

THE V-DAY MOVEMENT:
WOMEN ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES AGAINST VIOLENCE

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a qualitative examination of the experiences of women who participated in two V-Day initiatives. V-Day is a global organization that stages local initiatives aimed at organizing community members to raise money and awareness to fight violence against women in their communities. Half of the women participated in a college campaign in Northern California in 2007, while the other half participated in a community campaign in the same Northern California community in 2008. A total of twelve respondents participated in hour long, qualitative interviews where they were asked to describe their experiences working in the organization. The women's stories serve to illustrate and illuminate an analysis of the methods that the V-Day organization uses to successfully organize communities and the role of gender and emotions in V-Day organizing. Also discussed are a variety of concepts stemming from the two main themes that arose from the interviews. First, the concept of empowerment is discussed with consideration of the impact of the participants' involvement in V-Day on their self-perceptions, as well as their motivation to pursue further activism. Secondly, the concept of solidarity is discussed, with consideration of how V-Day organizing encourages a shared sense of womanhood and contributes to the development of new social networks in the communities that stage V-Day initiatives.

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PREFACE

This research project unofficially began over five years ago, in my experiences working for the V-Day organization as an activist organizing community members and university students in an effort to fight violence against women in my community. While I was raised in an area of California's Central Valley that was plagued by wide-spread gang violence, substance abuse, and poverty, I was fortunate enough to live in a home that, while surrounded by turmoil on the outside, was relatively quiet and safe inside. This strong upbringing gave me the foundation and the drive to address the social problems that surrounded me throughout my youth. Through my studies and research outside of school, I gradually became familiar with how pervasive and endemic the violence that people, specifically women, endured in their daily lives. I began searching for a vehicle to address this violence in my community and this is where I found the V-Day organization. As a student I connected with other women and men in my community and on my college campus who were working on this issue and for two years I led a group of men and women activists in V-Day initiatives, raising awareness and funds to address the violence in my community.

When deciding on a topic for my thesis, I had several in mind. My decision for researching V-Day and wanting to interview the women working in this organization was threefold. First, when searching for research on the V-Day organization in the academic literature I found very little representation of this wide-spread organization. The literature that was present, as reviewed later in this thesis, was mostly in the form of

critique. Scholars have argued, rightly so in my opinion, that the V-Day organization does not do justice in representing the diverse experiences of women in the United States. Although I feel that this critique is important, and the V-Day organization itself has used it as a catalyst to be more inclusive, I feel that the positive impact on women and communities should also be highlighted.

Secondly, in researching social movements and community organizing I found only a small, although growing, group of scholars who consider the role of gender and emotions in mobilization and organizing. I felt that the V-Day organization would be an excellent case study to explore the role of gender and emotions in community organizing and therefore would be a significant contribution to this field of study. Lastly, my own experiences working in the V-Day organization gave me a sense of personal and community empowerment that has permanently altered the way that I see the world and my place in it. I wanted to record the voices of other women who have experienced this transformation. My expectations were more than fulfilled. Sitting in living rooms, kitchens, and offices, speaking to students, public officials, businesswomen, and social workers, I was inspired and encouraged to hear stories of hope and perseverance. These stories were from ordinary women, taking time out of their busy lives to reach out to their communities and speak out against violence. I am grateful for this experience and for all of the men and women who work every day to make their communities a safer place to live.

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INTRODUCTION

In the dressing room in the back of the university theater, surrounded by ten smiling women clad in black evening wear, red feather boas swooped around our necks; I could hear the buzz of eager conversations coming from inside the packed theater. I gathered the women, all anxiously applying bright red lipstick and rouge to their faces. We circled closely together, as we had the two nights previously, and began our pre-show chant, shouting at the top of our lungs, “VAGINA! VAGINA! VAGINA!”

According to symbolic interactionists, the “meaning of any idea, moral, word, symbol, or object is pragmatically determined, or determined by its practical use” (Allan 2006:11). In the forward to the 2001 edition of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* Gloria Steinem writes,

I come from the ‘down there’ generation. That is, those words—spoken rarely and in a hushed voice—that the women in my family used to refer to female genitalia, internal or external. It wasn’t that they were ignorant of terms like *vagina*, *labia*, *vulva*, or *clitoris*. On the contrary, they were trained to be teachers and probably had more access to information than most. Nonetheless, I didn’t hear words that were accurate, much less prideful. Thus, whether I was learning to talk, to spell, or to take care of my own body, I was told the name of each of its amazing parts—except one unmentionable area. This left me unprotected against the shaming words and dirty jokes of the school yard and, later, against the popular belief that men, whether as lovers or physicians, knew more about women’s bodies than women did.

Symbolic interactionists also argue that “while meaning comes to be in the mind, it is produced and exists within pragmatically emergent social interactions—that which is in the mind is only a residue of these social interactions” (Allan 2006:11). I cannot

help but cringe when I consider how the meaning of the word vagina in people's minds has been shaped by years of interaction with family, physicians, teachers, partners, and preachers; many suggesting that the vagina, and in that women's sexualities and bodies, is something to be ashamed of, something unspeakable. What impact has this meaning had on the way women interact with others in society and the way they define themselves? With some consideration I think we can answer this question.

Historically, women have been hidden and silenced. Women have been kept inside the "private sphere" and prevented from fully developing their social selves and their abilities. As a result, historically the violence that many women have faced in their homes and their communities has been covered up and hidden. Violence against women for centuries was a not only a taboo topic, but in many cases a socially accepted part of life. Building off of the women's movement in the late sixties and the pioneering efforts of women who demanded that violence against women be recognized as unacceptable and that social institutions use their resources to fight violence in their communities, the V-Day organization has spent the last 10 years organizing women in communities to become leaders and a force for change.

The V-Day Organization

According to its founder, Eve Ensler, "V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls" (2001:3). She also writes that, "V-Day is a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalize the spirit of existing anti-violence organizations. V-Day generates broader attention for the fight to

stop violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual slavery” (Ensler 2001:4). Through V-Day campaigns, each year local volunteers and college students produce benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues* to raise awareness and funds for anti-violence groups within their own communities. In 2008, more than 3,700 V-Day benefit events took place by volunteer activists in the U.S. and around the world, educating millions of people about the reality of violence against women and girls (Ensler 2008).

According to their website, “The V-Day movement is growing at a rapid pace throughout the world, in 120 countries from Europe to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, and all of North America. V-Day, a non-profit corporation, distributes funds to grassroots, national and international organizations and programs that work to stop violence against women and girls” (Ensler 2008). In its first year of incorporation (2001), V-Day was named one of *Worth Magazine's* “100 Best Charities.” In nine years, the V-Day movement has raised more than 50 million dollars. The 'V' in V-Day stands for Victory, Valentine and Vagina (Ensler 2008).

The V-Day organization was formed in 1997 by Eve Ensler, with the help of activists from Feminist.com. In 1999 the V-Day organization established the college initiative, “which gave permission for universities and colleges to perform *The Vagina Monologues* and use the proceeds to stop violence against women and children in their communities as long as they followed organizational guidelines” (Reger and Story 2005). Importantly, Reger and Story (2005) point out that “*The Vagina Monologues* has spread on university campuses at a time when there is some ambiguity over the state of

contemporary feminism. In the media, 'post'-feminism has been declared and young women and men are portrayed as rejecting feminist ideas. Scholars and activists argue that feminism is not dead but has reemerged in a third wave different from previous feminist generations" (p. 140).

The Structure of this Study

In this study I address several questions surrounding the V-Day organization and the women who organize communities through this organization. These questions were developed during, in between, and after my interviews with women involved in the V-Day organization. I began this study as an exploratory study seeking to identify and describe the experiences of the women who volunteer to work in V-Day initiatives. After interviewing these women, several themes appeared. First, almost all of the women in my study mentioned feeling empowered by their participation. This empowerment came in several forms ranging from an increased self-confidence to a renewed sense of personal sexuality. Secondly, almost all of the women mentioned developing some sense of solidarity. This solidarity translated to new social networks and friendships as well as a stronger shared sense of womanhood. In my discussion of the findings of this study below I describe these main themes and the many facets of these two central themes.

After discussing the main themes that came from my interviews I consider several important theoretical concerns. I use the words of the women who have worked in the V-Day organization to add meaning and depth to my theoretical analysis. First, I consider why women get involved in the V-Day organization and explore what has contributed to

its success in mobilizing communities against violence. Secondly, after reviewing literature that recognizes the role of gender in community organizing I examine if and how gender plays a role in the form that the V-Day organization takes and how it mobilizes people. In the literature review I place the V-Day organization in the context of women's organizing historically, as it is important to acknowledge the work that has been done leading up to the establishment of the V-Day organization in order to have a better understanding of what has made an organization like this possible and successful. I analyze the way that V-Day organizes women on college campuses and in communities by taking into account theories put forth by scholars studying the gendered aspect of community organizing (Stall and Stoecker 1998; Thomas 1999). Some scholars writing in the field of social movements argue that the traditional ways of community organizing have been distinctly patriarchal and they contend that there is a manifestly female gendered style of organizing (Stall and Stoecker 1998). I consider the ways that V-Day is representative of this "woman-centered" style of organizing.

Additionally, it is important to consider what has made the V-Day organization so successful in organizing women across the globe to work against violence in their communities. Author Verta Taylor (1995), among others, has argued that emotions play a huge role in motivating actors in social movements. Cheryl Hercus (1999) identifies anger as having a significant role in unifying women to act in their communities, especially in the case of survivors of violence doing anti-violence work. I argue that V-Day has been very successful in using emotions to motivate and unify women. I consider the role that emotions play in mobilizing women activists, leaders and community

members and how the V-Day organization uses emotions in their events. A significant concept that came from the larger subject of emotions is the concept of emotion work. In this study I consider the types of emotion work that the V-Day activists engage in as a result of their involvement with the organization. Finally, in my conclusion I will briefly consider the significance of my findings in the current political and academic climates, while responding to the current literature on the V-Day organization and recommending future considerations for research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

I begin this literature review by relating the work that other scholars have written on the V-Day organization. This work takes a mostly critical tone, analyzing the cultural representation of women and violence in the V-Day organization's main fundraiser, *The Vagina Monologues*. I also describe the single comparative study of the experiences of women involved in the V-Day organization as well as a piece that critiques the role the V-Day organization played in a march in Juarez, Mexico several years ago. Next, I place the V-Day organization in the context of women organizing historically in the Civil Rights movement and the women's movement of the 1960s. I describe the development of feminist organizing and the onset of the "third wave" of feminism that the V-Day organization is part of. I also discuss the history of the battered women's movement leading up to the development of the V-Day organization. Next, I consider the literature on gender and community organizing in order to inform my analysis of the way that V-Day effectively organizes communities and the structure that the organization takes. I also review the literature on the role of emotions in social movement organizing including the concepts of "emotion cultures" and "emotion work".

The V-Day Movement Literature

In this section I will review the small but growing body of scholarly literature on the V-Day Organization and the organization's main fundraiser and consciousness raiser,

the play *The Vagina Monologues*. The bulk of literature that has been published on V-Day takes a critical tone, although this critique is often couched in an acknowledgement of the power and accomplishments of the organization. Although The V-Day Organization has seen much mainstream media exposure from Marie Claire Magazine features to a spot this year (2008) on The Today Show, my focus in this review will be on the literature published in scholarly journals and texts. Again, in my conclusion to this thesis I will respond to the V-Day literature and consider the significance of my findings in the context of the literature on V-Day and *The Vagina Monologues*.

