductive rights conversation as she does not lay blame on the Catholic Church but advances ways for the two groups to work together. Namely, her focus on the Catholic Church and its influence on Brazilian law and culture allows for a more impartial understanding of the abortion discourse in Brazil, without the heavily bias against the Church.

However, none of these works focus on how women have attempted to achieve equality through both abortion and plastic surgery in Brazil. There is an overall lack of connection between the two medical means. In this paper, I will trace this connection by focusing on plastic surgery and abortion as means for women to change their biology. I will also discuss the eugenics movements in Brazil and its effects on the body. The integrated

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9 Keri Bennett, “Limitations of Advocacy and Exceptions to the Criminal Law in Brazil: The Struggle for Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights” (Downsview, Canada: Canadian Women’s Studies, vol. 27, iss. 1, 2008).
approach of both cultural and political history will provide a more complete understanding of women’s push for citizenship and equality in Brazil.

Women’s Movements in Brazil

As a country with many descendants from Europe, an often considered patriarchal society, Brazil has held patriarchal societal norms. In the mid-nineteenth century, many colonizers found this place to be a backwards society with its economy dependent on slave labor. In observations from males abroad, the Brazilian man was viewed as an authoritative husband surrounded by slave concubines while the Brazilian woman was the subordinate passive, who remained at home. This idea of the authoritative husband and the subordinate wife persisted in Brazilian history. With the Philippine Code of Portugal, married women were legally minors under the law and their husbands were the legal head of the household. A married woman had to submit to her husband’s authority in anything related to children, including their upbringing and education. She was also unable to engage in commerce or even administer the property without the husband’s consent. This law was only altered slightly under the Civil Code of 1916, though it kept women as minors before the law.

The first major wave of Brazilian feminism began in the mid-nineteenth century and continued during women’s struggle for suffrage in the early twentieth century. Brazilian zoologist, politician, and activist Bertha Lutz was the main figure fighting for women’s right to vote, which was finally granted in 1934. Her work with American suffragists extended this voting ideal while maintaining Brazilian culture.

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13 Ibid., 6.
14 Ibid., 20.
Brazilian women continued the fight for equality again with the second wave of feminism during the late twentieth century. In the late 1970s, Brazil began to transition slowly towards a more civilian rule with the installation of the New Brazilian Republic in 1985. This led to a political liberalization and this second wave of feminism. During this period, Brazilian women focused much more on reproductive rights, as the body is the “battleground for women’s freedom.” Prominent American feminists, like Betty Friedan, even visited Brazil with the goal of driving them towards their Western feminism; however, Brazilian feminists were able to maintain their ideal of feminism. As foreign feminists announced that they have come to liberate Brazilian women, Brazilian feminists retaliated that they have been working for their own feminism for years.

Further problems with the reproductive rights battle generated from the Roman Catholic Church, which has held that contraception, abortion, and intercourse outside of marriage as immoral. Because the Church is prominent in Brazilian culture, when feminists pushed for more rights, relations between the Church and the women’s movement became far more difficult as the Church opposed many of the desires of the movement. Because of the fear of offending the Church, many political feminists have kept from pursuing the abortion issue. This issue, furthermore, has not only remained as a conflict between the Catholic Church and the women’s movement. Brazilian feminists also face the rising power of the Evangelical Church, which similarly opposes many wants of the women’s movement.

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15 Brazil went through an authoritarian regime, with a series of leaders, from 1964 to 1985. This period of military rule, as opposed to democracy, meant that many Brazilians were unable to voice their opinions. It was not until this transition from oppressive rule that women could once again begin to work for feminism.
16 Ibid., 195.
18 Emancipating the Female Sex, 195.
19 Ibid., 197.
While abortion remains illegal today, Brazilian feminists have been able to make great strides in liberalizing reproductive rights in Brazil in terms of contraception, sterilization, and sex education. Even so, motherhood and sexuality remain in conflict because reproductive rights are still viewed as not a state concern.\textsuperscript{20}

However, there are still problems within the movement itself, especially when considering who held its power. Much of this feminist pressure came from upper or middle class white women. With the eugenics movements in Brazil throughout the twentieth century, references to the “Brazilian” race began to shift to “black” and “white” races.\textsuperscript{21} While the concept of the black and white races was not new, this idea of a lack of common Brazilian identity became much more prominent. In an interview by Daphne Patai, the interviewee, Vera, expressed much about the Brazilian Black Movement, stating:

The Black movement is the Blacks inside prisons. It’s not directed, it just happens. But when there is leadership, it’s not the right kind, because the leadership of these groups turns out to be in the hands of Whites, of capitalists, of people who are much more interested in earning money…than in changing our way of life and improving out conditions.\textsuperscript{22}

This quote shows the idea of how separate the two races have become in Brazil by the 1980s by looking at the Black movement and who actually had power in them.

