

The Vagina Monologues Study Guide

The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler

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Plot Summary

This book is an expansion of a play originally written and performed in 1998, with both book and play anchored by the author's intent to break down the barriers of secrecy and shame surrounding both the use of the word "vagina" (both in public and in private) and the violence perpetrated against those who have one. Drawing upon both personal experiences and those of women whom she interviewed as source material, the author creates a wide-reaching, multi-faceted portrait of both the positive and negative aspects of being a woman in contemporary society.

The book opens with a series of introductions. The first is by the author, introducing the book as a central component of the Tenth Anniversary celebration of the creation, publication, and performance of her original play. She describes how her original intention (to simultaneously celebrate womanhood and awaken awareness of violence against women) has expanded into a worldwide movement manifesting the same dual intention. Introductions to the original published edition of the play (by noted feminist Gloria Steinem and by the author) highlight the need for such a movement, and the value it has in women's individual lives and in the place women have, can take, or in some cases are forced, in society.

The main body of the book consists of the original Vagina Monologues as well as subsequently written material. At the outset, the author comments that the content of the monologues is, for the most part, based on interviews she conducted with a number of women, material she distilled and shaped to varying degrees. Some of the monologues, she writes, are practically verbatim transcripts of what she was told. Others, she adds, are compilations and/or summaries.

The subjects of the monologues vary widely - from a serio-comic consideration of pubic hair to an elderly woman's description of her lifelong perceptions of and/or experiences with her vagina to a young girl's responses to the standard questions the author asks in her interviews. These questions range from "If your vagina got dressed, what would it wear?" to "If it could speak, what would it say?" to "What does your vagina smell like?" Summaries of answers to all three of these questions make up three of the monologues.

Many of the monologues are introduced and/or commented on by the author. Several times, she suggests that as she continued her interviews and gathered more and more vagina-related experiences, she made realizations about her own perspectives and attitudes. At one point, for example, she describes her realization that in the original play, she had not included any discussions about birth, and then includes a monologue communicating her sense of wonder at being present for the birth of her granddaughter. At another point, she incorporates her discomfort with a discussion of lesbian sexuality into a monologue spoken by a sexually satisfied lesbian prostitute.

This section also includes several monologues inspired by, and incorporating, the experiences of women from around the world. A section entitled "The Spotlight Monologues" contains stories distilled from the experiences of, among others, Bosnian,

Mexican, Pakistani, and Japanese women. This international broadening of perspective echoes, and perhaps is a manifestation of, a broadening of the author's personal perspective.

The final section of the book is a summary/documentation of the way the author's original intention has evolved into the world wide movement known as V-Day, a social activism aimed at increasing awareness of the pervasiveness of violence against women and ending such violence for good. This section includes a year-by-year summary of activities in North America and around the world, and lists ways in which lives of both individuals and communities have been changed by alignment with V-Day's objectives and actions.



Part 1

Part 1 Summary

This book is an expansion of a play originally written and performed in 1998, with both book and play anchored by the author's intent to break down the barriers of secrecy and shame surrounding both the use of the word "vagina" (both in public and in private) and the violence perpetrated against those who have one. Drawing upon both personal experiences and those of women whom she interviewed as source material, the author creates a wide-reaching, multi-faceted portrait of both the positive and negative aspects of being a woman in contemporary society.

Introduction - In her introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition of the Monologues, the author describes how the ideas in, and motivations for, her original writing of the stage presentation of the monologues (first performed as a "downtown" play in New York City) have expanded into the ideas behind, and motivations for, the global movement known as V-Day. That movement, she writes, is focused on raising awareness of, and bringing an end to, violence against women and girls. She describes V-Day activities around the world as ways in which those activities have triggered change and ways in which more change is necessary - violence against women, she contends, and continues in most countries, and in many forms. She comments that the root causes of such violence are still unchanged, and calls for governments and political leaders to make active transformation of those causes a priority.

Forward - In her introduction to the original edition of the Monologues, noted feminist Gloria Steinem describes the hushed tones and euphemisms ("down there") with which the vagina and other female sexual organs were discussed in her childhood, drawing a contrast with the pioneering, activist spirit of her grandmothers and mother. She also describes traveling to India and discovering the history of religious and spiritual respect for the power of the female, the ways in which the female sexual organs were portrayed in religious art, and how patriarchal western religions have recreated the shape of those organs in the physical structures of churches. This, she contends, was done to enable males to claim female power as their own, power that she also suggests is being reclaimed by women.

Preface - In her preface to the original edition, the author describes the reasons why she says the word "vagina" so often. It is, she says, a way of saying to women, including herself, that it's not a dirty word, that there's nothing wrong with either having a vagina or talking about it, in spite of what culture and tradition would have women believe. She describes how she was raped as a child, and how that led her to mentally and emotionally disconnect from her vagina. She also describes her awareness of how simply having a vagina (i.e., being a woman) makes an individual a target for violence, and her belief that such violence must stop. She comments that "as more women say the word, saying it becomes less of a big deal", adding that "it becomes part of our language, part of our lives ... [vaginas] become part of our bodies, connected to our



minds, fueling our spirits." She also comments that the process of creating the monologues involved interviewing women about their experiences with and/or opinions of their vaginas, and shaping them into the collection intended to "release the myths, shame, and fear ... to practice saying the word, because, as we know, the word is what propels us and sets us free."

Part 1 Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements here. The first is the way in which the preface to the new edition evokes, without outright suggesting it, the often referred to principle that one person can make a change in the world. The process described by the author, and described in greater detail in Part 8, is essentially that - one person triggering change in the lives of a few others who trigger change in other lives, and so on and so on. To look at the sequence more poetically, it has often been suggested, albeit sometimes whimsically, that the tiny flapping of a butterfly's wings can someday, somehow trigger a hurricane in another part of the world. That, in a metaphoric nutshell, seems to be what the preface, as well as Part 8, seems to be suggesting, and what the author, in writing the monologues in the first place and perpetuating them in this edition, seems to be advocating.

The second noteworthy element is the way in which the various introductions and prefaces summarize the book's three themes. Finally, they raise the possibility that from awareness of both the violence against women and what lies beneath the secrets and euphemisms surrounding the vagina in particular and female sexuality in general, comes hope for both personal and societal transformation. In other words, this section sets the reader up for both revelation and action based on that revelation, both taking place on the level of individual and of world community.

Finally, there is a sense here that on some level, the author is putting her unique, personal spin on the age-old idea that words have power, based on how they're used and how they're interpreted. In other words, here and throughout the book, the author is taking a word with a secret, hidden connotation (vagina) and transforming it into perhaps a slogan or a war cry, or maybe a sigh of grace, or even all the above.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

In an opening comment, the author lists several sometimes humorous euphemisms for vagina, comments on the strangeness of the word, and describes how difficult it actually is for a woman to actually see her vagina. This, she writes, is why she decided to talk to women, even though they were often reluctant, about their vaginas.

