



Genital Cosmetic Surgery and Sexuality: Mini-Review

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Abstract

Background: In recent years, there has been a boom in interest in genital cosmetic surgery as people strive to improve their genital image, and, therefore, surgical procedures for the female genital area have been increasing rapidly. The reason for the increasing demand may be the lack of accurate information about normal genital appearance and the spread of misinformation on social media and the internet.

Objective: The aim of this review is to determine the prevalence of female genital cosmetic surgery, to investigate the recommendations of associations, and to review the literature on this subject. This paper also investigates the complicated link between genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality, looking at the reasons for such surgeries, their influence on sexual well-being, and the ethical issues surrounding this emerging profession.

Conclusion: The current review paper draws insights into the intricate interplay between genital aesthetics and sexuality through a multidimensional examination, as well as sheds light on the ramifications for individuals and society as a whole. By analyzing the existing literature, it was determined that there is an increase in female genital cosmetic surgery. Although these operations cannot be recommended for adolescent groups, studies have found that adolescents also undergo genital cosmetic surgery. It is recommended that all women who want to undergo genital cosmetic surgery should undergo a psychological evaluation and counselling beforehand.

Keywords: Genital Cosmetic Surgery; Body Image; Sexuality, Labiaplasty

Introduction

Body image is a concept that includes individuals' health status, physical appearance and skills, attitudes and perceptions about their sexuality and constitutes the physical quality of the self [1]. It is known that body image is related to sexual functions [2,3]. When considered in this context, it can be said that body image is a factor affecting genital aesthetic operations. Genital aesthetics is the general name of surgical or non-surgical procedures performed to improve the appearance or functionality of the external genital area of women. These procedures are performed to address aesthetic concerns or, in some cases, to solve functional problems in the inner or outer parts of the vagina. Vaginal aesthetic procedures

may include G-spot amplification, clitoral hood reduction, labia majora augmentation, labia majora reduction, labia minora augmentation, labia majora reduction, laser vaginal tightening, laser for genitourinary syndrome of menopause, vaginoplasty, vulvar/perianal bleaching, liposculpture, and hymenoplasty [4].

The convergence of genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality is a complicated subject that includes both personal goals for physical change and cultural conventions about sexual attractiveness [5]. As the demand for genital cosmetic operations grows, it is critical to investigate the underlying motives, psychological ramifications, and ethical features of these interventions [6]. This essay seeks to

clarify the complicated link between genital aesthetics and sexuality by investigating the mechanisms that drive this phenomenon and its implications for sexual well-being and identity. The concept of body image encompasses not only individuals' physical health and appearance but also their skills, attitudes, and perceptions regarding sexuality, constituting a tangible manifestation of self. Indeed, studies have shown a correlation between body image and sexual functioning. Thus, it can be inferred that body image plays a pivotal role in influencing decisions regarding genital aesthetic procedures [7].

Genital aesthetics, a broad category encompassing both surgical and non-surgical interventions, seeks to enhance the appearance and functionality of the external genital area in women. These procedures address aesthetic concerns or resolve functional issues affecting the inner or outer aspects of the vagina. Examples include labiaplasty (reduction of the labia minora), labia majora augmentation, clitoral hood correction, vaginoplasty (vaginal tightening), G-spot enhancement, perineoplasty (reshaping of the perineal region), and hymenoplasty (reconstruction of the hymen) [8].

The proliferation of surgical interventions targeting female genitalia in recent years has been notable. Several factors contribute to this surge in demand, including misinformation about normal genital appearance, the pervasive influence of social media and the internet, and the spotlight placed on anatomical variances due to widespread pubic hair removal practices. Exposure to digitally altered images of the vulva, particularly on social media platforms, can distort women's perceptions of normalcy and desirability, potentially swaying their decision to undergo labiaplasty. Often, such procedures are sought by individuals grappling with aesthetic or psychological concerns [9]. (Gomes et al., 2019).

