

VOICES

THE MARCH ISSUE



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Letter from the Editor

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

“That is one good thing about this world... there are always sure to be more springs.” - L.M. Montgomery

Spring is often tied to the idea of rebirth and renewal: starting over and starting fresh. After the dreary and stressful days of winter, spring is a needed time to refresh our minds and bodies, and the student body at UConn feels no differently. When the air starts to change and the trees start to bloom, there is a noticeable difference in mood. People seem happier and more engaged. It makes sense, then, that there are so many events that take place on campus within the Spring semester, and the Women’s Center is no exception. Some of our most notable events, including Take Back the Night and the Women’s Herstory Event, are held in Spring.

Coming back this semester, my goal for the Women’s Center newsletter is mostly the same: to showcase all the hard work that goes on within the Center and to highlight voices that don’t always get a chance to be heard. I also want to make an effort to share more of the behind-the-scenes work here at the Center. I believe it’s important for those who read our newsletter to hear about our efforts from the people who orchestrate them the most. I’m excited to work with our new writing intern, Jordan Shaw, to put together another informative newsletter for the first half of this spring semester.

Some of the articles you’ll read in this edition of the newsletter are our New Staff Spotlights, an in-depth look at the Men’s Project and their new co-facilitator, an overview of Eating Disorder Awareness Week, an inside look at our Alumnae and more! As always, thank you for reading and keeping up with the Women’s Center. We hope you enjoy our newsletter as much as we enjoy making it.

Letter from the Writing Intern

BY: JORDAN SHAW

My discovery of the Women's Center was a happy accident that occurred halfway through my senior year here at UConn. As a soon-to-be graduate with an English degree, the importance of getting an internship had been impressed upon me by parents and professors alike. Professional experience was a must for any college graduate, and my window to get some was rapidly closing. I began my search for an opening with the English department, and was referred to the Women's Center based on the writing samples I had submitted as part of my application.

I can confidently say that applying for the Writing Intern position here in the Women's Center is one of the best decisions I have made since I transferred to UConn. I was happy to discover a place on campus that fostered such a strong sense of community and encouraged learning and growth among its participants. I feel that the work I am doing here is truly making a difference on campus, and I am glad I have found a space to grow as a feminist. I hope that throughout the rest of the semester, I can continue to promote the Center on campus and work with everyone here to advocate for equality.

I am proud to work with our Editor, Lauren, on this edition of our newsletter where we are covering a variety of topics relevant to the Center and the work we do here. I hope that through this publication, we can bring awareness to feminist issues and help to lift up those around us.

Letter from the Director

BY: KATHLEEN HOLGERSON

This edition of *Voices* was written prior to March 11th, which signaled a turning point for many of us at UConn and beyond. What would usually have been the last few days for wrapping up before an often much needed Spring Break became the beginning of unprecedented times. It was on that day that it was announced that we would be moving to on-line classes until at least April 6th. Many began to speculate that the move would remain in place until the end of the semester, which turned out to be the case.

During the following week updates and changes to how we would work, teach, learn, and interact with each other were coming out on a daily and then hourly basis. As I write this letter, the University is at critical operations only. The State of Connecticut is under the Executive Order to "Stay Safe, Stay Home." People everywhere are figuring out how to navigate this new "normal" of remote education, essential work, and physical distancing.

We felt strongly that it was important to honor the work that went into producing this publication. We are proud of the students whose work shaped the programs and services of the Center this semester. We are committed to the community building activities such of the staff retreat and the Women's Affinity Group. We want to stay connected to our community, which includes highlighting our alums and their accomplishments. And we are looking to build on our past work to determine how we can best continue our work of education, advocacy, and support in these uncertain times.

As we messaged to our student staff, there are some things that are guiding our plans:

- 1) First and foremost, we are thinking of all of you, and your health and well-being are of our utmost concern.
- 2) We remain committed to our community of practice and will be creative

and flexible with how we can maintain our connections with each other. We are in this together.

3) We know everyone will be experiencing this disruption differently, so we ask that we all try to be as open and understanding of each other as possible.

4) As always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions for how we proceed.

I have had the opportunity to connect with colleagues across the country who are also thinking about how best to support our communities and ourselves. A few things from those conversations:

1) While there has been much kindness and care demonstrated, we recognize that bias and discrimination still exists and can be exacerbated during times of fear and crisis. If you or anyone you know has experienced incidents, there is help. Please visit <https://dos.uconn.edu/bias-reporting/> for more information.