Despite all of the work Brazilian feminists have done and all that they have achieved throughout the past few centuries, many Brazilian women argue today that it is not needed. As stated by a young woman named Glicia during an interview, “Being a feminist isn’t

\textsuperscript{20} Pretty Modern, 177.
\textsuperscript{21} Nancy Stepan, “Eugenics in Brazil, 1917-1940,” from The Welbourn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia, (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1990), 135. The eugenics movement will be detailed in far greater detail later in this paper.
worth the bother. I think their aim is to have women equal to men and not depend on men. But women depend on men and men depend on women. So they are equal. The feminist movement, on the other hand—they want to be superior to men...I think all feminists are imbeciles.”23 Likewise, another interview with a woman named Branca showed even less of a desire for the feminist movement; however, she did express a common solution Brazilian women have used—their own selves—to achieve equality: “I’ve heard about the women’s movement, but frankly I don’t really know what the point is...The shape we’re in, speeches, strikes, appeals for help won’t do a thing. We have to do things for ourselves, not by counting on other people.”24 Though the interviews are from the 1980s, they show common problems women even today have with feminism. Nonetheless, as I will show in this paper, through abortion and plastic surgery, Brazilian women have worked around the system to advance equality.

Citizenship and the “Unbound” Body

Brazil offers a unique perspective on citizenship, as captured in a term coined by James Holston: “differentiated citizenship.” Holston considers this term to involve being “universally inclusive in membership and massively inegalitarian in distribution.”25 Differentiated citizenship comes from the idea that people separate themselves from people of other classes, highlighting their class differences, and defining the “other” as citizens despite being citizens themselves. It stands in opposition to the idea of “universal citizenship,” which argues that all people can be citizens because they are equal. In relation to this idea in Brazil, certain Brazilians are discriminated against because they are certain kinds

23 Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories, 164.
24 Ibid., 284.
of citizens, such as women are discriminated against because they are seen as lesser citizens. All still belong to the nation, but they are different kinds of citizens according to their class with some at higher citizenship than others. Bank lines act as an example of how the poor are treated unfairly in bureaucracy. All Brazilians must pay bills in person at the bank. However, employees treat wealthier Brazilians better by allowing them to avoid while while the poor remain in the long lines.\textsuperscript{26}

This idea of citizenship has been present since Brazil’s creation and stable throughout Brazil’s transitions from colony to nation, slave to wage economy, and so forth. Its longstanding power is rooted in the trio of economic exploitation, political coercion, and violence. But the tools that sustain it have to do also with a distinct use of the law and legal institutions, with Brazil’s elite mastering the misuse of law, e.g., how the elites are able to crush any protests with police force.\textsuperscript{27} Holston further argues that the origins of differentiated citizenship come from histories of slavery to those of political enfranchisement, labor struggle, and populist co-optation.

The body presents a unique site for understanding the notions of citizenship and rights as they take shape in Brazil. Caldeira contends that the Brazilian body is an “unbounded body” that is constantly subjected to intervention. This notion can be viewed in plastic surgery habits of Brazilians but also through the exercises of justice and power. Caldeira further argues:

The body is conceived of as the locus of punishment, justice, and example in Brazil. It is conceived by most as a proper site for authority to be asserted through the infliction of pain. On the bodies of the dominated—children, women, blacks, the poor, and alleged criminals—

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 18.
those in authority mark their power, seeking, through the infliction of
pain, to purify the souls of their victims, correct their characters,
improve their behavior, and produce compliance.\textsuperscript{28}

The physical body is not respected in its individual enclosure and privacy in Brazil. It is viewed to be of public domain. It is the specific place of some people’s disenfranchisement and marginalization. Furthermore, civil rights and the body are entangled, and civil rights and the democratization process cannot be developed fully until the body becomes a personally controlled place without intervention from the government.\textsuperscript{29}

The discourse of citizenship can be further discussed in relation to gender. Gendered citizenship examines citizenship in terms of the gender of the member of the society and observes the role of biology in human and political worth.\textsuperscript{30} Citizenship cannot just be viewed through a universal lens, as it ignores the inequalities women face. When considering citizenship, Brazilian women are not working to achieve it in full by becoming an abstract type of equal citizen. Instead, they are working to achieve equality through gender differences, via abortion and plastic surgery. This form of citizenship works to individualize and collectivize specific categories of social beings giving both a sense of self-responsibility and group responsibility.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Abortion and the Church in Brazil}

One of the medical means that Brazilian women use to achieve equality in politics, society, and the economy is abortion. Abortion is a contentious topic in many places in the

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 367.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 441.
world. Arguably, abortion is a necessary right for women around the world for equality. It is seen as a moral right for women to be able to control their body. Abortion is needed for equality for three main reasons: 1) forced childbirth causes the woman to have to continue pregnancy to birth and then support the resulting child for years after; 2) women’s ability to choose whether or not to have children is in line with achieving equality simply because men do not get pregnant and so are not restricted in the same way women are; and 3) women’s freedom and life choices are limited by children and the stereotypes, duties, and customs that go along with it.  

