

The Missing Vagina Monologue For VDAY

Curious to learn what women were talking about I read the "Vagina Monologues". I wasn't curious about the play. I was curious about vaginas. I am a woman who was born without one.

My life completely changed when I was 13 and sent home from camp with abdominal pain. When I was examined they found that I had no vagina, and they could detect no uterus. *With sarcasm:* I was labeled with "sexual dysfunction" because I couldn't have intercourse. *Curiously:* ...But I had discovered my own sexuality so I was very confused.... *Resigned:* But my doctors recommended vaginal reconstruction so I could have a normal sex life with my husband when I got married. I never had a chance to want a vagina I simply had to have one. {PAUSE...} I went from selling Girl Scout Cookies to correcting my sexual dysfunction in one afternoon.

I spent the next few years going to specialists, having tests to confirm my gender, being probed by curious doctors and interns with multiple instruments in multiple holes at multiple times. They saw their definition of normal, and I wasn't it. Like an android on an assembly line, I had no concept of feeling that this body was mine. But I was not yet capable of wondering who was having the biggest problem with my body. Was it me or the people treating me? There was so much focus on the woman I "should be" that I lost all knowledge of the girl who I was.

Wishing I could have had choices... The chance to desire change on my own - embracing opportunity rather than fearing who I was supposed to be. And I was told that I would never meet another woman such as myself. Like the Hunchback in the Bell Tower, I found a place to hide when normalcy failed me. {PAUSE...} Why was my gender challenged in the first place, and then confirmed like something I didn't already know? Why was my body taken away and rearranged like a sexual Action Figure by men with knives? What was the need to feminize my body, which actually neutered my soul?

When I was fifteen I had my 2nd and 3rd surgeries.

"...a slight dimple was present where the vagina was expected to be. By means of sharp and blunt dissection a very adequate vagina was developed... a skin graft was obtained from the buttocks, attached to the mold, and inserted into the cavity...The vagina was closed... All sponges were accounted for."

Two weeks later I had the surgery to have the mold and stitches removed. Then I was told about postoperative therapy to keep my vagina “functional”. A “functional vagina” is a vagina that will be able to accept a normal size penis. I wasn’t interested in sex, and this plastic vaginal dilator for postoperative therapy wasn’t very appealing. One doctor actually compared a vaginal dilator to a shoe stretcher! I had two follow-up visits with my surgeon and never saw him again. I was another surgical success.

As I grew older I realized I was faced with many questions. How will I experience menopause? How do I monitor my ovaries? How many ovaries do I have and where are they hiding? What about pap smears? I was tired of all this and really pissed that I had to ask all the questions.

My sister is the one who told me there was an actual name for my condition. That is when I discovered the other symptoms associated with my Syndrome. The connection to years of disability and hearing loss made me numb. The most important discovery I made was to learn that there are many variations of gender. This wasn't just about bodies - it was about genocide of variation. A whole new perspective was growing from very old emotions....

I also learned that various body parts are transplanted to create vaginas for "normal sexual function". I read one case where an actual vagina was transplanted from the patient's mother. My mother's used vagina?! But regardless of how your vagina is created, you still have to keep it “functional” with regular intercourse. Now who benefits most from that?

I have read a lot about the "medical challenge" of treating women with vaginal agenesis but I think the challenge is broader than that. We challenge the role presented to women and that makes people very nervous. We challenge the concept of normal for gender and sexual activity, and that makes people fanatic. We are literally molded to fit societal values. We are faced with questions of our most vulnerable selves during our most formative years. But how can you follow your heart to the answer when the process has ripped out your heart?

Questions have haunted me for too many years because I couldn’t find the words. Meeting others with my experience has finally allowed me a voice. Some of their stories seemed so traumatic that it challenged me to recognize that their trauma was also mine. We exist in a conundrum because our knowledge is powerful but hidden in embarrassment and shame. The approach to our bodies is very extreme

but affects all women in subtler ways. Advances in medicine offer men Viagra, but women still get the knife! Scar tissue does NOT enhance sexual pleasure.

I come out about my surgery in carefully selected ways. I have seen the response of too many twisted faces telling me that they have never heard of such a thing. They show me pity. They tell their friends this great gossip and strangers ask intrusive questions on the street corner. One medical provider told me I was "just too weird". I have been asked if this is what made me a lesbian, by lesbians who were born with vaginas?!?

I want people to understand that doing the right thing often does more harm than good. The standard of normal that we aim for is imaginary. People don't fail to meet the definition of normal gender, but the confines of the definitions fail to meet the people. I feel abnormal because I had to be fixed, not for the truth about my body. I feel different because of my surgeries, not because of my vaginal dimple. Being born without a vagina was not my problem. Having to get one was the real problem! My "sexual dysfunction" posed less of a threat to my health than the parts of the Syndrome that disabled me. So why is a vagina all I was given to cope with a much greater loss?

The complete survey, article, and links to resources can be found at www.mrkh.org
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