In her introduction to the actual monologues, the author comments on the process she used to accumulate/shape the monologues, and suggests that the subject of this first monologue, in one way or another, came up in every interview.

"Hair" The speaker of the monologue describes how her husband didn't like the hair around her vagina and made her shave it. She describes her discomfort, how she let the hair grow back, how her husband started "screwing around" on her because, as he says, she didn't please him sexually, and how a female therapist manipulated her into shaving herself again. The speaker then comments that this made her realize the hair around her vagina was a kind of protection, "the leaf around the flower", and that you had to love hair in order to love the vagina. And besides, she adds, her husband still "screwed around".

In her introduction to the next two monologues, the author comments that she asked every woman she interviewed the same questions.

"If your vagina got dressed, what would it wear?" The monologue is a list of some of the answers - "... a male tuxedo ... something machine washable ... glasses ... an electrical shock device to keep unwanted strangers away ... lace and combat boots ..."

"If your vagina could talk, what would it say, in two words?" This monologue is also a list of some of the answers - "Is that you ... brave choice ... enter at your own risk ... I'm here ... find me ... where's Brian ..."

"The Flood" The author introduces this monologue with commentary on her experiences interviewing women in their sixties and older, describing one seventy-year-old woman who had never seen her vagina, who, on the advice of her therapist, took the time to find her clitoris and "when she finally found [it], she said, she cried".

In the monologue itself, spoken, according to stage directions, with a Jewish, Queens accent, the speaker is at first reluctant to talk, saying that her "down there" isn't something to talk about at all. But then she describes how, as a teenager, an intense kiss from a boy released a "flood" of fluid from her "down there" and how her embarrassment and reluctance to experience another "flood" led her to mentally and emotionally shut her vagina down. She narrates repeated dreams in which intense contact with a movie star made her release another "flood", complete with little boats and sea animals, and comments that if her vagina could talk - which it obviously can't,



she points out - it would have a sign - "Closed Due to Flooding". She reveals how cancer led her to having all her reproductive organs removed, speaks resentfully of the author for making her talk about that part of herself ... and then confesses it was the first time she'd ever done it and feels a little better.

Part 2 Analysis

This section is notable for the way it covers a wide range of human reactions to vaginas, both as concept and as fact. There is humor here, disgust, creativity, pity, wisdom, surprise, all emerging from the blend of matter-of-factness (the hair monologue), whimsy (the "talk" and "dressed" questions), and profoundly personal revelation that permeates the writing and the stories throughout the book. Because this tapestry of reaction and experiences weaves its way throughout the entire book, it could be said that both tone and content of this section foreshadows what will follow - in other words, expect the unexpected.

An interesting element to consider here is the way the male presence in the lives of both individual women and women as a group are portrayed. The first point to note is that for the most part, men and maleness receive only glancing attention - valid, most would probably argue, because this is a work for and about women. It could also be argued, on the other hand, that women feel about their vaginas the way they do, either positively or negatively, in large part because of the actions and attitudes of men, a point which suggests that maleness and the variety of male reactions to womanhood in general and vaginas in particular are perhaps under-represented here. This idea is supported by the fact that of all the references to men in all the monologues, there is only one significant reference to a positive male reaction - in "Because He Liked to Look at It" in the following section. The overwhelming majority of the rest are negative. It may be, however, that the author chose the emphasis she did to avoid turning the work into a rant rather than a celebration of femaleness and/or a call to action against violence, both of which are by far the book's dominant themes.



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

"Vagina Fact" A quote from "The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets" describes how, during a witch trial in 1593, an investigator noted a woman's clitoris, declared it to be evidence that the woman had an inappropriately extra organ, and then declared the woman to be a witch.

"I was Twelve. My Mother Slapped Me." The author introduces this monologue by describing the "wild collective song" that began to emerge, how the voices began to "bleed into one another", and how she "got lost in the bleeding" as she examined women's experiences around menstruation. The monologue is a series of one or two line quotes from various women on what happened when they had their first menstrual period, many of which comment on the reactions of their mothers and which vary from fear to disgust to (only occasionally) joy.

"The Vagina Workshop" This monologue opens with a quote describing the vagina in poetic terms as a shell, or a flower. The monologue itself (spoken, according to stage directions, with "a slight English accent") narrates one woman's attendance at a workshop designed to help women find, and be comfortable with, their vaginas and clitorises, and with the idea of having an orgasm. The speaker describes how her orgasms, when she had them, had always been accidental and never during sex, and how the challenge of looking for her clitoris filled her with a fearful sense of responsibility. She narrates how the leader of the workshop gently guided her to a discovery of her clitoris, how comfortable and joyful she felt as she connected with it, and then poetically describes her first deliberate orgasm.

"Vagina Fact" A quote from "Woman: An Intimate Geography" describes the vagina as simply 'a bundle of nerves' with "a higher concentration of nerve fibers than is found anywhere else in the body ... twice the number in the penis."

"Because he liked to Look at It" In this monologue, the speaker describes how she came to accept and even enjoy her vagina. It wasn't, she wryly suggests, the result of a special, intimate encounter with herself - she had, in fact, looked at her vagina and hated it. She describes how her perspective changed after an intimate encounter with a man named Bob, whom she describes as profoundly ordinary but who, she adds with a degree of surprise, loved her vagina, took the time to explore it, and became intimately and familiar with it. She describes how much of a sexual stimulant his attention was, and how much pleasure their sexual union brought her.

Part 3 Analysis

This section introduces the "Vagina Facts", a series of evidently researched (and historically documented) realities associated with having a vagina and/or being a



woman (which are, in the author's perspective, indistinguishable). Presented with a brief, almost terse, matter-of-factness, the "Facts" are an effective, starkly compelling counterpoint to the more subjective, feeling and/or opinion based commentary of the monologues.

The contrast in this section is particularly notable with the "Facts" juxtaposed with the vivid, sometimes searing emotions evoked by "I Was Twelve ...", the poeticism of "...Workshop" and the wondering near-romance of "Because He Liked ...". Here again, the broad range of women's experiences is compellingly and vividly portrayed, contributing effectively to the process of unveiling the mystery, of revealing layer by layer the depths of both pain and pleasure associated with having a vagina. The reader begins to get the sense here that both sorts of feelings are both possible and valid, that both suffering and joy are the inevitable results of having a vagina and/or being a woman.

