

Part B Submission

Applicant: Gemma Sharp

Title: Psychological Motivations and Outcomes of Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery

1. Briefly describe your research (maximum 400 words)

Labiaplasty is the most common form of female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS) and involves the surgical reduction of the labia minora. The procedure has become increasingly popular in Western countries, including Australia. A recent audit of labiaplasty procedures performed in public and private hospitals in NSW revealed a 64% increase from 256 procedures in 2001 to 421 in 2013. Professional medical organisations throughout the Western world have expressed serious concerns about the increasing number of adolescent and women undergoing FGCS as it is not medically indicated, and long-term safety and effectiveness data are lacking. My research project examined the factors promoting the increased interest in labiaplasty, and also the psychological outcomes of this procedure through a series of studies, with several being world-first studies. My findings showed that exposure to genital images in the media, in particular on the internet and in pornography, was the strongest influence on women's dissatisfaction with their genital appearance, and, in turn, their decision to undergo labiaplasty. The other major decisional influence was receiving negative comments about genital appearance, usually from sexual partners. This may be the result of the sexual partner also being influenced by media images. As a result of these findings, I examined the effectiveness of online resources aimed at educating women about the paucity of diverse female genital appearances shown in the media. The results showed that a short video was able to significantly improve women's perceptions of genital appearance diversity and so this video could potentially be used as an educational tool in sexual education classes in schools.

My research investigating the psychological outcomes of labiaplasty showed that women were generally satisfied with the change in their genital appearance after surgery. However, this did not lead to improvements in their psychological well-being or the quality of their intimate relationships. In fact, my research was the first to show that women who were involved in an intimate relationship prior to surgery and were experiencing greater preoperative psychological distress were more likely to be dissatisfied with their surgical results. These women may have had unrealistic expectations for improvements in these domains and so this research has helped to alert physicians to these key discussion points with preoperative patients. Overall, my findings suggest ways in which genital appearance dissatisfaction could be addressed in a non-surgical manner. In addition, the findings identify factors which could help with the assessment of patient suitability for labiaplasty.

2. Describe how your research illustrates Innovation, Best Practice or Excellence (maximum 200 words)

My research demonstrates excellence in mental health research in a number of ways:

- I won the 2015 Elaine Dignan Award (presented by the APS Women and Psychology Interest Group) in recognition of the significance and contribution of my research to women's mental health.
- To date, of the seven first-author articles I have produced from this research, three have received Editor's Choice article honours from the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*.

- I was a grand finalist in the 2013 Trans-Tasman 3-Minute Thesis competition (explaining your research project in 3-minutes).
- My research has been presented in national and international mainstream media (television, radio and print). Highlights include appearing as an expert guest panellist on the SBS TV show “Insight”, presenting on ABC RN’s “The Science Show”, interviews with BBC radio, and writing an article for “The Conversation”.
- I have presented studies from this specific project at nine national and international conferences, including two invited guest speaker presentations.
- As “the leading expert internationally” on the topic of FGCS (according to one of my PhD thesis examiners), I have been asked to design professional development materials for health professionals so they can better manage the increasing patient demand for FGCS.

3. Summarise the potential contribution to and/or implications for society (maximum 200 words)

The number of adolescent and adult women experiencing genital appearance concerns and requesting labiaplasty has increased rapidly in Australia. A recent survey of Australian GPs found that 97% had been asked by patients about genital appearance normality and 54% had seen patients requesting FGCS. As FGCS is not medically indicated and potential side effects include infection, loss of sensation, painful sexual intercourse and scarring, it is concerning that FGCS is increasing in popularity. My research, which was cited in the world-first GP guidelines for FGCS, contributes to our understanding of the sociocultural factors promoting this demand. My research also showed that women’s understanding of the diversity in normal genital appearance could be significantly improved with a short video. Such a resource could be used in clinical settings as well as in schools to help to prevent the development of genital appearance concerns in younger girls. My research investigating the patient characteristics which predict dissatisfaction with surgical outcomes may also help health professionals identify women who are less likely to benefit from surgery. More generally, being invited to present my research in mainstream media has seemingly helped to lessen the social stigma surrounding the topic of female genital appearance.