As mentioned above, most of the literature on V-Day is critical and speaks specifically to the major fundraising event produced each year, the play *The Vagina Monologues*. For example, in an article published in 2005 titled “Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*” author Kim Hall compares *The Vagina Monologues* with some examples from feminist body art and the feminist health movement and argues that in order to avoid reproducing structures of oppression, feminist attempts to reclaim the female body will have to adopt a strategy that recognizes the place of women in the political and social structure while not seeing this as bound to a natural foundation. Hall argues that V-Day perpetuates heterosexism and ableism. In her critique, Hall describes a challenge to V-Day by the Intersex Society of North America on the grounds that it did not include violence against the inter-sexed in its definition. In response to this challenge V-Day began providing literature from the Intersex Society of North America during the performances and suggesting that organizers could donate to this organization.

Many feminists have argued that one needs the category of woman in order to

make women's oppression visible, "The categories *woman* and *vagina* enable feminists to name the bad things that happen to those whose are perceived as woman and that which is perceived as a vagina" (Hall 2005:114). Ultimately, Hall argues that an "effective feminist politics of disidentification would have to recognize how women are positioned as women in a patriarchal society while simultaneously striving to reveal the fiction of the identity 'woman'" (2007:115). This article places *The Vagina Monologues* in the context of other feminist art and considers the debate around seeing "woman" as a universal identity.

In an article titled "The 'V-Day' March in Mexico: Appropriation and Misuse of Local Women's Activism" published in 2005 author Clara Eugenia Rojas describes the ways that local women's activism against the murders of women in Juarez Mexico has been appropriated by local nongovernmental organizations, as well as national and international organizations, such as V-Day. Rojas is a feminist writer and activist living in Juarez, Mexico. Rojas explains that in the first five years that followed initial discoveries of the murdered women in Juarez local women activists fought to get the attention of the local authorities who did little to pursue justice for the victims' families. In addition, local authorities attempted to delegitimize both the plights of the victims' families as well as the work of local women activists. Rojas argues that some local women appropriated and misused the stories of the victims.

Later when V-Day decided to stage a march, too little too late according to Rojas, these local women partnered with the V-Day organization. Rojas describes the tension that she and other local women activists felt in wanting to be supportive of the efforts of

international activists while still acknowledging that those activists, along with other local women, were, intentionally or not, appropriating the victims' bodies and the families' suffering to forward their political personas. This article raises important concerns about the delicate nature of coalition building and the risk of appropriating the stories and cultures of women in other countries while attempting to reach out beyond white-middle class feminists. Rojas acknowledges that the attempts of the V-Day organization to spotlight the murders of women in Juarez were well-intended, while also pointing out that in the process some local women activists felt silenced and cut out of the protests. This article presses activists in the V-Day and other organizations to carefully consider their methods and the possible outcomes of their protests, regardless of their intentions.

In an article titled "The Vagina Monologues: Not So Radical After All?" published in 2002 author Roxanne Friedenfels critiques the content of the play *The Vagina Monologues* after viewing a performance at a local university. The author critiques the play on several levels. First, Friedenfels argues that the title and major themes in the play cater to dominant notions that female pleasure emanates from the vagina, instead of the clitoris. I have to disagree with the author on this point. I believe the title and main theme of the play is intended to incorporate a wide range of issues associated with women's vaginas, not just pleasure. Additionally, the play's author, Eve Ensler, gives due attention to the clitoris as the locus of female pleasure. Friedenfels also critiques the play on cultural terms, arguing that Ensler's critique of women wearing the *burqa* in Afghanistan is ethnocentric. Friedenfels asserts that the play's content is ageist,

and argues that Ensler's depiction of prostitution ignores the harsh realities of the often poor and drug addicted women doing sex work. Friedenfels ends her critique by placing Ensler's work in the context of what she calls a "sex liberal" contemporary women's movement. Overall, this article touched on many of the critiques of V-Day and "The Vagina Monologues" that have surfaced as the organization has become more mainstream. Again, the arguments that this author makes press V-Day and other activists to evaluate their protests and actions on a multi-cultural level and to consider the many possible interpretations of their intentions.

In an article written by Christine Cooper, published in the journal *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in 2007, the author builds on previous criticisms of *The Vagina Monologues* such as Hall's and Rojas' above. Cooper is critical of the monologue form and the singularity of voice. She argues that, "in both their form and their content, the monologues reduce their speakers to the version of the same, whatever the patina of diversity adorning their surface" (Cooper 2007:729). She asks "what are the implications of the play's mono-logic (critique silenced, dialogue disabled) for a new or reviving feminist movement?" (Cooper 2007:729).

Cooper does not want to disregard the appeal of the play or any viewer's shift of consciousness because of it, nor does she comment on the individual experiences that fed into the monologues. "*The Vagina Monologues*' collapsing of self and vagina, however energizing and entertaining the gesture, carries the ideological baggage of this essentialist history. Reversing a binary, privileging what was previously denigrated, does not free us from epistemological underpinnings" (Cooper 2007:734). Cooper places the play in the

context of the “second wave” of feminism that Ensler is rooted in. According to the author this “reformist and cultural” brand of feminism moved away from social transformation—economic and racial as well as patriarchal—to embrace “a cult of the individual liberated woman” (Cooper 2007:734).

Cooper mentions that Wollstonecraft and later de Beauvoir attempted to argue that women were “human creatures” and part of arguing for education reform and the like was pointing out that women were merely products of a patriarchal society and that given a different socialization women would be different beings—what was known as feminine or womanly was a result of acculturation. “Ensler’s essentialism dissuades consideration of contradictions and constraints—in the play, its mono-logic vagina-selves, or its anti-violence mission” (Cooper 2007:735). Cooper also speaks to the ways in which race plays out in *The Vagina Monologues*, noting that the only women who are raped in the play are women of color. A major criticism is that the show gives young feminists a way to be involved without really being involved ala marketplace activism. The author notes that the voices of activists and their responses to the play are not present on V-Day’s website and that quotes from women involved do not mention the anti-violence theme.

Finally, the only V-Day case study published to date is by Jo Reger and Lacey Story (2005). In the article, titled “Talking about my Vagina: Two College Campuses and *The Vagina Monologues*” the authors describe the impact of *The Vagina Monologues* on feminist organizing in two geographically and ideologically distinct college campuses. The first case study, “Woodview”, is located in the Midwest and is a relatively large, public university with a newly formed Gender Studies department and feminist club on

campus. The second case study, “Evers”, is an urban, all female university on the east coast that has a strong feminist presence in its curricula, but relatively little overtly feminist student organizing. The authors use “political generation” theory to describe the impact of the play, and the organizing surrounding the production, on young women at each university. According to Karl Mannheim, a political generation occurs when, “common and historical experiences during one’s youth produce a common frame of reference from which individuals of similar ages would view their later political experiences” (Reger and Story 2005:144). The authors argue that at Woodview through performing *The Vagina Monologues* the women experience a “political awakening” that has two features: reclaiming language and sexuality, and fostering a feminist community. They use the Evers case study to explore criticisms of *The Vagina Monologues* that have been present in the previously published literature that I have reviewed above. The authors posit that criticisms take two general directions. First, there are criticisms that the material performed is offensive, or goes “too far”. The second common criticism is that the play does not go far enough in including and representing diverse voices such as the transgender community, lesbians, and women of color and also that it uses the vagina to bring in an essentialist argument that ignores the differences among women. The authors conclude that, “young women (and men) are doing feminism, but not in exactly the same manner in every locale. Instead, environment, community, and culture provide a context that shapes the experiences which in turn create new political generations. For scholars of the women’s movement, this study reveals the difficulty of describing any of the “waves” of feminism in absolute terms” (Reger and Story 2005:158). I will respond to

these claims as well as the claims from other authors mentioned above in my conclusion. Having described the context of my findings by reviewing the literature on V-Day and *The Vagina Monologues* that is present to date, I will further expand on the context leading up to and surrounding the work of the V-Day organization by reviewing the development of women organizing their communities in the Civil Rights and women's movement.

Women Organizing

Prior to the mainstream women's movement in the 1960's, most commonly referred to as the "second wave", women can be seen advocating for social justice and organizing community members for social change. Stall and Stoecker (1998) argue that women have been organizing their communities through "private sphere" activities throughout the history of social movements in the United States. They, along with other authors (see Krauss 1994, Crenshaw 1991) contend that although men have traditionally taken public leadership roles in social movements, women have organized their communities and connected movement participants through family, church, and other more private ties. They argue that without this community base the social movements would not have been successful. For example Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (1994) in her article on African American women in the Civil Rights movement describes the community work that the women performed to combat racism and empower their communities to survive, grow, and advance in a hostile society (p. 454). Gilkes argues that the diverse and all encompassing scope of community work that the women perform

is evidence of the overwhelmingly complex and pervasive issues surrounding racism in these communities. Gilkes also posits that if it wasn't for the women in African American communities there would be no churches or community organizations. Gilkes identifies African American women as being the backbone of positive social change within African American communities.

Ferree and Hess (2000) contend that the Civil Rights movement of the 60s provided a model "of moral protest and effective change that inspired women to seek full equality for themselves" (p. 54). They also see the Civil Rights movement as a place where women activists acquired valuable resources such as "a sense of personal power, of taking on a difficult task and making things happen" and becoming skilled in organizing "people and events, and in using effective tactics for implementing change and manipulating the media: civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, passive resistance, community organizing, law suits, and the mimeograph machine and press release" (Ferree and Hess 2000:54). However, both African American and white women activists realized while working in the Civil Rights movement that they would have to have a movement of their own to fight for gender equality. African American women were kept from public leadership roles in the Civil Rights movement and they faced gender discrimination continually from male ministers and organizers (Robnett 1996).

Ferree and Hess (2000) draw on a large body of social movement literature to suggest that there are four factors that contributed to the development of the second wave women's movement: grievances, collective identity, organization, and opportunity. First, they argue that women had to be fed up with the current situation and also to feel that

there was something worth fighting for. Women had to acknowledge the unfair situation that they were in and they also had to see a vision of what could be if they decided to pursue a struggle. Secondly, women had to develop a “group consciousness” in order to work together in the movement. For the privileged upper and middle class women this proved to be more difficult as they were not interested in sharing poor women’s stigma. Women were also separated in society based on race and class so it was difficult to make connections across these lines. Women organizers were faced with actively encouraging a collective identity and promoting a platform that women would come together to support. Third, women needed organization in order to gain momentum and push people into action. The authors see organizations as the combination of social networks and resources. They argue that women used existing ties to form new organizations for the women’s movement, as in the case of women labor union workers using union resources and social networks to create the National Organization for Women (Ferree and Hess 2000:30). Lastly, the authors argue that in the 60s women saw the opportunity for change within the existing social structures.

Third Wave Feminism. Most scholars place the beginning of the “third wave” of feminism in the early 1990s, although women from the second wave such as bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldua began writing on issues in the 1980s that would become the basis for the third wave later on (Freedman 2003). The third wave is commonly seen as a response to some of the failures of the second wave of feminism. Central to the third wave are issues of race and class as many third wave feminists criticized the “essentialist” definitions of femininity that the second wave espoused as being based in

the experiences of middle-class white women (Henry 2003). The third wave also saw an uprising of young women's activism seen in many third wave organizations as well as sub-movements such as the riotrrrl movement. The V-Day organization is seen as a third wave organization, although as I have mentioned previously, they share criticisms with many of the ideas put forth in the second wave.

