

Putting Women Back on Top?:  
(Re)constituting Power and Audience in *The Vagina Monologues*

Ashley Elizabeth Gellert

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
In  
Communication

Beth M. Waggenpack, Chair  
Rachel L. Holloway  
Jim A. Kuypers

April 29, 2011  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: constitutive rhetoric, second persona, third persona, bell hooks, *The Vagina Monologues*

## ABSTRACT

Eve Ensler's goal in writing *The Vagina Monologues* was to generate a dialogue regarding women's sexuality to counter the silence that pervades the patriarchal culture that they inhabit. To achieve this goal, Ensler constructs two ideologies—one grounded in patriarchy and another supposedly grounded in female agency and dialogue—to reveal the problems within the current ideology in hopes that her audience will adopt her new ideology and resolve the detrimental silence women endure. To evaluate its success, this study utilizes an eclectic approach—comprised of constitutive rhetoric, second persona, third persona, and bell hooks' rhetorical options—to determine if the play's content encourages the dialogue Ensler desires.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been the wonderful experience that it was without several faculty members from the Communication Department, my family, and friends.

Dr. Waggenpack, thank you for guiding me through this project with meetings during most of your on-campus days, good discussions, and tough questions that challenged me to think in new ways. Your availability, support, and enthusiasm have been invaluable since I started here last fall but especially so with this thesis. I feel like I've grown so much as a student and scholar during my time here and you've played an important role in helping me with this.

Dr. Holloway, thank you for reminding me to let the discourse guide me to my questions, and for helping me learn how to “muck around” in it. Your advice helped me create my eclectic approach and taught me how to carry it out. I also appreciated your confidence in this project when I sometimes had trouble finding that within myself.

Dr. Kuypers, I thought that I was going to “be quantitative” until I took Rhetoric last fall. Now I can't imagine studying anything else. Thank you for that first introduction to this field and for telling me last spring that you hoped this project would challenge me to reconsider what I thought that I knew. It has in many ways.

Dr. Tedesco, thank you for all of your feedback in the Prospectus Practicum. Your questions and critiques helped me to articulate this project and the positive, light-hearted atmosphere for our group meetings made the initial stages of this project seem less daunting.

I've also been lucky to receive constant encouragement from my family through our nightly phone calls. Mom, thank you for reminding me to always be passionate about my work and being my gateway into feminism before I even knew what it was. Dad, thank you for being the first person I call whenever I need advice or when I'm feeling overwhelmed and for helping me regain the perspective that I have a tendency to lose. David, thank you for being a great brother and one of my friends. You've let me distract you countless times from your homework whenever I've needed to talk and I'm so grateful that you know that I'm always here for you like you are for me.

Fatima and Kathy, the two best friends that I will ever have, thank you for your long-distance support and excellent humor. I've missed you both terribly these last two years but I'm grateful for the Facebook chats, virtual reminiscing, and letters that make the distance seem smaller.

To the friends I've made here at Tech, thanks for all of the game nights and group dinners that have made my first grad school experience so special. I didn't think that it would be possible to make such good friends in just two years, but this experience has proved me wrong. Finally, special thanks to the Shultz lunch gang—Chad, Eric, Matt, and Phil—for making Friday afternoons, group meetings, and office hours more fun, and reminding me to never take myself too seriously.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract   |     |
| Acknowledgments.....   | iii |
| Table of Contents.....   | iv  |
| Chapter 1. Introduction.....   | 1   |
| Chapter 2. Unpacking an Eclectic Perspective.....                        | 8   |
| Patriarchy.....  | 8   |
| Feminism.....  | 10  |
| Constitutive Rhetoric.....   | 17  |
| Second Persona.....  | 26  |
| Third Persona.....   | 31  |
| Methodology.....   | 33  |
| Chapter 3. Constructing Patriarchy in <i>The Vagina Monologues</i> ..... | 36  |
| Values.....  | 36  |
| Implied Auditors.....  | 45  |
| Negated Auditors.....  | 49  |
| Chapter 4: Constructing Eve Ensler’s Ownership Ideology.....             | 55  |
| Values.....  | 55  |
| Implied Auditors.....  | 64  |
| Negated Auditors.....  | 69  |
| Rhetorical Options for Revolution.....                                   | 72  |
| Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion.....                                | 81  |
| References.....  | 93  |

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Eve Ensler is a self-proclaimed vagina warrior.<sup>1</sup> Through her most notable play, *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler challenges women to share their stories about sexual experiences in order to regain sexual agency, reclaim the vagina as a source of female-centered pleasure, and reveal the atrocious sexual experiences that many women world-wide have endured. Through storytelling, Ensler hopes to spark a dialogue about women's sexuality that is often silenced by the "patriarchal culture [that] is waging war on vaginas," a culture that subordinates women in numerous aspects of life, including the bedroom.<sup>2</sup> In countering patriarchal values of domination, coercion, and violence, Ensler, perhaps unknowingly, presents her audiences with a new ideology that they can adopt to reinforce the values of dialogue, communication, and female agency that *The Vagina Monologues* promotes.

When asked what inspired her to write *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler responded with surprise that the play was an accident. After talking with a feminist friend about menopause, she was distraught by the negativity and disconnect that such a woman associated with her vagina.<sup>3</sup> This conversation made Ensler curious about other women's perceptions of their vaginas and led her to interview more than 200 women worldwide to learn what they thought about their vaginas and sexual experiences.<sup>4</sup>

As she interviewed women, Ensler learned "not only how much women needed to talk and share their stories because they had never had the opportunity, but how...many incredible

---

<sup>1</sup> "Eve Ensler," *V-Day*, <http://www.vday.org/about/more-about/eveensler> (accessed June 21, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Julia Bourland, "The Vagina Monologues: Q&A," *Random House*, <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/ensler/vm/qna.html> (accessed June 14, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Eve Ensler, interview by John Von Soosten and Howard Sherman, Downstage Center, October 6, 2006, American Theatre Wing.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

stories there were of both triumph and great pleasure, [and] more importantly how many women had been violated and raped and abused.”<sup>5</sup> This discovery made dialogue regarding women’s sexual experiences Ensler’s goal in compiling *The Vagina Monologues*.

A self-described feminist and activist, Ensler synthesized these interviews into a series of ten monologues. Although some of the monologues are taken directly from a single woman whom Ensler interviewed for this project and others are pieced together from similar themes found in stories that multiple women told, each shares one story as it relates to a specific sexual experience. The themes explored in *The Vagina Monologues* range from gynecological exams, masturbation, and orgasms to sexual assault and rape.<sup>6</sup> These ten monologues—in addition to answers to questions including what the women’s vaginas would wear and say, and “Vagina Facts” from news sources—comprise *The Vagina Monologues*.

The play debuted at Adhere Theatre in New York in 1996 and was an instant success, garnering great media and audience attention.<sup>7</sup> Ensler attributes the play’s success to its ability to grant women the permission they never knew they had to talk about their sexuality. She notes that *The Vagina Monologues* “became a channel for women to stand up and rise up and take back their sexuality and take back their bodies” by engaging in the dialogue that she works to generate through the play.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, she claims that “as each woman tells her story for the first

---

<sup>5</sup> Katie Couric, “Eve Ensler, creator of ‘The Vagina Monologues,’ and Kristin Tyler, high school director, discuss the play and its role in promoting awareness of violence against women,” Today Show, January 23, 2004, (June 21, 2010); Marc Peyser, “Eve Ensler Uses the V Word,” *Newsweek*, February 18, 2002, (June 21, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000). Although individual monologues will be cited in the analysis portion of this paper, those individual monologues will not appear in the references pages because it is understood that they all derive from this one play.

<sup>7</sup> Eve Ensler, interview by John Von Soosten and Howard Sherman.

<sup>8</sup> Couric.

time she breaks the silence and in doing so breaks her isolation, making the experience real.”<sup>9</sup> For Ensler, women’s act of sharing stories and “naming” the experiences they endure is crucial.

The actresses who perform with Ensler in *The Vagina Monologues* and female audience members agree that sharing stories about their sexuality is a freeing experience. Actresses note that women have called the play “life-changing” when talking with them after performances. Additionally, they have witnessed the play’s transformative effect on female audience members who appear uncomfortable when the play begins but are more relaxed and appreciative of its content by the end.<sup>10</sup> Ensler remembers how, at first, she expected women to talk with her post-performance about their sex lives and pleasurable experiences, but was surprised that most of the women’s stories involved sexual abuse, rape, and incest.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Fighting Social Norms*

Ensler explains that she considers theater a medium where playwrights can “start creating spaces to speak and create opinions and dialogue in the culture” to help people reconsider the society and norms that determine their behaviors, worldviews, and roles within that society.<sup>12</sup> But more important than theater’s function as a medium or channel is the message that Ensler shares with her audience, a message that she hopes will create the space her audiences need to help them speak out against patriarchal social norms, namely silence.

The silence that motivated Ensler is created by patriarchy’s command over much of Western culture. Within a patriarchal society, men are empowered and given places within a

---

<sup>9</sup> *All Things Considered*, NPR, March 20, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Callaway, “Interview with Jane Fonda,” CNN Live, January 17, 2004, (June 21, 2010); Wei Chen and Jeff Hutcherson, “Canadian Comedian Takes a Role in ‘Vagina Monologues,’” January 4, 2001, (June 21, 2010); Valerie Pringle, “Superman Actress to Perform in ‘Vagina Monologues,’” CTV Television, Inc., May 31, 2001, (June 21, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Callaway; Farai Chideya, “Eve Ensler on a Mission to End Sexual Violence,” NPR, December 18, 2007, (June 21, 2010); Pringle.

<sup>12</sup> Eve Ensler, interview by John Von Soosten and Howard Sherman.

public sphere; conversely, women are marginalized and confined to private spheres. Ensler acknowledges that this “patriarchal culture is waging war on vaginas”<sup>13</sup> by oppressing women’s sexuality through abuse, dependence upon men for sexual pleasure, and cultural norms. Importantly, this oppression is perpetuated through silence surrounding the sexual experiences that women have.

In order to counter the silence that surrounds women’s experiences, Ensler presents two types of ideological constructions through *The Vagina Monologues*: society’s current patriarchal construction where men are empowered over women, and a reconstruction, an alternative ideology, where women are empowered. What is unique about Ensler’s reconstruction of patriarchy is that she limits her construction and exploration of this ideology to how it exists *solely* in regard to women’s sexual experiences, not other aspects of social life where patriarchy similarly restricts and marginalizes women.

By presenting both society’s current construction of patriarchy and her reconstructed ideology as they relate to women’s sexuality, Ensler reveals the flaws in the current patriarchal construction in hopes that audiences will break away from it and adopt her reconstruction as their own. In adopting her reconstruction, Ensler hopes that her audiences will then participate in the dialogue that this reconstruction promotes as a solution to the silence surrounding women’s sexual experiences in the current construction of patriarchy.

This study explores Ensler’s constructs of patriarchy and her alternate ideology, as well as the audiences that both constructs imply and negate. Since feminism is typically presented as an ideology that refutes patriarchy, this analysis is influenced by feminist scholar bell hooks’ rhetorical options to revolutionize a patriarchal society as well as her focus on partnership

---

<sup>13</sup> Bourland.



between men and women that she claims fosters feminist values of mutuality and respect. Ultimately, this study will determine if Ensler's new ideology counters patriarchy by evaluating her ideological reconstitution and the audiences the new ideology implies and empowers through dialogue as well as those it negates and silences.

This study begins by utilizing a constitutive perspective to study the current construction of patriarchy that Ensler offers. Then Black's second persona is applied to explore the audience that the current patriarchal construction implies for *The Vagina Monologues*. After studying the patriarchal constructions and audiences generated through *The Vagina Monologues*, the same perspectives are utilized to determine what values constitute Ensler's alternate ideology, the audiences that are implied from it, and the audiences that are negated through this reconstruction.

Ensler's techniques for empowering women and encouraging audiences to reject the patriarchal society surrounding them are reminiscent of hooks' rhetorical options for revolutionizing oppressive ideologies in society. These four options function together to eliminate patriarchy's manifestations in the silence that women endure as well as their dependence upon men or a dominating partner. In order to revolutionize a patriarchal ideology, hooks argues that a new ideology that embraces feminist values of mutuality and respect needs to be created. hooks notes that men and women need to embody these feminist values in their behaviors and worldviews; moreover, institutions that function according to the old patriarchal ideology need to adopt these new feminist values as well.<sup>14</sup>

This combination of personal and structural change within society should prevent patriarchy from perpetuating itself in a society's institutions and people, effectively revolutionizing a patriarchal society in favor of one grounded in a new ideology. This

---

<sup>14</sup> Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin, "bell hooks," in *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999).

perspective on the importance of partnership to achieve feminist values as a counter to patriarchy's influence on society informs the three perspectives that I will apply to *The Vagina Monologues* to determine whether or not its application of these options is successful in working to create change within society.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between *The Vagina Monologues'* symbolic "vagina" and female identity,<sup>15</sup> how female audience members engage in meaning-making by connecting their own experiences to those presented in the play,<sup>16</sup> the play's efforts to shift dialogue regarding women's sexuality from private to public spheres,<sup>17</sup> the consequences that come as a result of reducing female identity to the vagina,<sup>18</sup> and the play's international implications for women from other cultures who live within a patriarchal society.<sup>19</sup> All of these studies deem *The Vagina Monologues* a success in countering patriarchy's dominance in society or explore the consequences or concerns that arise from such success.

---

<sup>15</sup> Kim Q. Hall, "Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*," *Hypatia*, 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Ann McCue-Enser, "Consciousness Raising, the Body, and the Self: A Rhetorical Analysis of Women's Interpretations of *The Vagina Monologues*," Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Michele L. Hammers, "Talking about 'Down There': The Politics of Publicizing the Female Body through *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29, no. 2 (Fall 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Susan E. Bell and Susan M. Reverby, "Vaginal Politics: Tensions and Possibilities in *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28 (2005).; Virginia Braun, "Breaking a Taboo?: Talking (and Laughing) about the Vagina," *Feminism and Psychology*, 9, no. 3 (August 1999).; Virginia Braun, "Public Talk about Private Parts," *Feminism and Psychology*, 9, no. 4 (November 1999).; Christine M. Cooper, "Worrying about Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32, no. 3 (2007).; Deirdre O'Rourke, "The Ensler Monologues: The Limits of Experience, Identity, and Feminism," *MPA*. (October 2009).; Sal Renshaw, "Divine Gifts and Embodied Subjectivities in *The Vagina Monologues*," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6, no. 2 (June 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Sea Ling Cheng, "Vagina Dialogues?: Critical Reflections from Hong Kong on *The Vagina Monologues* as a Worldwide Movement," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6, no. 2 (June 2004).; Jirye Lee, "The Distance Between Two Worlds: What Happened to *The Vagina Monologues* When it Crossed the Pacific Ocean?" M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 2009.

This study, however, questions *The Vagina Monologues*' success in countering patriarchy because of its limited focus on this ideology *solely* as it relates to sexuality and its seemingly limited appeal to a female audience and consequential exclusion of a male audience that plays an integral role in both ideological constructions. Furthermore, this study seeks to determine if the play's manifestation of confession, enactment, dialogue, and the visual arts is successful in creating the revolutionary change that Enslar desires. Such a study will fill a gap left within current research regarding *The Vagina Monologues*, as previous studies explore the play as a success or its consequences as results of its success, when such achievement has yet to be proven.

## CHAPTER 2. UNPACKING AN ECLECTIC PERSPECTIVE

### **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a male-centered ideology that holds men as dominant agents in society and women as subordinates. Writer and activist Adrienne Rich notes that “patriarchy is the power of the fathers” and further defines this power’s manifestation in society as “a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play” in society.<sup>20</sup> Here Rich, explores how this ideology’s institutionalization—in the workplace, home, and a culture’s customs—influences numerous aspects of both women’s and men’s lives by determining where each group belongs and how they interact in society.

Because this ideology holds men as powerful and dominant and women as weak and subordinate in society, it promotes values of “oppression, elitism, domination, competition, hierarchy, alienation,”<sup>21</sup> and violence.<sup>22</sup> Allan Johnson, a sociology scholar, writes that “a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male-identified, and male-centered.” Essentially, a society is patriarchal when it embodies and crystallizes dominant values throughout various social structures.<sup>23</sup> bell hooks writes that patriarchy’s influence on society is evident through the hierarchy of gender roles that it creates within both public and private spheres. This hierarchy determines what roles men and women

---

<sup>20</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1986), 157.

<sup>21</sup> Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, “Our Journey to Repowered Feminism: Expanding the Feminist Toolbox,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 39.

<sup>22</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin.

<sup>23</sup> Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 5.

hold in society and in relation to one another within these different spheres as they are institutionalized through the home, workplace, and educational and legal systems.<sup>24</sup>

Foss and Foss note that the detrimental effects of these patriarchal-determined roles are exhibited in accounts of women's experiences within the country's various institutions. When reflecting on their own encounters with patriarchy, Foss and Foss reveal that they first realized that women were subordinate to men when working in factories where women earned less than men despite the more arduous labor they endured in poorer working conditions. Furthermore, after their father died, their mother had to take on a full-time job for the first time in order to support their family.<sup>25</sup> These examples illustrate how patriarchy's influence on society's institutions determines and effects women's experiences through the institutions' perpetuation of elitist and dominating values.

But hooks also notes that patriarchy functions in society through silence when women are taught to not speak about their oppression and to accept roles that patriarchy determines for them. When women are silenced, patriarchal values are not challenged and continue to exist in society through perpetuation in social institutions and ideologically-determined gender roles. With speech, women would be able to resist patriarchy's influence on their lives and speak out about this detrimental domination that controls many women.

Although men are frequently considered the oppressors in a patriarchal society because of themes and values related to male domination, scholars agree that women can also acquire oppressive roles in such a society. hooks notes that women typically assume this role within

---

<sup>24</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin; bell hooks, "Feminism: A Transformational Politic," in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Foss and Foss.

familial settings; she specifically cites the parent-child relationship as an example.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Johnson argues that the detriments of a patriarchal society cannot be generalized to all people because not all men are oppressors and all women are not equally oppressed.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, these scholars reveal the roles that both men and women play in perpetuating a patriarchal ideology in society. Therefore, both men and women need to reconsider how their behaviors and beliefs allow this ideology to continue its control over society. The feminist movement provided women with an opportunity for this reconsideration and evaluation of life experiences and social roles within a patriarchal society.

