



IS FOR VIOLENCE, VALENTINE, VAGINA... AND CONTROVERSY

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A look at the voices behind V-Day

Each Valentine's Day, when images of hearts, flowers, chocolate, and hallmark cards dance in the minds of lovers and friends, activists aim to promote a different message: the demise of violence against women and girls. The global non-profit movement V-Day has branded Feb. 14 as V-Day, with the V standing for Violence, Valentine and Vagina.

Although Valentine's Day has come and gone, V-Day is an ongoing campaign that aims to raise awareness about, and fight to stop, violence against women and girls. From Feb. 1 to April 30, local volunteers and college students will produce benefit performances of the play *The Vagina Monologues* to increase awareness and raise funds for anti-violence groups such as rape crisis centers and women's shelters within their communities.

V-Day also stages large-scale benefits and produces innovative gatherings, films and campaigns to educate and change social attitudes towards violence against women. In 2008, more than 4,000 V-Day benefit events took place around the world, and over the course of 10 years, the V-Day movement has raised more than \$60 million.

The Birth of a Revolution

Before the creation of V-Day, *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler took the nation by surprise. Based off of interviews that Ensler conducted with 200 women about their views of sex, relationships, and violence against women, the play, which opened in 1996, quickly gained popularity through a word-of-mouth campaign.

The stories explore female sexuality and strength through a series of monologues, all of which relate to the vagina through sex, love, rape, menstruation, mutilation, masturbation, birth, orgasm, or the variety of names for the vagina. Ensler wanted to shatter the taboo surrounding the word vagina and lift women out of the darkness and secrecy surrounding their bodies and sexuality. Ensler's experience performing *The Vagina Monologues* inspired her to create V-Day in 1998. Now the play has been translated into 45 languages and performed in more than 120 countries.

V-Day 2009 Spotlight: Democratic Republic of Congo

Each year V-Day focuses on a group of women who are experiencing violence with the hope of raising awareness and funds to put a worldwide media spotlight on this area and provide aid. After Ensler traveled to the Congo in 2007 and heard the tales of women who had been sexually tortured, she was compelled to do whatever she could to help them.

Ensler launched the Stop Raping our Greatest Resource: Power to Women in the DRC campaign to bring attention to the brutalities committed against women and girls in Eastern DRC and demand an end to the impunity with which these crimes are committed.

Even though the war in the Congo is formally over, sexual violence continues daily. Rape is used as a weapon of war to torture and humiliate women and girls. Entire families and communities are torn apart by acts of sexual violence. Survivors often suffer in silence, fearing stigma and ostracism. In addition to the severe psychological impact, many survivors are left with genital lesions, and other physical wounds, as well as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Local response to support survivors is hindered by a lack of resources. Official United Nations Population Fund statistics show that in the two Kivu provinces alone more than 3,500 women and girls were raped in the first six months of 2008.

To find out more information, or to join the campaign, visit <http://raisehopeforcongo.org>.

V-Day at ASU

ASU became involved with V-Day in 1999, the first year of the college campaign movement. Each year through tabling and events on campus, actors and activists share information about the prevalence and danger of violence against women, and they produce a show as a fundraiser for



Photo by Kathryn Reyes



Statistics for Concern

- According to Home Safe's data from the spring of 2008, one out of 20 female ASU students and one out of 100 male ASU students experienced either an attempted or completed sexual assault.
- National surveys report that one in four college women has experienced rape or an attempted rape.
- According to the FBI, everyday four women die in America as a result of domestic violence. The number of women who have been murdered by their intimate partners is greater than the number of soldiers killed in the Vietnam War.
- According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, every two minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.
- The Arizona Department of Public Safety estimates that a forcible rape occurs every four hours and 35 minutes.
- Somewhere in America a woman is battered, usually by her intimate partner, every 15 seconds.



a local shelter.

Auditions for the play are held in the fall, and actors must fill out a form detailing why they want to be involved and how devoted they are to the cause. Tiffany Duening, a senior at ASU who organizes and helps produce *The Vagina Monologues*, says once people become involved, it becomes a bigger part of them. Aside from rehearsing and marketing together, the cast is educated on sexual violence and how it affects college students. Home Safe, a violence prevention and education program at ASU, trains the cast in the fall.

According to Duening, the cast and crew start tabling Feb. 1 outside of the Memorial Union. Every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., they'll advertise for the show and sell merchandise such as t-shirts and chocolate vaginas.

"It's amazing how many people will come up to the girls at the tables and open up about their experiences," she says. "People feel connected to our girls and we can really support each other."

Duening adds that girls who previously acted in the play always come back to support the movement and help raise awareness. "You can never completely leave the movement," she explains.

ASU V-Day generally raises \$10,000 to \$15,000 each year. Of those funds, 80 percent goes to a local shelter, 10 percent goes to the national





V-Day campaign and the final 10 percent is allotted to ASU Home Safe.

