

**“Girls Just Want To Have Fun”: News Coverage of the  
Washington, D.C. SlutWalk**

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Historical Context	7
Theory and Methods	9
WJLA: “Slutwalk march to end victim-blaming in sexual assaults”	16
<i>Washington Post</i> : “Marchers protest sexual assault and a culture of victim-blaming”	21
WTOP: “Global movement SlutWalk struts into DC”	30
Conclusion	36
Appendices	39
Bibliography	46

### **Abstract**

On Jan. 24, 2011, a Toronto police officer told a group of law students at York University, "Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized" ("Toronto 'slut walk'"). His comments ended up sparking a movement called the SlutWalk, in which grassroots organizers in cities across the world organized marches to protest victim-blaming and rape culture. The marches' attention-grabbing name and associated rhetoric has sparked plenty of commentary in the media, but there has not yet been much academic research into this unique contemporary feminist movement. This thesis analyzes three different news articles that cover a Washington, D.C. SlutWalk that occurred in August 2011, asking specifically: How do news organizations frame contemporary feminism in journalism coverage? Also, how well do news organizations cover issues of sexual assault? Utilizing analytical tools from rhetoric, feminism, and journalism, this thesis uses the news coverage of this particular event as a case study to show where journalism coverage continues to misconstrue feminist goals and improperly frame sexual assault and survivors of sexual assault.

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## Introduction

On Jan. 24, 2011, while speaking at a personal security class for a group of law students at York University, Toronto Police Constable Michael Sanguinetti told them, "Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized." He later apologized for his comments when they sparked outrage, but for many women, his comments were merely indicative of a broader mentality ("Toronto 'slut walk'"). As Heather Jarvis, an activist from Toronto, explained in an interview with NPR,

This idea is very, very common that somehow people who experience sexual assault do something to attract it, are asking for it, or even deserve it. And that's not OK. And it's not the case. So we decided to go down to Toronto police headquarters and tell the Toronto police that we had had enough and we demanded better and we wanted to raise awareness about these issues. (Jarvis, Heather and Anna Fry)

Jarvis, along with several other women, organized a Toronto march under the moniker of SlutWalk to "to use a language that the police officer used against us and throw it back at [the police department]" (Jarvis, Heather and Anna Fry). The SlutWalk, held on April 3, 2011, ended up having about 1,000 participants who marched to the Toronto Police Headquarters ("Toronto 'slut walk'"). Andrea O'Reilly, a professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University, marveled, "As a frequent attendee at Toronto feminist protests over the past thirty years, I can attest that SlutWalk exhibited a vibrancy and an energy seldom experienced since the prochoice marches of the early- to mid-1980s" (O'Reilly et al. 246).

Activists in cities around the globe quickly began organizing their SlutWalk marches — within a few months, SlutWalks were taking place around the world, including Austin, Texas;

London, England; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (“ ‘Slutwalk’ Goes Global”). Over two years later, the SlutWalk marches are still going strong: As recently as April 5, 2013, a SlutWalk occurred in Tel Aviv, Israel (“Support and solidarity...”).

As a method of protesting the idea that a woman’s clothing is to blame for a man assaulting her, many of the SlutWalk participants wear revealing outfits and carry signs with corresponding messages, such as, “[A] Short Skirt is NOT an INVITATION to RAPE me” (see Appendix D). As Jarvis explained,

... some people they do come up wearing a certain outfit that is a form of protest — protesting with their bodies. Whether it's wearing a slogan, writing across their bodies or showing skin, but we encourage people to come as they were and come as they were comfortable. (Jarvis, Heather and Anna Fry)

The protestors frequently use their bodies as a form of protest, wearing outfits that send a personal protest against victim blaming (see Appendices D-F). However, the outfits are far from the only method of protest at the march: Although the marches vary from city to city, since grassroots activists independently organize each walk, most of the walks host speakers, involve related, local organizations, and make a list of concrete goals and demands. For example, at the 2011 Washington, D.C. SlutWalk, the march organizers created a list of eight demands, including affordable reproductive health care, an end to violence against transgendered people, and an end to the deportation of undocumented immigrants who report cases of sexual violence (“SlutWalk D.C. Demands!”). They also hosted numerous speakers, including relationship expert Dr. Ruth Neustifter, artist and sexual assault activist Andrea Bredbeck, and Maryland State Delegate Ariana Kelly (“Event Schedule, March Route”).