2) Going home is not safe for everyone. For some family, partners, and/or guardians may be abusive. For support around gender-based violence, please visit <https://titleix.uconn.edu/>

3) Going home is not an option for everyone. Many of our International students are facing travel restrictions that preclude them from leaving and/or returning to the US. For some, those with whom they live do not recognize or honor their gender identities and expressions and/or their sexual orientation. If you find yourself feeling disconnected or not supported in your current living arrangements, please reach out to us. Our staff emails are available at <https://womenscenter.uconn.edu/about-us/meet-the-staff/>

I've been starting or ending almost all of my communications with "I hope you are well and your families are healthy and safe." To all who are taking the time to read this – that is my hope for you.

2020 Spring Staff Retreat

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

To kick off the start of the Spring Semester here at the Women's Center, we held an all Staff Retreat on January 24th. At the retreat, we engaged in a series of discussions and activities to help us think about the work that we do at the Center: intersectional feminism, what it means to be a community of practice, and call out vs. call in culture (the practice of informing or educating someone without making them feel judged). We also established boundaries and expectations for ourselves as colleagues and peers and talked about the work we'd like to accomplish for the semester ahead. Director Kathleen Holgerson, Associate Director Kathy Fischer, Graduate Assistant Yasmine Taha, and VAWPP Graduate Intern Kelly Fannery led the retreat in both informational and social activities.

I asked the student staff here at the center what they found most helpful and useful throughout the staff retreat:

"My favorite part of the retreat was finding out the strengths and weaknesses of the work style you were most similar to after taking a questionnaire. This exercise shed light on how I work and what I could do to optimize my time even better. This was very informative for myself and my peers. The exercise aided in how we can work together in the Women's Center despite our differences. We must be aware of each other and ourselves in order to collaborate fully." – Marielis Cruz, Co-Marketing Chair

"The staff retreat felt like the best way to reconnect with my coworkers and get inspired for the upcoming semester, while revisiting the successes and downfalls of last semester. It gave me a chance to fully prepare for the work ahead following the first week of class, and really align my mission as a staff member to that of the Women's Center as a whole. As the Women in STEM program Co-Coordinator, I want to take this semester to try and get more involved with the other student-led groups, like the marketing and programming committee, and help my participants realize just how much the Women's Center has to offer.

Being surrounded by my coworkers and friends made me feel excited about the future, but ready to put in the work I need to get there!" – Katie Kwochka, WiSTEM Co-Coordinator

"As a new staff member, attending the staff retreat was a great experience. I was able to get acquainted with key topics covered in the Center, and I got to know the other staff members better. Many of the activities that we did were very group-focused, so getting to see how everyone worked together made me feel very welcome here. I'm happy I got to be a part of it." – Jordan Shaw, Writing Intern

Overall, the retreat was a great way to get back into the swing of things here at the Center, and it helped start a dialogue on how we can aid each other in our work this Spring Semester.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLEVATE NETWORK

UConn Instagram Takeover

BY: MARIANA PELAEZ AND MARIELIS CRUZ

The Women's Center had the opportunity to "takeover" the UConn Instagram page, which has over sixty-six thousand followers. As the Co-Chairs of the Marketing Committee, we were in charge of the takeover, which consisted of posting content about the Women's Center in an attempt to advertise ourselves to everyone who follows the account. We hoped to gain more followers for the Women's Center Instagram and inspire students to get more involved with the Center. Most importantly, we wanted to showcase what the Center is about and inform students of all the different programs we provide.

The day consisted of posting on Instagram Stories from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. We had already created a timeline for the day and decided what posts we would include such as a tour around the Center, advertising for Herstory Month and Lunafest, and highlighting all of the programs and groups that UConn students can get involved in. A few days before, we pre-made some posts that could be quickly added to the page. The day of the takeover, we did a few live videos that talked about what we did at the Women's Center and the upcoming events that we're sponsoring or hosting.

We had fun creating the videos and posts knowing that we were advertising somewhere as impactful and special as the Women's Center. The Center had 950 followers on Instagram before the takeover and has reached over 1,000 afterwards! We hope that by taking over the Instagram we were able to accurately show UConn students, staff, faculty and alumni/ae about all of the incredible features of the Center, and hopefully drive more traffic to it in the future.

