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Del Rosso, Stephanie

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Gradient

A Thesis submitted in satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

by

Stephanie Del Rosso

Committee in charge:

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair
Professor Allan Havis
Professor Deborah Stein

2019

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The Thesis of Stephanie Del Rosso is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

DEDICATION

To my professors Naomi, Deborah, and Allan. Your wisdom, dramaturgical insights, and mentorship have made me a braver writer and a deeper thinker.

To my playwriting cohort Mara, Dave, Vivian, Ali, Ava, Anna, Will, and Lily. Your friendship and talents and brains have buoyed me these past three years.

To the cast, crew, stage management, and design team of *The Gradient*. Your trust in my capacity and your commitment to the process meant the world to me. You're all geniuses.

To my parents and sister for traveling across the country to move me in, and see my shows, and support a career path that often feels crazy and impossible.

To Christie, Zoe, Ellen A., Ellen G., Maggie, Kate, Kathleen, Maya, and other friends who love me wholly even when we live many, many miles away.

To Caleb. You are the most generous, patient, supportive, loving human on this planet.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you UCSD for a challenging and gratifying three years.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Gradient

by

Stephanie Del Rosso

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

University of California San Diego, 2019

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair

Tess just landed her dream job at sleek tech start-up The Gradient: a center where men accused of sexual misconduct are sent to be rehabilitated. The clients go in with a lifetime of toxic male conditioning and emerge as new men: sensitized, redeemed. It sounds too good to be true, and maybe it is. When Tess meets a client who says all the right things, she's forced to question her most basic assumptions about what is real. What seemed like radical innovation quickly reveals an ugly underbelly, and Tess starts to doubt this tidy, commodified road to redemption. The Gradient interrogates the notion of “grey areas.” It questions the impulse to label certain sexual misconduct allegations as “not actually that bad,” comparatively speaking. The play posits: why can't we dream bigger, expect more, expect better? Standards will never shift if we keep making

concessions, and acknowledging a spectrum of harmful actions doesn't mean creating false equivalences. But the play also investigates the flaws, bureaucracy, and potentially, the futility of trying to instigate behavioral and societal upheaval. The Gradient asks what it means to say I'm sorry and whether it's possible for people to truly change.