The SlutWalks have generated a large amount of conversation within the feminist community, and have also garnered plenty of editorial and news coverage from blogs and more mainstream news sources. Despite the amount of text that has been generated in response to the SlutWalks, there has been very little academic analysis that has been performed on the walks or on the media coverage they have received. However, the news coverage of the SlutWalks is particularly important to discuss, because news organizations both reflect and shape widely-held societal beliefs (Worthington 347), making it imperative that issues such as sexual assault — and the SlutWalk march, which is concerned with bringing attention to that issue — are handled respectfully and in a way that accurately explains the issue. This thesis analyzes three news articles that cover a Washington, D.C. SlutWalk that occurred in August 2011, using close textual analysis and a feminist lens to ask specifically: What framing devices do news organizations use when covering contemporary feminist events and issues of sexual assault? Also, what voices do news organizations tend to include or exclude in the text, and how are they used to present their frame?

### *Historical Context*

In the United States, the SlutWalks are only one piece of a larger, discursive context of public and political controversies regarding rape culture and other issues in which women's bodies, safety, and reproductive health are central. For example, in 2011 and 2012, state legislatures passed 135 new laws restricting women's access to abortions — the highest number of restrictions ever passed in the United States (“2012 Saw Second-Highest”). In early 2011, several politicians came under fire for introducing the “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act,” which said federal funds could only be used for an abortion in cases of “forcible rape,” meaning

that statutory rape, or possibly rape in which the woman was drugged, might not be considered eligible for abortion funds (Somashekhar). In August 2012, Missouri Congressman Todd Akin (R-MO), who had co-sponsored the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, came under fire once again for claiming during an interview that women rarely got pregnant from “legitimate rape” because “the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down” (Kane and Henderson).

In addition to these political moves that have restricted women’s rights and silenced the voices of sexual assault victims, a series of egregious cases of sexual assault in small U.S. towns made national news — cases that were then mishandled in mainstream news coverage. In March 2011, the *New York Times* came under fire for its article “Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town,” in which it described a gang rape of an 11-year-old girl, but framed it in such a way as to insinuate that the girl was to blame for the rape; a *Mother Jones* editorial called the article “a collection of one perpetrator-excusing, victim-blaming insult after another” (McClelland). The *New York Times* wasn’t alone in erring in its coverage of the case, though: In a corpus study of articles covering the gang rape, O’Hara found that many of them focused on the effect that the rape had on the community, or on the victim’s clothing and actions, rather than focusing on the effect that the rape had on the victim (O’Hara 252-254). And in March 2013, several major news organizations committed heinous errors in their coverage of a case in which two high school football players from Steubenville, Ohio were photographed raping an inebriated teenaged girl; flouting standard journalistic ethics regarding sensitive information about minors, Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC all aired the victim’s name (Tenore). Furthermore, several of CNN’s journalists talked sympathetically about the rapists — one correspondent, Poppy Harlow,



bemoaned that the rapists “literally watched as their life fell apart” — without even mentioning or considering the trials of the victim (Tenore).

These cases are but a small part of a larger media landscape in which the rapist is far too often painted as a sympathetic character that was somehow misled into raping the victim, with the frequent insinuation that the victims themselves are to blame for the rape. As Edwards et al. explain, “media stories are often constructed from a viewpoint that is more favorable to the perpetrator (e.g., by focusing on the perpetrator’s version of events) rather than the victim” (767).

The SlutWalks have talked back to some of these issues directly, attacking the silencing and misrepresentation of sexual assault victims and opposing the politics that attempt to limit women’s reproductive choices. The Washington, D.C. SlutWalk, for instance, states in its demands that it opposes the No Taxpayer Funding For Abortion Act, saying, “DC residents must have access to affordable reproductive health care services including abortions” (SlutWalk D.C. Demands!). Similarly, part of the reason why sexual assault survivor Elizabeth Webb decided to organize SlutWalk Dallas was because of its proximity to Cleveland, Texas, which is where the gang rape of the 11-year-old girl occurred. “Sexual assault is traumatic, and to add victim blaming on top of that is damaging to the psyche,” Webb told the *Huffington Post* (Stampler).

