

Example of essay on the vagina monologues eve ensler

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



A Critical Essay

Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, first performed in 1996 and published in book form two years later is designed to shock by its frequent use of the word 'vagina.' Its appropriation halfway through the text of the word 'cunt' and its detailed exploration of issues that have previously thought of as taboo make clear its motivation. The words are important: Ensler produced her work after many interviews with women - most of whom had never spoken openly about the organ that might be said to define their femininity and which is central to sex and to childbirth. Therefore, simply by claiming the words 'vagina' and 'cunt' for open discussion is a powerful step forward. The purpose of the book is not simply to shock. Its purposes are as multi-layered as the book itself: it is informative, argumentative, funny, moving and a work of activism. *V-Day* has become a global phenomenon and it undertakes important work in raising awareness of abuse towards women and to raising funds. It is, as Still (115) has described it A vehicle for subversion, designed through its insistent focus on the vagina to demystify the societal taboos surrounding it. Overall, *The Vagina Monologues* as a form that perfectly matches its subject matter and which the message of this text.

Ensler's book relies on hundreds of interviews conducted with a huge range of woman about their vaginas. Since going on tour with the stage show Ensler has added to the performance text by including stories related to her by women she has met after performances. [Incidentally, although the subject matter might remain taboo, Ensler whole point is that it should not be taboo and that sense, the success of the stage show and the large

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number of women in the audience suggests that this is a subject matter that women themselves should be out in the open.] Apart from the interviews with women, which are arranged thematically, Ensler peppers her text with attributed quotations by experts or famous woman to give her text authority. At times she presents scientific facts. She also tends to juxtapose serious chapters with funny irreverent chapters. For example, the section on genital mutilation is followed by a story of love between two women who meet at a shelter for abused women. This very technique it could be argued mirrors the volatile, changing nature of the vagina itself in the course of life and, more specifically in the course of a month.

The celebratory parts of the *The Vagina Monologues* are rooted in surreal humorous passages and are interspersed through the book. Early on Ensler makes the point that many women do not take the time or the trouble to look at their vaginas and the list (6) she produced of euphemisms and names which women use to refer to their vagina is largely puerile which suggest that as a topic for serious debate the vagina is surrounded by ignorance and a childish embarrassment - 'poonani, deedee, monkey box, coochi snorcher, fanny boo, mushmellow' - suggest that the reclamation of 'vagina' and 'cunt' are well over-due.

In the context of the history of feminism, Ensler's text exemplifies key developments since the early 1970s. On a very simple level this is a book that could not have appeared in 1968. The historical phenomenon of feminism has created a climate in which works like *The Vagina Monologues* can be published and become very successful. It is a feminist work in two key ways: firstly, it seeks to draw evidence from every corner of the globe to

campaign on issues of concern to women: domestic abuse, clitoral mutilation, rape as a weapon of war to terrorize a civilian population and the denial of basic human rights, such as the right to an education or equality in the courts. But it also a feminist text in an aesthetic sense: the plethora of voices used and brought together by Ensler are typical of some feminist texts which we might think of a poly-vocalic. By contrast, texts produced by men are uni-vocalic – they have one voice and present one point of view, reflecting the rigidity of patriarchal societies. Returning to the word “ cunt,” Ensler’s appropriation of it represents a development in feminist thoughts and attitudes. Early feminists had avoided the word and proscribed it because they felt it was used in a derogatory way by men and encouraged sexist attitudes to women – as if one body part was selected as the most important part of a woman and the spoken about which a taboo, harsh-sounding word. How is Ensler able to appropriate such a word? Partly because of post-modern developments in feminism which have allowed women to explore their own bodies and embrace their sexuality through self-pleasure and an acceptance of their full, sexual selves.

However, Ensler is good at keeping the audience’s interest and veers between the amusing and infantile (‘ If your vagina got dressed what would it wear?’ 15 -17) and heart-rending accounts of mass rape in Bosnia by Serbian troops in the 1990s, or the ongoing practice of female circumcision. A Bosnian woman (63) describes the horrendous injuries performed on her by enemy soldiers as the violation of her whole community: “ They invaded it. Butchered it and burned it down.”

Apart from the irreverent fun and the horror of what men do to women, there

is an area of the ext which encourages female self-discovery. The moment (24) when an old lady touches her clitoris for the very first time is momentous and astonishingly beautiful (“ when she finally found her clitoris, she said, she cried.”), and Ensler herself (43 – 50) goes to a workshop in order to learn how to give herself an orgasm:

: there was a little quivering at first which urged me to stay. Then the quivering became a quake, an eruption, the lays dividing and sub-dividing. The quaking broke open into an ancient horizon of light and silence, which opened onto a plane of music and colours and innocence and longing
Ensler’s monologues serve as a reminder that child abuse is just one form of violence against the female body, that also includes rape, female circumcision, gynaecological examinations, or quite simply, the ignorance that women are kept in with regard to their own bodies.

And that ignorance extends not only to the location of the clitoris and the uncertainty over a woman’s first period, but to the cultural assumptions that encourage women to buy vaginal deodorants and to be dominated by men. Not all critics have liked Ensler’s work. She has faced criticism for her tendency to lump all women all over the world together: Ashton (57) writes: It is problematic in terms of its globalising and essentialising impulse: the desire to connect with damage down to women worldwide, but at the possible risk of erasing the different social, sexual and cultural circumstances.

It is possible to concede that Ashton has a point but for me the sheer variety of different voices from all over the world, made the book stronger, and its cultural success can be measured by the growing popularity of V-Day – a

worldwide awareness day to educate everyone about the problems of male abuse of women in whatever guise.

Ensler's style is constantly varied because she adopts many voices. The scientific voice recounting facts about the clitoris; the historical voice about the condemnation of witches; her own voice when she is recounting deeply personal experiences; the voices of other women recounting stories of pain, stories of pleasure and awakening. This variety of styles is entirely appropriate for the subject matter. She is trying to assert the primal importance of part of a woman's body which is often ignored, misunderstood or demonized – the variety of styles help convey the idea that all woman – regardless of age, class, ethnicity or nationality – should be aware of and celebrate their vaginas.

Works Cited

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