Death Pussy!

March 10, 2015 By Rae Lewis-Thornton

Today is National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day! I'm honored to have been asked to be an ambassador for this day with other incredible AIDS Activist by Women's Health. Since I don't have a speaking engagement today, I'll I'll be taking questions from 11:00-5:00 on both my Twitter and Instagram accounts. You know the rules, **nothing is to personal.** you can find me on both accounts @RaeLT the Hashtag for the day is #NWAGHAAD

Also, I thought that I would repost a blog that was reprinted in my book, The Politics of Respectability. There is still so much stigma attached to HIV and that must change. This blog post speaks to the core of stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. But it also speaks to how we as women see ourselves. I believe when we love ourselves first, we live our best lives. Get Tested! Use Condoms but first talk to your partner before he touches one breast *wink* See ya on Social Media later today

Death Pussy!

Last year I wrote well over 200 blogs, but ***Death Pussy*** was one of my most read... I thought that I would share it just one more time. I hope for those who didn't get a chance to read it last year, this recap will be enlightening... For those who did read it, you will either get a new aha moment or be reminded of the old one!

I've never had anyone call my vagina "death pussy," at least not to my face. But I have had someone call it "diseased pussy." I've even been called "that AIDS Bitch." Each time I wanted to be mad, but I couldn't. I had to stand like the strong black woman that I am and take that hit like a champ. The fact of the matter is that my vagina is infected with HIV and I do have AIDS. The fact is HIV has taken up camp right between my legs and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. But,

I've learned over the years not to put a lot of energy into what I cannot change, and my HIV status is one of them.

But Sunday when I was reading the RLT Reads Book Club first book, *What Look Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*, I was stopped in my tracks. In one part, a young man refers to Ava, the HIV positive woman in the book, as "death pussy." I was so stuck that I had to put the book down and go bead to clear my head. I thought about it long and hard. I was really shaken. The very core of me was sadden by this description of a woman infected with HIV. I understood the writer's goal of showing the ugliness that people with HIV must face, but it ripped at the very core of me. And y'all know that I have very thick skin, but I was genuinely hurt. It was as if I had been transcended into that very scene in the book. I felt like that young punk was talking to me and every woman in the world with HIV. Suddenly, HIV became an incredibly heavy load, a burden to bear.

It made me wonder if that's what people thought about me. And honestly, more so, if men thought of my vagina in the very same way. It seemed to speak to the core of my self-worth. I started to wonder, had men reduced my self-worth right down to my vagina? Forget that I'm intelligent, smart, educated, articulate, compassionate, driven, cute as a button, and the list goes on and on. Has this been the problem with my dating life in recent years? Was I that much of a liability? Death is a heavy load to carry between your legs. But when I really reflected, what disturbed me the most was in that moment, I had bought into the madness also. Just by thinking such a thing, I had thrown all my self-worth out the window and reduced my value right down to my vagina?

But, that's the way of the world. Our self-worth has very much been connected to our vaginas for centuries, all around the world. A woman's worth has been placed between her legs by man since the beginning of time. Even with Eve, our punishment became the blood that flows each month from between our legs. And in ancient times, a woman had to be isolated during menstruation and then "purified" before entering back into society.

The value of our vaginas has risen and dropped like the stock market at the whim of men. STOP IT! Before I go any further, this is not about male bashing. Why does everything have to be about them? Why can't we women talk freely about us, and let it be about us? Why is the discussion about us, co-opted by them? Why can't our truths, where they intersect with men, be articulated without being perceived as criticism about them. And the fact that I'm even qualifying myself speaks to the very core of the problem.

Yes, our vaginas have been used like a commodity, with no value to us. It's only worth has been where it intersects with the agenda of men. Our vaginas have been mutilated so we can have no pleasure of our own. This horror has been even forced on baby girls, implanting a memory of pain and terror to our vaginas, making us hate it before we really know what it is.

They have been using our vagina's baby making machine to help drive a labor force to build this country. Slave owners made it clear, our vaginas belonged to them, for their pleasure and for their business.

In modern times, our vaginas have been used for human trafficking for the pleasure of men; enslaving our mind, body and spirit. Our vagina's have been raped, beaten, and used as a tool to advance political agendas. Our virginity has been taken from us in a misguided belief that our untouched vaginas will cure them of their diseases.

Make no mistake, we have many subliminal messages drilling into us over and over again that the value of our vaginas are connected to something greater than who we are. Even what appears to be innocent advertising sends a message. Honestly, take a good long look at the Dolce and Gabbana ad, then take a good look at the picture of the soldiers and the woman. The similarities outweigh the differences.

So when I heard the term, "death pussy," I had a heavy heart. It forced me to sit down and take a long hard look at the history of women. But it also made me look at my own history. What got me to this destination called HIV. But most important, why would I consider at any level, that such a term as "death pussy" would define me. Had I reduced my entire self-worth right down to my vagina? Was this leftover residue from my childhood, being violated by the men in my family who should have protected me? Being taught that any love that I get from a man may begin with popping popcorn and watching tv, but ends between my legs?

I had to gather myself. Remind myself that God created me in His image, all that I am, mind, body and spirit. I cannot let anyone determine the value of my vagina anymore. I made myself a cup of tea and became still in the moment. Instead of focusing on the darkness of my life, I shifted to the goodness of my life.

l had worked too hard and too long in therapy to be thrown right back into the self-loathing that got me there in the first place. I cannot believe the hype! I will not believe the hype! I am a wonderful Black Woman and any man would be lucky to have me. If a man can't see that I am living in my life, that there is nothing that says death about me, then he does not see my true

value. And I believe that a man who does not see my value is not worthy of me. It’s like putting pearls on swine, they have no place together. And I will never again give the best of me to have just a part of him.

But most important, how I see myself will dictate how I treat myself. This is not just about a man but about what I do with my life and how I live that life. Your self-worth must begin with you, about you, for the greater you, to be used in the larger society. But you can never fulfill your purpose in life if you do not see yourself as God sees you and intended for you to be.



There is much truth to the Bible verse that says, “As a person thinkth so is he.” But I submit, it’s the easiest thing in the world to tell someone, “Change your mind and your ass will follow.” The truth of the matter is that change takes time and work. You cannot will the darkness away, you’ve got to dig yourself to the light. And once you get there, you gotta constantly remind yourself that the light is where God intended for you to be.

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