Follow us on Instagram for more updates!

<https://www.instagram.com/uconnwomenscenter/?hl=en>

WELCOME TO THE WOMEN'S CENTER INSTA TAKEOVER

MEET OUR MARKETING COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Senior
English major
Passionate about equality
for all identities

Junior
Political Science
and Human Rights major
Passionate about making
the world a better place
for future generations

M A R I E L I S

M A R



**MARKETING COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS MARIELIS
AND MAR FOR UCONN'S INSTAGRAM**

Men's Project Update

BY: TOMMY JACOBSEN

The Men's Project is super excited to start a new semester with a fresh cohort of young folks committed to our mission. We strive to train college students who will positively influence their peers by challenging social norms that promote gender-based violence, understanding their connection to survivors of gender-based violence, and role modeling effective bystander interventions. Our weekly meetings focus on topics such as gender socialization, masculinities, social justice, and gender-based violence. Over the break, we welcomed sixteen new participants into the program as well as a new Co-Facilitator, Ethan Werstler, to join returning facilitator, Tommy Jacobsen. We are excited to see what this new cohort will contribute in terms of their diverse experiences with the aforementioned topics, as well as what observations they can bring to the space to inform our group discussions.

We are also looking forward to officially rolling out a new part of our program called the "Spheres of Influence Facilitation". We recognize that having conversations around these topics can be challenging, especially for young men. In an attempt to support our participants in this endeavor, we are providing them the opportunity to facilitate a discussion within a UConn community to which they actively contribute (their "sphere of influence"). In these spaces, they will hold and engage in a conversation regarding a topic about masculinity that benefits both the people in that space and themselves as they develop their self-efficacy and competence in doing this work. We look forward to seeing what the folks in this cohort will accomplish and the impact that they will have on each other and the community, this semester and beyond.

New Staff Spotlights

BY: JORDAN SHAW

MARIELIS CRUZ



My name is Marielis Cruz. I am a senior. My major is English with a double minor in Psychology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. I am one of the Co-Chairs for the Marketing Committee. Mar and I did an Instagram Takeover on the UConn Instagram, and it was amazing. I am excited about working on the social media for the Women's Center and all of the upcoming events.

ETHAN WERSTLER



My name is Ethan Werstler, and I am a sophomore studying Political Science and Communications. I am so excited to be co-facilitating the Men's Project this semester. As a new participant in the Project, I am eager to jump right into the semester and learn everything I can. When I'm not working in the Women's Center, you can find me in the USG office, interning in the state capitol, or losing my mind in the

CONNOR DOUGAN



My name is Connor Dougan (he/him). I am a graduate practicum intern pursuing a Master's Degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs. I support the Women's Center by working on a committee for the Advance Conference, participating in the Men's Project, and by benchmarking peer and aspirant higher education institutions' women's centers, or lack thereof. I am originally from Kansas, but moved to Connecticut in August of 2019. My biggest complaint is that the sunsets are not like those on the open plains, but my biggest praise is the culture of the Northeast and everyone's diehard attitude toward Dunkin'. I am excited to support the Women's Center in all of its endeavors over the course of my time here and beyond.

KATIE MACHATA



My name is Katie Machata, and I am a senior Communications major and Human Rights minor. My role at the Women's Center is a VAWPP Ambassador which plans events for Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) in April and Take Back the Night! I joined to grow as an activist and empower students who come to our events. I'm excited to be part of the team this semester and be surrounded by people who care about making our campus more inclusive and supporting each other along the way!

ARIELA REITER



My name is Ariela Reiter, and I am a Marketing major with a concentration in Digital Marketing and Analytics, and a minor in Communications. I am returning to the Women's Center in a new position this spring! My position this semester is a Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) Teaching Assistant for the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) 3271 course on Rape Education and Awareness. Over my time in the Women's Center I have grown tremendously. This community has provided me with the resources to learn from other student staff at the Women's Center, allowing me to build relationships with the student leaders and understand the effect we can have on our campus. One of my favorite parts about working at the Women's Center are the friendships I am forming here, especially with the team of Teaching Assistants, Georgina and

JORDAN SHAW



My name is Jordan Shaw, and I'm a senior English major. I am the Women's Center Writing Intern, and I work with Lauren on this newsletter. I also put together the Daily Digest that goes out every Thursday. My main goal in joining the Women's Center staff is to learn more about feminism and to effect change on campus!

