

**The Vagina Monologues: A  
Theorised Understanding of  
its present and future role in  
the EE context**

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**Course: Public Health Promotion  
via Entertainment-Education.**

**Due Date: 18 August 2004**

## **Introduction**

Eve Ensler's play, *The Vagina Monologues*, addresses the issues of sexual violence and disempowerment in a provocative, entertaining manner. The script is based on Ensler's interviews with over two hundred women about their personal experiences and includes topics such as genital mutilation, incest and rape. Although the play has been well received by audiences in many countries, it has also generated a considerable amount of controversy. The play has spawned a grassroots movement, The V-Day Campaign, which aims to put an end to violence against women and girls in the global context.

The body of this paper is based on our observations and analysis of two performances of *The Vagina Monologues* in March 2004; one amateur, one professional. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with members of the professional and the amateur casts in order to gain further insight into, and understanding of, the topic. Entertainment-Education (EE) principles and theories have been used as a basis for our assessment of the present and potential roles of the play in addressing the social problems it highlights.

The analysis is particularly relevant to the South African situation in which rape and other symptoms of female sexual disempowerment are widespread. As it has become understood that these factors also play a major role in the spread of HIV/AIDS, addressing the roots of these problems through effective health communication has become even more urgent. As a theater piece with the potential of empowering women in the sexual arena, *The Vagina Monologues* has not only entertainment value, but also the possibility of being used as a vehicle for social change.

In the body of this paper, the use of live theatre as a vehicle for EE and the way in which social learning theory can be applied to the play, will be explored. A comparative analysis of the two performances of the play will excavate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Finally, recommendations on the further use of *The Vagina Monologues* as an EE intervention will be useful to those who may want to put on performances of the play in future or who may wish to use it in other violence against women campaigns in the South African context.

## **Section 1: Background**

### **1.1) Sexual violence and disempowerment in South Africa.**

In South Africa, there is an unacceptably high prevalence of rape and sexual harassment. Sex for women is often coercive and violent, and to some extent, this is accepted as the norm by both genders (Delius and Glaser, 2002:27). Not only are violent sexual assaults emotionally and psychologically damaging, they also make women more susceptible to HIV/AIDS, other STDs and pregnancy (Parker et al., 2000:3).

According to Rape Crisis, there were 54 310 *reported* rapes, indecent assaults and incest cases in South Africa in 1998. At a conservative estimate, it is believed that only 1 in 20 cases is reported, thus the actual figure could be as high as 10 86200, which is 2976 rapes per day, or **more than two a minute**. South Africa has the highest per capita rate of *reported* rape in the world (115.6 for every 100 000 of the population in 1998). According to Vogelman and Eagle (1991) violence is present in 50% to 60% of marital relationships (<http://www.rapecrisis.org.za>).

Rape and sexual violence are an extreme example of the sexual disempowerment of women. However, women can be pressured by those who love them, and in situations which they could avoid, or in which they could offer social, emotional, or physical resistance (Holland et al., 1992:9). In a male-dominated society such as ours, women are generally in a subservient position to men, even in the context of a loving relationship. Although women may know the risks of unprotected sex, including HIV infection, taking control in sexual relationships can be difficult if women play subordinate sexual roles. It has been argued that women who wish to ensure their sexual safety (and their sexual pleasure) may have to be socially assertive, and possibly, “unfeminine” as defined by their culture (Holland et al., 1992:1). Thus, in order to be in control of their sexuality, women may need to be prepared to lose a valued social relationship with a partner or potential partner.

The ways in which gender ideologies are embedded in social and economic pressures can be complex (Stanley and Wise, 1983 cited in Holland et al., 1992:4). In South Africa, two major factors have contributed to unequal sexual relationships and the spread of HIV/AIDS:

transactional sex and poor negotiation skills in a sexual context. Researchers have noted the transactional nature of sexual relationships in black South African society; in exchange for sex, girls expect their (often older) boyfriends to provide them with gifts, and even spending money and school-fees (Varga, 2000:53). Thus, poverty determines the expectations and structure of sexual relationships, with women being forced to rely heavily on the sexual economy to survive. In addition, young women are thought to be especially vulnerable to HIV infection because of their inability to negotiate the terms of sexual encounters (for example, Varga and Makubalo, 1996 in Varga, 2000:41). Condom use, for example, is related to factors like gender dynamics, sexual role stereotypes, the threat of physical violence, financial and material constraints and a lack of skills to challenge scripted sexual dynamics and partner expectations (Varga, 2000:44). Adolescent females do not talk about safer sex with their partners because they are worried about the possibility of emotional rejection, physical abuse, or being seen as promiscuous or HIV positive (Varga, 2000:46).

In the South African context particularly, the need for the sexual empowerment of women is, therefore, apparent. The question, then, is how. Holland and colleagues (writing in a more general context) state that there is no language or model of positive female sexuality for young women (1992:6). As discussed in later sections, *The Vagina Monologues* can fill this gap by serving as a powerful model of positive femininity and female sexuality. When young women become sexually active and begin to test out their sexual identities, they do not have direct personal experience to draw on, and information that could be helpful is usually not freely available. The information that they do receive comes from a variety of often contradictory sources: childhood experiences, schools, parents and siblings, peers and the mass media (Holland et al., 1992:2). Thus, women have to make sense of contradictions in the social construction of feminine sexuality (Ibid:3). They may have very little emotional or practical information that can be used to define and negotiate the boundaries of their own pleasure or safety (for example Thompson, 1984 in Holland et al., 1992:3).

Holland et al. consider empowerment a process at the level of knowledge and ideas. Intellectual empowerment requires a model of positive female sexuality, which offers women a means of reflecting critically on their own sexual experiences. Women are only victims when their experiences of coercive and/or violent sex appear to them as isolated personal experiences, for

which they are responsible, and which they cannot prevent in the future. Intellectual empowerment, then, is a process of moving away from this way of thinking to a more collective sense of women's relationships to men. Experiential empowerment is a process of putting into practice ways of negotiating safe and pleasurable sex with men (1992:23). Empowerment is not easily won, it is contested and a process in which women struggle to negotiate with men to increase control over their own sexuality (Ibid:7). Positive female role models like those in *The Vagina Monologues* can be helpful in showing women an alternative way of engaging with their own feminine sexuality.

### **1.2) The Vagina Monologues and the V-Day Campaign.**

It is daunting to think of the high rate of physical and emotional violence that women endure throughout the world, regardless of ethnicity, nationality or education. Many women have to suffer through various forms of violence at some point in their lives. Not only do the acts of violence need to be stopped, and the concept of inflicting violence on others eradicated, it is imperative that women are empowered, too, as the ultimate way of ending violence in the long run. It is through empowerment, and the construction of self-worth, that women are able to have the strength to stand up to violence.

This section will give an overview of the rise of the play *The Vagina Monologues*, its role within the V-Day organization (which has expanded globally), and some details of the workings of the organization. V-Day is both a non-government and non-profit organization, established to help women envisage their sexuality with an open and empowered mind. The organization has initiated a series of awareness campaigns and events across the world since its inception to achieve these aims.

Eve Ensler's play, *The Vagina Monologues*, served as the seed that gave rise to the V-Day organization. Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, founded V-Day in 1998 together with a group of women in New York. They all shared the same ideal of a world where women are free from any form of violence. Ensler interviewed hundreds of women as background information and inspiration for her play. During this process she realized that women across the globe are constantly threatened by violence and abuse.

*The Vagina Monologues* is a controversial piece due to its sexuality-oriented theme, witty yet explicit script, and the often passionate and bold performances of the participating actresses. The play is comprised of a series of sketches, which centre on women and sexuality. Each sketch consists of a story about a woman or a group of women whose sexual experiences bring changes, pain, revelation or joy to their lives. The play can be seen as “a collection of women’s voices and... speak[s] for other women” (Transcript 2:21). A number of social issues such as the prevalence of sexual abuse of women are raised in these monologues, which are aimed at all social or cultural groups that make up the audience. The play can be very adequately viewed as a form of entertainment-education because it is indeed a “communication form with both entertainment and education elements to enhance and facilitate social change” (Coleman, 1999:76). As a part of the V-Day campaign, *The Vagina Monologues* provides entertainment, information, as well as serving as a potential source of empowerment for its audiences, particularly women and girls.

