

GIVING FAITHFUL TESTIMONY:
THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE, MORMON WOMEN'S SEXUALITY,
AND *THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES*

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ABSTRACT

JILL PETERFESO: Giving Faithful Testimony: Theatrical Performance, Mormon Women's Sexuality, and *The Vagina Monologues*
(Under the direction of Thomas A. Tweed)

This thesis rests at the intersection of women's studies, performance studies, and Mormon studies. Using two case studies—a performance of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* at Utah Valley State College and a *Sunstone* magazine conference session known as *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*—this thesis explores how Mormon women have used the theatrical medium to explore their sexuality. By staging or scripting their sexual lives within a community of actors or playwrights, and for a public audience, these women give faithful testimony—not about their religious faith, but about their sexual selves. This public testimony has generated, but it also has enabled the women to find healing, foster empowerment, and reconstitute community.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I bet you're worried. I was worried. That's why I began this piece. I was worried about vaginas. I was worried about what we think about vaginas, and even more worried that we don't think about them.

—Eve Ensler, opening lines of *The Vagina Monologues*

Until the violence stops. —official slogan of the V-Day Movement

In October of 2003, Utah Valley State College (UVSC) student Errin Julkunen read Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. Julkunen had suffered sexual abuse as a child, and she found in Ensler's script a means for her own healing and empowerment. Perhaps the play could touch other lives, as it had touched her own. And so, in 2004, under the leadership of president Julkunen, UVSC's Gender Studies Club staged a performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. As part of the V-Day College Campaign, UVSC's Gender Studies Club joined hundreds of colleges across the United States and around the world in performing *The Vagina Monologues* royalty-free, with proceeds benefiting local organizations that help victims of sexual violence and oppression. In short, Julkunen's personal struggles with sexual abuse motivated her to stage a very public performance, one that sought to instigate discussion about women's sexuality and violence against women and children.¹

But UVSC's performance started other conversations as well. UVSC is located in Orem, Utah, a town with an estimated 88% Latter-day Saint population. UVSC itself has an estimated 83% LDS enrollment. The school and the surrounding community are often described as a

bastion of conservatism, and so, not surprisingly, a remarkable uproar surrounded the staging of *The Vagina Monologues*. The single performance in 2004 drew an audience of three hundred on a campus of 23,000, yet despite the small audience relative to the size of the student body, debate raged on campus and in the Orem community. After the play was restaged in 2005, the Utah State Legislature pulled funding for UVSC's proposed Digital Learning Center. Reasons given for the funding cut included a 2004 campus visit from Michael Moore, a Queer Studies course, and the Gender Studies Club's performance of *The Vagina Monologues*.²

A few years earlier, on Valentine's Day 2001, Janet Kincaid found herself enjoying dinner with friends and brainstorming topics for the upcoming Sunstone West conference. These women were associated with *Sunstone* magazine, a publication of the Sunstone Education Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that endorses critical discussion of Mormonism and is wholly independent of the Mormon Church. Inspired by Ensler's play, Kincaid and her comrades decided to invite women to write their own "monologues" for a conference panel titled "Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality." The organizers solicited essays from LDS women in the United States and Britain and collected essays on various topics, including modesty, sacred undergarments, homosexuality, transsexuality, sexual assault, and relationships with husbands, bishops, and fathers. Like the various monologues in *The Vagina Monologues*, "Sacred Spaces" contained a multitude of voices, some humorous, some somber, some tearful; some pieces were confessional and others confrontational. Borrowing the tone and format of Ensler's play, the women contributors wrote their own scripts, which in turn were read before a conference audience, either by the authors themselves or volunteers. The panel was so well-received that it encored months later and was thereafter referred to as *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*.

These two productions, the one staged for a paying audience, the other scripted and read conference-style, used *The Vagina Monologues* as a starting point to comment upon women, sexuality, and the Mormon Church. The play at UVSC was not merely theatrical entertainment, nor was the Sunstone panel simply academic conversation. Instead, both performances were part of a larger effort to generate discussion about women's sexuality and, in so doing, help women find healing from sexual abuses and seek sexual empowerment. Because the performances took place within a Mormon context, the issue of religion also comes into play. UVSC is embedded in Mormon culture; individuals in Utah County who are Mormons, ex-Mormons, and even non-Mormons feel the majority religion's impact on their daily lives. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* deliberately addressed the connections between Mormon women's faith and sexuality; contributors revealed the ways, both direct and indirect, that Mormon teaching impacted their sexual self-understanding. What's more, both performances met with resistance, although to varying degrees. Some UVSC students and Orem residents disapproved of the production, and some Sunstone conference attendees walked out of the "Sacred Spaces" session in disgust. This resistance, however, seemed only to impassion organizers Julkunen and Kincaid, as the women used sometimes fiery rhetoric to demand change within their communities and their Church's teachings, scriptures, and patriarchal structure.³

One key element of Mormon faith is testimony. For Latter-day Saints, including men, women, and children, testimonies come through the Holy Spirit and attest to the truth of the Gospel and the Mormon Church. Testimonies develop and change based on life experiences and conversations with others. Most of all, testimonies grow as believers share their stories time and again—and sometimes, faithful Mormons will be called to publicly present their testimonies before a listening audience. The performances of *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina*

Monologues are a kind of testimony—a “seximony,” as one participant called it⁴—that is faithful to the women’s personal experiences, if not to the Mormon Church’s teaching.⁵

In this thesis, I argue that UVSC’s production of *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone’s *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* represent faithful testimonies for the women who participated in the performances, either as actors, organizers, or script writers. As testimony, the monologues promote individual healing (from past sexual abuse and patriarchal gender expectations), foster empowerment (inspiring the individual to reimagine herself and seek a new social role), and build community (strengthening bonds among women and communicating new ideas about women’s sexuality). These testimonial monologues accomplish all this through the theatrical medium: UVSC’s *The Vagina Monologues* staged a performance in a traditional fashion, while *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* invited LDS women to script and perform their own testimonial stories. Theatrical performance gave the women an audience and an opportunity to give voice to their experiences as either Mormon women, former Mormon women, or non-LDS women living in a Mormon-dominated culture. Not all audiences, however, interpreted the monologues as faithful testimony, and controversy ensued—particularly at UVSC—as women discussed and described their sexuality in ways not sanctioned by the Mormon Church.

This thesis, then, explores the connections between female sexuality, the contemporary Mormon Church, and theatrical performance. UVSC’s Gender Studies Club and the Sunstone panel share Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* as a starting point, and they imagine similar ends: promoting awareness and prompting change, building community among women, and encouraging women to reimagine their relationships with their sexual bodies and the Mormon Church. The project I undertake here touches upon several areas of scholarship, including feminist studies, performance studies, and religious studies. Most compelling for me, however, is the role of performance and theatrical production. Because the theatrical idiom best illumines

the power and impact of these two events, I have formulated my argument by appealing to theatrical language. I talk about performance and theatricality, staging and restaging, scripting and rescripting. Through the theatrical process, the Gender Studies Club built a community while challenging the idea of a monolithic “community,” and “Sacred Spaces” problematized and revised the Mormon position on women’s sexuality. Both UVSC and “Sacred Spaces” contain theatrical elements: they involve preparation, performance, and an audience. Further, because *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* are *monologues*, a particular form of the performed spoken word, I emphasize speaking about issues and, by extension, giving voice to women, whether as actors performing monologues or as authors writing them.

At the heart of this project is a desire to explore the ways theatre can change religious communities, either by commenting on restrictive religious doctrine, inspiring new conversations, or allowing religious persons to re-evaluate what it means to be faithful participants. A 2004 book entitled *Theatre and Empowerment* looks at community theatre world-wide, examining from the practitioner’s standpoint how theatre can “creatively, productively, and meaningfully” engage issues like AIDS, poverty, racism, political strife, and sexual intolerance on a local level. “Empowerment,” the authors explain, is not about control, but rather about liberation through creative and critical analysis: “Empowerment is not to do with the amelioration of oppression and poverty per se, but with the liberation of the human mind and spirit, and with the transformation of participants . . . into conscious beings aware of and claiming voices and choices in how their lives will be lived.” In describing practitioners who use theatre for social change, the editors write, “by enabling people to discover and value their own humanity, both individually and in relation to others, they seek to empower those involved to claim the status of creative, thinking beings who have agency over the shaping of their lives and those of their families and communities.”⁶ If empowerment starts with the individual, it can

spread to others, affecting change in both the person and her community. In this sense, UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone's *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* are examples of theatre as empowerment.

Staging and Scripting: Different Uses of the Theatrical Medium

But while these two cases share an emphasis on Mormon women's sexuality and the performed spoken word, both also vary in their performances and theatrical emphases, and I will explore those differences in the following chapters. The Gender Studies Club staged what is best thought of as a traditional theatrical production. The club had organizers (producers), rehearsals, costumes, and lighting, and they performed before a paying audience. Thus, in describing UVSC's relationship to *The Vagina Monologues*, I use the words "staging" and "restaging." Using theatrical terminology, one can say that UVSC's Gender Studies Club staged *The Vagina Monologues* in 2004 and has restaged it again in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Also in contrast to "Sacred Spaces," UVSC used previously published material—Enslar's *The Vagina Monologues*, which was also being performed simultaneously around the world as part of the larger V-Day movement. This raises questions about the nature and function of community, for as I see it, UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* positions itself within several communities. First there is the theatrical community, the cooperative group that arises when a play is staged: cast, director, and crew come together to create a product, creating shared identity and purpose. Second, by participating in the V-Day movement, the Gender Studies Club tapped into a global community dedicated to ending violence against women. In this way, a predominantly Mormon college in Utah lent their voice, or some voices, to the international outcry against sexual abuse and oppression. In a third sense, UVSC's production challenged the existing community of primarily LDS residents in Orem. Traditionally, the Orem community has claimed influence and authority

over the campus, speaking out when the college seems to defy “community values.” In the UVSC example, as we shall see, this community extended all the way into the halls of the Utah legislature. Thus, by creating community (through *The Vagina Monologues* and participation in the V-Day Movement), UVSC also challenged community (in Orem and in Utah County). Here, staging and restaging takes on a meaning that extends beyond the theatrical. The word “stage” also can imply development, progress, process, or journey. The Gender Studies Club used the “stage” (theatrically-speaking) to “restage”—to move from one stage to another, to bring about progress through “talking” and “discussion.”

“Sacred Spaces,” or *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* did not “stage” anything in the traditional manner. While borrowing from *The Vagina Monologues*’s format, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* was more akin to an academic conference than a theatrical production, with women standing at a microphone, reading aloud their pieces (or, in many cases, other women’s pieces) before a conference audience. There was no staging in terms of blocking, or putting movement to an actor’s words. There was no lighting and no costumes. Unlike at UVSC—where college students, faculty, and staff performed or acted Ensler’s words—the women at Sunstone wrote and spoke for themselves. They crafted their own monologues, and in so doing, commented directly and indirectly on the influences of Mormonism on their sexuality. While Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* is intended to encompass *all* women, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* addressed *Mormon* women, active or inactive. In thinking about *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, I use the word “scripting”: as a verb, “to script” invokes the act of writing, and as a noun, a “script” is the written text of something that is ultimately performed or read aloud. The contributors to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* wrote scripts for themselves, not for publication or dramatic performance, but to be read aloud to the Sunstone audience. By creating these scripts, the women took part in several facets of the theatrical process. The contributors became

playwrights; some contributors became actors, using their voices and bodies to deliver their monologues; and finally, the contributors also became part of the audience, hearing and absorbing the words of other women, being affected by others' pieces, just as their own pieces moved others in the room.

As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, the word “script” is etymologically linked to “scripture” and “scriptural,” both of which relate to sacred writings. Some Mormon women disagree with the prescriptions put forth in Mormon sacred writings. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues's* scripts, in turn, offer a new kind of scripture, a new way of narrating women's sexuality as sacred, a *rescripting* of patriarchal ideas and structures. In this way, through scripting and re-scripting, more directly than UVSC's production of *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* problematizes and revises Mormon positions on women's sexuality. The new script includes Mormon women's voices and their testimonies about not just spirituality, but sexuality.

Given my emphasis on staging and scripts, it won't be surprising to find that drama history and dramatic theory have informed my thinking. Since the time of Greek theatre, some dramatic theorists have championed theatre as a means for shaping citizenship and corralling the masses into socially and politically acceptable behaviors. In the twentieth century, Bertold Brecht expanded these ideas. That German playwright and theorist conceptualized theatre as an educational tool that could inspire audiences to social and political action. Brecht's innovative way of manipulating the audience's reality—and thereby forcing them to question the social and political rules of that reality—inspired other modern and postmodern theatrical productions. Politically-oriented theatre dominated in the 1960s and 1970s, as playwrights and theatre companies responded to the Vietnam war, racial strife, and feminism.⁷ In *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, political activist and theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal, has

argued both theoretically and practically for the revolutionary potential of theatre and the power of a visual and aural spectacle to stimulate audiences to action.⁸ Ensler's play has become decidedly activist over the past decade, and the V-Day Movement aims to educate, inspire, and instigate social and political change. All of this literature has shaped my analysis.

Another field informing my project is performance studies, primarily the works of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner. In *Anthropology of Performance*, Turner builds upon his past work with ritual to explore "cultural performance," which for Turner includes rituals, social dramas, and dramatic theatre. Here, Turner emphasizes performance's social roots and potential social impact. He observes that "performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of," and indeed, *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* are critiquing the sexual lives of women in Mormon communities.⁹ Schechner's contributions are also significant here: as a practitioner, Schechner's theories acknowledge the theatrical *process*—not simply the final product—and he explores script-writing, blocking and choreography, rehearsals, and the energy exchange between actor and audience. Because I believe that the theatrical process is as important as the "performances" themselves in promoting change and creating community, I have found Schechner's perspective particularly relevant.¹⁰

But performance is also about power, and contemporary dramatic and performance theories apply Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity and Foucault's ideas about power and cultural affirmation or subversion. Foucault's work, which centers power, knowledge, bodies, and institutions, offers insights into Ensler's play. The V-Day movement aims to empower women through knowledge, to share stories in the hope that women will claim ownership of their bodies away from oppressive power structures. That the Mormon Church disciplines women's bodies goes without saying; that some Mormon women resist this institutional authority and reclaim sexual autonomy through theatrical performance has not been

noticed or emphasized. Foucault, however, had little to say about feminism—and so it is Judith Butler’s notion that we *perform* gender that becomes especially useful. By performing *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, the actors are performing a particular understanding of gender, made all the more poignant by the dominant Mormon religion’s prescriptions. Yet Butler too has her limits as a theoretical guide for this thesis since Enslar’s *Vagina Monologues* seems to challenge Butler’s idea that gender is entirely constructed. In fact, Enslar has been criticized for essentializing femininity and reducing women to their sexual organs. Doing so makes it difficult for transsexual and transgendered people to embrace *The Vagina Monologues*’s mission.¹¹

Religious studies scholarship also informs my research, particularly work in the fields of American religions and Mormon studies. Scholars of American religious history are increasingly writing women into the historical narrative. In a recent book, *Women and American Religion: Reimagining the Past*, Catherine Brekus traces the historiography of women as actors upon the American religious landscape—and she summons more scholars to attend to women’s issues. This thesis heeds Brekus’s suggestion and places women’s voices front and center.¹² Also relevant is Mormon studies—most notably controversial questions of Mormon “feminism.” During the past two decades, some Mormon scholars (many of them LDS or former-LDS) have examined women’s relationship to priesthood authority, explored theological questions about a female deity, and uncovered evidence of women’s power in early Mormon history. But Church leaders have routinely criticized such scholarly endeavors, sending the message that Church teachings are above scrutiny. Now, UVSC’s *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone’s *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* lead new efforts to critique Mormon positions about women’s roles and women’s sexuality, using theatrical performance instead of academic publishing.¹³

Little scholarly work has been published on *The Vagina Monologues*, and to my knowledge, no articles have been written connecting the play to a conservative religious community.¹⁴ Thus, the heart of my research consists of primary source material. This thesis's starting point is the script of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, and the edition I use is subtitled *The V-Day Edition*, which traces the history and development of the V-Day Movement. In trying to understand the controversy surrounding UVSC's production of the play, I rely upon newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor in local and college papers, particularly *The Deseret Morning News*, *The Daily Herald*, and UVSC's paper, *The College Times*. A documentary film titled *This Divided State* has provided me with interesting insight into UVSC and the influences of the Orem community. While the film does not discuss *The Vagina Monologues* specifically, it demonstrates how a 2004 campus visit by liberal filmmaker Michael Moore polarized UVSC. In addition, I have enriched my research through email correspondences and telephone exchanges with students and faculty involved in *The Vagina Monologues*.

The Mormon Vagina Monologues has not been published, but I was able to purchase cassette tape recordings of the conference panel from *Sunstone* magazine. The tapes offer an audio recording of each of the 18 monologues, plus introductory remarks by facilitator Janet Kincaid that include biographical information about the authors. Some monologues are read by their authors; some are not. Audience reactions—boisterous laughter or stunned silence—can be heard on the tapes. In addition, I communicated by email with Janet Kincaid and Holly Welker, both former LDS members who organized the event. Kincaid, who also spoke with me over the phone, has spoken very eloquently about her personal reasons for bringing a project like this to the Mormon community. While I purchased the cassette tapes through a public forum, and it would be within my scholarly rights to use the women's real names as given on the tapes, I have created pseudonyms for the majority of women to protect their privacy. I name only Kincaid

and Welker, who already are public figures, and Sylvia Cabus, who has published her monologue elsewhere. The women's monologues were written with a small Sunstone audience in mind, and I would not feel comfortable exposing their names and their stories without written permission.

**A Need for Healing & Empowered Community:
The Vagina Monologues and the V-Day Movement**

Little did Eve Ensler know when she first wrote and performed *The Vagina Monologues* that the play would ignite a worldwide movement. An activist and feminist who often based her plays upon interviews, Ensler stumbled upon the topic of vaginas while working on another script. She recalls a surprising conversation with an older woman who spoke about her vagina with disgust, and this got Ensler wondering what other women think about their vaginas. Her interviews with over 200 women—“older women, younger women, married women, single women, lesbians, college professors, actors, corporate professionals, sex workers, African American women, Hispanic women, Asian American women, Native American women, Caucasian women, Jewish women”—became *The Vagina Monologues*. Ensler performed the piece as a one-woman show, first off-Broadway in New York, and then on tour in the United States and abroad. Wherever she went, female victims of violence approached Ensler, thanking her for freeing “their memories, pain, and desire.” Ensler heard from thousands of women who had been raped, beaten, genitally mutilated, and victimized by fathers, brothers, boyfriends, and strangers. She had not anticipated this response, nor was she prepared to handle it.¹⁵

A victim of childhood sexual abuse herself, Ensler felt she had to do something, something beyond writing and performing the show. And so with a group called Feminists.com, V-Day was born. Launched on Valentine's Day 1998, V-Day stands for “valentine,” “vagina,” and “victory” over violence. The V-Day mission is “to end violence against women by increasing awareness through events and the media and by raising funds to support

organizations working to ensure the safety of women everywhere.” The first official V-Day performance took place in New York City, featured a celebrity cast, and raised over \$100,000. The next year, V-Day initiatives started popping up on college campuses; in conjunction with a royalty-free performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, college student groups raised money and awareness to end violence against women. To this day, proceeds from the V-Day College Campaign benefit local organizations such as women’s shelters and safe houses. V-Day also extends overseas, with V-Day funds supporting groups in nations such as Afghanistan, Kenya, and Croatia.¹⁶

Just as the play has raised awareness and funds wherever it goes, it has also generated controversy. Since its inception, some people have been uncomfortable with *The Vagina Monologues*. A publisher who gave Ensler an advance for the script later changed his mind—although he was willing to let Ensler keep the money, if only she would find another publisher. Newspapers and television shows dedicated articles and segments to Ensler’s play, but avoided using the word “vagina.” According to the V-Day edition of *The Vagina Monologues*, lawmakers in Arizona considered eliminating funding to Arizona universities’ women studies programs, a backlash against Arizona State University’s 1999 V-Day performance. They did not follow through. On college campuses nationwide, fliers advertising the show were defaced or removed, and actors occasionally withdrew from the show because of external pressure. Many times, people criticized the show without having seen a performance or having read the script. As we will see, UVSC’s Gender Studies Club faced similar criticism, often from those who knew the play only by reputation. Furthermore, UVSC is just one of many schools in conservative communities that saw debate surrounding *The Vagina Monologues*. In other words, the controversy that surrounded UVSC’s and Sunstone’s productions was not unique to those cases. What is unique—and significant—are the conversations surrounding the controversy.¹⁷

Being a part of UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* or of Sunstone's *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* also had an impact on organizers, actors, and writers, in addition to the social awareness inspired by the interaction of script, actor, and audience. This personal empowerment and communal bonding, likewise, are not unique to the Gender Studies Club or the Sunstone panel. Rather, I suggest, it is a function of the theatrical process. The 2001 edition of *The Vagina Monologues* includes letters from V-Day College Campaign participants. Danielle from Colorado State University writes, "Directing *The Vagina Monologues* taught me more about myself than anything I have ever done. It also reinforced my belief in the power of community, especially a strong community of women." Jenna from Carnegie Mellon University says of her V-Day experience, "Since becoming involved in this project, I have learned to respect myself more. I take more chances. I am just a happier person overall, because I feel that I am a part of something so colossal and important and compelling and breathtaking." Women from UVSC and "Sacred Spaces" echo these sentiments. In short, the fact that the Mormon and former Mormon women derive self-respect and empowerment from the play is significant, but not uniquely so. What is profoundly significant is the way in which the play speaks to the women, as both women and as Mormons. Their responses to the play, as well as critics' responses to the performances, emerge from a Mormon culture that has scriptural and doctrinal ideas about a woman's role.¹⁸

Mormon Patriarchy: Restricting Women's Voices

In order to understand how *The Vagina Monologues* fits into a Mormon context, we must first examine some fundamental features of Mormon teaching. The Church holds strong positions on many aspects of daily life, including women's roles and women's sexuality. Mormon women's sexuality is, of course, not entirely unlike that of other contemporary

American women, particularly those who are in conservative religious environments. At the same time, the patriarchal nature of the Mormon power structure, the Church-mandated instruction for women to be wives, mothers, and homemakers, and a woman's spiritual dependence on her husband for salvation all influence a Mormon woman's experience of her sexual self.

The Church of Latter-day Saints is a patriarchy, and unabashedly so. While the term "patriarchy" often carries negative connotations in describing male domination over women, the LDS Church sees patriarchy positively, as being in union with God's established order. When the Church discusses the "patriarchal order," it describes the God-given union between Adam and Eve, one that mirrors the power structure in heaven.¹⁹ Within the Mormon faith, men and women have very specific roles in the Church, community, and family, and these differences reflect church doctrine. In 1995, the Gordon B. Hinckley Presidency issued a "Proclamation to the World" regarding familial roles and the sacred nature of the Mormon family. Within this proclamation are key tenets about gender roles and responsibilities:

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an *essential characteristic* of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose... By *divine design*, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.²⁰

These prescribed gender roles become part of Latter-day Saints' everyday lives. In the model LDS family, the husband is the bread-winner and primary decision-maker while the wife devotes herself to the care of their children.

Church leaders have explained in detail how women are to become devoted wives and mothers. In 1987, President Ezra Taft Benson delivered an address entitled "To the Mothers in Zion," which laid out the sacred duties of Mormon mothers within the family unit. Drawing

upon Mormon scripture, Benson described how women “are, or should be, the very heart and soul of the family.” Husbands and wives should not postpone having children, but must gratefully receive all children God bestows. Borrowing from past speeches of President Spencer W. Kimball, Benson then stated that women belong in the home, taking on “the greatest career on earth—that of homemaker, wife, and mother.”²¹ Benson’s speech not only outlines the Church’s disapproval of women working outside the home, but elevates the role of wife and mother to the exclusion of single women and childless women. Benson did address single women a year later in a speech titled “To the Single Adult Sisters of the Church.” He told them to remember “the sacred goal” of celestial marriage. “Keep yourselves attractive,” he advocated, and “[p]lace yourselves in a position to meet worthy men.” Benson advised single women not to become too independent or self-reliant, nor should women postpone marriage until after finishing school or establishing a career.²² While Benson acknowledged that some women are widowed, divorced, or unmarried, the tenor of his speech indicated that all Mormon women should strive to attain temple marriage and motherhood.

Women’s roles are significant for a number of reasons, but two are particularly relevant for this study. First of all, in Mormon theology, marriage is linked with salvation: only by keeping the gospel and following Church guidelines for marriage and family can Latter-day Saints become “exalted” and enter the celestial kingdom, the greatest of all heavens in Mormon theology. Exaltation takes place within the family unit, and thereby, a woman’s salvation is connected with her husband’s. Second, this “ideal Mormon wife and mother” as set forth by the LDS Church is the standard to which many LDS women feel they must adhere. Any deviation from this church-sanctioned “norm” can make women feel uncomfortable with themselves and their life choices. Indeed, some of the participants in UVSC’s *The Vagina Monologues* and some contributors to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* have felt this pressure. What’s more, some of

these women found in *The Vagina Monologues* a means of escaping this unattainable ideal, or a means of suggesting that the Mormon standards for women are not, in fact, “ideals” at all. And while some women I discuss have rejected Mormon teachings of women’s roles, many still felt the pressure to emulate the “perfect” Mormon woman. Even when women reject the patriarchal order, the enveloping Mormon culture makes patriarchal ideas virtually inescapable.

This patriarchal structure manifests not only within the Mormon family but also within the church hierarchy. All church authority rests in the hands of the priesthood, with varying levels of power depending upon age and rank. The LDS Church does not have a small cadre of ordained clergy, as many religious groups do. Instead, all worthy males can hold the priesthood, provided they live the gospel faithfully and adhere to expectations for correct behavior. Starting from around the time of puberty, when sexual identity begins to develop, LDS boys and girls are separated: at age 12, boys move upward in Church ranks and take on the first level of priesthood authority, while girls learn to support the church, the community, and the family. Women do not and cannot hold the priesthood. This prohibition is scripturally decreed and hierarchically enforced. As priesthood holders, men are expected to protect and spiritually direct those beneath them in the patriarchal chain, including their wives and children. Women, for their part, are to support and strengthen husbands, sons, and priesthood holders through obedience and service; women should not criticize or question priesthood authority.²³

Priesthood authority informs all doctrine and decisions within the Church, and therefore, priesthood authority also sets the standard for women’s sexuality. At the heart of these LDS teachings on sexuality are guidelines about modesty and chastity, which both men and women are called to obey. Simply put, the law of chastity decrees that sexual relations can only take place within the bounds of legal marriage, i.e. heterosexual marriage. The law of chastity, which is seen as a commandment from God set forth in scripture, connects to the advocacy for

modesty, which regulates improper thoughts and sexual behavior. Chastity and modesty, in turn, connect to issues of sexuality and procreation. The official LDS website says of “Modesty”:

Central to the command to be modest is an understanding of the sacred power of procreation, the ability to bring children into the world. This power is to be used only between husband and wife. Revealing and sexually suggestive clothing, which includes short shorts and skirts, tight clothing, and shirts that do not cover the stomach, can stimulate desires and actions that violate the Lord's law of chastity.²⁴

This advice, though not explicitly gendered, evokes images of *women's* clothing: short shorts and skirts, tight clothes, and belly-baring tops are typically associated with females, particularly young women. Thus, this kind of clothing primarily associated with women can lead (both men and women) to unchaste urges and behaviors.

Other advice from the Church is explicitly gendered. In the article “The Message: Right for the Climate,” Elder John H. Groberg of the Seventy instructs believers, “Young women should refrain from wearing off-the-shoulder, low-cut, or revealing clothes. Young men should similarly maintain modesty in their dress.”²⁵ Women are given specific instruction on what not to wear; men’s directions are vague. In other words, instructions like those given here suggest that women’s bodies and sexuality are dangerous and need to be regulated, more so than the bodies and sexuality of men. Men are not as responsible for controlling their sexual desires as are women, whose clothing and behavior are to blame for stimulating male desire.

The Vagina Monologues do not emulate the law of chastity, nor do they endorse the standards of modesty. Instead, the monologues tell stories that involve sex outside of marriage (“Because He Liked to Look at It”), immodest language (“Reclaiming Cunt”), immodest clothing (“My Short Skirt”), female masturbation (“The Vagina Workshop”), and intimate lesbian relationships (“The Little Coochi Snorcher that Could,” “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy”).²⁶ *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* echo many of these stories, though are

decidedly milder in tone. Some of the monologues describe women's attempts to live the law of chastity, while some trace women's attempts to thwart the standards of modesty. Some monologues detail extra-marital sex, loving same-sex relationships, female masturbation, and graphic language. The language and subject matter in both pieces defy Mormon teachings, proposing a different standard of sexual behavior, physical intimacy, and women's sexuality. Both *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* are collections of stories, neither endorsing a particular lifestyle nor condemning specific sexual behaviors. Patriarchal leaders, however, would not agree with any sentiment or story in *The Vagina Monologues*, and most would criticize the monologues in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. The very fact that the performances spoke so frankly about vaginas and sexuality are enough to rouse LDS ire, as private body parts and personal experiences became fodder for public discussion.

But I suspect there is yet another aspect to the controversy surrounding these productions. In staging *The Vagina Monologues* and scripting *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, the women involved removed men from the picture. There are no male roles in *The Vagina Monologues*, and all of Ensler's interviews were with women; UVSC used an all-female cast and performed for a largely—though not strictly—female audience.²⁷ Likewise, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* was a collection of Mormon women's monologues, written and read by women.²⁸ Although both *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* sometimes include men as peripheral characters, men's voices were not heard—rather, men's voices were deliberately excluded as a way to heighten the power of the women's words. Thus, both performances not only inverted the hierarchical structure of the Mormon Church by placing women's voices before and above men's, but the performances nearly eliminated men's voices and men's presence altogether. While the Church teaches that women must rely upon and respect male priesthood authority, *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* removed men

from this equation, casting women in roles of power and authority. While the Church teaches that wives' salvation comes through her husband, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* linked Mormon women's faith with their sexuality, at times independent of men. Through these gynocentric performances, *women* became authorities on their own bodies, their sexuality, and their experiences, reclaiming the power that is so often denied them and gifted to the male priesthood. In so doing, the UVSC performance roused controversy, and the Sunstone panel raised disapproving eyebrows. But this was, of course, also by design. *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* allowed women to speak, and women alone. In this way, the women claim power and offer healing, taking charge of their bodies and sexual experiences, exhorting other women to become sexually autonomous.