The Battered Women's Movement. It is also important to consider the activities of the battered women's movement to have an understanding of the environment that produced V-Day. Author Claire Reinelt (1995) describes the beginnings of the battered women's movement, which came out of the activities of the larger women's movement:

During the 1970s and 1980s, shelters for battered women formed all across the country. They had diverse organizational beginnings. Some were neighborhood-based (for example, Casa Myrna Vasquez in Boston). Others emerged from consciousness raising groups (such as Women's Advocates in St. Paul, Minnesota). Still others were organized by formerly battered women (Boston's Transition House). In some locations women's centers became de facto shelters, as did the Women's Center South in Pittsburgh (Schechter 1982), or shelters were integrated into existing treatment programs (Johnson 1981). Many of the early organizational efforts were grassroots; many of them were also feminist, although this was not always the term that women used to describe themselves. (P. 87)

Importantly, Reinelt notes that in the 1980s there was a rapid increase in battered women's shelters because "large amounts of money from local governments and foundations were made readily available to shelters" (p. 86). With the funding for shelters starting to come from government sources, the battered women's movement began to feel some of the tensions that the larger women's movement faced. Reinelt deals with a common philosophical debate among feminist activists; whether we should work in separate autonomous organizations or work with the state institutions. Radical

feminists argue that in order for an organization to be truly feminist it must be free from the institutional constraints of the state. Liberal feminists argue that it is necessary to work with the state in order to change state policies for the better. It is important to note that V-Day's main agenda is to raise money for local shelters and anti-violence organizations through community events. By doing so I would argue that V-Day is attempting to put funding back into the hands of community members and activists and thereby decreasing the role that the state has in determining the role of the shelters. Having reviewed the history of the movements that lead up to and surround the V-Day organization, I will now consider the literature that informs my theoretical analysis of the organizational structure of the V-Day organization and its mobilization efforts.

Gender and Organizational Structure

In her research on women's organizations, Jan E. Thomas (1999) describes three main ideological issues that feminist organizations face. First, feminist organizations deal with the importance of maintaining a system of equal power distribution. Secondly, they deal with the importance of growth versus autonomy, and lastly, they must address the importance of feminism as an organizational outcome or process. In considering these issues Thomas outlines three ideal types that she derives from her research of 14 women's health centers. The first type, "Feminist Bureaucracies" are seen as moving toward a hierarchical power and decision making structure, focusing on empowerment as an outcome not an internal process, and focusing on growth of the organization rather than a commitment to the equitable distribution of power. The second type,

“Participatory Bureaucracies”, gave equal weight to growth and equitable internal power and decision making. The administrators worked through a system of “democratic management” whereby the workers’ input was considered in the decisions that were made. In this structure, the author points out, day to day decisions were made quickly, while critical decisions were made slowly with input and discussion as a whole. The third ideal type, “Collectivist Democracies”, emphasize democratic methods of control rather than a particularized organizational structure. They “viewed hierarchy as ideologically inconsistent with feminism” (Thomas 1999:116).

In their article on gender and community organizing authors Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) compare two distinct approaches to community organizing. First, they describe a popular approach put forth by Saul Alinsky, the “Alinsky Model”. According to the authors, this model “begins with ‘community organizing’—the public sphere battles between the haves and have-nots” (Stall and Stoecker 1998:733). They compare this approach to what they refer to as a “women-centered” model—building expanded private sphere relationships and empowering individuals through those relationships. The authors do mention that in reality approaches to community organizing may not exclusively follow one distinct approach. “Women centered organizing also often requires bridging a gap between the community’s needs and its resources, mobilizing to demand necessary state resources and/or to engage in institutional transformation. Within this type of organizing there is an emphasis on community building, collectivism, caring, mutual respect, and self-transformation” (Stall and Stoecker 1998:733). Importantly, the authors trace the “woman-centered model” to

two sources: first, the organizing of African American women in the home and neighborhood and secondly, to the neighborhood work of working class white women through neighborhood associations. “Women centered organizers view justice not as a compromise between self-interested individuals but as a practical reciprocity in the network of relationships that make up the community” (Stall and Stoecker 1998:739).

In Stall and Stoecker’s (1998) description of a “women-centered” model of community organizing they argue that “within the woman-centered model, the maintenance and development of personal connections with others that provide a safe environment for people to develop, change and growth are more immediately important than conflict to gain institutional power” (p. 740). Cheryl Hercus (1999), in her work on feminist organizing, suggests that spending time with other feminists, such as the feminist organizing conference where she interviewed the women in her research, is a way to recharge spent emotion and to gain strength through spending time with like-minded women. Gretchen Arnold (1995) contends that “organizational issues concerning structure and process have been both a locus for innovation and a source of dilemmas for the contemporary women’s movement. Whether at the broader level of movement structure—such as in networks and coalitions of various movement actors—or at the level of individual organizations, feminists have been concerned with the form they give their organizations” (p.276). Arnold, adding to the authors mentioned earlier, argues that the way that women organize is representative of the ideology of the organization.

The Role of Emotions in Organizing

In the last decade the field of social movement theory has seen an influx of writing on the ways that emotions work in social movements. Scholars writing in this area claim that in a response to the notions of social movements being a collection of irrational actors that were dominant in the 50s and 60s, social movement theorists adopted a rational choice analysis. This was exemplified by the popularity of resource mobilization theory. However, as Cheryl Hercus (1999) claims, “By emphasizing instrumental rationality, resource mobilization theory perpetuated a false dichotomy between reason and emotion, which has been extensively criticized by feminist scholars both inside and outside of the social movements field” (p. 34; See also Marx Ferree 1992; Jay 1991; Taylor 1995; Thiele 1986). Several new approaches to the study of social movements, including new social movements theory and social constructionism, emphasize “meaning, identity, and cultural production in collective action” (Hercus 1999:35).

Author Verta Taylor (1995) joins Hercus (1999) and others in calling for the inclusion of emotions into the study of social movements. Taylor writes that, “Feminist scholars have been among the most vocal critics of the “rationalist” or cognitive bias in Western thinking that privileges rational, independent, self-interested action over action that is driven by emotion, undertaken collectively, and motivated by altruism or the desire to affirm the group. Women have generally been deemed—even if largely as a result of gender stratification—more emotional, subjective, and relational than men. Feminist theorists contend that the separation of passion and reason serves not only to dichotomize

thought and feeling but to elevate what has come to be called ‘abstract masculinity’ over women’s standpoint” (Taylor 1995:227). These authors have specifically focused on organizing in the women’s movement and emphasized the important role of anger in mobilization and framing, but examples outside of the women’s movement, such as Deborah Gould’s (1994) work on the role of emotions in AIDS activism, do exist and as the literature builds, more social movement analyses include the consideration of emotions in activism.

Also important in my analysis of emotion in the work of the V-Day organization is the consideration of what Hochschild (1979) terms “emotion cultures”. These emotion cultures work to “channel women’s fear, shame, and depression into feelings conducive to protest and activism rather than resignation and withdrawal” (Taylor 1995:229). In her discussion of the emotion cultures that grew out of the activities of the women’s movement Verta Taylor also mentions the significant role of “rituals”. She contends that:

At demonstrations, marches, and cultural activities such as concerts, films, poetry readings, exhibitions, plays, conferences, and music festivals, ritual evokes and channels women’s emotions, dramatizes inequality and injustice, and emphasizes the connection between women’s individual experiences and their disadvantaged status as a group. For example, songs and poems use vivid and moving terms to describe homeless women, or lesbians incarcerated in mental institutions, or victims of battering and incest, or women activists from third world countries who have been persecuted for their resistance. Slogans such as ‘No woman is free until all women are free’ express anger and remind listeners of their continuing subordination as women. Speak outs by women who have had illegal abortions or been raped or suffered forced sterilization, poetry readings by incest survivors, testimonies from recovering alcoholics all reframe feelings of shame over past events into pride over having survived such ordeals. (P. 229-30)

Cheryl Hercus (1999) also emphasizes the important role that these environments have in nurturing activism. She finds that the women activists in her research “received an emotional boost from participating in feminist events” and that “for most participants, these events affirmed feminist identity, provided strength for continuing the feminist struggle, and served as an outlet for the expression of deviant emotions” (Hercus 1999:48). She also writes that “participating in protest or workshops with like-minded women served as a welcome relief from the emotion management required in non-feminist settings. Interviewees talked about having their views confirmed, clarified, and strengthened through involvement in feminist events and of coming away from these replenished, renewed, and energized” (Hercus 1999:49).

Although the literature on social movements is overwhelmingly huge and varied, and there are many perspectives not mentioned above that would be useful in an analysis of a social movement organization such as V-Day, I chose the scholars and perspectives above in order to address several specific theoretical questions. These questions address the distinct style of organizing as well as the unique organizational structure of the V-Day organization. The V-Day organization represents a feminist organizational structure that begs the question, how and why is this structure significantly different from the structures of other social movement organizations? The V-Day organization stages emotion-laden events in order to mobilize and inform communities. In my discussion I consider the impact of emotions of V-Day mobilization and how this analysis contributes to the growing emphasis on culture and emotions in social movement studies.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

For this project I interviewed two groups of women. The first group was comprised of six women who participated in a V-Day college campaign, which included a fundraising performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, in the winter of 2007 on a college campus in Northern California. The second group was comprised of six women who participated in a community production of *The Vagina Monologues* in the same Northern California community in 2008. All of the women in the first group were white, with five out of the six attending college at the time of the campaign. In the second group there was one woman who identified as white, two women who identified themselves as Chicana, one woman who identified herself as Portuguese, and one woman who identified herself as Portuguese and Greek. Two of the six women in the second group were attending college at the time of the interviews. Participants' ages in the first group ranged from twenty to twenty-eight. Participants' ages in the second group ranged from twenty to forty-eight. In order to access the first group and solicit interviews I contacted the organizer of a V-Day college campaign in Northern California in 2007. After speaking with the organizer, I obtained permission to approach the whole group during meetings prior to the fund raising performances of *The Vagina Monologues*. I spent time with various participants during rehearsals and meetings, discussing my research interests in an attempt to solicit possible respondents. Later, I contacted members of the group and asked if they might be willing to be interviewed for this project. A total of six women

agreed to be interviewed. For the second group in the 2008 production I contacted the director of the fundraising production of *The Vagina Monologues* via email and was able to send an email invitation to the rest of the cast through the director. A total of six women agreed to be interviewed from the 2008 production.

Data Collection

In their text on qualitative data techniques Lofland and Lofland speak of “starting where you are”, meaning that a researcher’s personal experiences can inspire interest in a research topic, while also possibly helping them gain access to the population they wish to study (2006:10). They argue that both of these combined become the “starting point for meaningful naturalistic inquiry” (Lofland and Lofland 2006:10). I believe that my past experiences give great insight into this current research project and also that my personal history is relevant to the story of the lives that I am representing in my research. I know that I came to my current interests through a myriad of different life experiences and observations and that some of these experiences will create a context for, and enrich the reporting of my findings for this study. With this in mind, this project draws on my participation in the V-Day movement from 2004-2006. During this period I participated in various roles that included directing the fundraising production of *The Vagina Monologues*, organizing on-campus activities with the purpose of educating students and the community about violence against women, coordinating with local domestic violence shelters, as well as performing extensive fund raising and promotion work. It was my

experience in the movement in the past that led me to my current exploration of V-Day activists' experiences.

For this study I employed what Lofland and Lofland refer to as *intensive interviewing* (2006). Intensive interviewing, according to the authors, includes “ordinary conversation and listening as it occurs naturally during the course of social interaction” as well as “semi-structured interviewing involving the use of an interview guide consisting of a list of open ended questions that direct the conversation without forcing the interviewee to select preestablished responses ” (Lofland and Lofland 2006:17). One of my goals for this project was to get a sense of the activists' experiences as defined by them as a way to compare their experiences to my own as well as develop themes and ideas for further research of this population, while also collecting data for my current project. Accordingly, Lofland and Lofland argue that the goal of intensive interviewing is to “elicit rich, detailed material that can be used in qualitative analysis” (2006:17). In light of this, the use of intensive interviewing was the most appropriate method for my research goals.