### **Feminism**

The feminist movement functions to “end sexism, sexist exploit, and oppression” that exists within society because of the current prevalence of a patriarchal ideology.<sup>28</sup> hooks notes that the movement resists patriarchy’s presence in society in an effort to revolutionize both the social structure and individual people who live within it.<sup>29</sup> By transforming the social structure, patriarchal values can be eliminated within institutions; similarly, by transforming individuals’ behaviors and beliefs, people will no longer help to perpetuate this ideology in society.

Whereas some scholars define feminism according to the movement’s efforts, others define it according to the ideology that it promotes. Foss and Foss write that unlike a patriarchal ideology—that promotes relationships where people dominate and are oppressed, relationships established through hierarchy and competition—feminism promotes “the creation...of

---

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, “Talking Sex: Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imaginary,” in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Judith M. Bennet, “Patriarchal Equilibrium,” in *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> bell hooks, “Feminist Politics: Where We Stand,” in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>29</sup> hooks, “Talking Sex: Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imaginary.”

relationships of equality, self-determination, affirmation, mutuality, and respect.”<sup>30</sup> hooks supports Foss and Foss’ focus on partnership and adds that feminism also values women having a voice in society that they use to speak out against patriarchy in order to resist its domination in their lives.<sup>31</sup> Scholars note the changes the movement has endured as its values and goals have changed over time to reflect the current society. These changes coincide with the second and third waves of feminism.<sup>32</sup>

### *Second and Third Waves of Feminism*

The second wave of feminism was marked by efforts to change women’s status in society and gain equality within society’s institutions, namely the workplace. However, some second wave feminists promoted a separatist ideology because they believed that it would be impossible to alter their status. Instead, they promoted female unity and independence from men.<sup>33</sup> Feminist scholars acknowledge the second wave’s focus on gaining equality in terms of women’s experience but not their status. Foss and Foss write that they, like other women, began to question goals of gender equality because equality with men in a patriarchal society would make women oppressors.<sup>34</sup> Although efforts to gain gender equality in terms of experiences were successful, they merely granted women access to the public spheres that men and

---

<sup>30</sup> Foss and Foss, 39.

<sup>31</sup> bell hooks, “When I Was a Young Soldier for the Revolution,” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Although the first wave of feminism lasted from 1840-1925, this paper explores only the second and third waves of feminism because these waves embody the themes and values found and potentially negated in *The Vagina Monologues*. Moreover, the feminist scholars whose rhetorical options will be explored focus primarily on these two final waves as well. For a description of the first wave of feminism within the greater women’s movement see Julia T. Wood, “The Rhetorical Shaping of Gender: Women’s Movements in America,” in *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Canada: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 59-63.

<sup>33</sup> Wood.

<sup>34</sup> Foss and Foss.

patriarchy inhabited and did little to change the overarching ideology.<sup>35</sup> The second wave's focus on experiential equality—as well as its exclusion of men and minorities<sup>36</sup>—led women in the late 1990s to spur a third wave of feminism focused on resolving the problems that plagued the second wave.

Unlike the second wave, which catered primarily to privileged white women's needs,<sup>37</sup> the third wave of feminism worked to include minorities and men excluded from second wave feminists' ideology. The third wave feminists' connection to men is especially important because they believed that working with men to achieve structural change would help them gain the status change that had not been achieved within the second wave. Despite advancements made in achieving experiential equality for women, third wave feminists still recognized a “rift between legality and reality, theory and practice, structural changes and everyday life.”<sup>38</sup> This rift is the result of changes in the way women interact with patriarchal institutions but few change in the patriarchal values that guide those institutions' practices.

Scholars agree that working to change women's status is as important as working to change women's experiences in society. Spretnak equates experiential changes with relieving the symptoms of patriarchy without treating the cause of its perpetuation in society: women's subordinate status.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Bennet acknowledges that feminist movements have resulted in great change in women's experiences but minimal changes in women's status within society.

---

<sup>35</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin.

<sup>36</sup> bell hooks, “Feminist Focus on Men: A Comment,” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); hooks, “Feminism: a Transformational Politic”; hooks, “Feminist Politics: Where we Stand”; bell hooks, “Men in the Feminist Struggle—The Necessary Movement,” in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* (San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> hooks, “Feminism: A Transformational Politic.”

<sup>38</sup> Wood, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Charlene Spretnak, “Treating the Symptoms, Ignoring the Cause,” in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* (San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992).



These experiential changes overshadow the minimal status changes and, consequently, lead people to “seldom consider how during these great divides, the forms of patriarchal power might have changed more than the degree.”<sup>40</sup>

Third wave feminists’ focus on compromise coincides with goals of mutuality and partnership that feminist scholars desire for the movement. hooks writes that including men in feminist efforts is integral to revolutionizing both societal structures and people’s experiences within them because both men and women perpetuate patriarchy through their behaviors and beliefs.<sup>41</sup> By learning how everyone benefits from feminism by embodying its values, men and women learn new ways of interacting together to resist domination within patriarchal institutions.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Rhetorical Options to Achieve Status Change*

In order to achieve status and experiential change, hooks provides rhetors and society members with four options: confession, enactment, dialogue, and the visual arts. She offers these options in order to move people away from an old reality in favor of a new reality marked by a new ideology. hooks calls for simultaneous individual and structural revolutions to crystallize change within society’s ideology. One way to achieve this structural transformation is by “integrat[ing] feminist thinking and practice into daily life” and providing both men and women with “new habits of being, different ways to live in the world.”<sup>43</sup> Essentially, these

---

<sup>40</sup> Bennet, 63.

<sup>41</sup> hooks, “Men in the Feminist Struggle—the Necessary Movement”; hooks, “Feminist Focus on Men: A Comment”; hooks, “Feminism: A Transformational Politic.” Eisler further recommends merging the once separate men’s and women’s movements to encourage partnership in eliminating patriarchy from society. Riane Eisler, “What do Men Really Want?,” in *Women Respond to the Men’s Movement* (San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> hooks, “Men in the Feminist Struggle—the Necessary Movement.”

<sup>43</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin, 84.

rhetorical options promote feminist values including mutuality, partnership, and respect, effectively enabling men and women to move away from patriarchy and embrace feminism.

People employ enactment, the first rhetorical option, when they stop participating in situations that promote or perpetuate a dominant ideology. hooks further explains that “rhetors who choose...enactment act in nondominating, nonexploitative, nonoppressive ways of being in their own lives.”<sup>44</sup> Acting in these nonviolent, nonconfrontational ways reinforces the fact that although patriarchy exists, it does not control that individual person’s life.

Confession, the second rhetorical option, requires that people share their own stories and give a voice to experience. hooks writes that sharing stories that relate to greater societal structures simultaneously reveals previously masked feelings such as “sorrow and anguish, rage, bitterness, and even deep hatred” making them real in society through the process of naming.

hooks writes that dialogue, the third rhetorical option, “implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination.”<sup>45</sup> Dialogue challenges domination by building upon confession, because it provides people with a channel through which they can simultaneously reflect on different experiences and situations that counter each other and explore new beliefs regarding those experiences. Importantly, hooks stresses the role that both men and women play in dialogue, writing that “dialogue can only emerge if there is awareness that women and men must consciously alter the way we talk to and about one another so that we do not perpetuate and reinforce male domination.”<sup>46</sup> With this conscious self-reflection and two-way communication,

---

<sup>44</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin, 85.

<sup>45</sup> hooks, “Feminist Focus on Men: A Comment,” 131.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., hooks frequently stresses the importance of accessibility, in regard to feminist discourse and dialogue expanding beyond academe and into communities and male inclusion. Dialogue fulfills both types of accessibility; Foss, Foss, and Griffin.

feedback is additionally provided, allowing the rhetor to determine what the audience hears and understands as well as better enabling the people who are engaged in dialogue to understand how their different experiences relate back to a greater societal structure.<sup>47</sup>

The final rhetorical option, the visual arts, is used to make feminist values accessible to audiences beyond academe. hooks claims that rhetors can use the visual arts to “critique...conventional expectations and desires contesting all dominant forms and structures” and then additionally promote a new ideology to counter current oppressive belief systems.<sup>48</sup> Essentially, the discourse should present a “possibility for a transformative future.” The visual arts provide a channel through which an encompassing, varied audience can explore this new ideology because of its pervasiveness throughout society. hooks explains that “art that is created and enjoyed by the oppressed in their places of work and everyday life—can function as a force that promotes the development of critical consciousness and resistance movement.”<sup>49</sup> Here, hooks illustrates the accessibility to new ideas that the visual arts provides people and the important role this medium can serve to cultivate resistance to dominant ideologies.

By promoting partnership and mutuality through her rhetorical options, hooks works to prevent women from creating a pseudo-feminist reality where women dominate men and other women in relationships in society. She warns against such a reality where women “primarily conceive of sexual agency by inverting the patriarchal standpoint and claiming it as their own”<sup>50</sup> for this reality still supports patriarchal values of domination and oppression.

---

<sup>47</sup> hooks, “When I Was a Young Soldier in the Revolution.”

<sup>48</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin, 91.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>50</sup> hooks, “Talking Sex: Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imaginary,” 80.

### *Summary*

Patriarchy is an ideology that empowers men over women through violent and oppressive means. This ideology is perpetuated through individuals' behaviors and thoughts as well as society's institutions. Although patriarchy often holds men as dominant, scholars note that women can, and do, also oppress others and other women within a patriarchal society. Because both men and women perpetuate patriarchy, both play an integral role in revolutionizing this ideology and its manifestations within individuals and institutions.

The feminist movement provides people with an alternate ideology to patriarchy through which they can consider how new values—namely mutuality and respect—would function in society. Although some scholars believe that partnership between men and women is integral to helping revolutionize society, they acknowledge that the feminist movement has excluded both men and minorities effectively stunting such partnership. Scholars also note that although the feminist movement has changed women's experiences in a patriarchal society, it has done little to change women's status within that society. bell hooks provides four rhetorical options—enactment, confession, dialogue, and the visual arts—to emphasize the importance of partnership when working to achieve revolution. These four options inform the three rhetorical perspectives from which this study approaches *The Vagina Monologues*: constitutive rhetoric, second persona, and third persona.

### Constitutive Rhetoric

Jasinski defines constitutive rhetoric as language's representation of "the refractions and modifications of political concepts and ideas, in other words, their reconstitution, as they unfold in textual practice."<sup>51</sup> From this perspective, the critic can explore "the ways specific discursive strategies and textual dynamics shape and reshape the contours of political concepts and ideas."<sup>52</sup> Because of its focus on representations of political concepts in society, constitutive rhetoric enables the critic to understand how a rhetor's discourse both shapes social reality and creates new realities through reconstitution. Jasinski claims that a discourse functions constitutively when it succeeds in creating a world and shaping the social reality of those who inhabit that world by offering new interpretations of reality that those people subsequently adopt. Scholars agree that in order to create a new world and shape people's reality, the rhetor needs to construct a new ideology for people to adopt as this belief system grounds people's behaviors, interactions, and the meanings that they attribute to experiences and ideas.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Ideology*

Ideology functions to establish parameters within a social reality by determining what beliefs, behaviors, and meanings are salient for people within that reality.<sup>54</sup> Black defines ideology as "the network of interconnected convictions that function in a man epistemically and

---

<sup>51</sup> James Jasinski, "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Histiography: Toward Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in *The Federalist Papers*," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, by Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 73.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Jasinski; Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987); Charles W. Kneupper, "Rhetoric, Argument, and Social Reality: A Social Constructionist View," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 16 (1980).

<sup>54</sup> Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric"; Kneupper.

that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world.”<sup>55</sup> Here, Black illuminates the important role that ideology plays in helping people understand the world or reality around them according to the perspectives the ideology prescribes.<sup>56</sup>

Delgado, Tate, and Hirshmann illustrate ideology’s role in establishing worldviews and meaning for people who inhabit the same reality. Delgado explored the ideology present in the Chicano movement during the 1970s and noted that an ideology determined how people within the movement interpreted and assigned meaning to life experiences.<sup>57</sup> Tate studied how the Radicalesbians of the 1980s promoted a new ideology by reinterpreting the term “lesbian” as a “woman-identified woman.” With this new interpretation came a new set of values—including independence from men and a focus on women’s issues—for people who inhabited a lesbian reality.<sup>58</sup>

Likewise, Hirschmann’s social construction of feminist freedom values democratic practice and public policies that favor women’s interests; at the same time, this freedom values women’s independence from such policies when it comes to choices regarding women’s issues

---

<sup>55</sup> Edwin Black, “The Second Persona,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (April 1970): 112. Kneupper shares a definition similar to Black’s, deeming ideologies “universes of discourse” that serve as “the shared symbolic matrix that undergirds the operation of social reality” (p. 175). Like Black, Kneupper acknowledges the role that ideologies play in shaping people’s worldview through shared symbolic meaning and interpretation or reality.

<sup>56</sup> Although this study utilizes Black’s conception of ideology to evaluate its role in constructing belief systems, and implying and negating audiences in *The Vagina Monologues* other critics have approached the study of ideology in society from a variety of perspectives. Several examples include critical rhetoric, ideographic criticism, and ideological criticism. Despite their different methodologies, a common theme regarding an exploration of ideology’s influence on meaning-making, power relations, and the possibility for social change unites these articles. For studies regarding critical rhetoric, see McKerrow, (1989, 1991, 1993); for ideographic criticism, see McGee (1975, 1980), Lucaites & Condit (1990), and Cloud (1998); and for ideological criticism see Wander (1983, 1984).

<sup>57</sup> Fernando Pedro Delgado, “Chicano Movement Rhetoric: An Ideographic Interpretation,” *Communication Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1995).

<sup>58</sup> Helen Tate, “The Ideological Effects of a Failed Constitutive Rhetoric: The Co-option of the Rhetoric of White Lesbian Feminism,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005).

(e.g. domestic violence, sexual harassment, and financial support).<sup>59</sup> The convictions or values that each study's examined ideology prescribes determines the meaning that people attribute to different life experiences as well as the aspects of life that are salient to them. What is more, all of these ideologies were constructed, or rather reconstructed, in opposition to another ideology that had been dominant, yet problematic, for people within each given reality.

### *Contradiction and Reconstruction*

Kneupper explains that reconstitution results when problems arise within a given society that the current ideology cannot resolve. This dilemma leads a rhetor to create a new ideology, one with values and convictions that resolve the problem within the current reality. Additionally, he notes that the reconstitution can offer a completely new ideology—one featuring “considerable reassignment of roles, status, and power within society”<sup>60</sup>—or it can simply be a “reordering” of the current ideology's values and beliefs.<sup>61</sup> Once the new ideology is constructed, it exists in contradiction to the current ideology because it serves as a confronting belief system to the old ideology.

Both Jasinski and Charland acknowledge that such contradictions are beneficial to people who are forced to choose between the two ideologies and realities that they constitute. The distinction between the two subsequent realities can reveal the benefits and limitations of life within the current and reconstructed realities that each ideology creates.<sup>62</sup> Society members are required to choose one ideology over the other, because this contradiction prevents closure for

---

<sup>59</sup> Nancy J. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Kneupper, 178.

<sup>61</sup> Kneupper, 179.

<sup>62</sup> Jasinski; Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric.”

the problem that has arisen within the current reality.<sup>63</sup> Notably, scholars recognize the role that constitutive rhetoric plays in helping to resolve such contradictions between ideologies because of the space it provides society and critics alike for evaluation of both the current and reconstituted ideologies.

Delgado's and Tate's studies illustrate the contradictory results of reconstituted ideologies that occur when a new ideology is created to resolve a problem within the current reality. For the Chicanos in Delgado's study, their ideology was constituted in opposition of the Anglo Americans' ideology that oppressed them during the 1960s and '70s. In order to resolve this oppression the Chicanos needed to create a new ideology—one grounded in freedom and culture—in order to gain equality through self-empowerment in society.<sup>64</sup> By redefining the term "lesbian" to mean a woman-identified woman, the Radicalesbians in Tate's study created an ideology grounded in support of women's issues and against all forms of patriarchal institutions within society. This ideology was constituted in opposition of a heterosexual definition of feminism and an ideology that valued the same interests but was plagued by homophobia.<sup>65</sup>

However, as Kneupper notes, reconstitution can also simply be a "reordering" of old values or a fusion of values from both ideologies presented.<sup>66</sup> Charland and Kendall illustrate this type of reconstitution in their studies. Charland explains that uniting shared values between two once separate groups, the French-Canadians and Quebec residents, created a new ideology through discourse associated with a new group: the Quebecois. Although he writes that the groups were once separate because "some French-Canadians live outside of Quebec and not all of those in Quebec are French-speaking," Charland reveals how uniting the groups through

---

<sup>63</sup> Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

<sup>64</sup> Delgado.

<sup>65</sup> Tate.

<sup>66</sup> Kneupper.



shared values in territorial independence constituted a new group and ideology.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Kendall explores how blending values from capitalism and environmentalism created Natural Capitalism, which promotes “protecting the biosphere but also improving profits and competitiveness.”<sup>68</sup> Like the Quebecois, the Natural Capitalist ideology reorders the values that constitute ideologies to create a new one rather than constituting an ideology in opposition to another.

### *Social Action*

Regardless of how each new ideology is constituted—through opposition to a previous ideology or through reordered or fused values—each requires that its inhabitants act and behave in ways that support and reflect each ideology’s values. Charland writes that once society members choose one of the ideologies presented they are constrained to act according to the ideology in order to crystallize their beliefs and to achieve the future—a resolution to the problem in society—that the ideology promotes. Although the ideology provides a resolution to a societal ill, that end can only be achieved through the audience’s action.<sup>69</sup>

Jasinski refers to this social action as *discursive action*, illuminating the link between discourse and subsequent action by defining it as the ways in which “textual forms enable and constrain beliefs and practices.”<sup>70</sup> Charland notes that this social action is what establishes salience for an ideology constituted through discourse. He explains that “what is significant in constitutive rhetoric is that it positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action

---

<sup>67</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric.”

