

This is an ode to the vagina.

A beautiful, sensual and mysterious part of a woman's body. The part that is silenced physically (female genital mutilation) and metaphorically (patriarchy), and is known by many names (some which may be considered derogatory depending on the individual) such as pussy, cunt, and the most recent va-jay-jay. The women in the piece speak on behalf of their vaginas, giving them names, expressing what their vaginas would say if they could speak, and speaking to other vaginas. This is only the beginning of my quest to get vaginas to speak.

The 6 minute documentary seeks to uncover what women think their vaginas would say, if they could speak. Women's empowerment is deeply connected to their sexuality, and so by giving the 'vagina' a platform and an audience to speak, I feel that I will be empowering the women involved, and the women who watch this documentary.

One could call me a feminist, a hard core woman, one of those opinionated black women, or simply someone who believes that they are alive and therefore they should live life to the fullest. Never let anyone (especially men) dictate how you should live your life, and if you have an itch. Scratch it. My mother is a strong woman, and if I can be half as strong as she is, then I believe that I too will be a force to be reckoned with. That is how I wish to live my life, that is how I am living my life, and that is how I will continue to live my life. One day I would like to look back and like Shawn Carter say that - "I came, I saw, I conquered."

Why tackle such a topic?

I seem to be a sucker for such 'taboo' topics... I have since discovered a new love for my vagina, and I was wondering if other women have had the pleasure to do so. There has always been something sinister about the vagina - so we are led to believe - and this is what makes me want to let it speak. Let it have a voice, and with that, let the woman have her voice.

Target audience?

My audience is anyone and everyone who is at an age where they know that a vagina exists. Therefore, if anyone watches this and they get offended, I would like to know why. I know it will make some people uncomfortable and nervous, but that is the point. One should ask why such a subject is taboo, when there are songs played all day everyday about women's bits and pieces (the breasts and bum) but when it comes to the most important part, and the part that gives women pleasure, suddenly it is taboo. How many times do we hear about men and their inflated penises, oops, I mean egos?

Inspiration?

My creative piece was inspired by my desire to one day perform the vagina monologues. I thought that being part of something as powerfully extraordinary and as life changing as that might add more substance to my life, and do my self esteem some good. Then I came to the realisation that I could do my own version of the vagina monologues. Going the extra mile of asking women to talk about their own vaginas and not recite monologues of unknown women like the original vagina monologues. There is a script which performers (including Oprah etc) around the world have had the honour of performing. I thought that if I could do something similar but different - get women to talk about their own vaginas, give them names and speak to other vaginas - it would be my way of paying tribute to the vagina monologues and at the same time empowering the women who participate.

The history of one's vagina is intrinsically connected to the woman's history. If your vagina is a happy vagina, then your life was probably a happy one. My quest was to give vaginas voices, give them a platform to speak and in that way, they can hopefully speak for other vaginas that do not have the privilege nor the means to speak.

Reflection

I was amazed by the number of women who turned me down. The word vagina seems to scare people and even worse implying that a vagina actually has a voice and that it could actually speak. Whether it's a physical or metaphorical voice most of the women were not willing to speak. They felt that it would be embarrassing to speak about their vagina, especially in front of the camera. I came to the realisation that I was a different breed of woman. A fortunate breed that has been nurtured and brought up to speak and not be shy about any part of me. That my vagina is a part of me that is to be celebrated and a part of me that I can feel free to speak about, because it is the part of me that makes me a woman.