4. Describe any contribution by Mental Health consumers/persons with lived experience other than as subjects (e.g. reference group, researcher) (Maximum 200 words)

Owing to the highly sensitive nature of my research topic, women are often very hesitant to talk to anyone about their experience with labiaplasty. Involving a sufficient number of women as research participants was highly challenging. However, one brave woman (“Emma”) accompanied me on my guest appearance on the SBS TV show “Insight” (27/09/2016). Emma was not involved in my research but had had a labiaplasty at a collaborating clinic. To my knowledge, Emma was the first woman to appear on Australian television and speak about her experience with labiaplasty. Her appearance finally put a face to this growing population of women who are concerned about their genital appearance. Through Emma’s presentation, I think it was clear to the audience that these women are not vacuous and superficial. They are intelligent women who have usually experienced distressing events related to their genital appearance and labiaplasty is seemingly a solution to this distress. After in-depth discussions with Emma, I was able to propose strategies for how her genital appearance distress may have been alleviated without surgery and this informed my future research proposal involving the design of a psychoeducational intervention for girls and women with genital appearance concerns.

5. Attach a brief Curriculum Vitae (maximum 4 pages)

Please find my four-page CV starting on the next page.

CAREER SUMMARY

I am a Psychological Researcher and Clinical Psychologist Registrar. After completing my PhD in Clinical Psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia in 2016, I moved to Perth, Western Australia where I hold research, teaching and psychological practice positions (see below). I initially trained as a Molecular Biologist, graduating with a Masters degree in Oncology from the University of Cambridge in 2010. Thus, I bring a strong background in medical sciences to my psychological research and practice.

CURRENT POSITIONS

1. Postdoctoral Researcher/Academic | School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University, Bentley WA 6102
2. Research Collaborator Associate for Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery Project | Jean Hailes Research Unit, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC 3004
3. Research Consultant | Academy Face and Body: Cosmetic Surgery Perth, Subiaco, WA 6008
4. Clinical Psychologist Registrar | Cygnet Clinic, Midland, WA 6056

EDUCATION

- 2016 PhD (Clinical Psychology), School of Psychology, Flinders University, Adelaide, AUSTRALIA (date thesis passed: 09/12/2016, date conferred: 20/04/2017)
- 2012 Bachelor of Behavioural Science Honours (Psychology), GPA: 7.0 (First Class), Flinders University, Adelaide, AUSTRALIA
- 2011 Graduate Diploma in Psychological Sciences, GPA: 7.0, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, AUSTRALIA
- 2010 Master of Science (Oncology), University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
- 2005 Bachelor of Science Honours (Microbiology and Immunology), GPA: 7.0 (First Class, University Medal), University of Adelaide, AUSTRALIA
- 2004 Bachelor of Science (Molecular Biology), GPA: 6.8, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, AUSTRALIA
- 2004 Diploma in Languages (Japanese), GPA: 7.0, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, AUSTRALIA

RESEARCH AND TRAVEL GRANTS

1. Australasian Sexual Health Conference Travel Grant, 2016, **\$400**
2. Flinders University Research Student Travel Grant, 2016, **\$1,824**
3. Flinders University Student Association Development Grant, 2016, **\$550**
4. Flinders University Student Association Development Grant, 2015, **\$400**
5. Flinders University Academic Internship Fellowship, 2015, **\$1,200**
6. Flinders University School of Psychology Travel Grant, 2014, **\$1,870**
7. Flinders University School of Psychology Travel Grant, 2013, **\$130**
8. Australian Postgraduate Award, 2013-2016, **\$82,466**
9. Flinders University Summer Research Scholarship (Psychology), 2011-2012, **\$2,000**
10. Cancer Research UK Studentship, 2007-2009, **\$34,000** (awarded in GBP)
11. General Sir John Monash Award, 2007-2009, **\$100,000**
12. University of Adelaide John L. Young Honours Scholarship, 2005, **\$300**
13. University of Adelaide Summer Research Scholarship (Immunology), 2004, **\$2,000**
14. University of Adelaide Summer Research Scholarship (Statistics), 2003, **\$2,000**