<sup>68</sup> Brenden E. Kendall, “Personae and Natural Capitalism: Negotiating Politics and Constituencies in a Rhetoric of Sustainability,” *Environmental Communication* 2, no. 1 (March 2008).

<sup>69</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric.”

<sup>70</sup> Jasinski, 81.

in the material world.”<sup>71</sup> For Charland, audience action is the final step in bringing an ideology’s resolution to fruition, a means of attaining the reality that these values promote. People’s actions will differ according to their ideology, because each ideology is constituted by a different set of values, thus requiring different action to uphold and crystallize these values in society.

### *Textual Analysis*

Jasinski and Charland provide critics with techniques to explore constitutive rhetoric’s manifestation within discourse as well as its effects on the people who adopt the constituted ideologies as their own. Jasinski writes that there are four ways that constitutive rhetoric can manifest within discourse: through self-constitution, shaping experiences with time and space, organizing cultural norms to create collective identities, and shaping a culture’s “linguistic resources.” He explains that self-constitution occurs when a rhetor, in this study Enslar, creates a discourse that embodies a particular ideology and is then subsequently constituted by that ideology herself.<sup>72</sup> Here, contradiction plays an important role as the rhetor creates the new ideology and her own through contradiction or “othering.”

Discourse that functions constitutively can also shape people’s experiences with time and space. Often, constitutive discourse explores how people’s past experiences shaped the present experiences people face in order to build support and create the means of achieving a new future separate from the past and present through a new ideology. Additionally, constitutive discourse can alter people’s relationships or interactions as they relate to particular concepts by moving a concept to and from public or private social spheres and thus closer to or distant from people. This change in proximity subsequently leads people to have different interactions and relationships in regard to such concepts. Jasinski notes that discursive forces—such as

---

<sup>71</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 141.

<sup>72</sup> Jasinski, 77.

feminism, legislation, and advocacy—play an important role in altering people’s proximity to concepts and values.<sup>73</sup>

The Red Flag Campaign exemplifies how a discursive force—here, advocacy—can alter people’s proximity to concepts, here, dating violence in college student relationships. The campaign works to educate students on the different ways dating violence can be manifested in relationships and its causes; it also encourages students to speak up when they are bystanders to a violent relationship. Although the campaign acknowledges that dating violence is often considered a private matter for the affected couple it works to encourage dialogue with victims and perpetrators of violent relationships to help them identify the violent and harmful nature of their relationship. By encouraging this dialogue, the campaign tries to move dating violence from a private to public issue thus eliminating the space that exists between victims of violent relationship and silent bystanders.

Because constitutive rhetoric provides people with the ability to resolve conflicts in society by adopting a particular ideology, this discourse challenges communities to self-preserve by engaging in reconstitution and adopting such ideologies. When constitutive rhetoric functions to establish and maintain a collective identity, it does so by confronting, reordering, and even negotiating issues related to power, affiliation, meaning, value, and their manifestation in society’s institutions. Finally, constitutive rhetoric can shape people’s interpretations of life experiences and the meanings that they attribute to such experiences as a result of changing which values are salient within a given society.<sup>74</sup>

Once again, The Red Flag Campaign exemplifies how issues are confronted and reordered within constitutive discourse. Although dating violence is often relegated to private

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

spheres of individual violent relationships, the campaign challenges students to make this concept public by communicating with peers trapped within such a relationship. Its discourse also reorders and negotiates the idea of power as it exists within a violent relationship by empowering victims to build new relationships with others to find help and leave the perpetrator and encouraging bystanders to speak up if they detect a violent relationship. By confronting dating violence and reordering power within such relationships, people are able to interpret dating violence and experiences with it as negative, harmful, and something that they need outside help to overcome.

Jasinski's manifestations of constitutive rhetoric within discourse coincide with the three ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric—constituting a collective subject, transhistorical subject, and the illusion of freedom—which Charland provides. Although individuals must act in accordance with an ideology's prescribed values, Charland first notes that this action is always attributed to a collective agent.<sup>75</sup> In other words, individuals who act to embody an ideology's values are identified within a larger community of people who are acting similarly. Although women who embodied the Radicalesbian ideology denounced and disengaged from all forms of patriarchal society in their individual lives, their efforts were part of a movement to gain gender equality by being woman-identified women.<sup>76</sup>

Second, Charland writes that “time collapses” within constitutive rhetoric to link people with common values, not separate them by space and time. Charland exemplifies this effect in his study when he explores how Quebec's White Paper linked Quebec's original settlers, French-Canadians, and Quebec residents with a common value for territorial independence. Despite the time and space that separated these groups, the White Paper's ability to associate all groups with

---

<sup>75</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric.”

<sup>76</sup> Tate.

common values creates a fight for freedom for which Quebec residents have a history of fighting.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, Charland argues that constitutive rhetoric creates an illusion of freedom for people who choose to inhabit a new social reality. He explains that people are “constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain...consistency” that the ideology prescribes.<sup>78</sup> This is much like Charland’s claim that people need to act according to an ideology to bring the resolution it promises to fruition. Without the appropriate action, the problem that plagues the current social reality will continue. Although people think that they have the freedom to behave as they want, in reality the ideology and desire to obtain the prescribed reality create an illusory freedom. This means that their actions and behaviors are restricted by the ideology’s prescribed values and goals. For example, in order to obtain equality in society, Chicanos during the 1970s movement were required to act according to the movement’s values for freedom and culture in order to gain the equality that served as this ideology’s goal.<sup>79</sup>

### *Summary*

Discourse functions constitutively when it shapes how political concepts are represented in society and thus shapes people’s realities. Ideologies establish parameters within each social reality by providing values and beliefs by which people can live and act. Scholars agree that contradiction plays an important role in ideology constitution and reconstitution. Often, new ideologies are created to resolve a problem in society that the current ideology cannot. Regardless of how these new ideologies are constituted—as a complete reconstruction or a fusion of once separate values—each requires the people who adopt them to act according to the

---

<sup>77</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 140.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>79</sup> Delgado.

prescribed values in order to crystallize the beliefs that the ideology promotes. Moreover, people are constrained to behave and act as the ideology prescribes in order to bring its ultimate goal to fruition.

### **Second Persona**

In addition to inviting social action and establishing social realities, ideologies also constitute and imply auditors, or audiences, within those realities. Black refers to these implied auditors as a discourse's "second persona" and further explains that such auditors are "an artificial creation" of an audience that has embodied the values in the rhetor's prescribed ideology. Implied auditors differ from the first persona of the rhetor and the actual auditors, or the people who witness the discourse. They are also the people the rhetor wants the actual auditors to become, as these people have embodied the ideology she promotes through her discourse.<sup>80</sup>

Black explains that "rhetorical discourses, either singly or cumulatively in a persuasive movement, will imply an auditor [an audience], and that in most cases the implication will...enable the critic to link the implied auditor to an ideology."<sup>81</sup> Charland supports Black's concept of a second persona as ideologically contingent by writing that audiences are constructions, constituted by the ideology the rhetor promotes in her discourse. Each audience implied through a discourse will be required to act and think in different ways according to the ideology the discourse prescribes.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Black, 111.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>82</sup> Maurice Charland, "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association/American Forensic Association (Conference on Argumentation), 1995; Kenneth Burke, "Definition of Man," in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 6. Burke similarly acknowledges the different actions that different ideologies

Similarly, each ideology generates a discourse unique to the values that it encompasses. This means that discourses that are generated from different ideologies—patriarchy and feminism, for example—will require their implied auditors to act in different ways that reinforce the values each ideology promotes. Implied auditors for patriarchal discourses will be required to act in oppressive and violent ways to reinforce the values of domination that constitute patriarchy. Likewise, implied auditors for feminist discourses will be required to act in respectful ways that encourage mutuality to reinforce the values of shared power that feminism promotes.

Kendall illustrates how different discourses require audiences to act and think in different ways in his study regarding Natural Capitalism. He explains that this ideology is comprised of two once separate ideologies, environmentalism and capitalism, each of which are grounded in unique values: sustainability and economic profit from “financial and manufactured capital.”<sup>83</sup> Prior to their union, Kendall writes that implied auditors for each ideology would have had to act in different ways in order to reinforce each ideology’s values.

### *Ideology*

Black defines ideology as “the network of interconnected convictions that function in a man epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world.”<sup>84</sup> In encouraging critics to move beyond demographics to explore an audience’s nature, Black challenges the critic to consider how ideology constitutes an audience unique to that specific set of values. This provides for a richer audience evaluation than demographics alone could

---

prescribe, stating that “an ideology is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it.”

<sup>83</sup> Kendall, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Black, 112.

provide. But Charland is quick to note that both demographics and ideology play important roles in constituting a rhetor's implied audience. Although both Black and Charland acknowledge that critics can often fail to move beyond demographics when considering constitution, Charland argues that critics need to explore both demographics and ideology—not just one component—to fully understand an audience's constitution and its relation to the action an ideology prescribes.<sup>85</sup>

Each discourse also has a different effect on each group of implied auditors because each ideology requires that its auditors act in different ways to crystallize the promoted values. But ideologies can influence more than behaviors. Black notes that ideologies additionally function to determine auditors' worldviews.<sup>86</sup> Charland and McGee agree with Black in that worldviews are contingent upon ideologies and further argue that discourse functions to alter people's worldviews by presenting people with new ideologies that are alternatives to the ones they currently hold.<sup>87</sup>

Much like Jasinski's claim that conflict between current and proposed ideologies provides people with the opportunity to see how each function within society before choosing one, scholars agree that a similar conflict exists within auditors when they are tasked with selecting an ideology.<sup>88</sup> Rather than an external conflict among ideologies' function in society, this conflict is internal. Black explains that this internal conflict exists because of the disparity between the implied auditor and the actual auditor.<sup>89</sup> The rhetor wants the actual auditor to become the implied auditor; in order to do so the actual auditor must adopt the rhetor's new ideology and, in doing so, abandon his or her current ideology.

---

<sup>85</sup> Black, Charland, "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience."

<sup>86</sup> Black.

<sup>87</sup> Charland, "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience"; Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61, no. 5 (October 1975).

<sup>88</sup> Charland, "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience"; Black; McGee.

<sup>89</sup> Black.



Jensen and Hammerback reveal that Robert Parris Moses, a civil rights leader during the 1960s, was tasked with motivating his audience of young blacks in the South to abandon the current racist ideology for the new one that he promoted in speeches throughout Southern communities. His actual audience's current ideology subordinated them as powerless to whites and made them live in fear of punishment for breaking the communities' racially bound laws. Motivated by his new ideology, Moses' implied audience was comprised of brave leaders who used non-violent tactics to serve as civil rights organizers in their communities.<sup>90</sup>

Similarly, Charlesworth illustrates how the medical community promotes its ideology regarding menopause to menopausal women through information packets distributed at doctors' office. Her study revealed that the medical community perceives menopausal women's bodies as deficient and requiring medical attention—specifically hormone replacement therapy (HRT)—in order to resolve this deficiency. The community's implied auditors are menopausal women who also perceive their bodies as lacking and act to resolve this deficiency by realizing the importance of obtaining medical assistance and talking to their doctors about HRT in order to follow through with the packets' prescribed plan of action.<sup>91</sup>

### *Textual Analysis*

In order to determine how an ideology implies an audience, Black recommends that the critic examine discourse for stylistic tokens, words or phrases that denote an ideology. He notes that such tokens are subtle and can be found in both discourses that are overtly ideological as

---

<sup>90</sup> Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, "'Your Tools Are Really the People': The Rhetoric of Robert Parris Moses," *Communication Monographs* 65 (June 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Dacia Charlesworth, "Marketing Menopause and Inventing Identities: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Persona Created in Menopause Education Pamphlets," Presented at the 2007 National Communication Association Annual Convention, [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/9/4/6/6/p194669\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/9/4/6/6/p194669_index.html) (accessed November 22, 2010).

well as those that appear neutral at a first reading. Stylistic tokens serve to cue the audience into the rhetor's ideology, specifically the values that comprise that ideology, making them symptomatic in nature.<sup>92</sup> Black further illustrates the role of stylistic tokens in discourse by offering an example regarding school integration. He writes that if an audience was listening to a speech about school integration, during which the speaker used a derogatory term for blacks, that audience would consequently understand the speaker's ideology and perspective on school integration. Moreover, that audience would additionally understand how that ideology is applied to issues that exist beyond the text, such as race relations.<sup>93</sup>

In Black's example, the derogatory term for blacks would serve as the stylistic token for the speaker's ideology as it is derived from the values that comprise that ideology. This token also reveals the speaker's perspective on the current and broader issues, yet still relates back to the speaker's values. The actual auditors would then be able to understand the speaker's ideology and how implied auditors would behave and think according to the values it promotes, effectively allowing them to consider both their current ideology and the one the speaker presents when evaluating which they want to adopt for themselves.

Triece and Hammerback provide additional illustrations of stylistic tokens' role in discourse. Triece writes that Leonora O'Reilly, a working class woman who reformed working conditions for women workers during the 1900s, used the phrase "intelligent worker" in her speeches. This token revealed the new ideology she promoted specifically for working class women—one that valued working class women as "perceptive, strong-willed, integral to the economic system and the larger labor movement"—as a counter to the weakness and

---

<sup>92</sup> Black.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

discouragement the women had experienced as a result of their persistent poor working conditions.<sup>94</sup>

Hammerback explores how Cesar Chavez used the token “new person” to motivate fellow farmers to join him in creating a union. Like O’Reilly, Chavez’s “new person” stood as a counter to the farmers’ current perspective on their working conditions and valued “fearlessness and optimism as activist/advocates, commitment to faith in the power of well-reasoned discourse, and willingness to sacrifice in a long, hard campaign.”<sup>95</sup> Both examples illustrate how stylistic tokens reveal an ideology to an audience, constitute implied auditors, and extend beyond the text to reveal the rhetor’s perspective on broader issues (here, working conditions for women in the 1900s and farm workers).

### **Third Persona**

As important as it is to understand who the rhetor’s actual auditors are and who her ideology constitutes as implied auditors, it is equally important to understand which audiences are excluded or negated from discourse. Philip Wander deems this excluded audience the “third persona,” a complement to Black’s second persona or a discourse’s implied audience. Wander writes that the third persona “focuses on audiences negated through the ‘text’—the language, the speaking situation, the established order shaping both.”<sup>96</sup> Although he acknowledges that actual

---

<sup>94</sup> Mary E. Trice, “Appealing to the ‘Intelligent Worker’: Rhetorical Reconstitution and the Influence of Firsthand Experience in the Rhetoric of Leonora O’Reilly,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 11.

<sup>95</sup> John Hammerback, “Creating the ‘New Person’: The Rhetoric of Reconstitutive Discourse,” *Rhetoric Review*: 18.

<sup>96</sup> Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory,” *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (Winter 1984): 216.

and implied auditors play an integral role in carrying out the ideology that a rhetor presents, Wander challenges critics to explore the audiences that a rhetor's ideology silences.<sup>97</sup>

Wander categorizes the third persona under ideological criticism. He explains that this new approach to discourse focuses on ideology's application in everyday life situations with emphases on humanity and history to help scholars "critique rhetoric legitimizing actions, policies, and silences relevant to the great issues of our time."<sup>98</sup> Essentially, Wander is interested in how rhetoric can be used to determine how ideology, as presented through discourse, privileges some audiences, realities, and interests over others who are excluded by that same ideology during "emancipatory moments" in history. These moments are characterized by conflicting ideologies where auditors are required to choose one to adopt for themselves.

Understanding negated audiences is important to Wander for he fears that too often "rhetorical theory oblige[s] us to ignore audiences not addressed, unable to attend, and unable to respond to the 'text.'"<sup>99</sup> In order to determine which audiences are excluded from discourse, Wander recommends that critics utilizing the third persona understand the historical context in which this emancipatory moment exists, the rhetor's worldview in relation to the historical context, and "stylistic devices" within the discourse that reveal a rhetor's ideology and coinciding values.<sup>100</sup>

Because emancipatory moments are historically contingent, critics need to understand the historical context surrounding the issue around which conflicting ideologies are created.

Additionally, critics need to understand the rhetor's worldview, or ideology, in order to

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>100</sup> Philip Wander, "The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism," *Central States Speech Journal* 34 (Spring 1983), 12.

determine how meaning and experiences are interpreted within this given perspective, as well as how this perspective has been influenced by the historical context. Wander notes that critics should analyze the discourse for “stylistic devices.” Similar to Black’s tokens, Wander explains that these devices serve as cues that reveal the rhetor’s ideology and values to the audience. Like the rhetor’s ideology, they are also contextually bound and derive meaning and interpretation from their application to real-life experiences that the rhetor provides.<sup>101</sup> With these three guidelines—historical context, rhetor’s ideology, and stylistic devices—in mind the critic is prepared to approach the discourse and determine which audiences are negated by its ideology.

Cloud exemplifies the important role that each of these guidelines plays when evaluating discourse for negated audiences. In her analysis of the Uprising of ’34, Cloud explores how the paternalistic ideology that perpetuated racism in mill towns also served to silence black workers in these towns. By combining historical research from interviews with the mill town’s black residents with an evaluation of all workers’ roles within a paternalistic ideology, Cloud is able to determine how black mill workers were negated through ideologically-and self-imposed silence that perpetuated the workers’ subordination until the 1934 uprising.<sup>102</sup>

### **Methodology**

Three perspectives—constitutive rhetoric, second persona, and third persona—as well as hooks’ rhetorical options for revolutionizing a patriarchal society inform this eclectic approach to *The Vagina Monologues*. Although this artifact, with its focus on female sexuality and hegemony, does allow for a feminist critique, this study’s questions pertain to ideology and

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Dana L. Cloud, “The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of ’34,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1999).

audience construction—not gender construction—effectively guiding this study away from a feminist critique and toward constitutive rhetoric and personae in discourse.

*Ensler's Construction of Patriarchy*

The first portion of the analysis begins with an examination of Ensler's construction of a patriarchal ideology as it pertains to women's sexuality before determining this ideology's implied and negated audiences. First, Ensler's construction of patriarchy is examined by exploring how Ensler defines this ideology in terms of values and how these values obtain meaning when applied to women's sexual experiences.

