

Dress Is Not a Reason to Rape

Perhaps I cannot exhaust the topic of sex and dress in this column. No matter what I write, some people will always hold on to the opinion that dress “causes” men to rape women. In my recent article, I stressed that dress has nothing to do with it. It is about power and control, anger or a degrading view of women.

I am not saying that sexually revealing clothing is okay or that it does not arouse on-lookers. Arousal is one thing, but personal discipline, common sense, and self-control must rule the mind. If a woman dresses on a night out at the club in such a way that she wants a man to seduce her or she will seduce him, that is a far cry from rape.

I do wish that our women would dress more appropriately in public. I have seen so many women in public that look as though they should not have left their bedrooms. Sometimes you can tell if they are wearing thongs, no bras, or where all their curves are. Does dress reveal who you are or your intention? Can dress impact how you feel or perform on the job? Yes. For many years social scientists have studied the impact of dress on behavior. The results are stunning. However, note that no research empirically states that dress “causes” rape.

In this 2014 article “Dress, body and self: research in the social psychology of dress” the authors share a research that leads one to think. It exposes the scientific information how dress does impact behavior. “In the 1980s, researchers were interested in women’s provocative (revealing, sexy) dress and the extent to which men and women attributed the same meaning to it. For example, both Edmonds and Cahoon (1986) and Cahoon and Edmonds (1987) found ratings of women who wore provocative dress were more negative than ratings of women who wore non-provocative dress. No specific theory was identified by these authors as guiding their research. Overall, when wearing provocative dress, a model was rated more sexually appealing, more attractive, less faithful in marriage, more likely to engage in sexual teasing, more likely to use sex for personal gain, more likely to be sexually experienced, and more likely to be raped than when wearing conservative dress.”

The research also indicates the sexually appealing dress usually decreases the respect granted to the women. However, there is no research that states that dress “**causes**” rape although it can influence arousal. I stress that it is about personal accountability. We must not lower our men to the concept that they are male dogs on heat looking for female dogs likewise on heat.

I do appeal to women to dress less revealing or modestly in public not to prevent rape, but to eliminate the universal objectification of women. Women are not property or sexual objects. Sexually dressed women are used to sell cars, batteries, food, tools, open bank accounts. Women, you are more valuable than that.

Before I end this article, I must address briefly misconception and misuse of the Bible passage found in 1 Corinthians 7:4: The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. (NIV). This text is used to defend a man’s view of forced sex. Here are some of statements made by men who think that married men cannot rape their wives “The Bible says my wife’s body belongs to me so she must never refuse

me;" and "a husband cannot rape himself." These statements are based on a false concept of the value of women and a misinterpretation of scripture.

In 2001 I wrote the following on the topic. "When a husband says in his defense against the proposed marital rape law that "the Bible says my wife's body belongs to me, so she must never refuse me" he is giving a number of negative messages. First, that his wife has no control over her body and that she is the property of her husband. Second, the sex drive is the dictator to one's behavior and not reason. Third, that his opinions and feelings are always more important than those of his wife's." Note that the text was written to respond to the negative views of women. During the time of the writing of the text, women had no value and were only sexual property of men. Paul was seeking to elevate the status of women within a specific context, which was never to be taken as an ideal. Although Paul states that the wife's body "belongs" to the husband, the men did not expect him to say that the husband's body belongs to the wife." That was a new concept to them.

When a wife says, "my husband can take it whenever he wants," suggests that she has been indoctrinated and duped by the teaching that she is only a piece of sexual property. And also, she has not been painfully raped by her husband.

When a husband in his defense against the proposed marital rape law says a husband cannot rape his wife, he is misunderstanding the meaning of oneness in marriage. He is suggesting that the "one flesh" in marriage takes away the identity of a woman. He forgets that there could only be a marriage when there are two distinct individuals. He forgets that a loving marriage can only exist when the two individuals remain distinct and unique. That's the only way there can be reciprocal love. If the wife becomes non-existent after the marriage vows then the relationship becomes akin to that of a slave and a master."

Men, we must change our concept of women and sex. If we are defending the view that "women's dress causes rape" and on top of that, "our wives must never refuse us sexually" we are having a disparaging view of ourselves. Let us respect ourselves and our women.

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980