After writing *The Vagina Monologues* Ensler realized that if people did not take more action to put an end to violence against women, it would continue to destroy lives. With this strong conviction, she established V-Day as a “global movement to end violence against women and girls. It is also a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money, and revitalize the spirit of existing anti-violence organizations” (<http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/aboutvday>). V-Day implements projects to raise the awareness of women’s rights as, in many parts of the world, these rights are still being neglected or impinged on (for example, the issues surrounding female circumcision).

Unlike most other non-profit organizations, V-Day does not have a physical location. It is run by several part-time and full-time staff in different parts of the world, and major projects that aim to stop violence against women are chosen annually. Many activists and volunteers have offered their time to initiate, organize and participate in V-Day events. This has allowed the organization to gradually expand across the world. These events have also had support from, and participation by, many celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Glenn Close, and Oprah Winfrey. The V-Day campaigns and benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues* attempt to provide emotional support and empower women and girls. It is hoped that audiences will then be better equipped psychologically to deal with various kinds of gender-related discriminations. Women

can learn to celebrate their sexuality rather than being ashamed, afraid or disgusted about it. The general public who attend the V-Day events are educated about the respect that women and girls deserve.

The activities and events of V-Day are not constrained to any particular location, and are held at a variety of venues in many countries, ranging from stadiums, schools, to grass root community centers and spatially-intimate coffee-houses. These places usually offer a sense of familiarity to the participants, allowing interaction to take place easily.

Apart from the benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, other V-Day initiatives include public service advertising campaigns; interactive V-Day events; and appealing to opinion leaders to use their advocacy to end violence against women. Knowing that the influence of grass root and community level activities are limited in terms of a wider national scale, V-Day has approached opinion leaders, such as “the Presidential candidates [of both political parties in America] urging them to make Violence Against Women a central issue of their campaign platforms, not a sideline or ‘women’s’ issue” (<http://www.vday.org/contents/vote>). Public figures have the ability to exert a considerable degree of influence over the public. Their authority and advocacy is thus a valuable resource for V-Day as most of its activities are designed to raise public awareness of a violence-free world for women.

V-Day runs both College and Worldwide campaigns. Since 1999, more than one hundred universities and colleges globally have put on benefit productions of *The Vagina Monologues* on or around Valentine’s Day each year. Millions of people to date have been exposed to its messages. Students have the opportunity to be empowered during the process of actively participating in and organizing the college campaigns, where they constantly engage with V-Day’s philosophy of emancipating women from all types of sexual violence. As for the Worldwide campaigns, community members are encouraged to put on productions of *The Vagina Monologues* to help raise awareness of violence against women and to strengthen women’s sense of self-efficacy. The V-Day organization provides tools and guidelines online for those who wish to organize a V-Day campaign.

Both of the campaigns raise considerable sums of money through ticket sales of *The Vagina Monologues* performances and also from sponsorships and donations. The proceeds from V-Day events are directed towards supporting women's shelters and other organizations across the world that work to terminate violence against women.

### **1.3) Methodology.**

The major part of this project consists of a comparison between two local performances of *The Vagina Monologues*; one professional, one amateur. In order to analyze the two performances in as much depth as possible, all three members of the research team attended each performance and took detailed notes on particular themes that had been discussed beforehand, as well as any other points that arose during the performances. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of both casts in order to gain further insight into various relevant aspects of the performances (see appendix A).

Before exploring the differences between the two performances of the play, however, it was considered useful to apply Social Learning Theory and theories of live theatre to the script as a whole, in order to discover the ways in which *The Vagina Monologues* could work as an EE intervention. The comparative analysis of the two performances examines how each production was adjusted to appeal to the needs of different audiences, and shows that the modification of different elements can affect the way in which an intervention actually works.



## **Section 2: Live Theatre as a vehicle for Entertainment Education, and in relation to The Vagina Monologues**

The use of live theatre as a vehicle for Entertainment Education (EE) must conform to certain pre-existing theories of both of these concepts in order to be successful. An understanding of theories of Dramatic Art as well as their correlation to the EE environment is fundamental in the creation and production of an effective live theatre piece for an Entertainment Education initiative. For the purpose of this section, we will look at the medium of theatre, and *The Vagina Monologues* in four ways:

- As entertainment/art
- As an instrument of education
- As a weapon of social change
- As a document that reflects prevalent societal issues

(Trumbull 2004)

### **2.1) Theatre and The Vagina Monologues as forms of entertainment/art.**

Live theatre is a performing art. This classification sees the medium being viewed in light of various theories in keeping with this genre. These include elements like the “production, performers, audience, director, theatre space, design aspects and text” (Wilson and Goldfarb, 1999:12). It is also largely seen as being the embodiment of dramatic action in text, referring to the script. On a more abstract level, theories of theatre as a performing art involve discussions on its ephemeral nature, and reflection and awareness of the now (Ibid).

The notion of “the production” in dramatic theory deals with the overall manner in which the play is portrayed to the audience. The way in which the script, lighting, music, direction and choreography appear to the audience during the performance all form part of this theory.

The professional and amateur productions of *The Vagina Monologues* differed in this regard - for instance, the professional production contained several musical items while there was an absence of music altogether in the amateur production. The two productions also differed in terms of the lighting techniques employed. The professional production was marked by various

changes in the lighting styles – single spotlights for the individual performances; dimmed lighting for one of the pieces, that reflected the subdued tone of that particular sketch; full lighting for the musical performances. The amateur production used the theatre stage lights, which remained on throughout the entire performance.

The effect of these theatrical and technical facets of *The Vagina Monologues* performances leads to the conclusion that the medium of theatre is one that is easily adaptable to cater for variations in context, whether it centers on type of production – professional and amateur - or the actual textual elements of the performances.

Productions are also often altered for the specific target audience they aim themselves at. In a production like *The Vagina Monologues*, where there was both a professional and amateur performance, the specific tailoring of the show to context is an important element of theatre in terms of the performing arts, when considering factors such as cost, target audiences among others. The specific tailoring of performances is likely to lead to the better reception of the production by the target audience.

One of the prevailing questions is whether the “production” and “artistic” elements of live theatre can appropriately lead to an education about a societal problem. The arts by nature have been known to distance themselves from any overt propaganda or stance.

## **2.2) Theatre and The Vagina Monologues as instruments of education.**

The performing arts and theatre productions more specifically, have been used as instruments of education throughout their eras of existence. The appropriateness of the medium is embodied in the idea that the arts “help shape our perceptions (which comes through our emotions, imaginations, and intellect) – in art experience is presented, not necessarily explained” (Cameron and Gillespie, 2004). It is, therefore, up to the audience to interpret and to decide whether the information and ideas that they are presented with are worth internalizing and incorporating into their individual worlds. This links to the idea of Participatory Theatre, a

“strategic tool that envisages social and behavioral change. Community artists can sell their own story, highlight their own concerns and develop their own strategies amongst

themselves... These public peer-to-peer statements are empowering in themselves. And the performances can then be addressed to a broader public or to those policy makers in the wider world who have power over their lives” (Mavrocordatos, 2004).

The use of the medium of theatre as an instrument of education is now more pronounced since there is added emphasis placed on Entertainment Education initiatives in contemporary society (Coleman, 1999:76).

*The Vagina Monologues* aims to educate society about the prevalence of violence against women worldwide, and create awareness on this subject through the performance of the stories of actual women. The show educates in the nature of the pieces and the manner in which they are performed. The overt, explicit and uninhibited performances (evident in both the professional and amateur productions) combined with the show’s powerful content, have the potential to create a distinct awareness about violence against women and inform and educate to this effect as well.

### **2.3) Theatre and The Vagina Monologues as weapons of social change.**

The concept of theatre being a medium for social change links with its educational qualities. Seen in this light, it is usually the information contained in a performance- that is how it educates an audience- that leads to any social change. There are also other elements such as observational learning, which will be discussed in later sections.

*The Vagina Monologues* aims to initiate social change against women’s abuse. The medium of theatre is an often forgotten means of communicating important issues, but nevertheless can act as a powerful form of health communication. Live theatre is largely seen as a more intimate way of engaging with an audience than many other mass media forms. Cast members of the professional production pointed out that other media, due to their mass exposure in society, may have a desensitizing effect regarding the audience’s views of the issues of abuse against women (Transcript 1:43-46).

The medium of live theatre facilitates interaction between the performers and audience. In both performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, this served to heighten the effect of the already

controversial issues touched on, in that the audience was at times incited into some kind of action then and there – whether verbal or by showing a group consensus in standing up if they had been abused themselves, or knew anyone who had been abused. This type of effect could never have been achieved using any other medium. As will be discussed later, however, various factors can affect the level of interaction between cast and audience, and these differences were pronounced in the two performances analyzed.