Then, the audiences—in terms of both demographic and ideological constitution—that this patriarchal ideology implies as its second persona are identified. First, the audience's demographics are evaluated by identifying their collective, transhistorical subject, defined as the overarching agent to whom the audiences' actions and beliefs are attributed. This group links people from a variety of times and backgrounds, effectively reducing them to a single identifying demographic factor. After studying the implied audience's demographic constitution, this study considers how the patriarchal ideology requires these audience members to behave and think in order to uphold the patriarchal values that Ensler presents. Finally, the illusion of freedom, or the future that the implied audience is promised if it acts according to the ideology's prescribed behaviors and beliefs is identified.

After determining the discourse's implied audiences, this study then determines which audiences the discourse negates through silence or absence from the discourse by considering its historical context (in terms of the transhistorical subject) and language. Then this study identifies how the negated audience acts to maintain its subordinate status by examining this audience's experiences as presented within the discourse.

*Ensler's Reconstructed Ideology*

After completing the analysis of Ensler's construction of patriarchy, the same perspectives are applied to Ensler's new ideological construction to determine its values, implied audiences, and negated audiences. This portion of the analysis will also consider how hooks' rhetorical options coincide with the values that constitute Ensler's new ideology. Moreover, after determining the play's implied and negated audiences, this study will determine if Ensler has succeeded in fostering partnership and dialogue as a means to achieve patriarchal revolution in favor of her new ideology.

### CHAPTER 3. PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTION IN THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Eve Ensler's goal in writing *The Vagina Monologues* was to empower women through dialogue and sexual agency in an effort to counter the influences the patriarchal culture has on women's sexual experiences. With this goal in mind, Ensler, perhaps unintentionally, constructs two ideologies: one grounded in patriarchy and male domination, and the other grounded in female empowerment. In order to encourage her audience members to adopt her reconstructed ideology, Ensler must illustrate the need for change by revealing the detrimental consequences patriarchy has for women's sexuality. Once the problems within the current culture are identified, Ensler is able to construct an alternate ideology that works to resolve these problems.

#### **Values**

Two values—male pleasure and male domination—form the foundation for Ensler's construction of patriarchy within the current culture. In addition to illustrating these values as they are manifest within women's sexual experiences, Ensler also reveals how the extremes of these two primary values—perverted pleasure and force or control—are problematic for women who inhabit the culture. By establishing these values and their extremes as the foundation of a patriarchal society, Ensler is then able to illustrate how these values acquire meaning through women's sexual experiences.

In Ensler's patriarchal culture, men are consumed by sexual pleasure. It is their primary focus and goal, and they use the women in their lives to help them achieve it, regardless of the pain or emotional discomfort women experience as a result of men's quest for pleasure. The narrator in the monologue "Hair" exemplifies the consequences women experience as the men in their lives exploit them as a source of sexual pleasure. In this monologue, a woman recalls how her husband made her shave her vagina because he thought that pubic hair "was cluttered and



dirty.”<sup>103</sup> At first she appeased her husband by shaving but soon found sex to be painful. “When he made love to me,” she says, “my vagina felt...good to rub...and painful. Like scratching a mosquito bite. It felt like it was on fire. There were screaming red bumps.”<sup>104</sup> When she decided to stop shaving because of the unbearable discomfort it brought her, her husband cheated on her and blamed her inability to provide him sexual pleasure as his excuse.

Here, the narrator’s husband was concerned with achieving sexual pleasure for himself, not with his wife’s feelings and pleasure, although he used her as a source for his own sexual satisfaction. In the same monologue, the couple attended marital therapy. Afterward the narrator let her husband shave her vagina, per the therapist’s recommendation, in an attempt to please him after he has cheated on her. She recalls that “he clipped it a few times and there was a little blood in the bathtub” but that “he didn’t even notice it ‘cause he was so happy shaving me.”<sup>105</sup> Once again, the narrator’s husband was so intent upon achieving sexual pleasure for himself that he was unaware of the physical pain he caused his wife.

“Because He Liked to Look at It,” similarly illustrates how men ignore women’s displeasure during sex in favor of their own satisfactions. Here, the narrator recalls how Bob, her sexual partner, insisted on looking at her vagina before he would have sex with her, despite the disgust she felt for her body and her vagina in particular. The audience learns about Bob’s pleasure—he is described as a “hungry beast” who gasps, smiles, stares, and groans as he looks at the narrator’s vagina—and the narrator’s emotions—she recalls that she wanted “to throw up

---

<sup>103</sup> Eve Ensler, “Hair,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000),

7.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

and die”—as Bob experienced his pleasure.<sup>106</sup> Once again, a conflict arises when a man uses a woman as a source of sexual pleasure and focuses on this goal while ignoring the emotional and physical pain that his pleasure caused his partner.

In addition to illustrating how men’s focus on their own pleasure is manifest within women’s sexual experiences, Ensler also reveals how men pervert sexual pleasure in “Hair.” As the narrator recalls shaving her vagina for the first time, she tells the audience that “it looked puffy and exposed and like a little girl” and how her new appearance excited her husband. This sexual perversion serves as an extreme instance of men exploiting women to obtain pleasure.<sup>107</sup> The narrator’s husband was not satisfied with his wife’s body and made her change her appearance in order to achieve sexual pleasure while forcing his wife to degrade herself.

Male domination is complementary to male pleasure within a patriarchal culture because men often gain their sexual pleasure from women who are subordinate to them. Men are in control of their pleasure and, consequently, women’s as well. In “Hair” this domination is evident when the narrator’s husband first made her shave her vagina and later when he shaved her vagina after their marital counseling session. During their counseling session, the therapist told the couple that “marriage is a compromise” but women in *The Vagina Monologues* sacrifice more than their male partners in order to ensure their partners’ sexual pleasure.<sup>108</sup>

Narrators in both “Because He Liked to Look at It” and “The Flood” experience a similar subordination to the men in their sexual lives. Although the narrator told Bob that she did not want him to look at her vagina, he ignored her and continued to undress her, even though she asked him to stop. “He had to see me,” she recalls, reinforcing the control Bob had over her

---

<sup>106</sup> Eve Ensler, “Because He Liked to Look at It,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 20.

<sup>107</sup> Ensler, “Hair,” 7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

during foreplay.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, the narrator for “The Flood” shares a story about a time when her date, Andy Leftkov, suddenly kissed her “in this surprisingly ‘take me by control like they do in the movies’ kind of way.” She recalls how Andy “pulled me to him” to initiate intimacy while they were on their date, effectively putting himself in a dominant position to the subordinate, passive narrator.<sup>110</sup>

Although these two women did not experience physical pain as a result of this male domination, Ensler illustrates how domination can lead to extreme instances of force in sexual situations. Men are forceful when they use women against their will to attain pleasure. Importantly, though, men use force not just to take pleasure from women but rather to exert the power—the domination—that they have over women. Force is manifest within *The Vagina Monologues* through rape. Although these instances share common themes of force and extreme male domination, they are contextually very different. In “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could” the narrator recalls a time when she was ten, in the basement at her father’s house trying on her first set of undergarments when her father’s friend, Alfred, snuck up behind her and raped her. She tried to stop him by screaming, kicking, and fighting, but she could not overpower Alfred.<sup>111</sup>

Another monologue, “My Vagina Was My Village,” features a Bosnian refugee who was powerless when soldiers came to her home, took her away, and raped her repeatedly for an entire week. “The soldiers put a long thick rifle inside me,” she recalls. “Six of them, monstrous doctors with black masks shoving bottles up me too. There were sticks and the end of a

---

<sup>109</sup> Ensler, “Because He Liked to Look at It,” 20.

<sup>110</sup> Eve Ensler, “The Flood,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 27.

<sup>111</sup> Eve Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000).

broom.”<sup>112</sup> The narrator also shares the physical and emotional pain the soldiers’ force caused her, sharing that she could hear skin tear as they raped her and how, afterward, “a piece of my vagina came off in my hand” and how “now one side of the lip is completely gone.”<sup>113</sup> In both of these monologues, women were powerless compared to the men who forced them into having sex. Likewise, a common theme that unites the two is how Alfred and the soldiers used force during sex not to obtain pleasure, but to exert the power that they had over women, power bestowed upon them through Ensler’s construction of the patriarchal culture and its extreme values.

### *Summary*

Ensler constructed the patriarchal ideology in *The Vagina Monologues* to reveal the problems that women endure when they adopt this ideology because of its emphasis on male pleasure and male domination to attain this pleasure. The play’s patriarchal discourse depicts men on quest for sexual pleasure who use women to achieve this with no concern for the women’s pleasure or the discomfort their control and demands create for these women. In addition to these two values, their extremes—perverted pleasure and force or control—are also presented to illustrate how men are willing to use women to their own sexual advantage.

### *Women’s Reality in a Patriarchal Ideology*

Given the focus on male pleasure and dominance within the patriarchal culture, women’s sexual desire is consequently depicted as repressed through several themes: rare sexual pleasure, accidental pleasure, denial of pleasure, and the torture women experience within the culture. Women who inhabit this reality rarely experience sexual pleasure because they have “no access

---

<sup>112</sup> Eve Ensler, “My Vagina Was My Village,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 22.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

to their sexual happiness.”<sup>114</sup> Men have the ability to allow women access to this happiness and deny women this access because of their focus on fulfilling their own sexual pleasure. This lack of control leads women to feel unfulfilled and angry.<sup>115</sup> One woman even notes that such skewed focus “undermines” women’s vaginas, illustrating how the patriarchal culture denies women and their bodies from experiencing and enjoying sexual pleasure.<sup>116</sup> Another recalls how she felt “hopeless” when she had sex with men because she was unable to express any pleasure she felt.<sup>117</sup>

Notably, only one woman in the play related an explicitly enjoyable experience with a man. The introduction to “Because He Liked to Look at It,” even states that “this monologue is based on a woman who had a good experience with a man,” reinforcing the rarity of such an event in the play.<sup>118</sup> But the narrator’s “good experience” resulted in sexual pleasure, not actual intercourse. Perhaps more importantly, the narrator only experiences this sexual pleasure when she abandons the disgust she had for her vagina in favor of Bob’s admiration of it. She recalls when she “watched him looking at me and he was so genuinely excited, so peaceful and euphoric, I began to get wet and turned on. I began to see myself the way he saw me.”<sup>119</sup> Here, the narrator found pleasure in Bob’s pleasure and in her vagina as the source of his pleasure. Her pleasure, a rarity in the play, was dependent upon Bob’s.

Other times, women’s pleasure is purely accidental, although this type of pleasure is almost as infrequent as women having positive sexual experiences with men: just two women in

---

<sup>114</sup> Eve Ensler, “The Women Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 32.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*; Ensler, “My Angry Vagina,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” 33.

<sup>118</sup> Ensler, “Because He Liked to Look at It,” 18.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

the play experienced this pleasure. The first is the narrator for “The Flood” who had an unexpected orgasm after the boy she was dating suddenly kissed her. “I got excited, so excited,” she states, “and well, there was a flood down there. I couldn’t control it. It was like this force of passion, this river of life just flooded out of me.”<sup>120</sup> The second is the narrator for “The Vagina Workshop” who did not admit to having orgasms at the workshop because she could not make them happen; rather, they “happened to” her at random times in her dreams, the bathtub, “on horses, bicycles, on the treadmill at the gym.”<sup>121</sup> In this monologue, the narrator describes orgasms as “mystical” and “magical” and explains that she “didn’t want to interfere. It felt wrong to get involved—contrived, manipulative” to give herself pleasure.<sup>122</sup> Both instances illustrate how this accidental pleasure subordinates women by reinforcing the lack of control they have over their own pleasure, as well as their passive roles in sexual experiences. In “The Flood” the narrator was unable to control her passion and the pleasure she experienced when Andy Leftkov kissed her.<sup>123</sup> In “The Vagina Workshop” the narrator has never been in control of her own pleasure and even refused to take control because she believed it to be wrong, and accidental pleasure—or no pleasure—to be right.<sup>124</sup>

The narrator for “The Vagina Workshop” similarly illustrates how women deny themselves pleasure through their refusal to take control of their bodies, despite their desire for sexual gratification. Although this narrator describes her accidental orgasms and reinforces her subordinate role in sex through her explanations of why she does not try to pleasure herself, she does admit that she attended the workshop because of an intense desire to experience sexual

---

<sup>120</sup> Eve Ensler, “The Flood,” 13.

<sup>121</sup> Eve Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 16.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Ensler, “The Flood.”

<sup>124</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop.”

pleasure. She notes that “the problem, of course, is that I hadn’t had a magical accidental orgasm in a long time, and I was frantic.”<sup>125</sup> Just as pleasure from sex with men is rare, so is pleasure from accidental orgasms in the play, because both leave women dependent upon another person or activity as a source of sexual pleasure. Denying herself pleasure made the narrator desperate, and her last resort was a workshop where she finally learned how to control and fulfill her sexual happiness independently.

These three themes—rare or accidental sexual pleasure, and denying pleasure—all contribute to torture, the final theme regarding women’s reality within a patriarchal culture. “My Angry Vagina” focuses primarily on the torture women endure within a culture that holds male pleasure, domination, and control above women’s pleasure, agency, and partnership in sexual relationships. The narrator criticizes the numerous ways that the patriarchal culture, namely its ignorance of women’s pleasure, has been detrimental to women’s sexuality beyond the bedroom. She begins by denouncing patriarchy’s manifestation within societal expectations for women’s appearances, specifically attacking undergarments such as girdles and thongs. Citing first the discomfort that women experience when they wear these garments, the narrator then notes how women are hiding and constraining their true bodies by wearing them. She also protests feminine products—specifically tampons and douches—that have similar effects. Enraged, she illustrates the discomfort tampons bring women by first describing them as “a wad of dry fucking cotton” and then providing viewers with her vagina’s perception of tampons, explaining that “as soon as my vagina sees it, it goes into shock. It says forget it. It closes up.”<sup>126</sup>

Once finished with tampons, the narrator then explains that douches are another way that women are encouraged to hide or mask an aspect of their sexuality. She states that “my vagina

---

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>126</sup> Eve Ensler, “My Angry Vagina,” 23.

doesn't need to be cleaned up. It smells good already...they're trying to clean it up...All cleaned up like washing a fish after you cook it. I want to taste the fish." That's why I ordered it."<sup>127</sup> In both examples, the narrator illustrates how the patriarchal culture has affected aspects of women's sexuality beyond those involving sex. Here, women's bodies are physically altered and sterilized of any fluids or smells that might inhibit men from finding them attractive. Just as women's pleasure—although rare—is dependent upon men, men also depend upon women to obtain their sexual gratification. In order for a man to have a sexual relationship with a woman, however, she must conform to the social norms and appearance that the patriarchal culture dictates for her.

### *Summary*

Two values and their extremes—male pleasure and perverted pleasure, and male domination and force—form the foundation for the patriarchal ideology constructed in *The Vagina Monologues*. When considered in terms of women's sexual experiences, these values acquire a richer meaning illustrative of the realities men and women inhabit within such a culture. This focus on male pleasure, attained through domination, rarely leads women experience pleasure from sex with men or accidental pleasure when alone, and it even encourages them to deny themselves pleasure. Because of this, women who live within a patriarchal culture are described as hopeless, angry, and unfilled because they do not control their own sexual happiness. But the detrimental effects of patriarchy on women extend beyond sexuality and into social norms surrounding femininity and womanhood that dictate how women must maintain their appearance in order to sexually please the men in their lives.

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.



### Implied Auditors

Ultimately, the people who act according to patriarchal ideals in an effort to maintain this culture and ideology are acting for heterosexual men. This group of men serves as the play's collective transhistorical subject, because everyone who acts in favor of or according to a patriarchal ideology is acting to help men attain sexual pleasure from women and enabling them to exert their power over the women in their lives. Charland writes that a collective subject and transhistorical subject unite people through common values. Although these people act as individuals within a greater community, they are unified in their efforts despite the space and time that might separate them.<sup>128</sup> These qualities hold true for the collective transhistorical subject in *The Vagina Monologues*.

People who act to uphold patriarchal values inhabit a patriarchal culture, regardless of where they are geographically located. This culture serves as the greater community in which each individual who acts according to patriarchal values resides. Importantly, this "residence" is both physical and mental, because such a culture influences people's actions and behaviors as well as their thoughts. Additionally, all individuals in the play who act to uphold patriarchy are united through their shared experiences living under the values of male pleasure and male domination, regardless of when their experiences with patriarchy occurred. The play features stories from women regarding experiences with men that span 40 years, with some characters' stories dating back to the 1950s ("The Flood") and '60s ("The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could") and other characters' experiences occurring in the 1990s ("My Vagina Was my Village") when the play was written and had its debut. Furthermore, these women hail from different parts of the United States and world, although Bosnia is the only explicit location

---

<sup>128</sup> Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

outside of the United States.<sup>129</sup> Despite the women's varied backgrounds, ages, and experiences, all of their stories share a common theme regarding the women's efforts or circumstances that lead them to live according to patriarchal ideals in society by acting in support of the heterosexual men with whom they have sexual relationships as a result of consent or force.

This collective transhistorical subject, heterosexual men, serves a dual role as one group of the patriarchal ideology's implied auditors, or the people called into being through an ideology. Heterosexual women and role models who reinforce patriarchal ideals in women are two additional groups of auditors. In the play, heterosexual men are called into a dominant type of being through the pronouns, verbs, and prepositions women use when recalling their sexual experiences. These word choices reveal the dominant roles men play in their sexual relationships with women. For example, in "Hair" the narrator illustrates the control her husband exerted over her to obtain pleasure for himself with the following phrases (emphasis added): "he *made me* shave my vagina," "when *he made love to me*," and "when my *husband was pressing against me*."<sup>130</sup> All three phrases reveal how the narrator's husband was in control of her appearance and role during sex.

