



## The Last Word

### Some Thoughts on Victim Blaming

As women, we are vulnerable to acts of violence because: we live in a violent and misogynist world and we are perceived as vulnerable, we are often physically smaller, we are not taught skills to defend ourselves or effectively prevent violent confrontations.

As women we may find it difficult and even impossible to prevent or defend ourselves from an act of violence because:

We have been conditioned to be polite and trusting. We have been conditioned to believe that we are not capable of taking courageous action on our own behalf. We have been conditioned to look for someone else to protect us. We have been taught that we are not physically strong enough or capable enough to fight back and that men don't feel pain so any attempts on our part to defend ourselves will be laughed at and in fact incur even greater violence. If this happens, we may be told we provoked the situation.

Most importantly, we have been taught that we are not valuable and therefore are not worth fighting for and that if something bad does happen to us, it is because we somehow invited it, should have expected it and overall deserved it. We are taught to feel shame when we are assaulted because, " bad things don't happen to good girls". We must have asked for it. We must have secretly wanted it or at least were too stupid to prevent it.

As a woman, I believe that I have a right to wear clothing that suits my mood and personal style. I believe that I have the right to be in my home, at work or at school and walk down the street during the day or night. I have the right to begin and end relationships according to what feels right and healthy to me, and to begin and end sexual activity within these relationships according to the same criteria. I have a right to agree to an activity, including sexual activity and then change my mind. *That is not called: asking to be raped, that's called: Changing my mind.*

As a woman who is aware of the violent world that I live in, I acknowledge that, although these are my rights and ideally, I should at all times have the freedom to express them, it is a fact that it may not be safe for me to do so. My dress, actions, experimentation, possible confusion and changing desires may be interpreted as invitations to being violated. In response to this terrible injustice and in acknowledgment of its absolute truth, I will hold fiercely to my right to these freedoms and guard my behaviors according to what I know to be safe.

It is also a fact that the most modest of clothing worn in the most mundane of situations (most women who are raped are wearing blue jeans / most rapes occur in the woman's own home),

performing the most necessary of activities (studying, working, walking home, sleeping), with someone that I trust, (most women are assaulted by someone they know)...may be interpreted as an invitation to being violated. As a woman, I know that there is nothing that I can do to guarantee that I will be safe at all times.

As a woman who is aware of the violent world that I live in, I believe it is a wise choice to be aware and learn effective self-defense strategies. I believe that there are many wise choices that I can make that will result in a safer passage through this world.

I also believe that if a woman is violently assaulted, regardless of her actions, reactions or non actions in her particular situation, (whether or not she fought back/didn't fight back) *it was not her fault.*

Regardless of her past behaviors, guilt, low self-esteem, poor choices, others' opinions of her or her behavior, *it was not her fault.*

Out of ignorance, youth, naiveté, an adventurous spirit, addiction, emotional damage ... a woman may make unwise choices. If her behaviors are unwise and even inappropriate (if she drinks too much and wears "provocative" clothing and behaves in sexually inappropriate ways) she may be asking for attention. She may be asking for help with a drug or alcohol problem. She may be acting out earlier child sexual abuse trauma (where she learned to believe that her only worth is as a sexual object). *She is not asking to be hurt.*

As women who live in a world where females represent 51% of the population, do 2/3 of the world's work and own 1% of the world's property. Where the vast majority of world leaders are male, where we are excluded from *history* and even the very language that we speak, (mankind/manpower), we may feel that we do not exist unless a man sees us as attractive and desirable. We may feel invisible and in the only way that we know - *we may simply be asking to be seen.*

If a woman, within the context of a sexually active relationship, found herself in the middle of a sexual activity feeling vulnerable or anxious, or uncomfortable, or just unable to feel present - and then asked that the activity stop... If she were in the company of a decent, caring human being, she would have that request honored immediately. She would either be given space or comforted without being emotionally punished with anger or guilt.

If she were with a partner who saw her as responsible for meeting his sexual needs, she may be made to feel afraid that she would be abandoned or replaced. If she were with a physically abusive partner she may be raped.

If a woman dances, flirts and makes out with a man in his car and then invites him into her home - and then tries to end the evening without having sex, she may be told that she should finish what she started and she may be raped. Did she make some unwise choices? Yes. Did she ask to be hurt? No. There is a difference between being accountable and being responsible.

The unequivocal fact is, if some men didn't abuse their physical, economic and emotional power over the women that they harass, abuse, kill, and rape... I, as a woman and all women, could move through the world with freedom from this all-consuming fear; a fear that informs and controls our lives. The fear that at any moment, a member of the other half of the human race, will rise up in rage before us and violate, assault or even kill us...the fact is...*we could move through the world with the same freedom that men do now.*

One might say, surely if a woman had too much to drink and danced naked on a table at a party full of men she would be asking for it?

Ask yourself to think of the good men you know. Ask yourself..."what would he do?" Even better, ask them.

The answer is simple. If she were in the company of good men, they would help her down from the table, cover her up and make sure she got home safely. If she were in the company of rapists, she would be raped.

The last word is: *If there's no rapist in the room...there is no rape.*

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