GEORGINA DENG



I'm Georgina, and I am one of the VAWPP Teaching Assistants. My job is to assist the instructor and help students learn and grow in the VAWPP class. I decided to return to the VAWPP program because I learned a lot and was inspired by my Teaching Assistants while I was a student in the VAWPP class last year, so this year I decided to be a Teaching Assistant of VAWPP and hopefully be the inspiration for others. I have grown by becoming more confident by getting involved in the Women's Center. Equipped with all the skills and knowledge I have learned in the Center, I believe that I can make a difference and am not afraid to do it. One of my favorite things about the Women's Center is how it provides free tampons to

XINGRU CHEN



I'm Xingru Chen. I am a junior pursuing a Psychology and Human Development and Family Studies major. It's my second semester working in Women's Center. I appreciate that the Women's Center not only taught me knowledge, but also made me become a better person. I am more active, calm, and empathetic, and my time here has helped me improve my mental health a lot. I am so happy I made such deep connections with other staff here. I have learned a lot from them, and I'm looking forward to growing together with them.

ESTHER SHAO



My name is Zeqing (Esther) Shao (she/her/hers), and I am one of the VAWPP Teaching Assistants. I am majoring in Psychology and Communications, and pursuing a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. A major part of my college life has been devoted to the Women's Center. I have been constantly inspired by thought-provoking life stories shared by my peers and deeply moved by their fearless attitudes in the face of social prejudice. I've enjoyed every moment of sharing my experience and applying my expertise to help people in need, while continuously learning from others and empowering myself along the way. I've had times when I was really lost and unclear about everything. However, the students, faculty, and staff members at the Women's Center all have encouraged me and empowered me in different ways, which has led me to become the person I am today - more outgoing, confident, happy, and funnier (I think). (cont.)

(cont.) My favorite staff meeting memory from my time in the Women's Center was when we finally had chicken wings. (Thank you Judy. Thank you Kathy. Thank you Kathleen. Thank you everybody.)

CECILIA VIDAURRE



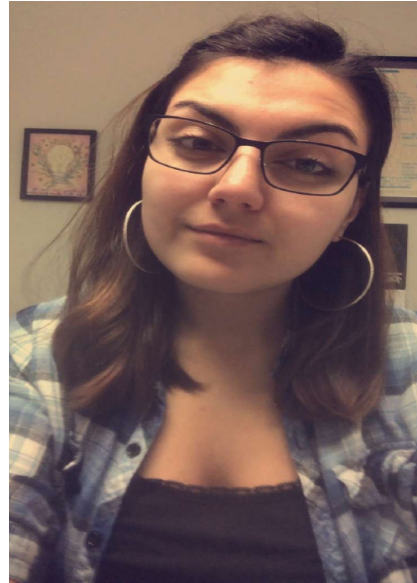
My name is Cecilia Vidaurre, but you can call me Cece. I am senior studying Latin American Studies and Human Rights with a minor in Spanish. I am planning on taking a gap year to gain experience, work, and travel before going to law school. I am an intern at Women's Center hoping to help make the Center more inclusive by building connections with other centers as well as collaborating with them about important issues affecting our communities. Please stay tuned for upcoming events!

GLADI SUERO



My name is Gladi Suero, and I am a sophomore Journalism and Communications major. My position at the Women's Center is VAWPP Ambassador. Ambassadors market the VAWPP program and plan events for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. As this is my second semester at the Center, I have learned and grown a lot since I first started. I've learned how to work effectively with other people as a team and have expanded my knowledge on feminist issues. I feel a lot more confident in my ability to spread awareness about gender-based violence to my fellow peers at UConn. I am excited to keep learning and growing this semester and to plan some great events!