Based on the literature about cosmetic surgery and genital esthetic, this review aims to determine the prevalence of female genital cosmetic surgery, investigate the recommendations of associations, and review the literature on this subject. This paper also investigates the complicated link between genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality, looking at the reasons for such surgeries, their influence on sexual well-being, and the ethical issues surrounding this emerging profession.

Literature Review

Women may seek vaginal aesthetic procedures due to various conditions, such as irregularities in labial shape or size, laxity or prominence of the labia majora, or sexual dysfunctions like difficulty achieving orgasm or experiencing pain during intercourse [10]. However, influenced by societal standards perpetuated by the media, many now aspire to achieve an idealized notion of beauty even in their genital region. Yet, the next four questions arise that will be discussed below.

The first question: What are the motivations for genital cosmetic surgery?

Individuals are motivated to undertake genital cosmetic surgery for a variety of reasons, including self-image, sexual confidence, and

social expectations. While some people seek these treatments to treat practical issues like discomfort or pain, others are motivated by aesthetic preferences or a desire to conform to perceived cultural beauty standards. According to research, dissatisfaction with genital appearance may have a significant impact on self-esteem and sexual happiness, leading people to seek surgical procedures to improve their perceived beauty and sexual confidence [11].

The second question: What is the impact of cosmetic surgery on sexual well-being?

The link between genital cosmetic surgery and sexual well-being is complicated and varied, with results that vary greatly across people. While some people report increased sexual pleasure and better body image after surgery, others may feel disappointed or dissatisfied if their expectations are not realized. Furthermore, the psychological impacts of genital cosmetic surgery can impair sexual performance and intimacy, demanding extensive prior counseling and aftercare. It is critical to remember that sexual well-being includes not just physical satisfaction but also emotional and psychological dimensions, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive methods to address genital aesthetic problems [12].

The third question: What are the ethical considerations of cosmetic surgery?

The ethical considerations for genital cosmetic surgery include informed consent, patient autonomy, and cultural pressures. Critics claim that medicalizing genital appearance reinforces unattainable beauty standards and pathologizes natural variances, potentially leading to unneeded procedures and mental damage. Furthermore, concerns have been expressed about the monetization of sexuality and the reinforcement of gender standards through cosmetic operations. As a result, ethical principles and professional standards must promote patient well-being while ensuring that procedures are based on true therapeutic necessity rather than cosmetic improvement [13].

The fourth question: Should every woman desiring genital aesthetics undergo surgery?

In response to this question the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) have issued various recommendations, which are outlined in (Table 1) [14]. Surgical procedures for the female genital area have been increasing rapidly in recent years. Many factors may play a role in the increasing demand, including a lack of accurate information about normal genital appearance, the proliferation of misinformation on social media and the internet, and anatomical differences emphasized by the increasing practice of pubic hair removal. However, exposure to images of altered vulva, especially on social media, can change women's perceptions of what is normal or desirable and may influence women's decision to undergo labiaplasty. Such operations are often favored by women with aesthetic or psychological concerns. Individuals may apply for vaginal aesthetic procedures due to conditions such as an abnormal labia shape or size, sagging or voluminous labia majora, orgasm problems or pain during

sexual intercourse. However, with the influence of the media, many women now want their genital area to be beautiful. Should every woman who wants to have genital aesthetics be operated on?

There are various recommendations published by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) (Table 1).

Table 1: Recommendations RCOG and SOGC.

Women should be informed about normal genital structures	Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)
Women should be informed about the lack of data supporting the effectiveness of genital cosmetic surgery and its potential complications,	American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist (ACOG)
Medical, sexual and gynaecological history of women who want genital aesthetic surgery should be taken and it should be determined that there is no sexual or psychological dysfunction, the possibility of coercion or exploitation should not be ignored	The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)
Psychological counselling should be recommended for problems such as body image distress	RCOG
Genital aesthetic surgery should not be performed for women under the age of 18, regardless of their consent	RCOG
In addition to counselling focusing on normal genital variations, counselling on the possibility of undesirable consequences of genital plastic surgery should be provided	SOGC
All women seeking genital cosmetic surgery should be assessed for the presence of sexual dysfunction (e.g. counselling) and other non-surgical interventions to improve sexual function	ACOG
It is recommended to consider ethical issues related to the marketing of genital aesthetic surgery	ACOG, 2019
Advertising of genital aesthetic surgery should be avoided; adolescents should not be offered genital aesthetic surgery services	SOGC