### *Theory and Methods*

As the SlutWalks are a very recent phenomenon, there has not been much academic research on the topic: *Feminist Studies* published a collection of perspectives on SlutWalks in 2012, but the perspectives were more reflective than analytical (O’Reilly et al.), and most other academic perspectives have been on SlutWalks abroad (Kapur), with little focus on the

relationship between the SlutWalks and the news coverage of the movement. There has, however, been prior research on the relationship between feminist issues and the media, and on the relationship between the news genre and hegemonic culture. In their analysis of newspaper coverage involving crime and victimization, for example, Nakhaie and Pike argue,

In the representation of news, the various media are often shown to have a ‘distorted’ image of reality...This perspective argues that the social structure, relations of production, profit motives, as well as institutional goals can exert a powerful influence on the everyday work of journalists and media institutions because these agents are already socialized into, and subsequently tend to reflect, existing social arrangements. (Nakhaie and Pike 310)

Nakhaie and Pike were comparing the coverage of newspapers from the United States, Iran, and Canada for the United States’ destruction of an Iranian passenger plane in 1988. They found that American journalists did not portray the realities of the event, but rather justified the actions of the United States using the explanation from the U.S. government. This, they argue, shows that journalists are incapable of stepping outside of the “ideological hegemonic perspectives” that dominate their culture (Nakhaie and Pike 309). In other words, even though journalism is meant to provide insight into existing social problems and inequities, the fact remains that media institutions and journalists are a product of the social structures that produce those inequities in the first place, and thus are often incapable of seeing beyond the current existing social standards and assumptions.

Although journalists and news coverage fit into existing social arrangements, Worthington argues that the news genre also has the unique opportunity to shape those social arrangements: “the particulars of the news genre encourage viewers to draw on a narrower range

of interpretive resources than they do for entertainment [media]" (Worthington 347). Readers are therefore more likely to trust the interpretation of events that a journalistic text gives them, making the news genre a significant opportunity to shape a reader's understanding of an event or issue.

Currently, however, existing scholarship suggests that the media reinforces, rather than changes, cultural misconceptions about sexual assault and feminism. In Edwards et al.'s "Rape Myths: History, Individual and Institutional-Level Presence, and Implications for Change," they explain four prevailing rape myths — "husbands cannot rape their wives," "women enjoy rape," "women ask to be raped," and "women lie about being raped" — and show the ways that headlines and story selection in the media can reinforce those myths. In "Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology," Bonnie J. Dow gives a history of the tension between the feminist movement and the Miss America pageant, and uses the media coverage linking the two over the past few decades to draw conclusions about the ways the mass media tends to portray feminism. Similarly, Jaworska and Krishnamurthy's article "On the F word: A corpus-based analysis of the media representation of feminism in British and German press discourse, 1990–2009," found that "feminism is framed predominantly as a political movement closely associated with radicalism, militancy, and leftist ideology, which in turn have distinctively negative connotations" (413). There already has been some research done on how journalists can change those misconceptions in their reporting, at least when it comes to reporting on rape. Worthington provides four criteria for progressive reporting on rape:

- (1) story selection that reflects the types of crimes that occur (i.e., attention to assaults perpetrated by acquaintances),
- (2) avoidance of sexist stereotypes that either blame the victim or mitigate suspect responsibility,
- (3) attention to the role of social structures such

as law, gender, race, and class in causing and normalizing gender violence, and (4) the inclusion of perspectives of victims and/or their advocates. (Worthington 345)

For my analysis, I have selected three mainstream news articles that covered the SlutWalk march that happened in Washington, D.C. on August 13, 2011. The first article was written for WJLA, the ABC affiliate television station for the Washington, D.C. area; the second article was published in the *Washington Post*, a nationally-regarded newspaper; and the third article was published on the website for WTOP 103.5 FM, a D.C.-area radio news station. These articles represent the few mainstream news outlets that covered the D.C. SlutWalk specifically. Although there has been much news coverage of the wider SlutWalk movement — *USA Today* published an article in October 2011, for example, that looked at the SlutWalk movement as a whole (Grasgreen), and the *Washington Post* had published two other articles solely on the SlutWalk that happened in New Delhi in July 2011 (Lakshmi) — it is instructive to focus on the coverage of a single SlutWalk, given that local activists organize marches independently of one another, and thus are not homogeneous in their aims or experiences.