#### **2.4) Theatre and The Vagina Monologues as a document that reflects prevalent societal issues.**

The theatre has traditionally been used to portray historical events or to reflect prevalent issues of society at that particular time. These performances serve as documents of history, and add to the history of the world. Examples of this include Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*; both explorations into the real history of the world.

*The Vagina Monologues* may be seen as enforcing the above idea, as it is a reflection of a prevalent societal occurrence. The play is also not a new one. It was in fact written in the 1980s, yet has only been exposed to audiences recently. This shows that the issue of documenting history and trying to change the future, regarding women's abuse, has been attempted for quite some time. Contemporary society, though, provides a somewhat easier platform for issues of this kind to be given attention, and the medium of the theatre provides an effective stage.

#### **2.5) The Vagina Monologues and Action Media.**

*The Vagina Monologues* links to theories of Participatory Theatre as well as Action Media. Action Media is defined as being “a methodology for the development of media products that integrates the interests of both the communicator and representatives of target audiences within a health promotion context” (Parker, 1997:54). Parker goes on to state:

“The Action Media approach involves a process that allows for integration of perspectives of representatives of target audiences – a process that allows for deep reflection around issues that affect their lives – and a process that allows for the

incorporation of linguistic and cultural perspectives relevant to the target audience. This allows message development to become an organic process. The methodology is such that it engenders action amongst the participants and this impetus can be harnessed in subsequent activities at the individual, group, or local community level” (Parker 1997:56).

Using the above definitions (and as will be discussed in more detail later) it is evident that the amateur performance of *The Vagina Monologues* can be viewed as being part of the Action Media theories in Entertainment Education more so than the professional performance. This is due to a number of different elements including that the amateur actresses seemed much more involved in making *The Vagina Monologues* real to themselves and their audience; thus empowering and educating themselves while doing the same to others.

Eve Ensler’s original concept, though, does fit in with Action Media in that it “brings together the imperatives of the communicator on the one hand and readers on the other” (Parker, 1997:57). Her vision combined with the real experiences of the women she interviewed led to the creation of *The Vagina Monologues*, thus possibly making the play more relevant and powerful than a purely fictional piece, or one based only on the author’s experiences.

### **Section 3: Social Learning Theory and The Vagina Monologues**

As discussed in the previous section, live theatre has the capability of effecting social changes, whether intentionally or inadvertently. Social change is a collective effort, and every individual matters. For this research, we have chosen to look at Social Cognitive Theory or Social Learning Theory in explaining the effectiveness of *The Vagina Monologues* in influencing individuals' thoughts and behavior towards specific social issues, particularly those pertaining to women and sexuality. Application of this theory allows an understanding of how the play, through providing vicarious learning experiences for the audience, can serve as a potential "weapon of social change".

#### **5.1) Social Learning Theory.**

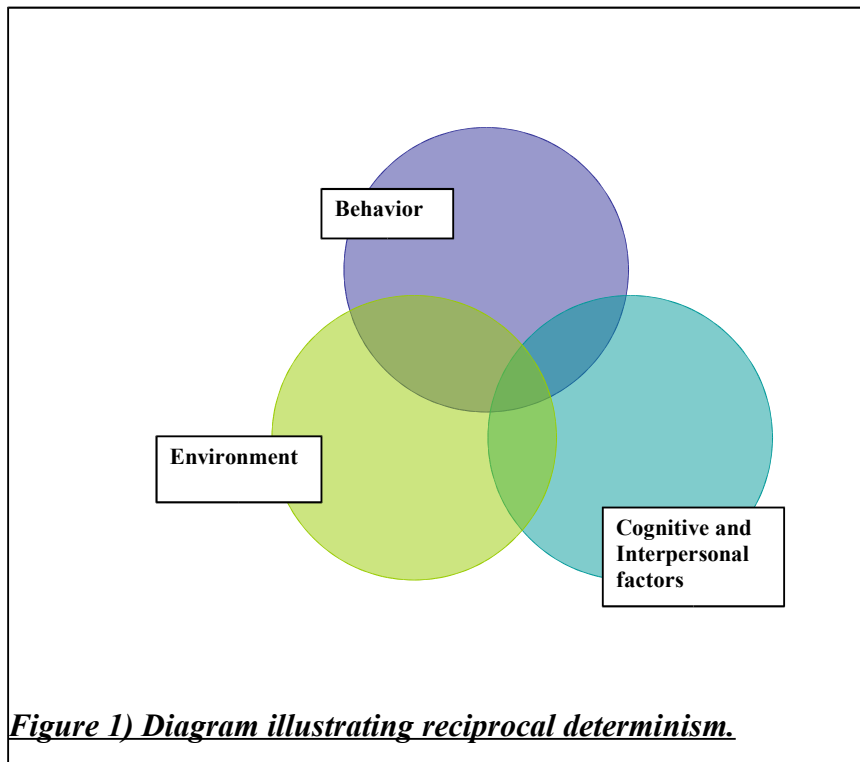
In the 1970's, Albert Bandura developed Social Cognitive Theory, a sophisticated and complex framework for understanding human behavior. Also known as Social Learning Theory (SLT), the concept is currently the dominant behavior change model used in the field of health communication (Glanz and Rimer, 1995:22) and is also widely applied to the field of Entertainment-Education (Coleman, 1999: 76). This theory is based on theories of modeling and vicarious learning, which contend that "new responses are acquired, reinforced, or extinguished, *at a distance* (vicariously), through observation of the behavior of others" (Sheldon, 1982:73). Social Learning Theory is an interpersonal theory and thus it states that no individual carries out a behavior in a vacuum; individuals exist within social environments in which other people's actions, attitudes and emotional support affect their own feelings, and behaviors (Ibid). People are both influenced by and influential in their social environments.

Social Learning Theory consists of a number of key constructs. These include:

- *Observational learning*: observational learning is one of the most important components of this theory and refers to the ability of an individual to learn based on observing others. Processes governing observational learning are: *attention* (gaining and maintaining attention), *retention* (being remembered), *production* (reproducing the observed behavior) and *motivation* (being stimulated to produce the behavior) (Lefebvre, 2001:509). This process is also called modeling because people learn what to expect through watching the experiences of others (Glanz and Rimer, 1995:24).

Individuals can learn something about the likely consequences of their actions by observing others and seeing whether the modeled behaviors are desirable or not (Ibid:24). The role of observation in changing behavior is most significant when the person being observed is powerful, highly respected or seen to have similarities to the observer (Ibid). Observational learning is particularly important in the process of socialisation and in learning the rules of correct behavior in society (Goldstein, 1994:266).

- *Reciprocal determinism*: reciprocal determinism implies that behavior, cognitive and other interpersonal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other (Lefebvre 2001:509). Figure 1 illustrates the concept of reciprocal determinism:



- *Behavioral capability*: behavioral capability is the knowledge and skills that an individual needs to possess in order to behave in a certain way (Ibid).
- *Expectations*: expectations are an individual's beliefs about the probable results of a particular behavior (Ibid).

- *Self-efficacy*: self-efficacy is the confidence that an individual has in his/her ability to take action and remain committed to that behavior (Ibid).
- *Reinforcement*: reinforcement-either positive or negative-can be defined as those social or environmental responses to an individual's behavior that either increase or decrease the likelihood of the behavior being performed again (Ibid:23).

In contrast to many behavior change models, this theory explicitly recognizes that behavior is determined not just by intrinsic factors nor are people just products of their environments, but rather that individuals have an influence on their actions, their personal characteristics, how they respond to their environments and what their environments are (Lefebvre, 2001:509).

### **5.2) Application of the theory to The Vagina Monologues.**

Social Learning Theory is particularly relevant in analyzing *The Vagina Monologues* as the play can be construed as a powerful example of observational learning. It provides a plethora of different role models-young women, old women, sexy women, ordinary women, lesbians and heterosexuals, women with different tastes and needs so that female audience members have a variety of women with which they can choose to identify. In addition, as the sketches were written by Eve Ensler after interviews with a diverse range of women these models are not portraying unrealistic, unreal behavior. This aspect of the play links to Bandura's proposal that the more similar a model is to the viewer, the more likely it is that observational learning will take place.

