

Sara Rodrigues, MA Candidate  
The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism  
University of Western Ontario

**The Will to Orgasm:  
Vaginoplasty, Female Sexual 'Dysfunction'  
and the Biopolitics of Pleasure**

Since their introduction into the public consciousness in 1998 (Tiefer, 2008), requests for Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery (FGCS) have increased dramatically (Braun, 2009; Cartwright & Cardozo, 2008; Liao & Creighton, 2007). This group of procedures includes vaginoplasty, which involves the removal of 'excess' vaginal lining and the tightening of the surrounding tissues and muscles. The procedure intends to 'enhance' the amount and intensity of pleasure that women experience in penetrative intercourse. Around the same time, in 1997, the discourse around Female Sexual 'Dysfunction' (FSD) emerged (Tiefer, 2006) and quickly intensified, accompanied by an almost immediate increase in the availability of experimental drugs to 'treat' the 'condition' (Canner, 2009).

Through the lens of Foucaultian biopolitics, I examine the relationship between vaginoplasty and FSD. I suggest that both phenomena are contemporary incarnations of the medicalization of female sexual desire. Although practitioners of vaginoplasty and supporters of the 'treatment' of FSD appear to be concerned with encouraging rather than suppressing female sexuality, both contribute to the medicalization of pleasure by (re)introducing sexually 'abnormal' women into erotic utility through surgical and pharmaceutical means, respectively. Instead of emphasizing desire, this form of what I call "vaginal biopolitics" intensifies power relations by regulating women's desirability as well as their capability to experience desire via medical institutions. Ultimately, vaginoplasty and FSD discipline female desire by producing subjects of desire as well as desiring subjects. In practice, both phenomena signify a contemporary (re)deployment of biopower aimed at making the erotic body more useful—a move from exception to exceptional.

**Biography**

Sara Rodrigues is an MA Candidate in The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at the University of Western Ontario. Her MA thesis focuses on the relationship between biopolitics and vaginas, and works toward the development of a theoretical framework called "vaginal biopolitics." Sara has presented her work at conferences in France and the Netherlands, and most recently conducted an analysis of fat shame in Catherine Breillat's controversial film "Fat Girl." Her research interests also include embodiment, cosmetic surgery, and a burgeoning interest in somatechnics.