Two other monologues, "Because He Liked to Look at It" and "The Flood," also use language that reveals the dominant role the male characters had in the women's experiences. In "Because He Liked to Look at It," the narrator shares that Bob insisted that he "*need[ed]* to look" her vagina before they had sex and that when "he *would not stop*" undressing her in order to do so.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the narrator in "The Flood" describes the way Andy Leftkov suddenly

---

<sup>129</sup> Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*.

<sup>130</sup> Ensler, "Hair," 7-8.

<sup>131</sup> Ensler, "Because He Liked to Look at It," 20.

kissed her as a “‘*take me by control* like they do in the movies’ kind of way.”<sup>132</sup> All three monologues illustrate how the narrators’ language reveals the dominant roles that men played in their sexual relationships. Additionally, the language also reveals men’s intent focuses on their own sexual pleasure and the power they used over the narrators in order to obtain this pleasure.

Heterosexual women, the second group of implied auditors, are complementary to the heterosexual men called into being through the play’s patriarchal discourse. Unlike their male counterparts who are called into a dominant reality, women are called into a submissive being. Just as the play’s language encourages men to dominate and control in their quest for sexual gratification, this language consequently encourages women to be submissive as men use them to achieve sexual pleasure. In “Hair” and “Because He Liked to Look at It,” the narrators did not have active roles in the sexual relationships they had with their male partners. Rather, they were passive, and the language used to illustrate their male partners’ active control and domination—in phrases such as “he made love *to me*,” “when my husband was pressing *against me*,”<sup>133</sup> and the narrator’s recollections of Bob undressing her<sup>134</sup>—similarly illustrates the inactive role that these women played during sex. Their only purpose was to help men achieve sexual gratification, not to find the same gratification for themselves through sex. When women are called into this passive form of being, they are expected to accept their subordinate role as the source of men’s pleasure. Consequently, they do not speak out against or question such treatment. Women also sacrifice their own pleasure in order to help male partners find theirs.

The final group of implied auditors for a patriarchal culture is comprised of the role models who teach women to accept their subordinate roles in this culture. In the play, three

---

<sup>132</sup> Ensler, “The Flood,” 12-13.

<sup>133</sup> Ensler, “Hair,” 7-8.

<sup>134</sup> Ensler, “Because He Liked to Look at It.”

people fulfill this role: the therapist in “Hair,” the narrator’s mother in “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” and a young woman’s father in the introduction to “Reclaiming Cunt.” Each is called into being when the women in the monologues begin to act in ways that counter patriarchal ideals of male pleasure and domination, by refusing to sacrifice in order to appease their partners sexually or seeking out self pleasure.<sup>135</sup> However, the last example is unique, because a woman shares her story about realizing at 14 that she had been born without a vagina or uterus. Right after this discovery, her “heartbroken” father assured her that “we’re gonna get you the best homemade pussy in America. And when you meet your husband he’s gonna know we had it made specially for him.”<sup>136</sup> Here, the woman’s father was called into being because his daughter physically lacked the ability to live within the patriarchal culture that dictates that her body, specifically her vagina, is a source of male pleasure. He saw the purpose of finding a way to give his daughter a vagina not to make her complete, but rather to enable her to find a husband and please him sexually. In all three examples, however, these role models are called into being to reinforce patriarchal values when women began to stray from them, primarily when they were in search of their own pleasure and not that of the men in their lives.

In addition to generating groups of implied auditors, the patriarchal discourse in *The Vagina Monologues* also generates an illusion of freedom for a specific group of auditors: heterosexual women. Although Charland writes that the illusion of freedom exists within a new social reality that people can choose to inhabit, this illusion can also be present within the current reality.<sup>137</sup> In the play, the current reality is grounded in patriarchy. Despite the fact that the play calls several different groups of auditors into being, the discourse only presents the illusion of

---

<sup>135</sup> Ensler, “Hair”; Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could.”

<sup>136</sup> Eve Ensler, “Intro—Reclaiming Cunt,” in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 30.

<sup>137</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric.”

freedom from the woman's perspective within a patriarchal culture. Women in the play experience this illusion when they try to act in ways that shift their focus to their pleasure, not that of the men with whom they have sex. Examples of these instances include the narrators' focus on their own sexual happiness and pleasure in "Hair," "The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could," "My Angry Vagina," "The Vagina Workshop," and "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy." However, men or role models frequently reminded these women that they must first value male pleasure and male domination in order to have sexual relationships with men. In fact, women who do not uphold these values are not in relationships with men. Rather, they are alone, crystallizing the importance of conformity in order to have sexual relationships with men.

### **Negated Auditors**

Given the focus on male pleasure through male domination within a patriarchal ideology, the vagina serves as a negated audience in this culture. Wander writes that this audience, also known as the third persona, can be negated through "the language, the speaking situation, [or] the established order shaping both" within a given discourse.<sup>138</sup> In Ensler's construction of patriarchy within *The Vagina Monologues*, it is the overarching ideology that negates vaginas. The language within the play reveals and illustrates this negation as it exists through women's detachment from their vaginas and the silence that surrounds this part of their bodies.

Detachment occurs in two different ways throughout the play, as women separate themselves from their vaginas both as a place to go or be and as something that they think about. When women in the play talk about the vagina as a place, a negative sexual experience has prevented them from returning in the future. For the Bosnian refugee who narrates "My Vagina

---

<sup>138</sup> Wander, "The Third Persona," 216.

Was My Village,” the repeated rape she endured for a week at the hands of soldiers served as this atrocious, negative experience that changed the relationship she had with her vagina. Prior to this experience, she describes her vagina as “green, water soft pink fields, cow mooing sun resting,” essentially a sanctuary.<sup>139</sup> Throughout the monologue, however, she describes how her vagina morphed from a peaceful place to a place that she is now unfamiliar with, a place that has been destroyed because of her experience with the soldiers. “They invaded it. Butchered it and burned it down,” she shares. “I do not touch now. Do not visit. I live someplace else now. I don’t know where that is.”<sup>140</sup> At one point, the narrator even admits that “there is something between my legs. I do not know what it is. I do not know where it is,” further illustrating the detachment she has from her vagina as a once safe and peaceful place that was a part of her.<sup>141</sup>

The narrator for “The Flood” recalls a similar type of detachment from her vagina. Following her accidental orgasm when she was kissing her date, Andy Leftkov, she states that “when I got out and closed his car door, I closed the whole store. Locked it, never opened for business again.”<sup>142</sup> Once again, a single negative sexual experience led the narrator to detach from her vagina as a source of sexual pleasure, because she failed to live up to patriarchal values of male pleasure by disgusting Andy with her “flood.” She also describes her vagina as a cellar, explaining that “you just know it’s there. Like the cellar. You forget about it. I mean, it’s part of the house, but you don’t see it or think about it. It has to be there, though, ‘cause every house needs a cellar otherwise the bedroom would be in the basement.”<sup>143</sup> Here, the narrator illustrates her detachment by revealing how meaningless and purposeless her vagina is to her. It serves

---

<sup>139</sup> Ensler, “My Vagina Was My Village,” 21.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>142</sup> Ensler, “The Flood,” 13.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

solely an architectural, or anatomical, purpose. The cellar is isolated from the rest of the house, just as the narrator's vagina is now detached from the rest of her body. In both instances, negative sexual experiences not only led women to detach themselves from their vaginas, but to also make that detachment permanent, to sever all ties with even the possibility for sexual pleasure, and to make them never return again.

The narrator for "The Flood" also illustrates the second way that vaginas are negated within patriarchy: through thought. She shares that she forgets about her vagina because of the physical detachment she experiences. Similarly, the narrator for "Because He Liked to Look at It" used to avoid thinking about her vagina and the disgust she had for it by pretending that it did not exist. Instead, she explains that "I began to pretend that there was something else between my legs. I imagined furniture...or pretty things—silk handkerchiefs, quilted pot holders, or place settings. I got so accustomed to this that I lost all memory of having a vagina."<sup>144</sup> Because the vagina had no purpose for these two women, they experienced both a physical and mental detachment from it, effectively negating the vagina and the pleasure they could experience from their lives.

In addition to detachment, silence is the second way that vaginas are negated through patriarchy. Importantly, both women and their vaginas experience this silence. Women in the play are silenced when they act in ways that counter patriarchal values of male pleasure and domination. For example, in "Hair," the narrator was silenced during marital therapy after she stopped shaving her vagina because of the pain and discomfort it caused her. She questioned whether changing her appearance would stop her husband from cheating on her and explained the pain she experienced from trying to sexually please him. Here, she was countering her husband's ability to control her actions and achieve sexual pleasure. This led the therapist to

---

<sup>144</sup> Ensler, "Because He Liked to Look at It," 19.

silence the narrator by telling her that “questions diluted the process [therapy]” and that she “needed to jump in” to resolve their problems.<sup>145</sup>

The narrator in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” reveals a similar experience with silence. She shares that she was a “moaner” when she first started sleeping with men and that she used moaning as a way to express and convey the pleasure she experienced from sex. Although it was important to her to express sexual pleasure, the men she had sex with felt otherwise. She explains that “it made most men anxious. Frankly, it terrified them. I was loud and they couldn’t concentrate what they were doing. They’d lose focus. Then they’d lose everything...Men thought I was too intense, some called me insane.”<sup>146</sup> For this woman, her moaning took men’s focus away from their own sexual pleasure and prevented them from even trying to achieve it. Because of men’s reaction to her moaning, the narrator reveals that she began to stifle her moans until she ultimately became silent during sex. In both examples, women tried to shift their focus to their sexual pleasure and control over such pleasure, actions that undermined patriarchal values of male pleasure and domination. In order to stop these women, men and role models in their lives silenced them through guilt for acting against patriarchal values.

But as the narrator in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” reveals, women’s vaginas are also silenced within a patriarchal culture. When women are silenced, it is because their vaginas have been silenced. This is because the vagina is the only site of sexual pleasure for women in the play, and it is the women’s vaginas, not the women, who desire this pleasure. When women are denied sexual pleasure, their vaginas’ desires are silenced, thus preventing them from expressing desire to help their vaginas achieve sexual pleasure. Several monologues’

---

<sup>145</sup> Ensler, “Hair,” 8.

<sup>146</sup> Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” 33.



titles reveal this trend of vaginas acting as agents of desire in Ensler's representation of sexuality including "My Angry Vagina," "The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could," and "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy." In all instances, the vaginas are agents and want sexual pleasure. This is most explicit in "My Angry Vagina," where the narrator shares that her vagina "wants sex. It loves sex. It wants to come...It wants to want."<sup>147</sup> The vagina's desires are negated through silence, however, because the patriarchal ideology dictates that people need to value and work to help men, not women, achieve sexual pleasure.

The narrator for "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" exemplifies the silence that vaginas experience within a patriarchal culture by likening her inability to express her pleasure through moaning to a vagina whose mouth is locked. Essentially, a woman's ability to express pleasure during sex is dependent upon her vagina's ability to fulfill its desire for sexual pleasure. Ultimately, such silence and detachment lead to a pervading sense of "darkness and secrecy surrounding" the vagina, which, in turn, isolates women from themselves and other women who are enduring the same negation within the patriarchal culture.<sup>148</sup>

### *Summary*

All people who uphold patriarchal values of male pleasure and domination do so for heterosexual men, because upholding these values enables men to achieve sexual gratification. This group not only serves as the play's collective, transhistorical subject but also as the first of its implied auditors. Heterosexual women and role models who reinforce patriarchal values serve as the two other groups of auditors called into being through the play. All three groups embody patriarchal values by respectively maintaining dominant or submissive roles in sexual relationships or reinforcing the importance of these roles that men and women have.

---

<sup>147</sup> Ensler, "My Angry Vagina," 24-25.

<sup>148</sup> Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, 5.

Furthermore, the play reveals that women who inhabit a patriarchal culture experience an illusion of freedom when they attempt to stray from the patriarchal ideology in favor of exploring their own pleasure or agency. These women are quickly reminded, however, that embracing these patriarchal values is integral to maintaining sexual relationships with men.

This focus on patriarchal values negates the vagina through the detachment and silence that women experience. Detachment occurs when women who once considered their vaginas a peaceful place to be decide to no longer return alone or with other men because of a negative sexual experience, and when women stop thinking about their vaginas. The vagina is also negated through silence that both vaginas and women experience. Vaginas are silenced through the patriarchal focus on male pleasure, shifting the focus away from women's pleasure that originates within the vagina, not within the woman. Because the vagina is represented as a woman's sole source of sexual pleasure, it is negated from lack of focus on women's pleasure. Women are also silenced, not only because they rarely achieve sexual pleasure from relationships that exist within a patriarchal culture, but also because they are not allowed to express sexual pleasure within such a culture.

#### CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING EVE ENSLER'S OWNERSHIP IDEOLOGY

In her play, Ensler represents the patriarchal ideology as dominated with values that negate vaginas and women's ability to achieve sexual gratification. Women and their desires are subordinated because of this ideology's focus on male pleasure and the control that men use to obtain it. To resolve this problem, Ensler constructs a new ideology that reconstitutes women's sexual power by redefining the vagina's role in women's sexual pleasure and women's relationship to the vagina. This new ideology presents women as powerful sexual beings capable of not only having sexual desires but also of fulfilling those desires themselves. Redefining the vagina as a site for female pleasure and calling upon women to become agents of this pleasure results in a new relationship, a connection, between women and their vaginas that did not exist within the patriarchal culture.

#### **Values**

Ownership serves as the foundation for Ensler's new ideology and three complementary values—women's ability to have and express desire, female agency in fulfilling this desire, and women's ability to express pleasure from sex—exist to encourage women to reclaim their vaginas as a source for their own gratification. Importantly, the vagina is a site for powerful sexual pleasure; women's ability to control their sexuality makes them inherently powerful as well. The vagina's power is made most clear in one of the "Vagina Facts" interspersed throughout the play. It notes that "the clitoris is pure in purpose. It is the only organ in the body designed purely for pleasure. The clitoris is simply a bundle of...8000 nerve fibers. That's a higher concentration...than is found anywhere else in the male or female body...and it is twice, twice, twice the number in the penis. Who needs a hand gun when you have a

semiautomatic?”<sup>149</sup> Not only does this fact establish the vagina as powerful, but it also makes women agents of their own sexuality by reminding them that they “own” this power; it is inherent in them just because they are women. Furthermore, women’s ability to harness their sexual power through this relationship is reinforced through the three values that underlie Ensler’s new ideology.

Women’s ability to embrace and express their sexual desire illustrates that they acknowledge their vaginas as a source of their sexual pleasure. In the play, women’s desire originates in the vagina; it is the vagina that craves sexual fulfillment and the woman who speaks on behalf of her vagina’s desire. She is subsequently fulfilled through the gratification the vagina receives.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, by expressing this desire, women are able to take the first step in establishing a new connection to their vaginas. The narrator in “My Angry Vagina” exemplifies a woman’s ability to embrace and share her sexual desire. In this monologue, the narrator begins by revealing her vagina’s displeasure at the numerous ways in which women’s pleasure is undermined within a patriarchal culture; she cites tampons, thongs, and gynecological exams as examples that counter her vagina’s desire for pleasure. She shares that her vagina instead “wants kindness. It wants change. It wants silence and freedom and gentle kisses and warm liquids and deep touch...It wants to come. It wants to want. It wants.”<sup>151</sup>

Here, the vagina serves as the woman’s source of sexual pleasure. By expressing her vagina’s desires in the monologue, she is able to acknowledge that her vagina has the ability to bring her sexual pleasure if its desires for intimacy are fulfilled. And although it is her vagina that holds these sexual desires, her ability to express them connects her to her vagina.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, 18.

<sup>150</sup> Ensler, “My Angry Vagina”; Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop.”

<sup>151</sup> Ensler, “My Angry Vagina,” 24-25.

Consequently, this forges a relationship between woman and sexual desire. For the narrator, simply expressing this desire is a powerful act, the first step to achieving the change that her vagina wants.

Similarly, the narrator in “The Vagina Workshop” reveals how her ability to acknowledge her sexual desire was her first step to becoming an agent of her own sexuality. She recalls that she had only ever received pleasure from accidental orgasms over which she had no control. Although she acknowledged that this accidental pleasure had been fulfilling, its absence left her “frantic” for sexual pleasure and led her to enroll in the vagina workshop where she would learn to pleasure herself so that she no longer needed to rely on pleasure beyond her control.<sup>152</sup> Here, the narrator embraces her desire for sexual pleasure and expresses this desire by enrolling in the workshop and learning how to fulfill her own desires.

The narrator in “The Vagina Workshop” also exemplifies the second complementary value present within Ensler’s new ideology: female agency in fulfilling desire. Once women have expressed sexual desire, they are then responsible for becoming sexual agents in fulfilling their own pleasure. Women become agents by seeking out help from other female agents in their lives who will help them fulfill their pleasure. Because this new ideology is grounded in women’s ownership of their sexuality, their desires can only be fulfilled when they learn how to masturbate.

Although the narrator in “The Vagina Workshop” eventually became her own agent capable of fulfilling her desire for sexual pleasure through masturbation, she acknowledges that she “learned this from a woman who runs the vagina workshop.”<sup>153</sup> This woman serves as an agent because she teaches the narrator how to masturbate and, thus, become an agent of her own

---

<sup>152</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” 16.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

sexual pleasure. Likewise, the narrator's neighbor in "The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could" serves as an agent who pleases the narrator and teaches her how to masturbate so that she will "never need to rely on a man."<sup>154</sup> For both narrators, learning how to masturbate enables them to become independent agents and take control of their sexual desire in the future.

Other times, female agents fulfill other women's pleasure through control and even domination. Rather than teaching women how to masturbate to help them become agents, the narrator in "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" admits to using force to both make women find their agency and pleasure them. As a sex worker whose only clients are women, the narrator shares that "sometimes I made the woman find her own [orgasm] in front of me. I waited, stuck it out, until she opened herself. I wasn't fooled by the minor, more obvious moans. No, I pushed her further all the way into her power moan."<sup>155</sup> Although the narrator achieves the same result as the woman who ran the vagina workshop—her clients become agents of their sexuality—she uses force, not teaching and encouragement, as the means to this end. Additionally, the narrator shares that other times she was forceful when pleasuring a woman and recalled the props—whips, rope, handcuffs, and dildos—that she used.<sup>156</sup> These props reinforce the control the narrator exhibited over women as she dominated them.