As argued by Keri Bennett, Brazil is progressive in its programs for sex education in schools and for people’s ability to get contraception. However, without abortion being legal except under exceptional circumstances, Brazil is considered to be disadvantaged in terms of women’s reproductive rights and equality. As of today, abortion is still illegal in Brazil under the Brazilian Penal Code. Currently there are two means by law that a woman could get an abortion: 1) the pregnancy is a result of rape and 2) the woman’s life is in danger. With only around 3,000 abortions legally obtained annually in Brazil, the number of unsafe abortions is substantial. In contrast to the 3,000 legal abortions, there are between 800,000 and 1 million abortions annually in Brazil, and about 200,000 women annually who go to the hospital following illegal abortion complications. Of a random sample of urban women between the ages of 18 and 39, one in every five were found to have had at least one abortion. There was no statistical difference among various religious groups, but abortions were more

33 Keri Bennett, “Limitations of Advocacy and Exceptions to the Criminal Law in Brazil: The Struggle for Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights” (Downsview, Canada: Canadian Women’s Studies, vol. 27, iss. 1, 2008).
common with less educated women. Furthermore, women who cannot afford abortions are disproportionately poor and black. They likewise are less likely to have access to contraception and sex education. This leads to the figure of black women being three times more likely to die from an abortion than white women.

Abortion is a crime in Brazil. A woman who performs an abortion to herself or who receives an abortion is placed in detention for one to two years. This causes women who seek abortion to be heavily stigmatized. Women also face the fear of criminal investigation and the revelation of their private lives to family, co-workers, and the public if they seek an abortion. The police in 2007 even raided a clinic and confiscated medical records of around 9,600 women who had been there resulting in a complete loss of privacy for the women. In an interview by Daphne Patai, interviewee Caroline describes her abortion and experience of not telling her family: “I was frightened [after hearing that I was pregnant]. I was afraid of my father…[the doctor] gave me an injection in my thigh, then she put this instrument in and started pulling. My family never found out about it.” In this interview, Caroline dealt heavily with the stigmatizations surrounding abortions and the fear women who seek abortions have. In another interview with Angela, a young Brazilian woman, on the topic of what she believes about abortion, she said, “I’m not totally in favor of abortion—but I’m also not against it…if a child’s going to be born and not have adequate conditions, it’s better to have an abortion.” Angela’s interview details opinions Brazilian women may have on abortion, especially when considering how Angela had to seek an abortion herself. The

36 “As Women Die from Illegal Abortions in Brazil…”
37 “Limitations of Advocacy and Exceptions to the Criminal Law in Brazil.”
38 “Negative Impacts of Abortion Criminalization in Brazil,” 975.
39 Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories, 68.
40 Ibid., 117.
legality of abortion is heavily linked to the high rates of unsafe abortions and high mortality rates caused by the procedures. Unsafe abortions are one of the top five causes of deaths for pregnant women in Brazil.\textsuperscript{41}

Feminists began the fight for abortion in the 1970s during the second wave of feminism in Brazil. However, their fear of offending the Roman Catholic Church, an ally in the Left and middle class opposition to the authoritative rule, led to conflict between the two over the issue of abortion. Because there were already problems between the two groups as reproductive rights and equality within the family issues rose, the women’s movement elected to avoid discussing the radical right of decriminalizing abortion.\textsuperscript{42}

The Roman Catholic Church’s influence grew significantly beginning in the 1930s. The Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest, most influential Christian churches in the Western world with governing powers and direct influence of members through moral policies. This was done through winning important constitutional concessions like making divorce illegal and making church marriage legal. As birth control, sterilization, and abortion go against the Catholic faith, these also became illegal during this period, though today only abortion remains illegal.\textsuperscript{43}

Fundamental Catholicism, arguably, is viewed as opposing women’s rights and liberties in many areas. In Catholicism, women are to be wives and mothers, something, Maria Jose Rosado Nunes argues, that is opposed to the feminist goals in reproductive rights. She furthers states specifically that “such a widening of rights allows for the possibility that a woman can control her sexuality and reproductive capability as part of the realization of

\textsuperscript{41} “Negative Impacts of Abortion Criminalization in Brazil,” 970.
\textsuperscript{42} Emancipating the Female Sex, 197.
\textsuperscript{43} “Eugenics in Brazil, 1917-1940,” 140.
feminine citizenship.”

Nunes later cites Brazilian feminist, Irene Leon, who stated that by “calling for the inclusion of social rights and reproductive rights into the scope of human rights, women contribute to the development of the concept of citizenship and democracy by projecting a new model of society which demands social reform and change in mental attitudes.” Therefore, as a result of the influence of the Catholic Church in Brazil, a struggle between feminism and motherhood is created. Women do not reject motherhood but they wanted to pursue it as well as a right and as a choice, and not as a forced obligation. This has led to discourse on gendered citizenship and what it means to be a true Brazilian citizen in relation to reproductive rights.

In one of the more extreme examples of the Roman Catholic Church in this arena is the Church’s denial for an abortion to a raped 9-year-old girl, who was at extreme health risks. By going against the Church and allowing her to have an abortion, the girl’s mother ended up excommunicated by the Church. Brazilian Archbishop Fisichella later realized and argued that punishing those who help an abused child does indeed make the church appear "bereft of mercy," and that this is part of what "has affected the credibility of [the Church’s] teaching." Currently, Pope Francis has stated his wish to de-emphasize abortions in Catholic teachings. This may mean that more women will be given access to reproductive healthcare without the Church’s involvement. This example shows how difficult it can be in Brazil to get an abortion even when fitting the legal criteria, and just how involved the Catholic Church can be in the matter.

