Introduction and Alexandra's Background

Hey, everybody, welcome back to another interview on our Sexual Health Summit. I am so, so excited to introduce to you a very dear friend of mine a vulva and pelvic health and sexuality, sensuality specialist, my friend Alexandra Durigan.

Thank you so much for being here with me today. Thanks, babe. Such a gift. Such a gift. And I want to start with just asking you to share a little bit about your story, because your background is so interesting as far as your history at Mayo Clinic, your history as a nurse.

And you at one point took a very, very, very say, different turn in your clinical career and went really deep into the specialty of yours. So can you just kind of give everybody a background of how you got into this, this work that you're doing?

For sure. So my journey began when I was younger and I was really battling a life threatening eating disorder throughout my years as a young woman. And it kind of came the time I was coming into my sophomore year of high school and via my doctors and my family, there kind of became this jurisdiction that I could go to treatment and heal and then go to college or like I wouldn't be able to go.

And I knew that going to college, like, you know, I kind of had this moment of like, yes, I want to keep living. And so it really it was in treatment that I decided to come back to my body.

Throughout that time, I had lost my menstrual cycle. I was deeply numb in my body and my tissues. And, you know, I know that that, in varying degrees, is a very shared story for us, as women of not feeling safe in our womanly form and our womanly bodies.

And so as I began to heal, I really knew that I wanted to help other women. And so growing up in the town of Rochester, Minnesota, it was a very natural next step to go to nursing school.

And so that became my path. And I love science. I love physiology. So it was a really amazing time. But during nursing school, I was also on my own healing journey, coming back to my body, my sexuality, my menstrual cycle, supporting and clearing my hormones and my mental health and just so many things.

And so by the time that I got you know, done with nursing school and became a women's specialty nurse, I feel like it was this lens of perception that had changed within me that began to interface with what I was seeing.

And so what I was seeing was women giving birth, having a third, second, fourth degree tear that then we were just sending them home or women getting hysterectomy as an issue for activities and having these massive reproductive surgeries or women getting nerve ablations from having deep, untouched pelvic pain.

And so I was starting to feel more in my body, and I knew that I had to be a part of something more. And that I actually believed in so much more for our womanhood than I was seeing in this allopathic care model.

And so that became the search for me, and that became my path. And eventually the founding of origin pelvic care. So, so, so beautiful. And, you know, they touched on such an important point in that which is so many times I think we hear in practice that from women, like, I'm ready to be done with my cycle.

I'm so sick of my hormones saying, God, it's over, it's hurt. Like, you know, this, this whole thing of womanhood sometimes is really sometimes framed as hard, as annoying and all these different things, right?

So a lot of your work really is in redefining that for women totally. And redefining it through the health that is

possible because we just have to know that as women today, like sexual health and whole health was severed a long time ago.

And I reproductive reservoirs and sexual bodies have not been cared for. And so everything that we've normalized as the difficulties of womanhood and these symptoms, like menstrual cramps and all these things, it's like that's happening.

Reframing Vulva Health and Safety

And our language is our body is languishing, not because we are not receiving the care that we need and required to be so radiant and vital and wow and thriving.

And our sexual bodies as women. And there's a whole other paradigm possible when we turn towards that. That's wonderful. And I want to bring us to the conversation that we have talked about a little bit offline, which is on the vulva.

And, you know, when you're talking about, you know, kind of connect this all when you're talking about vaginal terrors and all these types of situations that are really traumatic to the female.

Right. When we're talking about situations like that or other situations where it's so easy as women for us to say, compare what we look like, what our vulvas look like, our genital image.

And I've seen and as I imagine you have in research, a direct correlation with our genital image, how we feel about our genitals and our sex drive. Right? So there's this real, real like.

Like psychological and body physiological relationship of the vulva to our sex drive. So can we talk a little bit about the vulva? How with with the Volvo with that body part is to you how you utilize and help women really become more acquainted with their vulva as a well as as the topic of engorgement.

