

The Ensler Monologues: The Limits of Experience, Identity, and Feminism

by Deirdre O'Rourke

Feminism seeks to define the relationship of women to the world around them. This investigation has critiqued male domination over women and advocated “sisterhood” as an answer to female oppression. Within this “sisterhood,” however, we splinter into feminisms, representing diverse sects of women and questioning the implications of a singular feminism meant to speak for all women. Eve Ensler, as a playwright and activist, has become the face of a contemporary American breed of feminism, translating her fieldwork to the stage in *The Vagina Monologues*, *Necessary Targets*, and most recently, *The Good Body*. Her works aim to collapse the walls built by cultural difference in order to unite women across the world as a global community. In the introduction to her book, *Insecure at Last*, Ensler damns the “us vs. them” mentality that further divides the world and contributes to violence against women. Yet, by using the theatre as the mouthpiece of her work, Ensler herself conflates the “us vs. them” into one entity onstage, her own voice. Her intention is, of course, a peaceful attempt at unification, but in the process, she overlooks the inevitable problems of embodying “us” and “them” herself. While encouraging audiences to look beyond identity politics, she and her work depend on them.

Though challenging Americans to resist identity categories, Ensler makes constant reference to her own identity markers and cites her experiences as points of comparison between herself and the subjects of her plays. For *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Good Body*, Ensler was the only actor onstage, representing ‘everywoman.’ In *Necessary Targets*, Ensler is present onstage within the fictive characters of J.S. and Melissa, two Americans who travel to Croatia to assist female Bosnian refugees. Ensler’s work relies on the interconnectedness of experience and identity to tell its story. Her pieces reveal the limitations and dangers of employing personal experience and identity as foundational elements of a feminist approach. By putting Ensler’s work in conversation with the insights of feminist scholars, the conflicting objectives of her mission are disclosed and analyzed under the light of their inherent contradictions. The scholarly work of Uma Narayan on essentialism troubles the character types employed by Ensler. The insights of Kimberle Crenshaw and Judith Butler into the essentialist conversation reveal the stakes of Ensler’s work for identities. Finally, when applied to Ensler, Joan Scott’s work on experience as a foundation for feminist critique unpacks the playwright’s methods and the consequences of her dependence on experience as source material. The theoretical analyses of Narayan, Crenshaw, Butler, and Crenshaw open up Ensler’s work and provide avenues for critical investigation.

Before we explore the feminist theory needed to flesh out Ensler’s work, we must first understand her own reliance on identity and experience as a feminist, an artist, and an activist. Despite her call to destabilize identity categories, Ensler frequently references her identity, and the experience that it has engendered throughout her theatrical work and as a public persona. In her book, *Insecure at Last*, Ensler’s focus centers on the American need for security triggered by the events of September 11th. She suggests that, in order to feel secure, the United States continues to engage in activities that

inhibit security such as declaring war on Iraq. Ensler locates the realization of this security within identity. Paraphrasing the American psyche, she says “You can’t not know who you are; it’s more secure to cling to hard-matter identity...You become part of an US, and in order to be secure, you must defend against THEM” (xiv). She argues instead, at the close of her book, that “Freedom means I may not be identified with any one group, but I can visit and find myself in every group” (197). We will trouble the implications of the latter statement further when we examine Narayan’s notion of “cultural imperialism” and its connection to Ensler’s work, but first, we must put these statements about the limitations of identity in dialogue with her other work.

Ensler decries a reliance on identity because of the bias, and violence, that often accompanies it, but a survey of her plays and comments from interviews reveals how often Ensler identifies herself. In an interview discussing a production of *The Vagina Monologues* by the United Jewish Appeal, Ensler acknowledges the impact her Jewish identity has had on her work. She insists “my thinking, my social activism, my humor are all rooted in my Judaism and my Jewishness” (Keys 2). Ensler makes reference to her Jewish identity again in the text of *The Good Body*. In this play, which centers on her personal issues with her lack of a washboard stomach, Ensler traces her bodily insecurities back to her early life as a Jewish child. She sets the scene as follows: “My father looked like Cary Grant. My mother looked like Doris Day. I was a dead ringer for Anne Frank” (24). By comparing herself to Anne Frank, the quintessential example of a Jewish girl for American audiences, Ensler conveys both her Jewish identity and the sense of not belonging that accompanies it.

