

Women in their Comfort or Wow Zone

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Abstract

Authoress Eve Ensler has *The Vagina Monologues*, but why stop there? There is so much more to a woman's vagina, but what about the comfort or wow zone? What about what happens when a woman goes to see her OB/GYN doctor to have an annual Pap smear done with the pain and anxiety that comes before, during, and after the exam? This is just one of the areas that needs to be explored by experts and professionals who work in female health and reproductive fields so that women feel comfortable speaking about every and any part of their body. Women experience sufficient stress, anxiety, and pain with their womanhood, so why not address what could make their annual Pap smear exam less stressful and painful?

Approach: This article will discuss one of the many areas in which practitioners who specialize in the fields of women's sexual and reproductive health have yet to shed light on and what women have yet to make known to their OB/GYN doctor. Addressing this issue begins with two questions: what is a Pap smear and what is an OB/GYN doctor? In addendum, the question of what is important about having a Pap smear procedure done and some of the many names and or phrases used to refer to the vagina and everything womanly attached to it and interview accounts are used to note how women view Pap smears.

Findings: When it comes to being a woman and learning how to cope with aspects of their womanhood and anything that causes them discomfort, women are the only ones who have the power to know what the thought and feel of a Pap smear exam does to them.

Keywords: *Pap smear; Pain; Woman; Sex; Penetration*

1. Introduction

When reading any of Eve Ensler's works on women and their vagina or watching her play titled *The Vagina Monologues* (VM) it creates an epiphany about womanhood that varies by the individual female. Eve Ensler's literary works and VM play show what women had to experience in order to focus on and discuss their vagina, including Eve Ensler herself. Authoress Eve Ensler started with herself and her own path to start *The Vagina Monologues* and from there women learned that their vagina has feelings and its own story to tell. The why, how, and when would vary because each woman's vagina has its own tale. On

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this path is where the words_comfort or wow zones start to develop when it comes to having the talk about knowing their vagina. The words comfort or wow zones are terms to illustrate and express that a woman's vagina is something that is a part of her body. Therefore, due to the constant changes in the feelings and experiences of a women's vagina becoming unpredictable as life occurs women have to learn at different periods in their life to be comfortable with whatever happens with their vagina.

When women visit their (OB/GYN) doctor to have an annual Pap smear exam, what they do not want is for the experience to be fraught with anxiety and pain or to ask themselves if the exam can be less painful during insertion. The only time this exam is extremely painful is in a woman's comfort zone where they receive the most pleasure. So, it is fortunate that this necessary procedure of inserting pain, which is required for women's health, is only done once a year. What is a Pap smear or smear test? According to Thornton and Schramm [1], a Pap smear is a gynecological exam women receive from their OB/GYN doctor. This exam uses a speculum to extract cells from the vaginal wall of a women's cervix and submits these cells for analysis to screen for illnesses such as cervical cancer. When the cells are microscopically examined and other malignant issues are seen, a separate Pap smear exam is done. Also involved in a Pap smear test is a pelvic exam. This exam is performed when the doctor places one hand on the woman's stomach and inserts two fingers of the other hand vaginally to check for any issues with the uterus and ovaries [2]. The acronym OB/GYN is an abbreviation for obstetrics and gynecology. An OB/GYN are male and female doctors who specialize in aspects of female health and reproductive system [3]. An OB is a doctor who specializes in pregnancy/childbirth & postpartum, and a gynecologist focuses on the health of a women's reproduction system which includes anything associated with breasts, vagina, ovaries and uterus.

Even though a Pap smear procedure is not a lengthy exam, it can be painful.

According to The Gynae Centre [4], the best way to make a Pap smear more comfortable is to take a painkiller such as Ibuprofen at least half an hour prior to the procedure to reduce and alleviate any discomfort during or even after the exam. Unlike this source on women's health, the only way to address this pain is through sexual activity according to the women who have been interviewed in this paper. This positive activity of sex as the anxiety and pain-relieving agent of anything negative associated with the Pap smear exam is something that women probably do not consider making known to their OB/GYN. Why is it then that sources on women's health and reproductive system do not cite sex as an optional pain reliever for Pap smears? Perhaps the answer lies with the fact that women do not feel comfortable sharing this information of how sex can make Pap smears less painful and relieve the anxiety associated with it.

2. What are Women Saying about their Vagina and Pap Smears?

According to Ensler [5] the word vagina creates negative words like disgust, anxiety, awkwardness and other off-putting terms. Women also refer to their vagina by a number of names like tamale, poopi, monkey box and many other euphemisms. As a Cambodian woman Somaly, says that women in her culture call their vagina "pum pum," and in Caribbean culture the term "punani" is used to refer to the vagina. The spelling of the term varies across the many Caribbean islands. It would appear that women of various backgrounds use humorous and unique references to refer to their vagina. Whatever the terminology that is used to refer to a woman's wow zone, a woman's comfort zone should be marked and met with pleasure, excitement, comfort, and care not the unease and pain experienced with Pap smears. Stashelle 33, (Probation Officer for New York State, June 17,

2023) says that sex is a penetration and with penetration other insertions like a Pap smear become less painful. In Somaly's (Station Agent for MTA in NYC, November 26, 2023) vaginal experience, she reiterates the importance of Pap smears and recommends that women in their forties and older receive this exam yearly. Somaly is a thirty-five-year-old married woman who says that her Pap smear experience is anxiety less and pain free because she is very sexually active.