A Need for Healing and Empowered Community: Mormons and Sexual Abuse

UVSC's Gender Studies Club and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* highlighted the problem of sexual abuse in LDS communities, just as the V-Day Movement highlighted the international problem of violence against women. The V-Day Worldwide Initiative says of *The Vagina Monologues*, "No one who sees the play can remain neutral to the appalling cost of ignoring the global theme of violence against women. . . . V-Day presents a sweeping movement based on women's ability to speak their truth about violence in a way that liberates rather than condemns, and frees both the spirit and political will."²⁹ Not everyone who performed in *The Vagina Monologues* or wrote a monologue for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* was a victim of sexual abuse—but many were.³⁰ Ensler and the V-Day Movement believe that overcoming silence about women's bodies, sex lives, and sexual encounters will reduce the shame that often prevents women from coming forth about rape and sexual abuse. Likewise, UVSC's productions of *The Vagina Monologues* concluded with a pledge, by cast, crew, and audience

members, to put an end to sexual violence. Similarly, some women who wrote *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* saw the anthology as an opportunity to end their own silence about past abuse. *The Vagina Monologues*, as text and performance, became part of the healing process.

Despite LDS efforts to maintain modesty and sexual purity, and despite the priesthood's protector-role, members have suffered from sexual abuse. This problem is not new to the Mormon Church, but the issue has gotten increased attention in past decades. Three studies in particular, which I will explore here, outline the nature and sources of sexual violence in the Church and in Mormon communities. My purpose in describing these studies is not to mark the LDS Church as uniquely susceptible to the abuse of women and children—certainly other American religious groups have faced claims of sexual abuse. Rather, I hope to identify and explain the need many Mormon women have expressed for healing—a need that, for many, *The Vagina Monologues* seems to address.

In 2005, the Utah Commission of Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) released findings based on surveys of women over the age of eighteen. The CCJJ found that Utah, a state with a clear Mormon majority and a dominant Mormon culture, falls below the national average in every category of violent crime *except* rape. In fact, Utah was one half to three times *lower* than the national average in murder, robbery, and aggravated assault—but Utah is and has been above the national average in rape statistics since 1991. Nearly one in three Utah women will be victims of sexual violence. What's more, the CCJJ study found that married and widowed women were far less likely to report sexual assault, compared to single or divorced women. A UVSC professor explained in *The College Times*: “People in Utah view marriage as so sanctified and sacred that bad things can't happen within it, so rape does not get reported.” The study also indicated that only 9.8 percent of Utah women reported the sexual assault to police. Reasons given for these low numbers include victims being too young to understand the assault and a

victim's sense of guilt at having been attacked. These Utah rape statistics became part of UVSC's 2007 performance of *The Vagina Monologues*: a faculty member, Laura Hamlin, wrote a monologue addressing the need for rape awareness and prevention in Utah.³¹

In 1996, a study titled “Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Case of Mormon Women” appeared in *Affila: The Journal for Women in Social Work*. Conducted and written by four women with connections to the Church, the study involved interviews with 71 Mormon women who identified as survivors of sexual abuse. The working hypothesis was that “adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are members of patriarchal religions face a particular challenge because church teachings and interactions with church members may present barriers to the full recognition and healing of their abuse.”³² The primary goal of the study is, first, to highlight the ways sexual abuse is exacerbated within the religious, patriarchal structure of LDS “life worlds” so as, second, to help social workers treating Mormon sexual abuse victims better understand the barriers to clients’ healing. In using the term “life world,” the authors refer to the Mormon inclination to place faith and practice in conjunction with all other aspects of daily life, permeating social interactions, community involvement, and family structures. Because of this deep personal entrenchment, the authors argue, it is nearly impossible for women to conceive of healing from sexual assault without involvement from the Church—and by extension, the priesthood. However, the study shows that many men who hold the priesthood are incapable of ministering to victims, or they place the community’s needs over victims’. One survivor of abuse told the authors, “It is like being abused again because we are under a patriarchal system.”³³

Invoking terms like “healing” and “empowerment,” the article details barriers to healing and ways abuse survivors might feel empowered to talk about their experiences. The authors argue that empowerment and healing are possible, but first, Mormon survivors of sexual abuse

need support from community leaders and freedom to make their own judgments—even if those judgments deviate from the Church’s top-down hierarchal authority.³⁴ *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* can be viewed as therapeutic ways for women to deal with sexual abuse, outside of patriarchal Church bounds. As we will see, some performers in UVSC’s production found that the play helped them deal with their own past abuse, and some authors of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* wrote pieces that they found cathartic. More than just therapy, however, the performances also became part of a preventative process that raised awareness about abuse and empowered women who have not been assaulted. In sharing faithful testimony and talking honestly about sexual abuse, participants in *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* spoke to other women—some survivors of abuse, and some not—outside the bounds of patriarchal authority.

But accusations of sexual abuse are difficult for many people to hear. One book that has stirred tremendous controversy is Martha Beck’s 2005 memoir, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found my Faith*. Beck claims that her father, an esteemed apologist for the Mormon Church, sexually abused her as a child. Beck wrote the book, she has said, “to complete the healing process.” She also said, “I wrote the book to give myself a voice, but I also wrote it because I know there are many others who've gone through sexual abuse and the same kind of attempts to be silenced.”³⁵ However, Beck’s own family claims she invented the story, and many Mormons have condemned her for revealing secrets about temple rituals—Beck vehemently denies that—and for negatively portraying Mormonism. Yet Beck’s book is relevant here because of the questions she raises about childhood sexual assault, the reactions of the LDS community to her story, and the outpouring of support she has received from other Mormon women who say Beck’s experiences resonate with their own.³⁶

Judging from the public reaction to the book, some Mormons *are* angry—because they believe her story or because they despise her message. A group of Mormon women started an email campaign to ban the book from Oprah’s Book Club months before the book hit shelves. Beck received graphic hate mail, and she has posted reactions to the book on the *Leaving the Saints* official website. “You are a disgusting piece of filthy garbage,” wrote Scott44lds, while one couple said, “I will smile the day you burn in hell for all the lies you’ve made up. You must be screwing Satan—is that it?” Another writer, Jennifer H., condemned Beck’s book because, she claimed, it is detrimental to family and community: “I feel bad for your family that they have to deal with this book, and sad for the Mormon community that will have to defend themselves against all the haters you’ve created by writing this book.” But not all reactions were negative. Many people expressed gratitude, and many told their own stories about sexual abuse within the Church and the leadership’s attempts to hide it. A therapist from Nebraska named Shari S., who has treated many Mormon victims of sexual abuse, defended Beck’s story. Marsha T., who grew up in a Mormon community where many of her friends were abuse victims, wrote, “I got in so many arguments . . . over these men and why the bishops weren’t listening to these women. My parents just kept telling me that the bishops were ‘men of god’ and that they are doing what the Lord advises.” Nowadays, she added, “I will no longer belong to a church whose females cannot hold the same positions as men. When that type of inequality occurs, then abuse against women and children is able to reign, and I will no longer be silent.”³⁷

An email response from Kyrra R. offered Beck encouragement amid the debate: “I know there will be controversy, harsh words and obstacles put up by people who do not agree with you. But remember there are many women who will benefit from your writing, who will finally have the strength to come forward and talk about what has happened to them in their lives and gain new hope.”³⁸ In spite of the controversy, Beck’s book opened a frank discussion about the

role of women and sexual abuse within the Mormon Church, as Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* had instigated an important conversation about women's bodies, women's sexuality, and sexual violence. And by staging *The Vagina Monologues* in Utah County, UVSC's Gender Studies Club brought those conversations together. Similarly, by scripting and presenting a Mormon version of *The Vagina Monologues*, the Sunstone panel put a particularly LDS-spin on representations of women's sexuality. Both productions generated controversy, but both also received enthusiastic support. What's more, participation in the play and the panel had an impact on the actors and playwrights. As we shall see, it brought therapeutic healing, empowering self-awareness, and community building.

Thus, *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* become a unique form of testimony. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to give testimony about God and Christ's existence, the Book of Mormon's veracity, Joseph Smith's prophecies, and Church leaders' revelatory power. What's more, followers are to nurture their own personal testimonies and share their sacred stories with others.³⁹ But some Mormon women want to speak not just about religious faith, but about gender equity and sexual autonomy. These women have reimagined women's roles and want to share those ideas with an audience. The theatrical medium offers this opportunity, giving women the chance to stage stories as actors and script-writers, and to exercise the power of their own voice. Theatrical performances like *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* allowed a community of women to stand together in solidarity, to speak as a chorus of individuals, and to perform stories before an audience. These plays, then, allow the women to give a new kind of testimony, one that emphasizes women's voices, women's bodies, and women's sexual agency.

CHAPTER 2

“The Vagina Dialogues”: Staging Mormon Women’s Sexuality at UVSC

This is where theater comes in. Theater insists that we inhabit the present tense – not the virtual tense or the politically correct tense. Theater demands that we truly be where we are. By being there together, we are able to confront the seemingly impossible, we are able to feel that which we fear might destroy us – and we are educated and transformed by that act.

—Eve Ensler, “What Happened to Peace?”⁴⁰

On Monday, March 15, 2004, *The Vagina Monologues* came to Utah Valley State College as part of the V-Day College Campaign. *The Vagina Monologues* had been staged before in the state of Utah: Eve Ensler performed the play herself at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival, and productions had popped up around Salt Lake City since 2001.⁴¹ However, this performance, staged on UVSC’s campus in Orem, Utah, marked the debut of Ensler’s controversial play in Utah County, often regarded as one of the most politically conservative counties in the United States.⁴² Eighty-eight percent of Utah County residents identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, making Utah County the most heavily LDS populated county in all of Utah.⁴³ Given these demographics, it is no surprise that UVSC’s performance of *The Vagina Monologues* did not escape notice in Orem.

In the weeks leading up to the performance and in the weeks following, debate swirled around UVSC, particularly in UVSC’s *The College Times* and Orem’s *The Daily Herald*. Errin Julkunen wrote an editorial for *The Daily Herald*. As a UVSC student and president of the Gender Studies Club, a new campus group dedicated to bringing issues like feminism and topics like queer studies into campus discussion, Julkunen was one of the persons responsible for

organizing *The Vagina Monologues*.⁴⁴ Addressing questions about why such a controversial play should be performed in Utah County, Julkunen wrote, “One of the most significant things I’ve heard regarding *The Vagina Monologues* is how many women see it, and afterwards want to discuss personal experience with domestic violence, rape, incest, sexual abuse, and other issues of violence against women, where they were formerly uncomfortable talking about these societal taboos.”⁴⁵ In other words, Ensler’s play helps open discussion and invites women to talk about experiences they would otherwise keep silent. Communicating—through talking and discussing—fuels the V-Day goal of raising awareness and ending violence against women. But some UVSC students and Orem community members disagreed with *The Vagina Monologues*’s ability to make positive changes through discussion. Another UVSC student wrote a letter for *The Daily Herald*:

I am concerned that this kind of material is being promoted by the school. The monologues are vulgar; they discuss masturbation, male bashing, lesbianism and various other sexually explicit topics that would be offensive to the vast majority of residents in Utah County. This is all done under the guise of “ending violence about women” but the monologues never address violence, only sex and sexual promiscuity.⁴⁶

This author called the monologues “thinly veiled pornography” and claimed that his views coincided with fellow students’ opinions.

The Vagina Monologues’s reputation always precedes its performances, and the play can draw controversy even when few members of a community actually attend the production. This was the case at UVSC. An estimated 300 people attended UVSC’s debut performance of *The Vagina Monologues* in March 2004.⁴⁷ On a campus with 23,000 students, one might expect such an event to go unnoticed, or at the very least, to fade from discussion. This was not the case. Despite the Gender Studies Club’s stated purpose of raising “awareness about violence against women, that we may stop it in its tracks,” UVSC’s *The Vagina Monologues* came to represent far more than that.⁴⁸ The play became part of political debates swirling around UVSC and was cited

in conjunction with three major issues: 1) the Utah state legislature's refusal to fund a new library, 2) the challenge of UVSC attaining university status, and 3) the issue of "academic freedom" and perceived liberalization at UVSC. When the 2005 Utah legislature denied funding for the school's proposed Digital Learning Center, a \$30-40 million dollar facility intended to replace the school's aging library, *The Vagina Monologues* was rumored to be a reason for the legislature's dismissal. Other reasons included a 2004 speech by liberal filmmaker, Michael Moore, and a proposed queer studies course.⁴⁹ Senator John Valentine (R-Orem) said that whether UVSC became a university depended on perceptions that the school had liberal leanings. "When you're in the process of trying to make university status and you ask the taxpayers to be supportive, you have to be reflective" of the community, Valentine said.⁵⁰ In April 2005, UVSC's hosted a forum titled "Toward Finding Common Ground: A Dialogue on Academic Freedom and Responsibility." This meeting addressed disparities between UVSC's student activities and the community's expectations. Some community members argued that *The Vagina Monologues* and Michael Moore's speech demonstrated an urgent need to limit academic freedom on campus.⁵¹

To my knowledge, the Mormon Church made no official statements about UVSC's production of *The Vagina Monologues*, perhaps because UVSC is a public college. Yet the Mormon community surrounding UVSC—which contains a number of priesthood holders—rigorously decried Ensler's play as demeaning to "community values." Resistance to this student-led production illumines certain social attitudes about women and women's sexuality. In turn, Julkunen and the Gender Studies Club wanted to perform the play in order to change many of those attitudes. Further, resistance to *The Vagina Monologues* shows the power a theatrical production can wield. By "talking" about women's sexuality and violence against women, actors' voices can inspire other women to talk about their own experiences. Words wield power,

and publicly performed words yield even more. Many critics in Utah County might have worried about that influence when they dismissed *The Vagina Monologues* as incendiary and offensive. Yet by staging Ensler's play, the Gender Studies Club tried to move discussion about women's sexuality to a new *stage* of awareness and acceptability.

The staging of *The Vagina Monologues* within this conservative, largely-LDS community presents a number of important issues. First, the Gender Studies Club (GSC) intended the play to instigate discussion about violence against women. Repeatedly using words like “talk” and “discuss,” GSC President Julkunen believed that the play would help liberate women to share their own stories about sexuality and sexual abuse. On the day before the play's 2004 debut, Julkunen told *The College Times*, “The less we talk about these issues as a community, the more difficult it is for individuals to talk about their own experience.”⁵² Second, the UVSC example reveals how a staged theatrical production can generate controversy. The power attributed to UVSC's production of *The Vagina Monologues*, by detractors and supporters alike, is astonishing. The former believed the play could destroy community values, while the latter believed the play could inspire important conversations that might transform patriarchal attitudes.

Finally, UVSC's performance shows the power of a small community—in this case, the Gender Studies Club—to make a significant impact using a theatrical medium. When the Church, the college, and the surrounding community were not doing enough to address the issues that *The Vagina Monologues* raises, the Gender Studies Club staged Ensler's play, thereby turning very private issues into a very public performance. Using the reputation of Ensler's play as its starting point, and then using her script as part of the V-Day College Campaign, the Gender Studies Club addressed social problems within a conservative Mormon community. The club sought to eliminate violence against women and inspire discussion about female sexuality.

This process of launching a theatrical production, rehearsing the script, and, finally, staging it before an audience also created a community, a kind of theatrical family, among cast members.

In tension with this small theatrical community was the massive Utah County “community” that spoke against the play and sought to protect community values. Individuals on both sides of the UVSC-*Vagina Monologues* debate constantly invoked the term “community,” but frustratingly, the parameters of this community are never defined. But outsiders to Utah County might still wonder: Who constitutes this community? Is it entirely made up of Latter-day Saints? Does “community” sometimes describe both Orem residents and UVSC students? In what follows, I will explore some of these questions as I unpack the many roles that the community and community members played surrounding *The Vagina Monologues*. What’s more, I suggest that, by staging *The Vagina Monologues*, the cast, crew, and producers of the play became a distinct community unto themselves, a community supported by some members of the Orem community. Even more significantly, by taking parting in the V-Day College Campaign, UVSC’s production tapped into a wider imagined community, into national and global efforts to stop violence against women. While members of their own, local community may have heartily disagreed with their efforts, they found themselves part of larger network, one shaped not by religious identity or geographical proximity, but a desire to speak out against sexual abuse and gendered violence. Indeed, tension over this term “community” played a significant role in the UVSC-*Vagina Monologues* controversy. Players on opposing sides made rhetorical appeals to the idea of “community,” and these varied communities—Orem residents, UVSC faculty and students, and the all-female cast of *The Vagina Monologues*—all clamored for authoritative status, over and against the voices of others.

UVSC’s controversial event became a staged communal testimony, and the words “stage” and “restage” provide insights into *The Vagina Monologues* at UVSC. The theatrical

allusions of “stage” emphasize the dramatic nature of UVSC’s endeavors. As a noun, “stage” describes a theatrical playing space. Sometimes an elevated platform, sometimes simply an area apart from the audience, the stage is where dramatic action occurs. As a verb, “to stage” can mean to produce and perform a play or spectacle before an audience. To “restage,” then, refers to putting on a play again: in 2005, 2006, and 2007, the Gender Studies Club *restaged* Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* at UVSC. Non-theatrical meanings for “stage” are also relevant. “Stage” can refer to a step or a degree, a level or a phase. The very existence of stages implies change, movement, and direction. In staging *The Vagina Monologues*, the Gender Studies Club sought a new stage in the community’s awareness of violence against women. In short, the club used the “stage” to “restage” women’s sexuality, i.e., to move from one stage to another by giving women a new space and new language to discuss their sexuality. By performing the play, the club staged a certain attitude (Ensler’s) about women’s sexuality, one that might be unfamiliar to audiences—and one that was uncomfortable for many community members. In so doing, they tried to move women’s sexuality to a new stage—a new phase of communal understanding.

To note, in describing UVSC’s *The Vagina Monologues*, I primarily explore the play’s reception in Utah County and the discussions surrounding the staged performance; I do not emphasize Ensler’s script itself. Few critics saw the play or read the script, and thus they objected not to specific monologues or passages, but to the play’s reputation as a liberal, feminist, political piece that combines graphic language with detailed sexual scenarios. What’s more, articles and reviews of UVSC’s production offer little insight into audience responses to specific scenes. In short, the text of *The Vagina Monologues* makes no appearance here—as vivid as Ensler’s script may be, I would be remiss to conjecture a causal relationship between Ensler’s words and the communal outrage when my sources draw no such correlation.

UVSC Within the Utah County Context

The Mormon Church is undeniably a dominant presence in Utah County, Orem, and UVSC. As stated above, Utah County is allegedly 88% LDS. Strengthening LDS numbers in Utah County, which is often referred to as “Happy Valley,” are the student and faculty populations at the Church owned and operated Brigham-Young University, in Provo.⁵³ BYU reports that 98% of its 30,000 students are members of the Church, as well as 95% of its faculty.⁵⁴ Adjoining Provo is Orem, located about 25 miles south of Salt Lake City. Part of Happy Valley, Orem is also known as “Family City, USA.”⁵⁵ Orem houses the Institute of Religion, sponsored by the LDS Church and geared toward 18 to 30 year olds in the Orem/Provo area. The Institute offers “religious instruction for all students, single or married, and young adults... [and] provide[s] students with opportunities to grow spiritually through service, social interaction, and leadership opportunities. Institutes also assist parents and priesthood leaders in encouraging youth to serve missions and marry in the temple.”⁵⁶ Institute activities, which are free and even open to non-LDS, help secure a Mormon stronghold in the college town. Utah Valley State College is also in Orem, and unlike neighboring BYU, UVSC is a public institution that relies on state funding. In 2007, UVSC’s Religious Studies department website stated that, with a 90% Mormon population, UVSC was the state school with the greatest percentage of Latter-day Saints in the world.⁵⁷ A 2006 survey yields slightly smaller numbers, with 83.6% of UVSC’s nearly 23,000 students self-identifying as LDS.⁵⁸ In any case, it is clear that UVSC serves a majority of students from Mormon backgrounds. Mormon influence is strong throughout Utah County and has an impact on UVSC, a public school that is inexorably linked to the surrounding communities’ religious values.

UVSC is not, of course, the first or only college to generate controversy by staging *The Vagina Monologues*. Practically anywhere the play opens—especially when it opens for the first

time—controversy follows. People often criticize the play’s title, language, and content. Furthermore, Mormons are not the first religious group to take issue with the play. The Cardinal Newman Society currently has an ongoing campaign to stop Catholic colleges and universities from performing *The Vagina Monologues*. Official Catholic criticisms of the play come from ordained men with institutional authority, and these priests criticize not only the play’s language, but also its depictions of female sexuality. For instance, the Very Reverend David O’Connell, President of Catholic University of America, said, “I find the play crude, ugly, vulgar, and unworthy of staging or performing.” Providence College President Reverend Brian Shanley, O.P, said of the play, “Far from celebrating the complexity and mystery of female sexuality, *The Vagina Monologues* simplifies and demystifies it by reducing it to the vagina.”⁵⁹ These Catholic condemnations echo, as we will see, many criticisms leveled against UVSC’s Gender Studies Club. However, there is significant difference in the modes of attack. The Cardinal Newman Society has organized a full-scale assault. Their website lists objectionable passages from Ensler’s script and quotes Church leaders speaking out against the play. The website also names those Catholic colleges and universities that are defying the Newman Society ban and encourages Catholics to contact those schools’ administrators in an effort to prohibit *The Vagina Monologues* on campus. In short, Catholic opposition is a very public, hierarchically-ordained assault. In contrast, the Mormon Church does not have an “official” position on *The Vagina Monologues*; the play’s R-rated language and content is enough to render it off-limits to Latter-day Saints. Significantly, critics of UVSC’s performance rarely evoked Church teachings, as Catholic critics have done. Instead, UVSC’s critics couched their criticism in terms of “community” and “community values.” *The Vagina Monologues*, they argued, stood in opposition to community values, and therefore, UVSC should not stage the show.

An appreciation for the controversy surrounding *The Vagina Monologues* requires an understanding of UVSC's relationship to neighboring Brigham Young University. When the Latter-day Saints founded what would become BYU in 1875, it was the only school in Utah Valley. Decades later, that changed. In 1941, UVSC opened as Central Utah Vocational School, a technical aimed to meet the educational demands generated by World War II. In 1963, the school's name changed to Utah Trade Technical Institute, and four years later, the name changed again to Utah Technical College. This was a time for change at BYU as well; in the 1960s, BYU's trustees capped enrollment from local Utah counties and focused on recruiting students nationally and internationally. As a result, it became harder for Utah County residents to attend nearby BYU; local students turned, instead, to UVSC. In 1987, UVSC became Utah Valley Community College, and then in 1993, the school took the name Utah Valley State College and began offering bachelor degrees. The number of four-year degrees continued to increase—the college offers 51 bachelor degrees to date—and with it, UVSC's enrollment. By 2007, 65% of Utah County's college-bound residents attended UVSC, compared to 10% attending BYU. In fewer than six decades, UVSC had changed its name, its mission, and its enrollment many times over, and with these changes came new responsibilities and a new sense of identity.⁶⁰

Whereas students once saw UVSC as a “stepping stone” to a larger university, such as BYU or the University of Utah, the school became a destination of its own.⁶¹ Since assuming duties as president of the college in 2003, William Sederberg has actively sought to improve the school's standing, in both Utah County and national opinion.⁶² One of President Sederberg's primary goals has been the construction of a new Digital Learning Center, a facility to replace the school's antiquated library and to improve the school's academic image.⁶³ Sederberg also has focused on college sports as a way to bolster UVSC's reputation, and the school is in the process

of becoming an NCAA Division I competitor.⁶⁴ Finally, UVSC has been striving to attain university status and has launched an aggressive campaign, “Project: University.” Sederberg and the College Board have argued that, as the third-largest institution in the state of Utah, UVSC serves a majority of Utah County residents, and central Utah’s educational needs will only increase in coming years.⁶⁵ Since Sederberg’s presidency began, UVSC has made a concerted effort to distinguish itself as a reputable institution for higher-education.

But the school still rests in BYU’s shadow. A mere five miles away from UVSC’s campus, BYU is the LDS stronghold that many people would like UVSC to emulate. As a private university, BYU can enforce its own ideals of student behavior, academic boundaries, and spiritual engagement, whereas the publicly-supported UVSC cannot. This distinction, however, does not prevent some Utah County residents and legislators from holding UVSC to a certain moral standard. One particularly outspoken community member, Norman L. Nielsen, called for “balance” at UVSC: “Conservative and traditional views must receive the same amount of attention and promotion as liberal and so called ‘progressive’ views. There are many who will not support UVSC attaining university status until appropriate balance is achieved.”⁶⁶ In addition, Steve Clark (Rep-Provo) said while attending a UVSC-hosted dinner for the Utah County delegates, “UVSC is a great opportunity for kids to have the BYU experience. We’re walking on eggshells when we say this, but we know that people want that experience.”⁶⁷ Thus, it seems that if UVSC remains in BYU’s shadow, this is in part because community members and state legislators want to keep it that way.

But rhetoric like this did not escape scrutiny. *The College Times* editor-in-chief, Vegor Pedersen, responded to Clark’s comment: “The people of this community want UVSC to be BYU-Orem, and the legislature is doing all they can to make this a reality. So you have to mesh the church and the state in a very quiet, sneaky way. You have to put pressure on the college to

tow [*sic*] the line.”⁶⁸ Another *College Times* Opinion Writer, Ryan J. Robinson, addressed the constitutional conflict of turning UVSC into a BYU: “If [a conservative constituency] wants to attend a college where the ends of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are taught and adhered to by all, including faculty, there are three four-year institutions funded by the LDS Church and one private four-year institution with the same values. The community cannot expect UVSC to look like . . . BYU.”⁶⁹ Robinson went on to say that, despite what some community members claim, conservative viewpoints are not being excluded on campus: “As I go to school, I see a vast majority of students who are conservative and LDS and seem to be getting along just fine at UVSC.”⁷⁰ Both Pedersen and Robinson are UVSC students concerned about the tendency to cast UVSC as a mirror-image of BYU, and they point to this tension as a source of conflict between the college and the “community.”

The players in this debate are hard to identify. Regardless of what is at issue—UVSC as “BYU-Orem,” *The Vagina Monologues*, or Michael Moore’s speech—the only constant participant is the “community.” That community is never defined, nor its boundaries established. It is clear, however, that for some local Mormon residents, “community” refers to those people who affirm political conservatism and Mormon values and oppose liberal thought and “academic freedom.” Certainly, some locals are particularly outspoken and claim to represent others’ interests; Norman Nielsen, mentioned above, is one example, and Kay Anderson, who played a leading role in the Michael Moore controversy, is another. These and other residents work to influence UVSC campus life, either by imposing expectations (such as having UVSC emulate BYU’s “moral direction”), threatening to withhold taxpayer support (as with the Digital Learning Center and promotion to university status), or trying to limit “academic freedom” (as with the queer studies course). In an effort to take this influence seriously, in 2005 UVSC formed a Community Relations Council, instigating conversation between students, faculty, state

legislators, and Utah County residents. Frustratingly, there is no easy equivalent group opposing the local community's influence. It would not be accurate to say, for example, that the community's opposite is left-wing students or democratic faculty: not only are political labels rarely used, but many UVSC students and faculty do share local values, and many are themselves LDS. In short, appeals to the term "community" are frustratingly elusive but rhetorically powerful. In editorials and articles, the community often comes across as a single-minded monolith standing in staunch opposition to many activities and academics at UVSC. While this is an incomplete picture, it seems all the more persuasive when there is no single, unified group to oppose it.

Residents of Utah County—many of whom constitute the community—are not above imposing their own social ideals on others. A 2000 *Salt Lake Tribune* article offers insight into the prevalence of Mormon culture throughout Utah County. On Sundays in Utah County, "municipally ordained inactivity is a fact of life," as libraries, gyms, parks, and public pools close down. Even most shops and malls close, certainly in part because the LDS Church encourages members to patronize stores that close on Sundays. As the then-Orem City Manager explained, "We go to church on Sundays. What does the rest of the world do?" Significantly, as the article points out, "religion rarely is mentioned when Utah County elected officials discuss the dearth of Sunday recreational opportunities—lest anyone accuse them of imposing Mormon standards on the whole community." While many residents and officials claim that Sunday closures are simply a tradition that should not change, other religious groups beg to differ. The Seventh-Day Adventists, who celebrate their Sabbath on Saturdays, would like to enjoy recreational activities on Sundays. One Adventist pastor said, in regards to the closings, "Too many officials in the county assume everyone belongs to the same religion."⁷¹ Thus, some residents' preferences—those of the dominant Mormon population—leave others without options. Even when the LDS

faith is not cited as a reason for Sunday inactivity, the connections between municipal closures and Mormon practices are undeniable.

A similar instillation of values, beliefs, and practices takes place in the dealings between UVSC and the surrounding Utah County community. As taxpayers, as neighbors of UVSC, and as a dominant LDS majority, many Utah County residents seem to believe it is their right and their duty to persuade UVSC to follow a Mormon-centered way of thinking and behaving. Thus, when *The Vagina Monologues* debuted on campus, with its language, content, and feminism in opposition to LDS values, outspoken residents worked to prevent the performance.