In addition to her active claiming and citation of her Jewish identity, Ensler’s identity as a feminist precedes her and her work. Reviews often draw attention to Ensler’s status as a feminist. One review of *The Vagina Monologues* christened her “the messiah heralding the second wave of feminism” (Gates E5). Another reminds readers that “Ensler [has] been called the ‘Best Feminist in America’ by *Time* magazine” (Keys 2). Still another review states that, through *The Vagina Monologues*, “Eve Ensler spreads her message of feminist and sexual unity” (Drake 77). One could charge the reviewers with the responsibility for this alignment of Ensler with feminism if it were not for her own claiming of the identity. In the opening of *The Good Body*, Ensler shows no trouble voicing her identity as a feminist. She confesses her embarrassment about being a feminist with body image issues. She says “What I can’t believe is that someone like me, a radical feminist for nearly thirty years, could spend this much time thinking about my stomach” (5). She also acknowledges her feminism as a reason why she was “a prime candidate” to create *The Vagina Monologues*. These transparent endorsements of feminism, along with her cannon of work which focuses on the three definitional principles of feminist work according to Janet Halley, “*m/f*, *m>f*, and *carrying a brief for f*,” situate Ensler safely within a feminist identity.

Ensler criticizes identity categories, but resides within her own self-claimed categories of feminism and Judaism. She also relies heavily on the experiences that either resulted from or produced the identities she embodies. Ensler uses her experience as a means of connecting with women from other cultures; their experiences become hers. In the

introduction to *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler attributes her desire to write the play to her own experience as a survivor of abuse. She acknowledges “I see now that I was a prime candidate...I had been violated sexually and physically by my father...and I longed with all my being to find a way back into my vagina” (xxiv). This connection is extrapolated in the same interview in which Ensler claims her Jewish identity. The article cites statistics from the United Jewish Alliance Federation, which report that “15-20% of Jewish households experience domestic violence” and goes on to state Ensler’s “firsthand experience” with that abuse as “Ensler said she was abused and beaten by her Jewish father” (Keys 2). Ensler attributes her work to her personal experience of domestic abuse as a Jewish woman.

Ensler again calls on her experience of abuse as her impetus for traveling to Croatia to be with female Bosnian refugees. In *The Vagina Monologues*, the introduction to *Necessary Targets* and *Insecure at Last*, she recounts the *Newsday* magazine cover that sent her off in search of Bosnian women suffering rape and abuse in times of war. The 1993 cover of *Newsday* featured six Bosnian women who had been released from a rape camp. Each of Ensler’s iterations on her encounter with the magazine is different, but all indicate that Ensler felt she was drawn to the women pictured; it is not until *Insecure At Last* that she suggests why. In *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler recognizes that “something sweet, something pure, had been forever destroyed in each of their lives” (59). It was her experience of reading their faces that confirmed for Ensler, “I knew I had to go there. I had to meet those women” (60). Ensler’s remembering of the *Newsday* cover in the introduction to *Necessary Targets* emphasizes empathy as the trigger for her trip to Bosnia. She acknowledges the photograph as “an invitation to a foreign place” (xi). Upon viewing the photograph, Ensler states, “we see their utter incomprehension and terror. We feel their shame. We are compelled. We go and meet them” (xii). This account provides a distanced approach to the Bosnian women. Ensler drops first-person singular in favor of first- person plural. Her use of the word “compelled” suggests that “we,” as Americans, as Westerners, have a responsibility, a nagging conscience, which motivates us to reach out to those who have been “shamed.” Ensler straddles the “us vs. them” divide, speaking in the former example from a place of similar experience, and as an onlooker in the latter account.