As models that the audience can observe and learn from, the use of attractive and self-confident cast members can increase the probability of people's desire to imitate their behavior. If the actresses project confidence and an apparent high degree of a sense of self-worth, this can serve to communicate positive and empowering behavioral guidelines. Empowerment leads to self-confidence, which ultimately leads to self-efficacy- a pre-emptive tool in minimizing the negative psychological effects from violence, which many women will experience at some point in life.

It is not, however, only female role models that are presented in the play. Positive examples of masculinity are also portrayed; for example the sketch about "Bob", a man who loved vaginas



and who taught the protagonist of the sketch to appreciate her own vagina. Here, female viewers are given vicarious positive reinforcement for being confident about their sexuality. The example of Bob teaches them to have positive expectations of men; not all men are interested in suppressing female sexual pleasure, some work with women to actively increase their sense of confidence in this regard.

In contrast with other media examples of women as passive recipients of male sexuality, the play presents - in most cases - women as active participants in their own sexual pleasure and identities. As not all female viewers are likely to be sexually empowered, the sketches often present empowerment as a process. In the "Hair" sketch, for example, a woman shaves her pubic hair - against her wishes - in order to please her husband, who suggests that his previous extra-marital affairs were as a result of her unwillingness to please him sexually. However, when he leaves her for another woman, she learns (and the audience learns by observing) that she doesn't have to acquiesce to male hegemony and that such compliance does not guarantee that a man will not leave anyway. A woman has the right to decide her own sexual preferences and pleasures and these do not have to be dominated by the wishes of her male partner.

Social Learning Theory suggests that, "if a particular pattern of behavior is performed by a model, and if that pattern is identified as problem solving, rewarding or in some other way desirable in its consequences, the probability that it will be adopted by an observer is increased" (DeFleur and Ball Rokeach, 1989:214). In this sense, perhaps the only sketch that is not particularly positive and does not fit in with Social Learning theory is the Bosnian rape sketch, in which a woman relates her anguish at being repeatedly raped by soldiers during the Bosnian war. The sketch is important because it describes a very real situation and shows women who have been violated in this way that they are not alone and can speak out about rape. In addition, it shows those would-be rapists that may believe that women actually *like* to be raped, how traumatic the experience really is. This may act as negative reinforcement for the act of rape. However, as it has no positive resolution and ends on a particularly bitter note, it portrays women as helpless victims and does not suggest any way in which women can rebuild their lives and reclaim their power after such an awful incident. Thus, an application of the theory would suggest that viewers would learn that rape is an experience from which it is

impossible to recover. This does not build a sense of self-efficacy in dealing with the situation and leads to negative expectations as to the outcome of such an event<sup>1</sup>.

Bandura asserts: "...through verbal and imagined symbols people process and preserve experiences in representational forms that serve as guides for future behavior" (DeFleur and Ball Rokeach, 1989:215). This statement can be applied directly to the interaction between the play and its viewers in effecting behavior change. Firstly, the play is "verbal", in that messages are communicated through the performer's interpretation, bringing them to life and establishing a dialogue with the audience. Secondly, as the play is only a replica of real experiences, very often the viewer's imagination are automatically 'activated' to paint a picture of, and in turn engage with, the full story that each sketch tries to tell. Through engaging with these two elements of the play, viewers are indirectly preparing themselves for possible behavioral changes. *The Vagina Monologues* is, thus, an excellent example of an intervention that can act to increase the self-efficacy and behavioral capability of women.

Although many EE interventions stress the importance of individuals' long-term repeated exposure to designed messages in order to result in any considerable behavioral changes, Social Learning Theory, however, "places some emphasis on single-exposure acquisition of new behavior" (DeFleur and Ball Rokeach, 1989:216). Thus, despite it being a once-off production, the unusual and explicit script of *The Monologues*, its presentation and the critical issues it raises enables the play to create an impact and leave an impression in the viewers' mind. Even if no immediate behavioral change is achieved, at the very least viewers leave the play with a renewed perspective on women and sexuality.

Holland et al (1992:23) suggest that the sexual empowerment of women requires a model of positive female sexuality, which offers women a means of reflecting critically on their own experiences as well as a process of putting into practice ways of negotiating safe and pleasurable sex with men. By providing both women and men-in most cases-with positive models of sexuality, *The Vagina Monologues* has the potential to accomplish just this. Women in the audience are thus able to learn a new way of behaving that does not subscribe to male

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<sup>1</sup> We are not suggesting that rape is not a traumatic and life-altering experience; nevertheless women can and do deal with the event and reclaim their lives.

hegemony. In addition it can give women a new sexual vocabulary; words with which they can name their desires, their genitals and their physical responses.

The next section will examine two performances of *The Vagina Monologues* in order to compare them on a number of elements considered important for EE interventions. This analysis will show how very differently the same play has been used to serve diverse target audiences and objectives.

## **Section 4: A comparative analysis of two performances of The Vagina Monologues**

For this research project, we attended two performances of *The Vagina Monologues*- the first one by a professional cast (led by Dawn Lindberg, a renowned local play producer and performer), and the other produced and performed by students of the University of Kwazulu-Natal. Both productions kept as close to the original script as possible, but incorporated several minor changes (such as additional sketches) in an effort to place the play in a familiar context for the audiences. Other than the script and the criterion of using only female performers, the two versions of the play differed considerably in terms of the overall production, the level of professionalism of the cast, the promotional activities and other aspects. All of the above factors are significant in contributing to the effectiveness of each of the productions in influencing audiences. The following analysis will examine how the two performances of the play functioned as EE vehicles by comparing the way each production utilized particular factors in an attempt to reach the specific target audience.

The professional production was staged at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, situated on the Howard College Campus of the University of Kwazulu-Natal. It was produced by Des and Dawn Lindberg, a well-known husband and wife team, and featured a cast of professional actresses. It was performed mainly for entertainment and profit-related purposes rather than as an intervention as such.

The amateur performance of *The Vagina Monologues* was produced and directed by five exchange students from the United States, and was performed together with twenty other students from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The play took place for three consecutive nights in a drama studio on the Howard College Campus of UKZN. Like the professional production, it was an all-female cast. However, the play was designed more as an effort to empower women and raise funds for a local women's organisation, rather than an entertainment-oriented piece, like the professional production.

### **4.1) Venue and production details.**

#### ***4.1.1) Professional performance.***

The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre is a familiar Durban venue for the performing arts. Shows are usually of a high standard and attract a mixed audience. Accordingly, the price of the performances was relatively high – R70 for adults and R45 for students. The venue is sizeable, with a large, raised stage and a tiered seating arrangement. Thus, there is a sense of distance between cast and audience, which positions the audience members as observers rather than as active participants in the process. There is very little interaction between the audience and the cast, besides laughter and the occasional round of applause. Props were used sparingly, but when they were used they were extremely effective in adding realistic touches to the dialogues. The lighting and costumes were professional and added to the impact of the play.

The script only deviated from Ensler’s original in that the cast did change place names and other details to make the production more relevant to the South African context. Examples include mentions of Pretoria and the South African flag and the use of Afrikaans. Singhal and Rogers suggest that the use of colloquial language, with which the target audience can identify, is important to increase the effectiveness of EE interventions (1999:211). The show also included artwork and music (not included in the original production) to add to the effect. The artwork (mainly of nude female bodies) especially contributed to a sense of celebration over female sexuality.

#### ***4.1.2) Amateur performance.***

The amateur production of *The Vagina Monologues* took place in Studio 5 of the Drama Department, on the Howard College campus of UKZN. This venue is usually allocated to the university’s Drama students for rehearsals and performances of their own productions. The studio is fairly small in size. All the available space is taken up by an unembellished stage, and a good number of closely packed rows of seats, which ascend at quite a steep angle, presumably to save space. The compact arrangement of the stage and the seats may be constrictive both visually and spatially; however, it does contribute greatly towards the interactive potential between the performers and the audience during the play. This “coziness” has an effect of reducing the interpersonal distance between the performers and the audience.

The venue is rather informal due to its unpolished setting and a relaxed ambience. There are no formalities in terms of the unwritten rules when attending professional theatre performances, such as speaking in a softer volume, waiting quietly before the show begins, and so on. Instead, the audience (the composition of which will be discussed later) of the amateur production walked in and out and socialized around freely. This was, at times, disruptive. Furthermore, there were no seat numbers; the seating worked on a first-come-first-serve basis. This arbitrary arrangement made the overall atmosphere in the studio relatively unsettling. A quieter environment would have better prepared and adjusted the audience's mindset for the reception of any art form. The air-conditioning was switched off before the play began, as the noise would have disturbed the transmission of sound. As a result of this, as well as the small space, the studio was very stuffy and uncomfortable at times. It was quite bright inside the studio, unlike the soft lighting or rather the semi-darkness found in a professional venue like the Elizabeth Sneddon theatre. Thus the lighting can, in a way, help to encourage or curb the audience's "level of activity".