Author Kathy Charmaz, when describing a “grounded theory” approach to interviewing argues that “qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight” (2002:676). In attempting to embark on an in-depth exploration from the grounded theory approach, I began my investigation by outlining themes and concepts about V-Day activists' experiences, drawing from my own personal experiences working in the organization. I then drafted questions, consulted

with colleagues, and revised my interview guide. In addition to my original interview guide, I followed Charmaz' notion that interviewing is a "flexible, emergent technique" and therefore adjusted questions, and included new questions based on emerging themes, as I continued with my interviews (2002:676). I also made an effort to recognize emerging themes during the interviews and pursued these themes as the interviews were taking place. Having a year between interviewing each group gave me time to develop my interview guide even more and adjust the questions so that the second group of interviews included more questions that were developed from themes that came out of the first group of interviews.

The in-depth interviews were comprised of open-ended questions and were conducted in a private setting on the university campus. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, were digitally recorded, and then transcribed shortly thereafter. I began the interviews by inquiring about the respondents' involvement in V-Day, whether they had been involved in the past, and also how they were currently involved. I asked the respondents to recount what it had been like participating in the V-Day campaign, what emotions they went through and how it affected their relationships with other people. I also asked them how they talked about their experiences to friends, family, and strangers, and finally how they saw their participation in the campaign effecting their lives in the future. In the second set of interviews I added questions that asked the participants more directly why they thought women got involved in *The Vagina Monologues* as well as how they thought the V-Day organization and *The Vagina Monologues* productions impacted the larger community.

Data Analysis

In addition to using a grounded theory approach when interviewing, I also utilized data analysis methods from this approach (Charmaz 2002). Charmaz points out that grounded theorists begin analysis as soon as they have their first piece of data. This method gives the researcher the ability to “take control of their data analysis” by maintaining more “analytic control” over the data (Charmaz 2002:676). After transcribing each interview, I reviewed the transcript for themes and missed concepts. I was able to refine my questions and develop additional questions by using this approach.

In her writings on grounded theory, Charmaz explains that grounded theorists usually associate with one of two approaches: “constructivist” or “objectivist”. For this study I adopted a constructivist approach, this meaning that I saw my research with the women in the V-Day movement as a shared experience between the interviewer and the interviewee. Charmaz argues that “constructivists construct meanings and actions” from as close to the perspective of the interviewee as possible (2002:677). The objectivist, on the other hand, sees the data as representing facts about a knowable world. Unlike the constructivist approach, the objectivist sees the researcher as remaining separate and distant from the participants. From the objectivist perspective the researcher is an outside authority there to produce an analysis of the participants’ reality (2002:677). I thought it quite imperative to my research efforts that I attempt to make the interviewing experience one of shared experiences between the interviewee and myself. I also found it essential that as I was analyzing the data I make every effort to construct my findings from the perspectives of the women that I interviewed. As Charmaz advises, I made it a point to

shape my definitions of “terms, situations, and events” by careful consideration of the V-Day participant's words and by doing so attempted to “tap the participant's assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules” (2002:681). I also made it a point to recognize my own assumptions and how these played into my data analysis.

Staying true to the grounded theory approach, my analysis occurred in two stages (Charmaz 2002). First, I performed open coding where I explored all of the concepts in the data and gave each theme a name. When I had done initial coding on all of the data I went back and began focusing my concepts by sorting all of the free floating concepts into larger categories while noting which concepts appeared most frequently within and among all of the interviews (Charmaz 2002:684).

Confidentiality and Management of Risks

Before any interviews took place a research proposal was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This proposal outlined how I would adhere to the ethical standards of my discipline and the university while conducting my research. Within this proposal was a description of the perceived risks and benefits to the women in my study. The only risk to participants that I foresaw was a possibility of some discomfort due to the personal and sensitive nature of the some of the questions being asked. To prepare for this possibility I developed a list of resources, such as the university counseling center, that I could give to the respondent if she seemed emotionally distraught or upset during the interview. While considering possible risks to the participant, I also determined that participants would possibly find great benefit in

having the opportunity to reflect on their involvement in the V-Day movement through participating in this study. In fact, several women mentioned at the end of the interview that they appreciated having the opportunity to talk about their experiences and reflect on them. It was also important in adhering to ethical procedures that I establish how I would maintain the confidentiality of the women involved in the study. In order to maintain confidentiality all of the interviews were transcribed soon after the interviews took place and the recordings were then destroyed. During transcription all identifying information that could link the participant to the transcript was removed.

Limitations

The first group of interviews was done within the time frame of a semester long methods course. Due to the time constraints that are almost always present when conducting research to fulfill a course requirement, some of the grounded theory methods were not fully utilized as I would have liked. If given more time I would have planned more time between the interviews to reflect on the themes emerging from the data and to consider how I might adapt my interview guide to elicit richer responses from the remaining interviewees. I would have also liked to have had the opportunity to conduct multiple interviews with each woman so as to follow up on missed concepts or underdeveloped perspectives found while reviewing the transcripts, but again due to constraints that arise from a limited timeframe to complete the requirements for this graduate program, I was restricted in my ability to reconnect with the activists. Also, although I believe that a critical analysis of race and class differences and variations in V-

Day activists' experiences is an important area for future research, given the small sample size I was not comfortable making claims about race and class based on the results of this study. Also due to the small sample size, I was not comfortable grouping activists based on the year that I interviewed them and making claims based on these two groups.

Therefore all of the women's responses, regardless of cultural background or year that I interviewed them were analyzed as a single group.

FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, the main goal of this study was to document the stories of the women involved in the V-Day organization and to hear from them how being involved impacted their lives and their self-perceptions. Through careful analysis of the interviews with these twelve V-Day activists I discovered that, although each woman spoke from a unique perspective with her own stories and opinions, two concepts seemed to emerge from the data: first, all of the women mentioned feeling *empowered* in some sense and secondly, all of the women spoke of some sense of *solidarity*, whether this applied to the women in the group specifically, or to women as a whole. Below I describe the many facets of these two central themes. Additionally, I consider the reasons that the women in my study gave for getting involved in the V-Day organization.

Empowerment

Throughout the interviews women continually expressed feeling empowered from their participation in V-Day in a variety of ways. One woman spoke excitedly about the empowerment she felt during the fundraising performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, “I was at the benefit, and I am looking at how full the room is, and how excited everyone is, and how much money is being raised for these organizations, and I wanted to cry. I was so excited and so empowered...it was terrific to know that you are actually part of something.” Most of the women mentioned a boost in self-confidence through being part of the V-Day organization. In addition to this, several women mentioned feeling

empowered in their abilities to continue having an impact as an activist. Finally, most of the women mentioned feeling empowered sexually in some fashion. This came in the form of a personal sense of sexual empowerment for some, while for others this was about feeling empowered to educate other women and men about female sexuality. Also significant was the sense of empowerment that came from healing from past sexual violence as well as feeling empowered to educate men and women about sexual violence and its social ramifications.

Self-Confidence. For several women, empowerment came in the form of a renewed and strengthened self-confidence. One woman I interviewed told me, “The whole experience of the V-Day activities has made me more confident. It is just another piece of armor...not to block the world...but to help me march out there as myself. Just having it internally as another strength force inside of myself...knowing who I am.” Another woman said that her experiences in the play have given her the courage to seek out graduate school across the country, an idea that she was hesitant about prior to her involvement with the V-Day campaign, “As far as the impact of participating in *The Vagina Monologues* had on me goes, I actually think about it a lot. Like it is really important for me to go to this school in *****. I actually think of myself out there. Because I did go out there and visit so I put myself out there like physically in my mind and because the whole experience of the VDAY activities has made me more confident.”

Other women mentioned their experiences giving them the confidence to pursue professional goals. Several of the women mentioned that being up on stage and performing in front of an audience helped them gain self-confidence. Some women

mentioned a change in their demeanor from the boost in self confidence, “The experience is very good just seeing everyone progress and becoming more confident and speaking louder and seeing what this was doing, raising thousands of dollars for local organizations... I speak louder than before and I am so much more confident than I was before.” The women said that the positive feedback they received from other women in the play as well as their friends and family after they performed contributed to stronger feelings of self-assurance. One woman told me, “It was a whole new step of growth...growing into myself through these relationships. So many of us formed great relationships that I feel like I have attractive qualities again...like I am a quality person again...like people respond to me.” Additionally, women mentioned that working side-by-side with other women to promote a positive sense of womanhood and women’s sexuality helped them gain self-confidence. One woman who was moving on from a broken relationship mentioned the impact of working with other women in V-Day, “I loved all of it. I thought that it was very empowering. I am getting out of an amazing relationship, but breaking off onto another path. So it kind of aligned with my relationship ended I got the part and so I was surrounded by all of these strong women with strong voices, so that even though I feel like I am a strong woman, I just got that extra push to really be strong in myself and be healthy and whole and to not be hung up on something that isn’t going to work. So spiritually I think for me it was huge to kind of be around such an array of women.” One woman who dressed up in women’s lingerie and made sexual moans for a monologue mentioned the impact she felt in her performance would have on other women, “I think that it is empowering to see someone up there who

is not a super model who is not skin and bones. I thought that it would just be empowering for everyone to see me up there in next to nothing.”

Importantly, several of the women interviewed mentioned a lacking of self-confidence as a motivating factor for getting involved with the movement. They sought out an environment that they felt would give them more self-confidence and a more positive self-concept, specifically about themselves as women. When looking at the personal change that these women went through in this and other areas it is also important to consider how the subject matter and language of the play reinforces the goodwill and positive feelings that flowed between the women. *The Vagina Monologues* in its language and spirit encourages women to develop a positive self-concept and a strong confidence in themselves.

A Stronger Activist. For many of the women that I interviewed empowerment came in the form of inspiration to get involved in other social activism and a stronger confidence in their abilities to enact positive social change. One woman told me, “Usually I am pretty shy so I don’t really go out and try to do something because I don’t know how to do it. But because I took on this huge project, I feel like maybe I would be able to do something else, whether it is *Vagina Monologues* related or something else.” Having such a positive experience and getting so much strength out of their participation in V-Day has inspired the women to do more work in their communities, specifically work that empowers and uplifts women. One woman said simply, “This is just one of the first steps for me towards changing the world however I can.” Several women mentioned wanting to work with local organizations and community members on projects in the

future. The women mentioned specific local organizations that they had developed ties to since becoming involved in V-Day, and they excitedly told me of future projects that they were planning to be involved in. One woman said, “Just with being involved and touched by this group has kind of launched me like I was hoping it would. I was kind of hoping to have it help me get to my next step.”

Several of the women noticed a definite change in the way they saw themselves and their ability to effect social change as a result of the performances. For some women, their involvement caused them to connect women’s issues to other issues they were concerned with, “I think that it has given me a perspective that if I am supporting a certain cause my role as a woman in that cause. I think that does play a role for the environment for example. The exploitation of women and the environment are interconnected. So for me to understand how I have been oppressed as a woman I think makes me connect more to those issues than I did before. I thought those are separate issues that I need to take care of, but I didn’t have it connect to who I was as a woman. The struggles are parallel. Also, what I want to work on. What issues I care about. I think it has brought up other issues because before I was like victims of domestic violence and rape...I personally haven’t gone through that experience. I can, to a certain extent, empathize with them, but not really. I think going through this and hearing some of the monologues I was able to see them in a different light. This is real, hundreds of people in this audience that can relate to this. That is really powerful so it has given me something else to take into consideration.” One woman, who aspires to be a congressperson in the future, told me, “I definitely want to be an advocate for women. I

want to get into politics. For me, after doing this, I feel that I need to stand up for women...I need to represent women. Because we are so underrepresented and the fact that we are putting on a show every year in so many cities across the nation and there is a lot of bad rap for it. I want to be an example and be like you can be part of this campaign; powerful and respectable women are part of this.”

