The Sexual, Psychological and Body Image Health of Women Undergoing Elective Vulvovaginal Plastic/Cosmetic Procedures

Aim: This prospective study evaluated anecdotal support that vulvo-vaginal aesthetic (VVA) surgery in women enhances sexual functioning and self-concept.

Methods: Women electing VVA surgery completed assessments of sexual functioning, psychological functioning and body preoccupation concerns and behaviors prior to surgery, immediately post-surgery and 6-9 months following surgery. A total of 39 women (n = 31 seeking VVA surgery and n = 8 receiving gynecologic surgery for a benign condition) participated.

Results: There were no differences for sexual functioning or psychological measures at baseline. However, body preoccupation concerns and behaviors were higher in the VVA group, with 48.4% satisfying criteria for body dysmorphic disorder compared to 25% in the control group. There was a significant surgery by group interaction on several measures of sexual functioning where scores improved in the VVA group but not in the control group, although this effect largely diminished by the 6-9 month follow-up. Psychological functioning did not change for either group other than a decrease in anxiety measures in both groups. Body preoccupation concerns and behaviors decreased considerably for women in the VVA group, such that only 11% of women met criteria for body dysmorphic disorder post-surgery, which dropped further to 7% at the 6-9 month follow-up point.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that women seeking VVA surgery are not necessarily motivated by sexual response concerns and that there is little benefit of VVA for sexual or psychological functioning. However, women seeking VVA had significant body preoccupation concerns and behaviors prior to surgery that significantly decreased following surgery.

Biography
Samantha Fashler received her BA in psychology from the University of British Columbia in 2009. She is currently working in the UBC Pain Lab on a full-time basis, and is applying to graduate programs in clinical psychology next year. Her primary interests include the psychosocial aspects of pain, intimate relationships and human sexuality.