Finally, and as previously discussed, this section includes the one substantial reference to a positive male reaction to the vagina in the book - Bob's tender attentiveness, as described in "Because He Liked ...". It's interesting to consider here the speaker's deliberate, almost over-emphasized, attention to Bob's ordinariness and relative unattractiveness. The writing of the piece comes dangerously close to implying that for the speaker at least, Bob had nothing else going for him other than his respect for her vagina. Is there, one wonders, a kind of reverse sexism at work here? Heterosexual men are, perhaps stereotypically, notorious for being interested in a woman solely for what they can get from her sexually. Might not the same be said of the speaker's interest in Bob in this monologue? Granted, she refers to something more than physical pleasure she gets from him, but ultimately her point boils down to this - that she only spent time with him because he was interested in her vagina ... the same way that so many men, heterosexual and homosexual alike, are interested in their partners solely because of their sexual organs.



Part 4

Part 4 Summary

"My Vagina was my Village" The author introduces this monologue with a description of how a photograph of female victims of the Bosnian war (circa 1993) led her to a determination to interview such women. She also describes how her interviews led her into a raging determination to raise awareness of rape as a weapon of war, and how shocked she was to learn how many rapes take place in the United States, a country supposedly not at war. In the monologue itself, stark images of brutal violation (by guns, broom handles, and a week of violent penises) alternate with poetically beautiful images of how the speaker viewed her vagina before the war. "My vagina," the speaker says, "a live wet water village. They invaded it, butchered it and burned it down. I do not touch now. I do not visit. I live someplace else now. I don't know where that is."

"Vagina Fact" A quote from "The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets" describes how orgasmic women in the nineteenth century were regarded as being medical problems and the invasive procedures used to prevent them from having any more orgasms. "In the United States", the quote continues, "the last clitoridectomy for curing masturbation was performed in 1948 - on a five-year-old girl".

"Vagina Fact" A quote from the New York Times lists statistics for the high number of "mostly African" women who have had their clitorises surgically removed or their vaginas sewn up, and lists a large number of painful side effects of such surgeries, some of which are life threatening.

"My Angry Vagina" The speaker of this monologue speaks bluntly about what she sees as the many invasions of her vagina - by tampons, by penises, by gynecologists - and comments on how the approaches of all of them are all wrong. She describes her ideals of softness and gentleness that would make visits to the gynecologist in particular more tolerable, and perhaps even pleasurable, describing her vagina as talking about other vaginas and wearing diamonds. The monologue concludes with a list of the good, affirming things her vagina wants, and how it doesn't want to be angry any more. "It wants," she says. "It wants. It wants ... it wants everything."

Part 4 Analysis

In this section, the author begins her exploration and revelation of the relationship between having a vagina (being a woman) and being the victim of violence. It is perhaps interesting to note that by far, the majority of stories included in this book that further that exploration come from women in non-Caucasian, non-Western societies. Yes, in this section there is violence in both "...Village" and "My Angry Vagina", and yes in both cases that violence involves unwelcome, un-prepared for penetration. But whether deliberate or not, there is the implication that sexual violence in other cultures



is of more pressing concern or perhaps importance to the author than such violence in the west. This is not to suggest that for the author, sexual violence in the west is not important, but rather to make the point that the author is perhaps assuming that the issue of sex-related violence in the west has less need of being revealed than sex-related violence in other parts of the world and in other cultures.

That said, there is undeniably powerful writing in this section, particularly in the way poetic beauty and stark violence are juxtaposed in "...Village". This monologue also contains a powerful, implied metaphor - that in the same way a woman's vagina gives literal, physical birth, a village/home can give spiritual/emotional birth to the people who live there. The parallel metaphor, of course, is that physical rape of both sources of birth can lead to damage and/or destruction on both the physical and spiritual/emotional levels. To look at it another way, there is a powerful evocation of the idea of "home" in this monologue. The word is never used, but there is nevertheless the clear sense that life is based from and/or grounded in both the vagina and the village, and that once such a "home" has been invaded and damaged, the feelings associated with it can never be quite the same.

Again, the "Vagina Facts" function effectively to juxtapose fact with feeling and reaction, here deepening the power of similar juxtapositions portrayed in "...Village".

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

"The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could" In her introduction to this monologue, the author describes her work with women described as homeless "so we can categorize and forget them", women who have almost all suffered incest or rape as young girls. She expresses the theory that for these women "home" is a scary word, and that the unconditional welcome of most homeless shelters is the first true home they've found. She describes how this monologue is based on the story of one woman who escaped her past and the shelter system by falling in love and developing a relationship with another woman in the same shelter.

The speaker of the monologue is a "Southern Woman of Color". In a series of short, vivid, verbal snapshots, she portrays a series of negative, painful experiences about her relationship with her vagina, including rape by a friend of her father. In a longer portrait of her experience as a sixteen-year-old, she describes the warm, friendly, sexually rich intimacy of her one night relationship with a beautiful older woman (in her mid-twenties) who taught her how to pleasure herself so she'll "never need to rely on a man". The woman, she says, "transformed her sorry-ass coochi snorcher and raised it up into a kind of heaven".

"The Vulva Club" The introduction to this monologue is a letter from the Honorary President of the Vulva Club (in New York) rejecting the author for membership on the grounds that she doesn't use the word "vulva" appropriately. The speaker of the monologue describes her childhood passion for naming things, including her collection of frogs (which were named only after an elaborate ritual involving dancing) and her body parts. She says naming her vagina was difficult, but eventually came to be known as "Itsy Bitsy" after a babysitter urged the girl, while having a bath, to wash her "itsy bitsy". The speaker then describes how the man she eventually married got used to calling her vagina by that name, and how a complaint from the speaker to her best friend resulted in her learning it was actually called "vulva". Finally, the speaker describes the ritual, similar to that of naming the frogs, used by her husband to re-name "Itsy Bitsy" as "vulva".

Vagina Fact - A quote from the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy describes how some African communities seem to be "quietly putting an end" to genital mutilation, describing how one physician actually faked the process.

"What does a Vagina Smell Like?" This monologue, similar in content to "If your vagina could talk ..." and "If your vagina got dressed..." consists of a series of responses to the question "What does a vagina smell like?" Some of the answers are "...wet garbage ... God ... a brand new morning ... deep, deep forest ... somewhere between fish and lilacs".



"Reclaiming Cunt" The author introduces this monologue with a series of moving stories about responses to her public performances of The Vagina Monologues, including one from an intensely passionate massage therapist who told her, among other things, that she had misrepresented the value of the word "cunt". In the brief monologue, the speaker dissects the word "cunt", examining each letter for its positive values of shape, sound, and texture, listing other positive, stimulating words that begin with each letter.

Part 5 Analysis

The first point to make here is that the various "parts" assigned to the book have been defined for the purpose of this analysis - in other words, the book itself isn't broken into the sections defined here.

