

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kryn Freehling-Burton for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Women Studies, Women Studies, and Communications presented on June 12, 2007.

Title: Passage through *The Vagina Monologues*: A College Anti-Violence Rite.

Abstract approved:

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Passage through *The Vagina Monologues*: A College Anti-Violence Rite examines the ways in which the audience at Oregon State University (OSU) responds to the annual production of the play in connection with the international college campaign to raise awareness about violence against women and to raise money for community organizations addressing the issue. OSU has produced the play since 2000 raising thousands of dollars for the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence in Corvallis, OR and sending part of the money raised through V-Day International to a selected spotlight group of women each year. The play, and its production each year, provide a unique look at the way this example of activist theatre represents (and challenges) feminist and performance theories. Using a mixed methods approach, I utilize quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data to explore what the production means to the audience, cast and producers of the show. Both sets of data show that the community finds great value in producing the show each year, even when it is perceived to function imperfectly.

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Passage through The Vagina Monologues: A College Anti-Violence Rite

by  
Kryn Freehling-Burton

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of the Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Kryn Freehling-Burton, Author

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For my children—may they know a world without violence

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## Passage Through *The Vagina Monologues*: A College Anti-Violence Rite

### Prologue

The focus of this research is how audiences respond to the V-Day production of the play, *The Vagina Monologues*. *The Vagina Monologues* has been performed as part of V-Day celebrations since 1998 with the goal of addressing violence against women through consciousness-raising and fund raising. With an eight-year history at Oregon State University (OSU), this theatre production provides the opportunity to understand how audience members interpret the play's message and intent and explores whether these responses coincide with those intended by the production. *The Vagina Monologues* functions as an activist theatre production with feminist roots and purpose. This thesis examines the production at OSU from three broad theoretical perspectives: theatre, activist theatre and feminism. Though "monologues" is plural, I will treat it as singular when it is used as the title of the play and/or production.

### 1 Act I: Literature Review

#### 1.1 Scene 1: *The Vagina Monologues*: A Beginning

Inspired by stories women told her about their vaginas, playwright Eve Ensler began writing them down, molding them into a collection of monologues she initially performed herself, for small venues, with primarily women as audience members. As she performed, more and more women divulged their deepest fantasies and their darkest memories as they visited her backstage and met with her for interviews. Ensler continued adding pieces to the performance during which she says she "had to hold 5-by-8 cards in my hands all through the performance every night, even though I had the piece

memorized. It was as if the women I had interviewed were made present by those cards, and I needed them there with me” (Enslar, 1998, p. xxvi). After performing the piece as a solo show for a year, Enslar met with “a group of activist women...and we formed V-Day” (Enslar, 1998, p. xxxii). The first V-Day production premiered on Valentine’s Day, 1998, at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York City, and raised over \$100,000. This money was given directly to grass roots organizations working to stop violence against women. Oregon State University (OSU) joined the College Campaign for V-Day 2000 becoming one of hundreds of colleges presenting the monologues by students, staff, and faculty to raise money for our local Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence.

Today, *The Vagina Monologues* is performed each year for V-Day in communities all over the world and has raised over \$30 million ([www.v-day.org](http://www.v-day.org)). The majority of the money raised continues to go directly to local grass roots groups in those communities while a small percentage of the money raised can be sent through V-Day Organization to the Spotlight Campaign focusing on a particular group of women. Past spotlight Campaigns raised money for Afghan women, comfort women in the Philippines, a shelter in Kenya, and women in areas of conflict, especially Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Sudan ([www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org)).

Each year, the production at OSU brings in a larger audience and raises more money for CARDV and the Spotlight Campaign. What draws people to attend *The Vagina Monologues*? What do they think about vaginas and the movement to end violence against women when they leave the show? These were the first questions I wanted to ask audience members who attended the 2006 production.

## 1.2 Scene 2: Introduction

My primary theoretical paradigm to explore how audiences perceive the efficacy of the stated mission of the production of *The Vagina Monologues* is feminism and I specifically use the lens of feminist performance theory (Deavere Smith, 1993, 1995; Dolan, 1998). I employ an ethnographic strategy that includes participant observation, traditional surveys and interviews.

Multiple methods allow for a multiple perspective examination. Surveys from the 2006 and 2007 performance provide the starting place to determine a general look at motivations for attending and reactions to the performance. In-depth interviews with audience members build on the survey data with personal narrative responses to the play and interviews with the directors, health education staff, and cast members describe the process of producing *The Vagina Monologues* at OSU. These methods and populations assume that *The Vagina Monologues* is doing at least a portion of what it is intended to do.

### 1.3 Scene 3: Why *The Vagina Monologues*? Why me?

I am a woman who found my way to feminism when I became a mother. This intimate, vaginal introduction to ideas about oppression and empowerment coalesced with my passion for theatre and the ways in which art can be used by women to connect with other women to affect social change. Art, and especially theatre, shows societal problems in visceral and imaginative ways that can be used to instigate change in systems of inequality. Art is a way to envision the world anew.

I believe that art touches people in ways that theory and politics cannot. I am a playwright who writes about women and am a director who deliberately collaborates with women artists in projects with which I am associated; I seek them out! I believe in

privileging women's stories and the women who tell them. I believe that theatre is one of the most active, tangible, present art forms. Feminist theatre is also vulnerable to harsh public critique of the subject matter and the appropriateness of the method of using bodies and sexuality in public forums (Hammers, 2006). It is one thing to read about the rape of a ten-year-old in a text book or newspaper. It is another experience altogether to have it described, 20 feet away by a real, live, breathing woman.

In 2006, I auditioned for and performed in *The Vagina Monologues*. I was intimately involved in the production I will be researching. I auditioned because I believe in the cause of V-Day and wanted to be connected with this world-wide movement and I was cast in the final monologue, "I Was There in the Room." This scene brought my journey to feminism full circle as it is the only scene in the play that describes a baby's birth. For the 2007 production, the director cast me as the interviewer of the six-year-old-girl as a way of honoring the research I was conducting and yet not overwhelming me with performance responsibilities so I could write this thesis! My personal experience with the *The Vagina Monologues* gives me additional perspectives into women theatre activists. I am occasionally recognized as a cast member (whom the participants could assume agrees with V-Day's message and method), but the participants rarely discussed resistance or opposition to *The Vagina Monologues* or its method of raising awareness.

#### 1.4 Scene 4: Metatheory

Emerging out of interviews with contemporary women, *The Vagina Monologues* is solidly grounded in standpoint theory that purports that women have a specific understanding of the world and the ways we experience oppression precisely because we

are oppressed. Each woman's story is valid and can offer a critique of the patriarchal system under which sexism, as well as racism, functions. Containing a range of archetypal women, the show connects women by the vagina, an anatomical body part all women supposedly possess. Ensler's desire to record and perform other women's stories grew out of the dismay she felt when hearing women degrade their vaginas and the memory of her own sexual abuse as a child (Ensler, 2005). The monologue format is an easily accessible theatrical device that can distill multiple women's voices into one woman's voice on stage. This distillation essentialized the notion of what it means to be a woman and attracted audiences all over the United States. When Ensler created V-Day and transformed the play into a piece of activist theatre, the intention shifted from sharing "woman's" story to raising awareness around the issue of violence that could be found implicitly or explicitly in each monologue.

*The Vagina Monologues* performs as activist theatre at the same time it enacts feminist theory and praxis. Vaginas, as part of women's bodies, act as the subject matter and are examined as the simplified place of sexuality and as a major site of violence against women. As an activist theatre piece, *The Vagina Monologues* is performed in provocative ways by women with various reasons for participating in the production. The individual monologues developed out of the playwright's belief that in order to dismantle the patriarchy that condones violence against women and girls, women must share their stories and experiences. That women are perceived as "other" in this society (de Beauvoir, 1952) serves to silence women's voices and render the very words for our anatomy unspeakable. Reclaiming this language through writing the woman's voice (Cixous, 1991; Heilbrun, 1988) and performing this voice publicly upsets the relationship

between the oppressor and oppressed and is inspiration for change on an individual, as well as societal level (Boal, 1979). Voice and language convey the ways in which an individual is oppressed at the same time they illuminate points of resistance (Deavere Smith, 1991). Maintaining that each monologue represents a woman's experience, the playwright places the weight of standpoint in women's voices. The close alignment of the play with standpoint theory and identity politics (Hill-Collins, 2000) sets the stage for charges of essentialism around two key issues, women as a group and women's bodies-as-identity. The performativity of gender (Butler, 1990) challenges audiences and participants to examine the voice of the character alongside the voice of the performer alongside the voice of the culture. The enduring popularity of the show as part of an annual anti-violence event over the past decade suggests that it functions on multiple levels of story, body, performance, and activism and suggests its place in postmodern theory that admits a person or event can exist in multiple places simultaneously. The contradictions that surround the performance are a microcosm of feminist theory as praxis and should not be so easily dismissed.

### 1.5 Scene 5: Feminist Theory

Feminism seeks to advance political, social and economic equality for all people and women specifically (de Beauvoir, 1952; Frye, 1983; Wollstonecraft, 1975).

Feminism in the United States is divided into "waves" that describe the various ideological activism performed. The "first-wave" focused on suffrage for women and the "second-wave" struggled to secure employment opportunities and reproductive rights including the Equal Rights Amendment which has yet to be ratified by the required number of states (Firestone, 1970; Friedan, 1983). Subsequent writings by feminist

theorists focus on reconciling a white middle-class perspective on equality with the realities that women of color and women of working/lower-classes face (Frye, 1983; Hill-Collins, 2000). The contemporary feminist movement has been referred to as “third wave” or postfeminism (Heywood, 2006) but neither term captures the sense of flux within which the movement exists at the start of this millennium. It is in this contemporary feminism that *The Vagina Monologues* emerged.

Women’s voices have not often been included in recorded history. In fact, one of the foundational writings for women’s rights was written by a man, John Stuart Mills, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Great pains have been taken by activists to incorporate women’s voices, stories and experiences into history and law. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the founding mothers of the First Wave, even re-wrote and edited the Bible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reflect women’s voices and perspectives.

Feminist writers have recognized that even when women were not the primary movers of history (i.e. presidents, generals, etc.), they participated in the great moments in history and their mark can be seen if one knows how to see the marks. Feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza coined the term “hermeneutics of suspicion” to describe the process by which women can examine sacred (and other) texts to find the untold stories of women’s lives and influence (1992). Linguist and anthropologist, Elizabeth Wayland Barber identifies the ways a weaver can understand weaving artifacts in a way other anthropologists cannot, thereby making the case that a woman’s examination of historical artifacts will provide a more complete story (1994). Bettina Apthekar claims that women perform acts of resistance in the dailiness of their lives, in the quilts sewn, stories told and recipes passed down to daughters (1989).

Many feminists of color have adopted Alice Walker's term, womanist, to describe the unique realities women of color face. Womanists have questioned the ways in which knowledge is passed down and how the dominant, white culture has stamped out language, tradition, and history along with women's voices (i.e. Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldua, Ntozake Shange). African-American writers have reclaimed their African heritage and the voice of resistance within slavery as they have struggled to hear the women's harmony in the chorus. Chicana writers have written in multiple languages back and forth across the borderlands to reclaim the indigenous women who have been subsumed in the multiple oppressions of colonialization, immigration, and living on the borderlands (Anzaldua, 1987). Often these voices are heard through poetry, fiction and performance pieces as opposed to traditional academic theoretical texts. These examples of identity politics privilege the voice of the marginalized in narratives describing their particular intersections of systemic oppression (Frye, 1983).

Women have written throughout the centuries of their own experience, struggling to find the time and space (Woolf, 1929) to write, in and around cooking, spinning, weaving, sewing, nursing, birthing, burying, plowing (Barber, 1992). Theorists have determined that it is crucial for women to write their own stories, their own experiences, to write out of our own bodies (Cixous, 1991), these very bodies that have been bruised by labor and the hands of men. The bodies we have misunderstood, birthed from and been controlled by. The bodies controlled by men, by science, by misinformation. The bodies the Second Wave attempted to reclaim through consciousness-raising (CR), health/sexuality workshops and health collectives. The bodies that women of color challenge and break to ease the lives of white women in the United States (Hill-Collins,

2000; hooks, 1976). These bodies created from women, birthed by women, subjected to abuse and secrecy by society, often remain the stuff of myths and secrets. Slowly, from the wings of history, in a society that deems women's bodies fit only for the purview of men, women begin to speak of our own bodies, projecting our own voices, on our own stages. Spurred on by memories of workshops to introduce us to our own bodies, and marches to demand reproductive rights, one woman sits down with another woman and then another, and asks her about her vagina.

Women occupy places of marginalization. "Women are not just outside cultural traditions. They structure the spaces that lie between the bold line picked out by previous generations of art critics and literary critics" (Battersby, 1989, p. 152). Women creating theatre occupy a tenuous place in culture and in history. When feminist vision erupts in activism through theatre, the experimentation is often seen as just that, experimentation. She "may often find herself the most outcast and ignored" (Malpede 1998). Performance elucidates the questions that undergird feminism, "Who is speaking? Who is listening? Who is in view, and who is not?" (Diamond, 1997, p. iii). Women performers understand that the "character is *always* performing for an audience; the audience changes and the form of address may change as well, but a character is never *not* performing versions of the self to others in the theater" (Fraden, 2003, p. 12). Women understand this, because as a gender, we are always performing (Butler, 1990).

Bettina Aptheker examines the ways in which women's daily experience informs their work and consciousness. Poetry is a vital method of researching women's lives that should be honored alongside traditional (masculine) methods of research. Her text overflows with personal narrative, poetry, short stories, letters by women about their

experiences. “It is not so much interest in the construction of text as text, but, rather, in how the text—the painting, poem, story—structures our understanding of women’s lives; it was an interest in how to learn from the shape, the texture, the rhythm of the telling” (1989, p. 29). Theory from the standpoint of individuals’ lives privileges the breadth of women’s lives and experiences emphasizing the patterns that emerge from this vastness. It is not a condensed version of what “woman” experiences. Rather, standpoint theory believes that marginalized groups have unique knowledge about themselves and the society in which they live that the dominant culture does not have. Women’s poetry, stories, and even crafted items like quilts, point the way to multiple truths and open up possibilities rather than close them down.

Conjuring the poetry and writings of Adrienne Rich, Aptheker identifies the woman writing herself. Survival depends on women re-visioning, looking back at our own lives and the lives of our foremothers to see what has been missing, neglected, and deliberately squelched. “Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (Rich, 1986, p. 35). These assumptions are buried under centuries of male-controlled literature and art production that reflect the patriarchal norms of our society today. Rich’s foundational work in the early 1980s, *Of Woman Born*, clarified that the act of mothering in relation to others is diametrically opposed to the institution of motherhood established and perpetuated by patriarchal oppression. This act of naming her own experience as critical in theory development is another example of standpoint theory at work. It challenges the masculine understanding of a key patriarchal function of women without minimizing the real love and work that goes into the act of mothering.

Aptheker straddles the space between standpoint theory based in individual accounts of reality from the margins, and post structuralism or postmodernism which emphasizes multiplicity of truths. Postmodernism as a philosophical perspective gained ground in feminist circles in the 1970s, notably by the “French Feminists” (i.e. Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray) who have been under-translated, misunderstood, and lumped together in one category for American theorists’ ease in categorizing their thought/s. Helene Cixous wrote the foundational essays “Laugh of the Medusa” and “Coming to Writing” which were translated into English in 1970’s and stood alone as representative of her thought for many years (Cixous 1991). Though Cixous is a highly regarded literary critical scholar and fiction writer, few of these works are widely read in the United States (Cixous 1991) and her name quickly became synonymous with only *écriture féminine*, her description of feminine writing to which all genders have access. Postmodern thought emphasizes that since it is through language that women have been subsumed under the masculine patriarchy it is through language that women can know ourselves and write our own stories. Cixous uses powerful maternal imagery to connect the act of writing with mothering and/or being mothered, “I’m brimming over! My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink. Nursing time. And me? I’m hungry, too. The milky taste of ink!” (1991, p. 31). Passages like this one provide critics with seeming justification for charging Cixous with essentializing women, (much like Ensler is), by reducing us to our female bodies and potential reproduction.

Reacting to identity politics and standpoint theory, postmodernism and post structuralism question our ability to know anything clearly. There is no truth. Judith Butler troubles the “truth” of gender further and offers a new reading of how gender is

established and experienced. She agrees that language with its limitations often confuses the very issues it is attempting to illuminate. For a political movement like feminism, this has historically broken down communication between women and splintered the movement into racial, class and sexual identity subsections that struggle to find ways to work together. For Butler, the act of performing gender can reinstitute the agency missing in the movement and supplant identity notions that often become fixed.

Theatre theorist, Peggy Phelan believes that good critical writing is performative (1997, p. 12). Like the performativity of gender, “performative, evocative writing confounds normative distinctions between critical and creative (hard and soft, true and false, masculine and feminine), allying itself with logics of possibility rather than of validity or causality...It shifts the operative social paradigm from the scientific “what if” (what *then?*) to its performative counterpart, “as if” (what *now?*), drawing the reader into a projected im-mediacy that never (mimetically) forgets its own genealogy in performance...it moves *with*, operates alongside, sometimes through, rather than above or beyond...It requires that the writer drop down to a place where words and the world intersect in active interpretation” (Pollack 81). Performative writing challenges the text itself which makes it a perfect, critical vehicle for feminism and social change. “Feminist writing is performative because *it promises and, in the act of promising, brings a feminist future closer*” (Modleski referenced in Phelan 1993, p. 16). When performative writing is performed, the gendered voice can be amplified and be experienced as heretical and empowering (Davis, 1997, p. 9) to the performer and the audience. It “disrupts, mimics, exceeds, and dismantles” the patriarchal (Diamond, 1997, p. 83).

*The Vagina Monologues* performs gender in ways that could refer to Irigaray's concept of "miming the mime." Whether or not that is the intention of Ensler and the groups presenting the play, the academic literature about *The Vagina Monologues* consistently criticizes it for its essentializing tendencies. Could this be read as an intentional presentation of gender performativity? By performing the very aspects of gender expected of women, the play draws attention to the ways in which women are violated and negated/neglected in our society. As stories told by women about their experiences around their gendered identities as women, the monologues are performed by other women in ways that often include over-the-top, stylized mannerisms stereotypical of women. The show is performed each year in communities and universities like Oregon State University in a repetitive action that Butler says can "affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices...that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them" (1990, 201).

#### 1.6 Scene 6: Feminist Theatre

Activist theatre has subtly and overtly influenced feminist theatre. The beginnings of feminist theatre as such burst onto stages, and sidewalks, and government steps, during the Civil Rights and Women's Movement of the mid-twentieth century. Much of early feminist theatre was agit-prop, politically and socially motivated for unpaying audiences that didn't expect to see a performance (Aston, 1999). Productions of feminist theatre in "traditional" theatre spaces have yet to be mainstreamed and theorists maintain that it is important for feminist performance to remain "experimental in style, because dramatic realism [of many theatres] is male-identified and often features

women confined to the private sphere” (Striff, 2005, p. 71). Feminist theatre practitioners have embraced Bertolt Brecht and his confrontation of the confines of theatrical space; feminist theatre often reacts against the fear that moves toward natural observations being accepted as objective and could continue to hold “greater authority than more experiential modes of knowing” (Lee, 1998, p. 168). But if “we take on board the idea that realist theatre attracts a wider audience, perhaps a realist piece carries with it the power to effect change through its popularity (Striff, 2005, p. 71). Like Brecht, *The Vagina Monologues* employs realism techniques at the same time it uses these techniques to disrupt the expected experience.