Can we kind of wrap all of that together? Love it, love it. So let's pass it out a little bit. I really believe that the vulva is one of the most under nourished and overlooked parts of our feminine physiology, particular literally our sexual bodies, as well as the birthing canal, you know.

And so this part of us, it gets me so excited because it has such an impact on our health. And, you know, we've really been fed most women a wounded story of what our vulva should look like.

And in my hands on practice, I would say that like pretty close to 100% of the women come in believing that something is wrong with the anatomy of their vulva and nothing is.

And so we each I call it like a snowflake, right? Like we each have a unique expression of our external and internal labia as and no two vulva are the same.

Every single woman has a one of a kind vulva between her legs. And like I wish that we were taught that as little girls like this part of you is so special and it will not look like any other person's because that is unique to who you are as a woman in your body.

And so when we carry shame around our vulva is when we don't feel safe in our own anatomy. That really starts to wreak havoc on our nervous system. And our nervous system goes all the way down to our vulva.

And the powerful thing about our nervous system is that when we are in safety, when we perceive a part of our body to be safe, beautiful, belong, joining our nervous system is in resonance and regulation.

And what happens then is that it orients blood flow to that place. However, when the opposite is true, when we don't feel safe in our evolv that when we carry shame or wounded sexual narratives and belief systems about our vulva and we begin to disconnect from that place, our nervous system says, I'm going to protect you and it will fault

blood flow to our vulva.

And now we want to be intimate. We want to make love, we want to feel pleasure, but we don't have physiologic blood flow going into those tissues. So what happens is those tissues get tight.

They get contracted. Some women, they get achy, some women they get numb. Some women have a difficulty lacking reaching like higher states of libido where lubrication.

And so much of that is in the under wiring of our relationship to our body. And whether or not we feel safe at the vulva and the vulva is key. Beautiful physiologic process that so few of us know about is the process of engorgement.

And so we have these incredible erectile networks swimming through and around our vulva and our clitoral body and into our labia as and around our vaginal opening.

And our vulva is meant to fill and engorged and aroused with blood flow. And that is where we as women and our feminine physiology get to unlock our deepest states of pleasure.

And it's that feeling of the vulva that also prepares the yoni and our internal pleasure spaces to actually be able to receive. And in this world of fast sex paired with, you know, a lot of residual shame at our own vulva, as you know, it's like that's why it's no wonder that we as women are having difficult experiences in that place when it's a place that's meant to be worshiped.

And I tell all my clients, like the sexual piece of your vulva, the engorgement, the filling, the arousal process of your vulva, it shows you that you were made to take up space, that you were made to be worshiped and loved and touched with care and slowness and attention.

And that is our nature, period, you know. And so it really informs us when we understand that physiology and nervous system led process of the vulva, of how truly sacred our bodies are as women, and what our deep feminine sexual processes are.

And again, that we get to take up that time and space and love what's between our legs. I want to tease apart what you said a little bit, because there is so much juiciness in that.

And and also just a comment that I think you're the absolute perfect person to talk about the nervous system component of this, because I'm sure our listeners are feeling like I am right now, which is just so soothed and relaxed by your voice or your tonality when you're talking about the nervous system.

It's it's so, so, so beautiful. And I think what I really want to make sure that people are understanding, to kind of summarize what you said, is that essentially and if I'm getting this wrong and you want to correct me, but just to make sure everybody's on the same page and hearing you, is that when we have shame, when we have this sort of displeasure with our vulva, with the look, with the genitals or anything else that can get our nervous system disregulated, that's going to change the blood flow, that's going to change the engorgement, that's going to change the ability to experience pleasure and take up space in the world.

Right. Totally such a beautiful, beautiful summary. And, you know, on top of that, like a lot of us as women are carrying really difficult memories in relationship to our vulva.