That said, there is a clear common thread running through the monologues in this section - the use of various names for the vagina ... "coochi snorcher", "vulva", "itsy bitsy" and, perhaps most controversial, "cunt", arguably one of the most distasteful and reviled "swear words" in contemporary vocabulary. While there are passing references to other, similar euphemisms throughout the book, there is the sense that the concentration of references in this section is intended to, in a way, overwhelm the reader in almost infinitely varied ways that vaginas are referred to. In other words, this section reinforces the book's secondary thematic point about the power of words - that getting past the connotation of such euphemisms, and in fact getting past the euphemisms themselves, can be both empowering and freeing. "Reclaiming Cunt" is perhaps the most vivid example of this process and intent in the book, almost satiric in its intensity of determination to trigger transformation.

A secondary commonality in this group of monologues are the references to violence - the physical violence glimpsed in "...Coochi Snorcher" and the verbal violence hinted at in "Reclaiming Cunt", a violence associated with connotation and attitudes arising from that connotation.

Finally, the reference to lesbian awakening and to genital mutilation both foreshadow further discussions of the same topics later in the book.



Part 6

Part 6 Summary

"I Asked a Six Year Old Girl" This short monologue consists of a six year old's answers to the author's standard questions about what a vagina would wear, etc. "Somewhere inside it," the girl says, I know it has a really smart brain."

"The Woman who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" The speaker of this monologue is a prostitute who, out of love for making women and their vaginas happy (to her, actually, they're indistinguishable) left the world of corporate law. She discusses the main attraction, for her, in being a woman and being with a woman - their moaning. She describes her own process of realizing what a sexual moan communicates, how she initially suppressed her moaning but then released it, and how she came to appreciate and find pleasure in the moans of other women. Finally, she describes, in almost comic detail, a list of the various sorts of moan.

The author then comments that after reading this monologue, the woman it was based upon said it didn't really feel as though it was her - that the author was still somehow objectifying women and their vaginas. The author then describes her realization of a difference in the way lesbians saw their vaginas, which led her into a second interview. During this, the lesbian says "you need to talk about entering into vaginas. You can't talk about lesbian sex without doing this." In the monologue that follows, the author alternates comments from the lesbian prostitute with narration of her own discomfort with the sensual, sexually explicit words she's hearing. Eventually, however, the author narrates her realization of the truth in what the lesbian prostitute is saying.

"I Was There in the Room" In the introduction to this monologue, the author describes the circumstances of her realization that in all her work on the project, she had neither heard nor incorporated stories about birth. After describing her recollection of someone asking whether there was a connection between vaginas and birth, the author describes the circumstances of her being present for the birth of her granddaughter. The monologue itself, one of the most poetically written in the book, describes in vivid detail the process of birth and concludes with a commentary on the similarities between the human heart and its capacity for opening itself to life and the female vagina.

Part 6 Analysis

On a very crude level, "The Woman who Loved ..." and "I Was There ..." juxtapose two very different vaginal experiences ... in the former, the meanings and potentials associated with something going in, in the latter, the meanings and potentials associated with something coming out. On another level, the monologues in this section are perhaps the most exclusively and entirely female in the book. "The Woman who Loved ..." explores and comments on the nature of the sex act between women, while



the perspective of "I Was There ..." is almost as exclusively and entirely female (the fact that a male contributed something to the process is glimpsed only in passing).

On yet another level, the two lengthier monologues are ultimately grounded in a portrayal of the author's growing awareness of what having a vagina involves. Readers might well be surprised, as the author suggests she was herself, by the revelation that birth (arguably the primary reason for women to even have a vagina) had for such a long time been absent from both the author's contemplations and her writing. There is the sense here that as she is guiding others (men and women alike) to a deeper, fuller understanding of what it means to have a vagina, she is on a similar journey.

The final point to note is the poetic comparison between the vagina and the human heart at the end of "I Was There..." It could be argued that there is the implication here that men, because they don't have a vagina, are incapable of the capacity for life-affirming love, compassion and happiness described here, an idea supported by the fact that with a few exceptions, men are portrayed throughout the book as powerful and life-destructive as opposed to nurturing and life-giving. There is also the implication of support in the previously discussed lack of reference to the male role in conception. Is the author saying that only women are able to bring open-heartedness, transcendence, and life (both physical and spiritual) into the world?



Part 7

Part 7 Summary

"Spotlight Monologues" The author comments in her introduction to this section that she wrote the monologues it contains to make note of situations "where women were totally at risk, where they had been raped or murdered or dismissed or simply not allowed to be". The monologues are headed with the title "The Memory of her Face".

"Islamabad" In this monologue, the author poetically describes the situation of a woman whose husband repeatedly attacked her with increasing violence, finally throwing acid in her face. "She's there inside this mess," the author writes, "Inside this monstrous mask / Inside the death of her esteem / Inside his wish to make her none..."

"Juarez" This monologue contains a description of how a young woman, one of hundreds missing in Juarez, was kidnapped, tortured, mutilated, and eventually murdered.

"Under the Burqa" In a series of brief, stark, poetic images, the speaker asks the hearer to "imagine" what it must be like to wear a burqa - to feel trapped, suffocated, humiliated, denied, dead, crazy, and ultimately lost to the world ... even to your own memory.

"They Beat the Girl out of my Boy ... or so they Tried" The speaker of this monologue is a transgendered woman, a woman born as a man but who has transformed her gender identity into the opposite. She describes the hatred and fear she encountered as she struggled to express the girl inside her boyhood, and her relief and release when she finally transformed into the gender she has always felt she was. Finally, she describes how her boyfriend was beaten by people who didn't think it was right for him to be involved with such a woman.

"Crooked Braid" This poem/monologue, dedicated to women from an American Indian community, is written in several stanzas. In the first, the speaker describes being slapped by her husband, whose father had frequently slapped his mother. The stanza ends with a reference to how her husband was "the nicest person" with long black hair that came loose when they made love. In the second stanza, the speaker describes being kicked and beaten for what her husband believed was flirting with his boss, when all she was doing was being nice to him as he had asked her to be. In the third stanza, the speaker describes her recovery after a drunken beating which resulted in "five brain surgeries". In the fourth stanza, the speaker describes how, in a quiet revenge for his beating her, she braided her husband's hair crooked.

In stanza five, the speaker describes hearing about her husband having been with another woman, cutting off his braid while he slept, and leaving for three years until his hair grew back. In stanza six, the speaker describes being beaten by her husband in



front of their son when he (her husband) suspects her of having been with another man. She describes how he calls, weeping, to apologize, and how he knows how much his mother suffered ... but, she says, he can't stop.

"Say It" (for the "Comfort Women") In a series of starkly presented word images, the experiences of the comfort women are summarized - how they were lied to, taken from their homes, used sexually, abused, left for dead, spiritually and emotionally mutilated. The narrative concludes with a description of how these women, now in their seventies and eighties, demand apologies from the Japanese government. "Say it", the monologue demands.