2004: Talking about Sexual Violence

After reading *The Vagina Monologues* and hearing about the V-Day College Campaign, Errin Julkunen decided to bring the play to UVSC.⁷² She knew staging the show in Utah County would be a challenge. In fact, when she met Eve Ensler at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, she told the playwright about the conservative community surrounding UVSC. Ensler encouraged Julkunen, telling her that *The Vagina Monologues* has been staged in places even more conservative than Utah County, and that Julkunen must believe that “everyone wants to hear what you have to say.”⁷³ In this single comment, Ensler captured two crucial elements of *The Vagina Monologues* and the V-Day campaign—listening and speaking. When describing why UVSC should stage *The Vagina Monologues*, Julkunen would come to use language that emphasized communication. Mostly using the words “talk” and “discuss,” Julkunen wanted to end the silence surrounding sexual violence. In describing how Ensler’s play can help abused women, Julkunen said, “The less we talk about these experiences . . . the more difficult it becomes for those who are affected by them to talk about their experiences.”⁷⁴ With these words, Julkunen was also describing herself. As she went about staging the play in 2004, she was trying to come to terms with her

own childhood sexual abuse. Struggling to speak out about something she had long kept secret, Julkunen saw Ensler's controversial script as a means for overcoming her own silence, and perhaps, helping other women as well.⁷⁵

As president of the Gender Studies Club and organizer of V-Day, Julkunen was the public face for *The Vagina Monologues* in 2004 and 2005. Again and again, she fielded criticisms from members of the UVSC student body and surrounding community, and she constantly reiterated the need for women to talk about their sexuality and discuss abusive experiences:

It seems as though I have brought a bit of controversy to our little community. As the organizer of *The Vagina Monologues* in Utah County, I knew this would be the case. However, I believe that the benefits of performing the play far outweigh any controversy that may arise. . . . The capacity *The Vagina Monologues* has in being a healing experience for victims of violence is immeasurable. I am sorry that people are offended by this idea. We are living in ignorance concerning the issue of violence against women. It does not go without saying that discussion of these issues is difficult. . . . However, the less we talk about these issues as a community, the more difficult it is for individuals to talk about their own experiences. It cannot be the case that we silence these women because we are uncomfortable with the topics. I would like to note that it was never my intention to add to the divisiveness in this community. I hope people will recognize that violence against women affects the population as a whole, and our community is, unfortunately, not exempt from this harsh fact. Let us all work together to stop violence against women.⁷⁶

Addressing the Orem community, Julkunen argued in favor of discussion and against silence, She made similar comments in the *Deseret Morning News*: "Just because we are uncomfortable, we silence women's sexual abuse. It goes on here as much as anywhere else, and I feel we need to stop it." Here, Julkunen again cited her hopes for healing and an end to violence, saying that the play can "take away the taboo" of discussing sexual abuse.⁷⁷ One of her 2004 cast members, philosophy professor Shannon Mussett, agreed with Julkunen. Reading a monologue titled "The Memory of Her Face," about women in Baghdad, Islamabad, and Juarez, Mexico, who suffer mutilation and death, Mussett said that her piece "gives those women a voice" they would otherwise not have.⁷⁸ Using their own voices as actors, Julkunen, Mussett, and the cast desired

to help other women find their voices, talk about their experiences, and begin a conversation in the surrounding community.

But many people wanted to silence this conversation. President Sederberg received “numerous” telephone calls and e-mails from members of the community, questioning why he allowed *The Vagina Monologues* to be performed at UVSC.⁷⁹ Julkunen said she, too, received a number of phone calls from “members of the community telling me that it was inappropriate for this play to be performed in the Provo/Orem area.”⁸⁰ A month before the play opened at UVSC, the LDS-owned *Deseret Morning News* lambasted Ensler’s play. Theatre editor Ivan M. Lincoln claimed the play “drags women down into the gutter” and said most women he knows would find the show “highly humiliating and degrading.” Instead, “the show is geared to groups of females who want to laugh and giggle about the kinds of things that used to be considered off-limits in polite society.” Thus, Lincoln not only subtly commended women who would be offended by the play—rightly so, in his opinion—but he reprimanded those women who might find the play humorous or moving. Lincoln also admitted he had not even seen the play, but had only read the script. He concludes by telling his Mormon audience that they should not see the show either—instead, they should give money to a charity and then see a “good” play.⁸¹

Perhaps most telling of all, Utah County residents tried to interfere with the Gender Studies Club’s fund-raising efforts. As part of the 2004 performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, local charities Wee Care Center, Turning Point, and the Clothesline Project were set to benefit from box office sales, with tickets costing \$7 for students and \$10 for the public.⁸² Like Lincoln, who recommended that readers give to charity but avoid the performance, some locals applauded the charitable aspect of the V-Day College Campaign but offered to support the charities *only if* the show were not staged.⁸³ People told Julkunen that if she really wanted to help these charitable organizations, she would stage a play that more community members would

attend.⁸⁴ Truly, this kind of response reveals fear and discomfort surrounding a performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, even if, as in Lincoln's case, people had not seen the show. Moreover, it was assumed that the dangerous and disruptive play needed to go away and could be made to go away if enough money was involved. Critics of Julkunen's efforts could have decided not to attend the show if they found the idea of *The Vagina Monologues* offensive. But residents did not simply avoid the play—instead, they actively sought to prevent it from reaching an audience.⁸⁵

Julkunen and the Gender Studies Club were undeterred, and *The Vagina Monologues* opened on March 15, 2004. The audience was “packed” into UVSC's Centre Stage, a venue holding approximately 300 people, and the show raised over \$2000.⁸⁶ A letter to *The Daily Herald* praised the performance: “Errin Julkunen and her diverse and delightful cast did a fantastic job—raucous laughter, horrified silence, respectful listening and wild applause raised the roof and our awareness of the variety of women's experience.”⁸⁷ A writer for *The College Times* also noted the play's humor, and Julkunen spoke to this: “I think that when we talk about our bodies in a way where it's not uncomfortable—where it's funny—more women are willing to talk about the scarier, more difficult things.”

Despite the show's success, not everyone responded warmly to the production. Two women are quoted in *The College Times* review, although it is unclear as to whether either woman saw the show. One woman commended the show's goal of raising awareness, but she added, “Some of the skits and things that are in the play are more offensive than helpful; they are graphic and unnecessary.” Another woman, a UVSC student, addressed a difference between reading the play and staging the play: “I read some of the monologues and they were embarrassing! I couldn't believe some of the things that people would put down in writing, then to have them come here and act them out, that is just sick and wrong.” The play's script offended this student, but even more “sick and wrong,” in her opinion, was that the script

would be performed for an audience. Both Julkunen and this student would acknowledge the powerful difference between reading a script and performing that script aloud, before a live audience. The latter would argue that performing *The Vagina Monologues* made the play more offensive; Julkunen would argue that performing *The Vagina Monologues* made the play more effective—for raising awareness, healing victims, and inspiring conversation.

Judging by newspaper coverage, the 2004 production of *The Vagina Monologues* soon disappeared from campus radar. However, the upcoming year was fraught with political debate. As the United States prepared to elect a president in November 2004, Utah County residents became increasingly sensitive to liberal-conservative dichotomies. Concern over UVSC's liberal leanings grew more intense, even in the wake of George W. Bush's reelection. This time, when the Gender Studies Club prepared to restage *The Vagina Monologues* in 2005, the play became part of a political conversation that extended beyond ending violence against women.

2005: Conversations amid Controversy

The Gender Studies Club again performed *The Vagina Monologues* on February 9, 2005. Building on the debut performance in 2004, V-Day 2005 offered panel discussions and a screening of the film *Until the Violence Stops*, a documentary about the worldwide impact of the V-Day Movement. Planning in advance for any possible criticism of another V-Day hosted by UVSC, Julkunen wrote an informative editorial for *The College Times* in December of 2004, a full two months before the play would open. Julkunen framed her article around a discussion of the Gender Studies Club, which was named UVSC's "Best New Club" in 2004. Julkunen emphasized the club's commitment to "bringing gender issues into campus discussion" and educating students about violence against women. *The Vagina Monologues* was part of that effort.⁸⁸ In addition, the Gender Studies Club sought to educate the campus and community

about the play itself. They prepared and publicized fact sheets, answering such questions as, what is V-Day? what charity benefits from the proceeds? why is the show being performed? as well as listing other Utah universities that staged the show.⁸⁹

Anticipating crowds in excess of the previous year's approximately three hundred attendees, Julkunen booked the 400-seat Ragan Theatre. Some professors offered students extra credit for attending the play. However, only about 230 people attended—most of them students—and proceeds were slightly lower than the \$2000 raised in 2004. The charity beneficiary was Promise for Women and Children, a local rehabilitation facility providing childcare for women undergoing drug addiction treatment. The cast consisted of 20 women, most of them students; whereas the 2004 cast was half students, half faculty and staff. Julkunen felt the performance “went amazingly well,” and, building upon her reasons for doing the show in 2004, she said that the play can start dialogue, inspire change, and help women accept their bodies and avoid harmful relationships.⁹⁰ *The College Times*, *The Daily Herald*, and *The Deseret Morning News* covered the performance. The latter interviewed members of the audience and of the play's production team. One “curious” UVSC student attended the play with his wife; he hoped that the play could broaden perspectives in Orem: “Anything that can open up people's minds a little bit is good.” A crew member said of the performance, “I think a lot of people probably go with the assumption they know what it's about, and then probably come out with a very open mind and completely different view.”⁹¹

For the 2005 performance, Julkunen reached out to the campus and Orem communities. Professor William Cobb introduced the performance. As a male and the Dean of Students, his presence would symbolize UVSC's support for the play and demonstrate that men can take an active role in ending violence against women. Emphasizing the power of words, he described “vagina” as “that six-letter four-letter word” and credited *The Vagina Monologues* for putting

“vagina” into campus and community conversation. He said, “So, with respect to this evening’s event, *The Vagina Monologues* has truly evolved into ‘The Vagina Dialogues.’”⁹² Cobb then went on to present “Vagina Warrior” awards, given to two community members who work with sex crimes victims in Utah County. Giving these awards called attention to the real-life implications of Ensler’s play and, in a symbolic way, made the community part of the performance. Finally, at the conclusion of the performance, Julkunen broke down the theatrical “fourth wall” and invited the audience to become not only part of the evening’s performance, but activists in ending sexual violence. Julkunen asked that the house lights be raised, illuminating the audience along with the actors. She asked anyone who had been a victim of abuse to stand; some people rose. She then asked anyone who knew a victim of abuse to stand; more stood, joining those already standing. Then she asked anyone who was committed to ending violence to stand. By now, the entire audience was standing. Theatre practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal would describe Julkunen’s action here a way of making spectators into “spect-actors,” who take part in the performance and can therefore be changed and empowered.⁹³ A cast member reflected on that experience: “It was very scary for me to stand . . . but when I saw all the people standing, it was really powerful. It wasn’t until then that I fully realized the [*Monologues*] purpose.”⁹⁴

Although the performance drew a smaller audience than in 2004, it was in 2005 that *The Vagina Monologues* entered into university politics, questions of state funding, and concerns about the school’s “direction.” Before the cast even took to the stage, the play drew fire from local residents. Responding to an enrollment drop at UVSC, a Utah County mother offered *The Daily Herald* an “obvious” explanation for the decline: “It wasn’t just the Michael Moore fiasco. I recall being amazed and sickened to read of the sexually explicit play being boldly presented there, *The Vagina Monologues*.” As a result, her own daughter would not be attending UVSC for college; instead, “she will choose an environment more compatible with her values.”⁹⁵ A day

before the performance, UVSC spokesman, Derek Hall, issued a statement in *The Daily Herald*, saying that the school supports students' and faculty's rights to organize the V-Day event—even if he does find the play's R-rated content “personally . . . objectionable.” No doubt trying to assuage tensions between the community and the college, Hall said, “However poignant, disquieting, or crude the message of the *Monologues* may seem to the individual, putting an end to violence toward women and girls is an important goal for the community to advance.”⁹⁶ Even *The College Times*' Top Ten list got in on the debate, albeit humorously. In a list from January 31, 2005, titled “Reasons UVSC is Going to Hell in a Hand Basket,” item number eight read, “We can advertise *The Vagina Monologues* in our newspaper.”⁹⁷ *The Vagina Monologues* was just one example of the tension between the local community's values and the “direction” of UVSC.

But that tension was escalating, and the play would soon enter a debate about funding and the college's future. If *The Vagina Monologues* did not escape notice in 2005, it was in large part because of the October 2004 campus appearance of Michael Moore, liberal filmmaker and harsh critic of the Bush Administration. Michael Moore's visit, even more than the queer studies course or *The Vagina Monologues*, exacerbated relations within and around UVSC. Events surrounding “The Moore War” were captured in a documentary film titled *This Divided State*, made by former BYU student Steven Greenstreet during the fall of 2004. The film depicts the fervent debate and intense emotions on both sides of the liberal-conservative divide at UVSC and in Utah County. The film also makes explicit the connections between anti-liberal views and the Mormon Church; Greenstreet opens the film with a quotation attributed to Mormon Church founder, Joseph Smith: “Political views and party distinctions should never disturb the harmony of society.”⁹⁸ The irony of this statement is particularly manifest in the figure of community member Kay Anderson, who corralled others in Orem to speak out against Moore's appearance. Addressing an audience, Anderson said of Moore, “This man hates who we are, he

hates our values, and he would like to destroy us.” Anderson presented himself as a defender of “Orem City’s ideology” who was concerned for “my children” and “my community.” Moore’s upcoming speech soon became a matter of “good versus evil,” and Moore was maligned with the latter. UVSC fielded hundreds of angry phone calls demanding the *Fahrenheit 911* director not speak in Utah County; however, according to a UVSC administrator, “one-hundred percent” of these angry callers had *not* seen *Fahrenheit 911*. Recall that the majority of critics of UVSC’s performance of *The Vagina Monologues* had not and would not see the show. Critics spoke not from personal experience or individual objections, but rather, from Moore’s reputation and the play’s reputation within their community. When rousing community support did not lead to cancellation of Moore’s speech, Anderson’s efforts became financial: he presented UVSC with a \$25,000 check, hoping to buy back every ticket sold to the Moore event. Like community members who offered money in exchange for canceling *The Vagina Monologues*, Anderson believed Moore could and should be silenced in exchange for money. When Anderson’s monetary offer was unsuccessful, he and other wealthy Orem residents sued some members of UVSC’s administration and student government, claiming Moore’s speaking fees exceeded limits set by the student government constitution. (They later withdrew the lawsuit.) UVSC also lost nearly \$200,000 in donations. Finally, to curtail the critical onslaught, President Sederberg ordered that student government also book a conservative speaker to provide a “balance” of viewpoints. Ultra-conservative radio personality Sean Hannity was selected.⁹⁹

This Divided State connects Michael Moore’s appearance with the Mormon faith. One student speaking during a street rally said, “You walk through the streets, and you feel like if you like Michael Moore, you’re going to hell, because everybody thinks that you’re a bad Mormon.”¹⁰⁰ Student government vice president, Joe Vogel, was told that, by bringing Moore to campus, he had betrayed UVSC, the community, the United States, and his Mormon faith.¹⁰¹

Another student pointed out an irony: LDS missionaries ask people to tolerate them and give them a chance to speak, yet many Latter-day Saints will not tolerate or listen to Michael Moore and the liberals who agree with his positions.¹⁰² Kay Anderson said in the film, “We are not a contentious people. We are a very respectful people.” But, he would add, “We don’t want Utah County to become like the rest of the world... [and we] don’t want the world in Utah County.”¹⁰³ Anderson never explains who “we” are, but one imagines he is referring to fellow Latter-day Saints, or at least, community members who share LDS values.

The controversy over Michael Moore connects to *The Vagina Monologues* and Julkunen’s stated reasons for staging the show. Julkunen wanted UVSC students and the surrounding community to feel comfortable *discussing* and *talking* about uncomfortable subjects, such as sexual abuse and violence against women. But this kind of free speech was hard to come by in Utah County, as the Michael Moore case shows. Speech can be dangerous. What’s more, words stated in a very public venue, in a performative style, can be seen as even more dangerous. Invited to speak on campus, before thousands of students and community members, Michael Moore was considered a threat to community values, so much so that community members were willing to spend thousands of dollars to withdraw his commitment. Monologues about women’s sexuality are, likewise, dangerous. Spoken by student actors seated on a stage before a paying audience, the play raised issues with which Utah County did not want to contend. Community members were willing to donate to charities only if the play was cancelled. Thus, in calling for discussion, for honest speech, Julkunen was hoping for something that was seen as potentially threatening to many people in the community. What’s more, supporting free speech can be viewed as a betrayal of Mormon values—when the words belong to Michael Moore or Eve Ensler, that is. Utah County residents like Kay Anderson did not try to stop Sean Hannity’s on-campus appearance, nor expensive guest speaker Barbara Bush’s visit months before.¹⁰⁴ Free

speech at UVSC was speech that affirmed Mormon values—and Michael Moore and *The Vagina Monologues* did not.

In 2005, *The Vagina Monologues* became increasingly associated with the Michael Moore controversy. Supporters publicized the upcoming play at a screening of *This Divided State*.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, administrators warned that events like Moore’s visit and *The Vagina Monologues* might signal the Utah legislature that UVSC was moving in a liberal direction, of which most Utah County residents would disapprove. President Sederberg’s State of the College address, given the day before *The Vagina Monologues* opened, was significantly titled “A Value-Oriented University” and focused on the “moral direction of the college.”¹⁰⁶ Sederberg had reason to worry—in the weeks surrounding his speech, the state legislature denied funding for the Digital Learning Center. *The College Times* addressed this in a March 2005 editorial and quoted Senator John Valentine in the wake of the legislature’s decision: “I feel that UVSC is a strong institution, but it is getting harder and harder to defend against things like sexual orientation class [and] the Michael Moore situation.” The author noted that the legislature *did* fund a library expansion at the University of Utah—where *The Vagina Monologues* had also been performed. The author concluded, “I am confident that...UVSC is held to a different standard than any other institution of higher education in the state.”¹⁰⁷ Even *Time* magazine picked up on the connections between Moore, the *Monologues*, and UVSC’s new library:

Legislators wield one potent weapon: money. In January, Utah state senators quietly red-lined funding for a \$37 million digital-learning center at Utah Valley State College. The senators were worried about “the drift of the campus,” said UVSC president Bill Sederberg, who fielded complaints from them about an October 20 campus speech by Michael Moore, a student production of *The Vagina Monologues* and a course on queer theory in literature. “The legislators are saying, ‘We don’t want the college to go too far and lose touch with the community.’ But we have an obligation to protect academic freedom.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, on the one hand, some residents and legislators saw both Moore’s visit and the play’s production as justification for denied state funding. On the other hand, supporters cited

reactions to Moore and *The Vagina Monologues* as evidence that something more than funding was being denied—rather, academic freedom was at stake.¹⁰⁹

This debate about academic freedom and UVSC’s perceived “liberal” biases grew increasingly heated in the months after *The Vagina Monologues*, and three student opinion pieces in the March 6, 2005 issue of *The College Times* demonstrate the variety of voices, all clamoring for a different form of liberal-conservative balance. Student Jon Fairbanks criticized the college paper’s “continuing liberal slant” and *The Vagina Monologues*, which was “not becoming of an organization such as this school or its affiliates.” He called for fellow students to take seriously the role of the community: “We as a school cannot underestimate our community. We are them, and they are us. There cannot be a ‘just me’ mentality, but rather there must be one that is inclusive of both the school and the community.”¹¹⁰ In contrast, Ryan J. Robinson pointed out that, Senator Valentine’s comments to the contrary, UVSC is not overrun with authority-undermining “leftist radicals,” and the conservative LDS students are “getting along just fine at UVSC.”¹¹¹ James Neel took an even more activist stance than Robinson. He challenged the idea of “community values” and criticized the LDS Church for hypocrisy and persecution, particularly against homosexuals. He asked, “Is it simply fear of something most of us don’t understand (and maybe don’t want to understand) that has made the community so discriminatory toward homosexuals and women speaking about violence committed against them?” Neel marveled at the attitude of Utah Valley’s LDS majority:

I would think most of the valley’s citizens being members of the LDS church would make us more accepting toward people who differ from us in race, sex, or sexual preference. Instead, UVSC is threatened with lawsuits and loss of funding because of recent events [such as Moore, the Queer Theory Course, and *The Vagina Monologues*]. . . . The LDS church was persecuted . . . because the members had different beliefs than the majority of U.S. citizens. . . . And here the descendants of persecuted people are turning around and telling Homosexuals they can pack their bags and leave town because . . . they differ from the LDS “norm.” Talk about hypocrisy. Here is a community value one would think the Latter-day Saints would be aware of but apparently aren’t in Utah Valley:

“Love thy neighbor as thyself”. . . . Fellow citizens of Utah Valley, in standing up for your ‘values’ you have ignored one of the many truths Christ taught.¹¹²

Neel’s argument about persecution raises an interesting consideration. Mormon history is fraught with stories of persecution, anti-Mormonism, and anti-polygamy, and these issues inform Mormons’ self-identity today. But the Church has also become a persecutor of sorts—particularly in regards to academic freedom. In 1993, the Church persecuted—i.e. excommunicated and disfellowshipped—six intellectuals for raising questions of which Church leaders disapproved. In short, the modern Church has not hesitated to use its power to silence voices and perspectives—and the Orem community’s threats against UVSC because of Moore, Queer Studies, and *The Vagina Monologues* echo the kind of silencing power some Church leaders have practiced in the past. What’s more, dissenting voices, like the Gender Studies Club’s, become like persecuted minorities who must persevere in the face of opposition. Early Mormons went to great lengths to protect their faith and their right to hold a testimony that contradicted that of other Christian churches; now, people in Mormon communities are going to great lengths to speak freely, about homosexuality, liberal political ideas, and violence against women.¹¹³

Debates about academic freedom intensified at UVSC, further raising questions about the school administration’s need to accommodate the LDS perspective at the expense of conflicting viewpoints. In 2005, the week before the Utah Legislature finalized UVSC’s budget, President Sederberg asked organizers of the 2005 Mormon Studies Conference to remove certain controversial words—“gay,” “lesbian,” “homosexual,” “animal rights,” and “liberation theology”—from presentation titles.¹¹⁴ Professor Scott Abbott took issue with Sederberg’s request and wrote an editorial in *The College Times* titled “Words Matter.” Criticizing Sederberg for stepping on academic freedom and putting the community before the college, Abbott pointed out that “appeasing angry community members for a week or a month does nothing but

encourage the need for more appeasement.” Abbott pointed to the heightened emotions and fear of retribution that tainted recent discussions around UVSC: “Academic freedom is academic, as they say, when nothing is at stake. When passions run high, however, when we’re threatened by fear, when ideology trumps science, when economic pressure is brought to bear, academic freedom is our bedrock, our guarantor of the possibility of truth and justice, our hope for intelligent and compassionate community.”¹¹⁵ In the wake of Michael Moore and *The Vagina Monologues*, UVSC’s president had to walk a fine line between community support and academic freedom. But as Abbott pointed out, limiting freedom of expression would only create an environment wherein individuals were afraid to speak out about things that matter—in short, an environment of persecution.

Conversations about academic freedom and the liberal leanings of UVSC led to formal discussions between college and community. In April 2005, UVSC hosted a forum titled “Toward Finding Common Ground: A Dialogue on Academic Freedom and Responsibility” as part of its newly formed Community Relations Council. Different panel discussions took place among students, faculty, administrators, community members, and Utah lawmakers. Panelists discussed academic freedom, the political persuasions of UVSC’s professors, and the link between UVSC and state legislators. UVSC administrator Bradley Cook pointed out that it was oversimplifying to say “the community” had a problem with Michael Moore’s—doing so suggests “that there is one community being served by the school, when in actuality, higher learning institutions are supposed to serve multiple communities.”¹¹⁶ Thus, Cook complicated the notion of community and tried to wrestle it away from those individuals who suggested that they and their values exemplified the entire “community.” UVSC hosted another formal panel in September, this one an Ethics panel titled “From Past to Future: Assessing UVSC’s Changing Role as an Institution of Higher Education.” Originally scheduled for April, faculty organizer

David Keller decided to postpone because of conditions “not conducive to constructive dialogue” earlier in the year. Certainly, Keller was referring to backlash about academic freedom and liberalization surrounding Michael Moore, *The Vagina Monologues*, and the rejected funding for the Digital Learning Center. This panel included faculty, students, and community members; *The Vagina Monologues*’s organizer Errin Julkunen also sat on the panel. She argued that “community values” had recently been “hijacked” by certain groups, and she pointed out, “The campus community is a community in itself, and it is this community that should be making future decisions about what happens.” Outspoken resident Norman Nielsen called for UVSC to set “a new standard in higher education,” one that truly achieved balance, while faculty said they wanted all students to feel free to express their opinions. Neither the April nor October panel resolved the academic freedom debates at UVSC, the discussions allowed all sides to speak their preferences. What’s more, the nebulous term “community” was challenged and expanded to include more people and perspectives.¹¹⁷

As part of the ongoing debates, Julkunen and *The Vagina Monologues* garnered public and political attention in 2005 that seemed inversely proportional to the number of audience members who attended the production. The simple fact that the play had been staged brought the play into conversations about UVSC’s liberal leanings and legislative funding. As a theatrical production, *The Vagina Monologues* is marked by performative speech—actors read the monologues, their voices conveying stories and lessons to an audience. Furthermore, because *The Vagina Monologues* emphasizes spoken words over physical actions, monologues over movement, the play intensifies the power of words, speech, and script. But as we have seen, speech—and namely performative speech—can be dangerous. Michael Moore’s speech before an audience of 8,000 led to arduous debate in the Orem community. Sean Hannity’s performative speech quelled some of the Moore controversy; if nothing else, his conservative

ideas inoculated the liberal Moore. Even UVSC President Sederberg had to engage in performative speech, as his 2005 State of the College address catered to angry community members and tried to convince donors and legislators that UVSC was headed in the right direction.¹¹⁸ As a staged performance, *The Vagina Monologues* took part in debates about free speech, instigating public debate about private issues and, thereby, helping move such debates to new stages of conversation. Concerned students and community members exchanged heated articles and letters in local papers, but these conversations also moved to a new stage, that of panel discussions between community and college.

2006: Advancing the Discussion and Inspiring Healing

In the third year of its staging, *The Vagina Monologues* again met with controversy. This time, however, controversy came not from locals, as in previous years, but from UVSC administrators. In an effort to curtail community complaints, UVSC spokesman Derek Hall chose to omit the word “vagina” from the play’s title in all college press releases. Instead, Ensler’s play was referred to as “The V-Day Monologues.” Many criticized Hall, pointing out that Hall’s action symbolized the very problems the play sought to overcome, in terms of talking openly and honestly about women’s sexuality and violence against women. In response, Hall stressed the challenges he faced in placating concerned community members. “As an institution, we walk a fine line between community and campus. Additionally, February is an awkward time since the legislature is in session.” Hall also notified college lobbyists of the upcoming performance.¹¹⁹

While the 2006 production was not marked by controversy, it was marred by tragedy. In August of 2005, two UVSC students, Blake Donner and Jen Galbraith, were killed in a Provo cave accident. Galbraith had performed in the 2005 *Vagina Monologues* and was to become

Gender Studies Club president. As a tribute to their memory, Donner and Galbraith were posthumously named 2006 Vagina Warriors for their commitment to gender issues, and the students' mothers accepted the award. Donner's mother said of the honor, "I can't think of any greater recognition a mother could have than to have her son known as a Vagina Warrior. Though I think he would prefer to be known as a vagina peacekeeper." In addition to the awards, proceeds for the 2006 performance were donated to the Blake Donner and Jen Galbraith Memorial Scholarship fund, to be awarded annually to a socially-active student. Less than a year after controversy about liberal values and academic freedom, the Vagina Warrior awards and the Donner/Galbraith scholarship quietly supported those students who engaged in social activism and worked for social justice.¹²⁰

On February 8, the Gender Studies Club presented *The Vagina Monologues* to a full house at the Centre Stage venue (where the first production had been staged). The cast included 30 women, consisting of students, faculty, and staff. Julkunen—now Errin Julkunen-Pedersen—presented the Vagina Warrior awards before the show. As in 2005, the evening ended by removing the theatrical fourth wall and inviting the audience to stand in solidarity with victims of sexual abuse. The reviewer, Michelle Walker, noted, "It was a powerful reminder of the reality, proximity and reaching effects of violence." At the end of her review, Walker encouraged readers "to attend (or at least read) *The Vagina Monologues* whenever, wherever possible. After all, the goal of the creators and everybody since involved has been to spread awareness. And sharing these women's stories, whether through humor, shock, or horror is the first step toward change."¹²¹ No other review in *The College Times* since the play's 2004 debut had offered such a positive plug for the play or its efforts at change. Calling the play a "celebration of womanhood" that emphasized "ownership of self," Walker's review suggested that UVSC was ready to do more than "talk" about and "discuss" issues surrounding women's sexuality.

Now, not only were people talking about the play, but, as Walker demonstrated with her review, people were finding themes in the text, engaging the play on a deeper level, taking the material to a new stage of conversation and discussion.