Engorgement, Pleasure, and Sexual Health

And so just knowing like that, that matters and that has impact and we deserve to cultivate these new possibilities of experience in our vulva so that we can begin to see her with greater eyes of love, touch her with deeper hands of care, and really heal our nervous system all the way down to the very birth of our pelvis.

Involve that. Yeah. And it's going to lead me to a really great next question, which I also before I ask that I think is

important for people to do. Just remember that like for women, when I look at research, I see that usually this whole process of how long this can take and how long like orgasm can take, right?

Which is sometimes where we're going with pleasure, sometimes where we're not, but it's oftentimes 20 to 40 minutes for women. So I think when you're talking about like, okay, well, quick engorgement and that sort of thing, it's so important to bring up like this is very normal for it not to go fast as women.

Right. Is there anything you want to add to that before I move us all along? Yeah, just that engorgement is a cultural shift. Yeah. Yeah, it's really well said.

That's really well said. And I think there's been so much history around. It's supposed to look this way. It's supposed to be the speed and it's a post as opposed to supposed to.

So it really is. It's such a beautiful way of framing that. And so, you know, when we're talking about all of this, when we're talking about our vulva health, we're talking about our ability to experience pleasure or nervous system regulation.

Can we kind of take this a little bit macro and say talk a little bit about how sexual health is actually a really important component of the overarching health picture?

Because I think for so many people, it's so easy. And one of the things I talk about sometimes is like, Oh, we eat or we eat our good food, we drink our water, we go exercise and you know, we get good sleep, right?

And so oftentimes sexuality is really not brought in to the tenets of foundation of of health. So can you help with that bridge and kind of tie that together.

A I love how you just said that too. Like the tenets of health, like if we can just really weave sexual health into that, I just have so much pleasure.

Yeah. So for me, you know, again, I came from the allopathic realm and I got really curious while I was a nurse, like, where the heck is our sexual health and our pelvic health?

And I remember even in my training on the labor and delivery unit, it was like, don't make it sexual, don't make it sexual. And I was like, This is very sexual.

And so when we've suffered sexual health from whole health, we have a really deep wounding in our women's health and, you know, whole health care system.

But today we get to talk about our beautiful women. And really what we need to understand is that suffered from her sexuality is a severance from our very nature as human beings.

And so that is a massive internal schism that we are all dealing with to varying degrees. The other piece is that our sexual health, the engorgement of our vulva, the filling and all of the drying of blood flow that our clitoral body brings.

You know, I constantly challenge that the clitoris is just made for pleasure. And I acknowledge she is made for so much pleasure and her role in engorgement is absolutely essential to drying blood flow all the way through the deep pelvis, all the way through the uterine body, all the way through the cervix, all the way through the over.

Cheese and these key reproductive reservoirs that are a part of our hormonal access system, our hypothalamus, our pituitary ovarian axis, that is the control center for our hormones.

And so when we have tight pelvic balls, when we are not engaging and filling with blood, when these spaces are not getting to drink the drying in of blood that sexuality provides, then they are deprived of key blood, nutrients and oxygen flow.

And over time this chronic malnourishment can create this is and we have one in four women, potentially one in three women. If we were going to update statistics today who have some form of reproductive or pelvic dis is.

And if we were to compare statistics, one in three women feel frustrated sexually. One in four women have pelvic pain. And so we have this huge correlation that we need to look at and this massive repair to come home to for sexual health as whole health.

And so not just the health of our reproductive systems, but also the health of our hormonal cascades as women as well as and our bodies capacity to experience dopamine and oxytocin in these beautiful biochemical that help us access joy, that help us access capacity and life, that help us access beauty and love and relationship in life like we deserve to be so, so, so wow.

And so now we have our biochemical makeup being impacted and then again, we have our nervous system being impacted and just kind of circling it back. If we have an internal schism from our sexuality, separating that from our whole health as human beings, that's going to up regulate our nervous system because we won't feel safe in the body that we are living in and the sexual body that we are living in.