Theatre that women intentionally create to operate as feminist theatre shares at least four characteristics. Feminist theatre places women’s issues, experiences, and stories on center stage. Women represent themselves as subjects, as practitioners, through the agency and identity of our characters. Feminist theatre re-appropriates the female body, overtly or covertly, in the type of material performed and ways in which the bodies on stage present themselves, the characters, and the story (Aston, 1999). Finally, feminist theatre often challenges the standard ideas of form by employing alternative scripting and staging techniques. *The Vagina Monologues* as a theatrical production, and through V-Day as a college-campaign fundraiser, is part of the feminist theatre legacy as it addresses each of the characteristics.

Re-appropriating the body, while serving feminist functions, also is the cause of criticism when the body is performed as the focal point on stage. What makes a woman? Is it her body? Is it her uterus, her vagina, her children? What do we name women without the requisite part, whatever that part may be for that moment? What do they

name themselves? Naming draws lines around ideas and people. It is through language that we can access the world around us. This is why postmodern writers like Judith Butler and Helene Cixous emphasize words and language. By deliberately playing with the language we use, theorists like Cixous and Mary Daly challenge the structures that oppress us. By placing women on stage, the masculine theatrical domain is challenged. In this way, feminist theatre is activist theatre.

Women-only spaces are important but since many women are “being trained for participation in dominant modes of theatre production, feminist critics and theatremakers need to continue to generate and comment on texts written in the more theatrical or literary tradition” (Dolan, 1996, p. 7). Performance art is one place that women have claimed and has been the subjects of the most prolific feminist theorist writing (Dolan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Goldberg, 1988). Regardless what genre within which women create, we often find ourselves caught in the liminal space between “critics and producers who can reject their creativity and invalidate their artistic expression” and “feminist scholars [who attack the artist] for capitulating to the commercial theatre which, by its very financial motives, panders to mainstream ideology and reinforces the status quo” (Kachur, p. 17).

Feminism as an identity confounds theatrical experiences. Gender questioned is the focus of much theory about feminist theatre. As a site of resistance, margins become visible and often shift in the process of making art (Dolan, 2001, p. 2). In fact, identity becomes crucial in that spectators need the motivation of identification to confirm a drive toward social change (Dolan, 2001), which is what feminist theatre is often purported or expected to perform. Woman and Man are questioned by the physical form an actor

gives a character (Frueh, 2003, p. 147). Feminist theatre plays in the face of the expectations that all parties bring to the space—actors, directors, audience members, producers, and even the text. These expectations can only be partially controlled by the performer and performance text (Diamond, 1997, p. vii).

Both performer and audience practice and develop (at times, unknowingly) theory around the production. Feminist theatre seeks to make women visible in this art form (Aston, 1990) when we have rarely been represented from our own perspectives or in our own voices; “theatre” has been associated with “culture” and “art” which can serve to alienate various populations from thinking that theatre is for them.

Fundamental problems of confronting the dominant, masculine culture are well-documented in the literature and arts discussion, and feminists have a variety of questions around these problems and approaches to resolving them. Power is not easily balanced or overturned (Canning, 2000) but a feminist text and production depends on the performers having a ready supply of “techniques and methods of disturbing” (Aston, 1990) and “troubling” (Butler, 1990) gender available. Recognizing women’s absence from the official historical narratives and providing disruptions to the stage narrative (Nigro, 1994) is one place to begin. Feminists can also examine “multiple perspectives” on myth (de Gay, 2003), refusing to allow the masculine to dominate. Feminist performers place women center-stage and name themselves as subjects (Aston, 1990) often using non-linear presentation like multimedia and a music movement understanding (de Gay 2003; Prendergast, 2003) in productions to evade the framing of closure. Theatre cannot remain static (Franco, 1994) because its very nature demands rewriting (through directors’ and actors’ interpretations) and prevents a capturing of the essence. Even a

performance that is recorded changes its medium and ceases to be a live performance.

Women are present in the mythology and stories that influenced playwrights throughout the centuries but the way they are presented is evidence of how their voices have been marginalized (Langelleer, 1993) and silenced. These characters must be radically rewritten (de Gay, 2003) and placed within a recognition that objectivity is not a single lens (Hart and Phelan, 1993). Seeing ourselves as subjects gives us agency in the systems we seek to change (Case, 1990).

One way women can act as agents is to claim the liminality theatre can provide. (I return to this idea of liminality in 3.10, Act III, Scene 10.) This liminal space is where resistance can begin (Nigro, 1994). Space is not only a metaphorical term but a literal one when applied to the physical stage of a theatre or performance. A subversive portrayal of female characters by actors and directors expand the meanings within texts (Lev-Aladgem, 2003). Language, space, body (Hart and Phelan, 1993), gaps, and silences (de Gay, 2003) that playwrights employ are crucial to the opening up texts and sources.

Women's voices, sexuality and image (Case, 1990) reside in our bodies. The fact that we inhabit a female body creates a space for resistance if we are brave enough to utilize it. The very act of speaking and not merely being spoken for (de Gay, 2003) changes a production to one with women agents. When women smashed the taboo against women writing (Svich, 2004) we claimed the right to write our own history. It is in theatre that flesh embodies words.

In Willis' examination of Cixous' *Portrait of Dora*, she asks what it means for the body to be a spectacle (1990). A woman on stage can be more vulnerable than other

women artists because she appears “nakedly” as the embodiment of her sex. The risk is great but the opportunities for “effecting social change” (Hart, 1993) are greater. Playwright, Ntozake Shange deliberately uses language and alternate staging to challenge the dominant male culture (DeShazer 1989) in her most well-known choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. These techniques have profound implications for an art form that relies on the stage as a place where bodies and voices converge.

Feminist theatre offers ways of including the audience’s participation in a performance. Post-show discussions have been a mainstay for the past forty years (Aston, 1995; de Gay, 2003; Goodman, 2003). These discussions served to further break the silence surrounding the issues in women’s lives. Even when a post-show discussion isn’t offered, feminist theatre engages women audience members in ways that allow them to consider how to tell their own stories (Canning 2000) or how to act with agency in their own lives. Gender analysis in plays provokes questions around what it means to be a woman today (Langellier 1993), and, for actors like Lena Ashwell (Hirshfield 1993) and Eve Ensler, celebrity status helps continue the social discussions outside of the theatre space in the larger community.

These artists demonstrate the collusion of the many ways feminist theatre empowers women. It challenges the masculine concept of what theatre should be, creates space for women to tell our stories, establishes community as it is produced, celebrates women’s bodies, and invites participation by helping the audience see beyond an entertaining night at the theatre.

My direct experience with a community of women in the production of my play, *In the Image of God*, informed my recognition of the liminal space within which women perform during rehearsal and performance. We don't merely memorize lines and blocking; we engage the writer, the source material, the characters and each other as we collaborate for performance. This collaboration does not end in rehearsal; it continues with the audiences that witness the stories performed.

*The Vagina Monologues* enacts a unique place in feminism, theatre, and activism. The historical contexts within which it emerged illuminate the contradictions that exist around the production as a fundraiser each year. While feminists and other theorists point out the difficulty of the essentialism of the text and the problematic politics around individual stories represented, auditions at OSU draw scores of women who passionately identify with the characters or the cause. Audiences flock to the multiple showings in greater numbers as each of the nine years passes raising thousands of dollars (\$4100 in 2007) for the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence. Oregon State University is not alone. The staying power of the performance piece is tapping in to a desire for something in women not adequately named in the literature but present nonetheless.

### 1.7 Scene 7: Theatre and Performance

Theatre. Stage, lights, costumes, actors, script. "THE-A-TUH." Theatre is created when performers and an audience share space and time together. Since Aristotle's time more than 2000 years ago, practitioners have been writing about performance on the stage. "Actors and writers drew a circle around the crowd and put a show in the middle" (Deavere Smith, 1995). Theatre is one of the unique arts that captivates the creator and the viewer simultaneously. Theatre is about voice (Clark,

2004), “a common metaphoric language” (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 304), and a “catalyst of social transformation” (Fraden, 2003, p. 15). Theatre reacts “to outside pressures...[it] is not made in a vacuum” (Salzar, 1995). Whether it reflects society at a particular moment in time or challenges that society depends on the author and the producers of the show.

The legitimization of theatre began with “the establishment of the author” (Paterson, 1991, p. 51). When players became actors and when festival-driven performance gave way to the institution of the theatre, the social function of theatre was defined (Paterson, 1991, p. 51). Today, “theater remains a site to which people travel to view and/or experience something together” (Dolan, 2001, p. xx). The common experience is explored in this thesis through the literature on audiences and the experiences of Oregon State University audiences at *The Vagina Monologues*. Audiences become the characters in the story when theatre works (Clark, 2004, p. 105).

Theatre for the dominant culture is highly professional. It is often believed that “only professional writers can compose profound stories, and only rehearsed actors and musicians can tell them” (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 292). This is a far cry from the earliest theatre—stories re-enacted by the community told around fires during sacred and festival times, the telling of myths and legends held sacred. Anna Deavere Smith in the forward to her script *Fires in the Mirror* agrees, “the standard for excellence is still a Eurocentric theater written by and for white men. Who else can participate? How? Does it mean new plays? Does it mean rethinking old plays? The mirrors of society do not mirror society” (1993, p. xxviii). Ensler, in the tradition of feminist playwrights and directors, challenges this androcentric model of the theatre and stretches the theatrical space to privilege women’s stories and voices. In doing so, she and the OSU Health Promotions

staff believe that theatre has the “power to illuminate our connectedness as human beings” (Clark, 2004, p. 105).

Theatre as an art form arguably needs an audience to complete the form. But performance remains a text without an audience to render the results into a theatrical experience. It is the immediacy and the “now-ness” of theatre that makes it a unique art form, that makes it performance. Even in performance art, which melds the two media of performance and art, requires an audience to “illuminate...[the] simultaneously intensely personal and immensely vast and impersonal” (Phelan, 1993, p. 574). It is this public space that emphasizes the intersubjectivity of the form (Phelan, 1997). In fact, performance art exists only in the moments of performance and “works against...the commodification of the art object and the socio-economic and psychic violence the object often fosters” (Phelan, 1997, p. 29) making it a favorite genre within which women and feminists create.

The desire of artists to take their art directly to the public helped to shape performance art as a legitimate, if often misunderstood, art form (Goldberg, 1988). Performance art’s rise coincided with the Women’s Movement of the 1960s and 70s and has been a location for many women artists to express themselves and their politics. Shock has a revered status in this field. Performance appeals to the public directly, in the moment, “shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture” (Goldberg, 1988, p. 8). *The Vagina Monologues* banks on the recognition that vaginas (and stories about them) are shocking!

Performance in theatre occurs in a public space. This public space elucidates an important connection with feminist theory that reminds us of women’s occupancy of the

home, the private spaces in society. By presenting herself in public space, woman demands that she be a subject (de Beauvoir, 1952); she demands that her voice be heard. She refuses to have someone else, particularly a man, speak for her.

What is so special about live performance? The closeness offers the audience immediacy and directness (Jackson, 1997, p. 228) and the power of words spoken aloud. When individuals “become” the Other, activism begins (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 304). In a live performance, an actor literally becomes another person; the audience vicariously experiences this transformation thus participating in the activism. Aristotle, the first Western theatre theorist, identified catharsis as an integral part of the theatrical experience. Although contemporary audiences and theatre practitioners understand catharsis in a less spiritual or religious way than did the ancient Greeks, experiencing the emotions and actions of a character through attending a play serves to allow society to witness the worst in humanity and to imagine the best.

The creation of and experience of theatre “are united through the act of playing, through the mutual contact between performer and spectator within the theatrical event” (Sauter, 2002, p. 128). It is the very possibility of transformation, that motivate the actor and the spectator alike (Phelan, 1997, p. 575). Jill Dolan describes it as “thinking through performance as an embodied relationship to history and power” (2001, p. 74). Performance exists in the liminal space between reality and the staged reality (Kapsais, 1997, p. 5). Its power resides in the public presentation of material that is at times intimate and private (Bell and Reverby, 2005, p. 434).

The bridge between the real and the staged is crossed by the artists—the writer, director, actors, designers. “The artist gives us the allowance to imagine things another

way” (Deavere Smith, 1993, p. 6). Smith believes that the “artist brings a certain health—and particularly a psychological health and balance—to society, even when the works of art communicate bad news and that darker parts of nature and human values” (Deavere Smith, 1993, p. 96). It brings out the best in people even when it is feared that it might bring out (or even cause) the worst (Deavere Smith, 1993, p. 128-129).

### 1.8 Scene 8: Audience

The performance must be attended by an audience to be a theatrical event (Sauter, 2002, p. 127). Without an audience, theatre would not exist, and yet, audience is perhaps the most understudied aspect of theatre studies (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 289) and is often seen in direct opposition to the performance itself (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 291). “The theatre audience is there to imagine what it must have felt like for the victim and perpetrator, and why what happened took place” (Fraden, 2003, p. 22). Audiences make theatre a shared experience.

Why then, is audience research difficult and rarely undertaken? The challenges in audience studies include “a privileging of performing over audiencing, lack of sophisticated language and procedures, distrust of positivist methods and the positing of a harmonious audience, a similar distrust of speaking for marginalized audience members, and a hegemonic privileging of dichotomies” (Park-Fuller, 2003, 304). Each of these challenges is complicated by imprecise research techniques and the two distinct areas which can be studied.

Audience research studies those who attend a particular performance; reception research studies how the audience perceives and experiences the performance (Sauter, 2002, p. 116). Audience research is understandably the easier research to conduct. Many

theatres conduct this type of survey research to find out who attends a particular theatre, what kinds of shows they enjoy, and other basic demographic information. Reception research is more difficult and cumbersome to conduct. Fyodorov conducted one of the “earliest known empirical studies of theatre audiences” in the early twentieth century, noting reactions of the audience “ranging from absolute silence to assaulting the stage” (Sauter, 2002, p. 116). Current methods include “observation, asking questions, interactions with unknown people” (Schoenmakers and Tulloch, 2004, p.15). Park-Fuller problematizes these methods; “how do we ask audience members to articulate changes in awareness about social issues as they view a given production without, on one hand, prejudicing them through language that may lead to a presumed response or, on the other, resorting to simplistic questions that prompt only a ‘yes, no, or sort of’ response and tells us very little?” (2003, p. 290). She goes on to question the “lack of innovative procedures for gathering information so that audience members can observe themselves in audiencing situations.” Quantitative methodology remains the obvious and most utilized method when studying audiences, reception, and social change (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 290).

Audiences are “possibly the most marginalized element of the performance process (Park-Fuller, 2003, p. 291) and are known to attend “plays which speak directly to one issue and confirm to their existing views” (Salzar, 1995). Contemporary performance theory sees audience as co-creators in performance but struggles to answer whether and to what extent the event manages to go “beyond being the one-way transmission of a message...Did the audience learn anything that mattered to them?” (Jackson, 1997, p. 227). What exactly is the audience’s role “during and at the edges of a

performance” (Jackson, 1997, p. 232)? The audience does not merely interact with the performers during the show; Deavere Smith recognizes that when the audience speaks, “they are talking as much to each other as to me” (1993, p. xxxviii). Theorists agree; audiencing is a complex endeavor.

One study “revealed that audiences reacted quite differently to unorthodox productions than to traditionally staged ones because their expectations were subverted” (Olsen, 2002, p. 261). Audiences have been shown to favor the quality of the acting, giving it higher evaluations than the whole performance (Sauter, 2002, p. 126). The status of the company and the venue take precedence over the actual, individual performance attended (Sauter, 2002, p. 119). Sauter notes a greater difference in reception of performances between a 17-year-old and a 25-year-old than the 25-year-old and a 50-year-old (118) in her research. This should serve as a warning when sending youngsters to “performances for educational reasons” (Sauter, 2002, p. 118). Educational theatre is a unique forum for performance and certainly informs *The Vagina Monologues*’ presence on college campuses every February.

“Spectatorship is not neutral...Access to spectatorship is restricted by class, race, and ...gender...this is significant in considering not only the theatre itself, but the area around the theatre that gives access to the theatre” (Gardner, 2000, p. 28). Theatrical surveys are regularly employed by theatres to gauge who the audience is and what they most enjoy attending. Theatre is a process “which starts long before the theatrical event and which prevails long after the last curtain falls” (Sauter, 2002, p. 120). Surveys assist practitioners in determining the direction of this process. The utilitarian purpose of surveys contributes to marketing campaigns, developing policies, justifying public and

private grants (Sauter, 2002, p. 117). Surveys confirm that audiences rarely include great numbers of working-class people and when they are, it is at “musicals, revues and other genres referred to as light entertainment” (Sauter, 2002, p. 117). People are more likely to attend if a friend invites them (Sauter, 2002, p. 118), female attendees tend to be more positive about productions they attend, and “Caucasian married couples constituted the most common attendees. Audience members are more likely to complete a survey comprised of closed-ended questions and when the surveys are handed directly to an individual (Olsen, 2002, p. 263).

### 1.9 Scene 9: Activist Theatre

Feminism’s history is intimately connected with activism. The very act of consciousness-raising (CR) was the foundation of the belief in the “personal is political” tenet of the movement that some writers believe developed “as a way to insist that all women were the same, regardless of their background” (Striff, 2005, p. 79). Whatever the impetus for its integration in the women’s movement, CR found a home in feminist theatre. The rehearsal process itself can become a consciousness-raising event and many “feminist theatre collectives and members shared what they learned in the groups with their audience (Scott, 2003, p. 412), though Scott suspects that the limitations of long-range effectiveness of CR contributes to the “brief lifespans of most of the women’s theatre groups” (2003, p. 412). Like audience research, little has been studied about the long term effectiveness of CR in the feminist movement.

The entrance of activist theatre onto contemporary stages coincides with the entrance of other theatre forms that questioned some of the traditional theatrical models such as the three act structure and realism. Male artists like Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy

Grotowski worked to break the barriers between the actors and the audience and influenced upcoming generations of theatre practitioners. Education theorist, Paulo Friere inspired Augusto Boal to create the Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil during the 1960s. Boal began creating activist theatre pieces to give voice to the common workers and offer a place to practice alternative ways of problem solving and confronting a system of oppressors seen to be out of touch with the population (Boal, 1979). Boal's influence can be seen in many contemporary activist theatre practitioners. Artists crossed oceans to collaborate with artists from different theatrical traditions (Bogart, 2001), the peace movement in the 60s and 70s utilized a confluence of theatrical forms to protest war and environmental degradation (Bread and Puppet Theatre) and Luis Valdez' Teatro Campesino inspired an influx of borderland artists in the 80s and 90s to create performance art and theatre that included music, food, visual art, poetry in order to question policies affecting immigrant populations.

Theatre can provide a respite for people caught in social or political circumstances and often transforms into a piece of activism by the organizers of the event or the participants. Women imprisoned as political dissidents in 1970s Argentina recreated remembered theatrical productions as a form of resistance (Taylor, 2001) while in prison. They found costumes and make-up and performed under the guards' very noses and retained a sense of their own humanity by speaking lines written by Shakespeare and storytellers within their own heritage. Following their release, these women rejected individual therapy as a viable way to deal with the experience. Instead, they hired a playwright who listened to their stories and crafted a piece of theatre that recognized their experiences in prison and the importance of their community as it developed within the

prison walls. Women in the prison industrial complex in the United States have also found a liberation in theatre classes, workshops, and performances (Fraden, 2001; Trounstine, 2001; Warner, 2004).