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45 Ibid.
46 This excommunication was later argued in a statement by Brazilian bishops as not okay.
The Catholic Church is not the only church with strong societal and cultural powers in Brazil. In recent years, both the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches have risen in numbers of followers. Both of these churches currently hold substantial political power. In 2013, the biggest public demonstration in all of Brazil was not one of its numerous political protests, but instead it was a March for Jesus rally of more than 800,000 people in São Paulo.\(^{48}\) These churches hold similar beliefs to the Catholic Church in terms of reproductive rights.

Despite all of this, there is still not a strong push for legal abortions in Brazil.\(^{49}\) President Dilma Rousseff and Marina Silva, political competitors, both have remained silent on the issue of abortion during the recent presidential election. Both in the past have made different statements. In 2007, Rousseff indicted that she was for abortion law liberalization. In a similar vein, Silva previously stated that she would support a public referendum on the matter. However, abortion is still a taboo topic in Brazil. Political scientist David Fleischer argued that they do not speak about abortion because it would give neither of them a political advantage.\(^{50}\) Arguably, Rousseff has made strides towards abortion law liberalization, as argued by João Lago in a pro-life article, by her choosing the activist Eleonora Menicucci de Oliveira as a head of Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres (SPM –Women’s Policy Secretariat). De Oliveira is an active pro-choice feminist who claims she had two abortions and recommends abortion for all women who feel that a child is inconvenient for them at the moment or incompatible with their lifestyle.\(^{51}\)

Brazilian women have also worked in other ways around the system to get legal abortions. For one, Brazil has one of the highest rates in the world for anencephaly


\(^{49}\) “As Women Die from Illegal Abortions in Brazil…”

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) João Lago, “What Dilma Rousseff Really Thinks about Abortion” translated by Olga Tiki (Viva a Vida, c. 2010).
pregnancies. Anencephaly is a birth defeat where the fetus’ cranium is missing a large portion of it, and if the fetus is born, it does not survive long. Women have been using this as a track to get legal abortions, because as a way of relieving the women’s pain, the Penal Code has been adapted to not include judicial review in terms of anencephaly-linked abortions. This mean does not help women with fetuses with other birth defects. However, it is important because it is also a way to lessen the restriction of seeing an abortion for many women. As well, abortion activists have also spoken for legalizing abortion by looking towards the words of the law itself and arguing how “health” can refer to also mental health of the woman.\(^\text{52}\)

For many, the right to abortion stands as a right for a woman to her own body and this claim for full control over her body must be acknowledged by the state. She should be able to decide whether or not she should go through pregnancy, childbirth, etc. This right to do what she wants to her own body extends further to plastic surgery and its effects on beauty, as many women feel that they have the right to enhance their body to their beauty desires. This right is the key concept connecting abortion to plastic surgery in women’s work for equal citizenship and rights.

*Eugenics, Plastic Surgery, and Beauty in Brazil*

One of the main battlegrounds women have to conquer for equality in Brazil is Brazil’s cultural emphasis on beauty, because control over one’s body is control over one’s political identity. Beauty, according to the person, can either act as a goal or as a means for a goal (economically, politically, etc.).\(^\text{53}\) It further becomes dynamic through plastic surgery. However, it can only be dynamic if the person has the economic means for plastic surgery. A poorer person is left in the frozen state of either being beautiful or not, while a wealthier

\(^{52}\) “Limitations of Advocacy and Exceptions to the Criminal Law in Brazil.”

\(^{53}\) I will detail full examples of how this is the case later in the paper.
person can add to their beauty. This means that beauty also becomes a means of social belonging. Moreover, the rich can use beauty as a way to reinforce the social economic hierarchy.

This idea that plastic surgery is used to further oneself in society is not the only argument as to why people go through the process. Plastic surgery can only be used for a person to fit into society. This idea is prevalent when noting the sheer number of reconstructive surgeries. However, I argue that this belief is not as important as the desire to improve in society through plastic surgery.

As a result of the eugenics movements and neo-Lamarckian eugenics, there is a strong belief system in Brazil that “beauty equals health,” which has lead to the high rates of plastic surgery in the country. This section will look at the history of eugenics, the history of plastic surgery, and the idea of beauty in Brazil in terms of how they affect women. It will further look at how women use plastic surgery and beauty as a medical means to achieve gendered citizenship and equality.

Brazil’s eugenics movement has traits that set it apart, ideologically and scientifically, from the well-known Nazi eugenics and many well-known Anglo-Saxon cases. From 1900 until 1940, Brazil began undergoing prominent social and political changes causes by industrialization, immigration from Europe, and urbanization with its many changes of government and growth in cities. These changes are commonly associated with the rise of eugenics around the world. The first eugenics movement was founded in 1918, and the history of the movements continues because of a “general enthusiasm for science as a “sign” for cultural modernity.”