MIRANDA GARCIA



My name is Miranda Garcia, and I use she/her/hers pronouns. This semester, I am a VAWPP Ambassador. I've previously been a VAWPP TA and Peer Facilitator. Over my time at the Women's Center, I feel like I have learned something new or seen a new perspective every day. Next year, I will be joining UConn's MPA program in hopes of working toward gender equity at a nonprofit or in government. My favorite memory at the Women's Center was meeting the class on my first day as a Teaching Assistant. Several of them had been participants in my workshops, and they were all so excited to begin their journey in this work. It reminded me of what an amazing

Women's Affinity Group

BY: KATHY PAIS

The Women's Affinity Group (WAG) at UConn was established in Spring 2019 through the Women's Center to empower and connect working women at UConn through events which encourage professional development, networking, and workplace support. Our mission "seeks to strengthen and empower the network of all women faculty, staff, and graduate assistants in our community across various identities through professional development workshops and social networking events. We aim to highlight and provide a space to process the various ways that gender matters in the personal and professional lives of women." WAG connects faculty, staff, and graduate assistants to campus resources and events promoting gender diversity, equity, and inclusion at UConn. WAG is excited to grow the group as a way to provide a welcoming and supportive space for working women to connect, mentor, and support each other across campus.

Since the group was established last spring, there have been various events to foster community among working women. Most recently on January 16, 2020, WAG hosted the Envision 2020 event where participants gathered at the Women's Center to sip warm beverages and create vision boards to visualize and actualize their professional and life goals. With twenty-five colleagues present, the event was well attended and participants left the activity feeling empowered to connect with each other and appreciative of the ability to network in a casual and creative environment.

Previous events have included a WAG networking happy hour last summer at the Nathan Hale Inn Tavern on the UConn campus. During the social, co-workers enjoyed delicious appetizers while getting the opportunity to engage and network with like-minded colleagues. WAG is also planning some exciting future events for this semester such as a hosting a guest speaker on a topic related to women's health and wellness. WAG also encourages colleagues to attend the various programs offered this spring by the Women's Center such as Lunafest and

the Women's Advance Conference on May 13, 2020. Lastly, WAG is actively recruiting members to join the Women's Affinity Group Planning Committee. If you are interested in promoting an inclusive, positive, and supportive working environment at UConn for women, please contact Lisa Famularo at womensaffinitygroup@uconn.edu. WAG has opportunities for members to get involved in the areas of event planning, administrative support, volunteering at events, social media and publicity efforts, and web development.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHERINE PAIS

Women's Center Alumni/ae

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

We asked some of the Women's Center alumnae to update us on their lives today and how their time and work at the Women's Center impacted their lives post-graduation. Many of them have continued within the fields of feminism, activism, and gender and sexuality studies. For those who haven't, they shared how their experience at the Center helped them in whatever career they chose to pursue. Here are a few of their staff bios. To read more, check out our Alumni' Update page on our website: <https://womenscenter.uconn.edu/about-us/>



MICK POWELL

2015

Professor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (my absolute dream job!)

University of Connecticut

My time as the Between Women Facilitator at the Women's Center led me to continue to seek community after graduating, to carve and keep important space for queer and trans women and femmes. My time at the Center was so rewarding, and I couldn't imagine being without such a thoughtful and intentional community!



RACHEL STEWART

2014

Director of Sexual Violence Prevention & Advocacy

Connecticut College

Being hired as a VAWPP facilitator completely changed my career path. Since graduation I have been working on college campuses supporting LGBTQ students and/or doing sexual violence prevention work.



CHANDRA WARING 2007

Associate Professor of Sociology and Race & Ethnic Studies

University of Wisconsin

The experiences and friendships that I developed at the WC definitely helped me feel more empowered as a young woman in a PhD program and later, as a young professor.



ALISON BERK 2009

Director of the Gender Equity Center

Arcadia University

My time at the Women’s Center has really guided me in professional life. I started working as a community educator at a DV agency out of undergrad and haven’t stopped working on issues around violence prevention and gender equity since.



GRETA KENNEY 2006

**Director of the Women’s Resource Center
Associate Dean of Students**

Cornell University

The Women’s Center has been embedded in every job I’ve ever had—from being a case manager at a domestic violence/sexual assault non-profit to a diversity and inclusion practitioner in higher education. More than anything though—what I’m most grateful for is how the Women’s Center shaped the way I think, view, and experience the world.



VANISSA KANIA 2017

Assistant Director, LGBTQ Student Center

University of Miami

My time at the Women’s Center led me to change my major to pursue my passion for social justice education, and I ultimately ended up going to grad school for Higher Education and Student Affairs.