One important aspect of the analysis performed in this thesis is identifying the frames that each article is constructing for the reader. Entman defines framing in the media as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (164). A frame activates certain schemas for readers, including perspectives that encourage the reader to interpret an issue a particular way. Scheufele describes framing in the news similarly: “Media frames have been defined as ‘a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. ... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143).” (Scheufele 307). Entman’s analysis uses a large corpus of work to

prove his perspective of framing, while Scheufele draws most of his sources from reader response studies. These broader studies of the news genre provide a framework one can use to then examine a particular text.

In order to determine the frames of each article, there must be particular attention paid to the voices included in each article and the way the author presents the information from each source. Fahnestock explains “voices” as another speaker or writer who is somehow brought into the text, and notes that the different ways a rhetor presents a voice in a text can influence or change the way the reader interprets that voice. For example, direct speech — an utterance quoted directly in the text — is the closest journalistic approximation of the speaker’s original voice; however, direct speech can still be misrepresented and the speaker’s intent misconstrued, depending on how much context is provided for the quotation (Fahnestock 307). Indirect speech, which paraphrases the original utterance, “offers a rhetor more opportunities for interpretive intervention” (Fahnestock 311). In other words, one way in which news articles create their narrative is through the sources they cite, so the voices they choose to include or exclude, and the way they present those voices, are central to the construction of a frame for each story. Fahnestock notes, though, that despite its importance to news articles, “apart from a few ‘rules of thumb,’ journalists have apparently had little to say about the nuances of speech representation” (Fahnestock 307).

Although speech representation may not be widely discussed in journalism, there is linguistic analysis that can be applied to speech representation in news coverage. Martin and White provide linguistic resources in their *Language of Evaluation* to analyze the ways in which particular linguistic constructions are used to make the text either more or less dialogical, and thus direct the reader toward particular ideas or perspectives. For example, Martin and White

discuss the different ways that the verbal tag accompanying a quote can change the reader's perspective of the quote. Attributions include tags such as "Kelly said," or "Kelly claimed;" while both attributions acknowledge a multitude of viewpoints, the former example just acknowledges the statement as one point of view amongst potentially many others, whereas the latter example distances the author from the perspective being expressed (Martin and White 98). This is just one example within Martin and White's systematic account of tools for linguistic positioning that proves highly useful when applied to news articles.

An article's headline also significantly contributes to an article's frame, as the headline alone can have a considerable rhetorical effect on a reader, particularly in issues of sexual assault. Franiuk et al. performed a study examining the effect that headlines had on a reader's perspective of the Kobe Bryant rape case, and found "that participants exposed to the rape myth-endorsing headline were less likely to believe that Bryant was guilty of rape and more likely to hold rape-supportive attitudes than participants exposed to the non rape myth-endorsing headline" (Edwards et al. 763).

I also paid attention to the structure of the articles; the standard news article structure, the inverted pyramid, "puts the most newsworthy information at the top, and then the remaining information follows in order of importance, with the least important at the bottom" (Scanlan). The inverted pyramid is designed to accommodate the "satisficing" reader (Redish 17), and to accommodate the way a reader consumes news articles. Thus, one can deduce how important the author considered a piece of information based on where he or she decided to place it in the article. The news articles cited here are not perfect reflections of the inverted pyramid structure, as they incorporate some of the elements of a feature article structure, which follows more of a

narrative structure. However, the influence of the inverted pyramid structure is still there, making it still a useful analytical tool.

In the following sections, I devote one chapter to each of three news articles about the Washington, D.C. SlutWalk that occurred on August 13, 2011. Each chapter draws from Martin and White's evaluation techniques to perform a close textual analysis of the article in order to determine how the article frames the SlutWalk march. Each chapter also draws from feminist and media studies to illustrate how each article either reinforces or challenges previous conceptions of sexual assault in the news.

**WJLA: “Slutwalk march to end victim-blaming in sexual assaults”**

WJLA is the ABC affiliate station for the greater Washington, D.C. area, and has over 5.7 million viewers per week (“About Us”). Its article, “Slutwalk march to end victim-blaming in sexual assaults,” was originally posted online on August 12, 2011, and updated the evening of August 13. The online article is only 243 words long and frames the SlutWalk as a controversial, sexualized, global protest.