Her third written encounter with the *Newsday* cover, however, returns to the first-person singular approach of *The Vagina Monologues* and offers more of herself as the cause for her travels to Croatia and Pakistan to interview Bosnian refugees. This now familiar photograph speaks to her: “There was something about the anger in their faces, and the shock. There was something about the disassociation and the loss. These girls entered me. Or perhaps they already lived inside me. I knew I had to go and be with them” (4-5). Ensler alludes to her own experience of abuse as the driving force behind her need to talk with “these girls,” suggesting that they triggered her remembrance of abuse as a child.

The nature of the texts in which each *Newsday* narrative appears accounts for the differences between them. Ensler uses first-person singular throughout *The Vagina Monologues* and *Insecure at Last*. Her experience of the photograph introduces the

monologue she wrote “for the women of Bosnia” that expresses, through poetry, the violation of the vagina by soldiers (60). This monologue gives voice to the Bosnia woman’s vagina: “My vagina a live wet water village. They invaded it. Butchered it and burned it down. I do not touch now. Do not visit. I live someplace else now. I don’t know where that is” (63). Ensler uses her experience among the Bosnian refugees to write and perform a monologue that speaks for the vaginas of those women. In *Insecure at Last*, her first-person statements about the *Newsday* cover preface the chapter on her experience with the refugees in Croatia and Pakistan in which she again speaks for their experiences through her own. She articulates the impact of this experience on her life. Ensler writes “Suddenly nothing was secure. Nothing was dependable. Nothing was what it appeared to be. My life in the U.S. seemed bizarre and irrelevant for months afterward. Most of me remained in Croatia and Pakistan with those women” (16). In *The Vagina Monologues* and *Insecure at Last*, Ensler speaks the experience of the Bosnian refugees through her own experience of abuse.

The change in tone from first-person singular to first-person plural in *Necessary Targets* results from Ensler’s adoption of a different writing style. Unlike the monologue-structure narrated by Ensler in *The Vagina Monologues* and the first-person narrative style of Ensler’s book, *Necessary Targets* utilizes a more traditional, dramaturgical style in which characters experience a linear plot, discretely broken down by scene. Though using a different structure, however, Ensler’s experience still writes all the text. Her experience interviewing Bosnian women is split between two characters, one a clinical psychologist and the other a trauma counselor, who together articulate the two sides of Ensler. She recalls her time in Croatia and Pakistan in *Insecure at Last* and says “In all these interviews, either I was filled with an overwhelming desire to rescue the women or I tried to maintain this ‘professional playwright’ position” (8). J.S., the psychologist, experiences the rescuing desire and Melissa, the counselor, is the one more interested in writing her book about the women’s experiences than allowing herself to be vulnerable. One review acknowledged the play’s relationship to Ensler. It states “Although on one level less personal than ‘Monologue,’ ‘Targets’ is more artistically introspective, probing the very techniques from which Ms. Ensler creates her work” (Brantley 1:3). Indeed, J.S.’s words at the end of the play recall Ensler’s own expressed in other works. J.S., in a letter to Melissa, suggests that, even though she has returned to the United States, she has not left the Bosnian refugee camp or one camp member in particular. She says, “What if I told you that Zlata stopped my life...What if she entered me, and I could not move? Back. Could not return to anything, anyone I’d ever been” (116). Ensler’s uses personal experience and the identity it engenders to ground her work.

