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The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. Unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.



BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

In my opinion

More than MAN MEETS WOMAN



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

Jury selection begins today for a second trial in the murder of Gwen Araujo, a 17-year-old biological male who had lived her life as female from age 14. Gwen was tortured and killed more than two years ago after her group of friends discovered her biological identity. The two men allegedly responsible for Gwen's death apparently had continual sexual contact with her in the months preceding her murder.

Remember these facts as we move to a related facet of this story.

It is my belief that one key reason for the presence of homophobia among men is the fear of being placed in a sexually passive position. In heterosexual romancing, most people abide by (or at least find themselves deeply entrenched within) the social norm of male as initiator, female as receiver. It is socially acceptable and normal for men to approach women, shower them with sexual flattery and take the initiative to make plans for the future.

Although there is nothing inherently better or worse about being in either position, it is often scary to be in a more passive sexual role, especially living in a culture in which masculine sexuality is so intense. If a woman at the bar is approached by a man in whom she has no sexual interest, the situation becomes one of fear when the male initiator continues to act toward her in a sexual manner. Suddenly, instead of considering how she can get away from this drunk loser and go talk to the cute guy hovering by the door, all her thoughts aim toward guarding herself from sexuality, specifically the sexuality of the unwanted initiator but also by default her own sexual feelings.

Although this woman may have started her night excited to get together with someone, a relentless bar fly full of cheap pick-up lines has quickly turned her evening into one filled with fear of sexual assault

rather than anticipation of an enjoyable sexual experience.

Now imagine being that woman every day, as every form of mainstream media shoves male sexuality down your throat.

It's hard to put yourself into that mindset if you are America's dominant gender or sexuality. Just as most gay women can never fully understand the intricacies of straight male sexuality, few straight men can truly grasp the delicate line women must toe between experiencing and protecting our sexuality.

Unless you think about it in terms of homophobia.

For the most part, it seems to me there are two types of homophobia in the United States. The first is a larger, institutional homophobia, usually based on religious teachings or a conservative culture. The Catholic Church's reluctance to condone gay marriage is one example of this brand.

The second type occurs at a more personal level and is often from straight men toward gay men. You've probably heard homophobic comments coming from straight men who are uncomfortable with homosexuality because they don't want gay men hitting on them. Though they may be liberally minded in every other facet of life and OK with homosexuality in general, the idea of another man expressing a sexual interest in them inspires the deepest sense of anger and fear. This anger and fear is exactly what most heterosexual women cope with at every stage of

their sexual lives: It comes from a place of not having autonomy over sexual thoughts, desires and actions because the sexuality of someone else is getting in the way.

This brings us back to the subject of Gwen Araujo, or, more accurately, the men who murdered her. Gwen was not murdered because she was a biological male pretending to be female; Gwen was murdered because she engaged in sexual contact with her killers under false pretenses. If her killers had spotted a transgender person on the street, would they have been so offended as to strangle him or her and attack that person with a skillet? Unlikely. The people most bent on harming Gwen were the people with whom she had sexual contact.

The anger of those men is understandable. Sexuality is a personal and precious thing, and it's disturbing to feel that one's sexual life has been entrenched in deception. Sexuality is a powerful force and losing control of that is one of the most frightening experiences a human can undergo.

What is not understandable is the actions of the murderers in relation to that anger. Tragically, those young men determined that the only way to reclaim their sexuality was through the murder and degradation of another human being. Also tragic is the presence of any and all hate crimes based on sex and gender, so many of which occur as knee-jerk responses from heterosexual men afraid of losing their highly coveted role as social controllers of sexuality.

Until culture undergoes a serious revolution, let's at least hope the upcoming trial will let Gwen Araujo's killers know sexual control has to do with everyone's right to sexual autonomy and that murdering Gwen was a step in exactly the wrong direction.

aileeslater@dailyemerald.com

Editorial

Mayor helps distinguish line between church, state

The editorial board commends Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy for deciding to bow out of the annual Eugene-Springfield Mayors' Prayer Breakfast, to be held this year at the Eugene Hilton. In a time when the line between church and state has been blurred and religious acceptance has been narrowed, Piercy has shown true strength in the face of hundreds of complaints from local residents.

At a West University Neighbors meeting Thursday evening, Piercy said she wanted to represent people of all religious beliefs, a principle that has guided her leadership in other public positions for years. In addition, Piercy said attending the June breakfast would weaken the separation between church and state. The decision contrasts with Springfield Mayor Sid Leiken's readiness to give the welcome at the breakfast, which is sponsored by private Christian citizens but not sanctioned by the city. Leiken has cited his self-described "corny" rationale for attending the breakfast: He believes in American freedoms, and he's not going to give those up just because he holds a public office.

We strongly disagree with Leiken's shallow evaluation of this event and of his position.

If a mayor, as the leader of a city's policies and growth, attends an event sponsored by a certain religious group that says it believes "there's room for spiritual substance in the political dialogue," he or she is showing an openness to something that has caused very real religious strife in this city and in this country. Once elected to a public office, an official has the duty to represent his or her citizens to the best of his or her ability. When a mayor believes it is unimportant to sacrifice some personal beliefs to better serve his or her constituents in an unbiased fashion, that person shouldn't take on the profound duties of an elected office.

Piercy has not shown disregard for the prayers of the people of Eugene, as she has been publicly accused of doing. Instead, she has presented a genuine sensitivity and sense of sacrifice and duty for the greater good of Eugene's diverse array of residents.

Out loud

"I appreciate any citizen's desire to pray on behalf of our community, but I don't think such a prayer breakfast should appear to have government sponsorship or any religious point of view." — Eugene Mayor **Kitty Piercy** on Tuesday discussing her decision not to attend the Mayors' Prayer Breakfast.

"My concern about the Mayors' Prayer Breakfast is the very title of it." — **Piercy** at Thursday's West University Neighbors meeting.

"The beautiful thing about the United States is we are a melting pot, and we have this freedom of religion." — Springfield Mayor **Sid Leiken** on Tuesday discussing his decision to attend the Mayors' Prayer Breakfast.

"We just want to support the cities and mayors. It's not a plot; it's some well-meaning individuals who believe there's room for spiritual substance in the political dialogue." — **Clayton Walker**, a Mayors' Prayer Breakfast organizer, on the goals of putting on the event.

— From Register-Guard and Daily Emerald reports

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