

Images of 'designer vaginas' in the media can encourage consideration of genital surgery

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More and more women are undergoing cosmetic genital surgery and the most popular of these procedures is labiaplasty, also known as "designer vagina" surgery. This procedure involves the reduction of the vaginal lips, known as the labia, so the labia do not protrude. Women who have had greater exposure to images of vaginas in the media are more likely to consider labiaplasty according to new research being presented at the Appearance Matters conference in Bristol on Wednesday 2 July 2014.

The labiaplasty study was conducted by Gemma Sharp and Professor Marika Tiggemann from the School of Psychology at Flinders University, Australia. The report indicates that close to 1 in 5 of the 351 women surveyed, aged between 18 and 69 years, had some interest in undergoing a labiaplasty procedure. The study also found that women who had greater exposure to images of female genitals through a range of media sources (television, internet, advertising, and pornography) were more likely to be dissatisfied with their own genital appearance and consider labiaplasty. Furthermore, the study found that a significant percentage of women had received negative comments from [romantic partners](#) about the appearance of their genitals and a similarly sizeable number of women had discussed genital appearance with their friends, and both of these were related to a desire to undergo labiaplasty.

Gemma Sharp explains, "Our study is the first to systematically examine the role of the media, romantic partners and friends on women's

consideration of labiaplasty. Our findings suggest a worrying trend of women becoming dissatisfied with the appearance of their genitals. We think that if women and their partners were made aware of the large variation in normal genital appearance this might help to alleviate some of their concerns about their own genitals."

Dr David Veale, Consultant Psychiatrist at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and the Priory Hospital North London, who is convening the genital surgery symposium at the Appearance Matters conference explains, "This study suggests that the media, romantic partners and friends are influential in shaping women's perceptions of their own genital appearance and decisions to undergo labiaplasty. It is possible that women (and their partners) are not aware that women in porn may have had surgical modification of their labia. Therefore, women who have perfectly normal labia may think they look abnormal compared to [women](#) who have been modified."

In addition to findings from the labiaplasty study, the Appearance Matters 6 conference will feature cutting edge research on visible difference, body image, cosmetic surgery, ethics, education, the [media](#), weight and provision of care.

Provided by University of the West of England

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