

On Misogyny, Intimidation and Shockingly Hateful Speech

by Norm R. Allen Jr.

On Monday, September 21, 2015, the day after the New England Patriots defeated the Buffalo Bills, 40-32, a calm, respectful woman called in to a Buffalo radio talk show. She said that she attended the game with members of her family. She merely wanted to enjoy the game. However, she and her family members were subjected to verbal abuse by Bills fans.

As a result, she temporarily left the area to get away from the abuse and to clear her head. When she returned, she was again subjected to abuse. This time a Bills fan walked in front of her, proudly displayed his Bills shirt, and told her, "I hope you get raped!"

Even if the woman had been a convicted child killer, no decent person would have wished rape upon her. However, this was a freaking football game! If something as innocent as a football game could provoke this kind of vile hatred, one can just imagine how such viciousness could erupt in men that resent women's success.

Today girls and women outperform boys and men in many areas academically. There are more women in positions of leadership in business and politics, and a woman – Hillary Rodham Clinton – is the frontrunner in the race for the Democratic nomination for President of the U.S. Another woman, Carly Fiorina, is threatening to become the frontrunner in the Republican race.

Women are making names for themselves as officials in men's sports. There has been a woman coach in the NFL (Jen Welter, an assistant with the Arizona Cardinals) and there have long been female judges in men's boxing.

Yet what some men find especially disturbing is the changing role of women in the military. Recently, the first two women graduated from the elite U.S. Army's Ranger School, "The Army's Toughest Training." (Some religious conservatives believe that it is men's role to protect women, and not vice versa.)

Unsurprisingly, some feminists downplay the importance of these momentous steps forward and the symbolic statements these moves make to society. However, some men see these kinds of changes as major threats to their

manhood and their standing in the world. The hostility they feel often reveals itself in unexpected ways, in unexpected places, and at unexpected times.

When women are confronted with such hateful abuse, they are often told to get over it, to toughen up, and so on. Indeed, this is what one male caller seemed to be saying to the woman who was subjected to the abuse from the crazed Bills fan. The male caller seemed to believe that that is just part of the fan experience, and that such behavior is to be expected from people that sit in the cheap seats (a classist notion if ever there was one, especially in light of the fact that the woman did not say that she was sitting in the cheap seats.)

Imagine a White sports fan telling a Black sports fan, "I hope you get lynched!" Such a statement would have been especially cruel had it been uttered in the American South during the 1950s or earlier. Would the proper response have been, Black sports fans should just get over it because it's part of the game? Sadly, some White fans would probably have had just such a callous, pathetic response.

In European soccer, there is much racist abuse being hurled at Black soccer players. Some White soccer players use racial slurs. Some White fans throw bananas at Black players, make monkey sounds, and so on. However, at least responsible soccer officials try to discourage such behavior with fines on racist players, ejections of racist fans and players, and other kinds of discipline.

Likewise, there is no reason why stadium officials should have to tolerate intimidating hate speech in the name of freedom or anything else. This is not to say that the government should revoke a bigot's right to express himself, or that the bigot should be arrested for doing so. However, business establishments and stadiums have the right and the responsibility to provide safe, peaceful, non-threatening environments for their customers and fans.

Today many U.S. men seem to be obsessed with threatening to rape women. Men regularly make rape threats on the Internet. Indeed, as Lindsey Beyerstein wrote in "Why Secularism Needs Feminism:"

...The Amazing Atheist [a well-known blogger] is notorious for repeatedly threatening to rape a woman who identified herself as a rape survivor

during an online discussion...Feminist freethought activists, particularly feminist bloggers, are being deluged with abuse, including rape and death threats from secularists. (*The Human Prospect*, p. 34, Vol. 3, No. 2, summer 2013.)

The late Black psychologist Bobby Wright used to believe that racism should be classified as a mental illness. If that is true, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of hatred and oppression should get the same classification.

Wright's idea never caught on, especially among White psychologists. Perhaps it's just as well. After all, mental illness does not deserve the stigma it has. There should be no more shame in mental illness than in a physical illness such as cancer. Conversely, bigotry richly deserves to be stigmatized.

Do sports encourage men to hate women and to be violent? In actuality, professional male athletes have lower arrest and incarceration rates than the general male population, sensationalist accounts of athletes' bad behavior notwithstanding. And interestingly, female athletes do not engage in violence, nor do male sports fans engage in violence at women's sporting events.

In European soccer – especially in England – there is much violence led by hooligans. However, it would be odd to argue that a nonviolent sport like soccer could encourage violence. Soccer is nothing like American football, hockey, rugby, mixed martial arts, boxing, or wrestling. (BTW, one never hears about violence at a wrestling match.)

To successfully combat misogyny and intimidation of women it will take a massive societal effort involving educators, institutions, the government, houses of worship, parents and other role models, and so forth. Indeed, this is everyone's problem, and every individual can make a difference in his or her own way.