Sexuality. For many women that I have spoken to in the past and for one woman in particular in these interviews, a personal history that includes being sexually assaulted was one of the motivations to work in the V-Day movement. This painful connection to the issue of sexual violence can make participation in V-Day an emotional and challenging venture. One of the women that I interviewed for this project said that prior to working in the movement she didn't want anyone to know about the violence she endured. She told me, “The challenge for me was that I was raped on campus about a year ago. You know it was kind of early...but I knew that it would be a healing process. I hadn't really told anyone, save the people that I was living with and a few close friends. To be able to talk to them without judgment was really healing for me.” She said that working with a group of supportive women gave her a safe space to discuss the assault. She said that she found healing through participating in the movement and through this healing also came a sense of empowerment.

Some women mentioned feeling a renewed sense of sensuality and an empowered libido. The language and subject matter of the play encouraged a renewal of their sexuality. The women that I interviewed said that talking about women's sexuality and sexual empowerment encouraged them to focus on their own sexual experiences. For one

woman, being involved in the V-Day campaign renewed her sexual self, which she said had been dormant for seven years. She told me, “I haven’t had a boyfriend since I moved out here. So seven years. I have been really focused on my studies and I have become a little shyer. I have changed a lot and so within that changing thing that has really brought out a lot of issues that I have with men. Through that time, I have become a lot more intimidated by men. So, also wrapped up in that, my sexuality has been like suppressed. I have suppressed it myself. In the last year I have been really working on my life and stuff. My independence has really come out and I have become a lot more comfortable with myself and the monologues and being around women and being able to speak so openly about any issue. I can’t do that around men as well. I am a lot more open around women. So my libido and my sexuality went through the roof. My horniness level was like...except for around my menses, it was like I had so much trouble concentrating.”

Another woman spoke about the impact of participation on her sexuality, “Since we started rehearsals in January my whole life spent so much time thinking about how aroused I am and it is like I see any man and I just can’t stop thinking about it.” One woman told me, “I mean I can’t tell you what this has done for me as a whole. I just have for any circumstance...I have come into my age which I really hate thinking about because I am in denial about my thirties. But I have got a new sexuality and I have just got this confidence that I didn’t have before the monologues.” One woman connected her involvement in the play to her ex-husbands’ opinion of her sexuality, “It is liberating, it really is. It was a real liberating and life changing experience for me. It was horrifying to because I had never been onstage as an actresses and that kind of thing and I had never

done anything like that and the ironic part of it was at the end of my marriage my husband was seeing another woman and we weren't being intimate and he accused me of being frigid which was not the case at all, it had just fallen apart. So for me to play the woman who was in a way frigid and was trying to discover herself and everyone got a little kick out of that."

Other women talked about wanting to promote open talk about sexual issues in society. They felt that performing *The Vagina Monologues* was an important step in fighting for this. One woman said, "It really encouraged me to be more honest and open with my daughter...or other young people...that I know the truth about vaginas and sexuality and things that are common to women. Women making fun of each other just doesn't encourage positive sexuality. You know a lot of women saying 'that's dirty' or 'oh my gosh, I would never talk about down there'. It really does encourage this lack of self-appreciation. A lack of appreciation for our bodies is not healthy." Another woman I interviewed talked about the effect being involved had on her self-perception, "For me, my monologue was about body image and being comfortable with my body, the woman ends up loving her vagina and I am not there yet. But I felt like it was a catalyst for me being able to be like okay, why don't I like my vagina? Why am I not okay with myself? I feel like from that point on I have been trying to do affirmations like 'my body is beautiful.' I mean I am not in a relationship right now so I figure I will worry about it when the time comes. I tend to procrastinate like oh I will worry about being happy with my vagina later, I don't have time for it now. But I should probably do it more daily like 'Hi, how are you? How are you doing? (laughs) I think it has just got me to be really

like this woman, wherever she is...women are so institutionalized to not love their bodies and so I feel like it is not a failure of me but a failure of the system, my education system and the media.”

So empowerment came in many forms, but was a strong and consistent theme throughout the women’s stories. Next we look at the second major theme to emerge from the data, that of *solidarity*.

Solidarity

Most of the women described a new sense of solidarity with the women in the campaign specifically and also with women as a whole. They mentioned how important and meaningful this aspect of their experience was. It is important to note that I didn’t ask any questions specifically about their connection to other women in the campaign, but most of the women volunteered this idea. It usually came up when the women were describing the rewards of being involved. The bonding that they experienced with other women was a tangible benefit for these women. A few of them described lacking a connection to other women prior to the campaign. Their involvement in V-Day gave them the opportunity to explore new relationships with women. Some women described the opportunity for them to make new friends as being one of their motivations to get involved. Most women spoke very positively about the new social networks that they had after being involved in the campaign and women also talked about working together on future projects.

New Friendships and Social Networks. Most of the women mentioned building new friendships through working in the V-Day organization and with this came the development of a new, strong social network. Some women mentioned wanting to get involved in the play because they felt a lacking of female friendships prior to getting involved. They knew that becoming involved in the movement would bring them new relationships with other women. One woman told me, “I developed some friendships, which was something that I was hoping to get. To work with awesome strong women and to build friendships with them.” It is important to note that the women spoke of these new relationships as being strong and having great meaning and depth. The strength of these bonds came from many things, among them the influence of spending many hours working together in the movement and also, as I mentioned previously, the environment created through working to empower women in general and the language and energy of *The Vagina Monologues* encouraged strong connections between these women. One woman talked about overcoming her inhibitions in order to develop friendships, “I have been a lot shy making friends here. I can really do it outside of classes. So the friendship aspect was a really huge piece of being in the monologues. I was really happy to make some friends and I know that I have.”

Building new relationships with each other also added to the activists’ self confidence and getting supportive feedback from these new friends positively impacted each woman’s self-concept. One woman said, “I just got really close with the cast and I felt like they liked me. It was a personal gain there. It made me feel better about myself.” Also, all of the women spoke very positively of their newly formed

relationships. One woman said simply, “I loved them and they loved me.” Several women spoke of newly formed social networks. They said things like, “It was a really great social network...and we see each other all of the time, and we wave, and we talk, and we have been out to dinner.” and, “I have a social network like I have never had up here.” In all of their discussions of these newly formed friendships and social networks each woman spoke with great sincerity and joy. The impact of having new social networks was far reaching and spread out over many aspects of their lives and their individual sense’s of self.

One woman who was significantly older than the majority of the women involved in the local initiative at the time told me,

When I worked with these young girls...everyone has such negative things to say about the youth...you know, the music is disgusting and the crime is so bad and all of this gang stuff and everything and when I worked with these women...the young women were what really affected me the most. I had, through the nature of the business I am in and where I lived, I had been around people just by circumstance who were pretty self-serving and I felt like ...I like to volunteer and be socially responsible, which was hard because the business we are in is really not a socially responsible type business, no matter how hard you try. So when I worked with these women...sex trafficking is a huge issue for me and one of the young girls had gone to Thailand and researched and lived in Thailand and researched the sex trafficking industry and was writing a book. Another woman is joining the peace core and they are doing all of these great things and the older women were having babies and full time jobs and they are still taking time to do this because it is that important and I felt liberated. Like there are other people out there like me that care that really give a shit that aren’t just sitting back and watching women be abused all over the world and just sitting back and doing nothing. It makes you feel not so helpless. You are not just sitting back and watching it all happen and you can’t do anything about it. It is liberating, it really is. It was a real liberating and life changing experience for me. I feel so much better after working with theses young girls about whose hands we are going to leave the country in. They are capable they can do a better job. They are more in tune to the whole world

When asked what she found most rewarding about being involved in the V-Day organization one woman told me, “It was great to meet a whole new group of women outside of my little circle of ***** students or college students in general. That was really great, getting all the different perspectives. I think that everyone got along well and that it all came together really well.” Another woman said, “I got to know all of the women on a really personal level. They are all so unique and gifted and it was so inspiring.” Again, when asked about rewards one woman told me, “The best is meeting amazing new people. I really clicked with ***** and there are some other people that I want to get to know better too. That is so valuable.”

A Shared Sense of Womanhood. All of the women spoke of a shared sense of womanhood in one way or another. For some women this meant actually connecting to what they saw as their “feminine side.” One woman spoke of being raised in a Catholic family in a small Midwestern town. She said that her father was in the military and did not respect women and also that her mother worshiped men and had little respect for women as well. Working in the V-Day movement has given her a renewed respect for women and femininity, especially as this related to her own sense of womanhood. She told me, “I think it has really opened a door for me into more exploration of the feminine and I really think that I want to explore and I want to continue to learn about women and history. I love women, but I also have this part of me that has suppressed the feminine for so long and so I knew that the Vagina Monologues was going to bring that out of me and force me to look at me. In a lot of ways it did.”

Some of the women spoke of an emotional solidarity between the women activists and of feeling supported by this. One woman told me, “Being on stage I was just petrified. I almost threw up the night before. You know before it sounded great it was all exciting but as the actual performance gets close and I didn’t realize when I agreed to do it that there were going to be 800 people there. So I was petrified but other women get it and they boost you up and they say you know that this is a great cause and I really appreciate that you are doing this and I am glad you are doing this. I couldn’t get up there and I am glad you are getting up there. The women get it. They support you and even the women that don’t go are supportive.”

Most of the women mentioned the bonding that took place because the group consisted only of women. They said that this dynamic made them feel that it was a safe place where they could explore their notions of femininity and womanhood. One woman who was in an OB Nursing program described her experiences, “I am definitely more comfortable saying vagina personally or saying cunt. So that is pretty cool, just the personal empowerment. I am more aware of women’s issues. It is more in the forefront of my mind. It is more in my consciousness. Thinking about women and you know how they are doing and frankly their relationships to their vaginas too. I am also an OB and that is a very vagina-centric area of nursing. It is a little sad thinking that women don’t want to reach down and or that back in the day when they weren’t allowed to reach down and feel the baby’s head coming out or that people don’t want to look. After birth we try to get the mirror out to see how their vagina and perianal area look to see if there are any changes. There is always a little trauma down there with a vaginal birth. I mean I think

women don't really look at their vaginas. I haven't dealt with that many women. The one woman that I have seen seemed comfortable but it seems that there are a lot who aren't. I imagine that not all. That's really sad that part of your body is off limits to you. Or I remember last summer wanting to teach my nieces how to put in a tampon. They were 12 or 13... 'we can't go swimming we're on our period'. I said, 'no it's a beautiful day you just got put in a tampon!' I wanted...I was so close to having a lesson right there in the bathroom. Come on everyone get your fingers in your vagina. There aren't that many holes down there. Get to know what's in there reach in there feel your cervix feel the ends!"

Rituals. Once a week, for the two months prior to the fundraising performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, the women got together for what they called "ritual nights." Participants described these nights as consisting of bonding activities that emphasized womanhood and solidarity. They would meet at someone's house in the evening and participate in activities and discussions while sharing food and drinks. One activity was a collage that the women constructed together. I had the opportunity to view this collage when I attended the last ritual night prior to the performances. It consisted of many pictures and phrases surrounding the themes of sexuality and womanhood. The collage was auctioned off at a V-Day event the week after the play was performed and the proceeds were donated to local organizations working to end violence in the women's community.

Symbolic interactionism argues that meaning is produced and exists through social interactions (Allan 2006:11). The ritual nights had the specific purpose of creating

a shared set of meanings and symbols so as to create solidarity among the V-Day activists. In addition to creating unity and shared definitions among the activists in the group, the ritual nights emphasized the connection between all women based on gender. The “rituals” were symbolic in that they celebrated womanhood and the common threads between women.

It is also important to consider that the group was not homogeneous, aside from sharing the same gender. Although most of the women were in their early twenties, there were also women from the community who were significantly older. One woman mentioned that her involvement in the movement “was a great bonding experience...to meet women young and old.” Another woman said, “It was so wonderful to connect with so many women in the way that we did. Gay women and straight women and women from all backgrounds.” So although the women had varied histories and perspectives coming into the play, they all mentioned feeling a common sense of womanhood that connected them to each other, in spite of their differences.

