

Marriage is a Public Affair

In recent weeks, a few statements have been made and discussed in the public and private halls and on talk shows that I cannot escape responding to. They are misleading and demeaning statements that devalue personhood and the integrity of marital relationships and diminish personal accountability. The statements are: "Marriage is a private affair," "Scantly dressed girls invite attack," and "A husband cannot rape his wife."

First, as a male, I must speak out on behalf of our equal partner-females. The strongest voices against such misinformation must be the voices of men themselves. The women must know that we honor and value them as our equal. Second, as a writer and counseling psychologist, I will be remissed to ignore the dangerous impact of such ill-informed statements. For generations our society has become crippled by the ill teachings that are heard from pulpits during the weekends or lauded on talk shows, and the maladaptive behaviors that are transmitted through generations in the name of tradition or in some cases, "true religion."

MARRIAGE IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR

I've read it in the newspapers and online on Facebook, and I heard it on radio talk shows that marriage is a private affair. It is evident to me that the speakers/writers are not aware of the meaning and purpose of marriage and national protocols, policies and statutes that give married partners rights and privileges in a society. Let me first state here that marriage is not a private affair. It is clearly a public affair. I believe what the people might be meaning that marriage is a "personal affair" but certainly not private. I wonder if they understand what they are saying. Sadly, the statement is being used to respond to an issue that is painful and difficult for some to understand. Hence, they are implying that we should leave it alone because it is none of our business. This is a re-victimizing of the victim of rape.

True, the privacy of marriage is that a person is free, without undue interference, to select his or her own mate. If one is in a happy marriage, there is no issue about behavior and treatment of individuals. On the other hand, there are laws to respond to a husband who locks his wife out of the home, or a wife who steals money, or a husband who abuses children. Perhaps with this understanding it is fair to say that marriage is both private and public. The law reaches, regulates, and penalizes an individual when his/her behavior compromises the well-being of other individuals in a private or public setting.

In The Bahamas, as in all civilized countries, marriage is a recognized social institution governed by laws or statutes. One cannot get married without the permission and regulations of the state. (For example, polygamy is not lawful.) Therefore, there is the Marriage Registry in our country. The names of all couples who get married in The Bahamas are listed in the Marriage Registry, and it is available to the public to view. Even record of divorces are available to the public and can be read by any citizen of The Bahamas. Legally, there is no secret marriage or secret divorce.

The Marriage Act of The Bahamas in Article 17 states: "In every case of persons residing in The Bahamas intending that a marriage shall be solemnized between them under the authority of a registrar's certificate of notice, each of such persons shall on or about the same date give notice (making the declaration therein contained) of the intended marriage to the registrar in whose district he or she has respectively resided for a period of not less than fifteen clear days before the giving of such notice . . ." Also note carefully these lines in Article 23: "Provided that every such marriage shall be solemnized in the presence of a marriage officer and of two credible witnesses between the hours of six o'clock in the morning and eight o'clock in the evening with open doors . . ." Note "with open door" indicating that the ceremony is public and not private. As stated earlier, although my choice of whom I marry is my private decision to a certain extent, it is important to understand there is no room in one's private home that is out of bounds of the Law, the Department of Social Services, and the Police when individual rights are violated. This includes physical and emotional abuse, rape of a wife, husband, or child by anyone living in that private home. Rape by a husband of his wife is a violent act. It is not sexual. It is all about power and control. That cannot be private.

SCANTILY DRESSED GIRLS INVITE ATTACK

Is it true that scantily dressed girls invite attack? Certainly not. It is best to tell men to guard their minds despite the dress. Most of us do get sexually aroused by looking at someone naked, scantily or attractively dressed. However, no form of dress is a reason or excuse to violate the rights of another person. One might get aroused, but arousal does not dictate behavior. No man can say: "She made me do it;" or "if she was dressed differently, I would not have done it." What "made" him do it was the need to control, anger, selfishness, and perhaps a poor concept of who he is. Yes, ideally, females or males should dress decently. However, personal accountability and responsibility must be the dictators of our mind and heart. If a man is so influenced by a scantily dressed woman, then he is no better than a dog on heat. He is a slave to his baser passion. He is not fit to be in civil society. With this perverted view, we are blaming and hurting the victim and pacifying the rapist instead of holding him totally accountable for his depraved actions. In a 2014 CNN article by Carol Costello entitled: "Sexy clothes don't excuse sexual violence," she states: "The average rapist is a violent criminal who craves complete power over his victim. Sometimes he gets a sexual charge out of it and sometimes he doesn't. And it has little to do with what a woman looks like and everything to do with violent, criminal tendencies."

Dear readers, this article is not about modesty in dress, nudity or that women should not dress in skimpy clothing. This article is about personal discipline and responsibility. Men must learn to keep their hands off women, to extract their mind from the gutter, and to exercise restraint and complete control over their perverted and criminal tendencies and baser passions. If they cannot achieve this, they must seek professional help.

A HUSBAND CANNOT RAPE HIS WIFE

It is certainly untrue that a husband cannot rape his wife. We know of husbands who have murdered their wives. Thus, what makes it impossible for him to rape her. I have heard some women say that "my husband cannot rape me." They seem to believe that the meaning and purpose of marriage eliminates the possibility of a man becoming violent towards his wife. It is true that many husbands are loving, caring, and compassionate and WILL NOT rape their wives. It is not that they CANNOT rape. Remember rape is not about sex. It is about power and control. If a man has a poor view of his wife and thinks of her as his sexual property and he is in charge of her, then there is a greater risk that he will rape her.

One author writes: "A man who physically forces any woman, whether or not he is married to her, to have sex against her will, is committing an act of rape. A man who forces his wife to have sex is violating the Biblical principles regarding the marriage covenant." 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 provides us with the answer how husband (and wives) are to behave: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. ***It does not demand its own way.*** It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out."

There are men who at times force their wives to have sex with them. My article last week was about a story of a husband who raped his wife. I can give countless other stories of husbands who raped their wives. Some people do not like the term "marital rape." The term "marital rape" is a colloquial one. The official law is the Sexual Offences Act. Anybody who thinks that a man cannot rape his wife is not living in the reality. Rape is not a sexual encounter gone bad. It is an act of rage. It is about anger, misuse, and abuse of power and control.

In 2004 I wrote this on the topic: "Isn't it amazing that the greatest misunderstanding about marital rape is not among the secular-minded or non-Christians, but among those who call themselves God-fearing and born-again Bible-believing men? Note carefully that the confusion is not from secular or most Christian women, because they know quite well, from experience or just from the fact of being women, that rape is not exclusive to non-married individuals. It is even more shocking to think that Christians, pastors, and religious leaders would prevent legislation being passed that would protect the rights of women (or men) to choose. . . Men, there is no need to fear. If you are having a loving, understanding, caring, and mutually supportive relationship with your wives, then you are not in the category of marital rapists. All your sexual encounters are by mutual consent. You appreciate and understand their emotional, psychological and physical makeup. More importantly, you value their right to choose." If you are a marital rapist, then due process under the law will take place. Your rights and the rights of your spouse will be equally protected, but you will be held accountable and penalized for your criminal behavior. This is justice.

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