

It has to be “something of great community importance, social importance,” Bivins says. “Editorial cartoonists do the same thing all the time.” And while a lot of people might not like it, Savage often offends with pointed purpose.

Offending for a cause is all well and good, but Bivins says, “To be an ethicist you have to have some background in moral philosophy and some understanding of how to apply that.”

Savage makes a lot of moral pronouncements. Sometimes his verdict itself is potentially offensive: Go ahead, cheat.

Savage says that people being sexually unfulfilled in long-term relationships and not knowing what to do about it is the ethical dilemma that he is most surprised he has to write about “constantly.”

“People want to honor the commitment that they’ve made, but they don’t want to live for decades and decades without any sexual fulfillment or even sexual release,” he says. Monogamy isn’t the double rainbow or unicorn of Savage’s belief system, as others sometimes portray it. “I believe in monogamy,” Savage says. “I believe some people can pull it off.”

Dueholm, the Lutheran pastor, says the first rule of Savage’s “remarkably systematic” ethical code is full disclosure, which he says is Savage’s minimum standard. Savage, however, says that full disclosure isn’t something that he always insists upon, even if it is something he usually promotes. Situations where, for one reason or another, no party can leave or get a divorce constitute one type in which Savage says he might condone no-tell cheating, in addition

to certain situations of long-term care where a relationship has morphed into caretaker-patient.

“If you’re getting some on the side discreetly and protecting your partner from that information and not getting permission because that would be too painful for your chronically ill partner, if doing that allows you to stay sane and be the caretaker that your partner needs,” Savage says, “that’s a higher loyalty.”

The difference between Savage and the traditional Judeo-Christian perspective on commitment and monogamy isn’t that Savage denies it has its benefits: He lists issues of paternity and safety from sexually transmitted infections as two big pluses. But he says there’s a need to concede significant tradeoffs on either side. “People who elevate monogamy above all other things are unwilling to meet me halfway and acknowledge that there are things you lose in a monogamous relationship: variety, adventure, sometimes release at all, sometimes sexual fulfillment,” he ticks off.

In addition to those trade-offs, Savage says the way American culture regards monogamy can instill a lot of unnecessary guilt. “It’s really kind of destabilizing,” he says, when a person believes that simple attraction to an outside party signals loss of love. Part of the problem with putting monogamy on top, according to the Savage philosophy, is that sexual satisfaction is so often completely ignored, and the relationship howls in agony while the libido suffers in silence.

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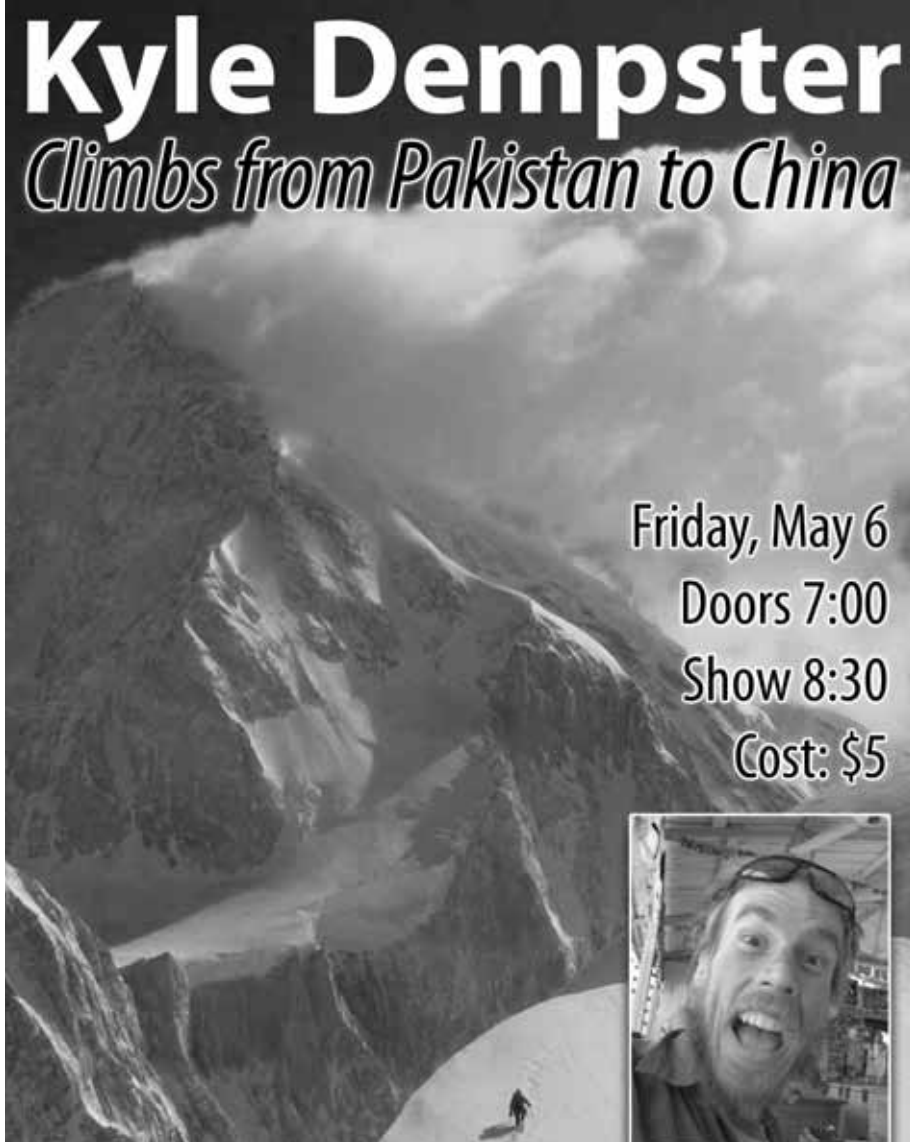
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