54 “Eugenics in Brazil, 1917-1940,” 111.
55 Ibid., 113.
Brazilian eugenics stands around the idea that “to sanitize is to eugenize,” which comes from neo-Lamarckian scientific concepts. A neo-Lamarckian eugenicist has the idea that hereditary can be improved through inheritance of “nurture,” which assumes that improvements on “nurture” can improve hereditary fitness over time.\textsuperscript{56} In a simpler sense, this is the idea that characteristics developed during one organism’s life can be passed onto its children, e.g., a man who lifts weights to improve how large his arms are would be able to pass to his children larger arms. This movement led to a strong belief that if Brazil wanted to compete globally, it needed to be a country of beautiful people.\textsuperscript{57} As neo-Lamarckian links hygiene with eugenics, the idea of beauty equaling health was formed. Therefore through the popularity of the work of Gilberto Freyre, many Brazilians believed that if Brazil were a country of healthy looking people, it would be a top country in the world.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, this neo-Lamarckian belief system is heavily linked to the high prevalence of plastic surgery in Brazil because health is of such importance in Brazilian culture.

With this strong notion in Brazilian culture of “beauty equals health,” Brazil has become not only the plastic surgery training capital of the world where people from all over the world go to learn the practice, but has become one of the countries most linked to plastic surgery and beauty.\textsuperscript{59} But why is beauty of such importance? As stated by Alvaro Jarrin, “beauty enables gender, race and class differences without being subsumed by any of them, because the embodied perceptions of beauty are always in excess of beauty as defined by discourse.”\textsuperscript{60} This discourse, controlled arguably by the populace reaffirming the beauty standard, allows for beauty to empower its hierarchies, where European appearances and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{56} Ibid., 119-121.
\bibitem{58} Ibid.
\bibitem{59} Ibid., 25.
\bibitem{60} Ibid., 15.
\end{thebibliography}
standards have become much more popular in Brazil, but still allow for differences in beauty to exist. The prevalence of plastic surgery in Brazil remains on the top in the world. Plastic surgery is even viewed as “rites of passage,” marking “milestones” for young women: puberty, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menopause. Despite the increase of the number of male patients, women remain the vast majority of people seeking plastic surgery, which marks plastic surgery as far more of a women’s issue than a man’s in Brazil.\(^{61}\) Surveys have found that in Brazil 64% of female university students desired a smaller body despite whatever their weight was. Even more, already 10% of college women had gone through cosmetic surgery with over 50% reporting that they planned to in the future.\(^{62}\)

During the first decade of the twentieth century with the large movement of Europeans, specifically the large movement of German and Italian immigrants, into the country, which caused a political shift as elites began to make changes to Brazil to make the country more European via the creation of European-like cities and the changes to the standard of beauty. This Europeanization of Brazil shifted the national beauty standard towards a whitening of the country because many of the immigrants held a higher status politically that other attempted to emulate.\(^{63}\) Reflecting on her life during an interview with Jarrin, Rosa, a fifty-one-year-old Brazilian, described the national beauty standard:

> You hear a lot about the padrão [standard] – it’s that sensual, big-breasted woman, but it has nothing to do with me... You have really two [standards], first the curvy mulatta, a padrão for export. Women enlarge their buttocks and their breasts, but it’s losing one’s good sense… Young girls go after the curvy ideal... but they are looking for padrões that are not theirs. It’s crazy.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 183.  
\(^{62}\) “Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating in Three Cultures,” 681.  
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 40.
We have somewhat lost the good sense of following your own padrão de beleza [beauty standard].

Rosa further reflects negatively on the beauty standard and shows how prevalent it is in young Brazilian girls. The point of the standard is for Brazilians to be viewed worldwide as a certain beauty stereotype. This results in many Brazilian women attempting to achieve that appearance themselves through either dieting regimes or plastic surgery. The self-betterment of an individual in society is seen through an appearance lens in which a person becomes more attractive to achieve higher status as opposed to higher education in which a person gets more education to achieve better life opportunities.

Beauty in Brazil is not only an aspect on the people but is also a leading industry. Overall spending on beauty products, beauty services, and personal hygiene products have increased immensely in the past ten years. Beauty as a commodity remains high in Brazil today with the beauty industry as an economic workhouse. Beauty is further quantified with the usage of ideal measurements, like clothing size, breast size, body fat ratios, and so forth, placed through the media.

With the whitening of beauty in Brazil through Europeanization, non-white beauty became something of an exception found only in rare examples. Even further, the media portrayal of criminals remains black-washed with the mulatta depicted at the face of a bad

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64 Ibid., 70.
65 "Brazil: Beauty Market Reaches R$53.9bil" (Brazil, Brazil Econômico, 10 June 2013).
Overall spending in cosmetics, personal hygiene products and beauty services rose 124%, climbing from R$26.5bil ten years ago to an expected R$59.3bil in 2013. Of this, middle class, average income classes will be responsible for almost half of the increase with 34.2% from the upper classes and 18.4% from the lower classes. Furthermore, in a survey on beauty saloons in 2013, statistics show that 78% of the women from upper classes went to beauty saloons in the past 30 days, in comparison to 56% of the average and 43% of the lower classes.
66 Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex, and Plastic Surgery in Brazil, 68.
67 “Cosmetic Citizenship,” 55.
Many black Brazilians, through the rising Pentecostal movements in Brazil, have fought against these perceptions of beauty as the religious movement focuses on the beauty of the soul and not that of the physical body. While this has not changed the Brazilian concept of beauty in society completely, this idea has affected members of the movement substantially, because many began to reject the beauty culture in Brazil and only work for spiritual beauty. Furthermore, the Brazilian beauty standard shifted from the guitar-shaped body with large full hips to the Western ideal as exemplified by Gisele Bundchen with a thin body and large breasts.