“Theatre that sets out to educate a specific audience in a specific context may also be art, and it will only do so effectively if it is also artistic” (Jackson, 1997, p. 51). Theatre professors can teach the connection between educational theatre (often the “high art” theatre) and the ways communities use theatre at the local level. In this way, “university theatres may be places where key political and social issues are worked out” (Dolan, 2001, p. 55). Activism in the university classroom can begin with professors sponsoring students’ choices, teaching “that performance is always a pleasurable and dangerous accountability—not to ‘certainties’ in the text, or to authorial intention, or to canonical tradition, but—to the ‘spin’ on it” (Bell, E, 1998, p. 59). Theatre is a place of doing rather than thinking (Dolan, 2001, p. 1), and this coincides with a key component of activism.

Feminist theorist bell hooks recognizes the power of performance in resistance work. “Whenever we choose performance as a site to build communities of resistance, we must be able to shift paradigms and styles of performance in a manner that centralizes to decolonisation of black minds” (1995, p. 219). Performance does not require “the material resources demanded by other art forms” (211) and can therefore be a place of transgression (220), a “democratic cultural terrain” (211), a place to reclaim “subjected knowledge and historical memory” (220), and be “designed to disrupt mainstream white sensibilities” (219). hooks goes on to remind us of the importance of dialogue in determining “the impact of the live act and where performance can be interrogated to see

what works as meaningful intervention” (220). Performance requires constant discussion to produce and to engage an audience.

As the research with OSU’s audience suggest, individuals often approach attendance at the show and performing in the show as a rite of passage and as an intentional participation in anti-violence activism. These results are discussed below in 3.9 and 3.10 (Act III, Scenes 9 and 10).

#### 1.10 Scene 10: The Place of Story

The potential for activist theatre to be therapeutic is lauded even as its true effectiveness is questioned. Phelan examines how mourning is performed: “In this mimicry, loss itself helps transform the repetitive force of trauma and might bring about a way to overcome it” (1997, p. 12). Rhodessa Jones incorporates directors, social workers and counselors into her workshops in the San Francisco county prison that houses the Medea Project (Fraden, 2001). She incorporates the women’s stories into retellings of myths creating not only a theatrical production, but a place for the women to speak their stories out loud, to be comforted and at times challenged. Fraden, who has studied Jones’ work, points out that in “Greek tragedy, the violence mostly happens offstage, while the stage becomes the place to make sense of it; there are explanations, though usually not repentance” (2003, 10). There is little evidence that the experiences of women creating a Medea Project show truly help release the women from the “old selves.” It remains difficult and therefore understudied aspect of performance.

Individual stories remind us that this is often an individual journey. Maya Angelou shares her story of recovering her voice—and with it her sanity, her capacity to face reality—by learning to perform (hooks, 1995, p. 212). More recently, the Standing

Tall project in New York City schools for students following 9/11, began “not as an agenda to be followed, but as a healing, creative process” (Ebert, 2002, p. 15). These personal stories often form the outline for art. Angelou uses her experiences in her fiction and poetry; Ensler reports “stories that I have heard that I have turned into literary matter” (Roark, p. 36). “Sometimes telling the story is the only thing that makes it all right” (Suzan Lori-Parks quoted in Elam and Raynor, 1998). Indeed, “Feminist revolution enlarges with every telling of women’s truths, and trauma can be a tool for transformation” (Frueh, 2003, p. 142). The individual stories can be a way to initiate discussion about the larger culture within which women live (Chen, 2004). Phelan believes that good critical writing is performative (1997, p. 12). Postmodernism denies a binary explanation:

Performative, evocative writing confounds normative distinctions between critical and creative (hard and soft, true and false, masculine and feminine), allying itself with logics of possibility rather than of validity or causality...It shifts the operative social paradigm from the scientific “what if” (what *then?*) to its performative counterpart, “as if” (what *now?*), drawing the reader into a projected im-mediacy that never (mimetically) forgets its own genealogy in performance...it moves *with*, operates alongside, sometimes through, rather than above or beyond...It requires that the writer drop down to a place where words and the world intersect in active interpretation” (Pollack 81).

Performative writing challenges the text itself which makes it a perfect, critical vehicle for feminism and social change. “Feminist writing is performative because *it promises and, in the act of promising, brings a feminist future closer*” (Modleski referenced in Phelan 1993, p. 16, italics in original). Feminist writing is not merely a record, it is a *manifesta* for change.

French feminists have written extensively on woman’s body and embodiment (Davis, 1997, p. 9). Cixous’ cry for *l’écriture féminine*, for woman to “write her body,”

is profoundly felt in feminist performance which often “demonstrate[s] that feminine embodiment is not simply oppressive but can be heretical and even empowering as well” (Davis, 1997, p. 9). It “disrupts, mimics, exceeds, and dismantles” the patriarchal (Diamond, 1997, p. 83).

How do women perform a voice that is not theirs? The dangers include perpetuating the marginalization and eroticizing of women who are traditionally “othered” by society and perhaps by the performer. Carilli offers the guideline that if it is for the purpose of exposing the marginalization, and giving voice to these narratives, then it is an exercise in “understanding rather than an expression of ego” (1998). All performance, (excepting autobiographical performance) demands speaking in a voice that is not one’s own. A quality of performance is this very act of putting on another skin and another voice to examine facets of human experience.

#### 1.11 Scene 11: *The Vagina Monologues* Literature

The published writing about *The Vagina Monologues* enacts as much drama as the staged monologues themselves. Functioning as a popular culture mainstay in the United States, *The Vagina Monologues* has elicited a multitude of writings, including theatre reviews in regional newspapers, op-ed pieces, and feature articles in news and popular magazines as any Google search will show. The academic literature about the play and V-Day is no less dramatic. Covering a range of issues in a variety of journals, *The Vagina Monologues* sparks controversy and passion in the authors’ examinations of the theatrical, activist event that is V-Day.

The themes emerging from this academic discourse are varied but tend to focus attention around several broad topics including charges of essentialism, anatomy and the

body politic, and the influence of the women's health movement of the sixties and seventies. Few of the authors make explicit the distinctions between *The Vagina Monologues* as a text and *The Vagina Monologues* as a performance piece integral to V-Day fundraising efforts. This oversight obfuscates the differences through which text and performance operate (Hammers, 2006). Only one of the authors is published in a theatre/performance journal (Scott, 2003), and she does not specifically address the activist theatre framework in which the play currently functions.

The strongest criticism to emerge is that *The Vagina Monologues* (text and performance) is essentialist in its conflation of woman (whatever "she" may be) with her body or vagina as a body part (Cheng, 2004; Hall, 2005; Hammers, 2006; Renshaw, 2004; Scott, 2003). Essentialism is a serious charge for the myriad of ways it prevents women from defining ourselves apart from our bodies. Closely related to the essentialism concern is the inaccuracy of anatomical naming in the play (Hall, 2005; Hammers, 2006; Renshaw, 2004). The vagina serves as a catch-all term to refer to the actual vagina, the clitoris, the labia, the uterus. The academic frustration with this imprecise terminology does not acknowledge the license necessary in an artistic representation limited by a finite time on stage. Ensler, in fact, uses the word vagina intentionally, even though it is imprecise, as a political and artistic strategy to reclaim the word and its place in public vernacular (Roark).

*The Vagina Monologues* have been placed in an artistic timeline of feminist reclamation of "woman's" body. This timeline includes Judy Chicago's Dinner Party of 1976 (Bell and Reverby, 2005; Hammers, 2006), Annie Sprinkle's "Post Porn Modernism" (Hammers, 2005) and Betty Dodson's "Vagina Workshops" (Bell and

Reverby, 2006). The style of *The Vagina Monologues* is compared and contrasted with Anna Deveare Smith's method of reproducing interviews on stage (Bell and Reverby, 2005), and Hall even wishes for a Guerilla Grrls intervention to address some of these criticisms (2004)!

The "second wave" health movement is acknowledged as a source of inspiration as well as a forgotten and neglected period of feminist history for women presenting *The Vagina Monologues* in the twenty-first century (Beausoleil, 2003; Bell and Reverby, 2005; Hammers, 2006; Scott, 2003). A refrain emerges from women who were involved in the women's health movement that women today don't, or choose not to, pay homage to the work done by women thirty years ago (Bell and Reverby, 2005; Scott, 2003) illuminating a generational (and more) divide between the so-called "second wave" and "third wave" feminists.

While *The Vagina Monologues* varies a little from year to year, it remains vulnerable to substantial criticism of heteronormativity (Hammers, 2006; Renshaw, 2004) and compulsory heterosexuality (Hall, 2005). Most of the monologues are heterosexual women's stories and those that are not continue to place lesbians at the margins of discourse through their portrayals as sex workers (in "The Woman Who Liked to Make Vaginas Happy") and child molesters (in "The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could"). Hall goes on to elucidate the ableism inherent in a monologue (no longer included in the performance script) about a woman born without a vagina who finds completeness only after she is surgically given one.

Similar concerns are raised around race and transworld women. The scenes containing the most violence are often the scenes with the most "othered" women (Striff,

2005). The scenes that include non-white women are often portrayed by white women (Renshaw, 2004) and when new issues are raised, new monologues are added in an “add woman and stir” strategy (Bell and Reverby, 2005; Hall, 2005) that can perpetuate the very stereotypes meant to be challenged by the new monologue. These monologues are often optional pieces that the director can include or not at her own discretion (i.e. “Say It: For the Comfort Women” and “Crooked Braid”).

One scene that is not an optional piece and elicits some of the strongest criticism, is “The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could” (Renshaw, 2004; Striff, 2003; and writers in the popular media). Ensler did alter the age of the main character from thirteen to sixteen but has left the scene otherwise unchanged in spite of the criticisms. This scene is mentioned and/or discussed by almost every participant and is further examined in 3.2 (Act III, Scene 2).

Because *The Vagina Monologues* is experienced as a theatrical production, even articles which do not include a discussion of theatre theory still attempt to discuss casting (Beausoleil, 2003; Bethman, 2003; Scott, 2003). The cast experiences consciousness-raising through rehearsals, even when directors require few rehearsals (Striff, 2005) and through the confrontation of adversity the show often inspires on campuses and in communities (Bethman, 2003). Cast members often relish in the show’s power to shock (Bell and Reverby, 2005) and experience a sense of community through the preparation for and performance of *The Vagina Monologues* before an audience. The question of whether or not raising money is enough of a reason to continue producing the play is raised (Bethman, et. al., 2003; Scott, 2003).

Art functions on multiple levels and in live performance; these levels are often experienced simultaneously. The monologues' ability to disrupt semantic closure is perplexing to theorists who want a neatly packaged piece that promotes "appropriate" theory and activism. *The Vagina Monologues* functions as Marilyn Frye's "speech act" in providing voice for women's stories and experiences. As such, it potentially becomes a consciousness-raising act for performers and audience alike through Aristotle's description of theatre as catharsis. The personal stories become political through performance.

None of the published academic articles include research conducted on audience or reception at a production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Several refer to personal observation by the author of audience reactions such as standing ovations or crying during particular scenes or moments. Without this research, the academic writing remains based in rhetorical analysis of the script itself and the personal experiences of the authors as performers or audience members.

## 2 Act II: Methods

*The Vagina Monologues* is itself a feminist document that has received ample rhetorical criticism through the lens of feminism in previous research. This study examines how *The Vagina Monologues* provides the space for "women [to discover] their own experience as they speak" (Reinharz 189). This space for women to speak is mirrored by the women in the audience who identify with, or can speak to a different perspective about, the stories acted out on the stage. Reinharz identifies the "potentially politicizing impact of both processes" (1992, p. 189).

## 2.1 Scene 1: Research Strategy

For *The Vagina Monologues* audience study, multiple research strategies are employed. I first employ the ethnography of participant observation through my participation as a cast member able to observe rehearsals and performances firsthand (Atkinson and Hammersley). This study is informed by the performance ethnography (Alexander, 2005) of audience surveys and interviews. Multiple perspectives are necessary to discover the layers of meaning *The Vagina Monologues* imbues and the interpretation of these meanings by the audience and the producers of the show because the play is experienced in multiplicity as a written text, rehearsal, performance, social action and a theatre production.

Performance ethnographer, Bryant Keith Alexander outlines five ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a theatre production like *The Vagina Monologues* as a performance ethnography: content, reflexivity, expression of reality, form, and impact (2005, p. 430). Do the intentions of the production actually occur? Why do the actors and producers perform? Do the performances reflect reality as understood by those involved? Is the form of the play well-crafted as a theatrical piece? How the impact is felt and evaluated by the various individuals involved (2005, p. 428-430)? Using the data gathered through performance ethnography in staged re-enactments (Alexander, 2005) is not realized in this project, but the perspective is valuable to situate bodies as sites for making meaning as story-tellers and interview participants.

Alexander's questions provide the basis for additional orienting questions to be explored by this research. *The Vagina Monologues* has become institutionalized; it is produced every year, around the same time. To understand the audience's perception of

the message and efficacy of the production, it is important to also examine how the staff and cast understand the “mission” of the production and how this is conveyed to the cast and the public. The efficacy of the V-Day event over the course of the years it has been produced can be traced by the methods examined below. The production has altered considerably from its original presentations and must be examined as an evolving phenomenon and not a static text. This study identifies how the production has evolved and the positive and negative impacts of this evolution on the campus and feminism in general.

Some of the questions examined include: Is there a point when an institutionalized event, like *The Vagina Monologues*, loses its efficacy because it is not new and original? Is there a place for OSU to put its unique stamp on the event to keep it current and vital? How do audience members receive the message of *The Vagina Monologues*? Is this reception shaped by the intentions of the staff that produces the production? Is this reception shaped by the anti-Monologues verbal and written discourse on campus? Do men and women see the production differently? How has OSU’s presentation of the play changed throughout its history on campus? How does this connect to, reflect or counter the national discourse around the play? Does the institutionalization of the play dilute the message? How can *The Vagina Monologues* spark new performances, new art and renewed activism around the issue of violence against women? These are a few of the questions explored in this research.

I participate in this production and in this research because I believe that art opens a space for dialogue and as expected, many of the study participants agree. Arts-based research seeks to connect “activist movements in art and research...by intertextual

reading” (Finley, 2005, p. 686). This intertextuality between the script, director, cast members, audience, and interview participants informs much of my approach to this material. As a feminist, I chose this topic because it coincides with my interest in arts activism and women as subjects of art, research, and our own stories (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992).

The surveys, while providing basic data, are largely unsatisfying to me as a qualitative researcher. They are helpful in confirming that the smaller interview sample seems to be representative of those who completed the surveys, but very often weren't able to uncover what I (as well as the academic authors writing about *The Vagina Monologues*) want to know, for instance, how people integrate the problematic scenes into their understanding of the world and entry into activism.

## 2.2 Scene 2: Data Collection

Data collection for this project is likewise multi-method and multi-leveled. Surveys and interviews make up the bulk of the data collection. These interviews are recorded conversations around semi-structured questions with individual cast members, audience members and producers of V-Day. To ensure that enough male respondents were interviewed, a male colleague interviewed a focus group of five male athletes in the hope that they would be more candid than they would be with me as a female researcher.

Audience members were given a short nine-question survey with the program in 2006 (see Appendix A). The survey provided the respondents the opportunity to provide their e-mail addresses if they were interested in participating in a future interview. I contacted each of these audience members by e-mail and conducted interviews with individuals between October 2006 and January 2007. I also contacted cast members and

conducted these interviews in the same time frame. To round out the interview phase, I interviewed the two directors of *The Vagina Monologues*, a theatre professor, two Student Health staff members and the former producer of the production. At the interviews (see Appendix B for the Interview Questions), participants completed a longer survey questionnaire (see Appendix C). In 2007, I conducted a longer survey that included the same nine questions as the 2006 survey as well as the additional questions about theatre and violence awareness and prevention to which the interviewees responded (See Appendix D).

I conducted all the individual interviews myself, primarily in offices on campus. Tucker Readdy, a PhD candidate and colleague conducted the focus group with five male student-athletes as an attempt to over-sample for men who do not necessarily identify as feminist allies (as most of the men in the study do). His assistance was valuable in helping the men relax and talk in a way they might not have if I had been there, but I recognize that the questions were occasionally asked and/or explained in different ways than the other participants experienced the interviews. My undergraduate research assistant, Molly Statham, coded and ran all the survey statistical data and Wendy Peterman transcribed most of the interviews. We engaged in several discussions about themes Wendy saw emerging as she listened to the interviews. Molly provided ideas for cross-tabulation of the quantitative data.

### 2.3 Scene 3: Participants

In 2006, approximately 2500 people attended the production and 610 participants over eighteen completed the survey. Eighty-three percent of these participants identify as

Caucasian and sixty percent are first-time attendees. As expected, more attendees are women (81.5%) and more attendees are students (just under 60%).

From these surveys, I received 125 e-mail addresses to whom I sent a request for an interview to explore their reactions and thoughts about the show. I also sent an e-mail to cast members and personalized e-mails to producers of the show. From these, eight female audience members, nine male audience members, one individual self-identifying as “other,” two men who have not seen the show, five cast members (all of whom had also seen the show another year), five female producers and one male producer participated in the interview process. The interviewees are primarily in their 20s and 30s with two older producers and one older actor. Of these interviewees, two women and three men are people of color. This presents a serious limitation in the study but illuminates not only the limited diversity of the OSU community but also the issues brought up in the play through the characters’ stories as discussed in the results. Another identifiable limitation is that I did not ask about sexual identity. Three of the women alluded to a transgender or lesbian identity prohibiting a fuller discussion of heterosexism outside a heterosexual context. The men often discussed girlfriends or wives but no one mentioned a boyfriend. Most participants selected a pseudonym to be used when writing about their responses and comments. All but one of the cast members and all of the producers elected to use their actual names.

Conducting a lengthier survey at the 2007 performances yielded similar results. Eighty-five percent of the 484 respondents identify as Caucasian. Again, more attendees are women (79.5%) and more attendees are students (62.5%).



### 3 Act III: Results and Discussion

Setting: Valentine's Day has traditionally been a day to demonstrate feelings of love and affection for one's sweetheart. In 1998, a theatrical movement took hundreds of college campuses by storm and offered a new way for American college students to celebrate the day and provides audience and cast members with a unique experience that I will argue is an alternative rite of passage, particularly for young adults. V-Day, an international movement to end violence against women and girls emerged out of an existing theatre production of Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*. The "V" stands not only for Valentine's Day, the calendar time during which the college campaigns take place, but also for Vaginas and Victory over Violence against women and girls ([www.v-day.org](http://www.v-day.org)).

#### 3.1 Scene 1: *The Vagina Monologues* at Oregon State University

This research examines the response of the Oregon State University (OSU) audience to the production of *The Vagina Monologues* as theatre and as an activist event. As part of the examination of the audience, I will explore the monologues and other production moments mentioned by the participants during the course of my interviews. The scenes most often mentioned relate in a variety of ways to the beliefs with which our society views sexuality, vaginas, violence, and the gendered behavior around sexuality, vaginas and violence.