To expand this concept further I would again argue that through the performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, as well as other V-Day activities, the larger community is engaged in rituals that channel people’s emotions similar to the rituals in the smaller group of activists. These events often involve music, art, and poetry as well as marches and rallies, all with the intention of nurturing the community and channeling anger and fear into action against the violence in these communities. Having described the main themes and sub-themes that surfaced in my interviews with V-Day activists, I briefly

consider the reasons that the women gave for getting involved with the V-Day organization.

Getting Involved

Wanting Community. The reasons that the women in my study offered for getting involved in the V-Day organization were as varied as the participants themselves. Some women anticipated the positive effects of spending time in the presence of “like-minded” women working towards a common goal. One woman said explicitly, “I heard that being involved changes your life so I thought ‘I want to be a part of this’ and that is why I auditioned.” When asked why she thought women got involved in the V-Day organization one woman stated simply, “I think it is that the power of sisterhood and that element of women: strong, smart, motivated, passionate women together trying to help women who aren’t in that space yet.” The concepts of “bonding” and “solidarity” were frequently mentioned as part of what the women took from their experiences, but for a few women these concepts were motivators for getting involved in the first place. One woman states, “I was imagining that the experience would be a very bonding experience because I just...I mean men are great...but I really get a bond with women so well. I am not intimidated by women at all. I knew that it would be a positive experience.” Some women mentioned having friends or knowing other women who spoke positively about their involvement in the V-Day organization and they said that this was what motivated them to get involved. One woman said, “I think finding that sense of sisterhood. I think that in general that gets played up a lot by previous cast members and just in general it is

very exciting that you just want to be a part of some community and also this whole 'women's empowerment'. I want to do this movement and I want us all to be excited about being women. I think if you do it in any other context people would be like 'you are weird'...if you were like 'we are women, we love our vaginas.' You have to have a reason to be all excited about your vagina." For some women it was the opportunity to meet a variety of women and to work with them in creating a common experience that motivated them to get involved with V-Day. One woman answered, "It is that sense of community. Finding a group of women, I think all of those women I wouldn't have met them any other way. Here are all these women from all different age groups and some of them have kids and such and careers so it was very...for me it was like I get to meet all of these people and get different perspectives."

Being an "Actress". Other women got involved for what they called the "more selfish reason" of wanting to act in a play. Several women admitted that getting involved in the V-Day organization had nothing to do with the main goal of the organization-to end violence against women. For some women the motivation for getting involved was simply that they wanted to act in the play, to be up on stage and participate in community theatre. One woman said, "I got involved for the more selfish reason of wanting to act and feeling like I could do a good job and be an asset to the team, to the cast and meanwhile it is kind of like a bonus that it is a great cause." Two women spoke of recently taking a theatre class in college and simply looking for an outlet to express what they saw as their newly discovered talent. Two women who directed one of the productions were Theatre majors who had discussed directing a production of *The Vagina*

Monologues for some time before getting involved. One of the women said, “I saw a poster when I was a freshman and immediately I was like, ‘I want to direct that play one day.’ So ***** and I had been talking about it for the past couple of years. We were like...yeah you know...the spring of our junior year we would like to direct it together. We didn’t think that we were actually going to, but the theatre department sent out an email to all of the declared theatre majors saying that *The Vagina Monologues* needed directors and we thought, ‘well it’s right here, so let’s just do it.’”

Supporting the Cause. Still other women got involved because they felt strongly about supporting women victims of violence or they wanted to work through their own past personal experiences with violence. When asked why she thought women got involved with the V-Day organization one woman said, “A few of the women are really aware of and really invested in the issues like specifically women’s issues. For example ***** put in her bio that specifically human trafficking is something that she has really taken on as a cause or other women worked at the shelter. Or people that have personal experience with violence against women and are working with their own demons and exercising them. It is sort of cathartic for them.” One woman spoke of the desire to help women heal, “When you devote something like that to really helping out your sister and reaching out to her and supporting her. That is the giving back. It is not all about the you, you, you; it is about her, her, her, her. It is eye opening...you get involved and you almost get hooked, you know. You really get to feel and see that person heal.” Another woman said, “Every woman had a different story, similar to mine, but different. Their own experience that they were going through. But each one of us had in common that we

wanted to help women that we wanted to do something to help women. Stand up for women, help women, supporting women, just be supportive of other women.” One woman mentioned, “I know some women were going through hard times during the rehearsals and stuff and so it was a place to be like ‘hey this is what is going on with me and we were like a support group for each other.’” In all of these cases, the V-Day organization reached out to these women and many like them all over the world and encouraged them to mobilize and speak out in opposition to violence against women and in support of the organizations who work year round on the cause.

DISCUSSION

Having introduced my research questions, placed these questions in the context of relevant literature, and described the main themes that surfaced during my interviews I will now discuss several important theoretical considerations for this research. As I have mentioned previously, because this study was somewhat exploratory in nature, in that I did not begin with a detailed and proscribed research plan, the data that resulted covers a variety of interesting topics for analysis, several of which are considered below. First, I consider the role of emotions in V-Day organizing as well as the concept of “emotion work” and briefly discuss the work that the women are required to perform in their personal lives as a result of being involved in the V-Day organization. Also important in my analysis of V-Day organizing and mobilization is a reflection on the gendered aspect of V-Day mobilization as well as the form that the organization takes.

The Role of Emotions

Cheryl Hercus’ (1999) work develops several important considerations for the role of emotions in feminist organizing that relate directly to the organizing work done in the V-Day organization. Here I will use her discussion as a guide for my analysis of the role of emotions in V-Day organizing. First, Hercus discusses “collective action frames” as put forth by Scott Hunt and colleagues (1994) and adds emotion to his concept of framing by referring to work by Collins (1990), Taylor (1995), and Fraser (1996), among others. Secondly, Hercus discusses emotional deviance, arguing that the use of anger is a

deviant emotion for women activists that results in women having to engage in emotion work inside and outside of the movement. In addition to anger, the women working in the V-Day organization found themselves engaging in emotion work with family, friends, coworkers, and the community all as a result of just being involved in the V-Day organization and staging *The Vagina Monologues*. Lastly, Hercus discusses the positive, strength building aspect of emotions in feminist organizing.

One of the greatest successes of the V-Day organization has been its ability to organize diverse groups of women all over the globe to act against the violence happening against women in their communities. In addition to the mobilization of small groups of women that put on V-Day events, V-Day also engages the larger community and encourages mobilization surrounding violence against women through its community events. Much research has been done on the process of framing in social movements. Hercus (1999) cites Hunt and colleagues (1994) stating that “Collective action frames mobilize collective action by diagnosing an aspect of social life as problematic, outlining a proposed solution, and providing rationale for action” (p. 35). However, Hercus adds that “extensive research into frames and framing processes has contributed significantly to the understanding of ideological factors in movement participation; here too, however, a cognitive bias has meant that until recently the emotional dimension of frames has not been directly addressed” (p. 35). Hercus argues that when considering the emotional dimension of frames, anger emerges as a particularly significant emotion. She writes, “a central component of any collective action frame is a sense of injustice, which is not merely cognitive or intellectual judgment about what is equitable but is what cognitive

psychologists call a ‘hot cognition’—one that is laden with emotion. Thus collective action frames not only provide an intellectual account of the injustice of certain situations but they also legitimate the expression of moral indignation and righteous anger directed toward the source of injustice” (Hercus 1999:36).

The V-Day movement promotes a collective action frame that has anger at injustice as a central motivating component. First, the V-Day organization promotes awareness of violence against women by organizing groups of women that stage education campaigns in their communities. For many communities violence against women is a personalized, private matter that receives little attention from the public. Because of this, one of V-Day’s main tasks is to simply make the community aware of the problem. In this way the V-Day organization diagnoses the issue of violence against women as problematic in the public discourse. The women in my study regularly mentioned this aspect of their work. When asked what impact she felt the V-Day organization had on her community one woman said, “There is a community response to these issues. Back before this play became so mainstream, and no one had really watched it, I think that it was kind of in the outskirts. It is like, ‘we know that women are being abused and that young girls are being abused but we don’t really like to talk about it or hear about it. There are some people who work with that, but we don’t really want to talk about it’ and I think with this production over the last few years and how popular it has been with each year it almost selling out and the response from the community with attending it and it is like the issue of violence against women it is not just a few people responding to it. That is the sense that I get it.”

One woman who described herself as “48 year old Conservative Christian” said frankly, “whether people like it or not 12 year old, 14 year old, 8 year old girls get raped every day and not talking about it, not seeing it, is not going to make it go away.” That same woman describes the framing process that goes on through her work with V-Day in her community, “It opens up a dialogue about it and you kind of realize that there is x amount of people in the county but really everyone is connected to each other through family or friends or whatever and it really isn’t that big. The world in general, we are all connected somehow. We can’t forget that there are women out there that need our help and maybe by doing this people will learn something and not turn away when they see something wrong, you know. Maybe they won’t turn away maybe they will face it.”

Secondly, the V-Day organization organizes action around providing funding for direct action by shelters and organizations in the community. In this way they are providing a solution to the problem. Almost all of the women involved in my study mentioned this aspect of their work with the V-Day organization. One woman said, “Just to know that we raised that much money for the women was huge and nobody ever lost sight of the fact that that is what we were doing.” One woman who had recently been through a difficult divorce spoke of her personal connection to raising money for the local women’s shelters, “in this case the money goes to local women’s organizations and helps them. The women’s shelter was what I was mainly concerned about because people always throw around a bunch of clichés like we are all this close to being in a shelter, but it is true, it’s true. I mean I have a fair amount of money and I am broke. I mean it is just a man’s world and although my husband and I were partners in our business, it is kind of

whoever breaks the rules and in that interim time until the court figures it out, you are just kind of hanging out there and there is no protection and so I really worry about these women that don't have money, that have an abusive partner, that don't have family to turn to, that don't have a place to stay." One woman who had previously worked for a local domestic violence shelter that was receiving funds from the V-Day organization said, "Having worked with one of the non profits that receives profits from the show and working with the ***** I know that it directly impacts the programs that are provided to survivors. It is empowering and powerful and beautiful." Another woman also mentioned her connection to providing funding to local organizations, "seeing what this was doing, raising thousands of dollars for local organizations. Working in non-profits for many years I know how valuable it is to have money that is flexible that you don't have to spend it on a particular thing. Most non-profits, their money is tied to a grant. They have to spend it in a certain way. So having thousands of dollars coming in from *The Vagina Monologues* kind of gives them some leeway. To help women out, whatever their grants don't cover. They will be able to help women out in a very personal and unique way."

Some women connected the fundraising that they were doing locally to the work that other V-Day groups were doing in other communities, "But it is so huge. It is so interesting to be a part of something that is international and that is the number one fundraiser for women's services period. The one that they have in Louisiana this year has Oprah and Selma Hayek. So being part of the bigger community is even more important to me and yeah there is us but then there is the globe that is putting their money towards

these agencies. So that feels really good. That feels really powerful.” Again another woman connects the local work to the work being done by V-Day activists globally, “I think that I just really appreciate the ‘My Vagina is my Village’ monologue...as far as being on a more global level and my eyes are starting to open up to that. Instead of ***** county, instead of California, instead of just the United States. I just went to a Zapatista meeting last night with women who were in Chiapas in Mexico. It has heightened my awareness. When you are in ***** County you are focused on this area and it helps to see it on different levels and that is big to me...to be connected to that.”