Having established Ensler’s reliance on identity and experience makes her work vulnerable to the critical interrogation of feminist scholars who have troubled identity and experience as foundational categories of feminist inquiry. The scholarship of Uma Narayan argues that, in an attempt to avoid gender essentialism, many feminist works engage in cultural essentialism that utilizes the same stereotyping they had hoped to prevent by questioning gender essentialism. Narayan’s assessment of feminist work speaks directly to the essentialisms that Ensler endorses in her plays. Her pieces fall

into the three categories that Narayan is critical of, gender essentialism, cultural imperialism, and cultural essentialism. After an exploration of Ensler from Narayan's essay, we will view her relationship with identity through the work of Kimberle Crenshaw and Judith Butler, who both posit the disadvantageous effects of using identity for feminist purposes. We will explore the ways in which Ensler "subjectivates" the women of her plays. Lastly, Ensler's dependence on experience as a grounding principle of her work will be questioned by Joan Scott's deconstruction of experience as a foundational element of feminist scholarship.

Uma Narayan's "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism" investigates the effect that the feminist work of Western scholars has on their Non-Western subjects. She decries gender essentialism which draws conclusions about "all women" based on only a sampling of "women." This kind of work also carries with it a sense of "cultural imperialism," which envelops the experiences of all women within the identity of the Western or "privileged" body. Narayan recognizes

The gender essentialism perpetuated by relatively privileged subjects, including Western feminists, [as] understood to be a form of 'cultural imperialism,' whereby privileged subjects tend to construct their 'cultural Others' in their own image, taking their particular locations and problems to be those of 'All Women' (89).

This emphasis on gender and culture often results in cultural essentialisms, in which scholars infer certain elements to be true of all women of a particular culture. Narayan articulates her point as follows: "Seemingly universal essentialist generalizations about 'all women' are replaced by culture-specific essentialist generalizations that depend on totalizing categories such as 'Western cultures,' 'Non-western cultures,' 'Western women,' 'Third World women,' and so forth" (Narayan 87). This approach employs the same strategies used to universalize gender to construct cultural identities. Eve Ensler's work is engaged in gender essentialism, cultural imperialism and cultural essentialism.

Ensler's willingness to speak for "all women" can be identified throughout her work. In an interview about *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler articulates a change in perception that occurred through her work on the play. She announces "I used to see the world in terms of races, classes, cities, and countries. Now I see it as having vaginas and not having vaginas; vagina-friendly or not vagina-friendly" (Keys 2). What at first appears as an elimination of identity categories is actually Ensler's separation of the global community in terms of their treatment of women. One's body part becomes the supreme object of categorization. Individuals without vaginas are not excluded from the latter part of her statement, but it, too, relies on a valuation of the vagina above all other characteristics of a group. Ensler carries a brief for vaginas and those who don't are set apart and aside by her work. The performance of her work enhances the gender essentialist aspects of her pieces, as well. She is the representative for all women onstage, despite the fact that her own identity, infiltrates all her work. Ensler does not consider herself a biased interpreter of information, but rather, as someone who has "the great gift of being able to channel the voices of a diverse group of women" (Drake 77).

Ensler's position as the voice for the "Other" situates her work within Narayan's understanding of cultural imperialism. Recall Ensler's desire to collapse the binary of "us vs. them" and relinquish identity in favor of the fluidity to move freely among many groups. In *Insecure at Last*, she insists that, due to a self-interested investment in identity, we "can no longer feel what another feels because that might shatter our heart, contradict [our] stereotype[s], destroy the whole structure" (xv). In her attempt to "feel" others' pain, however, she ends up re-inscribing their experiences within her own person, who has the power to speak for "othered" women. The primary examples of Ensler's cultural imperialism occur in her works that have a global aim, *Necessary Targets* and *The Good Body*.