The headline is a fairly straightforward summary of the goals of the SlutWalk march, although the use of the preposition “in” is ambiguous — it sounds as if the victim-blaming is happening during the sexual assault, rather than throughout rape culture. The article begins, “Started in Canada earlier this year, so-called SlutWalks have been held in several U.S. cities and in other countries.” This lede immediately establishes the international aspect of the movement by highlighting the fact that it started in Canada and that it has already happened in numerous other locations around the world. There are a few other places in the article that also highlight the global element of the movement; a few sentences down, it says, “thousands have participated in similar rallies that have taken place across the world, including London and Australia, since the Spring.” About halfway through the article, Samantha Wright is quoted as saying that SlutWalks have “created this global discussion about sexual assault that we’ve never seen before.” Similarly, at the very end of the article, Maryland State Delegate Ariana Kelly is cited as saying that Slutwalk can create “a global conversation.”

Although the focus on the global aspect of the SlutWalk could be seen as legitimizing, that sentiment is countered by the author calling the it the “so-called SlutWalks.” Although “so-called” could be used as a mere introduction to what its name is, it is frequently used to refer to



something “designated by this name or term, but not properly entitled to it or correctly described by it” (“so-called, adj.”). The word choice is therefore immediately calling into question the legitimacy of the movement by calling its moniker into question for the reader.

The use of language to question the legitimacy of the movement continues as the article progresses. The two sentences following the lede say, “Today, it came to D.C. and raised plenty of eyebrows — which is just what organizers say they intended. It’s been likened to bra burning of the 1960s: Young women promoting a cause in an unconventional and controversial way.” The connection drawn between bra burning and the SlutWalk is a curious one; although the article claims that it is drawing the connection between the two because they both are “promoting a cause in an unconventional and controversial way,” the media has traditionally drawn a very different meaning from bra burning. Bra burning is a myth that first began with a feminist protest of the 1968 Miss America pageant; although no bras were burned at the protest, the image has persistently been associated with second-wave feminism. Dow argues that the media used the image of bra burning to sexualize and trivialize the feminist movement. “Susan Douglas agrees, arguing that ‘women who threw their bras away may have said they were challenging sexism, but the media, with a wink, hinted that these women's motives were not at all political but rather personal: to be trendy, and to attract men’” (Dow 579). By linking the SlutWalk to bra burning, the author draws up in the reader associations of easily-dismissed radicalism, despite the author’s attempts to reframe the bra burning as “young women promoting a cause in an unconventional and controversial way.”

The article then says that the SlutWalk has been “Promoted as a march to end victim-blaming for sexual assault.” The use of “promoted” seems to imply that, while that is the march’s

goal, that doesn't necessarily mean that it has met that purpose; this word choice further highlights the controversial nature of the march. Similarly, the article later states:

But the Slutwalk isn't without controversy. With some calling it misguided with a tone and frivolity that distracts from an important and serious message. 'It's just ridiculous to conflate this with a good issue with celebrating sluts,' said one detractor. 'Let's face it, sluts, if you want to use that term, are not empowered women.'

Highlighting this particular criticism — of the SlutWalk being frivolous and sexualized — relates back to the associations with bra burning. Similarly, the statement that “sluts, if you want to use that term, are not empowered women” ties back into Douglas' argument that the media viewed bra burners as sexual women who were looking to attract more male attention to themselves. Oddly, however, this criticism is not credited to anyone — the quote is attributed merely to “one detractor.” On the one hand, “one detractor” implies that this criticism is one amongst many; on the other hand, the fact that the quote is anonymous means that the reader cannot judge the credibility or reputation of the source, and thus casts doubt on the validity of the criticism made in the quote.

Immediately following this anonymous detractor's quote is an endorsement from Maryland State Delegate Ariana Kelly.

Maryland State Delegate Ariana Kelly is a speaker at Saturday's event. She said she understands the controversy but also understands the cause. She was raped as a teenager and then accused by an emergency room doctor of being promiscuous. “We need to change the way as a society we work with and think about victims and survivors of sexual assault< [sic]” Kelly said.

