

# Roleplay Documentary Honors Original Tulane University Stage Production

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When "[Roleplay](#)," a play that explores the college experience and focuses mainly on the issue of sexual assault, first debuted in 2019, it received an enthusiastic response. Now, a documentary about the making of the show is also generating significant interest. Filmmaker Katie Mathews, Adjunct Professor Darci Fulcher, and Associate Professor of Theatre Jenny Mercein worked in collaboration with 15 Tulane students and artists from local theatre company Goat in the Road Productions to write, produce, and ultimately perform in the play.

The documentary originally premiered at SXSW film festival in March, and Newcomb Institute at Tulane University hosted a screening in October at Village Theater in Lake Hall. A full house included students, faculty, and past cast members. Mercein, a producer of the play and documentary, introduced the film as a potential “period piece,” since it was filmed throughout 2019. She noted that many conversations surrounding the topics featured in the film, like sexual assault, have evolved which resulted in a revised version of Roleplay in 2022. “Art is a catalyst for conversation, and conversation is a catalyst for change,” she said.

Even as conversations have changed and progressed, it continues to promote new perspectives. Joanna Fashijan, a junior at Tulane said, “Roleplay impacted me personally, because it opened my eyes to the wide range of experiences Tulane students face regarding sexual violence.”

The audience was immediately captivated and stayed fully engaged throughout the entire 90-minute feature film. There were gasps, tears, laughs, groans, and silence. No one had a phone out or talked. Most of the documentary was clips from rehearsals, writing sessions, and one-on-one interviews with cast members, but sprinkled with filmed versions of some scenes.

Roleplay is a raw, poignant look at important topics at universities across the country. “The Tulane University students created and performed an incredibly groundbreaking theatrical production. Roleplay the film gives us a backstage pass...It changed me. Access to these brilliant young minds and what they’ve accomplished got to me on a cellular level,” said reviewer Ashely Smith.

The cast members were deeply vulnerable in the documentary, discussing their experiences with sexual assault, racism, trauma, heterosexism, alcoholism, and complacency in the campus rape culture. One of the actors, Carl Briggs, Jr., said, “Creating the stage play was a test in vulnerability, trust, collaboration, problem solving, and outreach. I grew in empathy and declined in judgment.”

Miranda Jo Kramer, another actor, stated, “It's very, very, very, very hard to be vulnerable, but I think once you're vulnerable, it can begin the healing process.” The production team’s goal was to start conversations, and they believed that this performance and documentary are the gateway to that.

For members of the Tulane community, this documentary was particularly impactful. Familiar shots of the Commons, the Boot, Aron apartments, Diboll parking garage,

and other Tulane campus staples acted as grounding reminders of who and what Roleplay is really about — Tulane students navigating many issues they face, including racism and rape culture.

The film was originally inspired by the [Tulane University Climate Survey on Sexual Misconduct](#) in 2018, which revealed that 41% of female students and 19% of male students reported being sexually assaulted during their time on campus.

Mercein emphasized the film's transformative power and the importance of its being screened at Tulane, [saying](#), "Students will be seeing their reality, their campus reflected back to them. The young people in the film speak directly to their peers, creating a feedback loop that can transform behavior on campus."

After the film screening, Fashjian, as a representative from the [Sexual Violence Prevention and Response organization](#), guided a Q&A session. Actors from the initial Roleplay performance, Matthews, and Mercein answered several questions about what the play and film's production and reception was like. Fashjian said, "Learning how much this production has impacted students and faculty at Tulane and beyond was so valuable, and shows that Roleplay is truly resonating."

In 2022, another Sexual Misconduct Climate Survey was conducted and revealed that almost 50% of Tulane students believe that there are actions they can take to combat sexual assault on campus. "The good news is that students do report that they care about this issue and are engaging with educational opportunities. That's one of the reasons I'm so supportive of projects like Roleplay. They can be a really powerful tool for helping our community learn about this issue and inspiring students to work towards change," said Julia Broussard, Tulane University's Chief Title IX Officer.

"As we reflect on Roleplay's impact, it's clear that this project has done more than just open a dialogue—it has empowered our students to confront difficult realities and inspire real change," said Laura Wolford, Associate Director and Director of Operations at Newcomb Institute. "By holding space for these stories and providing a platform for these courageous voices, Roleplay exemplifies Newcomb's vision of raising awareness and preventing sexual harassment and assault."