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## One-woman show uses honesty and humor to discuss body image

Alex Paun March 7, 2017



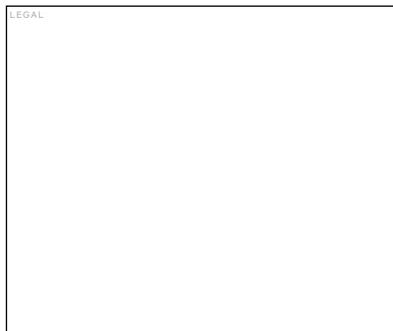
UPC guest speaker Kimberly Dark speaks in the Centennial Room on March 6, 2017.

Photo by Ann Milroy

“We like the idea that people should be valued for their talent, their verve and their beautiful hearts-- and we also know that’s bullshit.”

That’s a good indicator of how “Things I Learned From Fat People on a Plane,” the title of Kimberly Dark’s unapologetic one-woman show at the Centennial Room at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln went last night.

Dark, a sociologist turned performance artist, used a mixture of dramatic storytelling and envelope-pushing honesty to discuss body image and break down the stigma American society places around being a fat person.



“If fat is to be discussed at all, it must be made visible again,” Dark said. She called the word a neutral descriptive term, much like being tall or blond.

Reading from a large golden book against a plain black backdrop, Dark opened with a heartfelt poem directed at the audience about transcending one’s appearance in order to find true happiness.

“There is no wrong way to have a body. You’re so much more,” Dark said.

In a world where a woman speaker's clothing is often a greater focal point than the content of her speech, every piece of Dark's outfit was carefully crafted in symbolic defiance.

Wearing an airplane seatbelt extender as a belt with a form fitting dress under a cardigan, Dark sat still in a chair--the only prop onstage--to demonstrate the way people of larger stature sit on airplanes to avoid discomforting others.

"This thing about learning to be still, it just doesn't happen on airplanes," Dark said.

Dark said that negative associations with fat are socially constructed barriers.

She often referred to the dichotomy between being within the constraints of society and outside them as being the "respectable and the pitied one."

The pitied one, of course refers to the fat one.

Dark's first anecdote, her story behind the name of her show, was about a woman she sat on next to on a plane that confidently acknowledged her size when confronted with by another passenger, inspiring her to embrace her own deviation from the norm.

"I learned there are two different kinds of body acceptance activism: to do what you want and have no shame about it, and to inform others about it," Dark said. "I learned to be more like that woman on the plane."

Dark's stories ranged from brief anecdotes about dating a significantly thinner person she met at one of her talks, to being eerily self-aware she was larger than many girls her age at nine years old.

Although she sprinkled bits of biting humor throughout her talk, Dark's personal stories hit hard, and oftentimes the audience seemed taken aback by her candidness tackling such taboo topics.



Around the middle of the speech, Dark said the stage lights were too hot and playfully asked if taking off her cardigan would make anyone uncomfortable. The audience fell silent. She did it anyway.

The whole time, the girls in front of me kept looking at each other as if to ask "did she really just say that?"

Dark opened the last ten minutes of the talk to crowdsourcing clever responses to hurt comments made about fat people, in order to redirect the conversation to a more positive place.

A highlight was when a girl said her thighs touching made her that much closer to being a mermaid.

"We inconvenience our passengers not because we want to, but because of the diversity of the human body," Dark said, chalking up weight gain to genetic predispositions as well as personal choice.

Dismantling the notion that being overweight equates to being unhealthy, Dark pointed out the double standard that "plenty of trim people are not necessarily healthy, but that's often overlooked."

Dark ended her speech with a call to action.

"You have a script by age five where you just assume this is what you're supposed to look like," she said. "You can't put it down, but you can edit."

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