So it's huge. Yeah. Thank you. And it's so interesting. I guess you're talking I'm actually thinking about a client I had this week who had low blood flow to her feet and she was like she got some ultrasounds done and there was definitely some vascular issues.

And just what I'm thinking about in this moment as you're talking, is like, wow, how how dysfunctional is it still in medicine and vulva? How where? It's like, oh, the moment somebody says they have cold feet and we're worried about circulation, all of a sudden it's like, Oh, wow, we got to check this out.

There could be a vascular issue when that same sort of vascular issue could be affecting the vulva. And yet somebody's experiencing both of our symptoms.

We're not looking at it in this broad way that you're talking about. What's happening, cardiovascular like what's happening, nervous system wise, what's happening emotionally in safety wise, right?

Because it's connected to that bigger picture. So I want to make this really clear and actionable for people. So when it comes and people are listening to this and they're wondering like, okay, well how do I know if, like, I need to be better in touch with my vulva?

How do I know if I have a problem there? How do I know if a vulva issue is like leading to any level of sexual dysfunction? Like how do how do women know?

Yeah, obviously we all need more time with our vulva. We do. Also have I ever spent time touching the tissues of my external lips, my internal lips? Do I know what they look like?

Does that feel safe for me to touch them or to look at my body there in the mirror? And if there's some notes for you there, then this is the perfect place to be and to familiarize yourself both with your father, both physically through deep, caring, quality of touch and visually of what does my body look like there?

Because if we're not familiar with that part of us, then we're not familiar with a really essential and big part of us. And, you know, we deserve so much more than for our partners to be the only ones who perhaps know a little bit about our sexual body.

And we as women deserve to so sovereignly inhabit and deeply know our vulva and our sexual body. So for me, that first check in of have I ever touched and spent time at this part of my body?

Do I know what this part of my body looks like? And then we can explore sensation as I touch my labels and clitoral body. Does there feel like there's sensitivity there?

Do these tissues feel soft alive? Is there blood pulsing? Is there flow? Does it seem like these tissues are drinking blood or do they feel frail? Do they feel tight?

Do they feel sore, achy or numb? And if we have any of that tightness or a sense of, hmm, maybe there's some restriction, these tissues don't seem super alive if they're gray, if they're not feeling as you touch them, then these are all deeper reasons that we can look into the health of our vulva.

And then very clearly some women know I have pain at my involve vulvodynia is incredibly on the rise. That is both fashion nervous system emotional. It's such a complex experience, but it's because of lack of care and lack of attunement to our feminine physiology that that we've just been deprived from as women.

And some women very clearly know, I have numbness here, you know, so those are all reasons to turn to words. And then again, the biggest one for me is just do I feel safe and belonging to this part of me.

Yeah. Gave us all to ask ourselves that.

Recognizing Vulva Issues and Pelvic Care

Yeah. Yeah. And that's that's a huge part of what you're doing in your work. Right, is helping women learn to begin to heal their vulvas and become safer.

Is that. That's right. Yeah. Totally. Ultimately, our whole pelvic walls. But our vulva is a huge pleasure. Yeah. A scale. Yeah. Beautiful. Well, okay.

So other things I think that are important to talk about that I know you have experience in your work as far as healing the vulva, as far as pelvic health in general, like you just mentioned.

So I know you do a lot of like Yoni Steams in your work, right? And then you also do a little side project that I was invited to participate in, got sick and I couldn't, unfortunately.

But I think it's a very important side project that you have to the photographs and that sort of thing. So maybe tell us a little bit about Yoni steaming and what that's like because I think that's a really important healing process for people.

And I don't think probably a lot of our listeners are really familiar with what that is and why that can really help with vulva and pelvic health. Totally. Yeah.

So the foundation of my work is in person, hands on whole body pelvic care. So we tend the tissues, the fascia, the ligaments, the muscles, the wholeness of the pelvic wall to make sure that all of these incredibly important spaces are in integrity and that they're in a house.