Unlike the male domination that was portrayed negatively in the patriarchal ideology, however, this domination and control in Ensler's new ideology is portrayed as positive. The narrator notes that the force she used was "not violent, oppressing force."<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, women paid the narrator to dominate them in an effort to fulfill their desire for sexual pleasure, which still makes them agents of their own sexuality despite the passive role they played with the

---

<sup>154</sup> Ensler, "The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could," 28.

<sup>155</sup> Ensler, "The Women Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy," 34.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

narrator. Essentially, what differentiates negative and positive domination is that the narrator's clients are not being forced to masturbate or have sex with the narrator against their will, unlike the women men dominated in the play's patriarchal discourse.

Just as women's ability to express their desires is valued in the new ideology, so is women's ability to express themselves while receiving pleasure. Where women were once silenced within the patriarchal culture when their moaning and orgasms distracted men from fulfilling their pleasure, women in the new ideology are encouraged to express the pleasure they experience. This is because moaning and orgasms signify women's success in pleasuring themselves; they are a special type of language that women speak when they experience pleasure. When describing her efforts to pleasure women, the narrator in "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" explains that moaning is made possible by "unlocking the vagina's mouth."<sup>158</sup> Essentially, moans are the vagina's way of revealing that its desires have been fulfilled. When women are agents of their sexuality, they are responsible for this act, for unlocking their vaginas' mouths. Because a woman serves as the channel through which her vagina expresses the pleasure it experiences, this act reinforces the connection women are able to create with their vaginas and, subsequently, their sexuality.

"The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" features a woman sharing her experience of learning to express herself during sex; this made her passionate about helping other women learn to express themselves. The narrator recalls how she had initially been a "moaner" when she had sex with men. But men could not appreciate her moaning because it prevented them from focusing on their own pleasure. Although she silenced herself to appease the men she had sex with, she discovered that women were able to appreciate her moaning. "More

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 33.

importantly,” however, the narrator shares that “I discovered how deeply excited I got when other women moaned, when I could make other women moan. It became a kind of passion.”<sup>159</sup> Here, the narrator realized that she could use her role as an agent of sexuality and women’s pleasure to help women learn how to express themselves during pleasure and enjoy the excitement and empowerment that accompanies this self-expression. She recalls that she “made love to quiet women and I found this place inside them and they shocked themselves in their moaning. I made love to moaners and they found a deeper, more penetrating moan.”<sup>160</sup> For the women the narrator dominates, expression during sex is powerful and new. It allows them to experience a new relationship with their vaginas as a source of their own sexual pleasure.

### *Summary*

Enslar’s purpose in constructing this ownership ideology was to counter patriarchal values of male pleasure and domination with values that reclaim the vagina as a site for female sexual pleasure. This new ideology portrays the vagina as powerful and women as inherently powerful because of their gender. In order to help women access their sexual power, this ideology prescribes three values: acknowledge and express desire, women’s agency in fulfilling desire, and self-expression from pleasure gained through sex. Together, these values work to transfer power from the vagina to women by establishing a connection between the two, a connection that was absent in the patriarchal culture.

### *Women’s Reality in the New Ideology*

When women adopt this ownership ideology and live according to the values that comprise it, they reap the benefits of expressing and fulfilling their own desire in three ways: they acquire a new appreciation for the vagina and sexual pleasure, they create a new connection

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



to their vaginas, and they experience a sense of personal fulfillment. Where women were once detached from their vaginas on numerous levels—from never even looking at the vagina to not understanding the sexual gratification this part of their bodies could bring them—women now have a greater, new understanding of what their vaginas represent for them and an appreciation for the vagina’s ability to bring them pleasure.

The narrator for “The Vagina Workshop” exemplifies this transformation in appreciation for the vagina as she recalls her experiences in the workshop. She admits that before attending the workshop “everything I knew about my vagina was based on hearsay or invention. I had never really seen the thing. It had never occurred to me to look at it. My vagina existed for me on some abstract plane. It seemed so reductive and awkward to look at it.”<sup>161</sup> This changed when the women in the workshop were told to use hand mirrors to first explore their vaginas and later find their clitorises. Through these experiences, the narrator “awakened to what the woman who ran the workshop called ‘vaginal wonder.’ I just wanted to lay there on my mat, my legs spread, examining my vagina forever.”<sup>162</sup> Her vagina was not separate from her any longer and it did not exist “on some abstract plane”<sup>163</sup> because the narrator had seen it and experienced the pleasure it could bring her, a pleasure that she could control.

Often, these women have a newfound appreciation for sexual pleasure because these experiences in expressing and controlling desire make them more aware of the limited pleasure they had experienced within the patriarchal culture. For the woman who attended the vagina workshop, her new ability to pleasure herself contrasts with her lack of control over the pleasure she experienced prior to attending the workshop. Likewise, the narrator in “My Angry Vagina”

---

<sup>161</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” 15.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

has an enhanced appreciation for pleasure and a desire for pleasure when she names the numerous areas in her life where pleasure is absent. Her new appreciation leads her to share how pleasure could replace the discomfort that women too often experience.

This new understanding and appreciation for the vagina and the role it plays in fulfilling women's sexual pleasure also establishes a new relationship between women and their vaginas. The narrator for "The Vagina Workshop" shares how she acquired this relationship when she learned how to masturbate in the workshop. Although she was frantic at first because she was unsuccessful in locating her clitoris, the woman who ran the workshop helped her to learn that she was not separate from her vagina and that she had to *be* her clitoris in order to locate it within herself. Essentially, the woman who ran the workshop helped the narrator understand that she could be the source of her own pleasure only if she had a connection to her vagina; her detachment from it prevented her from experiencing pleasure. With this realization, the narrator was able to pleasure herself and find "connection, calling connection" in this experience.<sup>164</sup>

The narrator for "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" identifies a similar relationship between women and vaginas. "I love vaginas. I love women. I do not see them as separate things," she shares.<sup>165</sup> One reason for this is because women serve as the channel through which the vagina expresses its pleasure during sex. The narrator reveals that this expression is made possible by "unlocking the vagina's mouth."<sup>166</sup> As agents of their own sexuality, women hold the power and key to unlocking the vagina through pleasure. Additionally, this act reinforces the relationship between women and their vaginas and the benefits women receive from this connection.

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>165</sup> Ensler, "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy," 31.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 33.

This appreciation for and connection to the vagina ultimately leads women to experience an independent reality where they have a newfound sense of power and happiness. Women who live according to this new ideology are independent agents of their sexuality because they have learned how to give themselves pleasure. With this knowledge, women are able to fulfill the desires that they are now capable of expressing; they no longer need to rely on outside sources—people or accidental orgasms, for example—to provide them with sexual gratification. Women are also powerful because they are their own sexual agents. Unlike the silence and negation they experienced within the patriarchal culture, women who act as agents are in control of their desire and portrayed as powerful when they are successful in expressing and fulfilling this desire. Furthermore, this fulfillment makes women happy because vaginas that receive sexual pleasure are defined as such; narrators in both “My Angry Vagina” and “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” refer to happy vaginas as those that experience sexual fulfillment.<sup>167</sup> Given the new relationship women have to their vaginas, happy vaginas subsequently make women happy as well.

### *Summary*

Three values—the ability to have and express desire, become an agent in fulfilling that desire, and express pleasure from sex—comprise the new ownership ideology that Ensler constructs to counter patriarchy through *The Vagina Monologues*. These values acquire richer meaning when applied to women’s sexual experiences and can reveal the realities women live within the new ideology. Women who live according to these values have a new appreciation for their vaginas and the pleasure they are now able to control. This appreciation, in turn, forges a connection between women and their vaginas that had been absent from the patriarchal culture

---

<sup>167</sup> Ensler, “My Angry Vagina”; Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy.”

that negated female pleasure. These women are independent agents capable of fulfilling their own desires and reaping the power and happiness that this control and sexual gratification provide.

### **Implied Auditors**

Ultimately, all women who act according to the new ideology's values are acting for women who are agents of their sexuality and sexual happiness. These female agents, then, serve as the collective, transhistorical subject for Ensler's new ideology because all people's actions are attributed to this group either to reinforce women's powerful role in sex or to help women become these agents. Once again, as Charland writes, the collective and transhistorical subjects are capable of uniting people through their actions despite the distance, time, or backgrounds that separate them.<sup>168</sup> These qualities are exhibited in the collective, transhistorical subject for Ensler's ownership ideology.

People who inhabit this ideology work to embody and uphold its values of female ownership in sexuality. These women are united across different times, given that women in the play discover their agency in their teens ("The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could") through adulthood ("My Angry Vagina," "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy"). Women in the play are also representative of different ethnicities, as narrators for two of the monologues are differentiated by their accents: the narrator in "The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could" is described as a "Southern woman of color" and the narrator for "The Vagina Workshop" is English.<sup>169</sup> Most importantly, however, these women who act to uphold women's agency in sex are united through their actions despite the very different ways through which they encourage or embody this agency. Some women encourage agency by teaching others how to masturbate,

---

<sup>168</sup> Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

<sup>169</sup> Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*.

while others dominate women and force them to masturbate in order to discover this agency.<sup>170</sup> Some women were inspired to become agents out of frustration with the passive role they played in sex, while other women had never been in control of sex because they were raped.<sup>171</sup> Regardless of their ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds, however, all women who act within this new ideology do so to honor women's power as agents of their sexuality.

The collective transhistorical subject is also comprised of the two groups of implied auditors for this new ideology: women who discover their agency and the women who teach them. Women who discover their own agency are called into being because of their discontent within the patriarchal ideology. These women are "unfulfilled" because they have "no access to their sexual happiness" given the detachment they have from their vaginas and ability to control sex or sexual pleasure.<sup>172</sup>

Two women exemplify the displeasure such disconnection can create. The first is the narrator in "The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could" who describes her vagina as "a very bad place, a place of pain, nastiness, punching invasion and blood" after she is scolded for touching herself, raped, and beaten by a boy at school by the time she is ten. "It's a site for mishaps. It's a bad-luck zone," she shares. "I imagine a freeway between my legs and I am traveling, going far away from here."<sup>173</sup> The narrator in "The Vagina Workshop" is the second woman who describes the detachment she has from her vagina within the patriarchal culture. This woman recalls that "I did not think of my vagina in practical or biological terms. I did not, for example, see it as something attached to me."<sup>174</sup> Additionally, although she acknowledged her vagina as a

---

<sup>170</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop"; Ensler, "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy."

<sup>171</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop"; Ensler, "The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could."

<sup>172</sup> Ensler, "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy," 33.

<sup>173</sup> Ensler, "The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could," 26.

<sup>174</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop," 15.

source for sexual pleasure, she revealed that she had no control over this pleasure and relied on accidental orgasms as her source of sexual fulfillment.

For both women, this detachment prevented them from having sexual desires that they were able to control and fulfill. Learning how to become agents of their sexuality provides these women a new connection to their vaginas. They describe the process of becoming an agent as a “re-entry” into themselves and the final result, the new “calling connection,”<sup>175</sup> as a type of salvation or heaven.<sup>176</sup>

The transformation into this new type of being, this new auditor, is most explicit in “The Vagina Workshop.” Here, the narrator shares her experience of becoming her own agent when she learns how to masturbate in a workshop. After the women had examined their vaginas using hand mirrors, they were tasked with locating their clitorises. At first, the narrator was “terrified” because she was unable to find hers, but after talking with the woman who ran the workshop she realized that her detachment from her vagina was causing her problem. At this point, she recalls the re-entry that transformed her into an agent and reconnected her to her vagina. “I watched myself float above myself. I watched as I slowly began to approach myself and re-enter...It was very quiet, this re-entry...I bounced and landed...I came into my own muscles and blood and cells and then I slid into my vagina. It was suddenly very easy and I fit.”<sup>177</sup> Where she had once been frantic and separate, she is now “warm and pulsing and ready and alive,” all the result of her ability to become an agent of her sexuality and discover the connection she had to her vagina.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” 17; Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could.”

<sup>176</sup> Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could.”

<sup>177</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” 17.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

After experiencing this transformation, the narrator has discovered her agency and now considers her vagina a “destiny.”<sup>179</sup> Similarly, the narrator in “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could” shares that her neighbor taught her how to masturbate so that she never needed to rely on anyone else to give her pleasure. Like the woman who attended the vagina workshop, this narrator has also become an agent of her own sexuality. After spending the night with her neighbor, the narrator shares that “I realize later she was my surprising, unexpected and politically incorrect salvation. She transformed my sorry-ass Coochi Snorcher and raised it into a kind of heaven.”<sup>180</sup> Both narrators were called into being through their discontent in the previous patriarchal ideology and, through a transformation to become sexual agents, discovered a renewed connection to their vaginas as a source of their own sexual pleasure.

The second group of auditors established through the new ideology is comprised of the women who teach other women to become sexual agents. Three women fulfill this role in the play: the neighbor in “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” the woman who runs the workshop in “The Vagina Workshop,” and the sex worker in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy.” All three women are called into being through the new ideology when they interact with women who are both sexually subordinated within the patriarchal culture and resistant to its values of male pleasure and domination. In all of these monologues, women resist patriarchal values by seeking out pleasure from masturbation or other women. Focusing on their own pleasure, not that of men, and turning to women or themselves to fulfill this pleasure subordinates patriarchal values to the women’s own values.

This decision to break away from the current culture is also what calls the second group of implied auditors into being. In “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could,” the narrator’s

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” 28.

experiences with male domination have left her beaten and raped and have encouraged her to distance herself from the patriarchal culture.<sup>181</sup> This distance allows her neighbor to guide her toward the new ideology by teaching her how to masturbate. Likewise, the narrator in “The Vagina Workshop” is only united with the woman who runs the workshop, the agent who helps the narrator discover her own agency, when she begins to embrace her sexual desire and long for control over the ability to fulfill those desires.<sup>182</sup> In this monologue, women’s desire for sexual agency calls the woman who runs the workshop into being because these women need someone to teach them about their vaginas and self pleasure. The women who pay the narrator in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” to dominate them have also rejected the patriarchal values of male pleasure and male domination in favor of female domination to fulfill their desire for pleasure.<sup>183</sup>

Although the emphasis on ownership through sexual agency in the new ideology could give implied auditors the impression that they could be agents while still having sexual relationships with men and other women, this impression serves as the ideology’s illusion of freedom. This is because all women who become agents of their own sexual desire, who embrace this new ideology, are called into individual, independent existences. Yes, some women do learn to become agents through having sex with other women, as is the case in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” and “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could,” but these are one-time occurrences. After the women have learned to become agents, or discovered the benefits of embodying the values within the new ideology, they are left to independently pleasure themselves. The narrator in “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could” recalls that after

---

<sup>181</sup> Ensler, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could.”

<sup>182</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop.”

<sup>183</sup> Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy.”



spending one night with her neighbor, the narrator never saw the woman again. Additionally, although the narrator in “My Angry Vagina” claims that her vagina “wants sex. It loves sex,” she also notes that her vagina “doesn’t want a lot of company.”<sup>184</sup>

The “Vagina Fact” that establishes the vagina’s sexual power further reinforces the isolated form of independence this new ideology promotes. After learning that the clitoris is more powerful than the penis, the narrator asks the audience “Who needs a hand gun when you’ve got a semi-automatic?”<sup>185</sup> Here, the vagina is portrayed as so powerful that women need only the ability to masturbate to fulfill their own pleasure. Within the new ideology, independence eliminates the need for relationships; women do not need men or other women once they embrace and learn to fulfill their pleasure alone.

### **Negated Auditors**

Given the sole focus on women in this new ideology, men and sexual partners for those women serve as negated audiences. Once again, as Wander writes, audiences can be negated through “the language, the speaking situation, [or] the established order shaping both,” and it is this order, this new ideology, that negates these two groups in the discourse.<sup>186</sup> In *The Vagina Monologues*, this negation is made evident through their absence from the discourse that features Ensler’s new ideology.

Men are missing from the monologues that promote values associated with the reconstructed ownership ideology. Not only are women the narrators for all of the monologues, but women’s perspective on men’s role within the new ideology is missing because men do not have any type of role within the new reality. This is because the values that comprise this

---

<sup>184</sup> Ensler, “My Angry Vagina,” 24.

<sup>185</sup> Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, 18.

<sup>186</sup> Wander, “The Third Persona,” 216.

ownership ideology—women’s ability to express desire, fulfill their own desire, and express pleasure—reclaim the vagina as a site for female, not male, pleasure. Additionally, this ideology requires women to fulfill their own pleasure. Because they are capable of masturbating, women are portrayed as having no need for men in their quest for sexual fulfillment.

Furthermore, this ideology’s values only apply to women; therefore, men are presumably unable to adopt the new values and are left behind to inhabit the patriarchal ideology. It is almost as if it is impossible for men, who live according to patriarchal values, and women, who live according to ownership values, to have sex and achieve sexual fulfillment together because of the polarized values each would work to uphold within their respective ideologies. Both men and women would be focused solely on achieving pleasure for themselves

“The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” illustrates this ideological polarization and its role in negating men. The narrator shares how she became a “moaner” who expressed herself during sex with men. Although moaning provided her with an opportunity to focus on her pleasure, she recalls that “It made most men anxious. Frankly, it terrified them. I was loud and they couldn’t concentrate on what they were doing. They’d lose focus. Then they’d lose everything.”<sup>187</sup> As a result, the narrator abandoned her pleasure and began to silence herself during sex. This experience reveals the conflict between the polarized ideologies that the narrator and men held. The men in the monologue were unable to adopt the new ideology that promotes and values female desire and expression of that desire. Because of this, the narrator had to revert back to patriarchal values of male pleasure in order to continue her sexual relationships with men.

---

<sup>187</sup> Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” 33.

Additionally, this ideology's focus on individual agency and masturbation as the sole form of sexual fulfillment eliminate women's need for sexual partners of any kind since women are responsible for, and capable of, pleasuring themselves. Every time a woman who upholds the new ideology has sex with someone it is a one-time occurrence; these women do not have steady relationships or sexual partners. In fact, the only woman who has sex on a regular basis is the narrator in "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy" who has sex with numerous women for her job. But again, these instances are not steady and they do not result in relationships.<sup>188</sup> The new ideology promotes individual agency to the extreme of isolation, because these women who are agents of their own sexuality are also isolated from all other people in their sexual lives.

