

VAGINA MONOLOGUES—CRITICISMS:

- Female psychologist, Harriet Lerner, says the "psychic genital mutilation" embedded in the play's title, ignores the Clitoris and Labia, and should more accurately be called "The Vulva Monologues"
- "Pro-sex feminist Betty Dodson, author of several books about female sexuality, saw the play as having a negative and restrictive view of sexuality—with no bisexuals depicted—and an anti-male bias. She called the play "a blast of hatred at men and heterosexuality".
- Too much attention given to brutal sexual encounters compared with consensual or harmonious sexual encounters; negative portrayal of male-female sexual relationships; author excludes diverse male voices and only includes ones who are bad guys—this fails to make the text serve to open a dialogue with men
- Problematic story: "The Little Coochie Snorcher that Could", an underage girl (thirteen in earlier performances, sixteen in the revised version) recounts being given alcohol and then having sex with an adult woman; the incident is recalled fondly by the grown girl—giving the message of some rapes being good.
- Problematic that Ensler interviewed a six-year-old girl, asking her intimate questions, such as what her vagina smells like
- Ensler's story of FGM makes it seem Western culture has progressed beyond genital mutilations when mutilations still occur against the intersexed. Reclamation and celebration of the vagina marginalizes intersexed bodies. Critics refer to story of girl born without a vagina told by father they will give her one just for future husband, minimizing mutilation of intersexed genitals. Text challenges but unintentionally also reinscribes compulsory heterosexism and patriarchy. Comparing the struggles of intersexed people with the struggles of incest survivors, Emi Koyama, a member of ISNA, reports in her "Open Letter to V-Day Participants," "Many of us intersex people and our friends, family members, and allies went to see the play in the past, and came out upset, hurt, angry, and/or in tears, walking through a crowd of women talking to each other about how empowered they felt. We felt invisible, it presented horror stories about genital mutilation occurring in other continents, as if we do not experience them here." In their V-Day challenge ISNA points out that both IGM and FGM are routinely performed in an effort to "correct" or "normalize" unruly bodies. The Monologues still produce the same story of the "normal" female body as a body with a vagina—this "normal" female body is presented as the correct one for feminist sisterhood.

In the end The Vagina Monologues are a reduction of women to vaginas with the message that women's liberation equals affirming their vaginas—[At a lecture at Vassar College, Wittig was asked whether she had a vagina, and she replied that she did not—rejecting this definition. -Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*]. Feminist celebration of vaginas is as problematic as celebrating Sheela Na Gigs (stone carvings of bald, old women who are squatting, often grinning, and displaying their vaginas)—celebration reinforces the idea of the vagina as central to female embodiment. Celebrating the clitoris in clitoris monologues would be just as problematic—[Would it be?].

- Kim Hall, *Hypatia*, 2005: "If the visibility of intersexed bodies both sustains and unsettles systems of oppression, The Vagina Monologues and V-Day <http://www.vday.org> will need to do more than simply add new monologues and distribute educational materials at performances. They will also have to constantly critique rather than assume the connection between vaginas and female embodiment. We do not challenge dominant systems by emphasizing the normality or naturalism of bodies and body parts and their relation to identity. As disability studies demonstrate, such pretensions of the normal are always based on exclusion, marginalization, and pathologization of those bodies defined as abnormal. In