Hundreds of columns and op-ed pieces in community, university and national newspapers and magazines have been written over the past ten years, many without ever printing the whole word, "vagina" (Google search for *Vagina Monologues*.) In addition to this journalism, over a dozen academic articles have been penned around themes of

*The Vagina Monologues* and the V-Day event. None of these articles examines how audiences receive, perceive, or are motivated by the performances on college campuses. Part of this can be explained by the inclusion of celebrities in professional productions that garner a substantial amount of press and a tendency for journalists and researchers to focus on the inflammatory textual material that provides plenty of fodder for rhetorical and social criticism. I suggest that it also is the result of inadequate theatre audience survey instruments that often require an increased time investment to administer (Sauter), as well as the liminal space the V-Day event occupies as a “counter-cultural” movement that intersects in unique ways with mainstream culture. At Oregon State University, it is sponsored by the student health violence prevention offices with other groups on campus participating at various levels of involvement, from advertising to offering extra credit for attendance. The production occupies a further liminal space at OSU as a theatrical show not associated with the theatre department, about women’s issues without the official involvement of the women studies academic program (and little unofficial involvement) aside from occasional attendance at the show and yet it has been produced for the past eight years with ever-increasing audience attendance.

It is within this liminality that *The Vagina Monologues* transforms from a text written from the standpoint of the individual women sharing their stories with Ensler to a postmodern, “Third Wave” feminist movement that offers entrance to the production at various levels for various motivations. A postmodern performativity informs the ways *The Vagina Monologues* subverts the mainstream by being mainstreamed on college campuses.

While the audience members who completed the survey provided important data (i.e. the ratio of men to women who attend and how many are attending for the first time) it was often just as interesting to examine the comments that were hand-written in on the survey forms. This information is admittedly anecdotal and provided by those willing to take the extra time to write -in comments, but it mirrors the interview data, indicating the possibility that the details about which one takes the time to write are the moments remembered after a period of time elapses.

The survey responses show that 67.7% and 75.8% of women and 50% and 59.8% of the men identify as feminists (2006 and 2007 respectively) confirming the belief of many participants that the show is “preaching to the choir.” Survey participants were welcome to circle all responses that applied but this does create questions around what response might be the most important to a given respondent. In 2006 more audience members attended the performance because it looked interesting than any other reason (39%). Twenty-six percent of respondents attended with a friend, and another 26% knew someone in the cast. In 2007, the interest factor (33.3%) and attending because the audience member knows someone in the cast (33.5%) were the top reasons marked. Men and women were just as likely to attend to see a friend or acquaintance perform both years.

One of the most interesting statistics from the survey data is that 55% of 2006 attendees and 50% of 2007 attendees viewed the production as both art and entertainment. In 2006, however, only 26.3% thought that the production was feminist activism. This percentage jumped to 56.6% in 2007. Why did this number jump so much? One reason might be that the second year’s survey is twice as long and fewer

people completed it (610 versus 484). Those willing to complete a longer survey are likely to be audience members willing to invest extra time, but another reason could be the changes made by the new 2007 coordinator to increase the publicity and to include stronger educational information about the fundraising and activism intent of the production.

Surveys completed in 2006 indicate that audience members will most remember the entertaining performances (49%) and the new knowledge learned (40.5%). Another 26% was inspired to participate in other activism. In 2007, 43% agreed that the memory will be the entertainment, whereas 33.9% will remember the new knowledge and 33.3% are encouraged to participate in activism.

Since the interviews were conducted eight months after the production, audience participants commented on the scenes and moments they remembered after a time lapse. While this could be a limitation of the research, I believe it holds significance to elucidate what are the more lasting memories than the immediate responses would provide. For instance, interview participants had ready responses to the question, “what did you learn about women and/or vaginas that you didn’t already know?” lending credence to the survey responses that the new information would be remembered. Director Anne Bogart served as the artist-in-residence at the Actors Theatre of Louisville for four years in the late 1990s and incorporated the audience into productions in unprecedented ways. One finding from a survey of audience response shocked the theatre’s staff: 30% of the participants said that they actively think about live theatrical performances for a year or longer (Wegener, 2005, p. 79). This was months longer than the artists expected and

influenced a renewed respect for and interaction with the audience. Feminist theatre theorist, Jill Dolan believes that in theatre:

people destabilized by difference can speak and be spoken to, be touched by and touch. Theater can be a mobile unit in a journey across new geographies, a place that doesn't center the discourse in white male hegemony, but a space that can be filled and moved, by and to the margins, perpetually decentered as it explores various identity configurations of production and reception. University theater, in particular, has the potential to teach spectators how to be moved by difference, to encourage them to experience emotion not as acquiescent, but as passionate, and motivating toward social change. (2001, p. 84)

Activism hopes to initiate permanent change in individuals around social issues (Boal, 1979) and motivate action on the parts of the participants, in this case, a theatre audience.

Four interview participants went on to audition for the 2007 production and the percentage of survey participants who said they would audition went from 6.9% to 9.9% in 2007. The director, Kimberly Gifford Wear, confirms that watching the show inspires women to audition, "a lot of people write on their [audition] forms that the reason that they're auditioning is that they saw the performance and they wanted to do it. They saw it and thought, 'I can do that. I want to be a part of that.'" Four of the audience members who participated in the interviews auditioned for and performed in the 2007 production.

The women perform in approximately twenty scenes, many of which include introductions and three are group scenes in which everyone can participate. As part of the interview, I asked participants what scene they most remembered, what scene made them uncomfortable, what scene made them cry, what scene made them want to stop the violence, and what scene was missing. Their responses coincide with some of the academic writers and some scenes are remembered for their sheer outrageousness.

### 3.2 Scene 2: The Scenes Themselves

The interviews with women last longer than the ones with men and the women respond more in-depth to the questions asked and offer more personal information. The three scenes mentioned most often by women were “Angry Vagina” (“Angry”), “The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could” (“Coochi”), and “Say It: For The Comfort Women” (“Comfort”) which was written for the 2006 V-Day campaign to highlight the Spotlight focus for the year. Two survey respondents also wrote in “Angry” and “Comfort.” Men also mentioned these scenes but more often discussed the showing of the DVD (only one woman mentioned the DVD and several didn’t even remember it) and four men but no women commented on the “What Would Your Vagina Say?” (“Say”) scene during which the cast took turns to individually share what their vaginas would say in two words.

“Angry” is a rant. “My vagina’s furious and it needs to talk...An army of people out there thinking up ways to torture my poor-ass, gentle, loving vagina” (Ensler, 1998, p. 69). The monologue continues through a description of tampons, gynecology appointments, deodorants, and French ticklers. The actor performed passionately and was described by Madeline as the scene that stood out to her:

when she was yelling and gets really passionate about like, ‘I’m tired of being called this or that or the other.’ Partly because the person was so strong and so confident in that role. I don’t remember who it was. It was very in your face, but in such a positive way. Like, she didn’t make it real like, ‘I’m punishing people for saying these things,’ it was just more shedding those names, that persona. Coming out, stepping forward, powerful, confident, engaging, exciting, positive. Yeah. She...was really funny, which helps.

The energetic and not-your-typical-“feminine” approach impressed audience members by the humor wrought from anger.

“Coochi” is one woman’s memories of her vagina, called “coochi snorcher” by her mother. “My coochi snorcher is a very bad place, a place of pain, nastiness,

punching, invasion, and blood” (Enslar, 1998, p. 79). She was punched by a boy at seven, impaled by a bed post at nine and raped at ten by her father’s best friend; her father shoots him in the act. This woman describes the way her coochi snorcher was transformed “and raised...to a kind of heaven” (Enslar, 1998, p. 82) at sixteen by a twenty-six-year-old woman. She describes the seduction as loving and gentle even if it is “politically incorrect” (Enslar, 1998, p. 82). Five of the interviewees (three women and two men) name this scene as the one that made them most uncomfortable because of the older woman’s sexual abuse of a minor girl. Only two of the participants mention the graphic, violent rape by a man that ended with a bloody shooting by her father. Is male sexual violence so embedded in our culture that we do not even notice it? One wonders if audiences would have reacted in the same way if her “salvation” had come from an older man/boyfriend.

Enslar was inspired to add “Comfort” for the 2006 campaign to amplify the voices of “young women of various ethnic and national backgrounds who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Government during World War II” (Enslar, 2006 Performance Script). These women are seeking retribution and recognition for the war crimes committed against them in a world of “escalating armed conflicts [in which] wartime sexual violence” (Enslar, 2006 Performance Script) that Enslar states emphatically should not be tolerated. Comfort Women have not been recognized (and are often vilified) in their own countries and have been largely unknown in the United States. Audience participants noted consistently that this was the first time they had ever heard of them and Muriel was inspired to go home and look them up, “that was startling. It took me off guard...as I’m going through school, I am constantly being confronted

with new information that has been kept from the mainstream. That's something that I was impressed [with] and it was done beautifully. But I cried."

"The Woman Who Liked to Make Vaginas Happy" ("Moaner"), "My Vagina was My Village" ("Village"), and "The Flood" were the next three monologues mentioned by multiple interviewees in multiple categories. The "Moaner" was mentioned by both women and a man as what they remembered from the production. "Village" was also remembered but it was more often discussed as the moment that made women (and one man) cry. One woman mentioned that the information was new to her. None of the men mentioned "The Flood" but two women remembered it and two different women cried.

For short-hand, the director and cast affectionately called the next-to-last scene of the show, "Moaner." It's also an apt description one of the most memorable moments of the monologue. This character shares how she found happiness when she discovered that she loved to moan and bring out the moan in other women. It is a riotous performance that begins as a storytelling narrative of her journey discovering the pleasure of moaning and ends with a vocal demonstration of the various moans she can elicit from her clients. It's sexy and over-the-top, providing much laughter, especially since it closely follows the heavier "Comfort," "Coochi," and "Village" scenes. As noted by the pause required by the actor for laughter, the audience especially enjoyed the college student moan, "I should be studying!" Delilah, however, articulated that she "was so overwhelmed by the end, I had a hard time remembering those last couple [scenes]. It's like, I think, after the Bosnia rape victim, I have a hard time remembering 'cause by that point, I was so just emotionally, like, overwhelmed and then, I think I remember the next one being, I don't know if it was funny, but definitely it was a lot less serious where it could, like, kind of

give everybody a minute to compose themselves.” The scene is provocative and funny and placed strategically near the end for effective theatrical “climax.”

The introduction to “Village” dedicates the monologue to the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ensler was “outraged that 20,000 and 70,000 women were being raped in them in the middle of Europe in 1993, as a systematic tactic of war, and no one was doing anything to stop it...A friend asked me why I was surprised...over 500,000 women were raped every year in this country, and in theory we were not at war” (Ensler, 1998, p. 60, The introduction differs slightly in the performing version). This is the scene that most often reduced the women at auditions to tears, it is mentioned in the interviews as the scene most remembered, the scene that made audience members cry, and the scene that made people want to stop the violence. The director, Kimberly Gifford Wear, casts two women, one to portray the before character, and one to portray the after character. The juxtaposition of the positive, innocent-before with the graphic, brutal-after, (a description of repeated gang rape by soldiers and other foreign objects) is powerful and heart wrenching, affecting even the cast up through the last performance after a month of rehearsals together.

“The Flood” begins, “What’s a smart girl like you going around talking to old ladies about their down-theres for?” It is a tender look at a woman’s recollection of her adolescent experience with a boy in a Chevy Bel-Air. She floods all over the car seat and her new yellow dress, disgusting her date and shaming her into closing the door to her down-there forever. The performance includes the actor using a Jewish, Queens accent that when added to the (seemingly) unique experience makes the scene memorable and sad to several women (but no men).

Learning the number of nerve endings in the clitoris was awesome new information for many participants, as well as the variety of numerous names for the vagina shared in the introductory scene. One woman was surprised at the amount of humor in the show. Deborah's husband felt disappointed "about the humor because [he] didn't feel that there was anything funny about the topic." The men interviewed noted learning about women's self-examinations (and the difficulty of such a feat as demonstrated by the actor by lying on her back, center-stage, with her legs flailing in the air), the physiology of a woman's vagina and related parts, and the "adolescent discovery" referred to in several monologues. The other scenes that provided audience members with new information were the ones that take place outside the United States, "Comfort," "Village," and "Juarez" were the top scenes mentioned. "Juarez" describes the rape and murder of one woman and emphasizes that she is only one out of more than 400 women who have been found mutilated and murdered in and around Juarez, Mexico. No one has been convicted for any of these murders (Enslar, 2006, Performance script).

Inspired by a discussion with a friend after a performance, I included the question, "What vagina story or experience do you wish had been represented?" in my interviews. Most of the participants had a ready answer to a topic or situation they wished had been represented. Men wanted to see Muslim and Indian women's stories, a depiction of AIDS and a healthy, long-term relationship represented. Women participants also mention wanting more about women from other countries and healthy hetero and lesbian relationships. Several women interviewed note the absence of positive lesbian stories (the only two are "Coochi" and by assumption, "Moaner"). Women went on to include ideas about scenes including "chunky chicks," domestic

violence, date rape, rape in high school, rape with alcohol, rape with rape drugs, and rape in marriage.

Several women who are mothers wanted to see was a natural, or non-medicalized birth. The last monologue, “I Was There in the Room” (“Room”), connects the vagina with the heart and was added to the show after Ensler witnessed her granddaughter’s birth. Muriel was:

disappointed that it (the birth one) was a hospital birth, and it was centered around the hospital experience instead of the actual birth and the emotions around the birth. It was not from the perspective of someone giving birth but watching the birth, so that was a little disappointing, because birth is such a big part of what having a vagina is all about. I would have preferred just if it had been portrayed as a direct experience rather than an observed experience...I had home births – natural home births. I could feel the baby coming down my vagina. What I recall was in the birth piece, there was a reference about drugs, and the assumption that drugs were necessary. Which is a thing that I go off on. It would be nice to hear about it talked about as a natural thing, a not scary thing, not needing drugs kind of thing. And I understand that *The Vagina Monologues* is there to deal with domestic violence, but it’s part of a woman’s experience that has historically been a natural process. And what a great opportunity to have that as a platform to speak to young women about the beauty of birth.

This connection of the vagina with birth was a later addition to the performance. This romanticized view of vaginas and birth is a problematic connection at the same time it creates a powerful ending to the show. When Cheng created her *Stories of Our Little Sisters* for a Hong Kong audience, she struggled to avoid this essentializing tendency making a woman’s birthing the pinnacle of the vagina’s experience. “I deal with the topic of pregnancy from stories of absence and renunciation—hysterectomy and abortion...Such women deserve to be respected as much as those who do choose to give birth” (2004, p. 331). No men mentioned this scene.

Lastly, a moment in the show that was discussed in almost every interview and written in on two surveys was “the end.” For the 2006 and 2007 productions at OSU, a screen was lowered after “Room,” the director went to the microphone and said, “Thank you for letting us into your hearts this evening. We would like to share a clip from the documentary, *Until the Violence Stops*. Eve Ensler.” The documentary shows Ensler at a performance in Harlem from a previous year sharing about her experience of violence at her father’s hand and how it wasn’t her fault, she didn’t ask for it but was ashamed for so many years. She invites audience members who had experienced and survived violence to stand to break the silence about the abuse. With the house lights down, but the stages lights up, cast members at OSU who chose to stand to break the silence about their own experiences of violence, also stood and encouraged audience members to stand. Each of the three performance audiences responded a bit differently; very few people stood at one show, a good many stood slowly at one show, and at the third show many stood immediately (based on visual observation by the researcher). Then Ensler asked everyone who knows someone who has been abused to stand, and ended with a rally cry to stand if you want no one else to suffer violence again (2005). This ending was repeated at the 2007 performances and prompted three written responses, two positive and one negative.

In each interview I asked about the DVD documentary. Four women didn’t remember it and two commented that though they remembered it, the live performances were much more powerful. Two women and two men said that the DVD was powerful, with one of the men bringing it up before I asked the question as “a good way to wrap the show up. Sort of bring home the point.” The showing of the DVD and the request for

standing to break the silence surrounding violent events in one's life and the solidarity of other audience members became a scene in itself, evoking much discussion and emotion. It also demonstrates that the show can be ended in a variety of ways by directors. The end can be an empowering theatrical experience for the actors and audience alike; the end can be a call for action on the issues raised in this activist event. It can be both. In past years, Kimberly has ended the performance with simple bows or with dancing. Several years ago, Ensler encouraged colleges to have a time for men to read their own written stories about violence following the show. Dave Visiko, the Student Health staff member who originally brought the show to OSU said that no men replied to the advertisement for participation and only two research participants mentioned a desire to hear men's stories.

### 3.3 Scene 3: The “Exotic Other”

The repeated mention of the monologues about women from countries outside the United States brings up more than a few theoretical and social activism ideas, some of them problematic for feminism and for transnational activism. Transnational is the preferred way to describe women who do not live in the Western experience. It places focus on the varied experiences of women in countries, climates and locations rather than collapsing them into a singular “global” definition. These women’s presence in the monologues present several problematic issues, namely how they will be represented by women who are not like them and the context within which the performances take. Participants expressed a desire to learn more about other cultures, to see how women face similar problems and challenges regardless of where we live. A common criticism of standpoint and identity theory is the tendency to essentialize “woman’s” experience. The supposed universality of “woman” as a group oppressed not by biology, but by “secondary sociological and anthropological universals” (Mohanty, p. 81). This search for “sisterhood,” for a commonality with women from other cultures motivated many of the participants responses. Respondents were shocked by the stories and experiences described as evidenced by their comments about the scenes. They were disturbed that they had never heard about the Comfort Women in history classes or about the murders in Juarez on mainstream news programs. Their focus on these scenes indicates as much a dissatisfaction with not knowing about the instances described as it does a desire to understand other women’s experiences.

A tendency with “global” women’s stories is to exoticize them. These scenes consistently depict war (and in particular, rape as a tactic of war) and/or domestic

violence. There are admittedly few scenes that depict non-violent experiences in the American women's representations, but the fact that there are no foreign women's reclamation or positive stories can be significant to the audience's interpretation of the status of women worldwide. Furthermore, essentializing the "otherness" of "third-world" women by setting up a "we're so lucky" us versus a "poor" them dichotomy can serve merely to isolate and perpetuate a western attitude of colonialization of our ways of life.

In addition to the theoretical and practical concerns about othering certain women's stories and experiences, the focus by interviewees on transnational stories downplays the violence that American women face, the violence that the women in the audience have likely experienced firsthand or through the stories of close family and friends. This is often done in an attempt to distance "our" experience from "their" experience.

#### 3.4 Scene 4: American Representations of Transnational Women

Identifying a "discursive colonialization" by Western feminists, theorist Chandra Mohanty "contests an inclination to reduce the heterogeneity of Third World women into a single monolithic subject [in which they] are defined as victims of male violence, while Western feminists are positioned as the true subjects counter-history" (Saunders, 2002, p. 14). *The Vagina Monologues* can potentially feed this discourse through monologues depicting non-US women solely as victims of male, and often militarized, violence.

A major concern by transnational writers is that development programs and health campaigns in the global south rarely address "the needs of women, as women themselves would define them" (Myntti, p. 143). Mohanty believes it is imperative that women must

represent themselves, and no longer be represented by others. This self-definition and self-representation was crucial in the women's movement of the 60s and 70s in the United States and Europe, but scholars around the world worry that these same feminists are now importing a Western brand of feminism internationally, creating a new imperialism. "The power to set an agenda, to arrive uninvited in a country for a brief period of time, to tell people how they ought to feel and think about their sexuality and their bodies, to assume the right to rescue other people's children, and to use the experience as a yardstick of one's own freedom, is standard operating procedure in the textual tracks of imperialism's cultural production" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1996, p. 13). Is this measurement of one's own freedom why so many interview participants were most moved by the global scenes?