3. Oddities and Curiosities: Whys/How comes?

Yes, Pap smears can be painful and cause women much anxiety, but it does not have to be that way. Stashelle and Somaly who are both professional women over thirty years of age confirm that when it comes to Pap smears, sex is a positive factor that makes the exam less painful. However, in contrast to Stashelle and Somaly's sexual experiences and their relation to Pap smears, Integris Health [6] disagrees and states that it is unwise to have vaginal intercourse at least two days before a Pap smear. According to this source, during vaginal intercourse, seminal cells from the sperm can alter Pap smear test results negatively by somehow resembling squamous cells found in Pap smear results causing false positive results. In an interview with Rena 33, (Lead Medical Reimbursement Technician for the VHA, December 15, 2023) she says that yes sex makes the Pap smears less painful, but when OB/GYN doctors say to abstain from vaginal intercourse before the exam, as medical professionals, they are on the medical side of the spectrum and do not want their test results contaminated or distorted in any way possible. Furthermore, these doctors want to ensure that no internal or external factors prevent women from obtaining positive results. Their priority is to ensure that when visiting their OB/GYN, women receive the best medical care possible. Therefore, it would make sense for them to advise their female patients to abstain from vaginal intercourse until after the Pap smear.

4. Howevers and Agreements

In a strained effort to obtain further female intakes on their experiences with Pap smears and whether they agree that sex is the best anxiety and pain reliever for coping with the negative aspects of a Pap smear exam, it appears that the interviewees gave unsurprising answers. Here are further questions into the quandary and less talked about female vagina in relation to Pap smears. When asked about her take on Pap smears, Beata 40, (Relativity Specialist at NYS Department of Financial Services, January 14, 2024) the first interviewee stated that she just had the exam. She gave no other information regarding her Pap smear. In another interviewee's take on the subject of Pap smears, Wendy 40, (School Social Worker at NYC Department of Education, January 14, 2024) commented that she would agree that it is an important exam for women's health. However, besides this comment, Wendy would not elaborate about her experiences with Pap smears. Haddy 40, (Freelance Consultant at United Arab Emirates, January 14, 2024) shared her perspective on Pap smears and simply stated it is a good procedure for women to have especially when they reach a certain age. She also said that generally speaking, with the illness of cervical cancer being too common among women young and old, it is highly recommended that a Pap smear exam be done every three years. Haddy, however, said nothing about her own experiences. The commentaries from these three interviewees underscore Ensler's position and some statements from women that "there's so much darkness and secrecy surrounding them (vaginas) ---- like the Bermuda Triangle." Ensler drives this message home with her statement, "nobody ever reports back from there" [5].

Ensler [5] is correct. Women should be concerned about how they view their vagina and the fact that they not only do not think about it, but they do not talk about their vagina. In agreement with Ensler [5] and Lincoln [2] the book titled "Let's Talk Down

There” mentions that the vagina is something that women are not comfortable discussing. Women need to dismiss the thinking that their vagina is like any other part of their body and be open to the knowledge that just like their face, and other parts of their womanhood need taking care of, so does their vagina. To add to what Thornton & Schramm’s [1] book titled “Ask Your Gynecologist” mentions, the same number of questions that women should ask their doctors regarding their vagina are the same questions that women should be asking themselves when it comes to their vagina. For example, women should in turn ask themselves about their vagina like what’s going on down there, why is this happening and just basically asking themselves the five Ws and how about their vagina. Above that, when it comes to the topic of their vagina, women should be taking a moment to ask themselves about their vagina. Women need to give their vagina the tender loving care (TLC) that it so desperately needs. Conversations with their OB/GYN doctors, themselves, and other women surrounding their vagina open the door to more discussions that address the 5Ws and 1H (who, what, where, why, when and how) so as to initiate that long overdue and much needed discourse.

Women need to get to know and understand their vagina introspectively and retrospectively. Because women are all very unique individuals who do not have to chose the same methods and timelines of discovering their vagina. Women should not need sources and professionals in women’s health and reproductive system such as Thornton & Schramm ([1], Lincoln [2], (Obstetrics and gynaecology [3]), The Gynae Centre [4], Ensler [5] and Integris Health [6] to remind them about the importance of their vagina and how it needs to be heard and seen, not ignored. If anything, these medical professionals and sources should tell women that regardless of their cultural or educational background, profession, place on the globe, or individuality, women are wondering and eager to know what in the world is going on down there. Therefore, women, need to start a conversation about their vagina, embrace their vagina, and get to know it more each day.

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