



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 9, 2011

“Slut Walk” Protests Erupt Across United States

When Toronto police constable Michael Sanguinetti remarked that women should avoid dressing “like sluts” in order to prevent themselves from being raped or otherwise victimized, protests erupted internationally, beginning in Toronto, where Canadian women gathered and marched in the first of many “Slut Walks.”

The controversial statements made by officer Sanguinetti, which prompted the protests and the Slut Walks, were delivered when he spoke about safety at Canada’s York University. Though the constable was disciplined for his statements, Canadian feminists — still infuriated by his words — launched the Slut Walk movement. The [website](#) for the Slut Walk reads:



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As the city’s major protective service, the Toronto Police have perpetuated the myth and stereotype of “the slut,” and in doing so have failed us. With sexual assault already a significantly under-reported crime, survivors have now been given even less of a reason to go to the Police, for fear that they could be blamed. Being assaulted isn’t about what you wear; it’s not even about sex; but using a pejorative term to rationalize inexcusable behaviour creates an environment in which it’s okay to blame the victim.

Historically, the term “slut” has carried a predominantly negative connotation. Aimed at those who are sexually promiscuous, be it for work or pleasure, it has primarily been women who have suffered under the burden of this label. And whether dished out as a serious indictment of one’s character or merely as a flippant insult, the intent behind the word is always to wound, so we’re taking it back. “Slut” is being re-appropriated.

We are asking you to join us for Slut Walk, to make a unified statement about sexual assault and victims’ rights and to demand respect for all. Whether a fellow slut or simply an ally, you don’t have to wear your sexual proclivities on your sleeve, we just ask that you come. Any gender-identification, any age. Singles, couples, parents, sisters, brothers, children, friends. Come walk or roll or strut or holler or stomp with us.

The website for the demonstration also indicates that the women involved are:

... tired of being oppressed by slut-shaming; of being judged by our sexuality and feeling unsafe as a result. Being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work. No one should equate enjoying sex with attracting sexual assault.

At Toronto’s Slut Walk, one young female protester said, “I strongly believe in women’s sexuality.”



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Another added, “I think that I can dress in a thong and some tights — and maybe not wear any underwear when I’m wearing a skirt, and that not be a consent for me to get raped.”

Meanwhile, as the Canadian women asserted such declarations, a man in the crowd could be heard shouting, “We love sluts! We love sluts!”

The movement has made its way to the United States, and Slut Walks have already taken place in Dallas and Asheville, N.C. Many of those involved were attired in relatively demure clothing such as jeans and T-shirts, while others dressed more promiscuously in outfits intended to bring attention to what the protesters called “slut-shaming,” a term referring to shaming women for being sexual.

Thousands of protesters have shown up to take part in the demonstrations. Slut Walks have already been scheduled for other major cities such as Seattle, Chicago, Philadelphia, Reno, and Austin, Texas. Two thousand people have already indicated their intent to attend the Seattle Slut Walk on June 19.

Nicole Sullivan, a 21-year-old student at the University of Massachusetts, is the organizer for the Boston Slut Walk. She explained that her motivation for the event was the Toronto police officer’s comment. She explained: “It was taking the blame off the rapist and [putting it] on the victim. So we are using these efforts to reclaim the word ‘slut.’ ”

Similarly, Siobhan Connors, 20, of Lynn, Massachusetts, said of the Boston walk:

The event is in protest of a culture that we think is too permissive when it comes to rape and sexual assault. It’s to bring awareness to the shame and degradation women still face for expressing their sexuality ... essentially for behaving in a healthy and sexual way.

The Blaze [notes](#) that while the Slut Walks are similar to “Take Back the Night” rallies and other marches intended to raise awareness regarding sexual violence, there are vast differences:

Slut Walkers have danced to hip-hop, worn T-shirts with the word “slut” and held signs that read “sluts pay taxes.” Some women have skated around on Rollerblades in lingerie, while their male supporters wore shirts reading, “I love sluts.”

The rallies typically end with speakers and workshops on stopping sexual violence and calling on law enforcement agencies not to blame victims after sexual assaults.

Despite what the demonstrators believe is an empowering movement, the Boston Slut Walk group has already had to delete a number of “inappropriate comments” about women that appeared its Facebook page. Pages for Slut Walks in other cities have faced similar issues.

Likewise, a counter group in Boston has already announced that it plans to launch a “Pimp Walk” in response to the Slut Walk.

Though the spokesman for Toronto police did not wish to comment on the Slut Walks, he pointed out, “We said at the time that [Sanguinetti’s] comments were entirely unacceptable, that they didn’t reflect in any way what we train and teach our people.”

Photo: Women march past the Statehouse during the SlutWalk in Boston, May 7, 2011, which organizers described as a demonstration against those who blame the victims of sex crimes.: AP Images



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