Like WTOP's mention of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and the D.C. chapter of the National Organization for Women, the quote from a Maryland state delegate who is endorsing and participating in the SlutWalk serves to legitimize the movement for the reader, especially when juxtaposed with a quote from an anonymous detractor. Again, the author emphasizes the controversial aspect of the SlutWalk by saying that Kelly "understands the controversy but also understands the cause." Although Kelly is serving as a defense of the SlutWalk, the author interestingly does not say that Kelly understands the SlutWalk — rather, she "understands the cause," which doesn't necessarily negate the argument of the anonymous detractor. However, since it is indirect speech, it is unclear whether that is truly what Kelly expressed, or if the author's paraphrasing changed the intent of Kelly's statement.

The author also uses the verb "said" whenever citing Kelly, which is an acknowledgement attribution that neither endorses nor denies her statement (Martin and White 98). The author uses the verb "said" throughout the entire article, thereby presenting a neutral stance on all of the sources that the article cites.

The article then relays Kelly's personal account of being sexually assaulted as proof of why the cause of the SlutWalk march is valid. "She was raped" is a passive construction that places her as the subject, and doesn't contain an actor, thereby making it seem as though the rape was just an event that occurred, rather than a consequence of the rapist's actions. The use of the passive voice is frequent in written descriptions of rape cases (but unique in its frequency in comparison to written descriptions of other crimes) and has been shown to correlate positively with rape myth acceptance and the perceived responsibility of the victim (Bohner 515). "Accused by an emergency room doctor of being promiscuous" is still a passive construction, but now there is at least an actor (the emergency room doctor). However, as Bohner notes, "even

non-truncated passive forms, in which the acting person or entity is explicitly mentioned, seem to put greater emphasis on their *grammatical* subjects” (Bohner 517). Other than the passive construction, though, this clause attempts to work as an example of why Kelly’s support for the movement and her definition of victim blaming should be taken seriously. The verb “accused” has infused intensification (Martin and White 143), heightening the drama of the action described and thus serving as an example of the problem of victim blaming. By preceding Kelly’s quote of “We need to change the way as a society we work with and think about victims and survivors of sexual assault” with this personal experience with victim blaming, it lends more weight to her assertion.

The article closes with, “Kelly says that every generation has a way of communicating that resonates with them. And if it takes something called Slutwalk to create a global conversation, then she’s all for it.” Again, as with Kelly’s earlier indirect speech, this sentence is not quite a ringing endorsement for the SlutWalk movement — rather, it says that “she’s all for it,” but only because SlutWalk is what it took to “create a global conversation.”

This article does not treat the SlutWalks as a legitimate activist movement, but rather trivializes it by sexualizing it through association with bra burning; it also delegitimizes the movement by focusing on its controversy, rather than on its message. Furthermore, the language that the author uses to Kelly’s speech and experiences merely works to reinforce rape myths, even though the whole point of the march is to deconstruct rape myths.

***Washington Post*: “SlutWalk DC marchers protest sexual assault and a culture of victim-blaming”**

The *Washington Post* article about the march, written by June Q. Wu, is the only article to cover the march after it took place, and is the longest article of the three at 548 words. The *Washington Post* is a particularly influential news source in the Washington, D.C. area: About 60 percent of adults in the Washington, D.C. designated market area read at least one of the *Post*'s publications in an average week (“Audience”). Furthermore, according to a report from the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, “newspapers have a significant effect on public perception of violent crime, far more than any other news source” (“Reporting Sexual Assault” 8). This suggests that the *Washington Post*'s coverage of sexual assault and the SlutWalks would have a greater effect on its readership than the other two articles would, since WJLA is a television station and WTOP is a radio station.

The article's headline appears to take the march seriously, addressing both sexual assault and the wider culture of victim blaming without including any of the trivializing wordplay that was present in WTOP's headline. However, the lede of the article sets a very different tone than the headline. The article begins,

Sarah Lisenbe, wearing an off-the-shoulder top, short skirt, fishnet stockings, and boots, was on her way to a rally downtown Saturday morning when several men began verbally harassing her.

Taken aback, Lisenbe changed into capris before joining friends for SlutWalk DC...

As Lisenbe marched...she said she felt more comfortable in the less-revealing clothing — but was also aware that her discomfort with the men’s comments was an example of the very issue she had come downtown to highlight.

