

Discussing Women's Issues Through Theatre

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Being a woman I experience sexism everyday. Every single woman I know has been sexually harassed at some point in her life. Domestic violence is in many ways a gendered issue that revolves around the oppression of women. In recent years the subject of domestic violence and relationship abuse has come to light after being overlooked for many years, but this is not enough. Most people today still know very little about the realities of domestic abuse and its dire effects. Using theatre as a medium to discuss issues such as this one has been proven to be effective. Theatre is emotional, visual, powerful, and most importantly, it is personal. This being said, there are always ways in which a piece can be more effectively conveyed to an audience.

*The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler was the theatrical piece that inspired this question. Ensler talked to numerous different women and found that every woman has her own unique story. She discusses her experiences in a Ted Talk entitled *Happiness in Body and Soul*, detailing how the play was able to reach so many different women. As she told the stories of some women, others came forward and were inspired to tell their stories. This led to different movements and different communities performing the *Vagina Monologues* and the voices continued to spread and affect more women. Ensler raises the important point that when faced with so much disturbing information about the violence against women, we can often feel powerless and lost. She argues that the telling of stories is actually revolutionary and effects the most change. Something that I would like to explore is how I can tell stories through a different lens. I want to use images, sounds, symbols, and ideas to also convey stories as well as monologue pieces like Eve Ensler.

Looking at *The Yellow Dress* which is a show created by a company called Deana's Educational Theatre, has given me insight into how specific shows that target the issue of

domestic violence have been executed. This company tours around to different high schools and college campuses and performs a one-woman show about a girl who was killed by her ex-boyfriend. This play centers around a striking image of the girl coming out in a blood soaked dress, the dress that she was wearing when she was murdered. This visual is shocking and emotional for the audience and begins to touch on the idea that I want to explore further. The bloody dress allows the audience to imagine the gruesome incident in a tangible way. Something I want to avoid is creating distance between the stories I am telling and the audience, as news can sometimes do. I want it to feel real in a way that inspires people to act, whatever that may mean for them. *The Yellow Dress* also tells a story that many may have heard before. I am less interested in the details of the relationship (how he was such a nice guy at first), and more about the female's experience (how she viewed herself, how she survived).

It is interesting to explore how other students have studied the issue of domestic violence through theatre, and specifically by using techniques of theatre of the oppressed. This is something that I want to look into more to see how effective those methods are in reaching an audience. Julia Jester from Miami University wrote a dissertation titled *A Feminist Social Psychological Study Utilizing Theatre of the Oppressed Methods to Explore Issues of Women's Voices*, and the part of her reflection that I find particularly informative is the feedback she received from the women who participated in the activities she conducted. Overall the women found the exercises, which used methods of theatre of the oppressed, to be enjoyable. Most importantly they all reported that they felt comfortable and empowered sharing their experiences as women.



## Works Cited

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