Eating Disorder Awareness Week

BY: GRACE MANDY

“It is a powerful lie to equate thinness with self-worth.” - Roxane Gay

This year, National Eating Disorders Awareness Week took place from February 24th-28th, and so the Women’s Center, Active Minds, and SHAPE partnered up in an effort to provide as much support as possible to the UConn community during this time. This year, the campaign stressed the idea that “regardless of your body shape, weight, race, gender identity, ability, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or your stage of body acceptance and eating disorder recovery, your story is valid and deserves to be heard.” Working with this empowering message, we decided to table for the full week, collaborate on a self-love event with SHAPE, and collaborate on an informational panel with Active Minds.

For tabling, we created two important activities. The first involved writing positive messages about your body on a sticky note and then sticking them on a mirror. By the end of the week, the mirror was covered in messages, such as, “Don’t value your body over your being,” and, “It’s not your job to like me, it’s mine.” It was an incredibly powerful and moving display for students on campus to see. We also had an activity called “trash your insecurities.” This involves writing down anything you don’t like about your body, or anything you judge too harshly, and then ripping it up and throwing it in a garbage can. Some of these insecurities included things like “my nose,” or “my cellulite,” or “my jean size,” or even, “trying to be perfect all the time.” It was a great way to show that none of these things determine your self-worth. Paired with the mirror activity, it was a great way to teach students to let go of harsh and damaging self-judgment, and instead focus on all of the positive aspects about themselves.

Another activity, headed by SHAPE and USG, was the “Jars of Self-Acceptance.” It was an event where students could decorate a mason jar however they like and then fill it with statements about what they accept about their body. It was also a chance to reflect on what they may not accept yet and why, leaving

them with a goal to keep practicing self-love, even outside of NEDAW. These jars served as a reminder that self-love is a lifelong journey that takes time, effort, and reflection.

Active Minds, SHAPE, and the Women’s Center put on the Walden Panel, an event that sought to encourage conversation about mental health, stigma, and recovery. We had various employees from Walden Behavioral Care explain their experiences with these topics and even opened the floor up to questions at the end. It was an important opportunity to provide the community with resources they may need if they are struggling, and a great way to send the message that they are not alone.

Overall, NEDAW is a great way to increase awareness of these issues, and we hope to continue spreading the messages of self-love and healthy living throughout the entire year.



**PHOTO COURTESY OF
NATIONALEATINGDISORDERS.ORG**

Vagina Monologues - Then and Now

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

This past February, Page to Stage Productions, a drama club here at UConn, put on their annual performance of *The Vagina Monologues* in the Student Union Theatre.

The *Vagina Monologues* is a play written by Eve Ensler, and like the title suggests, revolves around a set of monologues about feminism, the woman experience, and, you guessed it, vaginas.

When the show first premiered back in 1996, it was praised by many but critiqued by others. For some, no other show had done anything like it: talk so openly about sex and anatomy and the hardships of women on stage in public. Even in 2018, the *New York Times* wrote that “no recent hour of theater has had a greater impact worldwide.” But who thought the show was radical, and who thought the show lacked in certain places? These are important questions to think about when discussing a show so widespread and popular. Many critique the show now for its lack of acknowledgments towards those who aren’t White, straight, Western cis women, but this isn’t a new phenomenon. Even within a decade of its inception, many critics argued that *The Vagina Monologues* wasn’t as inclusive as it could be.

One of the glaring issues is right in the title; *The **Vagina** Monologues*. At first, the show was written without a monologue about transgender women. However, after hearing complaints about the lack of gender identity representation in the show, Ensler added a monologue entitled “*They Beat the Girl Out of My Boy. . . Or So They Tried*” in 2004 that focused on the abuse, bullying, and trauma a transgender woman went through during her life. However, this monologue is still criticized, with people arguing that transgender women’s/people’s narratives don’t always have to focus on physical abuse. In an article for *The Daily Beast*, Samantha Allen lists various mainstream and popular media that tell stories about transgender people, but almost all of those narratives are steeped in violence.