The Reasons for Genital Aesthetics

The motivations underlying genital aesthetic procedures are intricately linked to perceptions of sexuality among adults. Surgical interventions targeting the genital area are meticulously tailored to enhance both sexual satisfaction and perceived attractiveness. Women who harbor dissatisfaction with the appearance of their genitalia often grapple with feelings of shame, diminished self-confidence during sexual encounters, and heightened anxiety stemming from apprehensions regarding their partner's potential negative perceptions [15]. Furthermore, for some individuals, sexual intercourse may engender physical discomfort and irritation, rendering it an undesirable experience. Consequently, a considerable subset of women unable to attain sexual fulfillment turn to genital plastic surgery as a recourse [16].

Initially conceived to address medical concerns such as the repair of episiotomy scars, excision of tumors, and urinary incontinence, the practice of genital aesthetics has evolved into a distinct surgical discipline known as genioplasty [16]. Gynecologists, obstetricians, and plastic surgeons collaborate in the provision of procedures aimed at rectifying perceived defects or dissatisfactions concerning the genital region, particularly in the aftermath of vaginal childbirth.

What are the rates of genital cosmetic surgery in the world?

The term aesthetics within the medical domain pertains to methodologies employed for rectifying or enhancing a deficient organ [16]. Global statistics indicate a notable escalation in the prevalence of aesthetic procedures, with a 5.4% surge observed in 2018 compared to the preceding year, culminating in an overall prevalence rate of 18.7%. Leading the charge in this domain are

the United States of America, with 4,361,867 individuals, and Brazil, with 2,267,405 individuals, representing the countries where aesthetic procedures are most extensively practiced [17]. In Turkey, the prevalence of aesthetic procedures, encompassing both surgical and non-surgical modalities, stands at three out of every 100 individuals [17]. Notably, a gender-based analysis reveals a pronounced predominance of aesthetic procedures among women, accounting for 87.4% of the total procedures conducted [18].

Within the purview of genital aesthetics, the British Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology Association reports a total of 266 genital aesthetic interventions conducted between 2008 and 2012, with a notable proportion being performed on individuals below the age of 14. Moreover, data from the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom evinces a fivefold increase in labiaplasty procedures over a span of nine years, spanning from 2001 to 2010. Concurrently, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons documents a substantial surge in vaginal rejuvenation procedures, with a notable 30% increase observed from 793 procedures in 2005 to 1030 procedures in 2006 [19]. These statistics underscore a growing trend in the realm of genital cosmetic surgery, shedding light on evolving societal perceptions and preferences regarding genital aesthetics. Further research is warranted to comprehensively elucidate the underlying factors driving this phenomenon and its potential implications on individual well-being and societal dynamics.

Approach to Genital Aesthetic Surgery

Genital aesthetic surgery is primarily aimed at enhancing individuals' sexual well-being. The correlation between body satisfaction and sexual behaviors underscores the significance of addressing dissatisfaction with one's body, as individuals harboring

such sentiments tend to exhibit heightened self-consciousness during sexual encounters, potentially diminishing their sexual interest [2]. Research indicates that individuals with greater body satisfaction report more frequent sexual experiences, encounter fewer sexual difficulties, and perceive themselves as more sexually appealing compared to those with lower levels of satisfaction [3,20]. For instance, Træen et al. (2016) conducted a cross-sectional investigation among Norwegian young adults aged 18-29 years, revealing a significant association between body image and sexual satisfaction, particularly among women. Genital surgery may thus be considered in addressing sexual dysfunctions experienced by individuals with negative body image perceptions, especially about genital appearance.