Necessary Targets revolves around two characters that are Ensler's two dueling approaches to fieldwork. At one point in the play, Melissa, who looks at the women and only sees chapters in her book, urges the refugees to tell her the story of Seada, a young mother suffering from the stress of having dropped her child while being pursued by the military. One of the women begins to speak, but Zlata, suspicious of the American's motives from the beginning, insists that the story is Seada's to tell. J.S., the psychologist who yearns to help the women, seconds Zlata. At that, Melissa retorts, "No, it's everyone's story. You have never been at war, J.S. It's a completely different dynamic" (94). Melissa, perhaps in justification of her book projects and Ensler's, insists that the experience of these women becomes the property of the global community. Everyone should know Seada's story and Melissa is the woman who will bring it to them. A confrontation between J.S. and Melissa further reveals Melissa's intentions. Attempting to discover why Melissa is so aggressive about getting the refugees' stories, J.S. suggests the reason behind her fervor. She patronizingly asserts "Okay. You're a lost little girl trying to find herself in the middle of big, scary wars..." (100). Melissa answers back, almost as if she is Ensler herself, sourcing her own experience as the bridge between the women's stories and her own. She says, "Maybe I am. Maybe I'm familiar-too familiar with cruelty and violence-and maybe it came too early" (100). The experience of the female Bosnian refugees finds full expression in American women who are affected by their devastation and loss. The last lines of the play acknowledge the sameness of the refugees and J.S. She, back home in America, still feels a connection to the Bosnian women. She writes, in a letter to Melissa, "I am without a country...I am there in that refugee camp in the middle of nowhere. I am with Zlata and Jelena and Seada and Nuna and Azra" (117). "All women" are within J.S because she has experienced their stories.

Much like *Necessary Targets* focuses more heavily on the two American women than the Bosnian refugees they encounter, so too does *The Good Body* view the experiences of women around globe through American eyes. *The Good Body* focuses on Ensler's issues with her stomach, which follow her to India, Africa, and Afghanistan, where she searches for peace with her body. Though the play expresses voices other than Ensler's, it resolves with Ensler, in Afghanistan, eating ice cream with Sunita, an Afghani woman. We learn that women could be persecuted for indulging in ice cream under Taliban rule, but because Ensler had "brought it up about a hundred times," the

women take her to an undercover restaurant to eat it (83). Ensler ritualistically eats the ice cream for all the subjects of her monologues throughout the play as a liberatory embrace of her body. She eats for “all women.” Her desire to do so, however, puts Sunita at serious risk and opens up Ensler’s cultural imperialism to harsh criticism from her reviewers. Charles McNulty reacts to the conflation of ‘women’s experiences’ and insists that “the playwright seems guilty of trying to artificially import a wider significance... Surely there’s a difference between a woman denying herself Haagen-Dazs in Brentwood and an Afghan woman being forbidden by the Taliban to enjoy a bowl of vanilla ice cream” (30). In many eyes, stretching the similarities between “all women” downplays the experiences of women under severe oppression. Lisa Foad seconds McNulty’s criticism of Ensler’s piece and charges that she “uses the Afghani woman’s situation to elucidate her own very privileged problem” (38). Within Narayan’s definition of cultural imperialism, Foad’s identification of Ensler as the privileged party put the Afghan woman into relief as the “cultural other constructed in [Ensler’s] own image” (89).

A third essentialism Ensler’s work exhibits is cultural essentialism. The characterizations in the *The Good Body* rely on simplistic crystallizations of cultural stereotypes. The preface to the play establishes these generalized reconstructions of women Ensler met on her travels. She states “I was moved by women in Africa who lived close to the earth and didn’t understand what it meant not to love their body. I was lifted by older women in India who celebrated their roundness” (xv). The stereotypes presented in the preface do not get fleshed out within Ensler’s drama. Leah, “the African Masai woman,” as the title of the monologue communicates, cannot comprehend body image issues. Instead, she imparts Eve with some primitive, religious wisdom. She says “Your bodies are just pictures to you. Here we live in our bodies, they serve us, they do our work... God made this body. God gave me this body” (68). Priya, “a middle-aged Indian woman,” is realized in a similarly limiting characterization. She is also untouched by concerns of weight and appearance and advises Ensler to “Read the *Kama Sutra*. Indian women are very, very curvy and voluptuous” (76). Claims that all African women love the body God gave them and all Indian women look to the *Kama Sutra* to validate their identify reek of cultural essentialism in operation. Positioning Ensler’s problems with her stomach as foreign to the African and Indian women also contributes to widening the gap between “Western women” and “Non-Western women.” Foad also criticizes this aspect of Ensler’s work by arguing that “Her overuse of plastic stereotypes never lets characters move past caricature, so Ensler never fully explores how a variety of women might feel about their bodies” (37). Ensler instead gives voice to cultural essentialist characterizations of her own creation, which are loosely based on actual women.

