



Sexual Assault Response Services *of Southern Maine*

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A Person's Rights While in a Relationship

(excerpts from "When Your Wife Says No: Forced Sex in Marriage" by Fay Honey Knopp, 1994)

Although some of the following information may refer to a legal/married relationship between a wife and a husband, it is applicable to any intimate relationship between two people. Many of the following assumptions are based upon our culture's socialization of men and the way they interact with women. However, this information is important for any person, male or female in any relationship, heterosexual or homosexual.

Though all states now have laws that make "wife rape" a crime, many men/partners still hold on to the belief that their wives are their property and that they therefore have the right to do whatever they want to them.

Everyday, popular culture and media give support to such outdated and criminal notions along with many other myths about women and sexuality. Perhaps one of the best known examples of such myths occurred in the film classic *Gone With The Wind* Rhett Butler, angered wife Scarlett's rejection of him sweeps her up in his arms and carries her up the winding stairway to their bed as she wildly protests. But the next morning, a smiling, glowing Scarlett stretches contentedly in her rumpled bed. The myths supporting rape from this movie scene are clear:

- 1) Women enjoy forced sex
 - 2) Women say "no" but really mean "yes"
 - 3) It is not only okay, but manly, for a husband to force or coerce his wife to have sex
 - 4) A woman's rights to her own body and life are overruled by her husband or partner
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So, given that such distorted ideas about women and sexuality prevail in our culture, how do women and men develop mutually respectful intimate relationships with one another? Some of the answers lie in rejecting outdated and barbaric views of women and instead adopting and living the following beliefs:

- Every woman has the right to control her own body and to make decisions about having sex, using birth control, becoming pregnant and having children. She does not lose these rights if she marries.
- No one, including a husband or partner, ever has the right to force a woman to have sex, either through physical violence, threats, manipulation or coercion.

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- There is no such thing as a marriage contract that allows a husband to force sex on his wife. Although sex is commonly understood to be a component of marriage, a woman does not give up her right to say yes or no to sex each and every time.
- Women do not become the property of husbands. Husbands do not have the right to 'take' sex from a woman as his property.
- Having a disagreement never gives a husband the right to physically abuse or rape his wife.
- If a husband rapes his wife, it has nothing to do with their sexual relationship. It is an act of anger designed to degrade, humiliate and punish his wife. Like domestic violence, it is a way of exercising power and control over another human being.
- Also like domestic violence, rape is not a spontaneous act that 'just happened' in the heat of the moment. Rape, like physical battering and all other forms of abuse are premeditated choices made by the perpetrator.
- It is a crime in the State of Maine for a husband to force a wife to have sex, either physically or through threats of harm. (Law enacted 1985)