As feminist health activists in the 1970s, Bell and Reverby trouble the universal sisterhood that many people understand *The Vagina Monologues* to purport; it "is too narrow to contain the multiple experiences and actions of women across the world" (2005, p. 439). They worry that the play doesn't make transparent how the monologues' "subjectivity and location have been created" (2005, p. 442) and problematize the "imagined" sharing of experiences of women from around the world. Criticizing the "add and stir" method Ensler employs for each new spotlight campaign, these scholars speak from their experience of women's health activists during the "second wave" of feminism. It is possible for the actor and the audience to hold this in tension, to recognize that a white, American actor cannot possibly know the reality of a Filipino Comfort women or a Bosnian rape camp survivor and at the same time this actor can put on this skin and imagine for herself and the audience that this reality does exist for some

women. Ensler herself admits, "whenever I have tried to write a monologue to serve a politically correct agenda...it always fails. Note the lack about menopause or transgendered women. I tried. *The Vagina Monologues* is about attraction, not promotion" (1998, p. xxvi). Do audiences recognize the intention of the play to expose the marginalization of the women portrayed in the transnational scenes?

The young women and men who attend the show in the first decade of the twenty-first century are overwhelmingly touched and motivated by these scenes, often researching the new information learned after they return home. Performed on the OSU campus with a strong Women Studies Program that enrolls approximately 250 students each term in introductory courses that meet baccalaureate requirements, a mechanism is already in place to have the ongoing discussions around subjectivity and location of women's stories. A majority of the show's attendees (54% in 2006 and 72% in 2007) identify as feminists in a culture that has declared feminism is dead. This may indicate that the audience comes to the play with an understanding of how social location affects the original teller of the story and the actor performing the story. Delilah acknowledges, "at the very least, *The Vagina Monologues* puts a face to it even if it wasn't the original face."

Audience member Jonathan would like to see more "international things [in the play] to really open the eyes of us comfortable white people here in the US" where these issues aren't as openly discussed and yet he recognizes that "seeing this play, hearing stories within our own borders just helps to cement the idea that something needs to be done." Maren, who portrayed the "Moaner" in 06 and performed in the introduction in

07, believes that this international attention pulls focus from problems in the United States. She says:

I changed my major [from an international degree] for a reason, from focusing on not maintaining the silence in other countries to not maintaining the silence here, because before we can help women in other countries, we have to learn how to protect ourselves and take care of ourselves. And if we spend all of our time saying “It’s happening over there, it’s happening over there!” It’s happening over here too guys...It’s more comfortable to look at somebody else than to look at yourself. It’s more comfortable to think about women in the 40’s being brutalized by rifles than it is to think of women in New York City being raped on a nightly basis. It’s more comfortable to think about female genital mutilation than it is to think about Oh, vagina rejuvenation here – people having their labia redone so it’s more attractive.

This pulled focus is not overtly recognized by other interview participants.

As the actors in this study indicate, the power of performance is a critical part of the experience for them. Like Ensler, writer-performer Anna Deavere Smith creates monologues out of the way people recount pivotal experiences in their lives. She weaves tales from various racial, ethnic, class, and gender perspectives in and around one another. Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* is often compared to Deavere Smith’s work in the way they both grew out of first-hand interviews. There are, however, substantial differences in the way the plays are performed. Deavere Smith makes a concerted effort to mimic the voice and speech pattern of the people she portrays and keeps the monologue intact (1993). Ensler concentrates on creating an artistic representation of a character and sometimes collapses several character into one character for performance. Artistic design does not necessarily mean that the artist believes that women should be essentialized into one woman. Dramatically, choices can be made to effect the most emotional connection or challenge for the audience. bell hooks notes that:

Performance as ritual re-enactment is quintessentially highlighted in Deavere Smith's work because she draws on current events and on the actual statements of a range of observers present at those events. This strategy of re-enactment has been at the core of African-American performance practice. The sense of immediacy is...present precisely because performance art and performance artists invoke that sense of immediacy by working critically to intervene in public response to events, in ways that are empowering (1995, p. 214).

hooks recognizes that Smith's work occurs immediately "in the wake of the actual events" to function as a critical intervention. Deavere Smith responded to violence in Brooklyn's Crown Heights and the Los Angeles Riots in 1992 by interviewing, performing and engaging the communities in dialogue about the very differences that caused the violence. Once that immediate period is past, hooks suggests that the performance becomes "a cultural product, consumed without the kind of critical engagement that might engender a response beyond that of merely good or bad performance" (1995, p. 214). I suggest that the university setting of *The Vagina Monologues* belies this belief. Its appearance in academia strives to encourage critical engagement. The majority of V-Day performances are produced on college campuses keeping the performance fresh with new audiences who often come to their "click" moments at this moment of critical engagement in their young adults lives. Whether it does so, or does so effectively, is debatable. The people who participated in this research suggest that many do experience the production as an entry into a non-dominant discourse.

Deavere Smith's theories about performance speak to the women's experiences on stage and the audience members' reception of the stories perceived as most different from themselves. "The spirit of acting is the travel from the self to the other...character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between the places, and in our struggle

to be together in our differences. It lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated...It is alive right now. We might not like what we see, but in order to change it, we have to see it clearly” (1993, p. xli). Imagination is crucial for the actor to see and convey this sight to the audience. For a production of *The Vagina Monologues*, this desire to work toward change is paramount.

Audience respondents often demonstrate an ability to hold the domestic and international violence information in tension, recognizing that it’s all shocking and too prevalent. Krista remarked that “the Comfort Women one from last year really hit home for me, cause it was something that I didn't really know about. I mean, somewhere I guess you always have a feeling inside that stuff like that happens, but you aren't really aware of it, so that one really hit home for me. And also what's real in the numbers about violence in the United States.” V-Day activists hopes that the belief of the early twentieth-century feminist playwright, Susan Glaspell, will prove to be true, “You cannot know [something] and leave things just as they were before” (in Malpede 1983, p. 154). It is this belief that drives the production at OSU.

When considering the transnational women portrayed in *The Vagina Monologues*, the question of representation arises. Recognizing that art is an imperfect medium, and the fact that the show was not originally written to be the fundraising phenomenon it is today, one may look at the intention behind the V-Day campaign and how the money raised is used both in the local communities and globally to examine both the efficacy of the production and the transnational scenes.

In gathering proceedings from a conference on women, war, and resistance held in 2000, editors Waller and Rycenga emphasize that “it is a sign of the robustness of

women's and feminist activism world-wide that no book could hope to be inclusive. Nor, we might add, should we take each other to task for not being universal intelligences, a subject position long since discredited as a denial of difference and a cover for political and cultural imperialism" (2001, p. xxi). The editors go on to "encourage readers to notice what is absent, the better to activate the dialogic possibilities of the spaces created by the texts." Like Deavere Smith seeing the possibility of the space between the gaps, a performance of *The Vagina Monologues* should not instigate academic snobbery about its shortcomings; it should inspire new dialogue, new activisms and new art. One of the strengths of university productions is the very space it occupies. It can be the connection between academia and activism. It can be the inspiration for other activism.

Enslar and the play were criticized by the media in 1998 for pandering to the sex-driven postfeminist age without real substance (a substantially different reason from the academic criticisms above). Waller and Rycenga recognize the ignorance of these accusations by *Time* magazine:

Referring to a benefit performance of Eve Ensler's theater piece "The Vagina Monologues," the *Time* article failed to mention either Ensler's long-standing involvement with Bosnian refugee women, the Women in Black, and the Center for Women War Victims in Zagreb, or the fact that money raised by the benefit performance was earmarked for these groups. And it completely missed the relevance of Ensler's reconfiguration of how we think about the female body to questions of militarism. *Time* could not or would not connect Ensler's work with the "mindless sex talk" of the military and paramilitary rapists and torturers in former Yugoslavia, Guatemala, and elsewhere, and/or the generals and heads of state who have collaborated on the construction of prostitution camps around U.S. military bases in countries around the world.

If the media is not willing to tell the truth, artists will step forward to dramatize the stories.

### 3.5 Scene 5: *The Vagina Monologues* as Activism

In 1998 when V-Day emerged as an activist movement, the show transformed into something unique and new. Shoef describes this as a “theatre’s social eventness” (p. 357). Examining the limitations of a social event or artistic work, Shoef recognizes that “isolating ‘an event’ is a rather difficult task” (p. 357). Artistic work is often discussed as an event though both descriptors are inadequate to explain the social process of the context of the piece. Events are not merely the production by the artistic team, but also the reproduction of the meanings and experiences by the audience. This reproduction is not always manifested in ways intended by the producers (p. 358).

*The Vagina Monologues* provides audiences with many interpretations and “take-home messages” as evidenced by the variety of responses to the production as a whole and to the individual scenes. For instance, what is seen as empowering, uplifting or even shocking to some respondents, is seen as degrading and even dangerous by another, “I thought it was very inappropriate to ask victims/survivors to stand. It is private.” And to still others, “It was surprising to see how many women stood. I was really happy that they felt like they could stand, but I was sad at the same time, because it seemed like a lot of people.” It is also interpreted by people who don’t attend performances, although only two of the participants interviewed for this study had not seen the show. Many of the Barometer columns and letters to the editor are written by people who haven’t seen the show. This population should be sought out in future research about the production.

Some of the problems elucidated by participants' responses (namely the transnational, essentialized woman) exist in the space between the play as originally written for a more traditional stage presentation and the play as the central piece of the V-Day movement to end violence against women and girls. Since the play wasn't conceived to be the fundraising activism production it has become, there are limitations to the monologues as they are presented as well as the ways new ones are written periodically to highlight new situations or spotlight campaigns. This "add and stir" method has flared criticism by academics (Bell and Reverby 2005; Hall, 2005) who desire the show to be something more or something different than a ninety-minute theatre piece can be. *The Vagina Monologues* as live theatre can include only so many stories, so many representations. Enslar's discomfort with adding scenes, as noted above, emphasizes the limitations of one artistic event.

Regardless of the purposes behind the inception of *The Vagina Monologues*, it exists now for the clear activist purposes to raise awareness about violence against women and girls and to raise money for local shelters and groups working to end violence and for groups working internationally around the specific spotlight group of women. In 2006, the spotlight was the Comfort Women discussed above; in 2007, the spotlight was on women in conflict areas. Past spotlight campaigns have supported the work of Afghan, Native American, Juarez, Iraqi, and Kenyan women and their supporters. According to survey results, 20% of audience members attended, in part, to support CARDV (Corvallis' Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence). The V-Day production of *The Vagina Monologues* promotes a dual intention, money for CARDV's work in providing shelter for women and educating oneself or a friend (v-day.org, OSU

program). Thirty-three percent of the audience is inspired to participate in other activism projects and over \$4000 is being used locally to help provide shelter to women, suggesting that the goals are in part being met by the annual production.

Krista is evidence of the desire to work for change. She is currently a student at South Dakota State University and is rallying to organize their first V-Day celebration. Initially, she was told that South Dakota wasn't ready for *The Vagina Monologues*, but she dug her heels in, called the ACLU, and is working with the Greek Life coordinator for a 2008 production. Krista remembers the end of the show:

as soon as the women on stage stood up, these are people that I see on my way class and who I've lived in the dorms with and seeing them openly admit, 'This is something that has happened to me or to someone I care about and this is bad stuff,' seeing those women stand up, I think is what ultimately made the rest of the audience stand up, and I think that is what really was powerful, because it gave everyone a sense that 'I'm not alone in this, and that this happens to everyone.' Obviously if this is happening to so many women--that's the point of V-Day is to show how common this is and how many people this really happens to and that we have to do something about it. We can't just let it happen...So it was like, 'Here, we're going to throw it in your face and make you do something about it.' I think that's a huge part of why they won't let you do it here [at South Dakota State], that it's very aggressive. Very abrupt. It's so in your face, and it's going to offend people, but in the same sense, I hope it's going to offend people into action, because obviously, if all those people stand up, it's a big problem, and that's so huge for me.

Krista credits the OSU show for inspiring this activism in a state that has been antagonistic to women's choice issues in the past year.

### 3.6 Scene 6: Compared to Other Anti-Violence Activism

Activists on the OSU campus have engaged in an on-going discussion about the methods for conducting and the motivations behind another college anti-violence experience held in April each year, the Take Back the Night march. Interested in how

this activism event is understood in connection with *The Vagina Monologues*, I asked the interviewees to compare the two events. The interviewees consistently noted the different audience, participants, and tone of the two events. Brigit sees the Take Back the Night march as:

very symbolic, but it's very hard to do any kind of real education in that kind of setting. You have your signs, there's people walking, so it shows there's people out here that really support this cause, but it doesn't educate as much as it--well I don't think it ever really could. I believe that it's a good thing to do, but there's still that lack of education piece. It may inspire someone to get educated, and then classes, it's so very like impersonal. You talk about statistics, facts, what happens, but you can't put it into context if you've never experienced it, or you don't know anyone that ever has, and so you know all these facts about it, but you don't really understand the emotional impact of what these things do, and so with *The Vagina Monologues*, there is a big combination of all of that, because you've got statistics, you've got facts. You have personal stories, and you have a mass amount of people turning out in support of something, so it brings together all of those important events into one thing.

Muriel thinks, "the Take Back the Night thing can come across as just being angry women. And *Vagina Monologues* is more like...lively women. The other is a protest. I'm sure the V-Day thing can be seen as a protest, but it's not so in your face I guess. Not as intimidating maybe...These other classes, what man is going to sit through that class? That's an unusual man who's gonna do that." The audience members in this study see the play addressing and attracting a different group of people. Even when the scenes portray angry or serious subjects, the participants agree that the audience is more receptive to the message because of the format of the play.

The survey questionnaires in 2007 show that women and men, feminists and those who do not identify as feminists believe that *The Vagina Monologues* and Women's Studies courses are more effective than Take Back the Night or other demonstrations. Some participants wrote on the survey and interview participants elaborated that the play

draws a wider and more diverse audience, especially drawing more men to attend, than the march and classes do.

### 3.7 Scene 7: Casting the Show

Kimberly's casting of the production is unconventional for standard theatrical productions. She holds auditions in the late fall inviting each woman to read from a monologue of her own choosing, or Kimberly will suggest one. Over the next weeks, she fills each part with a woman who demonstrates an ability or a spark that could be molded before the February performances. She casts everyone who auditions, filling the short introductions and titles with the less experienced or timid women, and casting the longer and more emotionally challenging monologues with seasoned actors or women who demonstrate an ability to take direction and show a range of emotion. Kimberly believes that there is great power in scores of women appearing on stage together for a common purpose. Each year there are a couple of women who support the event by simply sitting on stage with the speaking actors. In 2006, Deborah even attended rehearsals but didn't want to say anything. Then she volunteered to add her voice to the "What Does Your Vagina Wear?" scenes and, as a few people dropped out, agreed to take on an introduction to one of the monologues. She expresses how she felt left out "or that, well, that, you also want to share the whole...experience of the acting and the memorizing and everything and the whole effort...to just be helpful and take on some of the burden," and knew that she could do it.

Staging the show with thirty-five or forty women emphasizes the sheer numbers of women affected by violence and in addition, pulls in larger audiences of people who come to see their friends and family on stage; 26% of the survey respondents attended in

2006 because they knew someone in the cast. In 2007, men were more likely to attend for this reason than any other. Slightly more women attended because it sounded interesting than because they knew someone. The woman-centered title and subject matter have been suspected as the reason that women attend more often than men. These data show that Kimberly's casting philosophy and practice certainly contribute to the large numbers of ticket sales at OSU.

After the first years, V-Day incorporated Kimberly's casting style into the suggestions and guidelines for participating colleges and universities as a positive method for including many women by a method that supports the purpose of the production.

Kimberly elaborates:

before [V-Day] said that people should try to involve everybody who auditions, I was doing that from the very beginning, because when I came into this project it was clear this isn't just theater, this is activism, and these women showing up - they are not actors necessarily. Some were, but a lot of them were just inspired to be activists and to do something...So, I guess I've always thought of it as...an activist piece from the beginning, and that's how I always look at it...but as far as the actor in me and the director in me, I want to give people what they can be really successful at. So, I like that the script is designed so that I can. There's like bigger pieces, and really little pieces, and so something that I've always done from the beginning is to try to engage people at auditions to find out what it is can they be madly successful at. For the ulterior motive...of getting them hooked on being performers, being actors. Because that's a passion of mine also, and if they are successful, then they'll keep doing it, which is fun, because I do have people come back again and again.

Cast members agreed that this casting method adheres to a feminist sensibility for a show of this nature. Mabel likes how "people come back year after year and they're in different parts...actually it's so clever, because once you've got bitten, you're gonna come back." Audience members responded to questions about Wear's casting generally in positive ways. "You don't know where someone's coming from when they come to

audition. Just the power of being in that supportive group could be the best part of the performance for them,” Madeline suspects. Alex, a choreographer thinks, “it’s really a challenge, and I really respect that, and personally I try to do that as well. I want art to be accessible to everyone both as an experience and as a performance.” The *Vagina Monologues* appears to be an accessible theatre show.

Not everyone felt that the casting was positive for the production. One audience member was frustrated by the lack of professionalism of the actors and felt that the OSU production:

was just not as great [as the production she had seen at her undergraduate school]...There were fewer cast members at the other school, and so this production felt really disorganized, honestly, I couldn't hear some of the actors, and some of them forgot their lines. They were giggling in the middle. It really pulled me out, and I wasn't able to really get into it unfortunately.

Alex concurs that:

There were definitely points where I could see that people who were less experienced lost track of what they were doing, and definitely sacrificed some performance quality, but I think that’s part of it. You know, it’s part of having the community experience and feeling like the community is involved. That’s not what really really mattered as far as emotional content or delivery of the cast.

The positive responses overshadowed the negative ones by audience or cast members contributing to the power of the show to serve as a rite of passage as discussed below in 3.10 (Act III, Scene 10).

The year that Dr. Trisha Goodnow directed (2002), she cast the show in a traditional theatre audition process and if she ever directed the show again (which she emphatically declared she wouldn’t) she would cast only one or two women, saying, “To

me that would send an incredible message that one woman can be any woman. And anything, just cause it happens to them, doesn't mean it can't happen to you." She recognizes, however, that the main purpose of the production is the fundraising activism and finished this discussion with the observation, "Who is the audience? Is it the people who are involved, and I have no criticism of this, but from the health center's perspective, they are just as concerned with getting women involved in the production as they are with the production value that the audience will have." Because the intention of the production is not merely artistic value and content, the methods of producing the show are often altered from a traditional production one might find in the theatre department.

Seeing so many women on stage not only reminds the audience that the experiences described could happen to any one of us, it offers the idea that any woman could be on stage with the actors. In fact, 6.9% of the survey respondents said that they would audition in the future; four of the eleven women I interviewed did audition and perform in 2007. (This percentage jumped to 11.7% in 2007). One mother of an actor auditioned for and performed "The Flood" at Portland State University after seeing her daughter perform last year. "A lot of people write on their [audition] forms that the reason that they're auditioning is that they saw the performance and they wanted to do it. They saw it and thought, 'I can do that. I want to be a part of that,' explains Kimberly.

