Before and After
The Vagina Monologues Experience
From a male perspective

When people say, “What an experience!”, they are often referring to some event that provided a life altering feeling of exhilaration. Although there are various degrees of exhilaration, may it be from base-jumping to a family vacation, all such events supply the person with a different feeling than before the actual experience. From my perspective, an experience does not necessarily require something active, for a show or movie may have similar effects of exhilaration. The Vagina Monologues, from a male standpoint, offers enlightening insight into a rather sensitive issue regarding gender and sexuality.

Honestly-speaking, prior to seeing The Vagina Monologues, I had no distinct reaction or expectation of what the show was actually about. Carrying an open mind with no restrictions, I thought I was prepared to hear these stories of real-life people. Perhaps I did hold some fear for what might happen and what knowledge may be imparted to me, whether I wanted to know or not. For just watching a show, however, I will admit I was somewhat nervous in anticipation to find out what these women (actresses) had to say.

Sitting in the theatre minutes before the opening curtain, I began to ponder my own gender as expressed my men themselves. What do we see ourselves as? Stereotypical research will display the male as domineering and arrogant, but how does sexuality tie into our lifestyle in comparison to what the female counterpart was about to visually depict? I always believed men were rather secure about their sexuality, therefore
lacking any question or doubt. But in that case, what was I wondering about at that very moment?

These were all questions that inhibited my mind immediately before and throughout the entire play. Although I was fully focused on each and every monologue as they were presented on stage, this male gender and sexuality complex remained in the back of my mind, a telling sign of the effect of Eve Ensler and her stories. With each and every story, I grew more interested in what women had to say not only about their physical dilemmas, but as well as the metaphorical connotation represented. Some critics will deem the play graphic and obscene, but this perspective results from a common misconception. Women are not complaining or simply letting the world know, they are being open with themselves and their male counterparts, they are being true and honest to their gender.

Walking down the steps of Kendall Hall following the performance, my mind was engulfed in the issues regarding not only women, but those from the male perspective as well. First and foremost, many people left the theatre with relatively strong reactions and feelings, most of which was positive. When asked what I had thought of the show, I was rather speechless, fearing to choose the wrong words to describe my feelings. Looking back now, and how I feel in general about The Vagina Monologues, I am proud to see that there are women speaking out against men, confronting an issue so often dismissed in society due to hegemony. For as long as I have recognized the issue, I support the women’s cause in fighting against violence. The only difference between now and then is that there is a distinction between supporting and acting, that the belief is useless unless put to action. A community engaged learning program regarding some aspect of gender
studies goes hand-in-hand with helping students such as myself taking the first step towards action.

The Vagina Monologues serves not only as an eye-opener for women, but also an enlightenment experience for gender awareness around the world. Personally, the show made me recognize my unawareness of gender inequality and the responsibility that must be taken by everyone in order to achieve the prime objective of women and violence recognition. People frequently misinterpret the Vagina Monologues as a fight by women against men. This misconception is the source of why this issue can not gain credibility, for those who presume themselves innocent of any such wrongdoing assume they have no obligation towards resolution. Eve Ensler's work seeks to portray this fight as women and men against societal-created hegemony. In other words, I am just as much responsible for defending women gender rights as those who actually commit rape and violent actions.

My awareness as a male role was completely transformed from basically non-existent to a conscious supporter of the cause after seeing The Vagina Monologues. Unfortunately, prior to my experience of the play, I was one of those selfish individuals who perceived women violence as a battle between the victim and the accuser. My lack of awareness made me susceptible to simply taking the easy road out and placing the primary blame on those who rightfully deserve it, the rapists. However, combined with research studies from class readings, there is no evidence to show that any man is prone for committing such acts. Therefore, in addressing this issue, it is my responsibility to educate myself in women violence awareness, and subsequently, educate others in viewing the situation as it truly stands, a united (male and female) battle.
Returning now to the concept of how an experience comes in a variety of manners, The Vagina Monologues serves as the perfect example of a not-so classic situation involving exhilaration (i.e. base-jumping). Rather, the play was a window of opportunity. For viewers such as myself, those who had no definite reaction or expectation towards gender studies, saw the play as an enlightenment. Whether male or female, and whether he/she chooses to admit to this conclusion, a new awareness was revealed in several different methods. First, he/she became more intimate with the subject, getting to know the ins and outs of how women feel as victims of abuse. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the person becomes more aware of their own gender roles and how, regardless of male or female, this situation affects society as a whole. The experience The Vagina Monologues provides is unique considering its impact takes the form of social realization and not physical thrill. Despite this distinction, the play offers the same exhilaration and enlightenment through gender awareness.