Beauty is also heavily associated in Brazil with success. A successful woman is seen as a thin, perfect woman with sexual attractiveness. Attractiveness is further viewed as power. Alexander Edmonds, a leading cultural anthropologist focusing on beauty as a cultural norm in Brazil, even goes as far as to state that attractiveness has such a strong social effect that it short-circuits other powers, such as education. Beauty is also used as a social and economic strategy because it is a sign of wealth, power, and health. In this way, it is also seen as a means to a better life, especially when considering modeling as a profession. Girls are often told that they “look like a model” and can use that to better their lifestyles. This even becomes a goal and then a reality for some.

Beauty further affects people through class divides and aging. Aging for example, according to Edmonds’ interviewee Tatiana, is seen as “not cool” and something that “[jerks] do.” Women find themselves “locking [their body] up tight” so that they can remain youthful

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68 Ibid., 77.
71 Ibid., 680.
72 *Pretty Modern*, 17.
73 Ibid., 215.
looking.\textsuperscript{74} Poorer classes likewise suffer from the beauty ideal. As it is considered more difficult to become beautiful without plastic surgery when poor, plastic surgery becomes a means to “matter” in the world. Beauty is understood among the working class as a way to affirm their relevance in society.\textsuperscript{75} One working class man in an interview with Jarrin even stated:

> I believe there are social classes where there are more beautiful people. I believe that the more money you have, the greater the probability that you are more beautiful. For various reasons: you eat better, you lead a better life, you can get plastic surgery... Of course, there are beautiful poor people and very ugly rich people. But most rich people I see are beautiful, and when they are not naturally beautiful they make themselves beautiful.\textsuperscript{76}

However, as argued by Edmonds, plastic surgery may not be a means to move up in class. With the use of interviews, he shows how lower class women understand the real barriers they face, such as economic problems, something that cannot be fixed with plastic surgery, and that plastic surgery was used to fix a psychological discomfort.\textsuperscript{77} They recode social mobility in terms of beautification.

In his dissertation, Jarrin further argues that the poor’s experience in Brazil in trying to accomplish beauty leads to the common assertion of their “right to be beautiful,” with the claim that beauty is a basic component of human dignity that should be available to all.\textsuperscript{78} Beauty is viewed as a right since it is so heavily needed in society that without it, people struggle far more culturally, politically, and economically. This right comes from both the

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 9.  
\textsuperscript{75} “Cosmetic Citizenship,” 20.  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 83.  
\textsuperscript{77} Pretty Modern, 46.  
\textsuperscript{78} “Cosmetic Citizenship,” 93.
state and the populace. The government provides access to beauty through subsidized reconstructive surgeries. Furthermore, many also self-fund this right with the beauty market, as mentioned previously. This Brazilian concept of the “right to be beautiful” has led to the idea of “aesthetic medicine,” the fusion of beauty and health through plastic surgery. *Reparadora*, to repair, has become a common word used by the lower classes of Brazil as a means to argue their right to beauty since they would be repairing their bodies and not enhancing them. With this, lower classes use the government’s subsidies to fund their believed right.79

This idea of the right to be beautiful relates strongly to Caldeira’s idea of the unbound body. By asking for the right to become more beautiful, Brazilians ask for agency over their own bodies, i.e., for the bound body. I argue that this challenges the unbound body, which many institutions symbolically own, as it is seen as territory of the state. The populace retaliates by asking for their bodies to be given back to them by asking for their right to change their bodies to what they believe is beautiful. The right to be beautiful becomes something more than just social and economic but also political through this view of citizenship.

There is a constant battle between reconstructive and cosmetic surgery that comes from the history of legitimizing plastic surgery in Brazil where plastic surgeons argued that their surgeries were necessary because of the psychological healings that they could perform.80 Because reconstructive plastic surgeries are heavily subsidized by the Brazilian state, this psychological argument is a means actively used by Brazilians to argue to the state that their surgeries are needed. This difference between reconstructive and cosmetic plastic

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79 Ibid., 86.
surgery is further separated by the class divides as cosmetic surgery is viewed as a luxury and something of the higher classes while reconstructive is viewed as lesser and of the lower classes.  

