Handing Out Scarlet Letters

Antiquated sex laws turn into a bludgeon for divorcing spouses

By Andrea Sachs

When James Jakubowski's marriage was heading toward the rocks, he decided to take action: he called the police. Two weeks later, his wife Dawn was under arrest for adultery. Like a modern-day Hester Prynne, Dawn was soon the talk of the town, Norwich, Conn., a circumstance that does not dismay her husband. "People in this society need to hear that adultery is wrong and that it destroys families," he proclaims. "I believe in the institution of marriage." His wife's lawyer is less enthused. "The thoughtless and insensitive act by Mr. Jakubowski has caused enormous embarrassment and humiliation to all members of his family.”