Charles McNulty’s critique of Ensler’s performance of *The Good Body* recognizes that she ‘isn’t the greatest mimic and her portraits tend to play up broad ethnic markers’ (30). The characters in the play are both written and performed based on stereotypical portrayals of other cultures. This causes one to question to what end Ensler’s characters create a global community, free of identity politics. Kimberle Crenshaw’s work on the intersectionality of identities in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” suggests an answer. Crenshaw,

whose essay focuses on the effects of identity politics on women who claim multiple identities, argues that “The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, but rather the opposite—that is frequently conflates or ignores intragroup difference” (1242). Ensler’s work presents one face of the African woman, of the Indian woman, of the Afghani woman. Not only are her depictions culturally essentialist, but they often only serve as an example of what might be threatened for American women. Crenshaw also explores this idea in her work. She discusses the speech of Senator David Boren who, when advocating the Violence Against Women Act of 1991, framed the need for violence prevention in terms of the stakes for white women rather than the effects of violence on women of color. Crenshaw quotes his words “Violent crimes against women are not limited to the streets of inner cities, but also occur in homes in rural and urban areas across the country. Violence against women affects not only those who are actually beaten and brutalized, but indirectly affects all women” (1260). She follows his words with this insightful critique. “Rather than focusing on and illuminating how violence is disregarded when the home is ‘othered,’ the strategy implicit in Senator Boren’s remarks functions instead to politicize the problem only in the dominant community” (1260).

One could launch a similar argument at Ensler’s work. In her chapter on Afghan women in *Insecure At Last*, Ensler presents her case with a comparable strategy to Boren’s. She discusses her failure to garner interest in the Afghani cause. On two separate occasions in the book, Ensler interprets the Afghani female experience as an anticipatory reality of American women. She states “There was something about the lack of outrage surrounding the state of Afghan women, something about the acceptance of it, that made me fear for the future of all women” (26). Though she is interested in the Afghani cause, she is more disturbed by the consequences that all women, like her, could face if the Afghani plight went unnoticed. She reinforces this idea later in the chapter, insisting that “No one could understand what the terrible plight of Afghan women had to do with their own interests, their own comfort and security” (36). Here, Ensler’s concerns seem to be focused not on the Afghani women, but on the future of “all women,” and in particular, women like her who she is trying to inform. Crenshaw’s insights again come to bear on Ensler’s work. She suggests that “tokenistic, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion is at least as disempowering as complete exclusion” (1261). Ensler’s good intentions aside, her work does lend itself to a reading similar to Crenshaw’s interpretation of Boren’s statements. Ensler uses the stories of oppressed women to send a message to America, which sometimes overshadows the women whom she claims to “channel.”

The women of Ensler’s plays are vulnerable to manipulation by her because it is through her work that they become subjects. Judith Butler’s interpretation of Michel Foucault’s subjectivation in the third chapter of *The Psychic Life of Power* provides insight into the process Ensler’s subjects undergo to attain an identity. Butler explicates subjectivation: “The term ‘subjectivation’ carries the paradox in itself: *assujétissement* denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection—one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency” (83). The stories and experiences of Ensler’s interviewees only