Part 7 Analysis

This section of the book, perhaps the most vividly and violent in the book, communicates with a stark poeticism the various sorts of destructive brutality (is there such a thing as non-destructive brutality?) encountered by women all over the world. The first point to be made is that said brutality and/or violence comes in many forms - physical, sexual, spiritual and moral, the latter two being symbolized by the smothering images of the burqa, which has become an internationally recognized symbol for female oppression.

The second main point here is related in that in this section the author's intent to portray her concerns as crossing geographical, spiritual, intentional, ideological and ethnic borders comes into the forefront of her writing. The implication here, and in fact throughout the book, is that violence of any and/or all sorts, or at least the potential for violence, is an inherent, perhaps inevitable, result of being a woman (having a vagina).

It's particularly interesting to note how the story of a transgendered woman is included in this section, specifically, how the author presents this story with total matter-of-factness, without evident questioning of the moral/ethical/spiritual value of the transition. It's almost as though the author is suggesting that the speaker of the monologue was treated with the same disrespect accorded to women born with vaginas simply because she believed she should have been born with one ... in other words, that violence is (automatically? inherently? expectedly?) associated with even the idea of a vagina, or the implication of one. Is this, perhaps, an explanation why male homosexuals are so reviled - that they are perceived on some level as behaving (spiritually, emotionally, sexually) the same way and for the same reasons as those with vaginas do?

Finally, in the title and closing words of "Say It", the author presents a variation on her thematic exploration of the power of words. Specifically, here she reiterates her previously discussed point that speaking a word aloud fearlessly and from a place of truth, robs it of its corruptible power and opens the door to new understanding.



Part 8

Part 8 Summary

This section is entitled "V-Day: Ten Years of Changing the Story of Women", and is written by the founders and organizers of the V-Day Movement.

"Spreading the Word" The authors of this section describe the necessity, value, and importance of the V-Day Movement, which raises awareness of issues related to violence against women and promotes the expansion of services and activities to provide safety to women in cultures and communities around the world. The authors describe the movement's financial foundations ("ninety-four cents of every dollar" goes towards programming rather than administration), its founding principles, and its main activity - presentation of "The Vagina Monologues" as a tool for both fundraising and awareness building.

"In the Beginning" The authors describe how the movement began in the wake of Eve Ensler's creation and presentation of "The Vagina Monologues" which she came to believe could be "more than a moving work of art ON violence; it could be a mechanism for moving people to act to END violence". The first V-Day presentation was held on Valentine's Day 1998 and raised \$250,000.

"A Campus Movement" V-Day activities, the authors write, quickly spread to campuses across America, involving "empowered women and men who [were] willing to stand up against violence."

"Going Worldwide" The authors describe the growing, and increasingly powerful, presence of the V-Day movement throughout the world, and list some of the changes to the way women are treated (legally, socially, politically) that have been a direct result of the movement's activities.

"The V-Day Model Expands" In this section, the authors describe how V-Day events have expanded from one day and/or one evening presentations into multi-week festivals raising awareness of, and advocating an end to, violence against women.

"Pushing the Edge" V-Day, the authors write, "shatters taboos, lifts the veil of secrecy from the issue of violence against women, and pushes the edge." The movement, and in particular presentations of "The Vagina Monologues" have run into resistance, at times to the point of presentations being closed down. However, the authors suggest, members of the movement have always found ways to stage promised presentations - or, if not, to at least continue the work of the activists involved.

"V-World" The authors describe how V-Day activities have evolved into the Spotlight Campaign, in which the circumstances of a particular group of women (such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, New Orleans, or the Congo) are brought to light and a transformation



of those circumstances is sought. The authors describe how such spotlights have begun the process of transformation for women in Haiti, Kenya, and the Middle East.

"V10: The Next Decade" February 2008 marked the 10th Anniversary of the Creation of V-Day. The authors describe the festivities intended to mark the anniversary, and imagine that the next ten years will bring wider, deeper, and more lasting change to the condition of women and girls around the world.

"V-Voices: Testimonials and Thoughts from the Worldwide Network" This section contains excerpted comments from people all over the world who have participated in presentations of "The Vagina Monologues" and the work of the V-Day movement, all commenting on how personally and communally powerful the work is, has been, and continues to need to be.

"V-Day Mission Statement" This section of the book summarizes the purposes and intent of the V-Day Movement to end violence against women.

"V-Timeline: Ten Years of Vagina Victories" This section summarizes some of the most notable V-Day activities / landmarks of the ten years between the original performances of "The Vagina Monologues" and the 2008 Anniversary Celebrations.

Part 8 Analysis

The concluding section of the book takes its ideas, themes and intentions out of the realm of the literary and into that of fact, with less focus on theory and more on practice, supporting the idea discussed in the Analysis of Part 1, that it is indeed for one person to create significant change in the world. The interesting part of the story of V-Day is that author Eve Ensler didn't necessarily intend for her passion and ideas to trigger such broad-based transformation. But then, it could be argued, many activists and many causes start the same way - one person acts from a place of passionate personal conviction and belief, that passion ignites similar passions in others, and soon the fire spreads.

There is, however, a point that must be made in relation to both the literary and practical manifestations of the book's thematic intent. There is relatively little, in fact almost no, examination of the root causes of violence ... beyond, that is, the tension between male and female that for whatever reason seems inherent in the simple fact of being a human any place on the planet. Yes, there are brief glances at the effect and/or teachings of history in general and the teachings of religion, capitalism, and militarism in particular. But for the most part, the book's digging into the issue of violence against women seems to stop at the point of revelation that it exists and exposition of its manifestations. As examples, the relationship of poverty and/or of education to violence against women is barely touched upon. In other words, as a call to awareness the book functions extremely well. As an examination of the details of what the movement is arming itself against, it is less effective. Granted, raising awareness is the book's primary intent. But there is also the sense that awareness of more aspects of the issue than its mere

existence might go even further towards meeting the V-Day movement's express goal of ultimately eliminating the issue completely.



Characters

The Author (Eve Ensler)

Eve Ensler is a New York-based actor, playwright, and social activist. Her performance of the original Vagina Monologues in 1998 was, at the time, perceived as brave, groundbreaking, and in the eyes of many conservatives, inappropriate, to say the least. Both the author and her play, however, without originally intending to do so, have become the flagship components of an expanding, world-wide movement known as V-Day, a social activist organization dedicated to ending violence against women in all its forms all over the world.

Throughout the book, the author comes across as both strong willed and humble, determined to fulfill what she evidently perceives as an important mission, which is to empower women both as individuals and as participants in society and, at the same time, willing to acknowledge gaps in her own understanding and experience. This last aspect of her character and work is particularly evident in her references to how her interviews with the Lesbian Prostitute and her experiences with Shiva and Colette, but also through her description of her growing, and increasingly horrified, awareness of how women and their vaginas are treated around the world. There is the strong sense, in fact, that while she is on a mission to the world, she is also on a personal journey of enlightenment - that she is not only preaching and teaching and leading, but also studying, learning, and following the lead of others whose stories, drive and power have led them to activism of their own.