### 3.8 Scene 8: Challenges in Casting

OSU is situated in a largely homogenous geographical location with only 15% diversity among its student body. When casting a show with parts for various races and ethnicities in a diversity-challenged university, the directors face challenging questions. Kimberly Gifford Wear describes this challenge:

it's a reflection of our town. I have had African Americans and have not cast them in the part, because they would not be able to be successful with it. And I feel like that is more important than the color of the skin of the person doing it. And, it does say in [the V-Day instructions] that she cast this as a woman of color or not cast. This one was written as a British woman, but if the woman can't do a British accent, then don't do one. So, it's not required. I would prefer, and I have had an African American woman do it before, I think only once. But, I've also had an African American woman asking not to cast her, just because she's black in that part, or not to do the piece on genital mutilation just because she's black...If I find someone that I feel gets to the heart of what's being said then they are the ones that need to say it. I do however love when it coincides. And, I will always choose the coinciding next to the not coinciding, yes. So, it was great to have Renee, because she gets so powerfully that part, and it's great to have a Native woman in that part, especially one who wants to be. And I did choose women that were darker in complexion and darker hair, because it is just like casting any show. You want the audience to make as little leap problem as possible. I just don't want them to have to make huge leaps.

She refers in this dialogue to casting Renee Roman Nose as the central voice in "Crooked Braid" for the 2007 production. "Crooked Braid" is the interweaving of five Lakota women's stories of intimate partner violence. For the conclusion of this monologue, Ensler highlights the connection the Lakota women make between the violence they suffer at the hands of their men with the violence committed against the Native Americans by white settlers and the American government.

Trisha cast far fewer women the year she directed (2002) and was satisfied with the diversity she was able to represent:

Charlotte [Headrick] was really wonderful in getting me an African American woman to play the Coochi Snorcher one. I had a woman from Bosnia. I had a woman from Sri Lanka, but it could have been Senegal. She actually got written up in something for being in the show. I don't remember where she was from. I tried to you know...and I had very radical feminists, radical lesbians, as well as conservatives... I had older women and younger women, and I really think I had a fairly diverse cast. Obviously they were mostly white women, but the majority of the monologues are white women.

The play exists at OSU in the context of the diversity represented.

Does the portrayal of African American, Bosnian, Filipino, or Native American women by Caucasian women present problematic representation? The directors viewed it as an artistic challenge, not a theoretical dilemma, and none of the (mostly white) audience members interviewed mentioned this aspect of casting. This could be attributed to the inherent yet invisible ethnocentrism of the environment within which the participants were raised. Is it possible to discuss or even notice ideas to which one has never been exposed? Plays have the potential to “situate the questions and contradictions in the performative space between the narrative and spectacle, and in that space it is necessary to look for resistance” (Elam and Raynor, 1998, p. 267). Space as understood by Deavere Smith has the potential for transcending the constraints of reality. Madeline, a twenty-six-year-old graduate student articulated that “It would be interesting to kind of explore that international realm a little bit more, how it is in other parts of the world.” If Ensler did not include these problematic racial and ethnic scenes, audience members (at OSU) would be less likely to learn about these conflicts and the requested resolution and in fact want to see more.

When we consider that the majority (20 out of 27) of the interview participants (including all of the cast members), identify as feminists, we must also consider the likelihood that few of these individuals are familiar with non-American, non-Western forms of feminism that are not heavily influenced by American “second wave” liberal and materialist feminisms. OSU’s Women Studies program offers one undergraduate course on Global Women, one on-line Global Women in the Movies class, and one

undergraduate/graduate on International Women. Several other courses are intermittently offered under blanket topic course numbers. Other departments do offer courses that address transnational or global (and sometimes) women's issues but a full discussion of feminism or gender is not guaranteed outside Women Studies.

I suggest that the audience sees *The Vagina Monologues* production as an introduction to the very issues that make the scenes and the idea of representation problematic. As a university-sponsored production, professors and instructors could be encouraged to engage the material head-on in Women's Studies courses as well as other disciplines. Political Science professor at Indiana University, Linda Chen, assigns the book in her introductory Women's Studies course "in solidarity for the students engaged in staging" the show. She explains:

I concluded that personal stories expressed in *The Vagina Monologues* offered a means to engender discussion about relationships between individual experiences and their larger collective meanings. Here, I was interested in exploring how the personal disclosures of women chronicled in *The Vagina Monologues* could assist educators and students about the politics of women's sexuality...Further, I sought to consider why it was important to look at popular expressions of women's sexuality" (2004). Chen concludes that pedagogically the assignment encouraged empathy towards others and served as an example of "the personal is political.

The presence of the production on college campuses has much potential that remains largely unrealized academically. In an interview, Ensler says,

you are at an educational institution where, in theory, we are being taught to look at all kinds of ideas...I think that's the point of education. So, if you look at *The Vagina Monologues*, there are going to be monologues that speak to you, ones that upset you, ones that you disagree with, and ones that really excite you. That is the point. The point is not just to read text that everybody says, 'that's me!' and there is one line of thinking that we all agree to. That would be tyranny, wouldn't it? (Roark 37).

Higher education should be a place where this ambiguity is welcomed and debated, where new pieces of art-activism are inspired and created.

### 3.9 Scene 9: Perceived Connections between Violence and Vaginas/Sexuality

Stopping the violence is a paramount part of the V-Day college campaign and since many of the scenes in *The Vagina Monologues* are about sexuality or violence demonstrated sexually, I asked each research participant to respond to two statements. The first was, “Violence against women is connected to attitudes about sexuality” and the second was, “Violence against women is connected to attitudes about vaginas.” Responses covered a wide range of beliefs that often highlighted how the individual understands power and patriarchy functioning in collusion with one another. Almost every interviewee paused, or vocalized a non-verbal response indicating this is not something she or he has thought about before answering. A few participants answered immediately, “Yes!” and Maren shouted, “True!” When participants elaborated, a difference in responses to the two questions emerged. Everyone emphatically answered yes or qualified a “yes” to the presumed connection between violence and attitudes about sexuality. More participants were unsure about the connection of violence to vaginas.

When discussing responses to the violence and sexuality connection, ten of the respondents specifically mentioned power or implied power through aggression or domination. Documents penned in Beijing in 1995 acknowledge that “violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women” (United Nations, 1996, p. 75). This power difference crosses national, cultural, racial and class lines and thirteen of the interviewees discussed the cultural or social construction of sexuality particularly how sexuality is constructed differently for men

than it is for women. Two women interviewed extended this discussion to include violence toward transgendered individuals who may not be perceived as women but are not meeting society's expectations of maleness of masculinity and therefore their experienced violence is connected to sexuality.

Respondents related the social construction of sexuality to the visible and perceived physical differences between the genders biologically. Women noted the stereotype that males are stronger or that women are perceived as weaker. Sexual terrorism, the idea that women are terrorized by the threat of rape or sexual assault even if there isn't an immediate threat or a personal history of such an attack, was alluded to by several women when discussing the connection between violence and sexuality.

Elizabeth describes how her dad bought her mace after the time change so she would be "better protected" walking on campus after dark, she concludes:

the reality is, you know, we are, we do live in sexual fear all the time. And I think *The Vagina Monologues* does a much better way of doing that by, you know, bringing it to you, but not forcing it down your throat.

Carrie Giese, Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator at OSU, notes that sexuality is polarized for women. Women are not given a healthy perspective about a range of sexuality, and *The Vagina Monologues* gives women other options of how women take back from a violent experience or are empowered by sexual experiences outside this polarity.

Madeline articulates the idea that violence against women is justified through objectification, that "women deserve it" by our actions or the clothing worn. "We have words for women that have a lot of sex and other words for men that have a lot of sex and

the power differential there is intense. A man is a virgin-slayer and a woman is a ho or wet hole. Just completely devaluing,” she concludes. There is a societal “notion that men need it, men deserve it [in a completely different way than women deserve it], men are sexual beings, women are receptacles,” as Muriel articulates.

A couple of women noted that the exertion of power by men over women sexually is a way for men to feel in control, Alex believes it has “to do currently with men feeling threatened by women rising to a similar place in life...[men] wanting to put them ‘back in their place.’” Maren says, “It doesn’t help like the James Bond movies are there saying, Sean Connery in the James Bond movies would hit the women. ‘Tell me what you know!’ Smack! She’d fall down and cry and then she’d end up sleeping with him. I see those movies, and I love James Bond, fast cars, easy women, great clothes – go for it, but the beating I don’t really...I would sleep with James Bond, but I don’t think I would let him hit me. Ya know? So, you see it all over the place.”

The men interviewed are more likely to mention media as a way society reinforces male ideas about sexuality. Jules believes that “our attitudes about sexuality are shaped by the media and by our inconsistent social ideology...not only is violence coupled with sexuality through the media, but it also seems to be sort of like a social acceptance of a certain amount of aggression toward women that is not considered sexual assault or violence.” Emulating James Bond-like characters in the media is a prevalent way for men and women to be socialized in gendered behavior.

These responses are articulate and informed about the way sexuality is socially constructed and how rape and sexual assault are most often about power and dominance; they remind us of the self-selected population who not only attend the performances of

*The Vagina Monologues* but also self-select to participate in research about such activist performances. It is interesting to note that in addition to these participants being aware and/or informed of the literature and academic support for the statistics presented in the play, they also consistently support continued performances of the V-Day production as shown below in 3.11, Act III, Scene 11.

When discussing the potential connection between violence against women and attitudes about vaginas, eight men and women interviewed were unsure, three more gave a qualified yes, and four qualified a no or said no outright. The comments provide insight into this ambiguity. Women were more likely to believe that that attitudes about vaginas were the same as or close to attitudes about women in general. Differences in physical body were noted by both genders with several participants identifying women as weaker physically (in reality or by perception) and Madeline believes that society's reverence of the penis affects these attitudes, "there are phallic monuments [everywhere], but I think the underlying core is really probably attitudes about vaginas." Carrie believes that "Men know that's the way to put the most amount of hurt toward somebody." That men in this study recognize the connection between power and violence is telling and further study with men not identifying as feminists would be interesting.

Women demonstrate a concern about body image in their comments, and six participants (five women and one man) discussed the shame associated with our bodies.

Sarah articulates:

I think that maybe the fact that women's sexuality is sort of off limits to women and their own bodies, and that sexual violence is sort of a symptom of that or a result of that. I think women are less likely to engage with their own bodies sexually and to take ownership of their own bodies, because there is this implicit

fear, but I don't think it has to do with actual physical vaginas necessarily. It has more to do with fear.

Shame and silence about bodies and vaginas, in particular, is a primary reason that Ensler wrote the play. In an interview with Virginia Braun, Ensler muses:

I think the connection between how women regard their vaginas, and how women feel, and the state of women in the world is deeply connected...Connecting with the vagina is fundamental. I think that by focusing on a piece that has been cut off we end the fragmentation, we reabsorb it back into the entire body. I can only say that I was completely fragmented when this process began, utterly fragmented, and I'm not any more. (Braun 517-519).

Chris agrees, “this desire to hide things is unnecessary,” and Mabel says it’s “almost shameful in a way, and there is something about it being easier to beat up on something that is part of someone if it’s shameful.” And Ann says, “unfortunately we are bombarded by unhealthy images of women as flesh or sex and nothing more!” Krista, however, concludes that however strong a theoretical link between violence against women and attitudes about vaginas is, “I wouldn’t give society enough credit to actually think about vaginas.”

Violence against women is a pervasive and persistent problem in the United States and globally. Feminists in the 60s and 70s focused attention on building rape awareness and building shelters for women escaping intimate partner violence (Rosen, 2000). Take Back the Night as an activist march began in the later 70s and was a movement at which Andrea Dworkin spoke passionately in connection with her anti-violence, anti-pornography work. “We must use our collective strength and passion and endurance to take back this night and every night so that life will be worth living and so that human dignity will by a reality” (1993, p. 17) she cried at a march in 1979. *The*

*Vagina Monologues*, however imperfect its “parts” are, is contemporary manifestation of this feminist work.

Much of the research on violence has focused attention on how women can combat, prevent, or avoid violence in their individual lives leading scholars and activists to critique this avoidance of identifying and preventing the root causes of the violence and making women responsible for monitoring the symptoms for the violence directed against them (and other men) by men (Carmody, Flood). Anti-violence educator Jackson Katz discusses this re-placement of responsibility and blame in his 1999 film, *Tough Guise* and his recent book, *The Macho Paradox*. Nearly one-fourth of American women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime and one-fourth of college women will have been raped or have had an attempted rape during their college years (Katz, 2006, p. 21). It is not enough to only target women for anti-violence education; it is not enough to ask what leads individual men to commit violence. We need to ask about the ways violence is embedded in our socialization of men as a gender. “These problems are much too widespread for us to think about them in such narrow terms” (Katz, 2006, p. 21). Adding race or class to these numbers can dramatically increase (or decrease) these numbers locking women in a cage of interlocking oppressions that make it more difficult to escape (Frye, 1983).

A woman survey participant writes, “I believe it’ll take changes in culture; less violence on media, more healing opportunities, more communication training.” Carmody points out the related problem in the available research that “little is known about what types of [anti-violence] programmes are most effective, what attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural outcomes can be expected or how stable any changes are over time” (2005,

p. 466). Her interview research “suggests that we are currently failing to address the kinds of information and skills that especially young people need to negotiate pleasurable ethical sexual intimacy” and that a shift from “refusal skills” to “promoting and developing ethical non-violent relating” (2005, p. 478). This research was conducted and exists in this space of inadequate measurements of efficacy and little example of how to address these inadequacies. Carmody’s research is insightful and four participants in this study wished for scenes of positive relationships and interactions to be included in the show as examples of how non-violent relationships can be imagined. This suggests one avenue for future projects to follow to examine ways to promote and develop Carmody’s “ethical non-violent relating.”

*The Vagina Monologues* participates in the political aspect of this societal crisis of violence by “creat[ing] a space for women's issues in the public domain, and establish[ing] concrete places for women to turn to, thereby breaking taboos on domestic violence” (Bruchner 4). More women than men attend the production (although some participants note a shift over the years it has been produced at OSU and some participants show surprise at how many men actually attend) and more audience members identify as feminists (54% in 2006 and 68% in 2007). These results tell producers that the audience is potentially more aware of these issues before attending.

At the interviews and on the 2007 survey, I asked a series of scaled questions to gauge how audiences interpret various cultural media/events and how effective each is perceived to be in raising awareness about and stopping violence against women. Many of the interviewees started the recorded interview by evaluating the effectiveness of these options and expressing frustration that many of them draw an already informed audience.

“These events attract people who already are against violence against women” and Lisa believes, “people going to the monologues are pretty much going to be supportive of that anyway.” Several respondents call this “preaching to the choir.” Muriel wrote, “How effective can any of these be if men don’t attend?” One woman wrote on her survey, “need healthy families and influence on men and young boys growing up.” Other comments noted the importance of press coverage, actively involving people in events for effectiveness and requiring all students to take a women studies course. Finally, a seventy-year-old man articulated a question many of us ask, “How can we get more men to see V.M.?”

The questionnaire scale results do more to suggest future directions for research into anti-violence theatre audience responses than they do to suggest detailed information about response to this particular performance. More respondents are positive about the effectiveness of raising awareness they are about than stopping violence as the above comments indicate. Respondents were asked to circle 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 with 1 indicating “not effective at all” and 5 indicating “very effective.” They could also circle 6 for “no opinion.”

In raising awareness about violence against women, I examine the highest percentages for each category. Men’s and women’s highest response rates appear as Very Effective (five) for *Vagina Monologues* performances and women’s studies courses, three’s for news articles, and four’s for TV documentaries, workshops and demonstrations on campus, and Take Back the Night marches. The genders agreed that the internet had medium (three) effectiveness but the same percentage of men (25.6%) marked four as well, whereas the other women’s responses were more varied. V-Day

celebrations is the only area that the two genders' most often marked different numbers: 25.6% of men circled three and 36.2% of women circled five suggesting that the community building aspect is often merged with anti-violence results for many women.

In addition to looking at responses to the scales by gender, I also examine how self-identified feminists view these activities. Feminists and those not identifying as feminists were also more likely to circle the same number (News and internet-three, TV documentaries, workshops and demonstrations-four, V-Day and *The Vagina Monologues* -five). More individuals not identifying as feminists had no opinion about the Take Back the Night march indicating that this is event is more likely to attract identifying feminists, whereas feminists most often circled four. The only response that received more than 50% for either breakdown is performances of *The Vagina Monologues*. They are perceived as very effective (53% of feminists and 55.1% of women); this is not surprising since the participant pool is comprised of people already attending the show and will therefore be more likely to believe it is effective and important.

Turning to how audience members perceive these activities and events in relationship to stopping violence, we see little shift in the responses. The items feminists and non-feminists considered to be most effective in stopping violence are workshops and the performances of *The Vagina Monologues*. Men agreed with these being more than minimally effective, but were more likely than women to view Take Back the Night and women's studies courses as effective (four).

I asked the interview participants to discuss how *The Vagina Monologues* differed from the Take Back the Night march or classes about violence. Brigit perceives the Take Back the Night march to be:

a representation, it's very symbolic, but it's very hard to do any kind of real education in that kind of setting. You have your signs, there's people walking, so it shows there's people out here that really support this cause, but it doesn't educate as much as it...well I don't think it ever really could. I believe that it's a good thing to do, but there's still that lack of education piece. It may inspire someone to get educated, but then classes, it's so very like impersonal. You talk about statistics, facts, what happens, but you can't put it into context if you've never experienced it, or you don't know anyone that ever has, and so you know all these facts about it, but you don't really understand the emotional impact of what these things do, and so with *The Vagina Monologues*, there is a big combination of all of that, because you've got statistics, you've got facts. You have personal stories, and you have a mass amount of people turning out in support of something, so it brings together all of those important events into one thing.

Alex agrees by saying *The Vagina Monologues* is

highly highly highly entertaining. So, it gives you a good adrenaline rush going. It's much more memorable. And when you go to a class you have to be intentionally be looking for that experience, it's a time commitment and a lot of times, people can't ever around to doing it, even though it's really valuable, and you aren't as likely to reach as broad of an audience or reach as many men maybe who are into it or men who might actually be guilty of it, of hurting someone.

Most agreed that a wider cross-section of the campus and community population were likely to attend the performances than to march against violence or take a class.

If workshops are viewed by survey respondents as effective, then perhaps there is validity to the statements made by both survey and interview participants that all students should be required to take a class or workshop about the topic, and perhaps college is even past the optimum time for educating people, especially boys, about relationships, conflict, and appropriate responses to anger as noted above by audience members and researchers. The performances provide an "entertaining" forum to discuss the issues on

which we rarely hear a woman's perspective and in fact, rarely hear anything. They reach "a broader audience. And the format's not threatening," commented Roy. Chris agreed, "I recall a lot of laughing during the performance...Take Back the Night...has a much more confrontational feel." The majority of survey respondents both years said that the performance was entertaining and in the disarmament of entertainment, people are likely to learn something. "I mean it's a scary thing to know that these sorts of things happen. It's easy to say they happen, but to see a face associated with someone sitting next to you. I was under more the impression that this was more a theater group, on the stage the people are performing a canned performance, but to know they are here for a higher reason is very powerful" (Jonathan).