#### *Summary*

People who act to uphold the ownership ideology's values ultimately act for women who are agents of their sexuality. This group also serves as one group of implied auditors called into being through the play's ownership discourse. Women who teach other women to become these agents constitute the second group of implied auditors for this portion of the play's discourse. These two groups of women embody ownership values when discontent and displeasure within the patriarchal culture leads them to abandon values of male pleasure and domination and instead embrace the new ideology's values of female pleasure, agency, and self-expression. Female agents seek a reconnection to their vaginas and, subsequently, sexual pleasure; the women who teach them about this agency help them discover this connection.

Women who adopt this new ideology might think that they can be agents when involved in sexual relationships, but this perception serves as the ideology's illusion of freedom. In

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

reality, women who live according to the new ideology are incapable of having sexual relationships with men or other women because the agency the new ideology values promotes independence to the extreme of isolation. This isolation, in turn, prevents women from having sex with others because they are capable of and responsible for fulfilling their own pleasure independently.

Given this ideology's emphasis on individual agency and empowerment through masturbation, men and sexual partners are negated from the discourse that promotes this new ideology. Within the patriarchal culture, the vagina existed solely for male pleasure; within this new ideology, however, the vagina now exists solely for female pleasure. Because the vagina has been reclaimed for women, and because the ownership ideology values apply to just women, men are absent from the portions of the play that promote this new ideology. Similarly, the new ideology's focus on agency to the extreme of isolation inherently negates any type of sexual partner for women who adopt these ownership values. Women do not need to rely on anyone to give them pleasure because they can pleasure themselves.

### **Rhetorical Options for Revolution**

Enslar's strategies for empowering women and her ultimate goal of generating dialogue to counter the silence women experience within patriarchy are reminiscent of bell hooks' rhetorical options for revolutionizing an oppressive ideology. hooks writes that promoting confession, enactment, and dialogue through the visual arts allows people in society to explore problems within the current reality, solutions to these problems, and enables them to act in ways that counter oppression. The ultimate goal of utilizing these four options is experiential and structural change through partnership in society. This partnership, then, helps people abandon an

oppressive ideology for one that instead promotes mutuality and respect.<sup>189</sup> Given Ensler’s goal and use of the visual arts to achieve it, it is important to understand how, and if, hooks’ three remaining options—confession, enactment, and dialogue—are manifest within *The Vagina Monologues*.

### *Confession*

Confession occurs when individuals reflect on their experiences within an oppressive ideology to reveal their hidden realities and repressed feelings.<sup>190</sup> Because the play is comprised of a series of ten monologues where women share stories regarding their sexual experiences, confession is inherent. Through women’s confessions, the audience is able to learn about the consequences women face living within a patriarchal society, as well as the feelings and emotions they associate with these realities. A series of themes emerge within the play that illustrate these consequences: sacrifice, shame, and detachment.

Women sacrifice their pleasure and comfort to live within the patriarchal culture. The vagina does not exist for women in this culture; rather, it exists solely to help men obtain sexual gratification. Two monologues exemplify this theme. In both “Hair” and “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” the narrators reveal that they had to sacrifice their pleasure and comfort in order to ensure that the men in their lives were able to obtain pleasure for themselves.<sup>191</sup> Their vaginas have no purpose for them because of this culture’s emphasis on male pleasure. Additionally, in the introduction to “Reclaiming Cunt,” when a young woman’s father learns that she does not have a vagina, he promises that he will find a way to give her a vagina so that she is able to provide her future husband pleasure. “We’re gonna get you the best

---

<sup>189</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ensler, “Hair”; Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy.”

homemade pussy in America,” he assured her, “And when you meet your husband, he’s gonna know that we had it made specially for him.”<sup>192</sup> This young woman’s father reinforces this concept that a woman’s vagina serves no purpose for her other than to ensure that she can please a man.

Because women sacrifice their pleasure to help men attain theirs, women who do experience pleasure are often made to feel ashamed of this since it shifts their focus from men’s pleasure to their own. The narrator for “The Flood” experiences this shame when she has an accidental orgasm after her date unexpectedly kisses her. Her date calls her a “stinky weird girl” despite her attempts to explain that he had surprised her.<sup>193</sup> This leads her to “close the whole store” and she chooses to never again get close to a man for fear of flooding and re-experiencing this shame.<sup>194</sup>

This sacrifice also leads women to live detached from their vaginas. Some women experience this detachment through silence when they are prevented from expressing themselves during sex. The narrator in “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” recalls how she lost the ability to control her “sexual happiness” when the men she had sex with discouraged her from moaning because it prevented them from focusing on their own pleasure.<sup>195</sup> Other women experience detachment when they view their vagina as separate from their bodies. Narrators for both “The Vagina Workshop” and “Because He Liked to Look at It” do not consider their vaginas as parts of their bodies. Instead, they become “abstract planes” or furniture that replaces their vaginas during sex.<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> Ensler, “Intro—Reclaiming Cunt,” 30.

<sup>193</sup> Ensler, “The Flood,” 13.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ensler, “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” 32.

<sup>196</sup> Ensler, “The Vagina Workshop,” 15; Ensler, “Because He Liked to Look At It.”

In addition to learning about women's experiences within the patriarchal culture, confession also functions in the play to inform the audience about women's experiences within the new ideology that Ensler constructs. Once again, four themes emerge that reveal the benefits women reap within this reality: vagina as a source of female pleasure, connection, agency, and empowerment.

Because the new ideology emphasizes the vagina as a source for female pleasure, women's ability to reconnect to their vaginas through sex enables them to achieve sexual gratification when they were once unable to do so. With this connection, women share that they feel "young and alive."<sup>197</sup> Essentially, the ability to attain sexual pleasure rejuvenates women within the new ideology and some even share that the vagina now serves as a type of life source. In "I Was There In The Room," the narrator likens the vagina to a heart that pulses within women.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, the narrator for "The Vagina Workshop" refers to the vagina as her "reason" for being.<sup>199</sup> Where women were once unfulfilled and unhappy within the patriarchal culture, women are now alive and renewed because of the sexual pleasure they receive through the connection they now have with their vaginas.

This connection also provides women with a sense of agency and empowerment. Women are now in control of their own pleasure and capable of expressing desire, fulfilling their desire, and expressing the pleasure they receive. Whereas women were once silenced and subordinated through sex with men, they are now empowered as individuals who embrace their sexual desires. Ultimately, the vagina is a new source of powerful sexual pleasure for women and they become powerful through their ability to control and become agents of their sexuality.

---

<sup>197</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop," 17.

<sup>198</sup> Ensler, "I Was There In the Room," in *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), 36.

<sup>199</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop," 16.

### *Enactment*

When women act in support of the agency and independence that exists in the new ideology, they are fulfilling hooks' second rhetorical option: enactment. By acting as independent agents of their sexuality and switching their focus to achieving sexual gratification for themselves, these women are also acting in opposition of the male pleasure and domination values that pervade the patriarchal culture. hooks notes that an important component of enactment is that people are able to avoid domination and oppression through their individual behaviors, despite the reality that these values might still exist within the greater culture that they inhabit.<sup>200</sup> Women who act as agents avoid these patriarchal values through the isolation their extreme independence creates. Because these female agents are isolated from men and other women and lack sexual relationships, it is impossible for them to uphold patriarchal values of domination and oppression.

### *Dialogue*

For hooks, dialogue is comprised of self-reflection and two-way communication, because it provides an opportunity for people to both reflect on their different experiences within an ideology and explore possibilities for new ideologies. Additionally, hooks notes that it is important for both men and women to participate in this dialogue because both groups perpetuate patriarchy and thus need to work together to create new ways to interact in society. In *The Vagina Monologues*, self-reflection on experience and exploration of new ideologies are present, but a two-way flow of communication is absent.

Through confession women reflect on their experiences living according to both a patriarchal ideology and Ensler's reconstructed ownership ideology. Often, this self-reflection

---

<sup>200</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin.



regarding a comparison between their lives within the two ideologies is present within a single monologue, further illustrating the contrast between the two. Women reflect on the detachment, discomfort, silence, and lack of pleasure they experience within a patriarchal culture before reflecting on the connection, agency, pleasure, and power they experience within the culture the new ideology creates.<sup>201</sup> In all of these monologues, women explore both their experiences within the current culture and the possibilities that a new ideology could present them. But there is no two-way communication between the narrators and other women or men; there is only one-way communication between the narrators and the audience.

Two possible reasons behind the absence of dialogue within *The Vagina Monologues* are the play's language and the context in which the play was written. Although the play is comprised of a series of monologues, which are inherently a form of one-way communication, the commanding language within the monologues reinforces this one-way flow, effectively stifling the possibility for dialogue. Because the monologues encourage confession, women in the play talk *to* audience members. This one-way flow is made even more explicit in "My Angry Vagina" when the narrator tells the audience that "my vagina's angry. It is. It's pissed off. My vagina's furious and it needs to talk. It needs to talk about all this shit. It needs to talk to you."

In this same monologue, the narrator also uses commands to direct the audience toward the new ideology by telling them both how they should not act and how they need to act in order to abandon the patriarchal ideology and its culture that negates women, vaginas, and pleasure. When speaking about the way people should not act within the patriarchal ideology—with a specific reference to the use of tampons and douches that hide or mask the vagina—the narrator references "All this shit they're constantly trying to shove up us, clean us up—stuff us up, make

---

<sup>201</sup> Ensler, "The Vagina Workshop"; Ensler, "The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could"; Ensler, "My Angry Vagina"; Ensler, "The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy."

it go away.” Then she demands for her audience to “stop shoving things up me. Stop shoving and stop cleaning it up.”<sup>202</sup> Additionally, the narrator declares that “You need to work with the vagina. You got to convince my vagina, seduce my vagina, engage my vagina’s trust.”<sup>203</sup> Here, she demands that her audience adopts the new ownership ideology that promotes female pleasure over women’s sacrifice of this pleasure and their comfort. But she is simply telling people how they should act without engaging and reflecting with them so that they can together explore their different experiences and the possibility of creating new ways to interact within a new ideology.

Although dialogue is nonexistent within the play, it is also important to consider how the context in which it was written contributes to the absence of dialogue. The monologues feature content from Ensler’s interviews with over 200 women regarding their perceptions of their vaginas and sexual experiences. The play features themes reflective of women’s realities living within a patriarchal ideology and a new ideology free from oppressive values. However, men’s perspective on patriarchy and the potential for a new ideology and its construction are not present. This is likely because men were not interviewed; it is very possible that Ensler’s lack of dialogue with men prior to writing the play contributed to the lack of dialogue between the narrators and men in the finished piece.

This could provide a potential explanation for the lack of dialogue between men and women in the play, but it does not explain why women do not even engage in dialogue with other women. Individual women share confessions regarding their realities under the patriarchal and ownership ideologies. Individual women act in ways that counter patriarchy by adopting Ensler’s new ideology. But women never reflect *together* on their experiences within these ideologies because they are only encouraged to *individually* reflect. They never *together*

---

<sup>202</sup> Ensler, “My Angry Vagina,” 23.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

consider the benefits of a new reality made possible by adopting Ensler's new ideology because of the isolation they experience within the new ideology. In fact, it is almost as if women have already constructed the new ideology without considering men's role in it during construction.

### *Summary*

hooks' rhetorical options are designed to help people abandon oppressive ideologies in favor of new ideologies from which those people gain experiential and status change. However, the narrators in the play only exhibit, and encourage, experiential change due to the absence of dialogue. Through confession, women reveal their realities within the patriarchal and reconstructed ideologies Ensler presents. Women who live according to patriarchal values sacrifice their pleasure and reveal the shame they feel when they experience accidental pleasure. This sacrifice and shame contribute to women's sense of detachment from their vaginas. This detachment is illustrated when women reveal that they think of their vaginas as separate from their bodies, or nonexistent; additionally, this detachment is reinforced through the silence that pervades this ideology.

Conversely, women who live according to the reconstructed ideology now have the opportunity to experience sexual pleasure that has successfully reconnected these women to their vaginas. They now perceive their vaginas as "life sources" rather than "abstract planes." Furthermore, women are now responsible for fulfilling their pleasure through which they gain a sense of agency and empowerment. Enactment crystallizes the experiential change women have within the reconstructed ideology. This option enables women to act in nonoppressive ways in their individual lives by acting as agents of their sexuality. Essentially, oppression is nonexistent because these women are isolated within the new ideology through their reliance on

masturbation for sexual gratification, eliminating circumstances where they could experience oppression or domination.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*Summary of Findings*

Surprised with the negativity and silence that many women associate with sex and their vaginas, Eve Ensler's goal in writing *The Vagina Monologues* was to generate a dialogue regarding women's sexuality to counter the silence that pervades the patriarchal culture that they inhabit. All previous studies have deemed the play a success in countering patriarchy's dominance in society and thus only explore the benefits or consequences of such success. This study, however, sought to determine if Ensler was successful in countering patriarchal values by creating an alternative ideology that promoted dialogue and female agency.

By uniting three perspectives—constitutive rhetoric, second persona, and third persona—this study was able to evaluate how Ensler constructs each ideology as well as the audiences that each implies and negates. Additionally, this study also evaluated how bell hooks' rhetorical options—confession, enactment, dialogue, and the visual arts—are manifest within the play's alternate ideology given the similarity between these options and Ensler's goal of generating dialogue. These perspectives allowed for a richer understanding of the values that comprise each ideology, who Ensler wants her audience to become after viewing the play, and who is missing from the discourse to ultimately determine if dialogue and values that oppose patriarchy are supported within Ensler's new ideology.

This study found that Ensler's alternate ideology does counter patriarchal values of male domination and pleasure by reclaiming the vagina as a site for powerful female pleasure and promoting female desire, female agency in fulfilling this desire, and self-expression during sexual pleasure. Although women and vaginas were negated within the patriarchal ideology, women are now called to become agents of their sexuality through the play's alternate ideology.

Despite Ensler's success in constructing an ideology that counters patriarchy, however, dialogue is absent from the play because the new ideology's values of agency promote female sexual independence to the extreme of isolation. As a result of this negation, women who live according to the new ideology have no need for sexual partners or relationships because they are capable of, and required to, fulfill their pleasure independently through masturbation. This isolation, coupled with the commanding language within the play and negation of men, stifles the potential for dialogue. Rather than encouraging women and men to reflect together on their experiences within the patriarchal culture and together explore the potential for new ideologies through dialogue, women are only encouraged to share their reflections on life within the two cultures these ideologies promote (*confession*) and act to counter patriarchy in their own lives (*enactment*).

#### *Discussion*

Discourse is said to function constitutively when it provides people with a new ideology that offers a new interpretation of their world.<sup>204</sup> This new interpretation is made possible through reconstitution. Kneupper writes that reconstitution occurs when a rhetor identifies a problem within the current reality that the current ideology is unable to resolve.<sup>205</sup> A new ideology is required to resolve the problem and the rhetor assumes the responsibility of creating this new ideology. People are able to choose an ideology to inhabit because of the contradiction that exists between the current and new ideology; essentially, such contradiction makes salient the flaws in the current ideology and the benefits of adopting the new ideology

After identifying a problem within the current patriarchal reality—the silence women endure within the culture—during her interviews with women, Ensler used her play to construct

---

<sup>204</sup> Jasinski.

<sup>205</sup> Kneupper.

a new reality—grounded in a new ideology—that she believed valued dialogue and female agency in sex. The patriarchy and ownership ideologies that are constructed in *The Vagina Monologues* present audience members with issues women endure within the patriarchal culture while at the same time illustrating how these problems can be resolved when audience members adopt a new ideology and thus inhabit a new culture.

Regardless of which ideology they choose, however, people are required to act according to that given ideology's values. Through these actions, the audience can be called into being as the type of people the rhetor wants her audience to become. Black refers to this audience as a discourse's second persona. Importantly, each ideology calls people into a different type of being because each ideology is grounded in a different set of values that people are required to uphold.

This is illustrated through the different groups of people who serve as the implied auditors for the patriarchal and ownership ideologies constructed within the play. Men who inhabit a patriarchal culture are required to act in dominant, oppressing roles and women are required to hold passive, subordinate roles. The language in the play serves as stylistic tokens that reveal the different statuses that men and women hold in sexual relationships within a patriarchal culture. Conversely, women who inhabit the new ownership ideology are called into being through their resistance to the patriarchal culture's values of male domination and pleasure to become empowered agents of their sexuality. It is the references within the discourse to this resistance that serve as the stylistic tokens for this group of implied auditors.

When people act as a rhetor's second persona, by adopting the rhetor's prescribed values and acting according to those values, their actions are attributed to a collective, transhistorical subject, or a group of people who are supported through the second persona's actions. This

subject unites implied auditors from different times, regions, and backgrounds to create a community of people who act similarly. Furthermore, although a group of implied auditors may think that they can act as they want within a given ideology, they are in reality “constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain...consistency” with the values that an ideology promotes.<sup>206</sup> Charland refers to the audience’s constrained actions as the “illusion of freedom.”

Within the patriarchal culture, implied auditors act for heterosexual men by supporting male domination and men’s efforts to achieve sexual gratification. Men support themselves through the dominant roles they play in sex; by contrast, women act for heterosexual men by remaining submissive in sex so that men can use them to attain pleasure. However, women experience the illusion of freedom when they stray from the ideology in search of pleasure for themselves. During these instances women are reminded that they must remain submissive and sacrifice their pleasure in order to uphold the patriarchal values.

Within the ownership culture, however, implied auditors act for an oppositional subject when they act to support women who are agents of their sexual pleasure. Women who focus on their desire and fulfill their own sexual desire support this subject, as do the women who help others to become these agents by teaching them how to masturbate. Like in the patriarchal ideology, women also experience an illusion of freedom within the new culture when they think that they can have sexual partners or relationships. In reality, though, the new ideology promotes agency through independence to the extreme that women are isolated from partners because of their responsibility to pleasure themselves.