Another thing that I do for all of my clients is customer both blends and steaming care plans. And really that comes from my deep love of what yoni steaming is and how immediately accessible it is for all of us as women.

Because we can yoni steam in our own homes. We don't have to go to a professional. We don't have to go, you know, to a care provider. We can really yoni steam in our own homes and so yoni steaming is the process of brewing basically an herbal tea but for our bodies and so you I always have women do herbal consults so that we can look into their reproductive history, their sexual history, what they're experiencing and their tissues, what their relationship to their sexual body is.

We look at their menstrual cycle and all of these things because herbs are medicine, they have deeply medicinal properties. And then we formulate an herbal plan that is specific to each woman and her needs.

The process of Yoni steaming itself again is brewing the herbs with water and a small pot. And then once it's infused, we ultimately kneel over it and we allow that healing medicinal vapor to rise to the tissues of our vulva, of

our pelvic bone.

And the tissues of our vulva are deeply porous. And so as that heat encourages blood flow to that area, our bloodstream and cardiovascular system is going to absorb the medicinal oils and then bring it all through our deep pelvis.

Ultimately, our whole body and yoni steaming has so many benefits it can support the regulation of our menstrual cycle. It can unwind fascia in tight or dehydrated tissues at the yoni or vulva.

It can support us and feeling safe by having this ritual of relating to this part of our body, it can infuse and increase our capacity to be sensitive and sensitize to our vulva and just so many things.

I use it for postpartum healing. Whenever there is pain in the pelvis, whenever there is irregularity in the menstrual cycle. And so it's just a gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous ritual for us as women to engage with health within our pelvic ball.

Yeah. Thank you. And what you're bringing up for me with that conversation is IUDs and, you know, both the hormonal morena kind, as well as more of the copper kind.

What are your feelings like? I feel like some women do really well with them and then others do not. And it can be such a trauma for for some women to have the insertion, to have it remain in in their uterus.

So what have you seen with IUDs in your practice, especially from the, you know, the pelvic care world? I'm very curious about your feeling on that. Yeah.

And this is my personal feeling and this is what I witnessed and this is what I experienced. And so I'm just sharing from my direct experience is that IUDs are incredibly traumatic.

The insertion process for most women is extremely painful. For most women, they have multiple days of pain, Most women have multiple days of pain after insertion.

If something happens and the IUD protrudes through the uterine wall, it's often not detected for months at a time because far too often women relaying pain to their doctors ends up in dismay while the taking out process is extremely hard.

And then we have to acknowledge that the delicacy of our endometrial lining and of our intrauterine body this is a highly sensitive internal place and something like an IUD is going to be sending signals of chronic stress, then sending signals of chronic inflammation and chronic inflammation leads to the laying down of tissue very synonymous to scar tissue.

And so now we have intrauterine adhesions and then when women want to get them taken out and conceive, most women don't conceive right away. And we have an ever increasing rises of infertility or fertility difficulties.

And, you know, if we've been on an IUD for years, it's likely that we've had uterine stress for that same amount of time.

Yoni Steaming and IUD Concerns

So it's a huge healing process for our body is as well as, you know, the wire that goes through the cervix. Our cervix is also constantly in stress. And so, you know, for me, there's just far better ways than enduring ever lasting trauma in our uterine body to track our cycles, to be fit, like, aware of our fertility and to be sovereign in our capacity to conceive or our desire to not conceive in our lives.

And this is just such a wide conversation as women, is what's our relationship to the fertility of our bodies and how do we sovereignly use contraceptive mechanisms where we're not continuing the endurance of suffrage in our

feminine physiology?

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Thank you so much for that. I it's an interesting topic for me because every once in a while, like I'll get on social media, I use social media mostly for research and not for consumption typically.