A complimentary sticker came along with each ticket purchased. The stickers had phrases such as "Vaginal Bliss", "I love my vagina" written on them. This came across as a funny yet pleasant surprise for the audience members, and indicated to them the theme of the play instantly.

Although the play came originally from the United States, and the producers of the amateur production were five US international students, efforts have still been made to place the play in a context with which the audience could relate. Local rape statistics were provided and the producers also changed tampon names from an American brand to a local brand (*Lil-lets*). Two creative pieces scripted by South African students were inserted as an endeavor to make the play more relevant to UKZN students. One was an advertisement in connection with the issue of date rape; the other one was a piece in which a student turned her personal childhood experience of sexual abuse into a personal and powerful monologue- this took the audience by surprise, and both the audience and the rest of the performers on the stage were visibly moved.

## **4.2) Actors and the play's level of professionalism.**

### ***4.2.1) Professional performance.***

There were five cast members in this production of *The Vagina Monologues*: Dawn Lindberg, Rosie Motene, Rachel Tambo, Tselane Tambo and Nqobile Sipamla. Two of the actresses were white and three black, ranging in age from the early 20s to mid 50s. All were South African. Bandura (1986 in Glanz and Rimer, 1995:24) suggests that observational learning is most effective when the viewer perceives models as similar to themselves so this mixed cast allowed different viewers to identify with different actresses. In addition, it gave them credibility as authentic voices that were suitable for bringing across this particular message, which is essentially directed towards women of all ages, nationalities and colours. The actresses were all talented and extremely professional, which enhanced the realism of the performance. Coleman suggests that EE projects should use professionals, and should appear as professional as commercial entertainment (1999:79).

This professionalism, however, may also have contributed to a sense of distance between the audience and the subject matter, as the message was not as raw and as real as it was in the amateur production. This may have led to the audience seeing the play more as an enjoyable theatre piece rather than as an intervention that caused them to reflect on their own experiences and behavior.

### ***4.2.2) Amateur performance.***

The cast for the amateur production was made up entirely of Drama students from UKZN. There were only five performers in the professional production, and the load of performance was more or less evenly distributed among them. In the amateur production, there were twenty performers, some of whom performed an entire monologue, while the rest each contributed short parts to a longer monologue, which was usually a collection of several women's similar experiences around a topic, such as that of puberty and menstruation. It is worth mentioning that this particular monologue about puberty was not found in the professional play, presumably because the audience of the amateur production -who were mainly students- were more likely to identify with the subject than the audience of the professional play, who were older in age.

There were no tailor-made costumes. Instead, the performers dressed in their own clothes, with just the specifications that the colors black and red should be worn. Unlike the professional play, the amateur production had no songs or music. It was raw acting, but far from crude. The student performers were obviously less experienced than the professional performers, whose acting was slick, natural and well-polished. The acting of the student performers was vigorous even, at times, somewhat “overdramatic”.

Differences in the stage setting and the *misé en scene* also contributed to the two plays’ sense of professionalism. The professional production indulged in various changes in the stage lighting, the costumes, the setting, the props and so on. The student’s production was amateur in its truest senses: the lighting almost never changed, no setting had been constructed for the play, and only a few grey polystyrene blocks and a couch were used as props.

The level of professionalism of a play determines how the play is likely to be received by its audience. The amateur production was not as professional as it could have been. The overall setting was rather informal, and the audience was enclosed in a very casual ambience. This has, in the beginning, resulted in the audience responding to the issues raised within the play in a less serious manner. They were more involved with (or distracted by) the process of being entertained, rather than engaging critically with the educational messages in the play. Fortunately, that was quickly changed as the play moved on and communicated more serious issues, such as sexual violence and celebration of the female sexuality.

When a production is more professionally organized, it would assist to direct the audience to concentrate on, or at least be more aware of, its purpose and intentions (for instance, the aim to sexually empower the female members in the audience, and to introduce all to a new perspective on female sexuality). Therefore the amateur production should have enlisted “professionals with experience on the chosen medium to make sure that the Enter-Educate products look and sound at least as professional to the commercial entertainment products to which the intended audience is exposed” (Coleman 1999:79). In this way, the play can capture the audience’s attention from very early on, and manage their concentration and also the engagement with the messages more effectively.



### **4.3) Target Audience.**

#### ***4.3.1) Professional performance.***

A member of the cast explained that the play was aimed at “Everyone and anyone...[no] specific stereotype, no specific race or creed” (Transcript 1:15-16). However, the venue, price and reputation of the Lindbergs contributed to a mainly older audience; the self-styled “culture vultures” of the Durban area. All races -although mainly whites- and both genders were represented at the performance we attended. The lower student price may have been designed to attract students too, but there were definitely fewer students than older adults.

When asked about the relevance of the play to the local market, a cast member commented that it was extremely relevant because “abuse around the world *is abuse*-in whatever language, wherever it happens, its just different circumstances” (Transcript 1: 22-23). However, she also suggested that in the South African context, in which child abuse is so relevant, this aspect could have been a useful addition to the script (Transcript 1:17-21). In the amateur production, which will be discussed further on, this topic was in fact covered by a monologue written by a South African student taking take part in the production.

#### ***4.3.2) Amateur performance.***

The venue and the promotional elements (to be discussed in the following sub-section) of a play also serve as important determinants of the composition of the audience. By looking at the informal characteristics of the venue of the production, and the fact that the cast was composed entirely of students, the play was bound to attract an audience consisting predominantly of students. The ticket price was ten rand, which was truly a student’s price. People who came to Studio 5 to watch the play were mainly UKZN students, and friends and families. There was a balance between the two sexes, and the viewers were culturally mixed. Most were between the ages of approximately seventeen and thirty. The number of seats in the venue was also limited, thus it was only able to accommodate a small audience each night. Due to the play’s sexually explicit content, an age restriction of sixteen years was placed on the audience in the professional production. However, the amateur production seemed less insistent in this regard, as a child around the age of six or seven was spotted among the audience members.

Both the cast and the audience were made up of students, who can identify with, and relate to one another. One of the cast members viewed the relationship in this light: “the audience gets to see like all these images and see these reflections of themselves on stage, realizing that this is something that’s universal, it’s everybody” (Transcript 2:35-37). In this way, the formal distance between the performers and the audience was significantly reduced. However, this differed to the professional production where an interpersonal distance existed quite solidly between the performers and the audience, as in the more informal amateur production this distinction was much more blurred.

The advantage of having students in both the cast and the audience is that interaction was guaranteed. This is because as students from the same campus, both the audience and the cast were more or less on the same level with each other in terms of their experiences and understanding of the world. The audience was very responsive to the material of the play, partly because

- 1) many of them knew the cast members;
- 2) they were more comfortable with commenting and responding openly because the performers were younger and less formal;
- 3) the audience were mainly students who generally have a lot of nerve in voicing their own thoughts; and lastly,
- 4) the intimate space in Studio 5 allowed the performers and the audience to be closer to one another- this closeness enabled people to be more straightforward in confronting and expressing their emotions encountered during the play. In one of the performer’s word’s, “it was a space for women to connect” (Transcript 2:16).

There was continuous dialogue between the performers and the audience during the play. The script was provocative and humorous, which involved everyone under the roof very easily. For instance, there was a monologue in which the performer gave various verbal interpretations of the word “cunt”. The crowd was incited by the performer’s enticing movements and her solicitation of saying the word out loud, and responded wildly in an uproar of “cunt”.

According to Social Learning Theory, “vicarious learning best takes place when viewers can *identify* with, and relate to, these role models, and when viewers *recognize* the issue as relevant for their daily use” (Bouman 1999:60). In this sense, the amateur production should be effective in its influence over the audience as the performers (the role models) were students just like most of the audience, and the issues raised in the play were pertinent to life, such as that of the need to recognize and empower female sexuality.