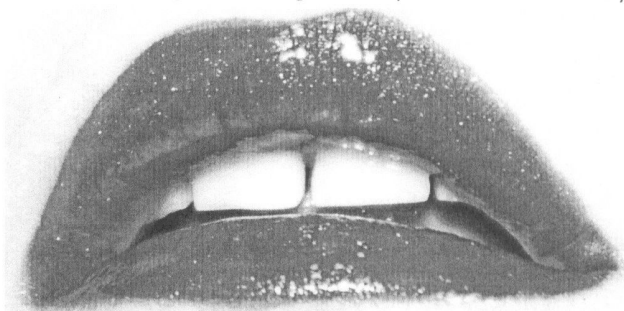
The women that agreed to participate had similar views to myself about vaginas speaking. This was refreshing because some of them were self conscious, and were not sure about taking part, but as soon as they started speaking they had more than enough to say. This made me proud of actually deciding to do this as an individual piece because through them talking about themselves I think that each woman gained some knowledge about themselves, something they did not know existed and at the same time it gave them food for thought. Something to challenge other vaginas on and something that they feel will help people out there, even if its just one person.

I think that the piece came together very beautifully. The edit was directed by the common threads that wove between each vagina and so that made the editing process easier. Asking every single person the same questions also helped in the grouping of ideas and the narration of the piece. This allowed the vaginas to narrate the story instead of having a voice over. When a story is being told I feel that voice overs give the story an us and them effect which I was avoiding in this piece. I feel that a voice over takes away attention from the people in the piece and so I was not keen on using that device in the piece.

I found that I was very comfortable with filming on my own. There was a sense of freedom and not putting anyone else but me on the line. Therefore, I could call the shots and make decisions without having to consult someone. This made life easier especially when it came to the types of shots I had, and the camera angles and the content in the interview. I do not think that anyone else in my class would have been comfortable filming what I was filming.

Will we see any real vaginas in the piece?

I actually did film real vaginas but my footage was deleted from our computer by a group member and I had recorded over the tapes which had the vaginas. Getting the same people to have their vaginas filmed would mean time that I did not have, therefore, I decided to move on with the piece without the real vaginas and it still worked out. The faces are very powerful on their own. I managed to find a vagina dummy from the pharmacy department. This is as real of a vagina as I managed to incooperate into the documentary.



technicalities

I decided not to use music because I also felt that it could take away the attention from the words that were being said, and I also could not find music that would compliment the piece. During the year I produced a spoof rap music video. This extra project allowed me to experiment with colour and the different ways in which colour can make a picture more interesting. It allowed me to play with the idea of silhouettes and bright colours that make the picture rich and more visually interesting. I decided to give the different vaginas different colours to separate the one from the other. This worked well because orange was associated with Nina Estrella, blue with Sexy Motherfucker and red with Roxanne. I used the colour that I used in the music video mostly on Nina Estrella (the bright orange and silhouettes). I played around more with the other colours – playing around with the amount of saturation and the angles in which the light came from (Sexy Motherfucker – lit from the bottom up and on the wall, Roxanne – lit from the top down). The studio and lighting also showed the difference between what was filmed in doors and outside. Technically I think that the piece was sound, but there was room for improvement. The sound was different for the different women because of the different microphones that I used. The best sound was produced when I was using either the rifle microphone or the lapel. The radio microphone was the most convenient to use, but it produced humming and an overall undesirable sound. Some transitions in the piece could have also been smoother, but the edit overall was good. I think that the piece was edited in a way that made sense and told a story about each of the vaginas that spoke.

What were the hurdles you had to go over?

I had to carry on with the piece, despite the fact that some important footage was deleted from our computer. I also had to deal with trying to find people that I could talk to about their vaginas. Women are not as liberated as I thought, and speaking about their vaginas or even mentioning the word vagina was such a shock to many of them. There were a lot of uncomfortable stares as to why I wanted them to speak about their vaginas, and why they should speak. They were more than happy to see a piece where other women are speaking about their vaginas, but they were not comfortable enough speaking about their own. Sad.

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A PATRIARCHAL CULTURE IS
WAGING WAR ON VAGINAS

THE STORY OF YOUR VAGINA IS
THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE.

OPENING THE DOOR TO A PLACE
WITH THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND
STORIES TO TELL.

ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO
TALK ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY
AND NOT TO FEEL APOLOGETIC
FOR THE WAY THEY FEEL