SELECTED HONOURS AND AWARDS

1. Editor's Choice article for the April 2016, September 2016 and March 2017 issues of the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 2016 and 2017
2. Flinders University School of Psychology Publication Award, 2015 and 2016
3. Elaine Dignan Award from APS Women and Psychology Interest Group, 2015
4. Trans-Tasman 3 Minute Thesis Grand Finalist (top 8 in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific) and Flinders University 3 Minute Thesis Competition Winner, 2013
5. Flinders University Chancellor's Letter of Commendation for academic excellence in Psychology Honours course, 2012
6. University of Adelaide Graduate Diploma in Psychological Sciences Prize (first placed student in course), 2011
7. University of Cambridge, Trinity College Contribution to College Award, 2008
8. Honorary Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholar, 2007-2009
9. University of Adelaide B. Science (Honours) University Medal (placed in the top three students in the Faculty of Science), 2005
10. University of Adelaide Derrick Rowley Prize for Honours in Microbiology and Immunology (first placed student in course), 2005
11. University of Adelaide Microbiology and Immunology Third Year Prize (first placed student in course), 2004
12. University of Adelaide Stem Cell Therapy Design Prize in Molecular and Cell Biology I, 2002
13. University of Adelaide Dean's Certificate of Merit for outstanding academic achievement in Molecular and Cell Biology I, 2002

PUBLICATIONS

1. Oates, J., & **Sharp, G. (co-first author)**. (in press). Nonsurgical medical penile girth augmentation: Experience-based recommendations. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*.
2. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (in press). Response to "Psychological outcomes of labiaplasty: A prospective study". *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*.
3. **Sharp, G.**, Pettigrew, S., Wright, S., Pratt, I. S., Blane, S., & Biagioni, N. (2017). Potential in-class strategies to increase children's vegetable consumption. *Public Health Nutrition*.
4. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (2017). A retrospective study of the psychological outcomes of labiaplasty. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 37, 324-331.
5. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (2016). Psychological outcomes of labiaplasty: A prospective study. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, 138, 1202-1209.
6. **Sharp G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (2016). Response to "Commentary on: Factors that influence the decision to undergo labiaplasty: Media, relationships, and psychological well-being". *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 36, NP13-N214.
7. **Sharp, G.**, Mattiske, J., & Vale, K. I. (2016). Motivations, expectations, and experiences of labiaplasty: A qualitative study. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 36, 920-928.
8. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (2016). Factors that influence the decision to undergo labiaplasty: Media, relationships, and psychological well-being. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*. 36, 469-478.
9. **Sharp, G.**, & Tiggemann, M. (2016). Educating women about normal female genital appearance variation. *Body Image*, 16, 70-78.

PUBLICATIONS (CONT.)

10. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Matiske, J. (2015). Predictors of consideration of labiaplasty: An extension of the tripartite influence model of beauty ideals. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *39*, 182-193.
11. **Sharp, G.**, Tiggemann, M., & Matiske, J. (2014). The role of media and peer influences in Australian women's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. *Body Image*, *11*, 482-487.
12. **Sharp, G.**, Hutchinson, A. D., Prichard, I., & Wilson, C. (2013). Validity and reliability of the food-life questionnaire. Short form. *Appetite*, *70*, 112-118.
13. Shehata, M., Teschendorff, A., **Sharp, G.**, Novcic, N., Russell, I. A., Avril, S., . . . Stingl, J. (2012). Phenotypic and functional characterisation of the luminal cell hierarchy of the mammary gland. *Breast Cancer Research*, *14*, R134.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

My work has been selected for presentation on 15 occasions both nationally and internationally, including two world congresses - the 18th International Society of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynaecology Congress (2016) and the World STI & HIV Congress (2015). Two of these occasions have been invited speaker presentations - the Australasian Gynaecological Endoscopy & Surgery Society's XXVI Annual Scientific Meeting (2016) and Sex, Gender and the Future of Relationships: A Conference Gathering (2016).