#### **4.4) Promotional Activities.**

##### ***4.4.1) Professional performance.***

The promotional activities of this production were professional and diverse. Street posters in the Glenwood/Musgrave area advertised the show and critics from newspapers reviewed the show beforehand, thus encouraging a newspaper reading audience to attend. It is interesting to note, however, that the posters around Durban (featuring an artwork of a naked women) were ripped in half by members of the public so that the lower half of the woman’s body was no longer visible. In Bloemfontein, the posters were banned. The flyer handed out at the show itself was printed on glossy, good quality paper and was attractive to the eye (see appendix B).

##### ***4.4.2) Amateur performance.***

As discussed already, the venue and the cast play an influential part in determining the make up of the audience. The commercial promotion of the production also contributes considerably in this aspect. The amateur production used very little advertising to promote the play. There were A4 posters put up on the walls and the notice-boards throughout the UKZN Howard College campus (see appendix C). However, the posters were genuinely inconspicuous. They were in black and white, lacked any appealing design and contained only the basic information such as the name of the play, the venue, the dates and the time. The production did not advertise to the external public, and could only have reached those other than UKZN students via word-of-mouth. The limited seats and budget, and the small scale of the play had decided its audience from the outset.

The flyers handed out at the play, while not comparable to the standard of those at the professional production, were considerably more attractive than the poster (see appendix D).

The back page contained some important features: the “mission” of the production so that the audience were immediately aware that the play was not only for entertainment purposes; the V-Day logo to link the play into the larger picture and finally, the numbers of relevant support lines in Durban.

#### **4.5) Link to V-Day and other support services.**

##### ***4.5.1) Professional performance.***

Entertainment-education interventions tend to have a greater effect on the intended audience if they include a number of additional messages to form an integrated campaign (Singhal and Rogers, 1999:209). The intervention should also link itself to an existing infrastructure for the provision of services if it hopes to have an effect on audience behavior (Ibid:212). This production had very little link to V-Day itself or to other support services that could have continued the influence of the performance as an entertainment-education intervention. V-Day was mentioned only briefly and although those members of the audience who had been abused or who knew of someone who had been were asked to stand up at the end, no further support was offered. When asked if they thought the production of *The Vagina Monologues* could have a long lasting effect on the audience members, a cast member commented that it would “if we carry on doing it, but also spreading the word - so after this another monologues comes out or we keep spreading the word (by other means)” (Transcript 1, 12-13). Thus, in terms of the research done on entertainment-education and the observations of the cast themselves, it appears that the play could have a much greater effect if it were 1) an ongoing production, 2) linked to other supporting messages (for example talks by the cast members) and 3) a stronger link to V-Day and support services for women who are being abused.

##### ***4.5.2) Amateur performance.***

There were posters outside the entrance of Studio 5 that gave a general description of the V-Day campaign, to which the play is linked. The posters and pamphlets explained V-Day’s central mission of ending violence against women, and its various activities across the world. The amateur production of *The Vagina Monologues* formed part of the global College Campaign of V-Day. The proceeds of the play went straight to a local women’s shelter called Women’s Desk. On the flyers provided to the audience, there were several telephone numbers

of support help lines for women who suffer from abuse and violence, such as the number for National Network on Violence Against Women (see appendix D). Audience members could also donate money to V-Day by placing the amount inside the donation box that stood outside the entrance.

#### **4.6) Possible influence on attitude and behavior change of the play in general.**

As no audience analysis was conducted, it is impossible to gain an accurate understanding of the effect the professional and amateur productions of the play may have had on the audience. However, a professional cast member commented on the way in which she felt the play worked: “A lot of the issues brought up were topics that needed to be addressed in the explicit nature (sic). Because a lot of its very hard hitting [it] gets people listening, [it] gets people understanding. And also, just approaching it in a humorous way, people don’t realise that they’re actually listening and learning from it” (Transcript 1: 1-4). This of course, is the quintessential definition of entertainment-education; people learning while being entertained.

Additionally, the professional cast members say that the play has been extremely well received by audiences (Transcript 1:47). Anecdotally, they mention the story of a woman who contacted them to tell them how the play had liberated her. She had been sexually abused and “had separated herself from her vagina because it was an object of pain” (Ibid:52). However, after viewing the play, she “actually forgave her vagina” (Ibid:56). Members of the amateur cast, too, referred to powerful potential effects of the play on audiences: “Because basically the audience gets to see like all these images and see these reflections of themselves on stage, realizing that this is something that’s universal...”(Transcript 2:35-36). Although more extensive summative research would have to be conducted to gain a scientifically valid indication of the effects of the play on audiences<sup>2</sup>, these anecdotal remarks by the cast suggest that *The Vagina Monologues* is capable of achieving worthwhile results. These results could be further improved by managing the play in line with key entertainment-education principles, as alluded to above and discussed in more detail in the recommendations of section 5.

#### **Table 1: Comparison between the professional and the amateur performances of The Vagina Monologues**

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Singhal and Rogers (1999) who suggest that a summative evaluation is imperative in order to determine the effectiveness of an intervention in relation to the planned goals and objectives.

Venue: Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in University of KwaZulu Natal	Venue: Studio 5, Drama Department, in University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
Professional cast and formal setting	A cast comprised entirely of students, and the setting was informal and unpolished
Target audience: middle-class, well-off, culturally mixed	Target audience: mainly students and families and friends, culturally mixed
Advertising and commercialization: professional posters and flyers	Advertising and commercialization: minimal- only found on campus, and not advertised to the external public
Localization of the play: several South African references throughout the play	Localization of the play: addition of creative sketches by the student performers
Not linked to support services	Linked to V-Day and Women's Desk (a local women's support organization)

#### **4.7) Concluding remarks.**

Kotler defines social marketing as “the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product, planning, pricing, communication, distribution and marketing research” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 in Piotrow et al, 1997:19). The crux of the theory is that a tailored marketing mix (price, product, promotion and place) should be developed for each distinct target audience that is going to be addressed and it is this aspect that is particularly relevant to our analysis of *The Vagina Monologues*. Our analysis of the effectiveness of the play cannot be viewed out of the context in which the plays were written and performed. Thus, in judging the overall effectiveness of each of the productions, our two major criteria were whether those elements that were adjusted for each of the plays were done so in line with a consideration of the respective audiences as well as whether the manner in which the play was delivered was consistent with EE principles.

In general, each of the productions was consistent with the audience they were catering for. As discussed above details like price, venue, promotional aspects, the changing of American names and so on were often adjusted by the producers and cast. Thus, despite the core content being very similar, these details made each production unique and distinct from the other. Both attempted to localize the play, by changing place names, adding in South African references

and-in the case of the amateur production- including two local monologues. In this respect, the two productions can be considered to be effectively adapted for their target markets. The amateur production can, however, be considered to be more in line with EE principles because it firstly, aims to empower and mobilize rather than to simply entertain and secondly, because its Action Media/Participatory Theatre approach enables both cast members and members of the audience to engage with their sexuality in a more positive manner. In line with the EE philosophy, some recommendations can be made to further improve future performances of the play. The next section will detail these suggestions.

## **Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusions.**

The review of the literature and the comparative analysis of the two performances of *The Vagina Monologues* have shown that the play can be used as an effective vehicle for education and social change. However, the implementation of the following recommendations- based on entertainment-education and health communication principles- would increase the potential impact of the play.

### **5.1) Formative and summative research**

If *The Vagina Monologues* is to work as an entertainment-education intervention, there should be greater audience research: including formative, process and summative research. Singhal and Rogers suggest that, in order to design effective EE interventions, research pertaining to the needs and characteristics of the target audience in question should be conducted (1999:210). Eve Ensler did conduct interviews with hundreds of women in order to form the basis for the monologues. Thus the play reflects the feelings and experiences of a wide variety of real women. However, in each local context, it is recommended that additional research be carried out to assess the needs of that particular target audience. This seems to have been done in an informal manner in both the professional and amateur productions, but a more comprehensive and formalised evaluation would enhance the likelihood of the intervention being successful.

It is also important to note that *The Vagina Monologues* may not be equally suitable for all sectors of South African society. It is an explicit play and may be received with condemnation by particularly conservative communities in South Africa. Thus, formative research is essential to ensure that the play is appropriate for the target audience at which it is aimed. This is also why community theatre- as will be discussed shortly- is an excellent means of delivering the play. If the production is performed by local amateur artists, they are much more likely to be aware of the prevailing social climate of their community than a group of outsiders bringing the play into an environment with which they are not familiar.

