

Tuesday, February 17, 2004

EDITORIAL

Protesters undermined the diversity they sought

In a bizarre display that seethes with a distinctly Eugene brand of irony, self-styled "vagina warriors" converged on Agate Hall on Friday, contending that the University's recent production of "The Vagina Monologues" did not adequately represent "a variety of skin colors, body sizes, abilities and gender expressions."

Certainly, striving for fairness and diverse points of view among actresses is an admirable and valuable goal in a play that, among other things, celebrates diversity of identities, perspectives and values.

But while the protesters' arguments may be well-intentioned and may present a rational facade, they are riddled with fallacies that detract from their message of fairness, tolerance and diversity, not to mention the intent of the play itself.

Protest organizer Nicole Barrett, who was offered a part in the play, decided not to perform after a conversation with the play's producers, who in her view weren't open enough to talking about race's role in the play. This deficit of dialogue, according to a statement that Barrett released, prevented the cast from having the sort of diversity she envisioned.

"A safe and welcoming environment was not created for people that I consider to be 'underrepresented,'" she said in a statement.

Whether that's true or not, the protesters' arguments are ultimately divisive, not diversifying.

One of the protesters' objections was that only two women of color were in the play. While race plays a part in the play, the producers decided to cast without necessarily aligning actresses' ethnicities with those of characters. In fact, that may have been difficult: Only about 85 people auditioned for the play, and there wasn't a large pool of "visible" people of color, assistant director Natalie Mays said. And, as of fall 2003, fewer than one in seven matriculated students on this campus identified themselves as ethnic minorities.

Some of those who complained that the play's cast did not represent them didn't try out for the play, and some of those who did dropped out.

Exacerbating the group's displeasure, according to the release, "One of the two 'visible' people of color in the cast was kicked out merely one week before the show opened, based on unjustified accusations of 'hostility.' Know that what you are seeing tonight is not the result of an inclusive process."

The producers deny that they called senior Melissa Ballard, the ejected actress, "hostile," but that's beside the point: The protesters' argument smacks of the very sort of discrimination and exclusion that they railed against. If a heterosexual white actress were charged with "hostility," it would be chalked up as a conflict of vision between herself and the producers, and certainly wouldn't have earned mention in the statement as an example of excluding whatever that actress' unique qualities were from the realm of the drama. Extending the protection against allegations of hostility to minorities alone is too divisive to be reconciled with the protesters' stated philosophy of inclusion.

Worse, protesters claimed that the producers did not select a cast that represents a variety of "gender expressions." Regardless of how true that claim is, the alternative is necessarily worse: It would be wholly inappropriate for the producers to ask each auditioner what her sexual orientation or gender identity was, and worse yet, cast parts based on her answer. If people are allowed to ask that kind of question, it opens up a doorway for undue discrimination against any sexual preference, which is exactly why asking such during job interviews is illegal in many cities and states.

Whether the play's producers did a satisfactory job of assigning parts and organizing the play in a way that was both fair to the auditioners and accurately reflected diversity among women (or even whether doing both in this production was possible) is beyond the scope of this editorial. However, unfair expectations and demands for de facto double standards certainly dilute the play's message of female empowerment and violate the protesters' stated premise of inclusion.



Atkins angst

Turn on the television these days, and this is what I hear: "Atkins Atkins Atkins, carbs carbs carbs, Atkins carbs Atkins. Bud Light."

Like many people, I'm a pushover when it comes to new fads, trends and products. So obviously, I had to try the more-popular-than-Ashton-Kutcher Atkins diet.

It lasted through lunch.

See, you think the Atkins diet is as easy as a hamburger. I figured I would just start eating more meat, cut out the bread and other carbohydrates, and drop 20 pounds by Thursday. I mean, with everybody from Carl's Jr. to T.G.I. Friday's offering Atkins fare, it had to be easy.

I was more wrong than Michael Jackson at a slumber party.

This was the plan. I was starting the morning after the Super Bowl. During "boobgate" I carbo-loaded on pigs-in-a-blanket, chips and dip and cookies. And plenty of beer. It wasn't Michelob Ultra, either.

The morning after, I started the diet. Armed with my 7-Eleven Atkins pamphlet, I looked in my cupboard for something to eat for breakfast. I only had Cheerios, which have 22 grams of carbs per serving. Milk also has too many carbs.

Under "Monday," my pamphlet recommended a smoked salmon omelet. Yeah.

I've never even seen a smoked salmon.

So breakfast was out.

For lunch, I was on campus and headed straight for Subway. I love that Jared is now



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Today is Hockaday

out of a job. Under Atkins, bread is pretty much outlawed. So Jared is like old fruit at the supermarket. "One Jared, half off!" Good times. By the way, fruit is another no-no when you go the Atkins route.

I ordered one of the Atkins wraps at Subway, and it wasn't half bad. That's the good thing about Atkins: If you do it right, you don't have to kill your taste buds. But, even though the Subway man switched me out for a bigger wrap, I was hungry again two hours later.

By dinner, I was done with Atkins. I could-

n't find anything Atkins-friendly in my food collection, and I realized I would have to drop some money on steaks and chicken if I really wanted to be an Atkins man. That, or spend \$5 a night on burgers without buns.

And when it comes to that, my motto is pretty similar to Sir Mix-a-Lot's: "Don't want none unless you got buns, hon."

The point of all this is that Atkins is hard. Maybe I'm just not dedicated enough, but seriously, I need my carbs. Everything I like has carbs in it. Asking me to cut out carbs is like asking Richard Hatch of "Survivor" to put on clothes. It's like asking OutKast to be normal. It's just not going to happen.

When I e-mailed my beautiful big sister, Caroline, about possibly doing the Atkins diet together, she had a sage response. She said she doesn't cut out carbs, she just cuts down on the carbs.

She's right. I believe carbs are bad for you, but I don't believe it's healthy to completely cut them out of your life. It's kind of like television. You recognize it's bad to watch too much television, but you can't completely axe "Average Joe" and "The OC."

Then you'd miss the Atkins commercials.

Contact the columnist at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Women of Juarez need help

Just south of the border in Juarez, Mexico, one of the greatest atrocities of our time have been taking place over the past decade. Young women have been murdered, raped, or "disappeared" by the hundreds. And local officials and police aren't doing anything about it!

They refuse to investigate these horrible crimes, and instead have the nerve to blame the women for "dressing

provocatively" or "staying out too late." All these women are doing is walking home from horrible factory conditions to their homes that have no running water or electricity. It's about time that their voices get heard!

If you care about this issue, I urge you to sign online petitions and to especially get involved in your local Amnesty International. This is one of AI's leading cases, and you have the power as a member of the group to create real change toward this and many other issues regarding

women's rights and worldwide human rights in general. In Eugene, there is both a local group and a student group at the University, and both will be working on an event on March 9 in honor of the Women of Juarez. The student group meets Wednesdays at 7 p.m. in the EMU.

I encourage you to get involved and take action! You can make a difference in lives of people all over the world.

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