The “awareness” component of V-Day organizing also provides a solution to the problem in that many women are unaware of the shelters and organizations in the community that provide services to women facing violence in their homes or at places like college campuses. V-Day uses events and local media to draw attention to the services that are available to women in the community and in this way they help provide solutions for women facing violence. At each staged fundraising production of *The Vagina Monologues* local women’s organizations are invited to set up tables and address the audience. At the college campaign, which was what the first group of women I interviewed were involved in, they have on-campus and community outreach events where they work with local organizations to get the word out about services available to survivors of violence. The local V-Day group also works with on-campus groups such as the university women’s center, campus police, and the counseling center. They stage events on campus that reach out to college students, men and women, educating them about violence and the services that are directly available to students at that school.

These events may include live music or guest speakers that engage the students and get them interested in knowing more. When I worked with a V-Day group on a college campus as an undergrad we worked with the Student Activities Center and created events that encouraged interaction with students on campus. We worked with the campus police and provided free self-defense classes for students. We also worked with the campus police to develop better methods of violence prevention and more effective emergency services for cases of on-campus violence. We brought the local domestic violence shelters to the campus where they staged events such as “Jeans for Justice” as well as “The Clothesline Project” where they displayed t-shirts that had been decorated by children survivors of domestic violence in an effort to educate the general public about the effects of violence on children.

Lastly, V-Day provides a rationale for action by staging performances of *The Vagina Monologues*. These performances use theatre as a way to expose the public to the lived experiences of women who have faced violence in their lives. By using intimate language and painfully candid narratives V-Day draws the audience in and nurtures a feeling of social injustice about violence against women. Many of the monologues directly name emotions that survivors of violence experience including anger, fear, and pain. The monologues incite these feelings in the audience members and create a sense of empathy that then promotes action, whether that action is bringing a friend to a V-Day event, volunteering at a local shelter, or simply being more willing to speak about violence against women to their friends and family. Skye Fraser, in her work with survivors of sexual violence, discusses the “energizing, mobilizing nature of anger, which

makes it fundamental to achieving social change” and suggests that “working with sexual violence involves mobilizing the force of survivors’ untapped anger and assisting them to directing it where it belongs, on the perpetrator(s) of sexual violence and on the social forces which shape the existence of perpetrators” (1996:167).

In Hercus’ (1999) discussion of emotions in feminist organizing she mentions the significant role of emotional deviance in women’s expression of anger. She uses Arlie Hochschild’s (1979) concept of “feeling rules” to explain this deviance. Feeling rules, Hochschild argues, guide what feelings are appropriate in a given situation. For women activists this means that many times the expression of anger means breaking the rules regarding the appropriate expression of emotions by women. Hercus argues that this leads to the expression of anger being labeled deviant and ultimately forces women to work to defend their right to express anger over social injustice. In the case of V-Day organizing, the use of anger is present throughout the performances of *The Vagina Monologues* as well as other events that V-Day stages. Importantly, many of these events are staged at college campuses where young women entering adulthood find themselves torn between wanting to assert themselves and stand up for the rights of women on the one hand, and living up to standards of coy femininity promoted by the media and other institutions on the other. The V-Day events encourage the open expression of anger against the violence that many women face. In this way V-Day specifically encourages the rejection of the feeling rules that preside over young women in college. The V-Day activities are most likely one of the first places where young women find themselves fully rejecting these rules, and in this sense they are important not only to fight violence

against women, but also to liberate young women from the ever-still oppressive rules of gender roles.

V-Day Participation and Emotion Work. Hercus returns to Hochschild's (1979) work on emotions again when she discusses Hochschild's concept of "emotion work". Hercus argues that women working in feminist organizations must engage in emotion work in two ways. First, they must work regularly to defend their feminist identities and in many situations this involves the emotion work of "self-restraint". Secondly, feminist activists sometimes engage in "self-assertion" when they assert their feminist views in a situation where their views are being questioned. Hercus contends that "this approach was used both in an attempt to educate others and as a strategy of self-defense" (Hercus 1999:43).

In my research with women working for a V-Day organization I found that women were more likely to report engaging in "self-assertion" than "self-restraint". Part of this may come from the nature of *The Vagina Monologues* performances. This event, along with other educational and outreach events all have a very assertive "in your face" type of tone. This flowed into the narratives of the women I have interviewed. When asked about how they talked about their work with the V-Day organization to their friends and family the overwhelming majority of the women said that they used their work as an opportunity to discuss violence against women, as well as feminism more broadly. For example one woman said, "I was really open about it. It is kind of no holds barred with me. I would show them my cast pictures. I was very excited about it. My ex-boyfriend and I still talk about it. He is like what is it all about, is it male bashing? And so I would

just kind of educate what it was about and just the strength that showed on the stage. With comedy and the more intense emotions and poetry and the messages that are underlying and the fact that violence is not okay.” Another woman spoke about the emotion work involved in talking about her work with V-Day to her mother, “Well my mom is interesting because she was just like you really want to do that? My mom is an old fashioned Greek woman so she was just like, ‘why do you want to get on stage and talk about your...you know...’, she couldn’t even say vagina, ‘...why would you want to do that?’ So I performed it for her ahead of time when I first learned it. She was just like, ‘wow, I can’t believe you are doing that.’”

One woman spoke about the emotion work involved in day to day interactions, “It definitely brought up a lot of conversations with people around me because going through the process and learning the monologue and meeting all of these amazing women from all walks of life, it just really got me thinking. Before *The Vagina Monologues* I had always been like, yeah you know women’s issues I get them but I felt like for me I wasn’t oppressed. I was like yeah, you know, people say sexist things, but whatever. Being with this group of women and us all working together on the show made me realize wow there is something internal going on here. The conversations I had with people, some people were like, ‘ewww why are you going to talk about your vagina?’ I would say see that is the point! You don’t want to hear me talk about my vagina because you think that it is so repulsive! I think that it has really helped me reflect on how I feel about my own body and how other women feel about their bodies and how important it is. We are taught to just brush it off as no big deal. I don’t look at it; I don’t think about

it; it is just something that is so integral of who you are, so you need to really value it. Even for me I am still hitting the block of getting through that.”

Another woman spoke about the mobilizing potential of the emotion work that she engaged in with members of the community, “I tried really hard to bring in more mainstream people. I could see it going in that direction that more mainstream people are comfortable going. I had a lot of dialogue with people that really had a negative attitude towards it but had never seen it or didn’t know anything about it and why do they swear and what is this all about and really get to the nuts and bolts of it, not just the controversy over it. We got together every Friday night and I thought we should do some promotion. So we did some live manikins and when I approached the businesses in down town for example...once I got the mainstream conservative guy on the block to go along everyone else got involved. That guy came to the play and he loved it.”

Some women reported having to engage in emotion work at their workplaces. For example one woman who owned a trucking company mentioned the difficulty in talking about her work with V-Day to her employees, “I am in a business...our trucking business would be what you would consider a good old boys network. So people that saw me in it thought what are you doing in it? It raised a few eye brows. I wouldn’t say that I was fighting with them...some of my Christian friends felt like *The Vagina Monologues* went over the line and they were like, ‘I don’t get it I don’t understand it’. But we had a dialogue about it. Dialogue is the first step to change. Start talking about what you don’t know about or that you are afraid of.”

In the 2008 community production of *The Vagina Monologues* the women that I interviewed faced a setback that involved dealing with a community response to their methods that was less than welcoming. The women had secured a large theatre in the downtown area of their community and paid the deposit for staging the fundraising production of *The Vagina Monologues* only to get a call a month later that they would no longer be allowed to use the venue because the owner of the company that runs the theatre said that the performance was too controversial to produce. One woman I interviewed described the situation, “I definitely feel...this year with the theatre being taken away and all of the controversy with all of that, I definitely saw that there was this clash obviously but there were a lot of people that were very supportive of the show. Where it was at I don’t care because it was a great show. But I think the underlying message of is this show smut or something meaningful, and I think that is what it came down to. People were saying, ‘no it is trashy...its disgusting...people talking about their vaginas...its gross I don’t want to hear it. It’s all in your face’ and there is the other side that says, ‘no we need to talk about this’. So I thought the fact that there were so many people against it showed that there definitely still needs to be that conversation. The job isn’t over. The fact that women still don’t feel safe walking down the street like I mean there is a sign there that the job isn’t done.” Another woman described her reaction to the situation, “Just being able to have conversations around it is powerful. I was really proud to be part of it. I was hurt when the theatre pulled the show in the beginning. It was like a slap in the face when we were just starting to get our strength up...to get pushed back. For me it felt like it was the community that was pushing back, even though I know that

isn't true. But everyone that would read about it...they would say f*** them. You are going to find a place and it will be better than being in that theatre anyway. After the show we could feel the laughter and the applause. The interaction was really powerful. It was definitely worth that little bit in the beginning of the production company has f***** us. We are such a great cast and we are all really fun and talented and we had no home. But we pulled it together.”

The majority of women in my study reported feeling a surge in confidence in their feminist beliefs and their willingness to articulate their views in settings that may not be so welcoming. In my own personal work with V-Day I found that getting my very conservative and reserved family to attend a performance of *The Vagina Monologues* gave me a platform to discuss my feminist views more openly. Interestingly though, I also found myself in circumstances where the intimate nature of the content of *The Vagina Monologues* persuaded me to practice “self-restraint” in conversations with people. It was because the nature of the V-Day events is so “in your face” that I felt compelled to be more reserved in my discussions of feminism and activism. One woman that I interviewed talked about the emotion work that was involved due to the fact that she worked for a religious based organization, “Working for a faith based agency that are elders and right wing and conservative. I didn't even feel comfortable telling anyone from work that I was in this. I told two people that I am really close to and that I wanted to go to the show and everybody else, they just knew afterwards. I am in this space and celebrating it and cherishing it and so it is hard when there is this two conflicting energies and I am immersed in it and have been for he past three years and I am kind of getting

used to them and I think from their perspective, and I can only speak from my observations, but they just aren't in the space to accept that or be comfortable with that or support that."

Another woman spoke about the self-restraint that she engaged in with her father, "we really didn't talk about the play. My mom and grandma were very open to it but I didn't talk to my dad about it. I assumed that he wasn't even going to come. He has never been to any of my play performances. When I said, 'Are you going to come to my play?' he didn't even know what it was. He was suspicious because he thinks that I have been totally corrupted. He is very conservative. My mother is very liberal but my dad thinks that I have been totally corrupted by ***** County. So he was very suspicious and then he heard me on the radio Thursday night talking with ***** and ***** and ******, did you listen to that? I called in as my character and he heard me. I was talking about (in English accent) 'everyone who comes to see the Vagina Monologues will want to hurry home and get in touch with their vaginas'. I think he was a little embarrassed about that." One woman that I interviewed who dressed up in a very revealing outfit, tall boots, and fishnets and performed a piece that involved making sexual moans on stage, talked about engaging in self-restraint with a professor, "I was a little afraid. My main nursing teacher was wanting to come when I first mentioned it she was like how much are tickets, is there a senior discount? Yeah we do...she is a little old fashion especially about dress for one and she is always warning the female students to cover it up you know kind of thing. I was a little worried that she might come and even if she did I would assume that I would say 'that is a character I don't dress like this

normally'. I am doing this trip with her this summer to Malaysia, a Muslim country, you know cover it up girls. That was actually my main concern."

Finally, some women mentioned having to engage in emotion work with the other women in the organization. One woman talked about being overwhelmed by working with such an intense group of women on such an emotional project, "'I am not used to being around women in that capacity so I think sometimes when my inner diva came out when everyone else's inner diva was coming out it was a little much. So, I am really much more passive in that respect. I appreciated it but I would also see some areas where I was like, 'this is not about you. It is about community and agencies so turn the ego down a little bit'. We had a pregnant woman. We had a woman who dealt with personal stuff. Sometimes we would all talk about it and process it and then go our separate ways and just being there felt good for some people. I know for me I would just leave so high from rehearsals it was great. It was so powerful.'" When asked what she found challenging about working in the V-Day organization one woman talked about feeling intimidated by the group of women she was working with and the activities she was asked to engage in, "One thing that goes through my mind is that during the audition they said that we would have to be doing moaning at all of our rehearsals. We would be going out and getting in touch with our inner moan. I was just terrified of that. I didn't even know...I couldn't tell you what my inner moan is...let alone do it in front of strangers. So every rehearsal I would go thinking okay what am I gonna do if they say now we are going to circle up and do our inner moan and I felt...that took me a while to get over that."

