



I was interested in this discussion because of all the news coverage that is sweeping our nation. I have been given the opportunity to look deep inside and battle my outlook on the power of a word or phrase. As a 50 plus female the word slut represents everything that a lady who is aspiring to live life with personal respect would totally reject. As an advocate the word slut or any degrading word or phrase has historically been a way that perpetrators have manipulated victims and continued to maintain power over individuals. Although I understand that social change in American history has always happened with discomfort.

CECILIA PERKINS
Event Coordinator

Slut is a word that is hurled at a person with the intention of putting the person in a one-down-less-than-discrediting-defensive-lets-keep-them-silent position. I have no use for the word, nor do I wish to see it reclaimed. Social Justice demands that old paradigms are disposed of, not by using the “rule(s)” under which they operate. Social Justice demands that new “outside the box” dynamics are created which empowers and enfranchises everyone. Social justice is about actions for, not reactions to. My hope is that one day people everywhere will stop using the words of oppression and create a vital, vibrant, empowering language of hope, independence and inclusivity.

WENDE HILSENROD
Training Specialist

The intent behind the “slut walk” event is not lost to me, but I fear will get lost in translation. The sensationalism (whether intentional or not) of the word “slut” may enable a literal conversation on the meaning rather than the figurative tie to victim blaming. I’m always hesitant to celebrate a misogynistic term historically used to objectify women and verbally flog victims. To attach the word slut to a sexual assault event initially felt counter intuitive to me. However, after our discussion I now see the poetic justice of it all.

ROSE LUNA
Outreach Specialist

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SLUTWALK

ON JANUARY 4, 2011 a member of Toronto's law enforcement commented on a sexual assault incident with the following quote "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized."

In response to the comment enraged community members organized an event titled "slut walk" to highlight the term that both angered and inspired them to join together with a message that victims are never to blame for their sexual assault.

The highly charged "slut walk" events have taken the world by storm. Since the initial walk in Toronto other walks have occurred across the globe including here in Texas. A discussion on the "slut walk" events invoked various responses from TAASA staff members. All agreed on the intent and goal of the events, however discussions around the term itself found staff members respectfully at odds.

As a firm supporter of the Slut Walk rallies, I also feel troubled by what I see as movement in the wrong direction. I worry that some would tone down the sex in favor of focusing more on the message of stopping sexual violence. But in emphasizing that "no," we would necessarily de-prioritize the eminently important "yes" of affirming all consensual sexuality. And that isn't just a harmless trick of language – cultivating real comfort and openness around consensual sex is fundamental to advocating effectively against rape.

Those of us in the sexual violence field – especially those who concentrate on prevention – talk a lot about changing misogynistic beliefs and attitudes, and not just intervening to deter violence. And that must extend beyond saying "no" to misogyny; we must enthusiastically say "Yes!" to all consensual sex between adults. If we feel discomfort when we see women marching through the streets with "Slut" scrawled across their chests, we need to ask ourselves why. If it is because we are

uncomfortable with women choosing unapologetically to enjoy sex with whomever they wish and however often they wish, then we are engaging in exactly the same misogyny that creates room for sexual violence in our society. If it is because we fear that others might respond negatively to such provocative messaging, then we should instead place blame on those other people, not on women who are celebrating their hard-won liberty to enjoy sex often.

Slut Walk activism is most effective when it directly confronts sexist attitudes about female sexuality – when it challenges all of us not to be put off by what our culture would call "sluttiness."

When considering our messaging around Slut Walks, it's critical that we do not obscure that most important message, for fear that it may be a difficult pill for our communities to swallow.

CHRIS KAISER
Staff Attorney

As kids, we said that "sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will never hurt us." As adults, we know better. Words can shake us to our very core. One word in particular – SLUT – has shaken people across our country into action. Regardless of people's views of the use of the word "slut," most can agree that "slut walks" have been effective in bringing attention to the issue of sexual violence. The organizers of each walk have been able to mobilize hundreds and in some cases, thousands to take to the streets to demand an end to victim-blaming.

EMILIANO DIAZ DE LEON
Prevention Specialist

TAASA provided a forum allowing staff members to voice dissenting opinions and diverse perspectives on a particular topic. In the end the discussion enlightened all who participated. In conclusion, regardless of your position on the "slut walk" events, they have sparked a much needed dialogue challenging communities to discuss the issue of sexual violence.