Three shows will run this year in Neeb Hall on the Tempe campus. The first show will be Feb. 28 and two shows will run on March 1. Tickets can be purchased online at <http://asuvday.com>. They're \$12 for students and \$15 for general admission.

ASU V-Day's Beneficiaries

Some of the profits raised through the ASU V-Day campaign this year will go to SEEDs (Support Education, Empowerment, and Directions). SEEDs, a project of the National Advocacy & Training Network, was established in January 2003 to help battered and sexually abused women recover. According to the ASU website, "the project is a community-based transitional home committed to the physical, mental, and emotional healing of women whose lives have been affected by substance abuse and violence." One home is located in Mesa and one is in Phoenix.

Monalou Callery, the executive director of SEEDs, says the organization tries to provide a holistic approach to [helping] women to become completely self-sufficient. "We want to help them clean up all the wreckage," Callery says. "First we make sure they're safe, and then we educate them." The program assists women with job skills, permanent housing, financial independence and money-saving strategies.

Duening says they've donated to SEEDs in the past and wanted to focus on them again this year. "We've visited the shelters, and we know they do great work," she says. "We really see the impact of our funding." Callery says last year the funds raised by the ASU V-Day campaign helped with operating costs, rent, food, and electricity. "This type of funding is crucial to our existence," she explains. "They helped us keep our doors open."

ASU Home Safe

Karen Moses, the director of the Wellness and Health Promotion at ASU, says the ASU V-Day campaign has an instrumental role in Home Safe. Moses says through the campaign's funding, Home Safe was established in 2004. "V-Day helped us to get going," she says. "If it wasn't for V-Day, there wouldn't be Home Safe."

According to Moses, Home Safe is an "outlet for anyone who's been a victim of sexual violence. Home Safe will provide them with contacts and information about what to do next."

Home Safe also offers presentations about sexual violence and creating healthy relationships.

The Controversy

When *The Vagina Monologues* was first performed in 1996, the emotionally charged subject matter and graphic language sparked a degree of controversy. Since then, many communities and colleges have been resistant about the production.

Since 2003, the Cardinal Newman Society, a group dedicated to renewing and strengthening Catholic identity at Catholic universities and colleges, has campaigned against *The Vagina Monologues*. According to the Cardinal Newman Society's website, the group believes the production presents a view of women's dignity, love and sexuality that significantly contradicts Catholic teaching. More than 20,000 members have opposed the play on American Catholic campuses by writing and

e-mailing college and university presidents.

At ASU, the Network of enlightened Women, a conservative women's club, promotes conservative ideals and intellectual diversity. Since the group was established in 2006, its members have been protesting *The Vagina Monologues*.

President Blayne Bennett says they believe the message portrayed by *The Vagina Monologues* does not serve as a vehicle to push the women's movement forward.

"*The Monologues* claims to empower women, but when I look at the script, all I see is the reduction of women to nothing more than a body part," Bennett says. "I do not want to seek the meaning of my existence from my vagina. I believe there is much more to me, and every woman, than a sexual organ. I believe a real power that women hold is in mysteriousness and intrigue. I am more than my sexuality, and my sexuality is a lot more than a body part."

Bennett says NeW does not protest the play in an attempt to silence other women. Instead, Bennett says they advocate another alternative: the dignity of a woman.

In the past NeW has protested *The Vagina Monologues* by holding signs, handing out flyers, and hosting lectures about the production. This year, NeW is looking to offer an alternative to the production. The group will host a Gentlemen's Showcase. Bennett says the main goals of the showcase are "to show genuine appreciation for the gentlemen of ASU and let women of ASU know that good men do exist." NeW will accept nominations for men who have performed a gentlemanly act at the NeW table outside of the MU and through e-mails to asuenlightenedwomen@gmail.com. A nomination must include the nominee's full name along with a description of the gentlemanly act performed. The top 10 gentlemen, the students with the most nominations, will be honored at a dinner event open to the ASU public.

"Women have the great potential to impact their lives and others if they take the initiative to require respect and honor from the men in their lives," Bennett says. "This would force the men to reevaluate their actions towards and perceptions of women."

In response to the controversy, Duening says the cast invites NeW to the show and tries to educate them on what the play really symbolizes. "We just try to help them understand what we're doing," she says.

If you or someone you know has been a victim of violence or sexual assault, there are people who can help.

ASU Office of Student Life Victim's Assistance: 480-965-6547

ASU Home Safe: 480-965-4721

ASU West Women's Resource Center: 602-543-3421

Counseling Services, Tempe: 480-965-6146

CASA (Center Against Sexual Abuse): 602-254-6400

Empact: 24-hour crisis intervention: 480-784-1500

Center Against Family Violence: 480-644-4075

For more information on V-Day go to <http://newsite.vday.org>