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Conference Organising Committee Member for *Connecting the Dots: Making Sense of Eating Disorders* (2017-current)
- Expert Contributor Panel Member for the Professional Development Program of the Australasian Academy of Cosmetic Dermal Science (2017-current)
- General Committee Member and Social Media Manager for the Bridges Eating Disorders Association of Western Australia (2016-current)
- Peer Reviewer for various journals (e.g., *Body Image*, *Sex Roles*, *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*) (2015-current)
- General Sir John Monash Award Applicant Mentor and Presenter (2010-current)
- Guest Expert Panel Member for *Embrace* documentary screening (positive body image documentary) at Flinders University (2016)
- Student Representative on the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (2015-2016)
- Article contributor for the Flinders University School of Psychology Student Newspaper (2014-2016)
- Flinders Medical Centre Hospital Volunteer (2012-2013, 2016)
- Student Representative on Flinders University Faculty Research Higher Degrees Committee (2013-2015)
- Student Outreach Ambassador for the Flinders University School of Psychology (2013-2015)
- Volunteer at Flinders University Mental Health Fair (2014)
- Volunteer at National Psychology Week Events (2013, 2014)
- Volunteer for Problem Gambling Group Support Program with Relationships Australia SA (2012)
- Volunteer English as a Second Language teacher with The Smith Family (2011-2012)

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CONT.)

- Student Representative for postgraduate and undergraduate courses at University of Adelaide (2003, 2004, 2011) and University of Cambridge (2008-2009)
- Conference Organising Committee for the *Virology MasterClass* (2007, 2010)

SELECTED MEDIA COVERAGE OF RESEARCH

News Articles

- The Conversation: “*Women don’t always get what they want from labiaplasty*” (30/11/16)
<https://theconversation.com/women-dont-always-get-what-they-want-from-labiaplasty-68431>
- Le Figaro (French newspaper): “*La diversité méconnue du sexe féminin*” (28/10/16)
<http://sante.lefigaro.fr/article/la-diversite-meconnue-du-sexe-feminin>
- ABC News: “*Labiaplasty surgery prompted by derogatory comments, research finds*” (17/05/16)
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2016-05-17/labiaplasty-patients-prompted-by-negative-comments-study/7418188>
- SBS News: “*Seven-minutes to influence a woman’s decision to undergo labiaplasty*” (18/01/16)
<http://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/health/article/2016/01/18/seven-minutes-influence-womans-decision-undergo-labiaplasty>
- ABC News: “*Labiaplasty: Online video could deter women from seeking surgery, study finds*” (15/01/16)
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-15/labiaplasty-how-do-we-convince-women-to-love-their-genitals/7091760>
- The Australian: “*1 in 5 women want genital surgery: study*” (01/07/14)
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/in-5-women-want-genital-surgery-study/news-story/c4206abe4b0c2af3074070437fd46cbd>

Television Interviews

- SBS Insight “*Picture Perfect*” (27/09/16)
<http://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/764238915945/insight-picture-perfect>

Radio Interviews

- ABC Triple J “*The Hook Up*” (01/06/16)
http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/hook_up/blog/s4473396.htm
- ABC RN “*The Science Show*” (02/11/13)
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/scienceshow/why-more-women-are-paying-for-lip-service/5064500>

Youtube Videos

- *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* September 2016 Issue Editor’s Choice Presentation (26/07/16)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENCe5tU_fRg
- *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* April 2016 Issue Editor’s Choice Presentation (22/03/16)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJFj_2JWuP8

6. Referees

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