



Press Release - March 26, 2012
Harvard Law Students For Reproductive Justice (a/k/a "HLSRJ")

*"A man called me the slut from East Toledo. [and], I thought ...
I'm putting it on my tombstone – here lies a slut from East Toledo.
You can take the sting out of the words."
- Gloria Steinem*

We are all Sandra Fluke. We are all women who have been called names by people like Rush Limbaugh – names that have been intended to pass judgment on our life choices, sexual decisions, appearance, and reproductive health.

We do not speak for all feminists or women's rights supporters. However, in our opinion, Sandra Fluke was called a slut because Rush Limbaugh decided that she was having sex. If the definition of the word "slut" is "a woman who has sex," then a very large percentage of women could be called this word.

Some women feel that the word "slut" should be taken back by females, and not used as an insult, but rather redefined to mean a woman who is in charge of her sexual and reproductive decisions.

Other women believe that even used in a positive light, the word "slut" hurts women and should be erased from our vocabulary.

All of these opinions are valid and appropriate and further the cause of establishing that people like Rush Limbaugh who use the word in a negative light should be held accountable for a judgment that is not theirs to make.

No matter what a person's belief regarding the term "slut" and how it should be used or not used by women, one issue is certain – as women, we need to combat the ugly stereotypes that women face regarding their sexual and reproductive choices.

Moreover, as an organization focused on reproductive justice, we believe that all women have the right to the best reproductive health option available to them, and every woman should be able to make her own decisions about her sexuality and her reproductive health.

Whether or not a woman chooses to have sex, she should be able to access reproductive health services unconditionally, without her choices being called into question.

Our feeling is, how dare a man like Rush Limbaugh be able to label a contentious, politically-active, modern woman like Sandra Fluke with a term that he believed, based on his extensive surrounding commentary, to be derogatory?

If we can use the word “slut” in a way that, as Gloria Steinem said, “take[s] the sting out,” and creates a space where some women feel more able to make their own choices about sexual and reproductive preferences, then we feel it is an appropriate use of the word, especially in the context of a sex-positive event.

Consensual sex is not something to be ashamed or embarrassed about – I would venture to guess that many people who are commenting on the inappropriateness of this event at a law school have also had sex or sexual experiences. And those who have never had a sexual experience should not be allowed to pass judgment on those who have.

Law school is part of the real world – it is not an insular place where people live in libraries and only talk about the Supreme Court. We are people who are going to take our places in the larger world at the end of our time here, and as such we, just like everyone else, should be constantly furthering our knowledge and understanding of the world we live in.

The word “slut” has been used in the recent news as an insult against a partner of ours, Sandra Fluke, who is also a member of LSRJ, which is the national Law Students’ organization for Reproductive Justice.

Amidst all of the negative attention that Mr. Limbaugh focused on the sexual choices of people other than himself, the word has sparked a national dialogue among American women who feel that they should be allowed to make their own reproductive health choices.

If our decision to represent the term in a positive light for students who would like to discuss the implications of the word in a larger reproductive health context offends some women, we are truly sorry, and we recognize and respect the choice of those women to determine that the word should never be used at all, even in a positive way.

What we do not allow is for people to form a negatively reductionist opinion of our event and our organization based on the word “slut.” Women’s feelings regarding that word cannot be reduced to a sound bite or a bumper sticker. This is a discussion that women from all over the country want to engage in – and we sincerely hope that anyone choosing to cover this event will give it the positive attention that it deserves.

We want reproductive justice for all women – and we believe that this event, like many we hold every year at Harvard Law School, including during our annual Sex Week, furthers that cause.

For more information, please contact Kandis Wood (President of HLSRJ) at kandiswood@gmail.com or Laura Carwile (Vice President of HLSRJ) at lauracarwile@gmail.com.