The inadequacies of survey instruments is most apparent in the analysis of this data. Responses were all over the scale and, from the comments mentioned above, it is difficult for people to believe that anything will change unless the perpetrators of the violence are attending any of these events.

### 3.10 Scene 10: *The Vagina Monologues* as a Rite of Passage

The most surprising result of this research is the language used to describe why audience members attend the show and why women audition for it. I began to notice that they are describing a (counter-)cultural phenomenon in which they feel drawn to participate. "My friend was in the show and she wanted me to come see, and I'd never seen it before, so I thought I probably should, you know, being a woman" (Alex). Some even implied they had no choice, "I had a roommate who pretty much declared that I needed to see it" (Elizabeth) and "I sort of felt obligated to go. It was something I wanted to do as a female like to support" (Madeline). *The Vagina Monologues* as a play

and an anti-violence event occur at a transitional time in young adults' lives, at a moment when they are often living away from their parents for the first time. Students, whether college-aged or not, are finding their place and vocation in the world, and experiencing new intellectual ideas about movement, choice, and speech. These comments led me to examine the connection between the V-Day event and its place as a rite of passage especially for women attending the performance and for women audition to be part of the cast.

Rites of passage have been traditionally described in anthropological literature as having three distinct phases, separation, transition and incorporation, through which people navigate “from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another” (van Gennep, 1960, p. 10). This understanding of rites of passage is used to describe everything from weddings and funerals to puberty rites. Victor Turner examines the sense of liminality that accompanies rites of passage. Liminality is “ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (1997, p. 95). College is a time for many people in which one is an adult but not yet living fully in the adult world.

This liminality is very much like the liminality that a performer experiences while enacting a part on the stage. She is the actor *and* the character at the same time, in the same space, in the same body. To hold this liminality in tension within one's body and memory can be a surreal and powerful experience for actors, to see the world of the play

through the character's eyes and at the same time glimpse the audience from the corner of actor's eye.

Performance ethnographer, Richard Schechner, describes Turner's three phases of theatre as the separation of rehearsals and workshops, the liminal of the "sacred" communication and the reaggregation of the "cool-down" which can include post-show discussions (Turner, 1987, p. 9) or as several of my participants discussed, desserts. Marithra and her mother had an intense discussion about the meaning of and work of feminism following the performance and Deborah and her friends went for dessert at a restaurant in town, "we had these long tables and we were going 'vaginas' all during the whole evening. And people were, I'm sure, looking at us the whole evening, and we were just all having such a wonderful time saying 'vagina.'"

While performance itself follows the format of a rite of passage into the next stage of mainstream cultural life (separation, initiation, and transformation), *The Vagina Monologues* as an event invites a slightly altered experience of a rite of passage. Sarah discusses how:

on the one hand, *The Vagina Monologues* is sort of a counter cultural bordering on a movement, but even though it's counter cultural, it's still visible in pop culture, and I think that visibility in pop culture benefits its message, because people are more receptive to things that they see in pop culture.

The play functions as an entrance into a counter-cultural discourse at the same time it has a modicum of visibility in the mainstream culture.

A few researchers are examining rituals such as Sarah describes that cannot be described using traditional rites of passage language. Ramona Faith Oswald (2003) edits *Lesbian Rites: Symbolic Acts and the Power of Community* in which she collects varied

narratives and research into how lesbians negotiate life events like death and weddings in ways that incorporate at the same time they subvert the heterosexism of rites associated with these experiences. Anthropologist Melissa Cheyney, in her research and work with midwife-assisted home births, describes how “Views of ritual as performative medium are based on the assumption that ritual does not always simply mold participants, rather that participants also fashion rituals that mold their worlds” (2005, p. 130). Feminists use praxis to ground theory in real-life political and social activism and through Catherine Bell’s (1997) theory about ritual, Cheyney argues “that homebirth practices/rituals are mechanisms through which many midwives and mothers actively challenge and manipulate the values and structures of dominant technocratic birthing paradigms” (2005, p. 131). Like midwife-assisted homebirths and social rituals designed by lesbians, *The Vagina Monologues* is experienced by audience members and actors as a counter-cultural rite of passage with familiar aspects of liminality at the same time it serves to challenge the status-quo of contemporary discourse about women’s bodies, women’s sexuality and the (often sexual) violence inflicted on women.

Although *The Vagina Monologues* has eleven years of production exposure and nine years as a college and worldwide campaign to end violence, it still functions in a counter-cultural space. It is mainstreamed on college campuses in student health and women studies yet remains outside the mainstream for most of society. This past V-Day campaign (2007) saw controversies ranging from high school girls suspended for defying the administration and saying the word, “vagina” (Sherriff, 2007) to a Florida town putting “HooHah” instead of “Vagina” on their theatre marquee (2007). When a culture can’t even accept the clinical term for women’s genitalia to be spoken out loud, in public,

by women themselves, a theatrical show with the word in its title remains very much outside the mainstream. Experiencing the play as a rite of passage into a non-dominant discourse becomes empowering in ways that are familiar to “second-wave” feminists who experienced their “click moments” by protesting the Miss America pageant and starting battered women’s shelters the early 1970s (Rosen, 2000).

While the theatre ritual described by Schechner above is present in performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, I suggest that this ritual is subverted by the ways people enter into the theatre space. This entry into a non-dominant discourse is intentional by many who attend or audition for the show. First, one recognizes that the production is occurring and some attend to “check-out” this risqué event. Many had heard about it and “had to go” because someone made them or they felt compelled. What is common in the responses is the intent behind the attendance to participate in an event that challenges the status quo or (for women attendees) to connect with other women in a show of solidarity. The men who attend are often (but not always) dragged by friends or extra credit but all the men interviewed agreed the discussion about violence against women is needed. Audience members often engage in discussion about the show with friends and family. David even wrote a letter to the editor of the Barometer in response to a negative column about the show. This annual performativity of response to gendered violence and challenge of societal expectations of women places the engagement of the play by the audience in the non-dominant/counter-cultural space. A final way that the production functions as a counter-cultural ritual is the audition process. Women who decide to audition do so to participate intentionally in raising awareness about violence and some even audition to break their own silence about past abuse experiences and be in

community with women breaking the silence around these issues. Audience and cast alike transform the experience by the intentions they perform with their participation. They mold the experience to meet their needs and the needs they envision for society.

As a participant observer auditioning for and performing in *The Vagina Monologues* I had the opportunity to participate in this ritual at the same time I observed it as a woman 15 years older than most of the actors. I listened to the women share why they auditioned, how their friends and family were reacting to their participation in the show, and very often how the women experienced the rehearsal and performance process as an empowering step in reclaiming their lives from assault or abuse.

Deavere Smith writes, “The body has a memory just as the mind does. The heart has a memory, just as the mind does. The act of speech is a physical act. It is powerful enough that it can create, with the rest of the body, a kind of cooperative dance” (1993, p. xxv). Dancer/choreographer and audience member Alex agrees:

People have kinesthetic memory. I mean we have kinesthetic memories whether we remember it or not, so like with sexual assault, people have a kinesthetic memory of it that is different than their psychological or emotional experience of it, so with anything we all have kinesthetic memories even of our births. And it’s really hard for us to process those if we’re not expressing with our bodies or using them. It’s really hard to experience positive sexual experiences if you’ve had negative ones, if you’ve had violent ones, sometimes people need an outlet that is safe to express violence through their body without hurting someone else or hurting themselves, and so really isolating body parts and getting rid of gender in really, really safe situations, in my experience helps people to gently process ways that they’ve been hurt and have them be safe and not sexual, but in a way sensual, to experience more neutral or positive emotions from that body part that they’ve experienced hurtful stuff from.

By taking on the skin of another woman, we have permission to physically, vocally embody another experience that can begin, or continue, the healing. Boal’s famous

Spect-Actor theatre (1979) experiment found its feet when the actors did not understand a suggestion from a spectator and she finally, in frustration, jumped up on stage into the scene and performed it herself.

This Spect-Actor embodied Aristotle's idea of catharsis in a way the oldest theatre theorist might not recognize and is demonstrated by audience members at *The Vagina Monologues*. Delilah comments while laughing, "I was walking out of the play last year, I turned to the guy I came with and I was like, I'm auditioning next year. And he was like, I can see that!" Later she says, "my mom's going to be really excited when she hears!" By watching the actors on stage, women see and often recognize their place on the stage.

Speaking out loud is another aspect of *The Vagina Monologues* as a counter-culture rite of passage. "I did see something written up as V-Day. They didn't even use the v-word. I thought, 'Just say it!'" one participant complained. A male athlete said there was not a particular scene that stood out for him, "I just remember hearing the word vagina a whole lot, man, a whole lot." Deborah recognizes the radical nature of the show, "because it was just that short of time ago that people couldn't even say it...we're pushing their buttons." The director remembers "some people auditioned to become more comfortable saying vagina, and then realized they couldn't the first week of rehearsals, and they just went, 'no, this is too scary.'" Speaking words like "vagina" and the more pejorative "cunt" out loud transgresses "appropriate" behavior for women. We are socialized to not talk about our bodies in mixed company or in public and we do, it not only builds an ease to be able to say "vagina" without pausing or whispering! This

transgression of appropriate speech by women in public spaces is part of the attraction for cast and audience alike.

Whether they are actors or audience members, women participants insist their male friends go to the show. The male athlete focus group guessed that people went because, “probably girlfriends make them,” and, “some of our teammates we saw there, their girlfriends had to do extra credit or they just wanted to go and the guy was obligated.” Most of the men who participated in the interviews are already allies and went to support CARDV, friends who were performing or working the event, or in David’s case, because he became a feminist ally as a child when he marched with his mom for the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) in 1977. This experience had a profound impact on his life and he appreciates how the show is “more accessible for men” than other events are.

On the surveys, people were likely to come with friends and several crossed out friend and wrote “mom” or “daughter.” In the interviews, some women attended because their moms brought them; Delilah’s mom saw it when she was nine and “definitely wouldn’t take me, understandably...[and when I got to college] the opportunity came up and I went for it.” Madeline “sort of felt obligated to go. It was something I wanted to do as a female to support.” The production is an opportunity for women to connect with each other.

In 2006, Kimberly added the closing element of inviting people to stand to break the silence about violence and an intense discussion ensued among the cast. Carrie Giese, the Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator in Student Health expressed serious concerns about the emotional fall-out of such an invitation. Carrie performed an

introduction and rehearsed with the cast on group rehearsal nights. The night of the discussion remains in Carrie's memory as the most memorable moments of the process.

I think I get protective for the audience members even more than the cast. Because the cast, I'm thinking it's informed consent, you know like, they know exactly what they're doing...I think sometimes with activism stuff, like we get people fired up to speak up, but then we don't have that support system there for them after they speak up...I'm just so against asking the audience in an environment like Corvallis, because the DVD is in New York City. It's in Harlem. You have so much more autonomy there. If you even look at the rates of sexual assault familiar vs. non familiar, in New York, it's 85, here it's 95. You know, there's that differentiation of who's being assaulted by who, and there's the confidentiality piece and anonymity isn't present here, so I'm much more cautious about doing that piece as I would be at NYU or Chicago or LA, where you can kind of go back into your pod and you can look around and say, "Okay, I don't know folks here." Where here, everybody is so interrelated. So, I would even prefer that it was just cast members stood up at the end that wanted to. You know, maybe show the DVD and have cast members stand up, and then if audience members take that lead, we're not asking them to, but if they take that lead, and they want to stand up, that's great, but we're not setting them for...we're setting them up for success. If the only people that are standing by responding to the DVD I think it would be great. Because then, people who want to stand up and be empowered can, and we're not setting people up for a situation that they might not be prepped for. We're having them keep control basically.

The director encouraged the discussion but knew that in the end, "I've gotta be the one who comes down with a final choice, which is why people trust me to do this job." She compromised by having the house lights stay dim so the audience was not in full light. It seems to Kimberly that the biggest problem was that the cast members in favor of standing were so forceful that "people are talking over each other and they're not listening, so like, it was amping up [Carrie's] emotional experience of the situation...she was just bulldozed right over."

The people for whom Carrie was trying to speak likely sat in the audience; they just didn't participate in the research. Audience members who participated in an

interview overwhelmingly remember the standing as one of, or the most powerful moment of the show. Many of them initiated the discussion about this part of the show.

Marithra remembers:

I was very confused [when people started standing], because my mom stood up, and by the time ‘Who wants to stop the violence?’ everyone was standing up, but then I realized why my mom had stood up, because my cousin was raped in college, and she’s never been the same since, and um...yeah, the second performance I [attended, I] stood up at the first one.

Brigit also discussed the standing and the discussion the cast had about it:

I am one of the people who stands up, and (starts crying) see I react all the time, and it’s so funny to me, because it’s been so long and I talk about it all the time very openly, but, just thinking about how it’s all these people, and then, if I go with friend, when they stand up with you, it’s really powerful for me, because of the people that I know, I’m generally the only person that has experienced something like that and I’ve had family members that were domestic violence survivors, and it’s just really powerful, and I think it’s a really...I just like that it’s there, because it puts more of a personal feeling to the production itself...

I can see where that concern would come. I think that in addition to that though it provides you the option of not, in that way, if you’re comfortable enough announcing that, you can make that choice. I’ve found that for me, with all of the various things that have happened in my life, the thing that helps me the most is to just tell people about it, because I’m just very open about it, because I think sometimes I can see that some people are like, “Oh my gosh! You just said that. What?” I think it’s very important they don’t like hide things like that. Then it’s worded “if you or someone you know,” so no one can really tell if you are the victim, the survivor or the friend, so but I could see the concern since I’ve worked in the field too, but I just really like that it’s there, and I think that it sends a really powerful message.

Muriel “was startled by the number that stood the first time. And it didn’t take me too long to try and recall what had happened in my life like that. It had been a long time since I had thought about that, and I started to cry. It was pretty powerful. It was good. Good for me.”

Standing wasn't critical for some women; Sarah only vaguely remembered standing and others didn't respond. Alex felt that "personally it would be humiliating. I don't talk about my personal history to the person I came to the play with, and I would never confide in her my own experience with sexual assault, so I wouldn't have stood up in front of her. Let alone a passel of strangers." She was, however, proud of those who did stand.

The men described the standing as "awkward" as in who will stand, will anyone stand? Jonathan's most uncomfortable moment was:

I would have to say the very ending, the simple fact there were so many [people stood]. (Pause.) So that was what probably explains the power of that scene that you're faced with so many instances [of a] person's circle of domestic violence. But the pride of being still alive and in control of that situation now was, went from disturbing to incredibly uplifting.

Some cast members saw the moment as "unifying" and "beautiful." Maren believes, "this is what this town needs to see. This is what needs to happen. This is so common and it shouldn't be common. Just because those things are commonplace doesn't mean they're acceptable...The most powerful moment was when at the last show we asked everyone to stand up who had ever been abused or ever known somebody who had been abused, and more than half the audience actually stood up." It can, however, set up an internal conflict, as it did for Mabel:

I understand their reluctance. It's really important for people to do that when they're ready. And even for me myself, I had an incident in my own past, and I was like, "Do I stand up, or do I not stand up?" Well, it wasn't rape, but it almost was, but...so I decided not to stand up, and I watched everybody else stand up, but I do remember thinking, "Well, maybe you should have." But, at the same time, I work here, and I see students, but maybe that would have been a good thing. Maybe if a student had seen me and then come in for advising, they'd be like 'Wait a minute, I saw that you stood up, I've got something to tell you.' I dunno.

I go back and forth on that. Isn't that kind of weird to think to yourself, that there's a spectrum for how bad something is for it to count as being stand-up-able. It was attempted, but was it bad enough to count? How weird is that? Does it count or not count, or how many minor things add up to a major thing, or does it work that way?

Deborah's friend didn't stand either, "She told me afterwards, 'I don't know why I didn't stand. I should-I wanted to stand. I wish I would have stood.'"

One of the most powerful moments of the experience for me was at a cast party after the closing performance this year. Joanna shared why she attended last year:

It was like advertised in the dorms, and I think we might have gotten like an extra floor point for going. Although, I did want to go, I must admit. It wasn't all the bribery. I went with a large group of people, like some of my friends from the rugby team, so...yeah. Two boys.

Kryn: What scene was like the most powerful?

Johanna: Definitely the end scene, which is kind of interesting, because it was actually like Eve when she was in Harlem, and she asked everyone to stand up, and I told you this before like at the party when like um it was just kind of interesting when she was just like 'if anyone has ever been assaulted or anything,' and I remember just like sitting in my seat and being like petrified of standing up, even though something like that had happened to me before, and I was there with my friends, and I was like 'What would they think of me if they knew this?' and how that would change, and I remember just being so ashamed and scared to stand up. And it was only when they asked if you knew somebody that this had happened to that I was able to stand up. I remember being like really upset that night when I went home, and I remember thinking like, 'Hey! Why was I upset?' Like why was I ashamed? And I've never thought about it like that before which is kind of interesting. So, I went home and I wrote like this huge email to myself and I wrote like three pages long, and I was just going off about how I was sooo mad and this was sooo wrong and just soo unfair! Why wasn't my uncle the one who was afraid to stand up? You know what I mean? It made no sense to me, so I was steaming mad, and I wrote this big thing about *The Vagina Monologues*, and I'm gonna stand up, I'm gonna stand up on the stage! So, yeah, that was my big powerful life changing moment from *The Vagina Monologues*.

Kryn: And then you did! You auditioned and--

Johanna: Yeah, it was one of those things that like I couldn't back down from because, I knew that if I didn't do it, I would be like, I dunno, calling myself a wiener for the rest of the year.

Kryn: And you'd always regret it. You'd say, 'I wish I had done that.'

Johanna: Yeah. So it was one of those things that couldn't be avoided.

This struggle about whether or not to stand is another example of a counter-cultural rite of passage. It is not socially acceptable to talk about abuse, especially sexual abuse. To publicly break this silence is to break with traditional culture but admits an individual into a new tradition that V-Day participants hope will change the course of society and usher in a new violence-free world.

### 3.11 Scene 11: Why OSU continues to produce *The Vagina Monologues*

One of the basic questions with which I started this research was to explore if OSU was producing the show for the same reasons audience members attend. Do the audiences leave a performance with the message intended? If not, does (or should) that alter the production? Stacey Edwards, Peer Health Advocates Coordinator, Health Educator for Student Health Services and the producer of the show since summer of 2006 answers:

Well, it's been at least seven years [that OSU has produced the show]. And that's one of my first questions when I came in was "Hey, we're doing *Vagina Monologues* this year - is it still worth doing? Are we still getting people that are interested, and every year, from what I hear there is at least one show that is sold out. It has always been still well-attended. So if people are coming, then obviously, they still want to hear or know something about the performance or know what it's for. I think the community always is kind of now, it's an expectation. The play, I think [addresses violence against women] in a really powerful way - an interesting way. And I think in some instances it does it through the great medium of theater and using humor and using personal experience, sadness, and everything else just to, something that's more

deepening of the experience, rather than just doing a march and being kind of a force out there. It kind of attacks it in a different way where it gets it into people's emotions and stuff. Not just those participating, but the audience members as well, who might not typically go to a TBtN march. And, the fact that it's still edgy enough that it gets editorials out and about every year shows that it's doing a great job. If people still feel that it's controversial still every year that it's gone on, then it's still hitting a social issue that is not - that's being so stubborn to change, you know? So, especially those that figure, 'Oh, well, women can take steps to stop violence. It's not really our jobs. It's their fault.' That they drank too much that night, or it's their fault they're dating someone that's abusive and stuff. So, yeah, so I think it's really...as long as we're causing controversy or it still ruffles feathers, that means it's still needed. Honestly. But, if the play just starts to become so mainstream that it's just, 'Oh yeah, it's coming tonight do I want to see it more than something else,' then we'll take that step to find out what that something else is, then we'll replace it, but right now, I don't know what that next step is, nor is OSU ready for it. I think they still have to work through their feelings about just women and their bodies and about allowing women to be comfortable with them and empowered. Allowing us to be like that.