In the days around the performance, communications professor Phillip Gordon wrote an editorial responding to the removal of “vagina” from the play’s title. The piece was published in both *The College Times* and *The Daily Herald*. He argued forcefully that there is, in fact, an important purpose for using the anatomically correct term. While the word might offend some people, saying the word aloud is an important part of healing and ending sexual violence. He wrote, “The shame associated with the word is related to the perpetuation of sexual violence against women. It feeds the hatred of women by making them simultaneously objects of desire and disgust. It inhibits discussion about sexual violence, and thus the accountability of victimizers and the healing of victims, by making it that much more difficult to talk about sex crimes.” Gordon criticized the notion that “modesty” justifies keeping silent about women’s sex organs, and in so doing, he implicitly criticized the Mormon teaching on modesty. Gordon contended that modesty must not get in the way of honest discussion about sexual violence. Referring to studies about rape victims, Gordon stated that victims who can put their experiences into words and share those stories with others are better able to recover: “In telling their stories, victims take control, come out of denial, name their assailants, absolve themselves, heal relationships, begin to trust, and help other victims progress from states of denial, misunderstanding, and turmoil, toward states of acceptance, understanding, and newfound strength.” In other words, *The Vagina Monologues* is not gratuitously crude, vulgar, or dirty; instead, “[T]here is sometimes a high purpose to low talk. Violence and silence are related. Speaking is healing.”¹²²

In 2004, Julkunen had said *The Vagina Monologues* helped women to talk about matters of sexuality and sexual violence. Here, Gordon agreed. He also added to Julkunen's previous statements, arguing that the act of sharing stories of sexual assault helps victims *to heal*. By interviewing over 200 women and putting their stories into the play's script, Ensler invited women to share their own experiences; then, through performance, Ensler's shared those stories with audiences. Gordon would probably attest that Ensler's process in writing and performing *The Vagina Monologues* was one that encouraged healing and sharing. Thus, *The Vagina Monologues* not only inspires discussions about violence against women, but it can inspire other victims to put "their experience into words" and share it with others. In this way, the play's function is not only political, not only about ending violence against women, but also therapeutic—giving victims the opportunity to discuss personal experiences that might, in some communities, be considered crude, uncomfortable, or immodest.

2007: Empowering Women to Embrace Sexual Pleasure

UVSC's Gender Studies Club's restaged *The Vagina Monologues* on February 21, 2007. Julkunen-Pedersen had graduated, and the Gender Studies Club was now headed by co-presidents Carmell Hoopes-Clark and Trisha Nicole. The cast was the largest in the play's four-year run, with 35 students, faculty, and staff. The women read the monologues before a "sell-out crowd" in the 400 seat Ragan Theatre. Proceeds benefited House of Hope, a treatment center in Provo that serves addicted women and their children. Three women were honored as Vagina Warriors: two honorees were community members, and one was Suzanne Swift, a specialist in the U.S. Army who has accused her commanding officers of sexual abuse.¹²³ Suzanne Swift's mother, Sara Rich, came to UVSC to accept the Vagina Warrior Award, and she also participated in a forum titled "Women in the Military: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," sponsored by the

Gender Studies Club. Utah Valley is very pro-military, and despite invitations to the area's major newspapers, only UVSC's *The College Times* covered Rich's appearance and Swift's story.¹²⁴

But despite what could have become a tenacious issue in support for Swift, the 2007 performance inspired little controversy. Co-producer Hoopes-Clark attributed this to three factors. First, she credits Julkunen-Pedersen and the play's original organizers with bearing the brunt of the initial controversy. One might imagine that, in its inaugural years in Utah Valley, *The Vagina Monologues* was bound to make waves; that the play coincided with the Michael Moore debates fueled the fire. Second, Hoopes-Clark noted that, by the time of the 2007 performance, UVSC was no longer worried about attaining university status and the Digital Learning Center. In February 2007, the Utah state legislature unanimously approved UVSC's request for university status. Starting June 2008, the school will be known as Utah Valley University, or UVU. Likewise, months before the 2007 performance, UVSC broke ground on the new Digital Learning Center, scheduled to open in the summer of 2008. Third, Hoopes-Clark and Nicole advocated different reasons for staging the play than had Julkunen-Pedersen, who had emphasized the need to talk about and discuss unsettling issues of sexual violence. Hoopes-Clark, in contrast, emphasized woman's sexual pleasure: "We are quick to criticize and downplay female pleasure, while male pleasure is socially acceptable and culturally ubiquitous." Hoopes-Clark also said that both women and men are touched by the play since men also suffer when women—wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters—are victimized.¹²⁵ Julkunen described a need for healing and an end to silence—and rightly so, as she and a number of fellow cast members were recovering from their own sexual abuse. Hoopes-Clark and Nicole also sought healing, but in addition, they wanted to empower and inspire men and women who were not survivors of sexual abuse. Thus, in 2007, *The Vagina Monologues* were about sexual pleasure,

women taking ownership of their bodies, an end to sexual violence, and the empowerment of both men and women. UVSC's new producers thus took the play to a new stage of discussion.

As part of the 2007 performance, the Gender Studies Club included a special monologue, written by cast and faculty member Laura Hamblin, detailing rape statistics in the state of Utah. V-Day productions often include local statistics to make sexual abuse pertinent to audiences, and Hamblin built her monologue on reports from the Utah Commission of Criminal and Juvenile Justice (mentioned in this thesis's introduction), the Utah State Department of Human Services, the Utah Commission for Women and Families, and the National Violence Against Women Research Center. Hamblin read 14 facts and figures, such as: "At least one incident of physical violence occurs in 50% of all Utah marriages." "Eighty-percent of rape victims in Utah keep their assaults private." "The number of rapes in Utah is 18% higher than the national rate, and has been above the national average since 1991." "The only funding source for rape prevention in Utah is an annual federal grant of approximately \$300,000. No state monies have been appropriated." After Hamblin read this jarring monologue, other actors delivered "The Memory of Her Face," a monologue about women who have been disfigured, by warfare, husbands, and strangers, in Baghdad, Islamabad, and Juarez, Mexico, respectively. By combining Utah rape statistics with graphic international abuse, the 2007 production helped connect the local community, at UVSC and in Utah County, with a global community, encouraging solidarity among abuse victims and among individuals committed to ending violence against women.¹²⁶

Framing these Utah rape statistics within the context of the 2007 performance lent new urgency to *The Vagina Monologues's* efforts. There was much at stake in ending violence against women—and the play was adding to the effort. The impact that these and other powerful monologues had on audiences, however, is frustratingly difficult to measure. An interview with

an audience member might reveal what that individual found shocking or personally relevant, but any long-term impact is nearly impossible to assess. Similarly, a reviewer can gauge audience reactions, but those do not necessarily translate to impact upon a campus or a community. Thus, the task of evaluating *The Vagina Monologues*'s impact at UVSC is a challenging one. Contributors to *Theatre and Empowerment* struggle with this as well: how can socially-motivated practitioners determine the impact of their theatrical endeavors? How can one evaluate, for example, whether performance workshops about masculinity empower black youth, or whether a play about Protestants and Catholics change perceptions in Belfast, Ireland?¹²⁷ Oftentimes practitioners can speak only from personal experiences and personal observations. For this reason, and because I did not participate in UVSC's performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, I will draw from conversations and email exchanges with actors and organizers as I explore the changes to take place as a result of *The Vagina Monologues*.

***The Vagina Monologues*'s Impact: Discussion and Empowered Community**

Professor William Cobb, who was then Dean of Students, saw the 2004 performance and felt deeply moved by the play's humor, pain, emotion, and humanity. He asked organizers if he could do anything to advance their cause, and he was asked to give an introduction to the 2005 performance. Cobb said, in the introduction and in an interview, that the play had impacted the campus and the surrounding community. Visiting a Utah County art gallery in early 2005, Cobb was amazed to overhear groups of people using the word "vagina" freely in conversation—and he credited *The Vagina Monologues* for making that possible. He said of the word "vagina," "Before [this event], we'd have thought it unsettling, inconsiderate, impolite, or distasteful. Now it's *out* there, no longer that unspeakable term." Cobb stated that "vagina"—and the gendered discussion it entails—was now part of academic discourse at UVSC, whereas a

decade earlier, even issues like racism, civil rights, and activism would have been considered taboo. UVSC's willingness to address these issues, Cobb argued, helped advance the school's reputation, even moving it out of BYU's looming shadow. Cobb added that the play inspired female students and faculty to form a task force to curtail men's intimidation of women on campus. As a result, administrators worked to ensure an "atmosphere that is respectful of women." All of this, Cobb believed, goes hand in hand with *The Vagina Monologues*.¹²⁸

Other measurable changes have taken place on campus, many of them focused upon conversation and education. As mentioned earlier, Michael Moore's visit and the 2005 *The Vagina Monologues* performance prompted an April 2005 forum about the limits of academic freedom and an Ethics panel event titled "Assessing UVSC's Changing Role as an Institution of Higher Education." In this way, the play and the ensuing controversy led to formal conversations between college faculty, administrators, students, and community members. The Gender Studies Club sponsored forums throughout the 2006-07 school year. Welcoming faculty and students from diverse departments, the forums tackled topics like masculinity, gender construction, and sexual abuse in the U.S. military; participants read Web-posted articles beforehand and came together for challenging discussion. The Gender Studies Club intended to expand the forums for the 2007-08 school year.¹²⁹ Whenever Julkunen-Pedersen explained why the play needed to be performed at UVSC, she emphasized the need for discussion and an end to silence. Now, the play and its organizers are spearheading efforts to bring students and faculty into conversation with one another.

The fact that the 2007 performance brought significantly less controversy than the 2004 and 2005 performances might indicate an increased tolerance in Utah County and on UVSC's campus, although surely some locals simply grew tired of protesting, especially when past efforts to stop the performances had failed. In this way, as Hoopes-Clark suggested, Julkunen-Pedersen

endured the worst of the controversy in the play's early years. Perhaps now, after four performances, those people who feared the play and its message have realized that *The Vagina Monologues* has not destroyed Utah County's Mormon values. Perhaps seeing the word "vagina" on the front page of *The College Times* or *The Daily Herald* no longer registers as shocking. Perhaps, also, the play's organizers have downplayed controversy and instead emphasized shared responsibility in ending violence against women. While almost certainly a performance of *The Vagina Monologues* at neighboring BYU would cause an outrage, UVSC has obtained its new library, university status, and a reputation distinct from BYU, all the while debating complex issues of women's sexuality and sexual abuse.

But above and beyond these visible, more measurable changes, the play impacted the organizers, as their personal testimonies will attest. Julkunen stated in newspaper interviews that her own childhood sexual abuse led her to stage *The Vagina Monologues*—and she described being in the play as a positive and empowering experience.¹³⁰ Hoopes-Clark acted in the show in 2006; her experience "empowered" her, and when she became co-producer in 2007, she wanted the cast to share that empowerment.¹³¹ This empowerment and inspiration came from a number of sources, including Ensler's script, an all-female cast, and participation in the V-Day mission.

Actors also found empowerment and inspiration, albeit for varying reasons. A 2005 actor, Avery Fellow, appreciated Julkunen's willingness to discuss controversial issues. Fellow said Julkunen's openness was "important to me because I'm not very daring, so it was a good opportunity for me to break out of my shell onstage and in my personal life."¹³² Being in the play also allowed cast members to make personal connections. In 2006, performer Kim Pack read "My Short Skirt," a monologue that her close friend, Jen Galbraith, had read a year earlier. Because Galbraith died in a cave accident in summer of 2005, reading that monologue gave Pack a special connection to her deceased friend. Pack said, "It's very significant, the fact that Jen did

it last year, and I know how much it meant to her.”¹³³ Furthermore, faculty who took part in *The Vagina Monologues* were sometimes motivated by their professional responsibilities. Dr. Joylin Namie, who teaches “Gender and Biomedicine,” listed the following as one of her reasons for participating: “As faculty, I thought it was important to show publicly that at least some of us support these views and the groups of students who are working hard to challenge the local culture.”¹³⁴

Women had different reasons for being in the show. Some wanted to raise awareness, some wanted to confront their own sexual abuse, some wanted a personal challenge, and some were invited by friends in the cast. Unlike many college theatre productions, *The Vagina Monologues* attracted actors and non-actors alike. As there were no auditions—and therefore far fewer competitions and comparisons between actors—anyone who wanted to participate was invited to do so. Several women joined the cast because they had been inspired by the previous year’s performance and wanted to be part of the show. One actor in 2007, a student with three children, said of the previous year’s performance, “I was moved, compelled, outraged, and intrigued by what I had seen and heard and by the strong women’s voices given free expression during the performance.” She took part in 2007 for her sons, her daughter, and herself, as a means for reclaiming her sexual autonomy after suffering abuse as a child. Another cast member, who is both student and staff at UVSC, said of her participation in 2004, “I wanted to be a part of this production because I felt it was a great opportunity to expand the image of women in Utah County from the traditionally silent, obedient wife/future wife to the more realistic strong-willed, outspoken, independent women that many of us are.” A professor said of her involvement: “Consciousness raising about women’s rights, violence against women, and the sanctity of women’s bodies is badly needed in this part of the United States.” Still, some cast members did not have fully-formed motives at the outset; one student said simply, “It was really

just a chance to be a part of something for me . . . what better way to explore [the extrovert part of myself] than to join the theatre group in this, what I believed to be, feminist play.”¹³⁵

Regardless of their motives for joining the cast, many women found that their monologues spoke to them personally. Take for example the actor who performed “Say it for the Comfort Women” in 2007. This monologue is about women, mostly of Chinese and Korean descent, forced into sexual slavery by Japanese soldiers during World War II. The actor was herself half-Japanese, and her grandmother had known women who had suffered this horrifying ordeal.¹³⁶ Through this monologue, the actor could explore her personal history and ethnic identity. A student who read “Cunt” found her monologue liberating. She said of the piece, “It was a declaration of independence, reclaiming sex and the joys of it from the abuse and shame that followed me through most of my adolescence thanks to my maternal grandfather.”¹³⁷ Two women who read “I Was There in the Room,” a monologue about the miracle of childbirth, were mothers themselves, and both found the monologue personally significant, a celebration of women’s power to create life.¹³⁸ One cast member, who read “Smell” in 2007, admitted that before becoming familiar with her monologue, she had wondered if other women felt ashamed about vaginal odor. However, rehearsing and performing helped her overcome her embarrassment.¹³⁹ Cast members also made monologues uniquely their own. In the play’s opening segment, actors list many different ways of saying “vagina,” along with the term’s place of origin. Actor Annik M. Budge took that opportunity to tell audiences how “vagina” is said in Utah: she became quiet, looked side to side, as if making sure no one was watching, and silently mouthed “vagina.” Annik told me, “I like to think I got the biggest laugh of the night.”¹⁴⁰

Sometimes monologues resonated with the women in less positive ways, and this tension became an opportunity for self-reflection. A woman assigned to read a piece about Iraq (probably “The Memory of Her Face,” in which an Iraqi woman suffers burns from a military

air strike) struggled with the piece because her son was deployed to Iraq at the time. When she was unable to read it for other reasons, she was assigned “Hair,” a monologue that “brought back a good number of angry memories” that she then had to contend with.¹⁴¹ In short, monologues often took on personal meaning for the actors, and in the process of learning the piece and delivering it before an audience, actors would discover ways other women’s stories (those told to Ensler) informed and challenged their own.

Through rehearsals and the performance, *The Vagina Monologues* cast became a kind of community. This is not to suggest the actors were identical in appearance, or life experience, or even attitudes about women’s sexuality. Performers included not only students, but faculty and staff as well, and therefore, the cast contained women of all ages, from late teens to middle-aged. The women had a range of acting experience and performance styles; some memorized their pieces, some read from scripts. The women brought with them an array of life experiences. Many women had been sexually abused, mostly as children, though many cast members had not. A handful of women were considered “active LDS,” and the majority of women had a Mormon background. Some women were single, some were married, some had children. Some women were lesbians. Some women had disapproving spouses, some had supportive families. What’s more, not every cast member felt the same way about the play. Some cast members embraced the more controversial monologues, like “Cunt” and “Coochi Snorcher,” while others expressed discomfort with some monologues’ language and content. But despite differences, the process of staging the play allowed individuals to grow and understand one another. As one woman wrote, “The more and more I heard and read *The Vagina Monologues*, the more I became comfortable with all the monologues, [and] the more I opened up and educated myself on the beauty of difference. My experience really changed who I thought I was and my direction for who I want to be.” The play and its performance became a learning experience for cast

members. The group of actors became, in Carmell Hoopes-Clark's words, "a community of individuals." In the first years of the show, the cast had to combat controversy; they pulled together for a common purpose, over and against community disapproval. In 2007, when the cast was no longer warding off community criticism, they could come together and concentrate on their roles, their fellow actors, and their cause. Hoopes-Clark, who enjoys the challenge of "community building," and co-producer Nicole encouraged actors to feel comfortable with vulnerability, finding strength and support from one another. Growing together through rehearsals, the actors' individual voices became part of a collective women's chorus.¹⁴²

This collective identity was emphasized in the play's design and staging elements. Costuming connected the performers. In 2004 and 2005, performers wore all black costumes with pink boas. In 2006, actors again wore black, this time with an optional red boa. In 2007, actors wore black but could choose a red accent, to be worn however they would like. Some women wore red head scarves, others red shoes; some wore red arm bands, others red neckerchiefs, others red belts. The accents emphasized the women's individuality while the black demonstrated their unity. The play's staging also gave a sense of community. Building on previous years' blocking, the 2007 cast took the stage together, with each woman being introduced by name. The women then sat in two rows of chairs across the stage, with closed curtains draped behind them. Each woman was on stage the entire performance; therefore, each woman was constantly available to the audience's gaze, and each woman sat, watched, and listened as her fellow cast mates stepped into the spotlight and performed their monologues. In this way, the women were supporting one another with their attentiveness, and in addition, the audience witnessed both the performing actor and the supporting actors in the background.¹⁴³

Some women cited this theatrical family as a major factor in their *The Vagina Monologues* experience. The play helped one woman feel less isolated: "Being a *The Vagina Monologues* cast

member made me thankfully aware that I am not alone here in ‘Happy Valley.’ There are so many people here with diverse beliefs and lifestyles and this production provides us the opportunity to acknowledge each other and make friendships that happen in no other way.” For other women, the play provided a support network: “It was amazing to see all these women come together with one common goal and to be able to cheer each other on.” Another cast member noted that, while their cast was not “tight,” it was “persistent during the rehearsal period and after the performance.”¹⁴⁴

This community of individuals created through the process of staging *The Vagina Monologues* at UVSC must be compared with the imagined monolithic “community” that dominated debate surrounding the play’s performance. While the community that vociferously opposed the production was never clearly defined, it is best understood as a large group of people who adhere to Mormon social and political values and expect similarity of thought and behavior from Utah County’s majority population. Or, as Hoopes-Clark, a 16-year resident of Orem, describes those residents who opposed the play, the “community” can be rhetorically understood as “the cultural deification of Mormon values.” Those who challenge Orem’s LDS values, e.g. the Michael Moore speech organizers or the Gender Studies Club, are accused of defying and harming the Orem community. There are ideas, words, and behaviors that some locals will not tolerate. They wield power over Utah County and UVSC, using money and political influence to prevent a performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, or a Michael Moore speech, or UVSC’s university status or new library. Participation in this activist group is not optional, but expected. In stark contrast to this seemingly massive local machine is the small band of women who brought *The Vagina Monologues* to Utah County. Taking part in this theatrical cluster was by choice, and any woman wishing to read a monologue could do so. This group was unified by a play that seeks to end violence against women and challenge traditional

notions of women's roles. *The Vagina Monologues's* community was all women, while the dominant Utah Valley community is a patriarchy. Women's voices and experience shape the former, while Church-sanctioned, priesthood-enforced ideals inform the latter. Among *The Vagina Monologues's* cast, individuals spoke freely about sexual abuse, sexual encounters, and sexual autonomy. Within much of Utah County, to talk about such things threatens the law of chastity, the standards of modesty, and the patriarchal order.

Conversations like those stimulated by *The Vagina Monologues* were, of course, taking place before the production, but the play forced such conversation into the open and required a response, from supporters and opponents alike. By bringing *The Vagina Monologues* to UVSC, Julkunen and the Gender Studies Club started a discussion that many residents and students would not otherwise have engaged publicly. The small, all-female community staging the play drew strength from one another and from their purpose. What's more, they drew strength from the larger, global V-Day community, joining in spirit with hundreds of college campuses staging Ensler's play. V-Day performances take place on our around Valentine's Day so that college women nationwide join in solidarity with one another, working separately yet together to end violence against women. This solidarity is then shared with audiences, as actors share *The Vagina Monologues* with the women and men who attend the performance. This relationship between actor and audience creates another kind of community, one where the audience is invited to join in ending sexual violence. UVSC's performance heightened this relationship by inviting audience members to stand, along with actors, at the end of the play. As the audience stood, either as survivors of sexual abuse, friends of abuse victims, or advocates in ending violence, the audience also became part of this community, that of the cast and of the global V-Day movement.

The theatrical community, brought on by the performance, seemed to actors and audience a thing special and set apart. Performer Robbin Anthony said of the performance, “There is almost a sacred feeling when the production is being performed, and it was very clear to me that despite the conflict and the negative press, the monologues are vitally important—even to those who refuse to accept the messages.” Indeed, not everyone who attended the performance became part of this alternate community in the sense of abandoning culturally conservative ideas and adopting a more liberal view of women’s sexuality. At the same time, many audience members were already conditioned to accept the messages behind *The Vagina Monologues*. Anthony was quick to point out that, despite the community outrage preceding the debut performance, many community members responded positively. She noted, “It was surprising, in fact, to see the number of people right here in Utah Valley that applauded the opportunity to attend a live production of the play.” One suspects that, by staging the play, the Gender Studies Club allowed people who would otherwise feel uneasy discussing women’s sexuality to show solidarity and support for the subject matter. In all of these ways, staging the play helped bring the topic of women’s sexuality in Utah County to a new stage of understanding and dialogue.¹⁴⁵

The conversations that the play inspired continued, even after the stage went dark. Aspects of the play’s message have reached the younger generation. A cast member with four children has tried to incorporate the word “vagina” into her children’s daily vocabulary, so that the word is as “regular” and shameless as any other word.¹⁴⁶ Tiffany Knoell read the 2007 Spotlight Monologue, which celebrated women’s ability to reclaim peace in war-torn areas, and shared the monologue with her husband and children. The piece generated much discussion within her family, and she hopes that, as a wife, mother, and V-Day performer, she can challenge her children to think about issues of women’s power and autonomy. This mother wrote, “If

anything, it is my hope that my daughter will participate in a performance [of *The Vagina Monologues*] when she enters college. If she does, I'll be in the front row, cheering her on."¹⁴⁷ In other words, these mothers are encouraging their young children to think differently about women's roles and women's sexuality. In these families, attitudes about female sexuality are not simply coming from Mormon Church leaders, but from mothers who do not entirely agree with the patriarchal male position.

In four years at UVSC, *The Vagina Monologues* tackled a variety of issues. Rebuked as an insult to "community values," the play entered debates about academic freedom, the power of the spoken word, and even publication of the word "vagina." The play became aligned with discussion about UVSC's future, as state legislatures and community members withdrew support from the public school that was not satisfactorily emulating Church-owned BYU. Organizers and actors faced a kind of persecution, whereby views that deviated from accepted LDS positions were criticized, considered dangerous, and nearly silenced. By staging Ensler's play and restaging it in subsequent years, UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* exposed the state of women's sexuality and free speech in Utah County and raised awareness about women's issues and sexual violence. In so doing, the play helped bring women's sexuality to a new stage, a new level of discussion, understanding, and commitment. Relevant forums took place on campus, and faculty and students met frequently to discuss gender studies and social issues. The play challenged Utah County powerful and pervasive values and expectations, and furthermore, through the theatrical process, the cast created an alternate community, one that celebrated academic discourse, individual experience, and women's voices.

The Gender Studies Club's efforts can be understood as a kind of testimony whereby a band of women used Ensler's play to speak honestly and faithfully about their own personal experiences and to persuade an audience to understand, if not embrace, their position. This

community of women used performance to address issues like healing from sexual abuse and to craft an empowering environment for cast members and audience members alike. The participants and audiences were not entirely Mormon, but given the Utah County location, all persons involved felt the impact—social, political, or spiritual—of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the next section, the women participating in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* have undeniable connections to the Mormon Church, and the scripts that they wrote—and the testimonies they offered—were about the relationship between Mormon faith and women’s sexuality. Women’s voices remain a key component of this performance, but the words are those not of Ensler, but of Mormon women.

CHAPTER 3

The Mormon Vagina Monologues: Re-Scripting Patriarchal Scriptures

Theater is sacred because it allows us, it encourages us, as a community of strangers, to go some place together and face the issues and realities we simply cannot face alone. Alone, we are powerless, translating our suffering and struggle into our own private narcissistic injuries. As a group, these issues become social or political concerns, responsibilities, a reason for being here together.

—Eve Ensler, “What Happened to Peace?”¹⁴⁸

“Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality” delivered a command encore performance at the Salt Lake City Sunstone conference in August 2001. After a standing-room only debut in San Francisco just four months earlier, moderator and co-creator Janet Kincaid honored audience requests to bring the event to the national conference. In the intervening months, Kincaid solicited additional monologues and added eight pieces to the script. In August, Kincaid stood before a packed room and again introduced “Sacred Spaces,” thereafter known, she announced, as *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*.¹⁴⁹

The Mormon Vagina Monologues easily lends itself to theatrical metaphors—not only did Eve Ensler’s play, *The Vagina Monologues*, inspire its compilation and format, but terms such as “debut,” “encore,” and “performance” as well as “monologue” and “script” enrich the idea of the contributors as playwrights and performers and the conference-goers as audience members. At the same time, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* was not theatrically “staged” in the manner of traditional plays. Unlike many performances of Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* did not use lighting, costumes, or stage movement. Instead, as part of an

academic conference, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* fit a panel format, with women standing at a microphone, reading their pieces aloud (or, in many cases, reading other women's pieces aloud). In other words, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* minimized the visual aspects of theatre—such as lighting effects, set design, and costumes adorning moving bodies— while emphasizing an aural encounter with the spoken word. This is fitting, given the academic audience's expectation of listening, as one would for most conference presentations. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues'* impact was to come from *hearing*, not seeing.

So, like the members of that audience, I try to hear the women's scripted words, words that become testimonies about the women's sexual and spiritual lives. Their writing the words, compiling the monologues, and adding the human voice to the written words can be seen as a process of "scripting," and I argue that scripting—and by extension, re-scripting—is the most useful way to interpret *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. While other performances of *The Vagina Monologues* call upon actors to recite and enact another woman's words—the words of Ensler, based upon interviews with nearly 200 women—*The Mormon Vagina Monologues* called upon Mormon women to speak for themselves. By writing their own monologues—their own "seximonies"—the women were invited to comment directly and indirectly on Mormonism's influences on their own sexuality. Ensler's play intends to encompass all women, of all ages, classes, and backgrounds.¹⁵⁰ *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, in contrast, includes Mormon women, from lifelong Church members to inactive members, and anyone in between. Furthermore, the women wrote not with publication or dramatic performance in mind; they wrote primarily for themselves (an important distinction) and for the Sunstone audience. Although *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* did not reach a full theatrical status, by creating their individual scripts, the contributors offered faithful testimony while part in artistic creation: as playwrights, as collaborators, and sometimes as performers (readers) delivering the message to a

listening audience. This artistic process allowed women's voices to be heard, and—through inclusion in the compiled script—preserved.

In this section, I interpret *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, using this vibrant source as a way to better understand both the function of scripting and the ways that Mormon women's sexuality calls for re-scripting. Recall that participants in Utah Valley State College's production of *The Vagina Monologues* consistently associated the performance with the essential outcomes of "talking" and "discussion." Similarly, Kincaid and contributors consistently referred to "voice" and "women's voices." For Kincaid and others, women's voices belong at the beginning, the middle, and the end of a neglected and frank discussion of Mormon women's bodies and sexuality. Both UVSC's "Vagina Dialogues" and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* desire communication and expression, and both stress the importance of the woman's voice—and by extension, the human ear—as part of the process of empathetic transformation. In what follows, I begin with Kincaid's lively introduction to the second edition of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* and show how Kincaid highlighted the crucial issues at stake and proposed how the Sunstone conference panel would address them. I then move into a fuller analysis of *Sunstone* magazine and its tense relationship with the Mormon Church. This will bring me to a more robust discussion of script, re-scripting, and women's voices as a new *scripture*. Finally, I will approach *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* as historical and literary documents that offer a unique brand of faithful Mormon testimony by celebrating Mormon women's individual experiences and collective voices.

