

Let's also ask why "women's groups" were so comfortable quickly speaking out against victim blaming in this case -- but were deafeningly silent during the victim blaming in the Kobe Bryant case. It is a grave disservice to women when groups claiming to stand for "all" women -- only stand tall when it is politically correct to do so.

WHEN WOMEN ARE TARGETED, LET'S SKIP THE FEAR-MONGERING AND FOCUS ON THE HATE CRIME

Imette St Guillen, a beautiful graduate student in criminal justice at John Jay College in New York was brutally sexually assaulted, stabbed and murdered after spending a night on the town with friends. About to turn 25, Imette was reportedly drinking and having a good time and when she left a local club alone at 4 am, closing time. She never made it home. Her mutilated body was found in an isolated area miles away.

The public reaction included shock and outrage at the brutality of the crime, but a small vocal segment of the population was only too willing to talk about how Imette was "asking for it" and "inviting" trouble because she stayed out late and had a lot to drink.

Few voices were loud enough to trump the drumbeat of criticism because let's face it, we're all eager to stay safe -- and we want to keep our children safe -- and it just doesn't seem reasonable to encourage anyone to go out late, alone and get drunk. But while hardly anyone defended the victim's conduct, NOBODY talked about the fact that it was clearly a hate crime - perpetrated against a woman BECAUSE OF HER GENDER - evidenced by the knife wounds to her vagina and breasts.

Targeting people for violence based on who they are is not only terribly unfair, it is the ultimate expression of discrimination because it causes whole classes of people to live in fear.

Using the N-word is terrible; but beating someone because their skin is brown is far worse. Being afraid of someone in a burka is bad; but burning down their home because they're Muslim is worse.

When these types of crimes happen -- we don't tell Muslims and African Americans to "be afraid" and stay home. We condemn the criminal and more importantly, we call it a hate crime.

But when women are raped, abused and even murdered, we never call it a hate crime (it would help if Congress could FINALLY get around to adding gender to the list of federal hate crimes), and instead of ONLY blaming the criminal, we get all wrapped up in the nonsense of victim-blaming and fear-mongering.

There's no doubt about it. If women stayed home, they would never be murdered by serial killers or evil bouncers at nightclubs. But shouldn't we, instead, be telling the scum who rape and kill that THEY should be afraid of public shame, humiliation and punishment.

This is not to suggest we shouldn't all take steps to protect ourselves from harm. But there's a BIG difference between risk reduction and the politics of fear. With a question of criminal culpability at stake and 100% of blame to go around, any attempt to judge the victim means the criminal, by numerical definition, bears less than full responsibility. And it means women should be intimidated and deterred from living lives as full and as free as men.

We could tell all "types" of innocent citizens to stop living their law-abiding lives and to be afraid whenever a member of their particular class is victimized. But what kind of society would we have if the good guys lived restrained lives while the dangerous types had relatively free reign?

It might be a different story if women disproportionately suffered violence during late-night trips to the local pub, but the unassailable truth is that women are far more likely to be raped and abused at home by someone they love and trust than by a stranger at a bar or anyplace else. Thus, telling women to "stay home" is the exact wrong message. Women would clearly suffer LESS if they went out MORE.

This is not to suggest that women should toss caution to the wind and dance naked and drunk down the middle of Main Street. The point is simply that if we really care about violence against women, the answer has nothing to do with making women afraid to have a few drinks at a local bar.

Maybe we should ALL be more afraid of more people. Maybe we should start assuming the "nice" guy next door with no adult friends might not be so nice to little kids. Maybe we should start wondering whether the woman in the downstairs apartment is quiet not because she's being polite -- but because she's being terrorized by her husband.

There's no surefire way to know who the scary people are, but there's no doubt that staying out of bar rooms is not the pathway to safety for women.

It's not the pathway to safety for guys, either, even though the type of person most likely to be beaten and victimized at a bar is a man - (though we need to talk honestly about why we never tell men to stay home after a guy is beaten to a pulp in a bar room brawl -- even if the victim lands in the hospital - or worse).

It is true that most women have less physical strength than most men, but isn't the better way to deal with that problem to send an unequivocal message to the criminals that they are no more entitled to harm a weak person than a strong one? Better yet, we could add extra punishment

when the criminal picks on a vulnerable person. Certainly, calling targeted violence a hate crime is a good start because it recognizes the "extra" harm we all suffer when people are singled out for violence because of who they are.

We could also simply encourage women to carry weapons in their pockets. If women are inherently less able than men to protect themselves, then all women deserve a little metal equalizer. Cowards who pick on "weak" women will think twice before choosing an armed target.

In one town in Africa where AIDS and sexual violence is out of control, women are not being told to "stay home". They're wearing penis traps inside their bodies. Rapists experience a little - ah -- mousetrap when they engage in sex without permission. Nothing is cut off, but the rapist has to get medical assistance to remove the device. It's a win-win situation. Law-abiding women and men get to live full lives. Only the bad guy gets, um, shortchanged.

It's only fair.

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