A summative evaluation of each production of the play would also be recommended. Singhal and Rogers suggest that such an evaluation can examine the effectiveness of an intervention relative to the stated goals (1999:210). Although anecdotal evidence suggests that on a local



and an international level, V-Day and *The Vagina Monologues* have had a powerful effect on audiences, formalised evaluations-carried out by professionals in the area- would be useful to determine how much of a long-lasting effect the play has had on changing attitudes and behavior. This of course may differ depending on the producers and the context, but useful lessons for future plays would emerge from this research. The V-Day organization could process the results of such evaluations in order to recommend new courses of action or methods that could help future producers of *The Vagina Monologues* to achieve more successful results with their chosen audiences.

### **5.2) The continued use of community theatre as a vehicle for the play**

As shown in section 4, in many ways the amateur performance of the play is closer to the definition of an entertainment-education intervention. In addition, this performance can be seen as a form of Action Media in which participants- not only the audience- become more empowered themselves and pass these new principles and knowledge on to the wider community. Thus, it seems appropriate that *The Vagina Monologues* is performed in community theatres and work-shopped by the participants, as occurred with the amateur production. Local cast members are likely to have a much more detailed knowledge of the needs and sensitivities of the community in which they live, as so can adjust the performances accordingly to suit the target audience. In this way, new pieces particularly relevant to the specific community can be included, which means that the message is more likely to be internalised by the audience. The structural support offered by the V-Day organization would be useful to ensure that the play was run as professionally as possible, in line with the original intentions of Ensler, but still with a local touch.

### **5.3) Linking the play to support services**

Singhal and Rogers explain that a support infrastructure that links to the intervention is necessary to support behavior change (1999, p.212). Informing the audience of support services like help-lines and activist groups is essential to ensure that the empowering effects of the play are reinforced and long-lasting. While the amateur production did align itself with a local women's organization and V-Day and provide telephone numbers of help-lines, the professional production did not. Both productions could have benefited from being included as

part of a longer running intervention in order for the message to be reinforced and support provided.

In general, it can be concluded that the script of *The Vagina Monologues* can be used to directly empower women and to indirectly address the issues of violence against women and female sexual disempowerment. With the right application, the active participation of members of the community as producers and actors, a link to support services and more research, the play can constitute a powerful intervention.

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# **Appendix A**

**Transcript 1: Interview with Cast of *The Vagina Monologues* (Professional)  
– 20 March 2004.**

**Members of the cast present:**

**Rachel Tambo  
Rosie Motene  
Tselane Tambo  
Nqobile Sipamla**

**Conducted by: Tyrell Singh**

- 1. What are your personal views on the production's content, and the main issues dealt with? How do *The Monologues* wish to change behaviour? Would this work – have a long lasting effect?**

***Rosie Motene:***

1. A lot of the issues brought up were topics that need to be addressed in the explicit  
2.nature. Because a lot of its very hard hitting (it) gets people listening, (it) gets  
3.people understanding. And also, just approaching it in a humorous way, people  
4.don't realise that they're actually listening and learning from it. These topics ten  
5.years ago – they were never allowed to bring them up, they were never allowed to  
6.discuss it.

7.A lot of the time it's been very, very, shocking. People have come in with attitudes  
8.not really wanting to accept change, but seeing it in a different light, as opposed to  
9.somebody standing up giving statistics, where they don't see the objective view of  
10.it, (the show) has already changed a few people's mindsets, so I think it's very  
11.good that way.

**(Would it have a long lasting effect?)**

12.I think it would if we carry on doing it, but also spreading the word – so after this 13.another  
*Monologues* comes out or we keep spreading the word – and keep the faith  
14.up basically, it will be lasting.

## 2. Relevance to South African audiences? Target market?

(Who was the show aimed at?)

15. Everyone and anyone. It wasn't aimed at a specific stereotype, no specific race or  
16. creed.

(Relevance to local market?)

*Rachel Tambo:*

17. I think it's exceptionally relevant. There's no two ways about it. On a personal  
18. level, I do feel... it's an American piece... there could be more if it *was* written by  
19. a South African... for example... we have such gruesome and child abuse to be  
20. honest... I think the play itself does touch on it... but in a South African context,  
21. it's far more shocking. But... *The Vagina Monologues* is a huge stepping-stone to  
22. dealing with this because abuse around the world *is abuse* – in whatever language,  
23. wherever it happens, it's just different circumstances.

## 3. Personal motivations for doing the show?

24. Personal motivations... the first time I read the play, I was shocked! You know,  
25. and also the idea of saying the word 'Vagina' so many times on stage was a bit...  
26. you know... 'WOW!' Once we started rehearsing, I just thought... well, you  
27. know... none of us grew up saying the word 'Vagina', you know – I think it's  
28. taught all of us, I mean I'm speaking for myself here, but it's slightly liberating,  
29. you know? You know, it *is* sexually liberating... on a level that you think more  
30. about it... I mean, I'd like to think of myself as sexually liberated anyway. You  
31. know, great marriage and sex etc. but you know, it *does* open your eyes a bit more  
32. to all aspects.

## 4. Were there challenging notions, how you were viewed and how it has changed?

33. Possibly, but I mean as you say 'challenging'... but I mean, one example which  
34. just shows you how our society works... this play was actually written in the '80s

35.– so it’s nothing new that we’re talking about, but yet people are still so shocked...  
36.when we toured Bloemfontein, our posters were banned... now this is by a mayor  
37.who cannot distinguish between a Modigliani, which is a piece of art... or a naked  
38.woman! You know... that is just ridiculous! In Durban, for example, on all of our  
39.posters where the vagina is... they’ve all been torn. Go have a look... its all been  
40.covered up, so you don’t see any hair... so you know as liberal as we think we all  
41.are now, we’re not!

**5. In terms of the audience, how did you want to be viewed?**

42.I think the audience... they need to come out and understand that they’re gonna  
43.have a fun night out... you know? But, learn a couple of things as well... you  
44.know, the statistics of abuse are huge, and as you say, you can read it in the paper  
45.everyday, and be like “Oh gosh, someone else’s been raped, someone else’s been  
46.murdered...” You know, you have to hit the message home slightly.

**6. How was the play received?**

*Tselane Tambo:*

47.It’s been very well received by everybody who’s seen it. I don’t think that anybody  
48.has been offended by it... I think that a lot of women have felt that they have been  
49.able to get in touch with a part of themselves that had been blocked, so I think that  
50..has helped a lot of people. I mean, some of the responses that we’ve had – there  
51.was one woman who sent us a letter saying that she was sexually abused and that  
52.she had separated herself from her vagina because it was an object of pain, and it  
53.was a part of her body that she chose not to remember because of that association  
54.of that abuse... and she was angry with it, because it was a part of her body from  
55.which her pain came.. you know, if that makes sense? And she said that after  
56.seeing the play, she actually forgave her vagina... you know and that’s a beautiful  
57.thing. If that can happen with one or two people then that’s already a lot, but I’m  
58.sure if it happens with those one or two, then it happens with a lot more. And I  
59.think also, it opens eyes, and for men as well... I think that a lot of men don’t  
60.understand women because they don’t understand the essence of women, do you



61.know what I mean?

62.No but, you know there was only one man, and I think it was more a defence, who  
63.said to me that “this is just man bashing”, you know... which isn’t true... but I  
64.think that also just some men have a very introspective response to things... and as  
65.far as he was concerned, because we were talking about rape and abuse and so  
66.forth, he said to me “but who does the abusing? Therefore, you’re talking about  
67.me, you’re talking about men”... which I just thought was stupid, because we’re  
68.not talking about men, we’re not man bashing, we didn’t really talk about men, we  
69.talk about *us*, what happens to *us*, our *response* to what happens to us, and it’s  
70.really all about *us*, you know, it really *is!* Do you know, what I mean? So those  
71.have been like some of the responses.

**7. Was the element of culture taken into account in the show’s presentation. Different cultures often have different perceptions about issues... was this a factor?**

*Nqoblile Sipamla:*

72.I think, sort of it’s an all rounder in terms of culture, because there’s a piece called  
73.‘(Under) the Burqa’ and I found out recently, that Indian women... or Muslim  
74.women? Sorry, thanks... have to shave their pubes, which I mean, and there are  
75.Muslims all over the place, so it sort of touched everyone... and I think also, the  
76.piece with the name calling also addresses that whole thing that it’s also not just  
77.your typical white-model C-that-kind-of-thing. Everybody gets involved and  
78.everybody gets touched, by, either the words or the cultures that are addressed and  
79.the customs.