Psychosocial factors, alongside mental health considerations, play a pivotal role in individuals' decisions regarding aesthetic surgery. Hence, thorough psychosocial assessment of female applicants is deemed essential alongside physical evaluation [21]. As with any surgical intervention, genital aesthetic surgery entails psychological stress. Thus, providing evidence-based information concerning normal genital anatomy, the surgical procedure, anticipated postoperative anatomical outcomes,

as well as potential complications is imperative for informed decision-making, involving both the woman and her partner [21]. It is noteworthy that genital aesthetic surgery is not advocated for adolescents. In a study involving 136 adolescent female students, educational interventions utilizing videos and photographs were implemented to enhance understanding of the variations in normal genital morphology and foster positive attitudes towards genital appearance. The findings suggest that educational interventions, such as informative videos, can positively influence adolescents' perceptions regarding genital aesthetics [22]. Consequently, it is recommended that adolescents expressing interest in genital aesthetic procedures receive comprehensive education and counseling before pursuing such interventions.

Web of Science search of the existing literature utilizing three terms labiaplasty, female genital surgery, and sexuality the top ten papers cited highest found through the literature search are listed in (Table 1). The citations of the ten top papers in WoS were also checked in Scholar Google database [23]. (Table 2) shows that the paper titled "A Large Multicenter Outcome Study of Female Genital Plastic Surgery" studied by Goodman et al. has the highest citation both in WoS and Scholar Google.

Table 2: The top Ten Research about genital Cosmetic Surgery and sexuality.

Author(s)	Title	WoS Citations	Scholar google citations
Goodman et al.	A Large Multicenter Outcome Study of Female Genital Plastic Surgery	163	308
Alter, G. J.	Aesthetic Labia Minora and Clitoral Hood Reduction Using Extended Central Wedge Resection	149	252
Braun, V.	Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery: A Critical Review of Current Knowledge and Contemporary Debates	119	220
Choi & Kim	A new method for aesthetic reduction of labia minora (the deepithelialized reduction labiaplasty)	112	261
Hodgkinson& Hait	Aesthetic vaginal labiaplasty	101	219
Goodman, MP	Female Genital Cosmetic and Plastic Surgery: A Review	98	223
Goodman et al.	Evaluation of Body Image and Sexual Satisfaction in Women Undergoing Female Genital Plastic/Cosmetic Surgery	74	136
Puppo, V.	Anatomy and physiology of the clitoris, vestibular bulbs, and labia minora with a review of the female orgasm and the prevention of female sexual dysfunction	72	180
Tiefer, L.	Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery: Freakish or Inevitable? Analysis from Medical Marketing, Bioethics, and Feminist Theory	72	168
Goodman, MP	Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery	64	173

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality is a multifaceted tapestry woven with threads of individual aspirations, societal norms, and ethical considerations. At its core, this link is deeply intertwined with the complex interplay of personal identity and societal expectations regarding physical appearance and sexual desirability. For some individuals, genital cosmetic surgery represents an opportunity to address physical discomfort, enhance sexual satisfaction, or align their bodies with their gender identity. However, these procedures also raise profound questions about the influence of cultural ideals on body image and the extent to which individuals feel pressured to

conform to narrow standards of beauty.

Moreover, the connection between genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality underscores broader issues surrounding bodily autonomy and the medicalization of human sexuality. As these procedures become more commonplace, there is a risk of reducing diverse expressions of sexuality to a set of standardized aesthetic norms, potentially overshadowing the importance of individual experiences and preferences. Additionally, the commercialization of genital cosmetic surgery raises concerns about the ethical implications of treating intimate aspects of human anatomy as marketable commodities, potentially exploiting individuals' insecurities for financial gain [26-28].

Moving forward, it is imperative to approach the intersection of genital cosmetic surgery and sexuality with sensitivity, empathy, and a commitment to ethical practice. This necessitates acknowledging the diverse motivations and experiences of individuals seeking these procedures, as well as the broader societal forces that shape their decisions. A patient-centered approach that prioritizes informed consent, psychological well-being, and comprehensive sexual health is essential in navigating this complex terrain [29-31]. By fostering open dialogue, promoting diversity, and upholding ethical standards, we can strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment in which individuals are empowered to make decisions about their bodies and sexualities on their own terms.

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Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of Interest.

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