Introducing the encore performance of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, Janet Kincaid set the tone for the academic session. Holding the microphone and wearing a man's tie, Kincaid addressed the female-dominated audience at the Salt Lake City Sunstone conference. Her voice

strong and controlled, she informed the audience that, during this session, “We’re going to push the envelope, we’re going to talk about sex, we’re going to talk about our bodies, and we’re going to have a damn good time.” Immediately, the academically-minded audience knew that this would not be a typical panel: *this* panel would strive to break new ground, to challenge established conventions and expectations. Not only was Kincaid, the chairperson, wearing a symbol of patriarchal dominance, but the “we” Kincaid invoked were exclusively women: women’s bodies and sexual experiences would be the focus of discussion. What’s more, Kincaid broke the Mormon prohibition against swearing by using the expression “damn good time.” She immediately corrected herself—“I swore. *Darn* good time. I forgot I’m in Utah.”—but the error might well have been a rehearsed attempt to deliver a message: this panel will be different.¹⁵¹

Kincaid’s introduction then took another confrontational step. She made it clear to the audience that although “Sacred Spaces” emerged from Mormon women’s experiences, the title “Sacred Spaces” did *not* apply to Mormonism, Mormon teachings and scriptures, or patriarchal Mormon attitudes toward women. In fact, “Sacred Spaces” suggested that the very Mormon scriptures and traditions that long determined women’s behavior and sexuality were no longer sacred, but were instead susceptible to reassessment and restatement—in my terms, *re-scripting*. Kincaid offered an anecdote to this effect. That afternoon, while traveling in the elevator of the 28-story Church Office Building, the official headquarters of the Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Kincaid was struck by the gentle, automated woman’s voice that announced floors. Kincaid commented pointedly to her fellow elevator passengers—whom she described as two tourists and two “suits”—“I’m so glad that women in the Church have a voice.” Kincaid said the men in suits were not “entirely thrilled” by her comment. In fact, once they departed the elevator, the female tourist observed that the men had seemed uncomfortable with Kincaid’s

comment. The problem, Kincaid explained to the tourists, was that “my feminism is showing.” At the conclusion of her brief narrative, many in the audience applauded and laughed, some heartily, some more apprehensively. Kincaid had thrown down the gauntlet, making clear what was at stake for this conference session: despite patriarchal Mormon prohibitions to the contrary, women’s voices would sound loud and clear.¹⁵²

After explaining how *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* was conceived, Kincaid again reiterated the importance of hearing women’s “voices”—this time with more gravity than the humorous elevator example. No longer speaking extemporaneously, as before, Kincaid’s tone became more formal. She saluted the women who “courageously took a step forward” by contributing to the anthology. “The voices you will hear,” she told the audience, “are poignant, honest, and real. They are also angry, joyful, reflective, provocative, confused, and dynamic.” Even though the women would be speaking as Mormon women about their faith and their Church, their views would not necessarily correlate with official Church teaching. In fact, many voices would stand over and against the LDS Church. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* intended to carve out a new sacred space—and with it, a safe space for women to speak. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* proclaimed that women’s voices—which communicated their stories, experiences, and perspectives—would determine what is *sacred* in the Mormon tradition, replacing, if necessary, the traditions and teachings ordained by LDS men. Kincaid concluded her introduction by celebrating the fact that all kinds of Mormon women—single, divorced, widowed, civilly married or married in the temple, straight, gay, and transgendered—had come together and “in one voice, proclaimed their sacred space.”¹⁵³

What Kincaid referred to as the “reception, conception, and birth” of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* began six months earlier, on a Valentine’s Day in Los Angeles. Over dinner with friends, Kincaid found herself brainstorming possible topics for the 2001 Sunstone Symposium

West, of which she was co-chair. One member of the dinner party had recently seen a performance of Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, and conversation turned to the provocative play. With the Sunstone Symposium on their minds, the group briefly discussed doing a reading of Ensler's play, but they soon agreed that a *Mormon* version would be more interesting and appropriate. As Kincaid later recalled, the women in this group had "strong voices" and were "open and frank" about their sexuality—but the Mormon Church gravely lacked the same openness. Kincaid explained to me, "It was my belief then, as it is now, that one of the fallacies in Mormon culture is a lack of honest discourse regarding sexuality. Instead, sexually is cased in terms of 'sinful' or 'not sinful.' Pre-maritally, it's wrong to think, speak, feel, or experience sexual feelings."¹⁵⁴ Like Ensler's play, this Mormon version would also be controversial and inspiring. Ensler believed such controversy was necessary—Kincaid and the other organizers, too, would not shy away from controversy. Recall that Valentine's Day had become the focal point of Ensler's V-Day movement, with "v" standing for valentine, vagina, and victory over violence. Now, on this holiday that the V-Day movement had reclaimed for women's sexuality, a group of Mormon women conceived a project to reclaim Mormon women's sexuality: *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*.

While Kincaid was not afraid of controversy, she did fear that Mormon women would not respond, and, therefore, there would not be enough submissions to constitute a session.

According to Kincaid, the carefully-worded call for papers went something like this:

We are seeking submissions from Mormon women—straight, gay, bisexual, transgender, single, married (civilly or in the temple), divorced, widowed—regarding their faith and sexuality. If you have any kind of sexual experience or insights into Mormon women's sexuality and how your faith has influenced your ideas about your own sexuality, we invite you to submit a poem or essay for consideration.

Kincaid also emailed several LDS e-communities that she was part of, including LDS Grads and LDS Lesbians, email lists for LDS graduate students and LDS lesbian/bisexual or male-to-

female transgendered women, respectively. Her fears of a lackadaisical response proved unfounded: the group received many “enthusiastic” responses from Mormon women.¹⁵⁵ The first reading of “Sacred Spaces” featured ten monologues. The encore presentation included several additional pieces, nearly doubling the original number. When I asked Kincaid about the process of editing monologues for presentation, she replied that she accepted the monologues as they were given to her. “I did not edit them for content or tone them down to match the audience. To do so would have been to silence the voice of a woman whose experiences were hers and were real; I did not want to do that.”¹⁵⁶ Even in the organizational stages of “Sacred Spaces,” Kincaid wanted to honor a woman’s voice, to validate an author’s experiences—regardless of the possible audience reaction.

At this point in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*’s “reception, conception, and birth” narrative, it is useful to touch on reception. More specifically, what is *Sunstone* magazine and what kind of audience would be receiving “Sacred Spaces”? *Sunstone* magazine is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization operated by the Sunstone Education Foundation. The magazine publishes five issues each year. In addition, *Sunstone* sponsors annually a handful of symposia in Salt Lake City and around the United States. *Sunstone*’s official motto is “Faith Seeking Understanding,” and the magazine considers itself a vehicle for honest, open discussion about the Latter-day Saints and issues confronting Mormons and the Church.¹⁵⁷ Since its inception in the mid-1970s, *Sunstone* has been viewed as a liberal publication that uses a range of media—such as news pieces, essays, scholarly articles, short stories, poems, photography, and graphic art—to engage the provocative issues confronting the Mormon Church. *Sunstone*’s audience, then, represents a more liberal cross-section of the LDS and former-LDS population. Many of *Sunstone*’s readers and contributors are also academics interested in intellectual engagement with Church issues. However, I must point out that even though the *Sunstone* Symposium audiences

consist of some of the most liberal Latter-day Saints, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* were still controversial—and quite unlike other sessions that preceded it. Kincaid recalls that a handful of older LDS walked out during one of the monologues; she heard later that a few people complained, and a secretary at Sunstone emphatically insisted that a session like that “would never happen again.”¹⁵⁸ In short, despite *Sunstone’s* more liberal leanings, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* still incited some controversy and elicited some complaints among those that heard the monologues.

Not surprisingly, given *Sunstone’s* critical tone, the relationship between *Sunstone* and the LDS Church is often fraught. The Church is not amenable to criticism from within its membership; and, while *Sunstone’s* editors and contributors are practicing or former Latter-day Saints, the Church has spoken out against voices that threaten Church stability and member testimony. One example worth exploring, not least of all for its emphasis on “voice,” a major theme of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, is a 1989 article titled “Alternate Voices,” from *Ensign* magazine, a Church publication. In this essay, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke out against publications like *Sunstone*, without, interestingly, citing *Sunstone* by name—though attentive Latter-day Saints understood the implication. By “alternate voices,” he referred “to those voices that speak of God, of his commandments, and of the doctrines, ordinances, and practices of his church” but who have not been “called [or] given divine authority to do so.” He went on to say that alternative voices trouble Church leaders and members, and this can lead members to be “misled in their personal choices, and the work of the Lord can suffer.”¹⁵⁹ He listed the responsibilities of the Church and faithful Saints in discerning and drawing the line between voices that are helpful and those that are harmful. Drawing heavily from biblical passages and the Doctrine and Covenants, one of Mormonism’s four scriptural works, and reminding the reader of God’s rules for and promises to His faithful,

Oaks stated that “what the world needs is not more scholarship and technology but more righteousness and revelation.”¹⁶⁰ Put simply, “alternate voices”—like those at *Sunstone*—are to be distrusted and discouraged.¹⁶¹

The voice of *Sunstone* magazine is an “alternate voice,” as are the women’s voices in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Just as *Sunstone* magazine represents a noxious “alternate voice” within the Church, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* is also an “alternate voice” because the monologues invited Mormon women to script their sexuality and, as a result, rescript the prohibitive scriptures that dictate women’s bodies and sexuality. Oaks’ article may be only one example of Church criticism of “alternate voices,” but it reiterates the typical LDS response to perspectives that conflict with Church teaching—perspectives like the ones presented in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Oaks defended his attempt to silence alternate voices with passages from Mormon teachings and scriptures. “Alternate voices,” he explained, lack the divine authority to comment on God, commandments, or the doctrines, ordinances, and practices of the Mormon Church. Of course, Mormon women, including those who wrote for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, can *never* have this divine authority, as divine authority is linked to the priesthood, which is for “worthy male members of the Church” only.¹⁶² As members of the priesthood, Mormon men are to use their power “for the benefit of the entire human family, for the upbuilding of men, women, and children alike.” What’s more, each member of the priesthood must act for the salvation of his “human family”—his wife and children¹⁶³ Women also hold an important position in the family, in relationship to the Priesthood: while they do not enjoy the power and authority bestowed upon her husband, women can and must strengthen her home and her Church by honoring “the counsel of priesthood leaders—our husbands, home teachers, bishops or branch presidents, stake or district leaders, and General Authorities.” *The Latter-day Saint Woman*, a manual for Mormon women, instructs that faithful women “should

refrain from criticizing priesthood leaders and teach our children to do the same. Sustaining and supporting the priesthood...is learning, praying, obeying, and serving in a good cause.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, according to Church teaching, despite differences between male and female LDS, both genders have equally important roles to play in sustaining the Church and nurturing the family.

However, as with Oaks’ critique of “alternate voices” that lack divine authority, it becomes unsettlingly clear that women are not invited to comment upon Church teaching or Church doctrine. The combination of scriptural authority and patriarchal voices (i.e. the voices of the priesthood) reaffirm that a woman’s place is in the Church and the family—yet she cannot freely lend her voice to issues regarding the Church—even issues regarding her own sexuality. A passage from Doctrine and Covenants that describes power afforded to priesthood holders illustrates the scriptural authorization of the male voice. Women are notably absent from the equation: “When holy men of God write or speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words ‘shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.’” (D & C 68:4).¹⁶⁵ While later interpretations have allowed this passage to refer to the testimonies of men and women, it is still cited as justification for male priesthood authority. Men’s words, therefore, can echo the Lord’s voice; men’s words can possess the power of the Holy Ghost; men’s words can be scripture.

The Mormon Vagina Monologues inverted this relationship. This anthology of monologues brought not men’s words, but women’s to the fore. Like faith testimonies that encourage Latter-day Saints to share their faith with others, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* became a testimony that combined spirituality with sexuality. It allowed women to create an alternative script for women’s sexuality, and by extension, an alternative scripture. Instead of Mormon men decreeing a woman’s place in the family, her relationship to her body, or the meaning of her

sexuality and sexual experiences, Mormon women issued their own decree, in the form of script and spoken word. Rooted in faith and conviction—albeit varying degrees of faithfulness to the LDS Church—the women scripted their own sexuality. This process of writing allowed the women to become, in one sense, playwrights. Like Eve Ensler, whose own sexual abuse at her father’s hands fueled her desire to write *The Vagina Monologues* and support the V-Day Movement, contributors to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* claimed that they needed to tell their own stories of pain, confusion, celebration, and loss.

These contributors not only wrote a script to communicate their experiences, but they scripted new possibilities. Prescribed in their monologues, directly or indirectly, was an ideal relationship between faith and sexuality; their scripts offered—implicitly or explicitly— suggestions for new ideas and practices. Theorists and theatrical practitioners have long acknowledged theatre as a force for social change—the power of what happens onstage can compel the audience to social action or afford a newfound perspective.¹⁶⁶ By giving their scripted words to an audience, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues’s* contributors lend their voices to social change and suggest an alternate reality for Mormon women. Not only were the monologues a force for change in their theatrical presentation, but, I suggest, the process of writing, of scripting their pieces, also had a transformative power. The Mormon women who became playwrights also became activists of a sort, adding their voices to similar pleas for understanding. The women used their voices not only expressively but politically—not only to express an individual feeling or recant a personal experience, but to prompt change—for themselves, their daughters, their friends, and future generations.

By “scripting” *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, the women also re-scripted Mormon women’s sexuality, and by extension, revised scripture. The etymological link among the words “script,” “scripted,” “scriptural,” and “scripture” refers to “something written, a piece of

writing.”¹⁶⁷ More contemporary uses of “script” connect it to performance, filming, or broadcasting: a script can have the specific purpose of being read aloud for an audience, and something scripted is “read or spoken from a prepared script,” in contrast with words delivered extemporaneously. In these examples, the word “script” implies an actor and, indirectly, an audience to aurally encounter an actor’s words. Furthermore, these scripts often challenge and sometimes recast Mormon sacred scriptures. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, I argue, offered a new kind of scripture. Of course, the monologues do not reach the status enjoyed by Mormons’ sacred works—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. But like other sacred texts that devotees regard as immune from interference—indeed, Mormons hold their scriptures in such esteem—the women’s words were treated with reverence, free from attack within the “sacred space” created by this academic session. Unlike other academic sessions that have respondents offering contributors feedback, sometimes critical, during “Sacred Spaces,” the women were allowed to speak without censorship, without criticism. Their scripts take on an element of scripture—a scripture written by Mormon women for Mormon women. Thus, in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, to re-script is also to revise scripture—Mormon sacred writings—to include Mormon women’s voices as faithful testimony.

If the Mormon women who wrote monologues for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* were in fact scripting and re-scripting Mormon women’s sexuality, what inspired them to lend their voice to the chorus proclaiming their “sacred space”? Each woman wrote from her individual experiences, yet in responding to Kincaid’s call for submissions, the women chose to address the common theme of women’s sexuality and the influences of Mormon faith. Each monologue varied greatly from the next: some pieces were humorous and light-hearted while others were serious and confessional; some authors had graduate degrees, some had professional careers, and some worked in the home raising children; some women were lifelong members of the Church,

some were recent converts, and some had left the Latter-day Saints altogether; some pieces discussed Mormonism directly, others offered a more subtle critique of the Church; some monologues were published in journals or magazines, and some monologues were written under strict anonymity. These differences must be acknowledged, and honored. At the same time, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* can be analyzed as a whole. Juxtaposed in this way—not quite theatre but something akin to a literary performance—the monologues offer a staging of women’s voices longing to reclaim their sexuality.

Listening to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* in its entirety, one notices recurring themes and issues. The first issue concerns the clothing of bodies: modesty, nudity, and sacred undergarments. Another major issue centers on relationships with men, particularly husbands and ward bishops. Connected to this are discussions about the role of Mormon wife and mother. Not all women fit the idealized Mormon mold, as monologues from lesbian and transgender women reveal. These women, like the victims of childhood sexual abuse, suffer spiritual confusion and self-loathing, searching for support within families and communities that all too often render only judgment. Finally, a theme that runs throughout the monologues is that of sexual autonomy: many Mormon women want to enjoy sex without fear, shame, or patriarchal interference. Through the women’s own words and voices, the monologues demonstrate those aspects of Mormon women’s sexuality, and Mormon teaching about women’s sexuality, that require re-scripting.

Reimagining Women’s Bodies and Relationships with Men

The opening monologue, written by Janet Kincaid and titled “Sunkissed,” began with the author sitting outside on a hot day, wearing her swimsuit. She told the audience that she wanted to take her top off and allow her breasts to enjoy the sun. Has she become brazen? No,

Kincaid said, “it’s about learning to accept my body,” which she has learned to do through an intimate physical relationship. Modesty, Kincaid offered, can be carried to an extreme and transformed into fear—and Kincaid no longer wanted any part of that fear. “Too many of us are too uncomfortable,” she stated simply, “of being what we have been created to be.”¹⁶⁸ Kincaid never mentioned Mormonism specifically here, but Mormon attitudes—and Kincaid’s reaction against them—permeate this monologue. Mormon teaching about modesty begins with the simple idea that our bodies are precious gifts from God. Through dress, appearance, behavior, and even language (i.e. not swearing) Mormons can express God’s love and demonstrate the workings of the Spirit. The Mormon body, whether through clothing or behavior, should not attract attention. Teachings about modesty begin early and deliberately in a Mormon child’s life: the Church encourages parents to instruct young children about the virtue of modesty, even offering suggestions on how to do so.¹⁶⁹ With this in mind, Kincaid’s deceptively simple monologue about learning to accept her body becomes a critique of Mormon teaching. That Kincaid is a woman who wants to remove her swimsuit top also challenges Mormon teaching—for, as we will see, modesty is often specifically connected to the female body. Perhaps most “brazen” of all: Kincaid, an unmarried woman, learned to accept her body through an intimate, physical relationship.

For Mormons, modesty is directly connected to improper thoughts and sexual behavior—and often places a greater burden on women than on men. A cursory search of articles on the official LDS Web page reveals many such gendered distinctions; in fact, most articles discussing modesty emphasize—consciously or not—the woman’s responsibility to wear modest dress. In John S. Tanner’s *Ensign* article, “To Clothe a Temple,” he offers guidance surrounding modest dress and behavior, and the examples he uses reflect this gendered responsibility. He says that, as a young girl, his wife learned that women must not wear strapless

gowns, no matter how beautiful, because “we [Mormon women] do not wear dresses like that.” His wife later taught their daughters—“from their infancy”—not to wear immodest swimwear. He comments also that a teenaged girl might not know how her swimsuit affects her male companion—therefore her parents need to teach her “about adult emotions.” His one example about males, however, has a far different tenor: his own son was given a suit and tie for his baptism so he could dress like the priesthooders distributing the sacrament.¹⁷⁰ While Tanner seems to believe these examples of modesty address the same message—that of teaching children that the body is a temple—the actual lesson is quite different. Dresses and swimwear lead to problems for girls and women, implicitly and explicitly, because of how the clothing impacts pubescent males thinking about sex. Women must dress, therefore, to protect men and, by extension, protect themselves from men. Males, in contrast, should dress to emulate the priesthood authority they will one day attain—an authority that women cannot have. While women may not have priesthood authority, they certainly bear moral responsibility. The manual *The Latter-day Saint Woman*, which instructs young and adult Mormon women on faith and practice, states the case directly: “We [women] are responsible for the effect our dress standards have on others. Anything that causes improper thoughts or sets a bad example before others is not modest. It is especially important that we teach young girls not to wear clothes that would encourage young men to have improper thoughts.”¹⁷¹ Thus, from a young age, Mormon girls and women learn the inherent link between the female body, female clothing, and sexual desire. What’s more, women can be blamed for a male’s immodest thoughts or actions, depending on her dress and behavior.

The law of chastity connects to these teachings about modesty, and some scriptural passages illustrate the importance of chastity *for women*. In Jacob 2: 28, God says, “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me;

thus saith the Lord of Hosts.” Another passage, from Moroni 9:9, describes the daughters of the Lamanites, the group who rejected Christ after he appeared in the New World, who were deprived “of that which was most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue.” While men and women must both live chaste lives, some scriptural passages place a particular burden on women.¹⁷² Returning to “Sunkissed,” Kincaid has admitted to breaking the law of chastity by saying she found bodily-acceptance through an intimate physical relationship—although she was not married. In fact, throughout *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, many women contend with the law of chastity: some struggle to uphold it, others disregard it, and some joke about it. All contributors, however, know the law’s importance within Mormonism.

But regardless of the law of chastity and instructions to be modest, Kincaid wanted to celebrate the body as beautiful, as “God’s greatest artwork.”¹⁷³ Likewise, in “The Body,” Anna Owencamp described how a trip to Europe—complete with art museums and naked statues—left her wondering, “How is something that is viewed as beautiful on one side of the globe . . . is relegated to the status of pornography on my side of the globe?” Owencamp did not vilify Mormons specifically for making the human body shameful: “I’m not saying I think Mormons are uptight about the human body. I am saying I think Americans are uptight, and in particular, the Puritan-Christian tradition has created shame around something so natural and normal as my own flesh.” Now, despite her American Mormon upbringing, Owencamp has learned to love the human body. As a married woman (and thus within the law of chastity), she learned to enjoy sex and the many angles of her lover’s body. She also discovered that “the female form [is] beautiful and desirable,” and, what’s more, she likes her breasts and enjoys looking at them and feeling them.¹⁷⁴ Like Kincaid, Owencamp found a way to appreciate her body and the bodies of others. “Bare Naked Lady,” Marilyn Dean, also longed to accept her body. Although she was a

lifelong Church member, she and her husband had become inactive and started to experiment with nudism: “Going naked is a way to remember the physical creatures that we are,” she says. When she wrote the monologue, Dean was coping with her new, larger self, as she had recently gained a good deal of weight. Accepting this new body would be difficult, but possible. She concluded her monologue with the simple statement: “[G]oing naked just feels good.”¹⁷⁵

These three monologues discuss nudity, bodily acceptance, and the beauty of the human form. Kincaid, Owencamp, and Dean longed to celebrate the body and remove shame and the burden of responsibility from physical embodiment—particularly the shame and responsibility of being in a female body. Even when the physical body is imperfect—like Anderson’s now heavier body—theirs was a message of self-acceptance and joy at being a woman. The LDS Church teaches that the body deserves respect and honor as a gift from God. Were Kincaid, Owencamp, and Dean saying anything discordant with Church teaching? Put simply: yes. Scripturally, nakedness is unacceptable. Not only do Mormons cite the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, becoming aware of their nakedness and receiving clothes from God, but passages from the Book of Mormon reiterate the prohibition against nudity.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps even more contrary to the monologues is a chapter from *Gospel Principles* titled “The Law of Chastity.” Here, under a section headed “Satan Wants Us to Break the Law of Chastity,” faithful Latter-day Saints are warned: “Satan attacks the standards of modesty. He wants us to believe that because the human body is beautiful, it should be seen and appreciated. Our Heavenly Father wants us to keep our bodies covered so that we do not put improper thoughts into the minds of others.”¹⁷⁷ In other words, despite Satan’s efforts¹⁷⁷ to convince us otherwise, faithful Mormons know the human body should not be “seen and appreciated,” except as part of marriage. Kincaid, Owencamp, and Dean clearly disagreed with this position. They made choices in their lives that deviated from the established Church script. In going “off book,” to use theatrical

terminology, and leaving what they see as an oppressive script behind, these women created a new way of appreciating and honoring the human body. Their new script was not focused strictly on modesty, heterosexual marriage, or keeping bodies covered. Rather, the women's new approach avoided fear, honored the nude human body, and celebrated the decision to be naked.

Mormon sacred garments are also connected to this discussion of nudity, and not surprisingly, garments made their way into a number of monologues. Referred to as temple garments or sacred undergarments, endowed Church members wear their garments between the skin and clothing. Garments help to ensure modest dress; for instance, a woman wearing garments would not be able to wear a sleeveless top or a short skirt because such clothing would make visible the temple garments. Traditionally, men receive their endowment—and therefore the temple garment—in the temple before undergoing a mission, at age 19. Women, on the other hand, typically receive endowment on their wedding day; however, a worthy single woman or a woman preparing for a mission can also receive endowment.¹⁷⁸ In a 1988 letter, the First Presidency wrote about the garments: “Endowed members of the Church wear the garment as a reminder of the sacred covenants they have made with the Lord and also as a protection against temptation and evil. How it is worn is an outward expression of an inward commitment to follow the Savior.”¹⁷⁹ Seen as a kind of shield against evil, the garments also remind Latter-day Saints of their faith commitment. While garments should not be visible to outsiders, adult Mormons should feel the garments' presence and make clothing choices accordingly. Garments are also incredibly sacred. Mormons do not often talk to non-Mormons about their garments; when talking to one another, Mormons are expected to speak with reverence.

In *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, however, garments were often a source of humor and laughter. Dawn Mason's untitled piece described her new husband's habit of putting his garments back on immediately after love-making. With him a “cradle LDS” and her a recent

convert, their level of sexual experience was mismatched: he was a virgin, she was not. On their wedding night, right after making love for the first time, her husband got out of bed, took a shower, and replaced his temple garments. This became a pattern, and, as Mason explains, “It gave me the feeling he had to clean all traces of me from himself, and in order to sleep, replace the sacred garments on his body.”¹⁸⁰ In this situation, the sacred garments that protect LDS bodies became a boundary between husband and wife. In a way, Mason’s husband was simply following Mormon teaching: “The fundamental principle ought to be to wear the garment and not to find occasions to remove it. . . . When the garment must be removed . . . it should be restored as soon as possible.”¹⁸¹ Whether his habit stemmed from guilt, sexual discomfort, or simply an adherence to Mormon teaching, Mason felt the garments were coming between her and her husband.

In other monologues, garments generate humor—even in pieces that are more serious in tone. On her wedding night, Trish Dixon emerged from the bathroom, ready to please her new husband—yet she was still wearing a slip, bra, and the temple garments. “What *did* you take off?” her husband joked.¹⁸² Susannah May sought her bishop’s advice for an embarrassing sexual problem with her husband, but the bishop was more interested in whether or not she wore her temple garments day and night than in her marital struggles. She admitted she did not wear the garments about two nights each month; he said that this must not get out of hand.¹⁸³ Surely the bishop was only upholding Mormon teaching, as once a Latter-day Saint receives the garment, she is expected to wear it throughout her life, day and night.¹⁸⁴ However, May found the bishop’s attention to this detail laughable—and judging by their response, the audience agreed.

Through these monologues, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* suggested ways that garments might come between a wife and husband. The Church teaches the connections between

modesty, nudity, sacred garments, and sexual relationships. It comes as no surprise, then, that a “cradle LDS” like Mason’s husband would feel uncomfortable and even unprotected without his garments. Likewise, it is not surprising that Dixon would be reluctant to remove the protected garments before her first sexual encounter. May’s bishop’s emphasis on garments—instead of healing a sexual spousal rift—is part of a larger problem, one I will address below. Yet this example emphasizes the importance placed on the sacred garments and perhaps suggests that, if the garments are properly worn, other problems will disappear. That the women described the garments in this way minimize the sacrality of the sacred garments by opening them up to practical discussion and critique. These authors seemed more interested in maintaining strong sexual relationships with their husbands—something the Church certainly advocates—than in abiding patriarchal rules about garment wearing. In fact, as she told the audience, Mason and her husband came up with a new approach to the temple garments. Frustrated with her husband’s habit, Mason eventually refused to wear her garments after love-making. Then, a year before she wrote this piece, she stopped wearing garments altogether; months later, so did her husband. Now, she wrote, “He likes to sleep naked, when we’ve made love and when we haven’t.”¹⁸⁵ Mason’s behavior would certainly alarm her ward bishop. Yet, with her husband, she scripted a new practice for temple garments, one that allowed her to take ownership of her body.

As a convert to the Church, Sylvia Cabus had a different attitude about temple garments, and her perspective—that of a single woman—bears reflection. For Cabus, the garments were an essential symbol of her new Mormon identity; unlike the vast majority of Mormon women her age, Cabus was neither a wife nor mother. The garments, then, connected her to other Mormon women, regardless of marital status. Her monologue, “From Victoria’s Secret to Beehive Clothing,” described her transition from a lingerie-loving non-Mormon to a white-bra,

polycotton underwear-wearing Latter-day Saint. While she knew it would be difficult to relinquish her annual shopping trips to Victoria's Secret, she did not feel like a real Mormon until she got the garments. She had not gone on a mission. She was unmarried. And she turned down a full scholarship to BYU to attend Berkeley. On the day of her endowment, she held a laying-away of lingerie ceremony but wore zebra-striped panties to the temple. She had to get rid of her "questionable" clothes—the ones that the Church would deem immodest, as they revealed the garments—and at first, she felt constantly aware of the extra layer of clothing. "Does anyone else notice?" she wondered. But now, she said, she accepts the garments: "I feel naked without them. I *am* naked without them."¹⁸⁶ For Cabus, the garments helped create her Mormon identity. She shed her old skin, so to speak, by discarding her sexy lingerie; the garments gave her a new skin, a new self that represented her theological and spiritual transformation. By simply changing her undergarments, Cabus underwent a significant change: the sacred garments so marked her as a Mormon that the physical change led also to an identity change, regardless of marital or motherhood status.

Cabus's was one of few monologues in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* that did not discuss relationships with men; Kincaid's "Sunkissed" was another, as well as "Excerpts from Corelli's Mandolin," written pseudonymously by a lesbian, and Monique Sorenson's "I am a Transsexual." Indeed, the pressure to marry and mother looms large for Mormon women, and it is not surprising that relationships with men, whether husbands, bishops, or authority figures, recurred throughout the anthology. (In fact, had Kincaid not sent the call for submissions to a number of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender listserves, there would probably be scarcely any monologues that did not chronicle relationships with men.) Because the Church teaches that women are called to be wives and mothers and, whether married or single, must help men fulfill their priesthood authority, Mormon women's identity is theologically and socially interwoven

with men. Some authors challenged the Mormon notion of men's authority and dominance; others disregarded it. Some authors fell victim to misused priesthood authority. Yet all monologues that described relationships with men revealed the extent to which LDS men and priesthood authority influence women and their sexuality.

Husbands appear in a number of monologues, sometimes as trusted companions, sometimes as clueless offenders, and sometimes as heartless abusers. As she depicted him, Marilyn Dean's husband in "Bare Naked Lady" is a partner and friend; together they became inactive Latter-day Saints, and together they experimented with nudism. Dawn Mason's garment-obsessed husband amended his self-conscious ways: while his temple garments once came between the couple, literally separating their bodies, now neither husband nor wife wears garments at night. The husbands in Leigh Daly's "Balance" and Trish Dixon's "Please, Please, Please" did not come off as well. Daly, a lifelong member of the Church, had her name removed from Church records not long before she wrote her monologue. Married for 25 years and the mother of five children, Daly bemoaned the present state of her marriage. She longed "to feel sexual, sensual, to feel soft." Her husband had become depressed, and she could not remember when they last made love. She lamented:

I try to reach out to this stranger, my husband, and find he is far gone. . . . I crave sweet kisses, the touch of hands on my body . . . my faith is leaving me. I look to the heavens for answers and get none. I beg. Where is this eternal marriage I've been told about all of my entire life? Where is the companionship I should have earned by staying here for the past 25 years?¹⁸⁷

Her husband was no longer a companion, but a stranger, and Daly mourned this wounded relationship. The doctrine of eternal marriage states that if a man and woman are sealed in a temple marriage ceremony, and if they keep God's covenants, death will not separate them. They will be blessed with eternal marriage and shall live together in the afterlife. Indeed, the spousal relationship is heralded as the most important of all relationships. The Church says of

its married members, “Their companionship will sweeten through the years; their love will strengthen. Their appreciation for one another will grow.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, after 25 years of marriage, Daly felt she was being denied the love and companionship her lifelong faith promised her. When she sought aid from the Heavenly Father, her prayers seemed to go unanswered. The Mormon Church promises faithfulness and loyalty, from both husbands and the Heavenly Father, but Daly felt none of this. It seemed both her husband and her Heavenly Father had abandoned her. While Mormon women’s faith and sexuality are interwoven with men—in Daly’s case, a husband and a Father in Heaven—men are not always faithful or trustworthy. In fact, for Daly, her failing marriage reflected not just upon her husband, but upon her God as well. The script Daly followed all of her life, one which promises eternal marriage and heavenly faithfulness, was no longer relevant.

