

Dear PLU Campus Community:

We - Elsa, Lottie, and Zanthia - are writing to inform our community that the PLU 2018 production of *The Monologues*, based, in part, on Eve Ensler's "*Vagina Monologues*," is cancelled.

This decision was reached mutually by the three of us, the remaining directors of this production, and with guidance from our advisors. We have come to this decision after receiving and then reflecting on feedback from those involved with the production. We do not make this decision lightly, and hope that this letter helps shed light on why *The Monologues* will not take place at PLU this year.

When *The Vagina Monologues* were first created by Eve Ensler, in the late 90s, it was a production for women to empower one another through sharing their experiences with sexism and gender-based violence. However, while the script featured monologues for women of color, women of differing socio-economic classes, and women who identified as queer, alongside white women; they were all originally written by a white, cisgender woman. Over the years, the production accumulated a reputation as culturally appropriative and exclusionary of women who do not have vaginas. The amount of progress made toward being inclusive of women (people) of color and people who do not ascribe to traditional conceptions of gender has been minimal. When PLU moved toward putting on *The Monologues*, without "vagina" in the title, the hope was that the show would not only become more inclusive and supportive of all gender targets, but feature the voices of those within our own community in particular. New monologues by PLU students and community members appeared alongside the originals written by Eve Ensler, and were widely acclaimed by audiences.

This year, as we embarked on producing the 2018 performances of *The Monologues* at PLU, we had this background in mind, and hoped to build upon previous efforts made towards inclusivity. However such an endeavor takes an awareness of how we three, as white, cisgender women take up space to create an inclusive environment and, to various degrees and in varying manners, we failed to do this. Originally, there were two more directors on our team, both of whom are people of color, but they each left the production team separately and for personal reasons. Soon after their departures additional people of color began to leave the production in response to their experiences being marginalized (which we discuss below), and a leadership team with which they could no longer identify. Some of the other white cast members heard about these departures and decided individually to resign from the production in solidarity.

The Monologues is meant to be a production that amplifies marginalized voices, but our actions, or in some cases inaction, instead formed an exclusionary show that does not represent the intersectional feminism that the Center for Gender Equity and the PLU campus teach and promote.

We would like to specifically address a number of issues with the production. The space we took up as white women kept people of color in the show from being able to fully express themselves, and from feeling comfortable within the cast and production team. And while we eventually noticed the tension, instead of pausing to address it, we chose to move forward with the production. This act of omission: pushing the experience of a marginalized community aside so that we could continue with the project, was ignorant. Not immediately acknowledging the tension and our role in creating an unsafe space further harmed the people of color involved with the production.

Additionally, as cisgender women we failed, in different ways, to meet the needs of trans performers in the production. We grouped their pieces together instead of respecting their individuality and integrating their voices throughout the entire show. Again, as directors, we did not hold one another accountable. By failing to call out instances of cissexism we not only injured trans performers, but we also sent the message to non-trans performers that such behavior was acceptable.

Finally, we were not transparent about our creative process, and as a result, contributed to misconceptions about the way the performance was framed. We did not share with our cast the ways in which we were planning to frame *The Monologues* as a whole and its individual pieces. This created an environment in which cast members felt their voices were continuing to be marginalized or ignored altogether. Our mistakes in this area only amplified the more egregious mistakes we made that are expressed above.

We want to emphasize that while being an active bystander can be difficult, silence is a form of complicity. No matter the personality type, as white-cisgender women, we each have the ability and the responsibility to check each others' privilege, as well as our own, at all times.

We recognize that many people and many of our friends, whether they were a part of the production or not, are confused, angry, and hurt. If you need resources to help you process, please contact the Center for Gender Equity, Counseling Center, or Campus Ministry.

Lastly, we want to acknowledge that our apology is meaningless if no growth comes from it. What we are learning is how to act against the ways we were socialized, how to speak up

THE 2018 MONOLOGUES: AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PLU CAMPUS COMMUNITY

when we witness injustice, and how to listen and be aware of the voices that are silent. What we are learning is that we will never stop learning.

This is a small campus and news travels fast. This is a campus where the majority of students, faculty, and staff benefit from privilege. *The Monologues* is supposed to address this and offer a place of healing, community, and conversation. We hope future directors of *The Monologues* will cultivate a tradition of an inclusive and intersectional feminism that encourages and supports ALL voices to speak in a world that does not always want to hear them.

We want to invite people to share how they are feeling and talk about how they want to be heard. There is no positive change without work, and we, as well as other privileged groups, have work to do. We hope that this open letter serves as a contribution to conversations on campus about how we and other privileged groups on campus can work to dismantle the oppressive systems that we benefit from. Finally, we ask that you respect the personal, figurative, and literal, space of marginalized folks who have been involved with *The Monologues*. We hope to keep further harm from being inflicted. We ask that you contact us or Talcott Broadhead at the Center for Gender Equity with further questions, concerns, and/or comments about our statements in this letter.

Sincerely,

Elsa Kienberger,
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