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## Speaking Out

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# Speaking Out

## **Abstract**

Why can we not take action now? I asked myself this question when, as a program coordinator for the Women's Center I decided to take part in the Vagina Monologues because I wanted to change them- monologues that are centered on the experiences of white, upper-class cis-gender women. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

diversity, exclusion, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, heteronormativity, inclusion, LGBTQIA, Privilege, survivor's incorporated, Vagina Monologues, White Privilege, Women's Center

## **Disciplines**

Civic and Community Engagement

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

**[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward**

## SPEAKING OUT

February 18, 2019

Why do I hold back?

Why do I feel a knot in my throat when I want to speak?

When I finally speak, my voice disperses across the room into silence.

My words become thin like paper without any weight. I hear “will think about it,” “I understand,” “that is very important,” “I agree.”

As time passes, we get to the point where thinking without action becomes a problem.

Why can we not take action now? I asked myself this question when, as a program coordinator for the Women’s Center I decided to take part in the Vagina Monologues because I wanted to change them—monologues that are centered on the experiences of white, upper-class cis-gender women.

I was part of the show as a first-year student and I had read the book, mesmerized by the idea that I was reading about vaginas for the first time. I felt empowered, but later realized that I was socialized to feel empowered by a white woman’s experience. I have been so used to not seeing myself represented in any work that I read in school or shows I saw on TV that it become normalized. After participating in it, I saw the disconnect. My vagina is not pink, not all women have vaginas and my genitals are not the only thing that makes me a woman. The Vagina Monologues are exclusionary to the experiences of transgender people, women of color and women outside of the United States.

As one of the program coordinators that would co-direct the Vagina Monologues, I was excited to make changes so it could be more inclusive. However, I suddenly felt too “radical” when proposing to take out original monologues because I felt they did not represent all women. I knew that change needed to happen slowly. If we took many of the pieces out of the Vagina Monologues, it could affect the money raised for Survivors and it was already popular within the white community. Changing it would be “confusing” and reduce attendance at this “traditional” event. Although the Vagina Monologues were a concern that I constantly addressed, the problematic aspects were taken seriously when a white person spoke against it. When this happened, planning was already underway and completely changing the

event would not be possible due to the lack of time and cancelling it was something the administration wanted to avoid.

As a result, the only choice was to create Our Voices as an addition to make up for the exclusive nature of the Monologues and to allow for the unrepresented voices to be heard.

Although I acknowledge that we only put a Band-Aid on a deep wound that has been felt through the invalidation of many people, I felt empowered by being able to make this small change.

But, at the same time, it was very mentally draining. I felt I had to carry the weight of my whole community in my back. I had to do things right so I did not contribute to an oppressive system. Like many people with underrepresented identities, I struggle to find a balance between being the voice of the unheard and being our own voice. We are forced to become activists because when we look at the societal mirror we do not have the privilege to see a reflection of who we are. I have fought to see that reflection, but when working in white spaces, there is still internalized oppression that holds back my voice. There is fear of being “too political” or being seen as the “angry brown girl.”

When choosing the monologues for Our Voices, we, as program coordinators, selected pieces by white women. This did not seem like a problem to anyone until I analyzed our actions and shared that our choices had been problematic. I broke my silence to say that I did not want the work of white women to be part of that section of the performance.

But, why was I the only one who said it? Why did the white women in my group not realize that they were the ones occupying more space? Why did they not make accommodations to include a piece from a transgender person even though it was submitted a little late? Why did they not volunteer to remove one of their own monologues to create a place for it? Why was it me? I believe it was because I know what it feels like to be excluded. I also know that I can share the small privilege that I have to bring light to those whose experiences are marginalized. It is difficult to see this when you have been up on the social hierarchy and not being able to relate to the people that are at the bottom.

However, we don't need to argue about who is more oppressed. Instead, we should recognize our own privileges and hold ourselves accountable, without justification, when we realize our actions have not been inclusive.

As a woman of color, I use my voice today to break the fear that keeps us quiet.

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