Daly’s lifelong script had become obsolete, and the final moments of her monologue revealed that she was grappling with this realization. What is the alternative? Daly’s conclusion is unclear. She asked rhetorically, “Can I kiss you?” Was she talking about having an affair, of breaking her sacred marriage vows? Her final words to the audience: “You see, I’ve figured it out now: it’s about balance.” Again, her intended meaning is uncertain. Perhaps she was calling for balance in Mormon doctrine, allowing room for Mormons whose marriages have not fit the ideal. Or perhaps she wanted to find sexual comfort outside of her eternal marriage, since her husband could not be fully present with her. Or perhaps she had felt unbalanced her entire life, and now, in middle age, she realized the need for balance in spirituality and sexuality.

Regardless, Daly’s monologue is one of realization: she began the piece saying, “I think I just figured it out.”¹⁸⁹ While she left the audience room to interpret her meaning, she demonstrated security in her own understanding. Her faith, sexuality, and marriage have not fallen in line as she anticipated—nor as she was promised. Her response was not to look outward, at Mormon

teaching or scriptures, but to turn inward, to herself, for balance in her own life. Thus, Daly's failing relationship with her husband and her perceived abandonment by God have taught her to rely not on men for validation, but on herself.

Unlike Daly, whose monologue resounded with sadness and strength, Trish Dixon desperately needed to please the men in her life. A lifelong member of the Church and the mother of six children, aged kindergarten through college, Dixon, whose monologue is titled "Please, Please, Please," wrote one of the most poignant and troubling pieces in *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. She began simply, "My sexuality and my [status] as a woman can be summed up in my desire to please." At a young age, she knew she must please her future husband, a "mythical white knight," by saving her virginity for him. Ashamed of her first sexual encounter on her wedding night, she tried even harder to please her husband sexually. She had learned from Church leaders that anything sexual between couples was permissible as long as it ended in the man's ejaculation—thus, this became her test for pleasing her husband. Her motto became "anywhere, anytime," even if she was struggling from sickness, pregnancy, or final exams. Although she gave birth just three weeks earlier, in a difficult labor that tore her uterus and the surrounding tissue, she seduced her husband as a 22nd birthday gift. The experience was excruciating, and she stated, "I wonder if he ever knew what that afternoon cost me. I raped myself with an incredible need to please." She never considered the personal cost of pleasing him while disregarding her own orgasm. Things changed dramatically, however, when he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He lost his ability to hold an erection—and Dixon therefore lost her ability to please him sexually. He eventually left her for a younger woman, telling his wife, "You make me an impotent."¹⁹⁰

Dixon's "desire to please" extended to men besides her husband. Toward the end of the monologue, Dixon described a recent blind date. She had recently decided her sexuality

mattered and she would not feel guilty about being a sexual being. The man she was with begged her for a blow job. When she asked coyly what he would do for her, he responded, “I’ll take a shower first.” Offended, Dixon left the man and ignored his future phone calls, clearly turning against her instinctual urge to please men. The monologue concluded, however, on a sobering note. Weeks after her blind date, Dixon went to her ward bishop to confess—what exactly she confessed is unstated. She told the audience, “I think my confession pleased him.”¹⁹¹

Certainly, Dixon’s demeaning experience with men was neither typical nor Church mandated. At the same time, however, her narrative revealed some frightening extremes to which Mormon teachings might be taken. Thinking back on her upbringing, she mused, “I wonder what would have happened to me in my life if I knew I was a sexual being, not a gift that was given to a sexual being.” Her feelings of sexual worthlessness were reinforced by her husband, a possible lover, and even the Church leader who instructed that sexual activity must end in ejaculation. The Church clearly teaches that intercourse is a beautiful and sacred expression of love and is not simply for procreation.¹⁹² What is not clear from Church literature is the Church’s position about wives pleasing husbands sexually, or vice versa.¹⁹³ However, another monologue, Susannah May’s “The Glory of God is Pleasing Your Husband,” helps fill this gap. As her title suggests, albeit in an ironic fashion, Mormon women’s faith has been linked with sexually pleasing husbands. As a young wife, May sought her bishop’s advice because her husband had a fondness for oral sex. The bishop’s advice? “Well, it’s important to please your husband.” He went on to advise her that she must pray for her husband that he might overcome his predilection; at the same time, she must continue to keep him sexually fulfilled. At this, the audience laughed: the bishop’s reaction indicated that oral sex was a sin, but May was instructed to continue sinning in order to satisfy her husband! She said, “Although

I didn't realize it at the time, I soon realized that pleasing the man was more important than pleasing the female.”¹⁹⁴

When she wrote the piece, May was inactive in the Church “after discovering that women actually have value,” and she had apologized to her now ex-husband about the oral sex absurdity.¹⁹⁵ Thus, her monologue chronicled a change of heart over time, a lesson learned. The script the bishop gave her dictating her behavior—to continue performing oral sex on her husband while praying that he overcome his desires—had become for May, in hindsight, “ludicrous.” Instead, she offered an alternative. The bishop should have told her to *enjoy* sex: “I should have been encouraged to explore pleasurable new ways of lovemaking.” Bishops and institutions like the Church, she concluded, “have no right to enter my bedroom” and come between the sexual union of husband and wife. May’s amusing monologue received warm laughter and applause, and the audience seemed to appreciate her concluding argument. Her tone was not without regret, however. She felt disappointment at having “lost all those years of sensuality” when she could have been sharing in sexual union with her husband, not simply pleasing him while praying that he overcome his sexual deviancy. Now middle-aged, May would like to rewrite part of her past, to script her life differently than the life her bishop scripted for her. Like Dixon, May learned that it was a wife’s job to please her husband. But May takes this a step further, offering alternative “readings” of the husband-wife script, one that is not clearly laid out in Mormon scripture, but one that Church leaders and bishops often interpret a certain way. Those leaders are always men, and sometimes they advise women to put the husband’s sexual needs before their own. May’s monologue demanded a revision of this practice.

Bishops, indeed, play an important role in Mormon women’s lives and sexuality, and thus play a role in their monologues. The bishop in May’s monologue offered unhelpful advice and concentrated more on her sacred undergarments than on sexual union between spouses.

Dixon's bishop became another male figure whom she longed to please, bestowing upon him her sexual sins in the wake of a failed marriage. Even Anne-Michelle Saunders's "My Name is Sarah, and I Am" began monologue with a revealing, half-jesting comment: "It's not often that you get to talk so openly without censoring what you have to say—my bishop isn't going to see this, is he?"¹⁹⁶ In the Mormon Church, bishops fill a role that goes beyond administrative and financial overseer to that of minister and counselor. As the highest authority within a ward, bishops are called to know ward members intimately. Bishops hear confessions—as demonstrated in May and Dixon's monologues—and offer advice on overcoming sinfulness. Bishop authority comes from both Mormon sacred scriptures as well as tradition, and a bishop should act out of loving concern for ward members, serving as spiritual counselor, friend, and judge.¹⁹⁷ What's more, the Latter-day Saints have no female equivalent of the bishop; therefore, Mormon women are required to discuss personal matters—sometimes of a sexual nature—with a male figurehead.¹⁹⁸

While all the monologues that discuss bishops and bishop authority did so with a critical voice, not all monologues were serious in tone. Marion Roberts's "New Testament 101" generated hearty laughter as she described learning about female masturbation in a New Testament Class at BYU. Instead of limiting his lectures to biblical questions, the professor would discuss his experiences as a ward bishop. According to Roberts, he often described—"at length"—a female member's habit of masturbating. As treatment, this professor would advise the woman about the horrors of this habit, read from the book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, and recite scripture passages.¹⁹⁹ Roberts, who had not even known women *could* masturbate, thought this was inappropriate for the teacher to tell a class of 80 students. She also doubted it when the teacher declared he "cured" the sinning woman. Roberts said, "I wondered, did she really stop? Or did she just stop telling him? I figured she lied to him and kept right on doing

it.”²⁰⁰ Ironically, Roberts herself began experimenting with masturbation thanks to the teacher’s off-topic lectures—a result he certainly never intended. As in other monologues, “New Testament 101” illustrates the intimate details women sometimes reveal to their bishops, who often double as a sexual counselor. The monologue also reiterates another instance of bishops denouncing a woman’s sexual pleasure, this time because masturbation is deemed sinful. This instance is particularly damning, as the professor used one woman’s shame to regale his students. Her sexuality and personal struggles were not treated delicately but rather were described in detail for college students. Roberts not only criticized the man for revealing this woman’s private life, she suggested the woman blatantly lied to the bishop about ending her habit. Of course, Roberts could not know this with certainty—but her speculation discloses something about herself, and perhaps other women’s relationships with bishops. Despite staid advice from a male authority, some Mormon women have made their own sexual choices; Roberts herself had become, sexually-speaking, “a do-it-yourself girl ever since” the New Testament class. This monologue’s valiant, self-assertive conclusion elevates it from an awkward, embarrassing story to one of strength and self-determination—Roberts’s, and, perhaps, the masturbating woman’s as well. While this Mormon man had a particular way of understanding women’s sexuality, the women reclaimed their own sexuality, proclaiming a new way of understanding themselves as sexual beings, over and against Mormon male authority.

Male authority comes in the form of bishops, teachers, and husbands, as shown above, but also through fathers and father-figures. “Coming of Age in America” was written anonymously and chronicles one Mormon woman’s life from age ten through adulthood. The monologue began with the author undertaking her first babysitting job, watching a baby boy from her aunt’s ward. Her abusive father was an alcoholic, and the baby’s father—a “gigantic blond man mountain”—seemed the antithesis of her own. As the years passed and she

continued babysitting for this family, the blond man treated her with kindness and affection. Her own father, in contrast, taught her that “There isn’t any such thing as rape. It just means the woman felt bad about it after,” and made her ashamed of her developing body, saying, “Is a girl her age supposed to have tits like that? Maybe she ought to go see a doctor.” At age 14, the father-figure she trusted raped her, telling her how glad he was to be her “first.” “A girl never forgets her first time,” he told her that night. The author then described the years of depression and suicidal ideation that followed.²⁰¹ Both father-figures in her life abused her, the one verbally, the other sexually, and both emotionally. Her father’s comments made her sexually vulnerable, criticizing her body and making any sexual abuse her own fault. The man treated her like an adult, telling her at age 13, “I love you like a grown woman,” and forcing himself on her sexually, proudly taking her virginity. Abuse of this nature is not limited to Mormonism; yet considering the authority given to priesthooders, women are placed in a position of obedience and inferiority. With the sexual details women and young women are expected to share with bishops, as well as the oft-repeated prescription for wives to please husbands sexually, Mormon women’s sexuality is scarcely their own.

“Coming of Age in America” represents an extreme case, though one that many Mormon women have endured.²⁰² The anonymous author does not describe her abuse within the context of her Mormon upbringing, yet her story reveals a pattern, starting in childhood, in which male authority figures essentially take away her sexual autonomy. She has become and remains a victim. Even at the time of writing, nearly two decades since the rape, she was locked in a state of perpetual childhood. As a 33-year old woman who just learned she cannot have any more children, she wrote, “I cry myself to sleep after everyone is bathed and fed, just as I’d done after my first babysitting job when I was 10 years old.”²⁰³ She has two sons, but longed for a daughter. Perhaps because of her horrifying experiences with men, she wanted to raise a

daughter whose life was free of abuse and self-loathing. In fact, many monologues echo this desire for self-love, self-acceptance, and sexual self-determination—for themselves and for all Mormon women. As a victim of childhood rape, Anonymous presents herself in “Coming of Age in America” as trapped in a cycle of victimization, of being not in control of her life, her body, or her sexuality. Other women who contributed to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* echo this sentiment, not necessarily because of individual male authority, but because of official Church positions on their sexual identities.

Monologues by lesbian and transgender Latter-day Saints reveal this struggle for acceptance, both self-acceptance and acceptance by the Mormon Church. These women also express a sobering desire to be “cured,” to be something sexually different than what they know themselves to be. Such sentiments occur in non-Mormon circles as well. What distinguishes these monologues as specifically Mormon is the language used to understand the sexual self and sexual relationships. The Church has the right to hold a disciplinary council for “serious transgressions,” including, among other things, having a transsexual operation or homosexual relations. The council could thereafter elect to remove membership.²⁰⁴ That the Church withholds or withdraws support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered members causes pain and frustration, as these monologues demonstrate. Anne-Michelle Saunders’s title, “My Name is Sarah and I Am,” depicts her desire to be seen as more than as lesbian, more than just her sexuality. She felt this form of discrimination prevented others from knowing her as a woman, a Mormon, and an individual. She used this monologue—this script for herself—to “talk” in the hopes that the audience—the *Sunstone* audience and presumably a larger, imagined Mormon audience—will “listen without judging.” As a Mormon, Saunders had been “conditioned” to want marriage, yet she and her partner cannot be married because of the Mormon prohibition against homosexuality. She confided, “All I have dreamed is being

denied.” Because of her unmarried relationship with another woman, she had repeatedly been accused of breaking the law of chastity, but, she explained, “Our love is no less valid because we are two women, two sisters in the gospel.” Her monologue concluded with a simple statement of her Mormon identity and relationship to God: “I am not my sexuality. I am a daughter of my heavenly father, and he knows me, he loves me.”²⁰⁵ Thus, while other Mormons judge her—and even condemn her—based upon her sexuality, she believed God loves her unconditionally. She longed for similar understanding from the Mormon community.

Sanderson describes how, as a young woman, she longed to cure or suppress her attraction to women; likewise, Catherine Lockhart, as Joseph Lockhart, often prayed fervently to God for “the cure.” A transsexual, Lockhart understood his gender confusion as a “defect of character.” In “Honorably Discharged,” Lockhart recalled her life before medical specialists helped “cure” her: “I am in hell here on earth. Every day I wake into a nightmare that started when I was five years old, and still the Lord hadn’t cured me. I just knew it was because I had done something so terrible before I was born.”²⁰⁶ Lockhart’s guilt stems from the Mormon teaching that, before being born into this world, children have spent many “eons” in preexistence, in God’s presence. Children come to earth to receive bodies and to be tested in the hopes of retaining childhood purity and ultimately returning to the celestial kingdom and God’s presence.²⁰⁷ As a child who knew he was different, Lockhart believed his condition a punishment from God. As an adult, Lockhart *is* cured, and over the course of several months, transitions to being a woman physically. Her wife and four children remain supportive. Yet Lockhart wondered about the Mormon doctrine of the eternal family—will she and wife Robin remain sealed for eternity? Does the doctrine of eternal marriage hold when one member changes gender? The Church did not help Lockhart find answers, for the Mormons will not accept Lockhart as a transsexual woman. Despite years of anguish and judgment from the

Church, Lockhart now believed her prayers have been answered and her journey has been blessed. She concluded with a sentiment nearly identical to Saunders's: "I know I am a daughter of my Heavenly Father."²⁰⁸ While the *Church* might ostracize them, despite their faithfulness—Saunders is a dedicated convert and Lockhart once served as bishop—these women have found *God's* acceptance. If God has accepted them, perhaps other Mormons will as well.

"I Am a Transsexual," the monologue of Monique Sorenson, also a male-to-female transsexual, takes the form of prayer to the Heavenly Father. Unlike Saunders and Lockhart, however, Sorenson's monologue never expressed self-acceptance or God's love. As a character in her own monologue, she is haunted by childhood lessons and hymns that teach a very different life than she has experienced. She was raised to believe that God gave her a body and loving parents. But because she is a transsexual, she wondered, echoing Mormon doctrine, "Am I a child of God, or a child of something wicked? Did he send me here, or am I cursed to this dismal existence?" She also compared herself to Christ in the garden of Gethsemane: "Oh my Father, if it may be possible, let this cup pass from me. Not as I will but as thou wilt. In some small way, I know the way the savior felt in that moment." Like Christ, she felt persecuted, wrongly accused, yet perhaps made to suffer for some greater purpose. Also like Christ, Sorenson suggests that she "prayed and prayed but feel[s] betrayed," as if God has ignored her faithful pleas for help. Her final question was surely one shared with all faithful Mormons: "Shall I ever live with him [God]?" Although the Church has dismissed her, Sorenson's monologue shows that she has remained devoted to Mormon ideas of God and Christ. She longed for the life and afterlife that Mormon teaching and scripture promised her. Yet as a transsexual—one who is "misunderstood," "ridiculed," "feared," "hated," "taunted," and "teased"—she wondered whether she deserved such blessings.²⁰⁹ Like many contributors to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, Sorenson pleaded for change, for understanding. But significantly,

she did not address her monologue to fellow Mormons, or to the audience, but to God. Was Sorenson suggesting, either literally or artistically, that she no longer hoped for acceptance from her earthly family because of the persecution she has suffered? Was Sorenson bypassing other Latter-day Saints altogether as she pleaded directly to God? When Kincaid introduced this piece, the audience learned that Sorenson had become estranged from her devout Mormon family, and three of her six children will not communicate with her.²¹⁰ Thus, in becoming the person she knows herself to be, Sorenson lost the people around her. This is not uncommon—after Sorenson’s monologue, Kincaid somberly noted that a close friend of hers, also a transsexual, committed suicide the previous year because of rejection from family and the Mormon Church. It is no wonder, then, that Sorenson turned privately to God, asking for heavenly help where little earthly acceptance is available.

Of course, Sorenson’s prayer was not private, but rather part of a public performance. Not only God but the *Sunstone* audience heard Sorenson’s prayer and plea for understanding. Furthermore, the stunned silence as she read and the booming applause when she finished suggested her monologue impacted the audience. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* gave Sorenson the opportunity to share her pain and plead for acceptance. By allowing an audience to listen in on her private communion with God, the audience caught a glimpse of Sorenson’s wounded heart. While this group of active and inactive Latter-day Saints has accepted Sorenson—or, at the very least, accepted her monologue—the Mormon Church has not accepted or understood her. The prayer-form of Sorenson’s piece suggested that change must begin first with God, that is, with the Church’s theology and scriptural teachings of the Heavenly Father and preexisting children. If theology cannot or will not change, then practicing Mormons—like many in the audience—are given the opportunity to hear, through Sorenson’s sexual testimony, the personal

ramifications these teachings have on persons who don't fit the mold. Thus, Sorenson appeals directly to God while appealing *indirectly* to the *Sunstone* audience.

Exploring Women's Sexual Autonomy and Empowerment

As we've seen, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* offers multiple examples of how Mormon women (active and inactive) would, if given the authority, amend Church teaching on women's sexuality. Some monologues addressed issues of modesty and temple garments, particularly with regard to the law of chastity and women's responsibility to remain chaste, as writers like Janet Kincaid expressed acceptance of her naked body and an unwillingness to take part in the fear surrounding the female form. Relationships with husbands, bishops, and other male authorities also came to the fore, demonstrating the power Mormon men exercise over their wives, daughters, and female ward members. Susannah May's bishop instructed her to please her husband sexually, in spite of any detrimental impact on her own soul; Trish Dixon longed to please her husband sexually at any cost, even if denying her own sexual needs. Finally, issues surrounding lesbian and transgender Mormons emerged; Anne-Micheele Saunders and Catherine Lockhart found love and acceptance in the eyes of God, if not in the hearts of fellow Mormons. Monique Sorenson turned to God for help when fellow Mormons, even those in her own family, rejected her. These monologues demonstrate the ways women, their bodies, and their sexuality, are controlled within Mormonism. At the same time, many of these monologues announce women's sexual autonomy, either within or outside of Mormonism, as some contributors defy Church teachings and find their own sexual voice.

We have already seen many declarations of sexual autonomy over and against the Mormon establishment. Some of these women remain active Mormons, and others have left the Church altogether. All have been shaped by Mormon teachings, however. Some monologue

authors do not fully adhere to the law of chastity. Kincaid has been in an intimate physical relationship outside of marriage, and Marilyn Dean and her husband participate in nudist groups. Marion Roberts has learned to appreciate female masturbation, her BYU professor's warnings notwithstanding. In "Twaddle Recall," the unnamed author assuages the sadness of a breakup with a shopping spree to Good Vibrations—clearly with the intent of now pleasing herself sexually.²¹¹ Although the Church recommends constant wearing of the sacred garments—day and night—Dawn Mason and her husband no longer wear them. In spite of Church positions on homosexuality and transgender operations, Saunders and Lockhart have developed a different understanding of God, one that allows "sexual transgressors" like themselves to remain daughters of the Holy Father. In addition to declaring autonomy from Mormon teaching, some women declared autonomy from the Mormon "ideal." For instance, marriage and motherhood are taught to be a crucial part of a Mormon woman's life, but not all women choose this lifestyle. Sylvia Cabus wears her garments faithfully, but she has rejected the notion she must be married and have children in order to live a full Mormon life. In another monologue, "On Marrying After One's Youth," Julie Bands-Smith described her decision to marry later in life and not have children—though she knows it's considered strange in Mormon circles to have "carried around [her] reproductive equipment" without using it.²¹² By scripting their experiences and reading their monologues before an audience, the authors not only make public their private decisions, but within the context of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, these voices together claim a new authority: a woman-centered, not male-dominated, perspective.

A number of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* make this headway, some more intentionally than others. Two monologues in particular take an active stance against Church teachings and practices. In the first, "I was a Born-Again Virgin: Diary of a Mormon Vagina," Anna Peters revisited the Mormon notion that sex within marriage is endlessly pleasurable and fulfilling. A

married woman and a mother herself, Peters questioned both the pressures placed on young women to remain chaste as well as the exaggerated expectations for married sex. Holly Welker, in “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” revised Mormon women’s sexuality from her unmarried perspective, calling for women to find pleasure and power within sexual relationships—inside *or* outside of marriage.²¹³ Both Peters and Welker attentively re-script Mormon women’s sexuality, building on their own experiences and a focused critique of the Church.

Peters considers hers a “normal” Mormon background. At the time of writing, she, like the “normal” Mormon woman, was married and had a son. Unlike the typical Mormon woman, however, she was an intellectual property lawyer who preferred floral bras over LDS regulation white.²¹⁴ In years of LDS sexual education, as a child through her college years at BYU, she learned in great detail the distinctions between “light petting, heavy petting, and very heavy petting.” She was also told, time and again, that men are incapable of controlling their sexual urges, and the woman is at fault if she does not stop him. She learned that, if she lost her virginity, her sexuality would be like chewed gum, or a wilted rose, or a licked caked, or a nailed board. That adults “who should know better” believe this teaching “lock, stock, and barrel” now boggles Peters’s mind. “Please tell me,” she begged the audience rhetorically, “that this excruciatingly wrong-headed practice has been eradicated.” Taking these lessons to heart—albeit selectively—Peters became “the world’s most sexually-experienced technical virgin.” She saved herself for her husband, not least of all because she believed that intercourse was the best, most important part of sex. Even during chastity talks as a student, Peters learned the linear progression of sinfulness, from French kissing to petting to foreplay to intercourse—she suspected pleasure would follow the same linear progression. Her well-seeded expectations, however, led to disappointment:

I had a very satisfying pre-marital, non-penetrative sex life, and I imagined married sex that included intercourse would be positively mind-blowing. So you can understand that, when my wedding night arrived, and intercourse not only didn't send me to the pinnacle of pleasure, but was affirmatively uncomfortable, I was a bit bummed. What a letdown! All that anticipation, all that buildup, all the frustration, and instead of an explosion of ecstasy, I got a slow fizzle.²¹⁵

The years of formal and informal sex education left Peterson longing for a sexual experience that intercourse—i.e., married sex—could not deliver.

This, she suspects, is the problem with Mormon sexuality. She said, “I think a lot of sexual dysfunction among Mormons arises not in discomfort with their sexuality, but in disappointment. Nothing could live up to that hype, generated by all those years of chastity talks.” Instead of married intercourse being the over-hyped experience some Mormon teachers promise, it can be embarrassing and painful. Recall Trish Dixon’s wedding night embarrassment, as told in “Please, Please, Please.” The monologue began on her wedding night as she anxiously anticipated sexual union with her spouse. Her husband teased her when she prepared to make love for the first time, still wearing her sacred undergarments; “I was so ashamed,” she said.²¹⁶ Remember also Dawn Mason’s awkward wedding night, when her husband’s garments came between them after love-making.²¹⁷ When the author of “Coming of Age in America” married, years after being raped, her virginal husband told her sarcastically, “[I’m] glad *one* of us has some experience.”²¹⁸ The fact that awkward, disappointing wedding nights appear in four of eighteen monologues indicates the importance placed on married sex and remaining chaste for your spouse. The wedding night is so ingrained in the Mormon imagination that it cannot meet expectations. This disillusionment, Peters argued, is not the fault of Mormon women, but rather with Mormon teaching about sexuality. For all the lessons she learned about her future sex life, Peters moaned that “there was no way I could have known beforehand” how disappointing her wedding night would be.²¹⁹ The oft-used scripts for

discussing women's sexuality and married sexuality need to be rewritten. These scripts, these teaching practices, which framed women's sexuality as a rose or iced cake to the climactic encounter with intercourse, should be "eradicated."

Of all the monologues, none reclaims Mormon women's sexual "sacred space" with as much bravado as Holly Welker's "B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony." Playing upon the Mormon idea of testimony, which encourages members to find and share their own story of faith with the Holy Spirit's help, Welker explores a new kind of "testimony" that takes into account *sexual* experience—not just *spiritual* experience. Welker also added bodily movement to her monologue that accentuated the link between testimony and performance. She delivered her opening lines while supine on the floor: "My womb is so full, I want to lie before you and bear my testimony, trying to expel/express some of what I feel." She did this to juxtapose the Mormon practice of standing to give testimony with the associations women have with lying down, such as giving birth, visiting the gynecologist, or sharing an intimate moment with a lover.²²⁰ The effect was to merge spiritual testimony with sexual testimony, challenging the audience's understanding of both.

Welker's was also *The Mormon Vagina Monologues's* most controversial entry, as a handful of session attendees walked out during her reading. Welker, who holds a PhD in English literature and is no longer part of the Church, delivered her monologue with passion and intensity. She began by deconstructing the panel's title, "Sacred Space." What is meant by "space?" she wondered. Her answer is subtly subversive. "I'd like to cast my vote for the freedom to explore our needs, interests, and individuality, but I have a feeling that first we'll have to carve out a blank or empty area in which to claim sufficient freedom from external pressure—in particular, pressure from the dogma that sex outside of heterosexual marriage is evil—in order to make that exploration." She then launches into an analysis of words used to

describe female sex organs, connecting the idea of space to sexuality. Using terms that would make Eve Ensler proud, Welker reclaimed the words “pussy” and “cunt” while dismissing “vagina” as only one part of a woman’s sexual anatomy—the part that holds the male penis. The best word to describe women’s sexuality, Welker claimed, would be “vulvic,” which would include all anatomical parts. “Vulvic,” Welker said, would indicate not just a sacred space (as vagina would) but, importantly, a sacred *presence*.²²¹

And what does “sacred” mean? In the Mormon context, Welker offered, sex is sacred in the way temple ceremonies are sacred: “outside the bounds of sanctioned discourse, pertaining to an action that can be performed, but not scrutinized or analyzed.” This is problematic, as Mormons are reluctant to talk about sexual experiences. Furthermore, Welker objected to the Mormon purpose for sex: it is “dedicated exclusively to a single use, purpose, or person, that purpose being procreation and that person being one’s spouse... Sex that doesn’t result in the birth of a child is supposed to be like practice for sex that does.” Welker offered a new understanding of “sacred,” both for the *Monologues* and Mormonism: “worthy of respect, venerable, and even in its sacredness open to discussion and scrutiny.” Welker’s authoritative voice summons more voices to the discussion. Opening Mormon women’s sexuality to analysis does not defile it—if anything, it empowers women to better understand their bodies, their sexual selves, and their relationships.²²²

Welker’s own foray into sexual intercourse was not that of a “normal” Mormon woman. Instead of waiting for marriage, she lost her virginity at age 25, primarily because she had less sexual experience than the undergraduates to whom she taught poetry. Like her fellow contributors’ wedding night experiences, Welker found sex “disappointing” in the beginning; also like some other authors, she then discovered masturbation as a means of sexual satisfaction. It took her a long time, she admitted, to overcome the Mormon notion of sex as *pragmatic*.

Instead, she had to learn a lot of “p-words,” such as pretend, power, pleasure, passion, play, and possibility; in turn, she had to discard words like prude, perfunctory, promiscuity, and punish. She realizes now that she does not have to give power over to someone else to achieve her own pleasure, nor does she need to please a male partner in order to feel sexually fulfilled. She said passionately, “While I may reclaim my own sexual space, I will not be a sexual space for someone else. I will not be the stage on which someone else performs his pleasure. I am happy to be a sexual partner, but whether I am in partnership or alone, I insist on being a sexual presence.”²²³ Another p-word that Welker would discard is patriarchy, and this also makes her monologue controversial. Welker does not need men to find sexual satisfaction—she can achieve pleasure on her own. If she does have intercourse with a partner, she will not give up her own power or pleasure for his.