**8. You’ve had a fair amount of media coverage. I think that there were quite a few reports on the show in mainstream media. Were there any negative comments?**

80.I remember one, I think it was *The Mercury*... which was on the singing, but other  
81.than that... that doesn’t even count because the show was brilliant, that’s what  
82.they said. So there hasn’t been any negative coverage from the media.

**9. In a longer time frame, once the show has stopped running, what happens? Is there a local, longer running version of it?**

***Rachel Tambo:***

**83.**You can check out the website, search Des and Dawn Lindberg... and their  
**84.**company is called *Cabaret and Theatre*, so you'll find out about that there. In  
**85.**terms of longevity, I mean we're dealing with a South African Economy... I mean  
**86.**we're still trying to get people back to the theatre, to go and watch the theatre,  
**87.**so... you know we are very passionate about the show... we're in here, Durban for  
**88.**about a week. The next two weeks, we're off – we don't get paid... when we go to  
**89.**Klein Karoo, then we get paid... and so it's really on a basis as to what  
**90.**opportunities arise.

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**Transcript 2: Interview with Cast of *The Vagina Monologues* (Amateur) – 27 March 2004.**

**Members of the cast present:**

**Shaheen Nazerli  
Tamara Sturges  
Jackie Cook-Eberle  
Kirsten Kuchler**

**Conducted by: Callen Morrison, Leeway Tsai and Tyrell Singh**

*Note: The transcript is a mixture of direct quotations from the cast members and a summary of what they said as the tape recorder was playing up and worked only intermittently.*

**1. What are the aims for the play, in your opinion?**

***Tamara:***

1. One example, if you had to fish an example out... we've had people in our Res.
2. come up and talk to us which was last night – when we came home... it was so
3. nice... this girl was just like “Oh my God... -

***Shaheen:***

4. It was just, you know, she was really, really thrilled about it and it just, I mean, I
5. feel like it's a space for women. I feel like this is and I speak for myself when I say
6. this, but I definitely think it's a space for women to connect, you know... and I
7. think that's why we worked so hard to make it specific to women.
  
8. We talk about *The Vagina Monologues* not excluding anyone... but the aim is: this
9. is about women, for women, and that's really about *it*, you know... Like this one
10. dude who said to me – he said it like “kinda rubbed him the wrong way” – and I
11. said to him: “Well it's really not meant for you, so it doesn't matter which way it

12.rubbed you... like, it's really not about you. It's about women, and about women's  
13.experiences, how they interpret them, how they interact with them.”

## 2. Do you think that it excludes men?

*Shaheen:*

14.I don't think that it's exclusionary, by any means, and I do agree that to stop  
15.violence against women, it's a collective effort. I do not think that it's specific to 16.women,  
I do not think that it's a women's issue either. I think it's a collective  
17.issue... But, like just the tactic of *The Vagina Monologues* – how they came  
18.about...Eve Ensler interviewed millions... okay... thousands of women, you know  
19.she interviewed thousands of women, she did not interview thousands of men. You  
20.know, she went all around the world, talking to *women*, so the product that comes  
21.out of it is a collection of women's voices and to speak for other women, and so...  
22.the aim to end violence against women is not just eager to promote activism, but  
23.also to promote consciousness.

*Tamara:*

24.And I think it does because it did interview so many women, because it brings like  
25.in the audience, they started saying like “uh huh”. And it was interesting that the  
26.Thursday audience – we had a lot of men in our audience... and our audience was  
27.dead! There was also an older crowd, I'm not sure. There was nothing... no  
28.clapping... it was very dead.

*Shaheen:*

29.That's why yesterday, the last line I said, I said like: “please feel free to laugh and  
30.clap” ‘cause we were all kind of like....

*Tamara:*

31.Last night was great! I mean I loved it.

*Shaheen:*

32.Yeah, it was and it empowered us too, you know, I felt much more comfortable

33.doing my piece, and I enjoyed it more. You just get more free on stage if the

34.audience is in to it.

*Tamara:*

35.Because basically the audience gets to see like all these images and see these

36.reflections of themselves on stage, realising that this is something that's universal,

37.it's everybody... like especially after the "My-mother-slapped-me" girl, after she

38.got her period ... like if nothing else connects, it's almost always that! People are

39.like "oh yeah, that happened..." "I remember what *my* mother said, I remember

40.what happened to me, I remember all of those things" you know they always

41.connect. Like for me, my mother slapped me and said "Mazel tov". You know, I

42.remember that.

*Jackie:*

43.I think, like specifically me, when I think about empowerment, like if you talk

44.about it... it's not just a women's issue... you know... it's humanity's issue. I

45.don't know if it's just 'space'... like for me I feel like there needs to be a space

46.where men can feel really comfortable. And then you can't necessarily have that. I

47.mean, often times in classes, I don't know if anyone else has this... you have in

48.conversations/dialogues like going on, there'll be male dominance in classrooms,

49.and this is a place where there's like *women* that can just talk as much as they

50.want, they can just shout and yell and just put it out there, which is something that

51.you don't see often.

### **3. Do you think it makes them (men) uncomfortable?**

*Tamara:*

52.It should... good! It's good if it makes them uncomfortable!

*Kirsten:*

53.I think it also makes some women uncomfortable. Like from my background, not  
54.having anything to do with *The Vagina Monologues* before this... there's a lot of  
55.issues that are in *The Vagina Monologues*, that are like taboo from just my  
56.experience and so I think it's a really great to experience an outlet for those taboo  
57.issues to be expressed.

*Shaheen:*

58.I think it also redefines (the term)“violence against women...”

**(How?)**

*Shaheen:*

59.Well, I mean, I'm just thinking of “Hair”. I just, like... she's feeling violated, you  
60.know, and she's feeling assaulted in a sense, not physically assaulted... like she's  
61.describing an experience where she's being violated and unconventional.

*Kirsten:*

62.And there's also the monologue... where she says like “at camp they wouldn't let  
63.me take a bath with my period, they wiped me down with antiseptic”.

*Tamara:*

64. Back to the “Hair” piece also is that like... the idea of cheating, as he cheated on  
65. her and its also the manipulation that he’s using... you know “she wouldn’t please  
66. me, she wouldn’t do this, she wouldn’t do that”... so I cheated, and cheating is a  
67. form of like psychological/emotional abuse... that usually people don’t really  
68. think about, but it is... definitely.

*Shaheen:*

69. And it’s really all aesthetic in the larger system of patriarchy – which we had a  
70. brief conversation about yesterday! But so, for me it was at least it redefines  
71. violence against women, and redefines like, what are women’s issues.

**4. What about the script? Did you make any changes? Do you feel that the American context is suitable for a South African audience?**

*Jackie:*

72. Well we have some parts that are added. If you notice there are a couple of Zulu  
73. phrases and then “Lil-lets”... and we attempted to have a creative piece where  
74. there were all different languages, not just Zulu... Afrikaans, Indian (languages). I  
75. mean, all over, so it’s not just like one, but unfortunately we had a very short time  
76. period to do it.

*Shaheen:*

77. I don’t know if you remember the first rehearsal that we had, which was in like the  
78. first few days of March, we’re like “What would you call your vagina?” and we  
79. went round in a circle we had women saying what they call their vagina and this

80.was before they received a script. And I wrote all of them down we did say that  
81.there are some specific monologues that talk about vagina names, talk about  
82.various things but you are completely allowed to like “change it and mix it to your  
83.concepts” and we would love to take that initiative ourselves but we’ve done  
84.everything and we just realistically in terms of time and manpower...  
85.WOMANPOWER... were not able to go do that research because we’re not from  
86.here... to find out what names are used for vaginas... so we left that up to the cast  
87.that... “You are more than welcome to change it and situate it to your own  
88.concepts”.

89.The script is given to us by V-Day campaign and then we went over the script...

*Tamara:*

90.The four of us like produced/directed so we went over the script.

*Shaheen:*

91.... And then we did the casting we just gave a specific part, so no one actually had the whole script.

92.(The cast also mentioned that they were allowed to put in local submissions and  
93.change any American references. They left out quite a few of the monologues and  
94.two new monologues that have been written by Ensler were not included).

##### **5. General comments made by the cast.**

95.(It is the first time *The Vagina Monologues* has come to campus. The American  
96.organisers of the play had experience with it in the States and so brought it here.  
97.As far as they knew, it hadn’t played in Durban before).



