

Female genital modifications in the western and african contexts essay example

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Sociology](#) \n \t
2. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
3. [References](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Sociology

Introduction

Female genital modification entails the temporary or permanent changes or alterations to the female reproductive organs. These alterations have been around since time immemorial as part of rituals and/or for cosmetic purposes. In various cultures, these modifications have symbolic connotations such as in many African communities; female genital modifications were part of an initiation rite for young girls growing into adulthood. In contemporary societies globally; particularly Western societies, these changes in the female genitalia are procured for aesthetic reasons or for enhancement of female sexual functions. This paper offers an insightful comparison between female genital modifications in the Western and African contexts. It will seek to show the perceptions associated with the female genital changes in both contexts, while focusing on their enforcement of heteronormativity.

Virginia Braun (2005), in *In Search of (Better) Sexual Pleasure: Female Genital “Cosmetic” Surgery*, written in the *Sexualities* journal, female genital modifications majorly focuses on aesthetics and pleasure in the western

<https://assignbuster.com/female-genital-modifications-in-the-western-and-african-contexts-essay-example/>

context. The author dwells on the female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS) that is highly prevalent and has gained immense popularity in the modern western societies. Surgical procedures such as labiaplasty, liposuction, vaginal tightening, labia, and G-spot amplifications are focused on enhancing both the aesthetic value of the female genitalia and the heightening of women's sexual desire (Braun (2005)). Also, many women perform female genital cosmetic surgeries to boost their body image. It is prudent to note that Western women pay and decide on the kind of FCGS procedure they want to undergo, analogical to their preference and expectations. In addition to this, Braun (2005) points out that the ideas of those cosmetic surgeries tend to be socially constructed by the media such as the women's magazines, and surgeon websites. The media draws attention to these procedures as part of a trend where women acquire 'designer vagina' with their body image as the primary focus.

Attainment of frequent, pleasurable, and satisfying sex has become a symbol of the liberalized woman, says Braun (2005). Her article explains these concepts with several other excerpts that portray women enjoying improved sex after removal of a number of psychological barriers through FGCS. These sexual impediments include the lack of confidence and anxiety about the appearance of their genitalia, which makes them act passively and look embarrassed during sexual intercourse with male partners. Consequently, many Western women are, in such cases, portrayed as individuals entitled rightfully to enjoy sex. Controversies rage regarding these developments, with the author noting that much of these surgeries are all made with male pleasure being secondary to them. This, is because FGCS has led to the

prioritization of female pleasure at the expense of the discussion surrounding male pleasure (Braun, 2005). It ceases to be a liberatory mechanism for women, but rather a procedure construed in the patriarchal nature of many contemporary societies. FGCS somewhat reinforces oppressive social cultures on women (Braun, 2005).

The Western context on the other hand, enhances heteronormativity through FGCS procedures aimed at improving the female genitalia for the sake of heterosexual activities. Braun notes that the women in the Western countries are illustrated as being inherently entitled to achieve sexual pleasure and heterosexuality. This is a bias that FGCS has managed to perpetuate by designing bodies that fit certain heterosexual activities rather than designing sexual practices to fit certain body types (Braun, 2005).

Mathabo Khau (2012), in his article *Female Sexual Pleasure and Autonomy: What has inner labia elongation got to do with it?*, focuses on the genital modifications of African women. The author dwells on the inner labia elongation and the societal concepts surrounding genital beauty. The article further pores into the violations Basotho women and girls face, as they carry out their gendered and sexual roles in a hetero-patriarchal society. Khau notes that the internal labia elongation was used as a rite of passage ushering young girls to womanhood (Khau, 2012). The initiation was coupled with transmission of sexual knowledge from elder women to younger initiates. It is through this socialization, that girls acquired sufficient knowledge, skills and attitudes that aided their future sexual relationships. In addition to sexual pleasure, Khau notes that beauty was another reason why Basotho women and young girls chose to elongate their internal labia; it

made them more attractive and appealing. The elongation further enhanced sexual pleasure for their male sexual partners. Female pleasure in this context focuses on the enjoyment of sex with their male counterparts as well as a means of controlling the Basotho women's sexuality. The elongation was important not only in reducing the female sexual desires, but also enhancing sexual restraint. This ultimately built a natural contraception that helped control the number of young pregnancies in the Sotho society (Khau, 2012).

Amongst the Basotho women, the elongation rites were associated with fear, pain, silence and shame. Many women carried out the rites with fear of losing prospective suitors in their patriarchal society that deemed women with well-elongated labia as eligible wife-material. Many women suffered privately as they tried to conform to cultural norms. Shame, on the other hand, was associated with women who had rather short labia and who were, subjected to regular labia inspection by elder, women relatives. Having a short labia was taboo to the Basotho women, who looked upon and associated short labia with potential sexual promiscuity (Khau, 2012). The regular inspections as narrated by the author, made many girls feel dehumanized as the elders publicized their supposedly private parts. Importantly, in the African context, heteronormativity is enhanced through taboos associated with homosexuality. The heteronormativity concept is enhanced by acts involving the mutual labia elongation by Basotho women, frowned upon in Christian settings. The mutual elongation however, was carried out with the sole aim of cementing heterosexuality (Khau, 2012). It is also pegged by the definition of sex in society; Basotho understand sex as a

coital activity between man and woman with penile penetration. Many women whom the author interviewed understood sex from the penile penetration angle and not from other sexual acts or engagements.

Conclusion

Female genital modifications in both the Western and African contexts, present a sharp difference in cultures globally. The modifications are carried out with the intent of pleasing self and/or their sexual partners. In the Western context, a woman's pleasure and self-image are primary. This has been made possible through the fueling of the ' designer vagina' trend amongst contemporary societal women. Their African counterparts on the other hand, are still bound by rites that has been passed down from one generation to another. Whether consensual or not, these modifications clearly point out the struggles African women have to undergo in order to fit in this patriarchal society. The male sexual pleasure or sexual role is not brought into question; it is women who have to bear the brunt of sexual relationships in both contexts.

References

Braun, V. (2005). In Search of (Better) Sexual Pleasure: Female Genital 'Cosmetic' Surgery. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 407-424. doi: 10.

1177/1363460705056625

Khau, M. (2012). Female sexual pleasure and autonomy: What has inner labia elongation got to do with it? *Sexualities*, 15(7), 763-777. doi: 10.

1177/1363460712454068