Welker’s proclamation of sexual independence stood in contrast to some fellow collaborators’ experiences. Her insistence on being a sexual partner would fly in the face of Susannah May’s bishop, who told May that she must sexually please her husband. Trish Dixon made herself a stage for her husband’s pleasure, often denying her own sexual self. And the author of “Coming of Age in America” was forced to become a stage for her rapist’s pleasure. Welker’s words could apply to Mormon and non-Mormon women alike, but she framed her monologue in a decidedly Mormon context, and she actively re-scripted her own sexuality to counter the examples and lessons she learned throughout her own life. She ended her monologue with another reference to Mormon testimony, thereby emphasizing that her sexuality is something sacred that she has come to value through experience. She concludes, “I am grateful for this opportunity to bear my sexual testimony, my seximony, and I say this in the name of all that is holy and good. Amen.”²²⁴ Her monologue is a new scripture, one of sexual presence, sexual partnership, and sexual pleasure.

Welker's monologue drove home a message that *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, in its entirety, reiterated. "B(e)aring My Sexual Testimony" privileged a woman's sexual power and pleasure, and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* celebrated Mormon women's sexual voice. Just as Ensler wrote *The Vagina Monologues* based on women's stories, to be performed by an all-female cast, *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* created a "sacred space" for women's voices, both scripted and spoken. The format of the Sunstone panel, like the format of Ensler's play, removed the patriarchal male voice that dictates women's roles and women's sexuality. Women spoke for themselves, about themselves.²²⁵ Theatrically speaking, the podium where the women stood to read the monologues became a kind of sacred space—or, a sacred stage. At the podium, "on stage," before the audience, the women shared their stories without audience interruption. The authors are not asking bishops for forgiveness or temple recommends; instead, they share their intimate experiences with an audience that cannot admonish or judge. No audience voice—male or female—silenced them. Audience approval came as laughter and applause; audience disapproval came in silent protest, as some panel attendees wordlessly walked from the room. In that space, in the context of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, women's scripts became almost sacred.

These sacred scripts, this new scripture, put forth a new understanding of Mormon women's sexuality and empowered women to rediscover their sexual selves. First, these scripts reimagined Mormon women's bodies. Moving beyond the Church directive to dress modestly, women explored their new-found appreciation for their naked bodies. Women decided if and how they would wear temple undergarments: some stopped wearing them altogether, while some viewed the undergarments as indications of Mormon identity. Other women chose to disregard the law of chastity, having sex outside of marriage, having sex with other women, or pleasing oneself sexually. Second, these scripts reconfigured Mormon women's relationships to

men. Women with husbands struggled to understand why a woman's sexual pleasure seemed inferior to a man's. Women challenged the advice of bishops and wondered why bishops pried into women's sexual lives. Women learned to give themselves sexual pleasure through masturbation, thereby taking men out of the equation. Lesbian women also removed men from the picture, finding sexual fulfillment in other women. The transgendered women chose to no longer live as men, undergoing surgery that would change their bodies to match their self-understanding. Thus, many contributors revised the Church's patriarchal order, removing the male as the "head" of the husband-wife relationship and creating a situation in which some women, unmarried and childless, might live spiritually and sexually fulfilling lives. Third, these scripts reestablished women's sexual autonomy within the Church. By taking ownership of their sexual bodies, by choosing which Church teachings to follow, and by analyzing the relationships between men and women, the authors, "in one voice, proclaimed their sacred space,"²²⁶ and challenged existing ideas about Mormon women's sexuality.

Finally, it should be noted that, in using scripts and performance to comment on their sexuality, the contributors to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* also comment, directly and indirectly, on their spirituality. Surprisingly few monologues explore women's changing theology alongside their changing sexual identity, and women who do discuss God still embrace this Higher Power as a "Heavenly Father," even though these same authors reject patriarchal authority in an earthly sense.²²⁷ Authors Saunders, a lesbian, and Lockhart, a transsexual, consider themselves faithful Latter-day Saints, and even though both have suffered intense criticism from fellow Church members. Saunders found solace in God's acceptance of her, regardless of her sexual orientation.²²⁸ Before transitioning to a woman, Lockhart prayed and prayed for God to "cure" him of his "defect." Now, after becoming a woman, Lockhart believed God has answered her prayers.²²⁹ Monique Sorenson's monologue-prayer, "I am a Transsexual," cries in anguish for

God's help when Church and family members have alienated her.²³⁰ Amid their struggles to live as atypical Latter-day Saints, these women wondered whether, in heaven, they can live with God and their loved ones as part of an eternal family. They feel torn between Church teachings and their own understanding of God's love. Likewise, Daly, whose husband's depression irrevocably harmed their marriage, felt her faith leaving her. She longed for the eternal companionship the Church promised, yet when she turned to God, she felt her prayers were going unanswered.²³¹ In other words, some women struggling with Church doctrine directed their frustration toward a supernatural being, angry with the Church but maintaining belief in God's power to heal. Other women, in contrast, found comfort in the knowledge of God's love, even when Church members rejected them and Church leaders denounced them. Thus, while the women as a whole reimagined their relationship with men, their relationship with the ultimate male authority—that of the Heavenly Father—may or may not be impacted by the women's new sexual self-understanding.

The theatrical medium allows women's private prayers and private thoughts—about both sexuality and spirituality—to become artfully public. The monologues were not simply journal entries, privately written for select eyes only. Instead, each piece became part of the larger compilation that was then performed, read aloud before a small audience at the Sunstone conference. In this way, the women's words became scripts, presented publicly by either the author or a volunteer reader. The monologues were scripts in another way, as well. They allowed women and women's voices to speak freely and frankly, calling for changes to Mormon teaching, practices, and scriptures that have a strict understanding of women's roles and women's sexuality. The monologues, as a compilation of women's voices, offer a new script, re-scripting those LDS practices that women find limiting or oppressive. The women present a new kind of scripture, one filled with women's testimonies about their spirituality and sexuality.

POSTSCRIPT

Approaching Theatrical Testimony

In preparation for V-Day 2007, Ensler posted the following on the V-Day website: “I did not realize the full potential and viability of the theater when I began *The Vagina Monologues*. I had certainly experienced the magic and the power before, but I had yet to understand its truly sacred nature, its ability to explode trauma, create public discourse, empower people on the deepest political and spiritual levels and ultimately move them to action.”²³² Indeed, in the decade since the V-Day movement began, Ensler’s play touched thousands of lives and impacted hundreds of communities. The play became part of public discourse and helped channel narratives of sexual violence and gendered oppression into mainstream conversation. This passage also noted the play’s ability to empower, both politically and spiritually.

The political impact of *The Vagina Monologues* has certainly been acknowledged before. V-Day College Campaigns nationwide align themselves with social causes and political issues, donating proceeds to local organizations actively helping women. The *spiritual* impact of *The Vagina Monologues*, however, particularly any beliefs and practices connected with religious or church institutions, has been overlooked. Surely this is in part because some religious organizations—the Catholic Church’s Newman Center most notably—condemn the play, and much of the play’s language and content offends conservative religious communities. However, what should not be ignored, and what I have attempted to explore here, is how plays like *The Vagina Monologues*, which so directly address the status and treatment of contemporary women,

often speak to the women's roles laid out by religious groups. Women who feel limited or hindered by their churches' mandates might find liberation in *The Vagina Monologues's* provocative reimagining of women's sexuality. The UVSC performance and the Sunstone panel are two such examples. Participants in both events were, by and large, active Latter-day Saints or former Church members. Some women without LDS connections acted in UVSC's production, but even they felt the impact of Utah County's dominant Mormon majority. Tackling problems in their church and their communities, these women helped expose issues like sexual abuse and domestic violence, which, as we've seen, occurs disproportionately in Utah households compared to other violent crimes. These women also challenged the idea of what it means to be a woman, in terms of gender roles and female sexuality.

Furthermore, as Ensler noted above, theatrical performances often contain a sacred element, particularly those that explore private traumas in a public fashion. Women's deeply personal stories form the foundation of *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Actors and readers then take these stories upon themselves, describing in sometimes jarring detail a woman's sexual abuse, or her experiences as a mother, or her journey toward accepting herself as a sexual being. In both performances, audiences responded accordingly. A reviewer of UVSC's 2006 performance noted, "The audience seemed to respond well to the varying tones of the different monologues, laughing (however nervously) at times, remaining respectfully silent at other times, and often nearly coming to tears."²³³ A 2007 performer also noted the audience's different reactions to her two very different monologues: when she read "Cunt," a rallying cry and reclamation of women's sexual bodies, the audience participated with laughter, enthusiasm, and a yelling of "Cunt!" that thundered throughout the theatre. In contrast, when she read the Spotlight Monologue about peace, the audience responded with a respectful "listening silence."²³⁴ Audience responses at the "Sacred Spaces" Sunstone panel, as heard on the tapes,

also indicate how an audience's reactions match monologues' tones. Humorous, light-hearted monologues received warm audience laughter; passionate monologues challenging Church teachings earned hearty applause; and reflective monologues about sexual violence, transsexuality, or living as lesbian LDS drew silence, followed by earnest applause. It would seem that, as women use the *Monologues*'s format to share deeply personal, often painful, stories, the audience's silence, in turn, is sometimes the best response to the woman's voice. Listening respectfully, with reverence and awe, lends to the sacrality of these dramatic readings. What's more, as the Sunstone panel's original title indicates, the stage and the podium became a "sacred space" for women to share their stories, particularly since many stories did not correspond with Church teachings about women's sexuality.

It has been my argument throughout this thesis that the two instances of *The Vagina Monologues* that I examined here—UVSC's performance of Enslar's play and Sunstone's unique *Mormon Vagina Monologues*—took on testimonial roles within their Mormon cultural and religious contexts. Like the Mormon practice of giving testimony to share religious belief and experience, the theatrical medium allowed women the opportunity to use their voices to speak before a listening audience and express personal convictions, albeit about her sexuality, not exclusively about her relationship with the Mormon Church. As faithful testimony, UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone's *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* inspired healing, promoted empowerment, and created community. Certainly, these performances faced criticism and even controversy, as some members of the Mormon community dismissed the women's words and experiences. Yet the women involved—whether LDS, former LDS, or non-LDS—found strength and support in their theatrical involvement—whether as actors, script-writers, or organizers. Their words, performed before a live audience, became a faithful testimony, not

about the truthfulness of the Mormon faith, but about their experiences as women and as sexual beings.

As testimony, performed before audiences in what might be described as an activist-fashion (particularly with Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*), theatre can perform some of the tasks acknowledged by theorists. On the one hand, dramatic performance can “bridle” an audience, calm them, and turn them into receptive listeners—or, more pessimistically, passive, and unthinking recipients—so that actors may speak freely and without interruption. Such contrived “crowd control” was one of the early purposes of theatre, but this passivity is not something Ensler would embrace. Indeed, *The Vagina Monologues* benefits from the typical audience-actor relationship of silence and speech, allowing, in the case of UVSC's performance and *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, women to speak freely, independent of the LDS patriarchy and priesthood. But as Brecht noted in the early twentieth century and Boal reiterated in the 1970s, theatre need not merely placate an audience, but might also inspire audiences to revolutionary ideas and challenge them to enact social change. Theatre, therefore, can empower marginalized groups, as Boal argues in *Theatre of the Oppressed*. By design, *The Vagina Monologues* aspires to social change, making the play available to colleges free of royalties so as to spread the word about violence against women. The nature of this social change, however, as I noted previously, is difficult to measure. A staged performance like *The Vagina Monologues* or a reading of *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* infiltrates the culture by way of individual minds—and individuals' changes of heart can be hard to evaluate on a social scale. At the same time, measurable changes took place at UVSC, with more discussions and forums taking place, bringing together faculty and students, males and females, to talk about issues of gender.²³⁵

I want to take this “power of theatrical performance” to another level and add to existing theatrical theory by suggesting that performances like *The Vagina Monologues* or readings

like *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* also wield a significant impact upon the actors and script-writers as well. Actors rehearsing and performing in *The Vagina Monologues* at UVSC reported growing personally as a result of their experience, and many described how the play changed their lives, even after the performances were over.²³⁶ Through rehearsals and performances, the women came together as a “community of individuals,” building a female community that offered testimonies that countered the patriarchal Utah County community.²³⁷ What’s more, because the women were not theatre professionals, they seemed to invest their personal selves into their roles in ways that a professional actor would not.

I want to suggest also that the process of writing their own monologues—their own scripts—was therapeutic for the women who contributed to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Kincaid’s call-for-papers invited Church-affiliated women to find their voice and share their stories with an audience. The women who attended the Sunstone conference also got to read their monologues aloud, giving a kind of dramatic performance, sharing their experiences with an audience. Directly addressing women’s spirituality and sexuality, the contributors wrote new scripts for their spiritual and sexual lives, offering a new understanding of Mormon scripture and women’s place in scripting and scriptural interpretation. In both UVSC’s performances and the “Sacred Spaces” panel, individual stories and voices came together and, “in one voice, proclaimed their sacred space.”²³⁸ Using LDS terminology, the women offered their testimonies, but these testimonies did not resound with Mormon teaching. Instead they challenged those values as a way of restaging and rescripting Mormon women’s sexuality.

In these and other ways, this project attempts to fill some gaps in scholarship and raises some questions for future researchers. I suggested in the Introduction that my thesis rests at an intersection of women’s studies, American religious history, and theatrical performance. I have tried to speak to scholars in these disparate fields, highlighting the value, for instance, of

studying contemporary religious women alongside dramatic performance, or of approaching American religious history through stagings of women's sexuality. Little scholarship has been done on *The Vagina Monologues*, and no scholarship brings together *The Vagina Monologues* and modern American religious communities. In addition, scholarly work on contemporary Mormon women is sorely lacking when compared to, for instance, work on early Mormon women.²³⁹ Mormon women's history lays the groundwork for studies like mine and is tremendously valuable. At the same time, contemporary Mormon women are making history, through events like UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone's *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*, and it behooves us as scholars to document and analyze these developments.

I also want to encourage religious studies scholars to treat theatrical performance as a valuable source for exploring groups and themes. Religious studies scholars have inspired much creative scholarship through linking theatre and performance with ritual practices and religious behavior. Now, I encourage others in my field to turn an analytical eye to creative artistic performance. In the two cases I have examined here, theatre gave voice to community members who might otherwise be silenced. What's more, theatre evoked a response in the Utah Valley community that demonstrated what the local Mormon residents both fear and hold sacred. The UVSC example also reveals how dominant local groups can use political influence—through academic funding and the state legislature—to hinder and intimidate public institutions. Taking this even further, I want to suggest that involvement in a theatrical event, either as an actor or scriptwriter, can impact participants in a very real way. While personal changes are admittedly more difficult to evaluate and measure, it seems possible that individual changes could have a snowball effect, where one woman's self-realization is passed along to others; perhaps to other students in courses, or to fellow cast members, or to children.²⁴⁰

While I have endeavored to better understand Mormon women's sexuality, particularly within Utah where Mormon culture dominates, there are still gaps that need filling. Thankfully, the women who performed at UVSC and who wrote for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* covered a range of ages, and so I was able to capture some different generational perspectives. The same cannot be said for different socio-economic classes or racial groups. I do not know whether any African-American women or Latinas performed during the four years of *The Vagina Monologues* at UVSC. Nor do I know whether playwrights for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* were entirely Caucasian. While Mormons in Utah and across the United States are dominantly white, the different cultural factors of ethnicity, race, and social class could complicate the picture of Mormon women's sexuality.

On the other hand, my research does complicate Mormon women's sexuality by exploring perspectives proffered by transgendered Latter-day Saints. *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* includes two pieces written by male-to-female transsexuals who can address the challenges of being transgendered within a religious tradition that teaches gender as an essential and unequivocal characteristic. The *Sunstone* panel also welcomed monologues from lesbian and bisexual Mormon women. Within the "sacred space" that the panel created, these women were able to discuss their faith and sexuality, talking about intimate relationships with partners and with God. These pieces exposed the ways women whose sexual lives the Church rejects understood their relationship with both the Mormon Church and the Heavenly Father.

The theatrical medium, which combines the written word with the spoken word, and which brings actors before an audience, allowed these women to give faithful testimony, about experiences both sexual and spiritual. The power of theatre has long been explored and exploited to impact audiences and bring about social change. In the relationship between Mormon women and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, theatre also allows women in

conservative religious communities to explore and express their sexuality in ways discouraged or even forbidden by patriarchal authority. Theatre becomes testimony as women speak faithfully about their sexuality. The performances at UVSC and the reading at Sunstone challenged patriarchal practices, letting women speak freely, not as solitary individuals, but as a community of individuals united in purpose.

NOTES

Introduction: Setting the Stage

¹ Jillian Doria. "Monologues' is coming to UVSC." *Deseret Morning News*, March 13, 2004, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20040313/ai_n11437859.

² Lynn Arave. "88% of Utah County is LDS." *Deseret News*, February 10, 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20030210/ai_n11377504.

³ While UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* and Sunstone's *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* are using the theatrical medium to discuss issues and affect change, other Mormon women (and men) today are using other means to inspire discussion. *Sunstone* magazine is one example that will be described later in this paper; another example is the blog titled "Feminist Mormon Housewives," which offers contributors "a safe place to be feminist and faithful." <http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/>

⁴ Holly Welker, "B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality* (Sunstone conference, Salt Lake City, UT, August 2001), tape 1, monologue 9.

⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Testimony," <http://www.lds.org/>. I want to point out that this connection between women's sexuality, performance, and testimony has been explored before. Holly Welker wrote a piece for *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* titled "B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony," in which she cleverly referred to her sexual testimony as a "seximony." Welker's monologue will be discussed further in Chapter 3. See also a book that uses the idea of testimony not in religious terms, but for approaching oral history: Hugo Slim and Paul Thomson, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995).

⁶ Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, eds., *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7-8.

⁷ "Brecht, Bertold," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:182-84; "Theories of Drama, Theatre, and Performance," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2:1355-61.

⁸ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979); Augusto Boal. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 2nd ed. Trans. Adrian Jackson. (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁹ Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986).

¹⁰ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988). Also informing my thinking about connections between religious studies, ritual, and theatre are the works of Ronald Grimes and Catherine Bell.

¹¹ Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Michel Foucault, *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Kim Hall, "Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*," *Hypatia* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 99-119; Michele L. Hammers, "Talking About 'Down There': The Politics of Publicizing the Female Body through *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies in Communication* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 220-243.

¹² Catherine A. Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 1-50.

¹³ Maureen Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority:*

Re-emerging Mormon Feminism (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990).

¹⁴ Two recently published articles on Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* are worth noting: Kim Hall, "Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*," *Hypatia* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 99-119; Michele L. Hammers, "Talking About 'Down There': The Politics of Publicizing the Female Body through *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies in Communication* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 220-243.

¹⁵ Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition* (New York: Villiard, 2001): 4-5, xxxi.

¹⁶ Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*, 173, xxxii, xxxiv-xxxv

¹⁷ Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*, xvi, xxvii-xxviii, 140-41.

¹⁸ Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*, 145-71.

¹⁹ Robert L. Millet, "The Ancient Covenant Restored," *Ensign* (March 1998): 36, <http://www.lds.org/>.

²⁰ Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (speech, General Relief Society Meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, September 23, 1995), <http://www.lds.org/> (emphasis mine).

²¹ Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Mothers in Zion" (address, Fireside for Parents, February 22, 1987), http://fc.byu.edu/jpages/ee/w_etb87.htm.

²² Ezra Taft Benson., "To the Single Adult Sisters of the Church," *Ensign* (November 1988): 96, <http://www.lds.org/>.

²³ "The Importance of the Priesthood," *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): 76, <http://www.lds.org/>; "Women and the Priesthood." *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): 91, <http://www.lds.org/>.

²⁴ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Modesty," <http://www.lds.org/>.

²⁵ John H Groberg, "The Message: Right for the Climate," *New Era* (March 1992): 4, <http://www.lds.org/>.

²⁶ Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*.

²⁷ Note that in 2007, a drag queen (a male dressed in women's clothing) read a monologues in UVSC's production of *The Vagina Monologues*. The 2007 organizers invited this man to participate as a way to complicate essentialist ideas about gender and gender identity. Interestingly, these essentialist notions seem to be something shared by the Mormon Church and Eve Ensler. As noted above, the Latter-day Saints believe God created people as either male or female; Ensler has been criticized for ignoring the social-constructedness of gender and thereby putting forth essentialist notions.

²⁸ Note, at the Salt Lake City Sunstone panel, one of the monologues was written and read as a duet between a male voice and a female voice. That monologue, titled "Excerpts from Corelli's Mandolin," was written pseudonymously. Inspired by the acclaimed novel, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, by Louis de Bernieres, the monologue includes both the voice of Carlos, one of the novel's characters, and the voice of a lesbian, life-long Latter-day Saint.

²⁹ Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*, 176-7.

³⁰ In listening to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues* cassette tapes and communicating with UVSC's performers, I have often heard women describe their own sexual abuse or that of other cast members. Of the women I talked

to, most were abused as children. Some were raped as adults. I will talk more about individual cases of sexual abuse in the following chapters.

³¹ Matt Canham, "Mormon portion of Utah population steadily shrinking," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 24, 2005, http://www.sltrib.com/ci_2886596; Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, "Rape in Utah" (2005 Survey), <http://www.justice.utah.gov/Research>; William V. Pelfrey, "Final Report of Utah Crime Assessment," <http://www.justice.utah.gov/Research/Crime/1999-ut-crime-assess.PDF>: see esp. 4-6; Matt Sandelin, "Casting a light on Utah rape stats," *College Times*. February 20, 2007.

³² Karen E. Gerdes, Martha N. Beck, Sylvia Cowan-Hancock, and Tracy Wilkinson-Sparks, "Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Case of Mormon Women," *Affila: The Journal of Women and Social Work* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 39.

³³ Gerdes et al., "Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," 54.

³⁴ Gerdes et al., "Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," 49-50, 53-4, 57, 58.

³⁵ "Discussions with Martha Beck: Ending the Silence and Speaking Openly" (online interview, n.d.), <http://www.leavingthesaints.com/endingsthe silence.html>.

³⁶ Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found my Faith* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005). The Nibley Family Response to Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints* can be found at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/nibleyfamilystatement.php>.

³⁷ These reactions all come from Martha Beck's own website, at <http://www.leavingthesaints.co/mail.html>, where Beck has compiled some of the letters and emails she has received in response to the book. Admittedly, this is a problematic source, as it is virtually impossible to prove the authenticity of these e-comments. However, Beck's website does display a variety of responses and probably represents the kinds of conversations the book generated.

³⁸ Kyrra R., e-mail to Martha Beck, <http://www.leavingthesaints.co/mail.html>.

³⁹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Power of a Personal Testimony," *Ensign* (November 2006): 37-39, <http://www.lds.org/>.

Chapter 2: "The Vagina Dialogues"

⁴⁰ Eve Ensler, "What Happened to Peace?" <http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/vmoments/0610231>.

⁴¹ Melinda Miller, "Swit Just One of the Wits Starring in the Return of *Vagina Monologues*," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 17, 2002: D3; Celia R. Baker, "*Vagina Monologues* Returns; Proceeds Aid Women's Groups," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 16, 2003: D3; Dan Nailen, "*Vagina Monologues* Speaks to Both Sexes," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 21, 2002: B7.

⁴² Laura Hancock, "UVSC Minor May Ease Gender Gap," *Deseret Morning News*, June 26, 2006, <http://findarticles.com/>; Utah County General Election Official Results, November 2, 2004, <http://www.co.utah.ut.us/Dept/ClerkAud/Elections/ElectRsIts>; CNN.com Election Results, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/>. Statistics show that only 11.64% of Utah County residents voted for John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election and 85.99% voted for George W. Bush, compared to 48% and 51%, respectively, in the rest of the United States.

⁴³ Lynn Arave, "88% of Utah County is LDS," *Deseret News*, February 10, 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20030210/ai_n11377504. The study was done in 2000 as part of the American Religion Data Archive. This article also reports that Utah as a whole is 66.44% LDS. Of course, statistics of this nature are inherently problematic, as inactive LDS who are still in Church records would be counted.

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- ⁴⁴ Errin Julkunen, "Gender Studies Club," *College Times*, December 5, 2004, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.
- ⁴⁵ Errin Julkunen, "Monologues Benefit Outweighs Controversy," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 2004, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.
- ⁴⁶ Damon MacArthur, letter to the editor, "Monologues Unfit for UVSC, Utah County Audience," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 2004, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.
- ⁴⁷ Jillian Doria, "Monologues is coming to UVSC," *Deseret Morning News*, March 13, 2004, <http://findarticles.com/>.
- ⁴⁸ Errin Julkunen, "Monologues Benefit Outweighs Controversy," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 2004, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.
- ⁴⁹ A number of articles and editorials explored this connection between *The Vagina Monologues* and the denied funding for the Digital Learning Center. Many such articles will be cited in what follows.
- ⁵⁰ Laura Hancock, "Senate Chief Says UVSC will be a University Someday," *Deseret Morning News*, November 12, 2005, <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,635160702,00.html>.
- ⁵¹ Elisabeth Nardi, "Academic Freedom Debated at Forum," *Daily Herald*, April 11, 2005, <http://harktheherald.com/>.
- ⁵² Vegor Pedersen, "V Day," *College Times*, March 14, 2004, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.
- ⁵³ Mark Eddington, "Welcome to 'Happy Valley,' Where a Whole County (Except for Church) Closes on Sundays," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 2, 2000, <http://www.sltrib.com/2000/apr/04022000/utah/38116.htm>.
- ⁵⁴ Lynn Arave, "88% of Utah County is LDS," *Deseret News*, February 10, 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20030210/ai_n11377504
- ⁵⁵ "Opening Titles," *This Divided State*, DVD, directed by Steven Greenstreet (Minority Films, LLC, 2005); City of Orem, official webpage, <http://www.orem.org/>.
- ⁵⁶ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Orem UT Institute: Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.lds.org/institutes/faq/0,8496,774-1-36-60244,00.html#12>.
- ⁵⁷ Utah Valley State College, Religious Studies department, "Mormon Studies," <http://www.uvsc.edu/phil/religiousstudies/mormonstudies.html> (accessed April 23, 2007).
- ⁵⁸ Utah Valley State College, "1st Annual UVU Student Survey, 2006 Self-Study Results," http://www.uvsc.edu/president/documents/Final_Report_to_President.pdf.
- ⁵⁹ To see the Cardinal Newman Society's official position on *The Vagina Monologues*, visit <http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/cns/projects/monologues2006>. The Cardinal Newman Society's campaign against *The Vagina Monologues* is a fascinating conflation of hierarchal power, ideals of female sexuality, and aggressive organization. Comparisons and contrasts between the Catholic Church's approach and the Latter-day Saints' would be a ripe area for future scholarship. Eve Ensler and the V-Day organization have spoken out about the Cardinal Newman Society's campaign; see <http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/press/releases/0304301>. Also, like the members of UVSC's Gender Studies Club, groups of students on Catholic college campuses have actively worked against the Cardinal Newman campaign, performing the show despite censure from the administration. See examples: Hannah Seligson, "Two Catholic Campuses Hush *Vagina Monologues*," *WeNews*, February 12, 2006, <http://www.womensnews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2633/context/cover/>; Lisa M. O'Neill, "Is it vital or vulgar? *Vagina Monologues* provokes complaints from Catholic colleges," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 19, 2004, <http://findarticles.com/>.

⁶⁰ Utah Valley State College. *Project: University. 2007 Advocacy Statement*, (UVSC Publications and Creative Services, MB011907), <http://www.uvsc.edu/university/pdf/casestatement012207b.pdf>.

⁶¹ William Cobb, "Opening for *The Vagina Monologues*," February 9, 2005; William Cobb, telephone conversation with the author, December 16, 2005. Professor Cobb graciously faxed me a copy of his introductory speech in December 2005.

⁶² I face an interesting problem when talking about President Sederberg, and that is the spelling of his name. In the myriad articles I have consulted, his name is spelled both "Sederberg" and "Sederburg." Even the UVSC website contained both spellings. For this thesis, I have opted for "Sederberg," but I acknowledge that the correct spelling might be "Sederburg."

⁶³ As I will show in what follows, Sederberg and UVSC struggled to attain funding for this Digital Learning Center. Finally, in 2006, the legislature approved UVSC's requests, and construction began on the DLC in September 2006. The building is scheduled to open in July 2008. According to UVSC's website, the building will cost \$48 million, will be 190,000 square feet, and will have over 100 public computers. For more information, see <http://www.uvsc.edu/library/newlibrary/index.html>.

⁶⁴ Valerie Chapman, "UVSC to Begin Self-Study of Athletics Program for NCAA Certification," October 3, 2006, <http://resource.uvsc.edu/pressreleases/2006/03oct06.html>.

⁶⁵ Utah Valley State College, "Project: University; 2007 Advocacy Statement" (UVSC Publications and Creative Services, MB011907), <http://www.uvsc.edu/university/pdf/casestatement012207b.pdf>. In February 2007, the Utah State Legislature voted unanimously to allow UVSC to become UVU, or, Utah Valley University. The name change will officially take effect on July 1, 2008. For more information, see <http://www.uvsc.edu/university/>.

⁶⁶ Norman L. Nielsen, "Public Must Demand Balance at UVSC," *Daily Herald*, July 10, 2005, <http://www.hardtheherald.com/>.

⁶⁷ Vegor Pedersen, "Building a Patriarchal Paradise at UVSC," *College Times*, March 13, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

⁶⁸ Pedersen, "Building a Patriarchal Paradise at UVSC."

⁶⁹ Liberty University is a private school in Lynchburg, Virginia, founded by Jerry Falwell, a conservative Christian, former Republican presidential candidate, and founder of the Moral Majority.

⁷⁰ Ryan J. Robinson, "UVSC not the liberal bastion it's painted as: Important differences between State and Private colleges," *College Times*, March 6, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

⁷¹ Mark Eddington, "Welcome to Happy Valley, Where a Whole County (Except for Church) Closes on Sunday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 2, 2000, http://www.adherents.com/largecom/lds_UtahCountySundays.html.

⁷² Hanna Hooge, "Vagina Monologues," *College Times*, April 1, 2004, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

⁷³ Jillian Doria, "Monologues is coming to UVSC." *Desert Morning News*, March 13, 2004, <http://findarticles.com/>. To note, I also heard Eve Ensler's speak in December 2005 on the campus of University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. As she told Julkunen, she told the UNC audience that the play was being performed in ultra-conservative environments, in the United States and abroad, with great success. It was this comment, in fact, that interested me in researching connections between the Mormon Church and *The Vagina Monologues*.

