


Substantial Disruption



The Grand Canyon

By Mike Tully

"One of these days, Alice, one of these days: POW!!! Right in the kisser!"

- Jackie Gleason, as Ralph Kramden on "The Honeymooners"

When Ralph Kramden, played by Jackie Gleason on the legendary 1950s television comedy series, "[The Honeymooners](#)," blustered and threatened his wife, Alice, played by the incandescent Audrey Meadows, we all laughed. "One of these days," he would bellow, followed by a threat to pop her in "the kisser" or send her to "the moon." Alice didn't flinch and dismissed Ralph's bluster with a wave-off or zinger of her own. There was no concern that Ralph would follow through on his threats. That was part of the humor; Ralph was a hot air buffoon. Alice was the smarter, more responsible one, patiently tolerating the inevitable embarrassment and failure of Ralph's wacky schemes. By the end of nearly every episode Ralph would rediscover Alice's worth and declare, "Baby, you're the greatest."

While we knew the Kramdens' relationship never included violence, Ralph was larger and stronger than Alice and could easily have carried out his threats. Reality provided a dark undercurrent to the laughter. A legion of Ralphs laughed boisterously at "The Honeymooners" along with millions of other viewers, then got drunk and beat the hell out of their Alices. Not all men who threaten their wives and lovers are harmless fools; some are dangerous fools. And, as we know from all-too-many examples, America has a generously populated pool of fools and many of the fools occupy positions of power.

That's also true of the world at large, in which suppression and control of women manifests in refusal to provide them an education, or allow them to drive, or show a square inch of skin. Even in the comparatively enlightened United States, powerful forces insist on control over a woman's reproductive process, including whether to carry a pregnancy to term. Many who oppose abortion also oppose artificial birth control, which is contradictory. Why would they oppose a process that results in fewer unwanted pregnancies and thereby lessens the need for abortions? The reason may be that the actual goal is not protect the unborn, but to suppress female sexuality. Males have tried to suppress and control females for millennia, perhaps since the dawn of human existence.

The late Mary Jane Sherfey, a psychiatrist who studied human sexual behavior, said her research indicated the development of human civilization was predicated on control of the female sex drive. "(I)f the conclusions reached here are true," [she wrote in 1973](#), "it is conceivable that the FORCEFUL suppression of women's inordinate sexual demands was a prerequisite to the dawn of every modern civilization and almost every living culture. Primitive woman's sexual drive was too strong, too susceptible to the fluctuating extremes of an impelling, aggressive erotism to withstand the disciplined requirements of a settled family life---where many living children were necessary to a family's well-being and where paternity had become as important as maternity in maintaining family and property cohesion." That ancient dynamic, if Sherfey was right about it, may live on in the "right to life" movement, provide fuel to modern efforts to suppress and control women, and lurk within the male-female divide that is roiling the presidential race.

In other words, those who seek to control female behavior and regulate female sexuality are not just metaphorical cavemen, but actual cavemen. Despite their modernity, their flashy cars and expensive dinner dates, they are channeling guys who dined on mastodon and carried spears.

Donald Trump, who clings to political relevance by pitting Americans against each other, has expanded the male-female divide from a fissure to a canyon. Whether Sherfey was right or not, there is a palpable gender gap in American politics and female reproductive rights are a big part of it. So is the matter of simple respect, which may or may not be related to the need to suppress female sexuality. The “me too” movement is about safety and respect. When men respect women, they don’t abuse them. Trump dismisses victims of alleged sexual assault and sides with their assailants. In his world, it’s not the women who are victims, but the men who abuse them. In the current dispute over Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination for the U. S. Supreme Court, Trump is more concerned with ratifying Kavanaugh’s sense of entitlement than expressing sympathy for his victim, Christine Blasey Ford.

Trump epitomizes a cadre of angry, insecure men who are more focused on themselves than the rampant mistreatment of women. “The sexual assault allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh have sparked a wave of unbridled anger and anxiety from many Republican men,” [write](#) Philip Rucker and Robert Costa in *The Washington Post*, “who say they are in danger of being swept up by false accusers who are biased against them.” These men could not care less about the millions of Alices abused in various ways by nondescript Ralphs. They are singularly focused on their own reputations and careers. And, while they claim their concern is over potential false accusations, the reality is that false accusations are rare and most victims of sexual assault decline to report the incidents. Their fear is being held accountable for what they have done, not being falsely accused of something they haven’t done. They cower in their man-caves and guzzle from the cauldron of victimhood.

An author once wrote that “[Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus](#).” I suggest a more terrestrial metaphor: men and women are like the Grand Canyon; women are from the North Rim, men from the south. Let it be known the north rim is the higher ground.