Others discuss the lack of representation, or accurate representation, of Black women in the show. In her article *Our Vaginas, Not Ourselves: A Critical Analysis of the Vagina Monologues*, Alyssa Resier argues, "TVM has been revamped, rewritten, and appropriated so many times because in its untouched form, it suffers from a lack of diversity... And where Ensler does deviate from this hetero-hierarchy, she subtly degrades gender variance and is unknowingly racist. For example, in the monologue about a lesbian woman remembering how she discovered her sexual orientation, *The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could*, a Black child from a broken home is raped by her father's friend. The content of the piece draws from deeply racist stereotypes." Additionally, the same monologue focuses on the details of the statutory rape of a sixteen year old girl and an older woman. The play originally included the line, "if it was rape, it was a good rape", but was later removed due to controversy.

The show also faces criticism for mostly focusing on White, Western narratives of women. There are very few monologues that focus specifically on women that fall outside of these paradigms, but even then, they mostly focus on violent, physical abuse, especially when it pertains to women from non-Western cultures. Kim Hall, Professor of Philosophy at Appalachian State University, criticizes the play for how it handles women in developing countries, and further perpetuating "colonialist conceptions of non-Western women," particularly in the monologue *My Vagina Was My Village*. Additionally, in her article "V Is for Veil, V Is for Ventriloquism: Global Feminisms in *The Vagina Monologues*", Srimati Basu notes, "while a few of these forms of violence, such as sexual assault and denigration of genitalia, are depicted in U.S. locations, violence is the primary register through which 'the global' is evoked, the main lens for looking outside the United States. These global locations serve to signify the terror that is used to hold the laughter in balance, to validate the seriousness of the enterprise, while the 'vagina' pieces are more directly associated with pleasure and sexuality and set in the United States."

Many different colleges and high schools are ending or altering their traditions of performing the show. In 2015, Mount Holyoke, an all-girls college that recently began admitting transgender women, cancelled their annual production of the show, with Erin Murphy, a representative for the student run theater group, noting that they felt the show wasn't inclusive enough: "At its core, the show offers an extremely narrow perspective on what it means to be a woman," Murphy explained. "Gender is a wide and varied experience, one that cannot simply be reduced to biological or anatomical distinctions, and many of us who have

participated in the show have grown increasingly uncomfortable presenting material that is inherently reductionist and exclusive." Similarly, Berkeley High, of Berkeley California, replaced *The Vagina Monologues* with their own show entitled *Our Monologues*, an entirely student written and directed play "meant to represent the diversity of local high schoolers' experiences," according to a *Berkeleyside* article on the show. Other schools, like Columbia University in 2014, have chosen to have a cast made up entirely of women of color to highlight the lack of diversity within the show.

With all of that being said, is it time for the show as a whole to be rewritten or revamped so that it's more inclusive of *all* women? Is it time that the students who put on the show protest its content? Or can we admire something and celebrate it while also noting its fallbacks, too?

Having been in the show last year myself, I knew that our cast had talked about some of the problematic elements of the show, and I was wondering if this year's cast did the same, too. I asked a few of them what they thought about the play and where it's shortcomings are.

Kaitlyn Crosset, this year's director, says that they "address the fact that it's written in the 90's and progressive for the time, whereas nowadays it's really not. There's the vagina and women line, which basically says, 'you can't love a woman if you don't love vaginas', and for a long time people kept blatantly ignoring it, but we try to talk about it in rehearsals even though we can't necessarily change the lines in the show. It's not quite of the time anymore, but we still talk about the monologues for what they were written for."

Similarly, Kathryn Kuhn, who has been in the show for three years now, notes that the show has "taught me a lot about feminism and how exclusionary it can be if it's not intersectional, and how this show in particular misses those intersections often. It's very representative of white feminism and TERFS (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists), because even though Eve Ensler added a monologue about trans women, it was about trans women who wanted a vagina, and that's not all trans women. Or where's the monologue for men with vaginas? I think a lot of people, when they think of feminism, they think of this show and 'if we empower vaginas then women will be empowered," point blank, but that's only a sliver of it.'

In an article for *The Verge*, entitled "Why I'm most critical of the things I love," Chris Plante writes, "... the belief that criticism is inherently all-encompassing, that disliking part of something means a critic dislikes the whole, and worse, that if someone or something receives negative criticism, it is spoiled for the remainder

of history.” I feel that this quote is a good one to keep in mind as feminists; it’s important that we think critically about feminist media and literature, or anything, really, that we enjoy, so that we can challenge those we admire who create these pieces to do better. While Eve Ensler certainly fell short in many aspects of *The* that we can challenge those we admire who create these pieces to do better. While Eve Ensler certainly fell short in many aspects of *The Vagina Monologues*, it would be reductionist to dismiss all that she did well, too. She brought the idea of women’s bodies and sexual pleasure to the forefront of mainstream media and paved the way for more women to do the same.