Although it is helpful to determine a rhetor’s implied auditors, it is equally important to identify the people a rhetor negates through that same discourse. Wander, who deems the

---

<sup>206</sup> Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 144.



negated audience a “third persona,” shares concern that “rhetorical theory oblige[s] us to ignore audiences not addressed, unable to attend, and unable to respond to the ‘text.’”<sup>207</sup> Thus, Wander challenges critics to evaluate discourse for stylistic tokens that this time negate an audience through “language, the speaking situation, [or] the established order shaping both.”<sup>208</sup> Wander also writes that it is integral to understand a rhetor’s negated audience during “emancipatory moments” in history.

Given Ensler’s effort to emancipate women from the patriarchal culture that silences them during sex, and her goal of generating dialogue, it is important to consider who is negated through her discourse. The portions of the play that construct patriarchy also reveal that vaginas and women are negated when women become detached from their vaginas through their perceptions of their bodies. The portions of the play that construct the alternate ownership ideology, however, negate men and sexual partners because the new ideology only applies to women who fulfill their sexual pleasure independently.

Finally, Ensler’s use of theatre, the play’s monologue format, and her goal of generating dialogue are reminiscent of bell hooks’ rhetorical options for revolutionizing a patriarchal ideology. When people adopt hooks’ options—confession, enactment, dialogue, and the visual arts—they should be able to abandon patriarchal values in favor of feminist values of partnership, mutuality, and respect that these options promote. Ultimately, hooks writes that these options are designed to help men and women achieve structural and experiential change within society by adopting a new ideology.

Through the monologues, women share their experiences in both patriarchal and ownership realities. From their stories, the audience learns that women who live within a

---

<sup>207</sup> Wander, “The Third Persona,” 216.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

patriarchal culture sacrifice their pleasure and experience shame when they receive accidental pleasure from sources beyond their control. This sacrifice and shame contribute to a sense of detachment women feel from their vaginas. By contrast, women who live within the ownership culture that Ensler constructs share that their ability to experience sexual pleasure provides them with a new sense of connection to their vaginas. This connection, in turn, allows women to become agents of their sexual pleasure from which these women gain a sense of empowerment that they lacked within the patriarchal culture. Women who inhabit the ownership ideology fulfill hooks' enactment option by becoming agents of their sexual pleasure. By independently fulfilling their desire through masturbation, these women act in ways that oppose or counter oppressive patriarchal values.

hooks writes that dialogue is comprised of self-reflection from and two-way communication between men and women since both groups are responsible for perpetuating patriarchal ideals. Although self-reflection is represented through women's confession in the monologues, self-reflection from men and two-way communication are absent in *The Vagina Monologues*. The commanding language that narrators use when talking to audience members, the consequential isolation women who inhabit the new ideology experience, and the play's format as a series of monologues contribute to dialogue's absence. It is also important to remember that the play's content is derived from interviews Ensler conducted with over 200 women. No men were ever interviewed. This lack of dialogue with men in the formative stages of the play's creation also contributes to the absence of dialogue in the finished piece.

These findings reveal that Eve Ensler was successful in using *The Vagina Monologues* to construct an ideology that counters the oppression and silence women endure within the patriarchal culture. By moving away from values grounded in male domination and pleasure in

favor of values grounded in female pleasure, agency, and empowerment, *The Vagina Monologues* encourages individual women to break away from the current ideology in order to break the silence surrounding their sexuality. Despite this success, Ensler fails to promote dialogue through her play. Rather than encouraging women to speak *with* others about their experiences in these two different realities, Ensler simply encourages confession and enactment. Women are encouraged to speak *to* others about their experiences and act individually to counter patriarchy.

Additionally, a group that plays an equally integral role in breaking the silence women endure is missing from the play: men. Ensler reveals the role that men play in perpetuating patriarchal values of male dominance and pleasure, but audience members only gain women's perspective on this role. More importantly, although men are accused of silencing women because they work to uphold patriarchal values, the new ideology that Ensler constructs applies solely to women. Men are never given the opportunity to abandon patriarchy and work toward values that respect women's empowered role in sex. Instead, they are negated and left behind to inhabit the current reality and essentially continue to perpetuate oppressive values in society. In order to fully revolutionize the patriarchal ideology that silences women, both men and women must acknowledge their contributions to perpetuating an oppressive reality and work together to identify new ideologies that present the possibility for different, respectful, partnerships in society. But without dialogue and the inclusion of men, this changed reality will never come to fruition.

bell hooks writes that people must be wary of women who claim that they promote feminism when in reality they are "inverting the sexual standpoint and claiming it as their own"

for such action perpetuates oppression in society.<sup>209</sup> Although Ensler does not promote domination through her reconstructed ownership ideology, the same polarization of pleasure that existed within patriarchy remains. Within the patriarchal culture only men are able to attain sexual gratification and women are negated; within the ownership culture only women are able to attain sexual gratification and men are negated. Given such polarization, interaction that promotes partnership and mutuality is unattainable. Without the possibility for mutual interaction, the problems that arise within the patriarchal ideology cannot be resolved.

*Identifying a Missing Option*

Although bell hooks proposes four rhetorical options to help people break away from oppressive ideologies and move together through reflection and dialogue to inhabit a new ideology that supports partnership and respect, it seems as though a significant element is missing. That element is a type of unified action. hooks' first two options—confession and enactment—complement each other because confession encourages individuals to share experiences from oppressive ideologies and enactment encourages individuals to act in nonoppressive ways to counter dominant ideologies in their own lives. The third option, dialogue, extends confession beyond the individual to a group where people reflect together on experiences within oppressive ideologies and explore the potential for new ideologies and realities free from domination. But this option is missing its complement, an option grounded in unified action where people act together to inhabit that new reality. People would then support those new values as a group because they would have, through dialogue, come to an understanding about the benefits they would all reap from such action.

---

<sup>209</sup> hooks, "Talking Sex: Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imaginary," 80.

Given the importance of partnership in hooks' goal for helping people overcome oppression to achieve experiential and status change, this missing element is crucial. Although people are encouraged to act individually to resist oppression, they are never encouraged to act together to actually achieve a greater freedom beyond that which an individual can experience. Yes, the visual arts are invaluable in sharing messages of individual reflection, action, and dialogue with audiences beyond academe. But without a type of unified action, can change at the group, community, and institutional level ever be achieved? And without institutional or structural change, can individual change ever be great or strong enough to revolutionize oppressive ideologies and bring new realities to fruition? The answer is no, because without this unified action, people are individually acting in nonoppressive ways and gaining experiential change while still inhabiting an oppressive culture and reality. In this case, revolution has not yet occurred. Both experiential and status change are required to make those new ideologies people discuss through dialogue a reality. Structural change is integral to achieving status change; unified action is thus required to make that structural change a reality.

This new option would serve to encourage *communal counteraction* among people within an oppressive ideology. It would complement dialogue because it would promote unity through a shared understanding of the benefits that all people involved would gain by adopting the new ideology and creating a new reality. Additionally, this option would require people to act against the current ideology's values by creating and adopting values that were free from oppression, effectively enabling this group to act in "nondominating, nonexploitative, nonoppressive ways of being"<sup>210</sup> together when they were once acting this way individually. By adding an additional option to those that bell hooks already prescribes, people would be able to work toward

---

<sup>210</sup> Foss, Foss, and Griffin.

partnership in society through unified action. Essentially, people would be encouraged to move beyond dialogue as unified communication to achieve the new possibilities they have discussed and explored.

Feminist scholars note the importance of achieving status and experiential change in order to successfully revolutionize a patriarchal ideology in its manifestations in individuals and institutions. Without a focus on this communal counteraction, people are able to gain experiential change but not the status change that is integral to revolution. Spretnak writes that such skewed change results in treatment for the symptoms of patriarchy—here, male domination, a focus on male pleasure, and silence surrounding women’s sexuality—without treatment for the cause of these symptoms’ perpetuation in society: women’s status in relation to men.<sup>211</sup> By simply empowering women and men to act individually and engage in dialogue together, women and men are never encouraged to work together to create the new realities that they discuss.

As is the case in *The Vagina Monologues*, when women are encouraged to be independent agents of their sexuality their experiences change, but women’s status within a patriarchal society does not. Women in the play are required to abandon the society and all other people in order to live in nonoppressive ways. Women’s status cannot change if men and women do not talk together and act together to change the way they interact.

### *Conclusion*

Although this study examined the audiences *The Vagina Monologues* constitutes through its ideology, the perspectives used prevented this study from determining if Ensler’s actual auditors mirror the auditors her play implies. Such an observation could further reinforce this study’s findings regarding the play’s success in encouraging confession and enactment among

---

<sup>211</sup> Spretnak.

women and its failure to include men in these actions and dialogue. Furthermore, although dialogue was Ensler's primary goal in writing *The Vagina Monologues* this study only explored dialogue as constituted within the play. Although dialogue is not present within the play, it is undeterminable from this study whether or not Ensler's audiences generate dialogue amongst themselves and others despite the lack of encouragement the play provides to do so. Future research could also study audience members' communication after viewing the play to determine if dialogue's presence within the play, or encouragement from the play's narrators to engage in dialogue, are required for audience members to identify the importance of two-way, self-reflective communication in revolutionizing a patriarchal ideology.

Despite these limitations, this study has identified Ensler's successes and failures in attempting to generate dialogue by constructing a new ideology through *The Vagina Monologues*. Although the play succeeds in countering the silence women endure within a patriarchal culture, the absence of men and dialogue, and the continued polarization of pleasure and isolation women endure within the new ideology prevent Ensler from promoting the structural change that is essential to resolving these problems. With these missing elements, Ensler empowers women individually and ignores the reality that the greater patriarchal culture and ideology remain unchanged without the inclusion of men, dialogue, and unified action. Furthermore, this study identified a missing rhetorical option—communal counteraction—from those that bell hooks prescribes. Without this option, people are encouraged to act individually and reflect together on the possibility for new ideologies but never encouraged to act together to make that possibility a new reality.

In a 2006 installment of NPR's "This I Believe," Eve Ensler spoke about "The Power and Mystery of Naming Things." More specifically, she shared how *The Vagina Monologues* was

successful in harnessing this power. “I believe as each woman shares her story for the first time, she breaks the silence, and by doing so breaks her isolation, begins to melt her shame and guilt, making her experience real, lifting her pain. I believe one person’s declaration sparks another and then another...I believe freedom begins with naming things. Humanity is preserved by it.”<sup>212</sup>

Through her play, Ensler illustrates the joy and fulfillment women experience from naming their negative experiences within the patriarchal culture as well as their positive experiences within the new ownership ideology she has constructed. The women who narrate the play are proof that freedom does begin “with naming things.” But this freedom also ends with naming, because the reality that Ensler has preserved is one still grounded in patriarchy. Although the narrators and other women who view the play are encouraged to live in ways that counter patriarchy in their own lives, nothing has been done to change the greater culture that they inhabit. Patriarchy persists around these women and their new realities are only preserved through isolation. Ultimately one person’s declaration must spark a dialogue and communal action against the current reality in order for widespread freedom from oppression to be achieved.

---

<sup>212</sup> *All Things Considered*, NPR.



## REFERENCES

- All Things Considered*. NPR. March 20, 2006.
- Bell, Susan E. and Susan M. Reverby. "Vaginal Politics: Tensions and Possibilities in *The Vagina Monologues*." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28 (2005): 430-444.
- Bennet, Judith M. "Patriarchal Equilibrium." In *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, 54-81. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (April 1970): 111-119.
- Bourland, Julia. "The Vagina Monologues: Q&A." *Random House*, <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/ensler/vm/qna.html> (accessed June 14, 2010).
- Braun, Virginia. "Breaking a Taboo?: Talking (and Laughing) about the Vagina." *Feminism and Psychology*, 9, no. 3 (August 1999): 367-372.
- Braun, Virginia. "Public Talk about Private Parts." *Feminism and Psychology*, 9, no. 4 (November 1999): 515-522.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Definition of Man." In *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966.
- Callaway, Catherine. "Interview with Jane Fonda." CNN Live. January 17, 2004. (June 21, 2010).
- Charland, Maurice. "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 133-150.
- Charland, Maurice. "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience." Annual meeting of the National Communication Association/American Forensic Association (Conference on Argumentation), 1995.
- Charlesworth, Dacia. "Marketing Menopause and Inventing Identities: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Persona Created in Menopause Education Pamphlets." Presented at the 2007 National Communication Association Annual Convention. [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/9/4/6/6/p194669\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/9/4/6/6/p194669_index.html) (accessed November 22, 2010).
- Chen, Wei and Jeff Hutcheson. "Canadian Comedian Takes a Role in 'Vagina Monologues.'" January 4, 2001. (June 21, 2010).
- Cheng, Sea Ling. "Vagina Dialogues?: Critical Reflections from Hong Kong on *The Vagina*

- Monologues as a Worldwide Movement.*” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6, no. 2 (June 2004): 326-334.
- Chideya, Farai. “Eve Ensler on a Mission to End Sexual Violence.” NPR. December 18, 2007. (June 21, 2010).
- Cloud, Dana L. “The Rhetoric of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization of Social Responsibility.” *Western Journal of Communication* 62 (1998): 387-419.
- Cloud, Dana L. “The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of ’34.” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 177-209.
- Cooper, Christine M. “Worrying about Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32, no. 3 (2007): 727-758.
- Couric, Katie. “Eve Ensler, creator of “The Vagina Monologues,” and Kristin Tyler, high school director, discuss the play and its role in promoting awareness of violence against women.” Today Show. January 23, 2004, (June 21, 2010).
- Delgado, Fernando Pedro. “Chicano Movement Rhetoric: An Ideographic Interpretation.” *Communication Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 446-454.
- Eisler, Riane. “What do Men Really Want?, The Men’s Movement, Partnership, and Domination” In *Women Respond to the Men’s Movement*, 43-53. San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992.
- Eve Ensler. 2006. Interview by John Von Soosten and Howard Sherman. Downstage Center. American Theatre Wing.
- “Eve Ensler.” *V-Day*. <http://www.vday.org/about/more-about/eveensler> (June 14, 2010).
- Eve Ensler. *The Vagina Monologues*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000.
- Foss, Karen A., Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin. “bell hooks.” In *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*, 69-100. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999.
- Foss, Sonja K. and Karen A. Foss. “Our Journey to Repowered Feminism: Expanding the Feminist Toolbox.” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 36-62.
- Hall, Kim Q. “Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*.” *Hypatia*, 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 99-119.
- Hammerback, John. “Creating the ‘New Person’: The Rhetoric of Reconstitutive Discourse.” *Rhetoric Review*.

- Hammers, Michele L. "Talking about 'Down There': The Politics of Publicizing the Female Body through *The Vagina Monologues*." *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 220-243.
- Hirschmann, Nancy J. *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- hooks, bell. "Feminism: A Transformational Politic." In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 19-27. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- hooks, bell. "Feminist Focus on Men: A Comment." In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 127-133. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- hooks, bell. "Feminist Politics: Where We Stand." In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, 1-6. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- hooks, bell. "Men in the Feminist Struggle—The Necessary Movement." In *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, 111-117. San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992.
- hooks, bell. "Talking Sex: Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imaginary." In *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, 73-81. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.
- hooks, bell. "When I Was a Young Soldier for the Revolution." In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 10-18. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989.
- Jasinski, James. "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in *The Federalist Papers*." In *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, 72-92. by Kathleen J. Turner. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003.
- Jensen, Richard J. and John C. Hammerback. "'Your Tools Are Really the People': The Rhetoric of Robert Parris Moses." *Communication Monographs* 65 (June 1998): 126-140.
- Johnson, Allan G. *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Kendall, Brenden E. "Personae and Natural Capitalism: Negotiating Politics and Constituencies in a Rhetoric of Sustainability." *Environmental Communication* 2, no. 1 (March 2008): 59-77.
- Kneupper, Charles W. "Rhetoric, Argument, and Social Reality: A Social Constructionist View." *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 16 (1980): 173-181.
- Lee, Jirye. "The Distance Between Two Worlds: What Happened to *The Vagina Monologues* When it Crossed the Pacific Ocean?" M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 2009.

- Lucaites, John Louis and Celeste Michelle Condit. "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal and Counter-Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision." *Communication Monographs* 57 (March 1990): 5-24.
- McCue-Enser, Margaret Ann. "Consciousness Raising, the Body, and the Self: A Rhetorical Analysis of Women's Interpretations of *The Vagina Monologues*." Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 2006.
- McGee, Michael C. "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1-16.
- McGee, Michael C. "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61, no. 5 (October 1975): 235-249.
- McKerrow, Raymie E. "Critical Rhetoric and the Possibility of the Subject." In *The Critical Turn: Rhetoric and Philosophy in Postmodern Discourse*. Ed. Ian Angus and Lenore Langsdorf (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).
- McKerrow, Raymie E. "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis" *Communication Monographs* 56 (June 1989): 91-111.
- O'Rourke, Deirdre. "The Ensler Monologues: The Limits of Experience, Identity, and Feminism." *MPA*. (October 2009).
- Peyser, Marc. "Eve Ensler Uses the V Word." *Newsweek*, February 18, 2002.
- Pringle, Valerie. "Superman Actress to Perform in 'Vagina Monologues.'" CTV Television, Inc. May 31, 2001. (June 14, 2010).
- Renshaw, Sal. "Divine Gifts and Embodied Subjectivities in *The Vagina Monologues*." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6, no. 2 (June 2004): 318-325.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1986.
- Spretnak, Charlene. "Treating the Symptoms, Ignoring the Cause." In *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, 169-175. San Francisco, CA: Pandora, 1992.
- Tate, Helen. "The Ideological Effects of a Failed Constitutive Rhetoric: The Co-option of the Rhetoric of White Lesbian Feminism." *Women's Studies in Communication* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1-31.
- Triece, Mary E. "Appealing to the 'Intelligent Worker': Rhetorical Reconstitution and the Influence of Firsthand Experience in the Rhetoric of Leonora O'Reilly." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 5-24.
- Wander, Philip. "The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism." *Central States Speech Journal*

34 (Spring 1983): 1-18.

Wander, Philip. "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory." *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (Winter 1984): 197-216.

Wood, Julia T. "The Rhetorical Shaping of Gender: Women's Movements in America." In *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 58-81. Canada: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005.