The Role of Gender and Feminism in Organizing

In their article on gender and community organizing, described in depth previously in the literature review, Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) argue that there is a distinct “women-centered” model for organizing community members. They suggest that this gender specific model relies on building expanded private sphere relationships and empowering individuals through those relationships. The authors write, “Women centered organizing also often requires bridging a gap between the community’s needs and its resources, mobilizing to demand necessary state resources and/or to engage in institutional transformation. Within this type of organizing there is an emphasis on community building, collectivism, caring, mutual respect, and self-transformation” (Stall and Stoecker 1998:733).

The V-Day organization is exemplary of the “women-centered” style of organizing that Stall and Stoecker describe for several reasons. First, Stall and Stoecker argue that the women-centered organizing often requires bridging a gap between the community’s needs and its resources. The main activity of the local V-Day organizations is to raise funds to give directly to local domestic abuse shelters and other organizations working to end violence against women. In this way the local V-Day organizations are bridging a gap between the needs of the other local organizations that work directly with domestic violence survivors and the resources of the community. Secondly, Stall and Stoecker (1998) contend that within the “women-centered” style of organizing there is an emphasis on “community building, collectivism, caring, mutual respect, and self-transformation” (p.733). V-Day emphasizes community building in that it encourages

women in the community to work together and also to engage the larger community on the issue of domestic violence by holding large, well-attended events that emphasize awareness and education about violence against women. Also, the V-Day movement encourages self-transformation exemplified in the stories from the survivors of abuse who organize against the violence in their communities.

In my work with local V-Day organizations I observed that the space that the organization created for women to grow, develop, and sometimes heal was rich and meaningful. Women in my study regularly spoke of feeling uplifted and empowered by spending time in meetings or preparation with other women activists. I have found from personal experience that this space is imperative for strength building among women activists, as much of the work done outside of that space can be emotionally draining and disheartening. For example one woman that I interviewed said, “I am going to be 29 this year so I am already in this transitional phase where I am really putting myself out there where I am surrounded by midwives and other social workers and other actresses and just really soft strong powerful women...very wise and very intelligent and very witty. It kind of filled in the gaps and helped me focus on the things that I needed to work on. So, I really appreciated that. I really appreciated being in that realm of like-mindedness. We didn’t have to be constantly challenged by something. We all worked towards something similar. That helps because I am going to be taking a really big step coming up this summer.”

On another level, I would argue that the space that *The Vagina Monologues* performances create for the larger audience is also one that exemplifies the “women-

centered” or feminist style of organizing. The subject matter and dramatic reading of the monologues creates a deeply emotional, sometimes transformative, environment that emphasizes awareness and concern for fighting violence against women. In this way the smaller space developed by the group of women activists is expanded exponentially through creating a similar place for women and men in the audience to also feel a sense of empowerment and gain emotional strength to work on the issues in the larger world. Although the V-Day organization does work on institutional change at a global level, the main work of this organization is in small groups, expanded to larger audiences, and in both cases it is about creating a space for growth and building strength and a connection to other activists.

As outlined in the literature review, some scholars, such as Jan E. Thomas (1999) argue that there is a distinctly feminist organizational structure that departs from the traditional bureaucratic structure. Thomas argues that feminist organizations can be classified into one of three ideal types of feminist organizational structure. Although I am not fully aware of the hierarchy at the top of the V-Day organization, because this information is not made public, I am familiar with the way that the leadership interacts with local V-Day groups, as well as the way that those local groups function. In considering the issues that Thomas (1999) describes I would argue that the V-Day organization best exemplifies a “participatory democracy”. Although major decisions are made by a board and the elites of the organization, the structure is set up so that the local organizations have considerable decision making power. V-Day distributes a handbook to the local organizations each year with general guidelines for the way that the

organization should run, but from there it is up to the organizers to make decisions.

Because of this freedom it is likely that each local organization will fall at some point on a spectrum of ideal feminist organizing. V-Day does require that each local organization have a specified “organizer” or leader and in this way V-Day institutes a power hierarchy at the local level. From my own experiences working as an organizer at the local level, most day to day decisions were made by whoever was working on something on that day. Regular meetings were held where major decisions were decided on by the group collectively.

Importantly, in making her distinctions Thomas (1999) considers if the feminist organization sees empowering women as an outcome of the work of the organization, or if empowering women is built into the structure and methods of the organization. V-Day’s ultimate goal is to empower the women who organize in the community, but also to empower the women who attend the V-Day events. In this way V-Day is making empowerment the outcome of the organization’s work. However V-Day also empowers women as a process built into the structure of the organizations. This happens on several levels. On a general level, V-Day works to empower women in a community to collectively come together to address the violence in their own communities. V-Day has set up a structure where local women do local work for their communities. More specifically, V-Day’s structure empowers survivors of domestic violence to heal through the process of organizing women in their community to fight domestic violence. During my work with a local V-Day organization I worked side by side with many survivors of abuse and was told by these women the empowerment that they felt by the process of

organizing in the community. The V-Day organization not only has empowering women as an outcome of the organizations' work, but also makes empowering women part of the structure and processes of the organization.

CONCLUSION

As you read this thesis, there are women and men all over the world engaging in community organizing in its many forms, giving their time and resources in an effort to change their communities, and the lives of women, for the better. The women in my study represent only a small part of the work that committed activists and community members perform on behalf of and with women who face violence in their lives. In the introduction to this paper I quoted Eve Ensler, the founder of the V-Day organization as saying, “V-Day is a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalize the spirit of existing anti-violence organizations. V-Day generates broader attention for the fight to stop violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual slavery” (Ensler 2001:4). What Ensler does not explicitly speak to are the secondary effects of calling on women to organize their communities against violence. These are the effects that the women in my study spoke of when I asked them how V-Day impacted their lives. Each woman in her own words spoke of feeling empowered. This empowerment came in many forms, sometimes empowering women to heal from past sexual violence, while other times empowering women to become stronger leaders and advocates in their communities. Sexual violence is still a secreted and disregarded issue in our society and many women face abuse feeling silenced and trapped. The V-Day organization empowers women to speak out against violence in their communities, while uplifting and empowering local

organizations and women's shelters so that women who face violence know of options other than suffering alone.

Enslar also neglected to speak explicitly of the solidarity that the women she called on would experience. The women in my study spoke of the power that they felt after spending time in the presence of other women with the same concerns. Many women faced lives outside of their work with the V-Day organization that forced them to engage in emotion work. Whether it was going to work at a "good-old boys club" or working for a conservative religious based organization, these women faced opposition that sometimes drained their emotional energy, while at other times ignited an assertion of their feminist beliefs. Several women spoke about a new appreciation of the feminine or a renewed sense of womanhood. Many young women growing up in a post-feminism era either didn't think of themselves as aligned with women as a whole, or adopted negative views of their gender from dominant cultural stereotypes. Working in a V-Day initiative gave these women a sense of solidarity with the women they worked with as well as women as a whole. The women in my study also described the new social networks that developed from participation in the V-Day organization. These networks lay the groundwork for a continuation of the strength building and solidarity that resulted from organizing the community together.

The main criticisms of the V-Day organization, and specifically the fundraising play *The Vagina Monologues*, as I outlined in the literature review, attack the essentialist nature of an organization and a play that embrace and spotlight a conceptualization of "women", "femininity", and "female sexuality", among other things. Although, as I

mentioned in the limitations section of my methods chapter, due to the small sample size I didn't feel comfortable making conclusions about differences in responses that might stem from race and class differences in the women that I interviewed, I feel that my research represents the possibility of claiming a solidarity based on womanhood, that embraces cultural or identity differences, without erasing them.

Recently I presented this research at the Pacific Sociological Association meeting in Portland, Oregon. After the panel presented, the discussant, Ellen Scott, Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon, argued that my findings beg the questions: "Who feels empowered by the experience of V-Day and who feels a sense of solidarity? Solidarity with whom? How far do the boundaries of alliance stretch, and if they stretch all the way to some notion of a common sense of what it means to be women, in part based on what is particular to gender oppression even in its many variants across time and space, then have we not arrived at the very conundrum of Second Wave Feminism?" In response to the questions Scott poses she answered this, "I want to say two things about this: one, perhaps it is okay to feel a sense of empowerment and solidarity with all women; and two, perhaps there is something about gender that we have shied away from in the debates after the Second Wave. Perhaps this is worthy of revisiting, albeit cautiously and with more than a healthy nod to the pitfalls of essentialist claims."

In response to the criticisms of V-Day that pervade the academic literature I would have to agree with Scotts' cautious conclusions. Although the sample is not large enough in this study to make valid conclusions based on race and class, my sense from working in the V-Day organization with a diverse group of women, as well as the sense

that I get from my interviews with a somewhat diverse group of women, is that the solidarity and empowerment that come from V-Day organizing, although imperfect for sure, may be evidence that third wave feminism can still embrace a shared sense of sisterhood and find power from this bond. There is still much work to be done on power and privilege in feminist organizing, but perhaps, like Scott suggests, we might revisit the connections that women have to each other, especially in fighting gendered violence, and consider the strengths of these connections and the potential that they might hold for building alliances and organizing diverse communities.

After my analysis of the interviews with these women I had the opportunity to reflect on my own experiences working in the V-Day movement and to consider how these experiences resonated with those of the women in my study. I realize now that I was deeply empowered through working in the V-Day movement. As I worked in the movement I became a serious student, and I developed a strong confidence in my abilities. I also realize after reflecting that my involvement in the V-Day movement had a huge impact on the strengths that I see within me now. The strength in my abilities as a leader and organizer were most certainly fashioned from my years organizing large events and directing groups of somewhat heterogeneous women. My self-confidence was made stronger as I worked in the movement, pushing myself to do new things and take on more and more responsibilities. Finally, I developed a strong sense of womanhood and a deep connection to women and the issues that women face through working in this movement along side many wonderful, encouraging sisters. This connection was most certainly developed in my experiences with the V-Day movement as I recall being quite

hesitant to connect with women prior to my involvement. Working in the movement encouraged me to connect with other women and I created networks that I still hold to this day. Many friendships grew out of my work with V-Day, friendships that have been with me for years now. Most importantly I developed a common sense of womanhood that has strengthened my commitment to working for social justice.

In conclusion, it is important to consider the impact that the V-Day organization has had on women in the United States as well as other parts of the world and why this is significant. V-Day is a catalyst for change in that it is empowering many women all over the world to become leaders in the movement to end violence against women, and to change the way that society defines women's sexuality and womanhood. In an era where social programs in the United States are seeing their funding cut, V-Day empowers women to organize community members to raise much needed funds for local women's organizations and shelters. V-Day lessens the power that government bodies have over local efforts to support women, by raising money for women with no strings attached, putting faith in women's ability to collaborate and heal their communities.

Secondly, in a political climate that threatens citizens who speak out and engage in activism, V-Day promotes brazen protest against the status quo and the forces that keep women from living free, strong and safe. V-Day pushes back at conservative currents that dictate what women can and should speak about in a public forum. As women all over the country and globe engage in a dialogue with their communities about sexual violence, as well as sexual choice and freedom, the opportunities for women to grow and thrive expand while the possibility of violence against our sisters and mothers and

daughters becomes less likely. Future research should explore how different segments of the population define their experiences working in the V-Day organization to determine if differences arise from various ethnic, socio-economic, political, cultural, or geographical backgrounds, and how this impacts what women take from their experiences working in the organization.

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