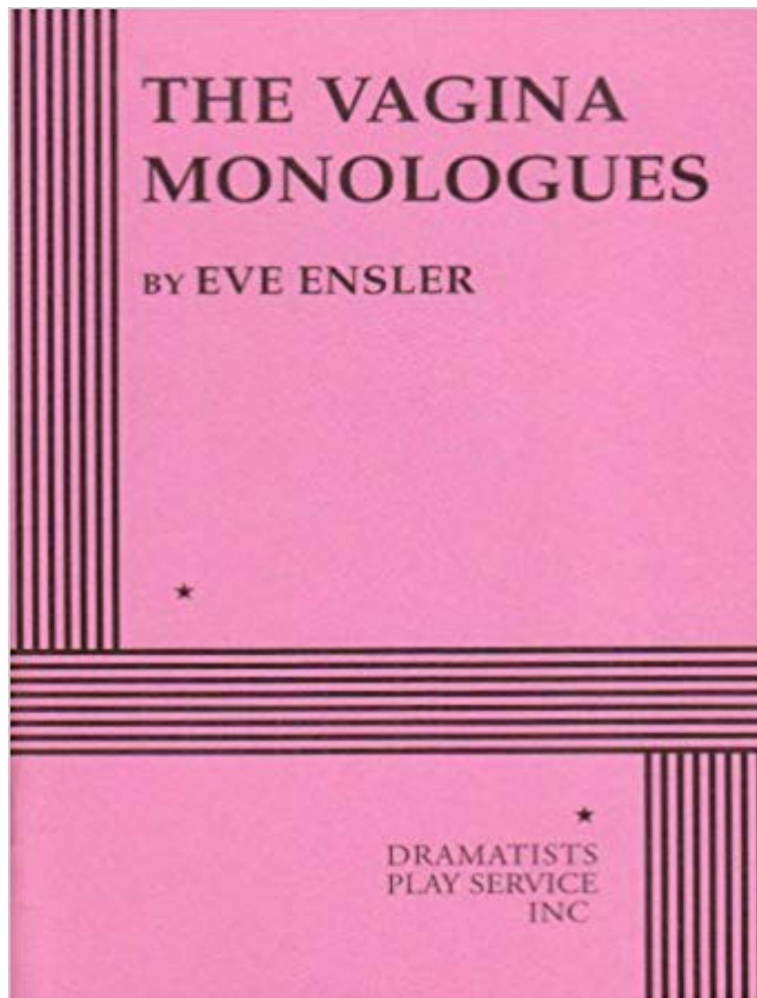


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Important Updates

Per UConn's decision to have students and staff work and study from home for the remainder of the semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Women's Center is closed until further notice. All staff are working remotely, and we will do our best to respond to you in a timely manner.

The safety and health of our students and staff, both at the Center and the University at large, are our number one priority. Below are a list of resources tailored to our work at the Center and to the ongoing COVID-19 situation:

- If you are in need of support regarding a sexual assault, Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut has a 24 hour hotline with counselors and advocates at **860-456-2789** or visit their website: <http://www.saccec.org/>
- If you are in need of support regarding dating or domestic violence, Safe Futures has a 24 hour hotline at **860-701-6000** or visit their website: <https://www.domesticshelters.org/help/ct/new-london/06320/safe-futures>
- Additional information about related resources both on and off campus can be found at <https://titleix.uconn.edu/>
- UConn Health has created a Call Center to answer any questions you may have about the virus. They can be reached at **860-679-3199**, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- UConn Health also has a COVID-19 FAQ page on their website to address concerns about one's individual health, which can be found at <https://health.uconn.edu/coronavirus#faq>
- If this is an emergency, please call 911.

Staff may be reached via email. Contact information can be found at <https://womenscenter.uconn.edu/about-us/meet-the-staff/>

**THANK YOU FOR
READING, FROM THE
WOMEN'S CENTER
STAFF.**