Women

The experience of being a woman is, according to the author, indistinguishable from the experience of having a vagina, and of dealing with the consequences of having one. These consequences, the book suggests, include physical, emotional and/or sexual violence, prejudice, fear, and rejection. In other words, to be a woman, the book suggests, is to be subject to these consequences but also, and as an alternative, the unique power, strength, joy, and connection to nature that women experience as the more positive consequences of having a vagina. The book's intent, and that of the V-Day anti-violence movement it inspired, is to raise awareness of both sets of consequences.

Non-Caucasian and/or Non-Western Women

The book, and by implication the V-Day Movement, place particular emphasis on ways and efforts to explore and define the circumstances of non-Caucasian and non-Western women. Japanese comfort women, Native American women, African women, Arab women, transgendered women - all receive attention, in the form of specifically tailored



monologues, in an effort to include their specific ethno-cultural circumstances in the more general portrayal of the circumstances faced by women in contemporary society.

Gloria Steinem

Gloria Steinem was one of the most prominent, the most vocal, and the most simultaneously respected and reviled of the feminist leaders of the 1960s and 70s. Her writing of the introduction to the 10th Anniversary Edition of *The Vagina Monologues* is, on some level, a passing of the feminist torch to a leader of the next generation of feminist activists, the author and her fellow proponents of V-Day.

Patriarchy

"Patriarchy" is the term used here and throughout much feminist writing and/or analysis to sum up the male-dominated power structure under which women have lived and suffered for centuries. A "patriarch" is a domineering father figure (as opposed to "matriarch", a domineering mother figure), meaning that the "patriarchy" is, according to contemporary feminist theory, a socio-political-economic system designed and maintained for men, by men, and with the aim of ensuring male dominance and control.

Bob

One of the few men actually named in the monologue section of the book (several men are named as allies in the non-fiction commentary on the V-Day movement), Bob is portrayed as something of an ideal man. Ideal, that is, in the sense that he finds vaginas beautiful and welcoming, as opposed to being something to penetrate and/or dominate, a source of sexual pleasure. There is the strong sense that in the author's mind, he and his attitudes are the exception rather than the rule.

The Lesbian Prostitute

The monologues including material spoken by the Lesbian Prostitute focus on the value and/or importance of the pleasure that can be experienced by women if they allow themselves to celebrate the sensual potential of their vaginas. In particular, they explore the relationship that lesbian women have with their vaginas, which the prostitute suggests is different from that of heterosexual women. The author's experiences with the Lesbian Prostitute awaken the author to previously unconsidered aspects of living life with a vagina.



Shiva and Colette

The author's daughter-in-law and granddaughter. The author writes of how her presence at Colette's birth inspired an awe-struck deeper awareness of the vagina and its power - specifically, its relationship to the process of giving human life.

Comfort Women

"The term 'comfort women' refers to the [thousands] of girls and young women from China, Taiwan, Korea [and other countries] who were abducted and forced into sexual slavery to service the Japanese military in 'comfort stations' from 1932 to 1945".

Footnote, p. 176.

Agnes Pareyio

Ms. Pareyio is a Kenyan activist fighting to eliminate genital mutilation in girls and women in Kenya, and in Africa in general. In 2005, she was named "the United Nations in Kenya Person of the Year" for her efforts. She is referred to several times throughout the book as an example of how women can become empowered by connection with the V-Day cause and the anti-violence message it promotes.



Objects/Places

The Vagina Monologues - The Play

First performed in 1998, "The Vagina Monologues" was the creation of New York playwright, actor, and social activist Eve Ensler. It has since been performed hundreds of times in a variety of languages around the world as the flagship activity of the V-Day Movement to end violence against women. The play is a collection of monologues (stories told by a single narrator or speaker) focused on the female vagina - specifically, how men and women have both reacted to it with aversion but have changed their opinions once their consideration and/or experiences of it have expanded.

Monologue

A monologue is a speech or story spoken by a single individual (as opposed to dialogue, which is spoken by one or more people) in the idiosyncratic, unique, character-defined voice of that individual, as opposed to a formal speech, which tends to be somewhat more academic in tone and quality.

The Vagina

In the female body, the vagina is the passage between the outer female genitals (the vulva) and the uterus. It is also known as the birth canal, since it is the route by which the fetus moves as it's being born.

The Clitoris

The clitoris is a small bundle of nerve endings in the front of the vulva and at the entrance to the vagina. Stimulation of the clitoris, whether by the self or a sexual partner, triggers the female orgasm. In a number of African and Middle Eastern cultures, the clitoris is surgically removed and/or amputated in order to eliminate the possibility of sexual satisfaction for the woman.

Vagina Workshop

This is an umbrella term for a workshop in which women are "introduced" to their own vaginas, giving the women the sense that what is often referred to by euphemisms and/or with distaste is in fact a part of their bodies and their lives to be known, acknowledged, and to a degree celebrated.



The Burqa

In Part 7, "Under the Burqa", the speaker describes the experience of living inside a burqa (also spelled "burka", a long, dark robe covering the female body from head to toe worn in several Middle Eastern countries, particularly in those with conservative Muslim governing authorities. Among the justifications often listed for its use is the conservative idea that women, their bodies and their eyes and their ways, are representative of temptation and of sin, and if they are concealed from all but their spouses, there is less risk of temptation and sin in the world.

The Native American Man's Braid

In Part 7, the monologue "Crooked Braid" describes an abusive relationship between a Native American man and his wife in which the wife uses the braid as a means of taking revenge - first by winding it crookedly, then by cutting it off. In many Native American cultures, a man's braid was a powerful symbol of masculinity, pride, and power, meaning that by treating the braid with a degree of apparent disrespect, the woman was taking revenge on her husband's disrespect of her.

V-Day

V-Day is the symbolic name of the worldwide movement to free women from the threat of violence - physical, emotional, sexual. The "V" in V-Day, according to the author, stands for Victory, Valentine (since the first V-Day events were held on Valentine's Day) and Vagina.

Genital Mutilation

The term "genital mutilation" is used to describe a clitoridectomy, a common practice in African and Middle Eastern countries in which a woman's clitoris is surgically removed and/or her vagina is sewn almost fully closed. This, the theory goes, is intended to reduce a woman's sexual desire and therefore make her more submissive to the will of the men in her life (husband, brother, father). The fight to eliminate genital mutilation from the experience of women the world over is a key component of V-Day activities and intentions.

Juarez, Mexico

The Mexican community of Juarez has, over the last several years, been the setting for a series of female kidnappings, mutilations, and murders. A number of V-Day activities and demonstrations have been motivated by the desire and/or determination to raise awareness of this situation, to bring about a resolution to the mystery of who is killing the women and why, and to make the killings end.