become known when the subjects give them up to her. This is not to say that, without Ensler, they would be without their experiences, but it does suggest that the best chance these women have at a history is by allowing Ensler to write and speak them into it. Butler explicates the process Foucault's prisoner goes through in *Discipline and Punish* when he's both constituted and constricted by his identity as prisoner. She explains that "The individual is formed or, rather, formulated through his discursively constituted 'identity' as prisoner. Subjection is, literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced" (84). The women in Ensler's work achieve their identities via the playwright's pen. Butler suggests that these identities, which are reinforced by humanity's need to embrace them, become "totalizing" and "imprison the body" within them (86). The subjects of Ensler's plays must submit to their identities as established by the playwright; they may disappear otherwise in the eyes of the Western world.

Joan Scott, in "The Evidence of Experience," builds off of the work of Foucault and Butler in her assertion that "Subjects are constituted discursively," like the women of Ensler's plays (793). Because of the interconnected nature of language and experience, Scott argues that work that upholds experience as a foundation for investigation ignores questions about what affects, enables, and changes one's experience. She quibbles with the state of historical scholarship and its reliance on "experience [as] an 'irreducible' ground for history" (781). Scott decries historians who employ experience without unpacking it. She proposes that "The project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories or representation, its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and of its notions of subjects, origins, and cause" (Scott 778). Ensler prizes the experiences of her subjects along with her own as the essential grounds for her theatrical work. She reads their experiences through her own and draw connections that unite "all women" through the primary evidence of experience. Her work does little to question the historical context for each woman's experience, but rather, offers identities forged in experience that speak for the oppression of "all women." Ensler's blind adoption of experience as the foundation of her work contributes to the simplistic renderings of women and her love/hate relationship with identity.

The work of Eve Ensler is significantly problematized by the scholarship of Uma Narayan, Kimberle Crenshaw, Judith Butler, and Joan Scott. When read against their interrogations of experience and identity, Ensler's plays are exposed as essentialist pieces which dictate identity and value experience above analysis. Given Eve Ensler's lack of consistency about her own notions of identity, we must entertain the idea that she is unaware of the negative impact of her work. Surely Ensler has become a household name and provided a face for feminism which popular America is comfortable seeing and endorsing. She has raised awareness about domestic violence and the V-Day Funds continues to support women throughout the world in need of assistance. Perhaps, however, we are too content with Eve Ensler. We must acknowledge the good that has come out of her theatrical work, but not at the expense of turning a critical eye away from the negative potential of her pieces. The feminist scholarship cited in this paper gives reason enough to offer critique of Eve Ensler's work,

which speaks to a larger community than the writings of theorists. If Eve Ensler is truly the “Best Feminist in America,” she and her work stand to benefit from feminist immanent critique.

Works Cited

Brantley, Ben. “Exploring the Pain of Bosnian Women.” *New York Times*. 1 Mar 2002: 1:3.

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997, 83-209.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*. 43.6 (1991) 1241-1299.

Drake, David. “All about Eve’s privates.” *The Advocate*. 23 Nov 1999: 77.

Ensler, Eve. *Insecure at Last*. New York: Villiard, 2006.

----*The Good Body*. New York: Villiard, 2004.

----*Necessary Targets*. New York: Villiard, 2001.

----*The Vagina Monologues*. New York: Villiard, 1998.

Foad, Lisa. “Review of *The Good Body*.” *Herizons*. 19.4 (2006) 37-38.

Gates, Anita. “A Body Part Returns as the Leading Lady.” *New York Times*. 4 Oct 1999: E5.

Halley, Janet. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.

Keys, Lisa. “A Playwright’s Global Dialogue on Domestic Violence.” *Forward*. CVI.31 (2003) 2.

McNulty, Charles. “For Ensler, a new body part to mull.” *Los Angeles Times*. 3 Feb 2006: E30.

Narayan, Uma. “Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism.” *Hypatia* 13.2 (1998) 86-106.

Scott, Joan. “The Evidence of Experience.” *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (1991) 773-797.