

Identifying Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Psychological Assessments for People Seeking Cosmetic Surgery

Melanie's story.

Ever since she was 11 or 12, Melanie has believed that her labia are large. Melanie is constantly uncomfortable in her underwear as her labia hang, causing a lot of chafing. After googling images on the internet Melanie has concluded that her labia don't look normal. She feels she can't wear bikinis in public as people will notice her large labia, and she is too embarrassed to use the school showers after sports. Melanie has felt very down about the way she looks, telling her mum she doesn't think she is normal 'down there' saying "something is wrong with me". Her mother assures her she is fine and that "we are all different, and that's ok".

When Melanie was 15 she started seeing Ryan and their relationship soon progressed to Ryan wanting to have sex. Melanie wanted to have sex with him too, and while her mother had prepared her about how to be safe, she was scared and anxious that if Ryan saw what she looked like 'down there' he would break up with her.

As the relationship progressed, Melanie became increasingly anxious about Ryan seeing her labia. When it happened, they were at Ryan's house kissing and touching each other, eventually getting undressed and having sex. Although the experience was a little awkward, it was relatively pleasant and fun for Melanie apart from the fact that the whole time she was worried about him seeing her labia because she knew he had been with other girls.

When they were lying together afterward, he commented "wow, you've got the biggest lips I've ever seen". Melanie was horrified. She was so upset she told Ryan she felt sick and that she wanted to go home. She rang her mum to pick her up and she cried all the way home and most of that night. When her mum tried to find out what was wrong, Melanie wouldn't tell her.

The following day Melanie texted Ryan and said she didn't want to be his girlfriend anymore. He was confused and asked why. Melanie told him she was weird and she didn't want to see him anymore.

Two months after her sexual experience with Ryan, Melanie told her mum she wanted to see a doctor because she wanted to get her labia fixed. Her mum told her she was too young and there was nothing wrong with her. Melanie constantly thought about it and was sick of feeling embarrassed and being told she was normal, when she knew she wasn't. Melanie became very serious about her online research, exploring the surgical options available.

Melanie discovered that labiaplasty might be an option to make her labia smaller, so she told her mum. Once again her mum told her she was being stupid and nothing was wrong with her. Melanie begged her mum, crying, saying "I'm not normal

mum; please take me to the doctor". Her mum said she would think about it.

Six months after the initial discussion about labiaplasty, and after many months of nagging her mother and not getting any results, Melanie discovered that she could obtain her own Medicare card and make her own medical appointments. She quickly filled out the paperwork and the day after she received her Medicare card, she made an appointment at her family clinic with one of the female GPs. She hadn't seen the female GP before; her usual GP is an older man.

The GP told Melanie that she did have slightly large labia however, her body was still growing and changing and she didn't think she should have surgery. Straight after she heard what the doctor said, Melanie burst into tears and told her that she didn't understand. "I feel so ugly, I can't have a boyfriend and have sex, I can't wear a bikini in public, I chafe, and I feel so embarrassed that someone might see me in the showers at school". The doctor told her it is probably best to wait for a few years to see if she still feels the same way, and told her to come back in 12 months' time to talk about it again.