Themes

The Vagina as a Focal Point of the Feminine Experience

Two main themes are developed throughout the book, and are essentially two sides of the same coin - or two edges of one sword, depending on the reader's perspective. Both are explored in greater detail below, and both are focused on the vagina as a focal point of female experiences of pleasure and empowerment, as well as of suffering and victimhood.

Throughout the book, the vagina is considered both literally and metaphorically, as an element of the female anatomy and as a representation of what it means to be a woman, as a source of both physical and spiritual pleasure and/or suffering. There are several instances in which the vagina is described as having never been named properly, as something to be ashamed of and/or ignored and/or hated, or as a secret whose pleasurable properties are either sinful or hateful, or both. There are as many instances, however, of women being awakened to a sense of freedom once the secrets and silences associated with having a vagina (i.e., being a woman) are broken down. In other words, there is the sense in many of the monologues that a woman's unease with or ignorance of her genitalia is a reflection of her own unease with herself, both as an individual and as a member of a group traditionally, and painfully, disadvantaged (to use a very mild term).

There are also several instances in which the vagina is portrayed as being the vessel through which domination and abuse takes place (i.e., systematized rape) - and here again the image is both metaphoric and literal - the individual woman is dominated while at the same time the spirit, the principle of womanhood is being victimized.

Combating Female Shame

In the introductions to the various monologues, as well as in the discussion/analysis of "V-Day" in the book's final sections there is the sense that the intent of both the individual monologues and the book as a whole is to free women from their shame, discomfort, and victimhood, both as individuals and as a sub-community of the human race. Saying the hidden word "vagina" out loud where there is still a widespread sense of unease about both the word and what it represents and talking about what it means to have one, both the good and the bad, are, in the book's intent, effective and powerful means of bringing women out from under the centuries-old domination of male influence. And saying it out loud is, again in the book's apparent intent, only a beginning. While the monologues, for the most part, focus on the experiences of individual women, there is the very strong sense that in most if not all cases, the speaker is actually giving voice to a whole group of women whose voices have not, in fact, been heard. Each monologue is about an individual woman's experience, but on a



cultural/political level, it's also about the experiences of most women, if not all. The speaking of the monologue, therefore, is not only a call to individual awareness - it's a call to societal action.

It's not just self-imposed shame that's being combated here. It's also cultural shame as imposed by systems of law and politics, social shame as imposed by conditions of male-dominated societies - families, cities, provinces, countries, etc., and spiritual shame as imposed by conservative religious and/or other belief systems. Ultimately, the book and the stories it contains can be, and in many cases already are, powerful weapons in the ongoing fight for female autonomy and respect.

Celebrating Female Power

On the other side of the coin, or on the opposite edge of the sword, is the book's determination to move beyond awareness and into celebration - of sensuality, of power, of joy, of independence, and of uniqueness ... all of which, the monologues contend, can and should be associated with having a vagina (i.e., being a woman). In its content, in its mission, in its very existence, the book urges women of all ages, ethnicities, backgrounds, sexual orientations, etc., to move beyond the oppression and suppression they face as individuals and as a community and embrace their womanhood, as symbolized by their vaginas. In other words, the book advocates freedom - from preconception, from violence, from any and all forms of oppression.

It's interesting in this context to note that there isn't a great deal of mysticism in the book, very few references to ancient female-oriented religions, belief systems, etc. In other words, the focus is on facts and feelings, not faith. Yes, there are passing references to some conservative faiths, particularly Middle Eastern ones, that restrict what women can wear and how they can act, presumably in order to restrict what they think and how they feel, as well as to restrict what male-dominated cultures see as women's fearful, corrupt sexual power. For the most part, however, the book advocates celebrating womanhood because it is a woman's right to live free of emotional, physical and sexual violence, and have power and freedom and independence here and now that women, for centuries, have simply and wrongly been systematically denied.

Style

Point of View

In broadest terms, the book is written from a very clear point of view - that of a woman determined to raise awareness of, and ultimately change, the way in which the full range of female experience (sexual, emotional, spiritual) is denied by violence (also sexual, emotional and spiritual). This violence, she suggests, is perpetrated in all its forms upon women by men, by women themselves, and by the society of men and women together.

Also in broad terms, the book is written from a western perspective - that is, a point of view that takes the freedom to speak about such issues as a given and/or as a right, and is evangelizing about both the right and the idea to the rest of the world. In other words, the author is speaking from a place and with a voice of assumed freedom, encouraging others to reach for and live with freedom of a similar sort.

Within these broad terms, however, there are several shifts in point of view. The writing from monologue to monologue is, at different times, matter-of-fact, ironic, poetic, confrontational, evocative, humorous, and very moving. On occasion, it is one or more at the same time. In other words, and on one level, the book's point of view is as varied as the women and their stories. Again, however, there is the clear sense that variations on perspective are all manifestations of the central, core point of view - that something is wrong and must change.

Setting

On one level, setting could be perceived as perhaps the least developed of the four stylistic elements discussed in this analysis - that is, if it is discussed in terms of what the setting is, which on one level is virtually non-existent. Yes, many of the individual monologues describe experiences unique to female lives lived in specific locations (the murdered women in Juarez, the Japanese Comfort Women, the rape victims of Bosnia). But the book's thematic focus ultimately has nothing to do with the geo-political contexts of its individual sections - the problem and its manifestations, it maintains, are a universal concern.

In short, while the book's literal setting may vary from monologue to monologue, its thematic setting transcends the physical. It could be argued, in fact, that this aspect of the book makes its setting current global society - the world, this world, in which anti-female sentiment crosses geo-political, cultural, and spiritual lines to become a truly international concern. It could also be argued that when discussing setting in this context, the idea of when is much more important than where. In other words, there is the sense that at no point in the planet's history has it been more possible for the experiences (both negative and positive) and intentions (mostly positive) of women all



over the world to be heard by each other and to be acted on in support of each other. V-Day, the book implies, is a movement that has emerged now not only because it needs to, but because it can.

Language and Meaning

As discussed elsewhere in this analysis, the power of language is an important element in both the book's intent and its execution. A stated component in the book's overall purpose (as indicated in the preface to the original version, included in this Tenth Anniversary edition) is to break down the barriers to free usage of the word "vagina", and by extension barriers surrounding what the word means (denotation) and evokes (connotation). This purpose manifests in several ways - as an urging to no longer use euphemisms, as a reclaiming of negatively connoted euphemisms, and as an encouragement to extend the freedom of using the word into freedom to both feel and communicate more positively about both having a vagina and being a woman.

The theory of this purpose is put to practice not only in the manifestations described above, but also in the very different ways language is used. Throughout the monologues there is the strong sense that words have been carefully chosen to vividly evoke the experiences they describe - of suffering, of pleasure, of joy, of fear, of celebration, of community, of isolation. In other words, in both theory and in practice, the book celebrates a variety of experiences of womanhood, suggesting first that speaking of all the various experiences is essential, valuable and healing, and second that such speaking, such use of words, is a powerful tool in creating necessary, and lasting, change. If it's spoken, the book seems to be saying, it's real - whether it's pain, progress, or pleasure. It doesn't have to be hidden any more.