Moreover, plastic surgery notably solves the sexuality versus maternity conflict. Much of women’s plastic surgery is linked to female genital cosmetic surgeries (FGCS) where women have plastic surgery to improve their sex lives, either as a result of childbirth or for personal reasons. Vaginoplasty is marketed to give women “multiple orgasms,” for example. Likewise, “Intimate plastic (plastic surgery)” is used to “correct” “vaginal widening” after childbirth. Furthermore, a desire for attractive genitals has led to Brazil having one of the largest rates for Cesarean sections and for episiotomy in the world, as women do not want to be “ruined” after childbirth. C-sections happened considerably more often than needed and trend in the poorest regions as a radical step for birth control because they can request sterilization performed during the C-section. C-sections occur at a rate of 44% nationwide and 77% in national hospitals. Furthermore, they are used as a means to maintain beauty, as the woman’s genital area does not need to be impacted by childbirth. Episiotomy, the surgical incision made in the perineal muscle during delivery, is likewise at a much higher rate in Brazil than other countries and is used as a means to avoid the “ragged tear” that could happen during delivery with a “clean cut.”

While plastic surgery arguably does improve the lives and social standings of Brazilians, there are still many issues associated with it. Brazilian psychologists argue that women need to begin accepting who they are instead of plastic surgery to fix their issues. An interviewed plastic surgeon doctor, Dr. Machado, further states, "When people with no body

81 “Cosmetic Citizenship,” 70.
82 “Can Medicine Be Aesthetic?” 241.
83 City of Walls, 368.
84 “Can Medicine Be Aesthetic?” 240-42.
deformities see themselves as deformed, it is a pathology; a disease called 'body dysmorphic disorder.' These people incessantly search for surgeries to change something they don't want to accept in their bodies. This is not a physical problem.” In opposition to the Brazilian psychologists, she continues, "We believe that if you are a stable person, seeking to improve something about your body for your happiness, it is all right. But this should not be based on social expectations or guilt about the way you look.”

Patients have a lot of agency with plastic surgery. Often they actively seek out plastic surgeons. If they want their nose changed, their skin whitened, and so forth, they will pursue the surgeons to fix these problems. However, these “free choices” potentially straddle the line of agency and cultural coercion. Moreover, assumptions that Brazilian women are more liberated because of their ability to expose their body and present their body are incorrect as these can also be viewed as restrictions for women.

Plastic surgery and the concepts of beauty present many issues for women in Brazil. The decisions for plastic surgery as a response to real or perceived appearance flaws or undesirable features suggest a high prevalence of body dissatisfaction in Brazil. Likewise, women sense that they may be economically disadvantaged if they are less beautiful. Studies of Brazilian newspapers and wanted ads show that 70% of service jobs seek women with an “excellent figure” and to have “excellent physical appearance.”

Plastic surgery itself can be dangerous. In “Aesthetic Medicine,” Edmonds weighs the risks and benefits of plastic surgery focusing on physical and psychological gains and

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86 Pretty Modern, 183.
89 Ibid., 678.
shortcomings. Similarly, in the article, “Médicos Alertam para os Riscos das Aplicações de Toxina Botulinica,” Antonio Marinho, discusses the effects of a toxin treatment, which is supposed to disguise wrinkles and is used frequently in Brazil. There is a suspicion that this toxin causes both health problems, such as new wrinkles or it spreads to the muscles, and psychological problems, such as dependence to the treatment. Dermatologists in Brazil argue, however, that it is safe. This is something, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) disagreed with in its issuing of a warning against its adverse effects.

Even women in leadership positions face many problems in relation to beauty and plastic surgery. In 2006, Justice Ellen Gracie Northfleet, 58, was formally elected president of the Federal Supreme Court (STF). She was the first woman nominated to the Supreme Court in the history of Brazil. In response to this, Justice Jobim said that Justice Northfleet "will know how to contribute with her knowledge, her administrative competence - and also her charm, elegance and beauty - to the relevant exercise of the court presidency." And he added that the president of the Republic will find it difficult in the eventual choice of other women for the Supreme Court "because a standard of charm and beauty was established that must be respected." The focus of Justice Jobim’s comments was on Justice Northfleet’s appearance and little on her accomplishments.

Current President Dilma Rousseff faced similar problems during her campaigns and two elections into office. Rousseff was the protégé of Brazil’s beloved former president, Luiz Insacio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party. Rousseff has not been able to match Lula’s popularity and has only narrowly won her second term at office. Most importantly, though,

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90 “Can Medicine Be Aesthetics,” 234.
91 Antonio Marinho, “Médicos Alertam para os Riscos das Aplicações de Toxina Botulinica” (Brazil: O Globo, 22 March 2008).
92 “Woman is Elected as President of the Federal Supreme Court of Brazil; Justice Ellen Gracie is First Woman in STF Presidency” (Brazil, Gazeta Mercantil Online, 16 March 2006).
Rousseff underwent a complete makeover including plastic surgery as a way to win public support.\(^{93}\) Dilma Rousseff’s extreme makeover began in 2009 and continued during her campaign in 2010.

The first step of the metamorphosis came on April 2009, when she submitted herself to a dental treatment to fix her teeth and get a gentler smile. It included aesthetic procedures such as dental alignment, clearance and filling. The move was succeeded by plastic surgery in December 2009. A lifting and a blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery) helped her acquire a more youthful look and less crabby expression than she used to carry when she commanded the Presidential Staff Office during the Lula government.\(^{94}\)

All of this is important for understanding what Rousseff has done to improve her campaign. She needed to look less “crabby” and “gentler” to look more feminine and less opposing. She even had her eyebrows changed to appear less aggressive. Rousseff, overall, needed to drastically change her appearance to be successful in her campaign. Arguably, she would not have been successful without having made the changes.