And one of the things I've been researching over the past couple of months is just what are people on social media saying about IUDs? Right. And I think it's an area where women are not really fully told the risk, because there's a lot of what I have been finding on social media is there's a lot of anger around why was I not told this?

Why was I not told? As I was told this was safe? I was told there'd be a little maybe premenstrual pain or my period would go away if you had the hormonal.

But like all of these other things you're mentioning, I think are just so important and so valuable for people to know. So at the very minimum, when you're making this decision that you know, that listeners are like, Oh wow, maybe I didn't hear that before.

Maybe that is something that whether or not it, you know, defines the end decision is still something you all at least get to know about in your decision making process.

So if you choose to go that way, it's not coming as a surprise, right? Totally. Yeah. That we're not actually authentically consenting to what's happening because we're misinformed or under informed.

Yeah. Yeah, I feel that go. Yeah, yeah. I thank you for sharing that. And we're, we're wrapping up here on time, but I do want to make sure we have time to let everybody know how to get a hold of you.

And before we do that, I am wondering if you'll share with everybody too a little bit about your vulva prior work, because I really feel like with what I'm seeing in research, like I mentioned earlier around genital image and that association with sexuality but also with confidence, you know, with like also internal personal confidence.

And what you mentioned earlier around some of the practices you recommend, you know, looking at your vulva, actually stroking, touching, becoming friends, really great friends with your own vulva, all of that really is related to this beautiful project that I know is a passion project for you.

And I think it's really important work that you're doing in the world. So I want to make sure we at least mention that as well. Oh, you're so great. Thanks, babe.

Yeah. So the Vulva Projects is really an initiative to restore anatomical literacy. And like you said, like body confidence in our vulvas as women to both celebrate the uniqueness of our own bodies, to understand that it there is such variation and the expression of each of our values so that we as women can feel safe and belonging to our sexual bodies in a way that hasn't been offered to us before.

And I love research as well, and I love anatomy. And our availability of anatomy is so poor, particularly for the array of gorgeous vulva anatomy that exists.

And for me, you know, there's so many ways to touch of all that. And it's so also unique to what is the expression of our tissues. And so for us as women, it's this gorgeous adventure that we get to have with our vulva.

But the Vulva Projects is holding women in a safe and sacred container, and we photograph our Vulvas. And my end goal biggest vision is to have just a massive gallery where women can come and experience and witness the truth of our anatomy, the beauty of our anatomy, and feel more belonging to their very own bodies.

And it was so cool in our first round of this experience, after women got their photos back, everyone was like very biased to their own vulva. There was like, Oh my God, look at how beautiful my vulva is.

The Vulva Projects and How to Work With Alexandra

And it was just so fun and so liberating and so freeing and exciting to like, see that. Whereas we went in and there was a lot of nerves and a lot of uncertainty, but all these women got to emerge just witnessing the beauty of their body.

And so it's a passion project. And yeah, I hope that many more women can be a part of it. Yeah, yeah. Please keep us all informed on what you need on that and tell us a little bit about how people work with you.

I know you are giving away a opt on the five best ways to improve your pleasure. Is that what it is? Yes. Yes. So you can receive that little e-book and and.

Yeah, the best way to work with me. Well, the main way to work with me is hands on an Origin Pelvic Care Ceremony. And really Origin Pelvic Care serves women and sexuality and pleasure, reproductive health and the whole birth continuum, meaning the journey of conception, prenatal and postpartum care.

For me, there's never a time that we as women don't require pelvic care, that it is actually foundational to our whole health as women. And so yeah, you can find me @Originpelviccare on Instagram or originpelviccare.com Perfect.

And you guys will have that all Alexandra's bio the the downloadable pdf on how to improve your pleasure will be actually found throughout the summit, so you'll have multiple places where you can sign up for that to make sure you get that and that amazing information in your inbox.

And thank you again so much for your time today. This has been a true pleasure, as always. Really appreciate you. Oh, you're amazing. Thank you. Bye for now, everybody.