

The Index of Male Genital Image: A New Scale to Assess Male Genital Satisfaction

Seth N. P. Davis,* Yitzchak M. Binik, Rhonda Amsel and Serge Carrier†

From the Department of Psychology, McGill University (SNPD, YMB, RA) and Sex and Couple Therapy Service (YMB) and Department of Urology (SC), McGill University Health Centre, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Purpose: Male genital image is related to overall body image, psychosocial variables and sexual health. Unfortunately, little scientific literature exists on male genital image, while scales to measure it tend to be limited in scope, not well validated and are based on homogenous populations. We evaluated the reliability and validity of a comprehensive scale that would be useful in clinical settings and as a research outcome.

Materials and Methods: Items were generated from the literature and examined in the research group. Five experts rated items for content validity. The Index of Male Genital Image questionnaire was created. This questionnaire and a number of other psychosocial and health related questions were combined into an online survey and posted on male health discussion boards. Main study outcome measures were a custom designed survey of demographics, physical measurements, health and sexual history, and biopsychosocial variables as well as the Index of Male Genital Image and Body Areas Satisfaction Scale.

Results: A total of 636 men responded with data suitable for analysis. A final 14-item scale was created after item deletions. Factor analysis revealed a 6-factor solution and a total scale score. The final scale was simple to administer, had good reliability and construct validity, and appeared appropriate for use in healthy and clinical populations.

Conclusions: The Index of Male Genital Image appears to be a promising measure of male genital image. Health and psychosocial variables were related to measure scores.

Key Words: genitalia, male; questionnaires; body image; psychometrics; psychology

Abbreviations and Acronyms

BASS = Body Areas Satisfaction Scale

IMGI = Index of Male Genital Image

MGIS = Male Genital Image Scale

PCA = principal component analysis

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* Correspondence: Department of Psychology, McGill University, 1205 Rue Dr. Penfield, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3A 1B1 (e-mail: seth.davis@mail.mcgill.ca).

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MANY men place important emphasis on their genitals and some go to great efforts to alter the genital appearance.¹ Despite this, scientific research on the satisfaction of men with the genitals has been minimal. Although men have been largely ignored, there has been a recent surge in interest in female genital image. Multiple aspects of the genitalia of women, eg appearance, odor and function,^{2,3} contribute to female sexual health.

It seems reasonable to hypothesize that men may share these concerns.

Research suggests that satisfaction with penile size is related to psychosocial and sexual functioning as well as to overall body image.^{4–9} Satisfaction with genitals is termed genital image,¹⁰ defined as the degree of feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various aspects of the genitals.¹¹ Unfortunately, most studies of male genital image have focused on penile

size and may have missed other factors that may be especially important in a urological or medical context. We present the development and validation of a new questionnaire to assess male genital image.

The only scale specifically designed to assess genital satisfaction by men is the MGIS.¹⁰ This 14-item Likert scale heavily emphasizes penile size. In healthy undergraduate men overall genital satisfaction was generally high¹⁰ and higher than that of women.¹² Nonetheless, many men were dissatisfied with the length, girth and appearance of the nonerect penis. MGIS scores negatively correlated with sexual anxiety, self-consciousness and age, and positively correlated with body image, penile size, and sexual esteem, competence and autonomy.^{10,12,13} Finally, nonheterosexual men reported a more positive genital image than heterosexual men and each group scored higher on the MGIS than those with an undecided orientation.^{9,13}

While these studies are an important first step, the low number of participants, use of healthy undergraduate populations and low response rates limit their generalizability as well as applicability to urological populations. The MGIS is also limited by its use of a summed total score that is heavily weighted to favor penile size. Other aspects of the male genitals, eg circumcision status, ejaculation strength and penile curvature, may also influence genital image. In particular, men with urogenital problems, such as Peyronie disease, testicular cancer or hypospadias,¹⁴ may face specific genital image concerns that cannot be assessed by the MGIS. A validated measure would be useful to assess medical and surgical treatment outcomes.

Aspects of genital image are already measured in patients with hypospadias but these outcome measures focus on repair and typically have fewer than 5 items.^{15,16} To our knowledge they also have not been tested in large samples and essentially assess only penile shape and urethral opening position. Preliminary evidence suggests that ejaculatory strength and function¹⁷ also affect the genital image of men, although it is difficult to determine whether this is a genital image or sexual function issue. In addition, the growing practice of male pubic hair removal¹⁸ may indicate pubic hair dissatisfaction in men. Finally, despite widespread practice, circumcision and the resulting appearance may contribute to male genital image but to our knowledge this has not been studied.

Our primary goal was to investigate the psychometric properties of a new scale to measure genital image in men. Questionnaire validation is a necessary step in the creation of a questionnaire to ensure its usefulness. Validation increases the chances that responses are reproducible and measure the purported concept.

METHODS

The study was approved by the McGill University research ethics board and participants provided informed consent. A questionnaire package was created and posted on Internet sites targeting male health and sexuality, eg www.malehealth.co.uk, www.ehealthforum.com, Peyronie forums and hypospadias groups. Participants had the option of entering an online raffle to win 1 of 3 \$100 gift certificates for an online shopping site. The survey was only posted in English and participation was limited to those 18 years old or older.

Questionnaire Creation

We searched MEDLINE® and PsycINFO® to find previous research that used measures of genital image, hypospadias, genital satisfaction or genital preoccupation in men. Only 3 measures were determined to be relevant to our definition of male genital image, including the MGIS,¹⁰ Penile Perception Score¹⁶ and hypospadias outcome.¹⁵ Any relevant items from these scales were adapted to fit the current questionnaire style. After item creation from the literature review, additional potential items were generated in our research group and redundant items were removed, leaving the 31-item scale named the IMGI (supplementary table, <http://jurology.com/>).

Each of the 31 items is rated on a 7-point Likert scale with qualifiers ranging from 1—extremely dissatisfied to 7—extremely satisfied. A central item was included (4—“I have no feeling one way or the other”) to allow participants to indicate that this item was not important to them.

Additional Questionnaires

Additional items were included in the online questionnaire, including demographics, self-reported physical measurements (height, weight and penile dimensions while erect and flaccid), the BASS, which assesses satisfaction with 10 nongenital body aspects,¹⁹ and an item on overall genital satisfaction rated on the same Likert scale as the IMGI. Participants were also asked to report circumcision status and sexual experience. Finally, participants were asked (yes/no) if they currently experienced any trouble attaining or maintaining erection, ejaculated before they wanted to or in less than 1 minute, or had Peyronie disease, hypospadias or a sexually transmitted infection.

Statistical Analysis

To assess the relevance of the proposed items, 5 sexual health experts who did not participate in generating the questionnaire assessed each item, including 2 university based urologists, 2 psychologists at a teaching hospital clinic specializing in sexual health and 1 professor of sexology who specializes in male sexual health. Each expert was asked to rate the relevance of each item to the concept of the genital image of men. Each item was rated from 1—irrelevant to 4—extremely relevant. The proportion of valid-to-invalid ratings was calculated and items that scored less than 0.8 were marked for potential deletion.²⁰

To assess potential item deletions, a number of factors were examined, including the number of incomplete

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