



Kimberly Dark, stripped and teased for a purpose

By Anna-Marie Epps

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Kimberly Dark has a way of captivating people with her stories about gender, sexuality, violence against women and media generated ideas of beauty. The reason Dark's performances are so successful aren't because she is writing about other people but she is writing about life, namely her own.

"I don't write fiction," says Dark. "I am interested in the moments in life that are kooky, humorous and meaningful all at the same time,"

says Dark.

Fiction isn't part of Dark's performance. It's all facts about real people and real situations. Discrimination, violence and gender issues occur each day in the home, in the workplace and especially on college campuses. VCU with the Department of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services invited Dark to share some her deepest stories in "Stripped and Teased: Scandalous Stories with Subversive Subplots" Friday.

Dark, Sociology Professor and principal for the consulting firm Current Change Consulting, grew up involved in the family business, modeling and finishing school, exposing her to generated images of women.

"It was hard to have meaningful conversations about women," states Dark recalling her childhood. "Now I look to sociology to help us understand gender as an organization because we separate gender into two boxes...so much that we don't understand each other."

Dark's mission is simple. "I am trying to tell stories that are accessible," she says. "I try to create a balance so that people understand the stories, yet stay on the edge of discomfort. Sometimes my students and listeners are shocked. But I meet my audience where they are. My stories are different each time I tell them."

For Dark the most rewarding aspect of teaching both men and women in large and small audiences are their reactions. Men and women see the stories in different ways.

"I am afraid we have gender so wrapped up that we don't understand each other. Men sometimes don't believe that women could be victims of discrimination on a regular basis," says Dark.

This is why she makes her shows interactive. She wants to get people talking about the gender, sexuality and abuse issues people deal with from day to day.

"I want to allow conversation," says Dark. "I am trying to be real. I tell the stories as if I am a listener myself. I want to make them think."

Dark's favorite aspect of "Stripped and Teased" is it's messages on body image and putting forth effort to be liked. Dark tells her stories in first person with vivid imagery and words that help reel audiences in to the other's struggles and ultimately, their own, especially when it comes to having a positive self-image.

"I have my own struggles. I am on the path. It's a conscious thing for the media to send messages about what they think it's beautiful. That's until you realize you are worth way more than that," says Dark.

kimberlydark.com