Stacey's response includes many of the ideas that audience and cast members bring up when I asked them the same question in their interviews.

Men and women alike voiced concern that the production is "preaching to the choir." It is a fear that only people interested and committed to work against violence will attend. While some people attend year after year, 60% of survey respondents in 2006 were first time attendees. Several interviewees remarked that it is for this reason that OSU should continue to produce the show. Four of the men interviewed commented on the college strategy, "If you're getting some different people in there each year, that's valuable" (Chris). Roy agrees, "we have a high turnover here. I think it's important to keep doing it here." The men also mentioned the fundraising aspect. Will notes that "the money goes to something good," and Chris adds that the fundraising is valuable, "Even if all the same people paid to come back and see it the next year, that would be valuable,

but I think even more so the fact that you have new people around each year. You're getting out those ideas." With a continually revolving first-time audience, the message could be perceived to be ever-new.

Women in the study also discuss the awareness aspect but extend their thoughts to include a variety of other reasons. "It's extremely valuable in empowering women and letting them have a voice" (Alex). "It's demystifying it. The whole, not just the word [vagina]. The idea that women have a lot going on—menses and birth and sexual drive and abuse and issues and it kind of just brings it all together very nicely" (Muriel). As brought into public awareness during the Women's Movement of the 60s and 70s, consciousness can be raised (Rosen) when women gather. *The Vagina Monologues* takes this consciousness-raising and places it in a public venue, on stage for thousands to see and hear. When Ensler began performing, the audiences comprised a lot of women. She says that following performances,

hundreds of women waited after the show to talk to me about their lives. The play had somehow freed up their memories, pain, and desire. Night after night I heard the same stories—women being raped as teenagers, in college, as little girls, as elderly women; women who had finally escaped being beaten to death by their husbands; women who were terrified to leave...I began to feel insane, as if a door had opened to some underworld and I was being told things I was not supposed to know; knowing that these things was dangerous.

The idea that the show is dangerous is discussed by Carrie, "I think it's an outlet for women to talk about things that aren't socially acceptable, yet talk about in a public forum." The division between public life and private life for men and women is an ancient practice and when a theatre presentation places women center stage in all our sexuality, these lines are blurred or erased altogether. Muriel says, "I think what *Vagina Monologues* seems to do is showing that women have so many sides to them—that we're

not just flat characters...They're talking about things they shouldn't be talking about...Do we talk about our bodies [as easily as men do]? No. I mean they're hidden physically and hidden emotionally. It's interesting. Naughty naughty. Not supposed to talk about it." Women transgress societal expectations of femininity when we talk about the "naughty" details of our bodies.

Some people worry that the show only draws men because of the voyeuristic aspect of hearing women talk about sexuality and faking orgasms on stage. While this concern may be well-founded for some audience members, men and women in this study express a belief in the importance of men attending *The Vagina Monologues* and other violence prevention events. Elizabeth was impressed by

how many guys were there, because it, I mean at some level most women already know about this stuff...I talk to [my male friends] about, you know, going to my care with my keys out and ready or walking across the campus with mace and they have no idea what I'm talking about...The V-Day stuff was very nice 'cause it was so—it surrounded you in the auditorium, you know, 'cause you've got women all around you. You've got women on stage and they're making points that you can't ignore.

Alex even conceded that it doesn't matter what gets the men there, as long as they are exposed to the message, "with a lot of activist, especially feminist activism, who really needs to be educated are the men. So as many men as can get dragged to it by some woman the better." If a little moaning helps the medicine go down, why not?

This is consistent response to the survey questionnaire as well. The last questions ask about the perceived efficacy of various media for raising awareness and stopping violence and one participant wrote below her circled numbers, "How effective can any of these be if men don't attend?" Participants generally agree that men must be the ones reading, hearing, attending, and participating for any of the efforts to make a lasting

change. A fifty-year-old male wrote on the survey that it “needs to start in primary school. Raise awareness; teach gentleness, love—not pain and hurt.” A twenty-five-year-old male stated that all the options listed are not effective at all and then added two more options, “tazers and small caliber pistols” that he believes are very effective in stopping violence against women. It is possible that his response was not meant to be entirely serious, however, it does emphasize the social idea that men solve problems with guns and that this individual did not understand the anti-violence message.

The male athletes in the focus group believe that the show should be mandatory. One young man says, “you know how athletes get one conference or meeting that we attend once a term? They should have *The Vagina Monologues* as one of the meetings that we attend.” Another put it this way, “The other workshop that I went to kind of like dealt with it...but *Vagina Monologues* was more about the whole subject. It was much clearer. Like, some workshops that you go to, they might slip it in, in kind of a sneaky way, but *Vagina Monologues* was right out there in great detail.” “The only problem” for Jonathan, “is that it doesn’t get to enough people.”

Another reason interview participants believe the show should continue to be produced is the age of the actors and many of those in the audience; the fact that it takes place on a college campus where “so many rapes happen...It’s so prevalent...I feel that by producing *The Vagina Monologues* on the OSU campus, not only does it spread awareness, but hopefully it gives an authentic, tangible experience for not only the women, but the men” (Desiree). Other actors interviewed discussed similar ideas of empowerment for survivors of violence. Deborah says, “for those women just coming into college, too, it just exposes them to an attitude, if you will, that it’s okay to talk about

it and such, and just hopefully it would give them an opportunity to maybe seek help for maybe the very first time.” Mabel hopes that young women will be “able to stand up and say, ‘This happened to me, this happened to her, this happened to you,’” and maybe it will start to change.

Audience members are more likely to talk about the awareness and the portrayals of characters, “It introduces those ideas to people like me who have no fricken’ clue,” said Marithra. A fifty-eight-year-old woman wrote, “I wish I had this when I was young and not believed it was my fault, ‘you must have done something wrong to cause it.”

Although Sarah didn’t particularly care for the staging of OSU’s production, she remarks:

It wasn't necessarily in this particular performance, but whenever I go to events where there are women, especially large groups of women, I feel at home, so if anything it provides me with a sense of solidarity. I may not be learning anything new or that I haven't lot about before. I may not be feeling any new feeling, except sort of comradery. I think that's just as important as any other reason.”

The last reason discussed in the interviews as paramount in the continuing production of the show is the very controversy surrounding the play. Elizabeth believes that “it shows that [OSU will not] ignore the issue.” Producing *The Vagina Monologues* sends a message to the student and community population that violence against women and girls is unacceptable and in order to address the societal problem, we have to be able to talk about it. By talking about it in the context of a dramatic production, it emphasizes the artistic dimension. Mabel says, keep producing it:

because it’s great art; it’s a great play. I think sometimes people get all caught up in the ‘controversy’ and forget it’s a good play, period. So you should always do a great play. And I think the fact that it’s still controversial—Why? Why is this controversial? It’s like, ‘Don’t beat up girls.’ What’s the issue? The fact that it still generates controversy is why you should keep doing it. Until it reaches a point where it’s like, ‘Yeah, okay, Vagina Monologues, whatever.’...Hopefully, the day

will come when there's no more controversy, and there's no more need for it, and then that's the day we stop it.

More than half the survey participants both years perceive the show as art. The interview participants have mixed ideas about whether or not the play is "great art," as Mabel believes.

Directors and cast members are more likely than audience members to discuss the artistic value. Both directors Kimberly and Trisha think the play leaves a lot to be desired artistically. Trisha believes, "they're poorly written." Kimberly agrees:

I don't think it's great art necessarily, I just think it's great what theatre can do. Theatre is a great art form and the fact that we're using this particular play to activate people, I think is just a perfect example of how theatre can change lives. Which is not to say that the play is a bad play either. I think it's provocative. And I think that I'm amazed every year when there's a group of women in my cast who are working through whatever they need to work through in order to say 'vagina,' in order to talk about like, what has happened to them, or get over what has happened to them or celebrate that they are over what has happened to them. And every time, there are poignant stories, there are happy stories, there are joyful stories that happen with the rehearsal process that make it all worthwhile. Even if nobody showed up to the show, it's really great, and a lot of it happens one on one, when I rehearse with people one on one, and then when we come together for our group rehearsals, and people we share with each other peoples' reactions to us being in the show, and it's obvious that we are not in a non violent society and that we are in a society where people feel like they know that this is either A - not going to help at all stop the violence or that are truly grateful that someone is at least trying to stop the violence with doing anything at all and getting off their butts and actually making an attempt, whether it's perfect or not perfect. At least their not just sitting there telling the people who are doing shit that their shit is not smelling very good. Ya know? I just really really respect that. Because there are so many people who just sit back and say, 'Well, that's not going to work.' Yeah, well then, what will work, and why aren't you doing that? Exactly.

As mentioned above, a limitation of this study is that those who completed the surveys, those who provided their e-mails for the interviews, and those who responded to the request for interviews are more likely to have strong opinions, one way or the other,

about the production. The ones who participated generally agree (albeit at times for different reasons) that there is value in producing the show each year and are generally well-informed about the prevalence of violence in society and the ways that sexuality and violence are often socially constructed along gendered lines.

#### 4 Conclusion and Directions for Future Research: A New Work

*The Vagina Monologues* at OSU performs at multiple levels for the cast and the audience. The audience that participated in the surveys and interviews generally think the annual production has value on campus. This value varies from building community, empowering women to speak out, raising awareness about violence, and raising money for our local shelter. The people with whom I spoke often mention the same scenes the literature discusses but talk about them in different ways. For the most part, they don't show an awareness of the nuanced theoretical and semiotic problems caused by the transnational scenes but demonstrate a deep emotional response to the subject matter and a desire to know more. The participants are pessimistic about the efficacy of the anti-violence aspect of V-Day but agree that it is important for the women involved to connect and speak out. The participants are remarkably well-informed about women, violence, and the way both are constructed along gendered lines in our society. They confirm what ticket sales have suggested—that the production is a worthy endeavor each year.

Future research on a wider cross-section of audience members could yield other perspectives and insights into how the performance is and is not meeting the

campus community's needs. The scope of this research necessitated a narrow focus on audience members who volunteered to be interviewed. Before and after surveys with people attending for the first time and interviewing people opposed to the production would allow for a wider range of questions and initiate discussions around what alternative anti-violence campaigns could include.

The most important result of the research into the literature and the study participants' responses is the recognition that one theatre show cannot possibly address all facets of the issues nor can it depict every woman's experience. At its very best, *The Vagina Monologues* should inspire new plays and fundraisers that speak to the spaces created by the text and the actors portraying the characters. It can also be the space for activists to question why we have such poor measurement instruments and to challenge this prevalent and invasive problem of violence against women that is stuck in the mire of women-blaming and requiring women to take most of the responsibility for our own safety.

I believe the play continues to draw in audiences because of the stories.

Mrsevic is a lawyer from Belgrade and writes:

The purpose of storytelling or narrative is twofold: we create a record of experiences with violence and we perform a political action, defying the invisibility of women. Men have created history through writing, noting, registering, and archiving all that has been in their interest. Women's absence from their history ends at the moment when and where we start to write and read our own stories. The stories that deserve to be noticed first are the stories about the most invisible violence, the most invisible sufferings of invisible women. (2001, p. 45.)

It is with defiance that women audition for and perform in the show each year. It is with defiance that women attend the show and "drag" their boyfriends along. We

are strong when we speak with our own voices, even if it is through someone else's story, or through our silent standing in solidarity. Women resist the traditional culture of the status quo and make conscious choices to navigate through the rite of passage of *The Vagina Monologues* and are changed by the process. I hope that this research inspires women and future students to continue probing these questions and dramatically imagining a world without violence.

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## Appendix A: 2006 Audience Survey

Vagina Monologues Survey  
Please check all that apply.

1. Why did you come to this performance?
  - a. I know someone in the cast.
  - b. It looked interesting.
  - c. A friend brought me.
  - d. I'll receive class extra credit.
  - e. I want to support CARDV.
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How did you perceive the performance?
  - a. As art
  - b. Entertaining
  - c. Feminist activism
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What will you remember about this performance?
  - a. It was great entertainment.
  - b. I'm going to audition next year!
  - c. I'll volunteer at CARDV.
  - d. I have new knowledge about women.
  - e. I'm inspired to participate in other activism projects.
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. I have seen the Vagina Monologues in the past
  - a. at OSU.
  - b. Somewhere else.
  - c. This is my first time.
  
5. I am
  - a. an OSU student.
  - b. OSU faculty/staff.
  - c. Community Member.
  
6. I am Female \_\_\_\_\_ ; or Male \_\_\_\_\_ ; or \_\_\_\_\_. 7. Age \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Race \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Y / N

-----

Yes! I would be willing to participate in future interview research about the play. Please detach and hand both parts in as you leave. Thank you!

e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B Interview Questions

## Interview Questions for Audience Members

Can you share why you attended this year's production of *The Vagina Monologue*?

1. Think back to this year's production. What scene stands out in your mind?
  2. What scene made you the most uncomfortable?
  3. What scene made you cry?
  4. What scene made you want to stop the violence?
  5. What did you learn about women and/or vaginas that you didn't already know?
  6. If you've seen *The Vagina Monologues* before, what was different this time?
  7. What vagina story/experience do you wish was represented?
  8. What would your vagina wear/say?  
(If you are male, what do you think your partner/mother's/sister's vagina would wear/say?)
  9. Did you read any of the Barometer articles, letters or editorials about *The Vagina Monologues*?  
If so, how did they impact your experience of the performance?
  10. If you were an actor in *The Vagina Monologues* in the past, how is being an audience member different than being in the cast?
  11. The director at OSU casts everyone who auditions, allowing each woman to participate at a level at which she's comfortable and capable. How do you respond to this idea of including everyone who auditions?
- This year, the production included a clip from the documentary "V-Day: Until the Violence Stops."
12. Did it make you want to watch the whole documentary?
  13. Eve Ensler's call for the audience to take a stand was
  14. When audience members stood to break their silence about rape and/or violence in their lives, I felt
  15. Respond to this statement: Violence against women is directly connected to attitudes about sexuality.
  16. Respond to this statement: Violence against women is directly connected to attitudes about vaginas.

## Appendix C Interview Questionnaire

*The Vagina Monologues* Questionnaire

1. Why did you come to this year's performance of *The Vagina Monologues*?

- g. I know someone in the cast.
- h. It looked interesting.
- i. A friend brought me.
- j. I'll receive class extra credit.
- k. I want to support CARDV.
- l. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did you perceive the performance?

- e. As art
- f. Entertaining
- g. Feminist activism
- h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What will you remember about this performance?

- g. It was great entertainment.
- h. I'm going to audition next year!
- i. I'll volunteer at CARDV.
- j. I have new knowledge about women.
- k. I'm inspired to participate in other activism projects.
- l. Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. I have seen *The Vagina Monologues* in the past

- d. at OSU.
- e. Somewhere else.
- f. This is my first time.

5. I am

- a. an OSU student.
- b. OSU faculty/staff.
- c. Community Member.

6. I am Female \_\_\_\_\_ ; or Male \_\_\_\_\_ ; or \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Age \_\_\_\_\_

8. Race \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? (please circle one)

YES NO

10. I am

- a. an audience member
- b. an actor
- c. a director
- d. a tech artist
- e. other \_\_\_\_\_

11. I see \_\_\_\_\_ professional plays each year.
12. I see \_\_\_\_\_ community plays each year.
13. I attend \_\_\_\_\_ OSU theatre productions each year.
14. I act in \_\_\_\_\_ plays a year.
15. I direct \_\_\_\_\_ plays a year.
16. I am tech crew in \_\_\_\_\_ plays a year.
18. Have you supported CARDV before?      YES    NO    If yes, how?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Did you write a paper about *The Vagina Monologues* for a class assignment? YES    NO  
If yes, would you be willing to let me use it in this study to compare your initial  
impressions of the play to your impressions after 8 months in this interview?      YES    NO
20. I have taken \_\_\_\_\_ women studies classes.
21. I have taken \_\_\_\_\_ health/sexual assault awareness workshops and/or peer advocate  
training courses.
22. If your friend confided in you about a sexual assault, you know where to help her find  
information. YES    NO
23. If your friend confided in you about a sexual assault, you know where to help her find help.  
YES    NO
24. If your friend confided in you about a sexual assault, you know where to help her find  
shelter. YES    NO
25. How effective do you feel the following are in **raising awareness** about violence against  
women?  
(Please circle one. 1=Not Effective At All, → 5=Very Effective,      6=No Opinion)
- |                                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| News articles                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| TV documentaries               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Workshops on college campuses  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Demonstrations on campus       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Take Back the Night March      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Women's studies courses        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| V-Day celebrations             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Vagina Monologues performances | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

26. How effective do you feel the following are in **stopping** violence against women?  
(Please circle one. 1=Not Effective At All, → 5=Very Effective, 6=No Opinion)

News articles	1	2	3	4	5	6
TV documentaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
Workshops on college campuses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Demonstrations on campus	1	2	3	4	5	6
Take Back the Night March	1	2	3	4	5	6
Women's studies courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
V-Day celebrations	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vagina Monologues performances	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thanks so much!

## Appendix D 2007 Audience Survey

*The Vagina Monologues* Survey

This survey is for a graduate student's thesis about audiences at the performance. If you are over 18, your participation is appreciated. The surveys are voluntary and anonymous.

You may leave them in the boxes as you leave the theatre. Thank you!!

Please Circle all that apply and write numbers where applicable.

1. Why did you come to this year's performance of *The Vagina Monologues*?

- a. I know someone in the cast.
- b. It looked interesting.
- c. A friend brought me.
- d. I'll receive class extra credit.
- e. I want to support CARDV.
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did you perceive the performance?

- a. As art
- b. Entertaining
- c. Feminist activism
- d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What will you remember about this performance?

- a. It was great entertainment.
- b. I'm going to audition next year!
- c. I'll volunteer at CARDV.
- d. I have new knowledge about women.
- e. I'm inspired to participate in other activism projects.
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. I have seen *The Vagina Monologues* in the past

- a. at OSU.
- b. Somewhere else.
- c. This is my first time.

5. I am

- a. an OSU student.
- b. OSU faculty/staff.
- c. Community Member.

6. I am Female \_\_\_\_\_ ; or Male \_\_\_\_\_ ; or \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Age \_\_\_\_\_



Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6
Workshops on college campuses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Demonstrations on campus	1	2	3	4	5	6
Take Back the Night March	1	2	3	4	5	6
Women's studies courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
V-Day celebrations	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vagina Monologues performances	1	2	3	4	5	6

24. How effective do you feel the following are in **stopping** violence against women?  
(Please circle one. 1=Not Effective At All, → 5=Very Effective, 6=No opinion)

News articles	1	2	3	4	5	6
TV documentaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6
Workshops on college campuses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Demonstrations on campus	1	2	3	4	5	6
Take Back the Night March	1	2	3	4	5	6
Women's studies courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
V-Day celebrations	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vagina Monologues performances	1	2	3	4	5	6

*You may use this space for any additional comments. Thanks!*