⁷⁴ David Randall, "Monologues prepares for 2nd-year run," *Daily Herald*, February 8, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid. (Randall, David.)

⁷⁶ Errin Julkunen, “*Monologues* benefits outweigh controversy,” *Daily Herald*, March 11, 2004, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁷⁷ Doria, “*Monologues* is coming to UVSC.”

⁷⁸ Ibid. (Doria, Jillian.)

⁷⁹ Ibid. (Doria)

⁸⁰ Julkunen, “*Monologues* benefits outweigh controversy.”

⁸¹ Ivan M. Lincoln, “Skip *Monologues*—give to charity, then see good play,” *Deseret Morning News*, February 15, 2004.

⁸² Doria, “*Monologues* is coming to UVSC.”

⁸³ Ibid. (Doria)

⁸⁴ Julkunen, “*Monologues* benefits outweigh controversy.”

⁸⁵ Interestingly, something similar happened to Eve Ensler when she was trying to publish this play. She found a publisher and received an advance; when the publisher later decided against publishing the play, Ensler was told she could keep the money if she would take the play elsewhere. Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition*, xvi.

⁸⁶ David Randall, “*Monologues* not as popular as expected, still draws 230,” *Daily Herald*, February 10, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁸⁷ Julie J. Nichols, letter to the editor, “*Monologues* performs great service for women,” *Daily Herald*, March 16, 2004, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁸⁸ Errin Julkunen, “Gender Studies Club,” *College Times*, December 5, 2004, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

⁸⁹ William Cobb, telephone conversation with author, December 16, 2005. Note, *The Vagina Monologues* has also been performed at the University of Utah, Westminster College in Salt Lake City, and Weber State University in Ogden.

⁹⁰ Randall, “*Monologues* not as popular as expected, still draws 230.”

⁹¹ Marin Decker, “This year, *Monologues* fails to make waves: Attendance, controversy far less at UVSC production,” *Deseret Morning News*, February 10, 2005, <http://findarticles.com/>.

⁹² Cobb, “Opening for *The Vagina Monologues*.”

⁹³ Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.

⁹⁴ Michelle Lee, “Women speak out in *Vagina Monologues*,” *College Times*, February 13, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

⁹⁵ Cheryl Carson, letter to the editor, “Blame Moore, *Monologues* for UVSC enrollment drop,” *Daily Herald*, January 17, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁹⁶ David Randall, "Monologues prepares for 2nd year run," *Daily Herald*, February 8, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

⁹⁷ "Top Ten: Reasons UVSC is going to Hell in a hand basket," *College Times*, January 31, 2005. Members of the college and Orem communities had complained about the play's front-page placement in the school paper. Some of the other list items are worth noting, as they poke fun at the pervasive Mormon influence on campus—and the ways the college does not always emulate Church standards. Item ten, addressing the community's commentary on UVSC's activities: "According to *The Daily Herald*, our fake tattoos, grinding dance-floor action, and mock gambling are 'too close for comfort.'" Item seven, speaking to the LDS ban on caffeine and hot drinks: "As if Mr. Pibb isn't bad enough, we have a coffee stand on campus." Item four, responding to comparisons between UVSC and BYU: "We hire the professors that are kicked out of BYU." Item three, demonstrating that male students do not adhere to the Mormon recommendation to be clean-shaven: "You can go take a test with a five o'clock shadow." In short, the college knew it was being watched, by administrators and community members with an LDS agenda.

⁹⁸ "Opening Titles," *This Divided State*.

⁹⁹ The Associated Press, "UVSC President orders conservative to balance Moore," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, September 21, 2004, <http://media.www.dailyutahchronicle.com/media/storage/paper244/news/2004/09/21/News/Uvsc-Pres.Orders.Conservative.To.Balance.Moore-725525.shtml>; Vegor Pedersen, "Did Michael Moore break up student government?" *College Times*, January 9, 2005; *This Divided State*, directed by Steven Greenstreet. Kay Anderson repeatedly criticized UVSC's student government for paying Michael Moore \$50,500 to speak on campus. However, even though Sean Hannity waived his speaking fees, his travel expenses totaled \$49,800—a mere \$700 less than Moore.

¹⁰⁰ "Controversy Begins," *This Divided State*.

¹⁰¹ "Tension Mounts," *This Divided State*; "Michael Moore 10-20-04," *This Divided State*.

¹⁰² "Hannity Announcement," *This Divided State*.

¹⁰³ "Public Panel Discussion," *This Divided State*; "The Lawsuit," *This Divided State*; "Tension Mounts," *This Divided State*.

¹⁰⁴ "Radio Show," *This Divided State*; David Keller, "UVSC is not shifting to the left," *Daily Herald*, June 27, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

¹⁰⁵ Autumn Nielson, "This Divided State: Documentary revels in the drama of the Moore War," *College Times*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹⁰⁶ Vegor Pedersen, "State of the College: President Sederberg walks the tightrope between academic freedom and community relations in annual speech," *College Times*, February 7 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹⁰⁷ Ryan J. Robinson, "UVSC not the liberal bastion it's painted as," *College Times*, March 6, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹⁰⁸ Jeff Chu, "Fighting Words 101," *Time*, March 9, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1034711,00.html>.

¹⁰⁹ It is worth noting that some UVSC students did not think coverage of *The Vagina Monologues* was strong enough, especially given the play's repeated connection to Michael Moore and the loss of funding. One letter to the editor in *The College Times* expressed dismay that *The Vagina Monologues* wasn't getting better coverage: "Even though it is continually listed as one of the reasons we did not receive our funding, compared to the Michael Moore visit it received little coverage... Half the people walking this school are women, and one in four of them have been abused in their lives. One in four. *The Vagina Monologues* very bluntly addresses that

fact. It shows women that they are not alone; no matter how isolated they may feel. Frankly, that is more important than Michael Moore, Nelly, and mock gambling combined. If UVSC does not receive their library for another year because women are standing up for themselves and saying ‘enough,’ then I say we can wait another year. If just one woman overcomes abuse, then it was well worth the wait.” Toni Mutter, letter to the editor, “Article on *The Vagina Monologues* is half-hearted,” *College Times*, February 20, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹¹⁰ Jon Fairbanks, letter to the editor, “UVSC can’t balk community values: *The Vagina Monologues* inappropriate,” *College Times*, March 6, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹¹¹ Robinson, “UVSC not the liberal bastion it’s painted as: Important differences between State and Private colleges.”

¹¹² James Neel, letter to the editor, “How would Jesus treat homosexuals?” *College Times*, March 6, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹¹³ Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); “Public Panel Discussion,” *This Divided State*; “Sean Hannity 10-11-04,” *This Divided State*.

¹¹⁴ Utah Valley State College, Religious Studies department, “Mormon Studies Conference,” <http://www.uvsc.edu/phil/religiousstudies/mormonconf.html> (accessed May 17, 2007); Scott Abbott, “Words Matter: Academic freedom, UVSC, and the United States of America,” *College Times*, April 10, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹¹⁵ Abbott, “Words Matter: Academic freedom, UVSC, and the United States of America.”

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Nardi, “Academic freedom debated at panel,” *Daily Herald*, April 11, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

¹¹⁷ Michael Palmer, “Panel debates the future of UVSC,” *College Times*, September 11, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹¹⁸ Vegor Pedersen, “State of the College,” *College Times*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>. Days after his address, Sederberg admitted that he intended his speech to placate the state’s decision makers. He said, “That’s part of why this speech was as conservative as it was. We need to reassure those donors that we’re a good school.”

¹¹⁹ Michael Palmer, “A play on words: Once again *The Vagina Monologues* survived controversy as administrators attempt political spin,” *College Times*, February 12 2006, <http://www.netxnews.net/>; Anna Chang-Yen, “UVSC puts on annual play with shortened title,” *Daily Herald*, February 6, 2006, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

¹²⁰ Michael Palmer, “*Vagina Monologues* Proceeds to go toward Donner/Galbraith Scholarship,” *College Times*, February 5, 2006, <http://www.netxnews.net/>; Palmer, “A play on words: Once again *The Vagina Monologues* survived controversy as administrators attempt political spin.” It is worth noting that Blake Donner’s mother is Laura Hamblin, a UVSC faculty member who performed in *The Vagina Monologues* in 2007.

¹²¹ Michelle Walker, “Vagina: not a dirty word,” *College Times*, February 12, 2006, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹²² Philip Gordon, “What’s in a name? When a Rose is Not a Rose.,” *College Times*, February 12, 2006, <http://www.netxnews.net/>; Philip Gordon, “Silence perpetuates sex-assault stigma,” *Daily Herald*, February 8, 2006, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

¹²³ For information on Suzanne Swift's story, see www.suzanneswift.org; for information on Rich's visit to UVSC, see "Women in the Military," February 9, 2007, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹²⁴ Carmell Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author, May 19, 2007.

¹²⁵ Matt Sandelin, "Casting a light on Utah rape state," *College Times*, February 20, 2007, <http://www.netxnews.net/>; "Vagina Monologues," *College Times*, January 21, 2007; Kate McNeil, "UVSC's Gender Studies Club presents *The Vagina Monologues*," *Daily Herald*, February 20, 2007, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>; Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author, May 19, 2007.

¹²⁶ Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, "Rape in Utah" (2005 Survey), <http://www.justice.utah.gov/Research>; William V. Pelfrey, "Final Report of Utah Crime Assessment," <http://www.justice.utah.gov/Research/Crime/1999-ut-crime-assess.PDF>: see esp. 4-6; Kate McNeil, "Monologues play draws full house at UVSC," *Daily Herald*, February 22, 2007, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>; Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author, May 19, 2007; Laura Hamblin, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2007. Passages from Laura Hamblin's Utah Rape Statistics monologue come from our e-mail correspondence, in which she sent me a copy of her piece as a word document. Also, the monologue, "The Memory of Her Face," which I discuss here, is an optional monologue offered by V-Day for the College Campaign, but is not published and publicly available. I obtained copies of this monologue and several other unpublished monologues, created for V-Day performances, from the V-Day organization, who agreed to let me read (but not duplicate) the pieces as part of my research. My thanks to them.

¹²⁷ Boon and Plastow, *Theatre and Empowerment*.

¹²⁸ Cobb, telephone conversation with author.

¹²⁹ Nardi, "Academic freedom debated at forum"; Palmer, "Panel Debates the future of UVSC"; Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author.

¹³⁰ David Randall, "Monologues prepares for 2nd year run," *Daily Herald*, February 8, 2005, <http://www.harktheherald.com/>.

¹³¹ Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author.

¹³² Michelle Lee, "Women speak out in Vagina Monologues," *College Times*, February 13, 2005, <http://www.netxnews.net/>.

¹³³ Michael Palmer, "Vagina Monologues Proceeds to go toward Donner/Galbraith Scholarship," *College Times*, February 5, 2006.

¹³⁴ Joylin Namie, e-mail message to author, June 6, 2007.

¹³⁵ Various *The Vagina Monologues* cast members, e-mail messages to author, June 2007. (Lolly Penrod, Tiffany Knoell, Robbin Anthony, Joylin Namie, and Kasi Grossman).

¹³⁶ Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author.

¹³⁷ Tiffany Knoell, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2007.

¹³⁸ Lolly Penrod, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2007; Robbin Anthony, e-mail message to author, June 5, 2007.

¹³⁹ Kasi Grossman, e-mail message to author, June 5, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Annik M. Budge, e-mail message to author, June 27, 2007.

¹⁴¹ Robbin Anthony, e-mail message to author.

¹⁴² Various *The Vagina Monologues* cast members, e-mail messages to author, December 2005 & June 2007; Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author.

¹⁴³ Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author.

¹⁴⁴ Robbin Anthony, Kasi Grossman, and Tiffany Knoell, e-mail messages to author.

¹⁴⁵ Robbin Anthony and Joylin Namie, e-mail messages to author.

¹⁴⁶ Lolly Penrod, e-mail message to author.

¹⁴⁷ Tiffany Knoell, e-mail message to author.

Chapter 3: *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*

¹⁴⁸ Eve Ensler, “What Happened to Peace?” <http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/vmoments/0610231>.

¹⁴⁹ Details about the April and August Sunstone conferences come from an email exchange I had with Janet Kincaid in early December 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition* (New York: Villiard, 2001), 4-5.

¹⁵¹ Janet Kincaid, “Introduction,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality* (Sunstone conference, Salt Lake City, UT, August 2001), tape 1. In December 2005, I purchased audio cassette tapes of *Sacred Spaces* through the *Sunstone* website, www.sunstoneonline.org. Now it seems *Sacred Spaces* is also available for purchase online as an MP3 file. To my knowledge, there is no available recording of the first “Sacred Spaces” performance in San Francisco in April 2001. In the endnotes that follow, I will simplify the citation by giving the author’s name, monologue title, and conference title, as well as offering the monologue’s placement in the reading series (when applicable) and whether the monologue is from tape 1 or tape 2.

¹⁵² Kincaid, “Introduction,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1.

¹⁵³ Kincaid, “Introduction,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1.

¹⁵⁴ Janet Kincaid, e-mail messages to author, December 8 and 19, 2005.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Kincaid, e-mail message to author, December 8, 2005. In the email, Kincaid mentioned that she did edit one piece that was grammatically incoherent. In that situation, she worked with the author to reframe what was originally a run-on sentence into a prose-poem piece. The content of this monologue, like the others, was not at all changed.

¹⁵⁷ This and more information about Sunstone Education Foundation and *Sunstone* magazine and *Sunstone* Symposiums can be found at their official website, <http://www.sunstoneonline.org/>.

¹⁵⁸ Kincaid, e-mail messages to author, December 8 and 19, 2005

¹⁵⁹ Dallin H. Oaks, “Alternate Voices,” *Ensign* (May 1989): 27, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Connections have been made between articles like Oaks's "Alternate Voices" and the LDS "crackdown" against the September Six in 1993, a group of six LDS intellectuals and feminists. While the Church has never formally stated why members of the September Six were either excommunicated or disfellowshipped, many scholars and media people have speculated as to the reasons. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Church faced challenges to its theological and historical claims. Perhaps as a move to assuage discontent, the Church moved to squelch dissent, particularly among intellectuals, scholars, and feminists. When some scholars would not recant their academic positions, the Church moved for excommunication and disfellowshippment. There are three noteworthy females among the September Six: Lavina Fielding Anderson, author of *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Cultural and Historical Perspective*; Maxine Hanks, author of *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*; and Lynne Kanavel Whitesides who was disfellowshipped for advocating the idea of a "Mother in Heaven," in addition to "God the Father." These incidents connect to Oaks's idea that what the world needs is not more knowledge and scholarship, but rather, more righteousness and revelation.

¹⁶² "The Importance of the Priesthood," *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): 76, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁶³ "Women and the Priesthood," *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): 91, <http://www.lds.org/>. The passages I have referenced come specifically from a section titled "The Priesthood Benefits All Church Members." The passages draw from citations spoken by Joseph F. Smith and Brigham Young and are worth repeating in full here, as a way of emphasizing the long-held teachings about men, the priesthood, women, and families: "[The priesthood] is ... the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family" (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 139). The Lord has assigned to men the chief responsibility for the governing and presiding over the affairs of the Church and the family. They in turn are to use this sacred power to bless and benefit all members of the Church—men, women, and children. President Brigham Young said: "Priesthood is to be used for the benefit of the entire human family, for the upbuilding of men, women, and children alike. There is indeed no privileged class or sex within the true Church of Christ. ... Men have their work to do and their powers to exercise for the benefit of all the members of the Church. "So with woman: Her special gifts are to be exercised for the benefit and uplift of the race" (quoted by John A. Widtsoe, comp., in *Priesthood and Church Government*, rev. ed. [1954], 92–93).

¹⁶⁴ "Women and the Priesthood." *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A*, 91, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁶⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Scripture," <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁶⁶ See Introduction footnotes 4–8.

¹⁶⁷ "Script," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/>; "Scripted," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/>; "Scriptural," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/>; "Scripture," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/>.

¹⁶⁸ Kincaid, "Sunkissed," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 1.

¹⁶⁹ "Lesson 9: Chastity and Modesty," *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A*, 60. "Chapter 39: The Law of Chastity," *Gospel Principles*, 247. "Chastity, Law of." *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Ed. Daniel H. Ludlow. 4 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1: 265–66.

¹⁷⁰ John S. Tanner, "To Clothe a Temple." *Ensign*. August 1992: 44. (accessed online at lds.org)

¹⁷¹ "Lesson 9: Chastity and Modesty," *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): 60, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁷² “Lesson 9: Chastity and Modesty,” *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women, Part A*, 60, <http://www.lds.org/>; “Chapter 39: The Law of Chastity,” *Gospel Principles*, 247, <http://www.lds.org/>; “Chastity, Law of,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1: 265-66, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁷³ Kincaid, “Sunkissed,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 1.

¹⁷⁴ Anna Owencamp [pseudonym created by the author], “The Body,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 2.

¹⁷⁵ Marilyn Dean [pseudonym created by the author], “Bare Naked Lady,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 10. Marie Griffith talks about Mormon women and body-image issues in *Born Again Bodies*. R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 195-97.

¹⁷⁶ One example of the scriptural-prohibition against nudity comes from Mosiah 10:5: “And I did cause that the women should spin, and toil, and work, and work all manner of fine linen, yea, and cloth of every kind, that we might clothe our nakedness; and thus did we prosper in the land.” In this passage, not only must nakedness be covered, but the women make the clothes—and once the bodies are concealed, prosperity ensues.

¹⁷⁷ “Chapter 39: The Law of Chastity,” *Gospel Principles*, 247, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁷⁸ “Lesson 17: Preparing to Attend the Temple,” *Young Women Manual 3*, 60, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁷⁹ First Presidency Letter, 10 Oct 1988, qtd in “Lesson 6: Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple,” *Endowed from on High: Temple Preparation Seminar Teacher’s Manual*, 26, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁸⁰ Dawn Mason [pseudonym created by the author], Untitled, *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 7. It is worth noting that Mason herself was not present to read her monologue; instead, her mother-in-law read this piece, which describes her son’s awkward wedding night and sexual habits! This fact generated laughter—and admiration for the brave mother-in-law.

¹⁸¹ First Presidency Letter, 10 Oct 1988, qtd in “Lesson 6: Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple,” *Endowed from on High: Temple Preparation Seminar Teacher’s Manual*, 26, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁸² Trish Dixon [pseudonym created by the author], “Please, Please, Please,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 5.

¹⁸³ Susannah May [pseudonym created by the author], “The Glory of God is Pleasing Your Husband,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape one, monologue 12.

¹⁸⁴ First Presidency Letter, 10 Oct 1988, qtd in “Lesson 6: Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple,” *Endowed from on High: Temple Preparation Seminar Teacher’s Manual*, 26, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁸⁵ Dawn Mason [pseudonym created by the author], Untitled, *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 7.

¹⁸⁶ Sylvia Cabus, “From Victoria’s Secret to Beehive Clothing,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 8.

¹⁸⁷ Leigh Daly [pseudonym created by the author], “Balance,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 4.

¹⁸⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Marriage,” <http://www.lds.org/>. Eternal marriage is also described in Mormon scripture: “If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and

everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; . . . and if [they] abide in my covenant, . . . it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world" (D&C 132:19).

¹⁸⁹ Leigh Daly [pseudonym created by the author], "Balance," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 4.

¹⁹⁰ Trish Dixon [pseudonym created by the author], "Please, Please, Please," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 5.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² "Lesson 41: Sexual Purity," *Aaronic Priesthood Manual 1*, 147, <http://www.lds.org/>. "Sex is for procreation and expression of love. It is the destiny of men and women to join together to make eternal family units. In the context of lawful marriage, the intimacy of sexual relations is right and divinely approved. There is nothing unholy or degrading about sexuality in itself, for by that means men and women join in a process of creation and in an expression of love" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 311)

¹⁹³ Considering the wealth of information on LDS.org, it's also surprising what is *not* on the website. For instance, I found very few specifics about sexual intercourse, even within the confines of marriage. A search for "oral sex" yielded no hits. However, on January 5, 1982, President Spencer B. Kimball and the First Presidency issued a letter to "Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops, and Branch Presidents" (i.e. LDS men in authority) about the process of interviewing Church members to determine worthiness, suitability for mission work, or to administer a temple recommend. Within this letter is stated, "The First Presidency has interpreted oral sex as constituting an unnatural, impure, or unholy practice." Members must not receive a temple recommend unless unnatural, impure, or unholy practices are abolished. A copy of this letter is available at www.lds-mormon.com/worthy_letter.shtml; however, there is no evidence of this letter on the official LDS website.

For more information about Church confusion regarding oral sex, see Romel W. Mackelprang, "They Shall Be One Flesh: Sexuality and Contemporary Mormonism," *Multiply and Replenish: Mormon Essays on Sex and Family*, edited by Brent Corcoran (Signature Books: 1994), www.signaturebooks.com/multiply.htm. Mackelprang's article also examines the tension between Church teachings about sex and member practices, as well as the often uncomfortable problem of Church leaders asking personal questions about members' sex lives.

¹⁹⁴ Susannah May [pseudonym created by the author], "The Glory of God is Pleasing Your Husband," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 12. Recall that Carmell Hoopes-Clark emphasized the importance of a woman's sexual pleasure when publicizing UVSC's 2007 production of *The Vagina Monologues*. In addition, a cast member told me over e-mail, without prompting, "In my gender studies class, a student who is Mormon was describing a Mormon bridal shower . . . and how the women spoke of sex like it was something to just do for your husband, no enjoyment was expected. This blew me away and I understood a lot more of *The Vagina Monologues*."

¹⁹⁵ Janet Kincaid, Introduction to "The Glory of God is Pleasing Your Husband," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1. Note that before every monologue, Kincaid provided biographical information about the author, and often improvised remarks of her own.

¹⁹⁶ Anne-Michelle Saunders [pseudonym created by the author], "My Name is Sarah, and I Am," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 6.

¹⁹⁷ Robert D. Hales, "The Bishop," *New Era* (June 1986): 42, <http://www.lds.org/>.

¹⁹⁸ Recall issues raised by Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints* and the article "Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Case of Mormon Women" regarding bishops and priesthood authority. Women are told to go to their bishops with problems, sometimes in lieu of talking to law enforcement. What's more, it is difficult

for some women to talk to their bishops about sexual abuse—particularly if the perpetrator is a Church member holding priesthood authority.

¹⁹⁹ Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969). Kimball's book is one of the most popular and well-known in Mormonism. Many people have considered it an important work on forgiveness and grace, while others have criticized it as guilt-inducing and depressing.

²⁰⁰ Marion Roberts [pseudonym created by the author], "New Testament 101," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 3.

²⁰¹ Anonymous, "Coming of Age in America," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 11. The author of this monologue requested that Kincaid give her name as "Anonymous," and the monologue was read by someone other than the author.

²⁰² Recall the earlier discussion about sexual abuse in the Mormon Church, including the Utah Commission of Criminal and Juvenile Justice study, the article "Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," and Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints*, including the backlash and support for Beck's story. It is worth noting also the experiences of Catherine Lockhart [pseudonym created by the author], a contributor to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Born Joseph Lockhart, Catherine wrote one of two monologues by transgendered Latter-day Saints. Before her surgery, Lockhart was a husband, a father, and a ward bishop. Lockhart recalls an incident where, as bishop, he learned of another bishop who was sexually abusing his own wife and children. When the Church did not excommunicate this man, or remove his priesthood authority, Lockhart called the state authorities—and was thereafter shunned for turning in a fellow bishop. Later, after taking an unmarried young woman "in trouble" to Planned Parenthood, Lockhart was released as bishop.²⁰² These examples demonstrate the kinds of issues a bishop must handle and ways the Church exerts control upon bishop authority. In the first example, the Church tried to protect the abusive bishop at the expense of his wife and children. In the second, Lockhart was released for helping a young woman obtain an abortion. Lockhart's action certainly went against Church teaching, yet for him to be released while the other bishop, a sexual abuser, went unpunished offers an unsettling commentary on Church priorities. The message delivered here—while not officially sanctioned in Church publications or scripture—is one of female sexual inferiority as compared to male priesthood authority.

²⁰³ Anonymous, "Coming of Age in America," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 11.

²⁰⁴ M. Russell Ballard, "A Chance to Start Over: Church Disciplinary Councils and the Restoration of Blessings," *Ensign* (September 1990), 12, <http://www.lds.org/>.

²⁰⁵ Anne-Michelle Saunders [pseudonym created by the author], "My Name is Sarah, and I Am," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 6.

²⁰⁶ Catherine Lockhart [pseudonym created by the author], "Honorably Discharged," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 16. Lockhart was not present to read her monologue. Instead, her piece was read by Monique Sorenson [pseudonym created by the author], also a male-to-female transsexual, who wrote and reads the piece following Lockhart's.

²⁰⁷ Bruce R. McConkie, "The Salvation of Little Children," *Ensign* (April 1977), 3. Mortal birth is described as follows: "It is the process by which mature, sentient, intelligent beings pass from preexistence into a mortal sphere. It is the process by which we bring from premortality to mortality the traits and talents acquired and developed in our long years of spirit existence. It is the process by which a mortal body is created from the dust of the earth to house an eternal spirit offspring of the Father of us all. Mortality is fully upon us when we first breathe the breath of life." What's more, children are described as adults in Mormon teaching: "A child is an adult spirit in a newly born body, a body capable of growing and maturing according to the providences of Him whose spirit children we all are. Children are the sons and daughters of God. They lived and dwelt with him for ages and eons before their mortal birth. They are adults before birth; they are adults at death. Christ himself, the Firstborn of the Father, rose to a state of glory and exaltation before he was ever suckled at Mary's breast."

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- ²⁰⁸ Catherine Lockhart [pseudonym created by the author], “Honorably Discharged,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 16.
- ²⁰⁹ Monique Sorenson [pseudonym created by the author], “I Am a Transsexual,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 17.
- ²¹⁰ Janet Kincaid, Introduction to “I Am a Transsexual,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2.
- ²¹¹ Author not named, “Twaddle Recall,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 18.
- ²¹² Julie Bands-Smith [pseudonym created by the author], “On Marrying After One’s Youth,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 13.
- ²¹³ This unique spelling of Welker’s monologue, “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” is, of course, not something I could have gleaned from simply listening to *The Mormon Vagina Monologues*. Welker has helpfully provided me a hard copy of her monologue, and only thereby have I learned her title’s clever double-entendre.
- ²¹⁴ Janet Kincaid, Introduction to “I Was a Born-Again Virgin: Diary of a Mormon Vagina,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1.
- ²¹⁵ Anna Peters [pseudonym created by the author], “I Was a Born-Again Virgin: Diary of a Mormon Vagina,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tapes 1 and 2, monologue 14.
- ²¹⁶ Trish Dixon [pseudonym created by the author], “Please, Please, Please,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 5.
- ²¹⁷ Dawn Mason [pseudonym created by the author], Untitled, *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 7.
- ²¹⁸ Anonymous, “Coming of Age in America,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 11.
- ²¹⁹ Anna Peters [pseudonym created by the author], “I Was a Born-Again Virgin: Diary of a Mormon Vagina,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tapes 1 and 2, monologue 14.
- ²²⁰ Holly Welker, e-mail message to author, July 11, 2007.
- ²²¹ Holly Welker, “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 9.
- ²²² Ibid. Holly Welker, “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 9.
- ²²³ Ibid. Holly Welker, “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 9.
- ²²⁴ Ibid. Holly Welker, “B(e)aring my Sexual Testimony,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 9.
- ²²⁵ See Introduction note 24.
- ²²⁶ Janet Kincaid, “Introduction,” *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women’s Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1.

²²⁷ Mormons teaching states that, in premortal life, before birth, humans lived with God, the Heavenly Father, as well as a Heavenly Mother. However, the Church does not allow members from praying to the Heavenly Mother, and this issue has caused considerable debate. See Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* and Margaret and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*.

²²⁸ Anne-Michelle Saunders [pseudonym created by the author], "My Name is Sarah and I am," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 6.

²²⁹ Catherine Lockhart [pseudonym created by the author], "Honorably Discharged," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 16.

²³⁰ Monique Sorenson [pseudonym created by the author], "I am a Transsexual," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 2, monologue 17.

²³¹ Leigh Daly [pseudonym created by the author], "Balance," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality*, tape 1, monologue 4.

Postscript

²³² Eve Ensler, "What Happened to Peace?" <http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/vmoments/0610231>. I did not come across this message from Ensler until the final weeks of drafting this MA thesis. When I found it, I was elated that Ensler had articulated so beautifully what those of us who "do" theatre have often felt about our craft. What's more, the fact that she discusses the "sacred nature" of theatre makes me all the more encouraged about linking theatrical performance to religious faith.

²³³ Michelle Walker, "Vagina: not a dirty word," *College Times*, February 12, 2006.

²³⁴ Tiffany Knoell, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2007.

²³⁵ "Theories of Drama, Theatre, and Performance." in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2:1355-61; Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979).

²³⁶ Various *The Vagina Monologues* cast members, e-mail messages to author, December 2005 & June 2007; Carmell Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with the author, May 19, 2007; Janet Kincaid, e-mail messages to author, December 2005.

²³⁷ Hoopes-Clark, telephone conversation with author, May 19, 2007.

²³⁸ Janet Kincaid, "Introduction," *Sacred Spaces: Mormon Women's Faith and Sexuality* (Sunstone conference, Salt Lake City, UT, August 2001), tape 1.

²³⁹ Laura L. Vance, "Recent Studies of Mormon Women," *Nova Religio* 10, no. 4 (May 2007): 113-27.

²⁴⁰ Women who participated in the 2007 production of UVSC's *The Vagina Monologues* said that classmates, castmates, and even their own families and children inspired them to participate. Various *The Vagina Monologues* cast members, e-mail messages to author, December 2005 & June 2007.

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