The cultural norms that are used in relation to beauty and plastic surgery are means for Brazilian women to further their success and work towards equality. This is done through bettering their appearances physically so that society takes them more seriously in economic and political positions, as highlighted by Dilma Rousseff’s example. Though women are coerced in ways leading to their plastic surgeries, women also have the agency to change what they want by pursuing plastic surgery as a right. And as beauty is heavily linked to success and health, a way for women to work within the system for equality is by improving

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\(^{93}\) “Dilma Rousseff: Brazil’s “Iron Lady,”” (BBC News Online, 16 Oct 2014).
their physical appearances. At the same time, these moves also reinforce the differentiated citizenship needed in which different actors must find their own access to citizenship.

In this paper, I have used Holston’s concept of “differentiated citizenship” to argue that women pursue a path to citizenship that is coded in different terms. That is, they ask for political rights in the form of rights to their own bodies, understood and pursued either as a right to be beautiful via plastic surgery or a right to abortion to pursue motherhood in their own terms. At the same time, I contend that it is precisely this distinct strategy of coding political rights as rights to one’s body that becomes a circular mechanism that reinforces a prevalent status quo: the social inequalities rooted in a patriarchal society.

In this way, abortion and plastic surgery both act as two sides of the same coin when it comes to women’s equality. Abortion is heavily stigmatized in Brazilian culture. It is illegal. Nonetheless, a large portion of the female population has had at least one abortion. On the other side, plastic surgery is far more accepted in Brazilian culture. It is legal and even subsided by the government. Even more, a huge portion of the population has had at least one surgery. Plastic surgery reinforces the spectrum while abortion is always considered wrong by society.

Women in Brazil do not have the right to abortion. However, they have worked around this in notable ways. One way is through self-abortions or illegal abortions by a third party. While this way is one of the most common ways, this way is extremely dangerous. Another way is through anencephaly-linked abortions, which are legal and do not need to go through a judicial review. As abortion is not legal, though, and as politicians are often not openly campaigning to legalize them, women still have much further to go for this equality. Therefore, in terms of abortion, Brazilian women do not have full citizenship.
Instead, pregnancy and childbirth place women in the category of “other” citizenship, as described by James Holston. Because of these things, women have difficulty in the economy, as there is 100% paid maternity leave for 17 weeks.\textsuperscript{95} This may possibly lead to reluctance to hire women. Similarly, women have difficulty in politics and in society because women are often expected to spend their time in the domestic sphere. Therefore, abortion and women’s ability to work around the legality of the system to get them when needed is a medical means women have used for equal citizenship, though it has yet to be achieved.

Plastic surgery is very different from abortion, though they are both used for a similar end. Many see plastic surgery as a right. Women use plastic surgery to their advantage, as beauty is idealized in Brazilian culture. Women fit themselves into the stereotypes of beauty with the claim of “I fit the norm, I deserve equal rights.” Similarly, as especially highlighted by the example of Rousseff, women use it for political gains.

Considering the idea of the “unbound body” in Brazil where it is a right of citizenship, women use plastic surgery to assert their rights through the gender difference. Women make gains as the “other” citizen by working within the social norms of beauty. In this way, women have gained some rights within the idea of “gendered citizenship.”

\textit{Conclusion}

Because the physical body in Brazil acts as an outlet for a better life, women in Brazil have been able to improve their rights and work towards political, economic, and social equality through medical means. In the past century, women have been able to make incredible strides in women’s rights. Throughout the paper, I have used James Holston’s concept of “differentiated citizenship” to show how society treats women as the “other”

\textsuperscript{95}“Maternity Leave, Paternity Leave,” \textit{HRW}. Accessed 27 March 2015.
Men are also given paid paternity leave but this is only for five days, a substantially smaller time.
citizen. Furthermore, I used Teresa Caldeira’s idea of the “unbound body” to contend that the body acts as a physical ground for women’s fight for rights. I argue that within the idea of “gendered citizenship,” women have been working for citizenship in relation to their gender differences that relate to how men and women contrast. The two medical means that achieve this are abortion and plastic surgery. Despite abortion remaining illegal in Brazil in most circumstances, women have been able to work around the system to obtain abortions. One way they have done this is through their battle to not need judicial reviews if there is the specific birth defect of anencephaly. With this, women can avoid the process and stigmatizations of getting an abortion, and it can remain in the privacy of the doctor’s office. The right for an abortion stands as a right for a woman to have full control of her body. This right to control her body extends to the right to plastic surgery. With plastic surgery, women assert their right to be beautiful as a way to gain equality within the system. Moreover, as people often equate beauty to health, the government extends this right to beauty through subsidies in reconstructive surgeries. In this paper, I explain how these two facets are of a much more complex phenomenon and how they exhibit the ways that gender and citizenship come together. They further demonstrate by highlighting how the wealthy can use these means to reinforce social and economic hierarchies that these processes are culturally contrived. In a remarkable way, Brazilian women have been able to fight for equality.
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