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IN THE NEWS

Did Rescue Me Go Overboard?

In a recent episode of *Rescue Me* two main characters portray an incident of marital rape. Did it go too far?

BY GABRIEL LEFRANCOIS

Marital Rape is not something that you hear of everyday. In fact, for many women, it may have been something they were a victim of, but didn't know because it was indeed their husband who committed the act. In Western culture, the law has been slow to form any type of criminalization; many of the United States rape statutes used to preclude prosecution of a spouse for sexually assaulting their partner, even if the couple was estranged or legally separated. In many of these cases the perpetrator may instead be charged with related crimes like assault, battery or spousal abuse.

However, it has been something that has made its way into movies and television over the years, and critics are saying that these acts of violence are glorifying rape and disguising it as an act of romance. These acts have been committed in movies and television for some time—even movies dating as far back as *Gone With The Wind* when a drunken Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) forcefully grabs a crying Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) and takes her up the stairs as she struggles—a scene critics say romanticizes rape.

More recently, in a controversial episode of the FX drama *Rescue Me*, Senior Firefighter Tommy Gavin, (Denis Leary) gets into a yelling match and shoves his on-again, off-again wife Janet Gavin (Andrea Roth) onto the couch and begins to rape her as she attempts to fight him off. After a few moments of struggle, Andrea's character then begins to show pleasure with the situation. After the graphic scene ends, the two casually dismiss the act.

"Sorry about the shirt," Leary's character says.

"It wasn't one of my favorites," replies Roth

Executive Director Harriet Lessel of the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault says the *Rescue Me* episode may be sending the wrong message.

"When you depict something like that on TV, it goes to creating social tolerance for marital rape, said Lessel. "It perpetuates the myth that it's not very serious and that it's not dangerous."

In a recent interview with CNN's Glenn Beck, Leary defends his character's actions saying, "If you take a look at that scene and you watch the dichotomy and you know the history of that relationship, it was anything but a rape. I think some people got it and some people didn't. But that's fine. Because that's the

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Do you think the Rescue Me showing the controversial s

- Yes, but I will still watch th
- Yes, and I won't watch the
- No, it's no worse than all tl
- Didn't see it

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difference between the audience that should be watching the show and the audience that should be watching something else."

Experts point to television as a gateway that allows marital rape to be accepted and looked at as a right of the spouse and not a crime. However, the effects are real.

Research conducted by David Finkelhor and Kersti Yllo in their book *License to Rape* shows that victims of marital rape suffer longer-lasting trauma than victims of stranger rape. They say the reason for this is thought to be the lack of social validation that prevents a victim from getting access to support.

Expert and published author April Masini of askapril.com says, "Within marriage, during sex, the line between rough play and violence can become blurred. When the line is crossed, it may be difficult for the man to know he has crossed the line if the couple had been engaging in role playing or rough sex."

Masini says to remember these points:

- If rough sex is part of your normal sex life, have a "safe word" that you both agree on outside of the bedroom, and when you're not having sex. The safe word can be "teapot" or "traffic" or any word that you both know means STOP. This helps delineate the line between consensual sex and violence.
- If your partner or you or both of you have drug or alcohol issues, loss of control is likely during sex. Be aware of this. If either one of you is concerned about violence during sex, or rape, don't mix substances with sex.
- If there is any sort of history of physical abuse in a relationship outside of sex, there is a better chance abuse will become part of your sex life. Report all abuse to the police and/or a doctor.
- If you have been raped within your marriage, report the incident immediately to authorities. Also, see a doctor for medical treatment and report this to your doctor. One of the ways to combat the difficulty in getting help with marital rape is to have a record of the rape. Whether or not it is disputed is less important than reporting it to an objective third party like the police and/or your doctor or hospital emergency room.
- Marital rape, like any form of violence, is grounds for divorce. It doesn't matter if the rape has been recognized by authorities or not. If you are in danger of violence, get out of harm's way—even if it means ending a marriage.

Whether it's a movie like *Gone With The Wind* or a television drama like *Rescue Me*, experts agree that glorifying the depiction of marital rape in movies or television could have lasting effects on society.

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