Structure

As previously discussed, the various "parts" of the book as defined by/for this analysis are absent in the book itself. Part 1 (prefaces and introductions) and Part 8 (V-Day) bracket the monologues themselves, which at first glance, don't seem to be presented in any particular order - there are titles for several of the monologues, but no real/formal groupings. There is, however, a sense that the author has, deliberately or not, ordered the monologues in a particular way - to take the reader on a similar sort of journey that she herself seems to have taken in developing the original play and the book. That journey, it seems, is one that moves from a certain superficiality of both understanding and intent to deeper, more profound, broader ranging, and ultimately more moving insight into both the joy and the suffering that goes along with having a vagina / being a woman.

That insight, in turn, also takes a journey - from the personal to the global. While each of the monologues focuses on the experience of an individual, over the course of the book the contexts of those experiences expands out into the world. The Spotlight Monologues, which close the monologue section of the book, all are spoken by women

whose lives are lived outside the experience of so-called "traditional Western culture". "Crooked Braid" in this section is set within North American Aboriginal Culture, but its belief systems and socio-political context set it apart in the same way as the other monologues in the section, which are spoken from Bosnian, Pakistani, Mexican, and Japanese contexts.



Quotes

"The most radical play I had ever written turned out to be the play that was accepted and invited into the mainstream."

Introduction, p. xii

"The art has made the activism more creative and bold, the activism has made the art more sharply focused, more grounded, more dangerous."

Ibid, p. xii (2)

"[T]here are two things on every college campus, a Starbucks and a V-Day."

Ibid, p. xiv

"We have not penetrated the mindset that, somewhere in every single culture, gives permission to violence, expects violence, waits for violence, and instigates violence. We have not stopped teaching boys to deny being afraid, doubtful, needy, sorrowful, vulnerable, open, tender, and compassionate."

Ibid, p. xix

"We have not cracked the tectonic plate at the center of the human psyche that is more terrified to love than to kill."

Ibid, p. xx

"It would be years before I learned that females possessed the only organ in the human body with no function other than to feel pleasure. If such an organ were unique to the male body, can you imagine how much we would hear about it - and what it would be used to justify?"

Preface, p. xxix

"[T]here is an outer and inner entrance, labia majora and labia minora; a central vaginal aisle toward the altar; two curved ovarian structures on either side; and then in the sacred center, the altar or womb, where the miracle takes place - where males give birth."

Ibid, p. xxxv.

"Doesn't matter how many times you say it, it never sounds like a word you want to say. It's a totally ridiculous, completely unsexy word."

p. 5

"You just know it's there. Like the cellar. There's rumbles down there sometimes. You can hear the pipes, and things get caught there, little animals and things, and it gets wet, and sometimes people have to come and plug up the leaks. Otherwise, the door stays closed."

p. 26.



"I had always thought of my vagina as an anatomical vacuum randomly sucking up particles and objects from the surrounding environment."

p. 44

"Whenever I had sex with a man, I pictured him inside a mink-lined muffler or a red rose or a Chinese bowl."

p. 54

"You need to work with the vagina, introduce it to things, prepare the way. That's what foreplay's all about. You got to convince my vagina, seduce my vagina, engage my vagina's trust."

p. 70.

"There were no props, no outfits in corporate law. There was no wetness. There was no dark mysterious foreplay. There were no erect nipples. There were no delicious mouths, but mainly there was no moaning. Not the kind I'm talking about, anyway."

p. 106

"To love women, to love our vaginas, to know them and touch them and be familiar with who we are and what we need ... to speak of their hunger and pain and loneliness and humor ... so that our center, our point, our motor, our dream, is no longer detached, mutilated, numb, broken, invisible or ashamed."

p. 118

"I was there when her vagina changed from a shy sexual hole to an archaeological tunnel, a sacred vessel, a Venetian canal, a deep well with a tiny stuck child inside, waiting to be rescued."

p. 122

"The heart is capable of sacrifice. So is the vagina. The heart is able to forgive and repair. It can change its shape to let us in. It can expand to let us out. So can the vagina. It can ache for us and stretch for us, die for us and bleed and bleed us into this difficult wondrous world. So can the vagina."

p. 125

"I wanted to belong / I got to be soft / I am allowed to listen / I am allowed to touch / I am able to receive ... A wrong was righted / I am right with God ..."

p. 147

"Our work is grounded in three core beliefs: that art has the power to transform thinking and inspire people to act; that lasting social and cultural change is spread by ordinary people doing extraordinary things; and that local women know what their communities need and can become unstoppable leaders."

p. 157



"V-Day has been a catalyst that has helped to shift culture and break through taboos so that women who have suffered invisibly in silence are forever made visible."

p. 179

"V-Day isn't a website, or a resource, or a movement. V-Day is the people who hold the goal of a world without violence deep in their hearts and their vaginas!"

p. 189

"If moaning on stage means that at least one other woman need not groan from hurt anymore, that one day, my sister can walk in the park without fear of being raped, that my niece can grow up in a world free from violence, then I will moan ... and moan some more."

p. 192



Topics for Discussion

Throughout the book, the author and her work advocate the transformation of connotation (what a word evokes rather than what it means) - specifically, the transformation of a negative connotation into a positive. Research and discuss the ways in which other so-called minorities (African-Americans, homosexuals, lesbians, etc) have transformed the connotations of words associated with them. How have the words "nigger", "faggot", "dyke" etc. been transformed by those to whom the word has been negatively applied in the past?

For women - what are your feelings about your vagina and / or about being a woman?

For women - answer for yourselves the questions posed in interviews by the author. "If your vagina could talk, what would it say?" "If your vagina were clothed, what would it wear?" "What does a vagina smell like?"

For men - what do you know about the anatomy and/or functions of the vagina?

For both genders - what have you been told about the functions and/or values of having a vagina? Were you taught (by family, friends, colleagues, spouses, etc.) a positive or a negative reaction? Did these teachings come to you directly or by implication and connotation?

Compare your opinions and/or awarenesses of the vagina / womanhood to those you have about the penis / male-hood. How does society view the former as opposed to the latter? Are these views different or the same as your own?

For both genders - what is your experience of the sexual/pleasurable aspects of having a vagina? Has it been associated with experiences other than physical pleasure? Has merely physical pleasure been enough, or have you sought for something more, perhaps a deeper connection, through the sexual experience?

Research and present statistics on violence against women in your community. How do the rates of such violence compare with other forms of violence - against buildings, against men, against children? How many incidents of violence against women are sexual in nature?

Research and discuss what V-Day activities take place in your community.