

Chloe Castro-Santos
April 12, 2017

The field of theatre is frequently dominated by men -- men direct, write, produce, design, act as dramaturgs and star in most productions put up on a commercial stage. That is, perhaps, what makes the Vagina Monologues so unique. I had never seen or performed the Vagina Monologues in full before stepping onto the stage to perform with a cast of thirty-seven girls this past Saturday night. I watched each monologue with genuine intrigue and reactions, hearing many of them in full for the first time.

The Vagina Monologues are a series of monologues compiled from hundreds of interviews by author Eve Ensler to give a variety of perspectives into women's experiences with their sexuality and their relationship with their own anatomies. Proceeds went to New England Learning Center for Women in Transition in Greenfield. Each uncensored, personal account is performed by a different student; some in pairs, some in groups, some solo. Some monologues continue for pages, some in the forms of poems. They portray women from every walk of life -- sex workers, CEO's, survivors of sexual assault, victims of violence, immigrants, LGBTQIA+ women, women of color, the elderly, the very young, and so on.

I sat on the stage, positioned in an arc of chairs. One by one, girls would stand and walk to center stage and tell their character's story. I suddenly realized what a unique experience this was. Much like the women whose stories were recorded, we were all from different walks of life. This group of girls wasn't a group of "theatre kids," coming together for just another high school production. In fact, very few had participated in any production at Northfield Mount Hermon before. I sat in the arc between my friend from dance, and a friend who plays lacrosse. People from every imaginable team was there -- debate, frisbee, swimming, and so on. Dance company members, eco leaders; girls from other countries, girls from the United States, girls of every race, sexuality, gender expression, economic status... the list could continue.

Our directors were female and our cast was female, but our audience was a mixture of male and female upperclassmen, lowerclassmen, faculty, parents, and more. My friends were there, but my female friends were with me on the stage, while my male friends watched attentively from the audience. Contrary to how that sounds, weren't separated. We were joined together in an artistic experience, watching young girls be empowered to talk openly about experiences that they and audience members may or may not relate to. The Vagina Monologues, chock full of controversial material, could be argued to be too risque for a high school to put on. I would respectfully disagree. These are real experiences of women; women who are so frequently silent because they have been told to be silent about their anatomy, sexuality, empowerment, and so on. These monologues are real experiences, being presented onstage in a thoughtful and open-minded manner. Giving women a chance to be heard in the performing arts is essential to a well-rounded education; what better way to offer a voice than to bring a community of diverse women together to speak proudly to their peers?