This is an example of a feature lede, rather than a hard news lede, and is using a highly visual scene to place the reader within the story. While the structure and the visual nature of the lede may serve to grab the reader’s attention, its focus on the visual of Lisenbe is problematic and undermines the marchers’ intentions. In their article “On the F-Word,” Jaworska and Krishnamurthy argue that the media frequently focuses on feminists’ physical appearances, which trivializes the movement (404). Recent research supports this claim: In a joint research project called “Name It. Change It,” the Women’s Media Center and She Could Run found that any mention of a female politician’s appearance — even if it was neutral or positive — was detrimental to her candidacy. Voters perceive her as out-of-touch, less likeable, and less confident, and she loses favorability and votes, whereas any mention of a man’s appearance had no effect whatsoever on voters’ opinions of him (*An Examination of the Impact...*). In the *Post* article’s opening scene, Lisenbe’s outfit is not merely mentioned in passing; rather, the adjectives that the author adds to describe her clothing are clearly meant to highlight the provocative nature of her outfit: Her skirt is “short;” her stockings are “fishnet”; and her top is “off-the-shoulder.” The verbal harassment that Lisenbe then encounters is almost secondary to this focus on her clothing. By saying that Lisenbe “changed into capris” and “felt more comfortable in the less-revealing clothing,” the author is implying that even the march participants don’t truly embrace the methods of the SlutWalk movement. Since the statement that “she felt more comfortable in the less-revealing clothing” is indirect speech, it’s unclear as to

how much Lisenbe actually expressed being uncomfortable, or how much of that statement is from the author, rather than Lisenbe.

There are several other instances in which the article focuses on the physical appearance of the marchers in a way that undermines the SlutWalk's message. Wu describes the SlutWalk as "an event at which men and women dressed provocatively to raise awareness about the issue of blaming victims for sexual violence." Further down in the article, Wu says, "One woman taped 'SLUT' across her sunglasses." Closer to the end of the article, Wu cites an interview with army veteran Stephanie Hargett:

Hargett said she was sexually assaulted while deployed in Kuwait with the Army two years ago. 'I want people to realize females should be able to go out and wear short skirts and have a good time without getting harassed,' said Hargett, who had transformed her uniform into a cropped top and short shorts and wore fishnets with boots for the event.

In this quote, the focus on Hargett's visual appearance — again, accompanied by adjectives like "cropped," "short," and "fishnets" — has a higher word count (20 words) than the sentence about her sexual assault (16 words), directing the reader's focus more toward her appearance than to the fact that she was sexually assaulted. Even though the march participants are using their bodies and appearance as "a form of protest" (Jarvis, Heather and Anna Fry), this article describes their clothing to distract from the very message that those outfits are trying to send.

The article further undermines the cause of the SlutWalk through its focus on the individual. Jaworska and Krishnamurthy argue, "there is a strong focus on self-transformation [in the media], usually consisting of individual success stories encouraging women to believe that they can meet all the challenges of modern life just by improving themselves. This, in turn, obviously discourages any collective action" (404). Similarly, Dow, in her analysis of the media

coverage surrounding the Miss America pageant throughout the last half of the 20th century, says, “the linkages between feminism and Miss America in mass media discourse point to dominant media’s tendency to promote a particular version of liberal feminism — one that emphasizes individualism, self-actualization, and achievement within existing social hierarchies — as the only feminism” (591). This focus on “self-actualization” appears in the article’s quote of Andrea Bredbeck, a keynote speaker at the march:

“If we truly want to stop slut blaming, we have to take a really hard look at how feeling shame has not only hurt us but enabled our own denial,” said Andrea Bredbeck, a freelance writer who delivered a keynote speech Saturday afternoon... “No matter what your gender, what you wear, you are never responsible for being assaulted,” she said to cheers and applause.

When she says, “feeling shame has not only hurt us but enabled our own denial,” the “us” and “our” is directed at other sexual assault survivors. The quote selection points toward the sexual assault survivors as the ones who need to transform themselves to advance their cause, rather than pointing toward the assaulters or toward broader rape culture. While one may argue that Wu was merely reporting upon Bredbeck’s speech, this quote selection does not accurately represent the broader context of Bredbeck’s speech. Bredbeck focused on rape culture and the pain of sexual assault in her speech; for example, during her speech she said, “we live in a world that wants women to be shamed, period,” and listed the ways that focus on the characteristics of a sexual assault victim “serves to excuse whoever is pointing the figure from holding themselves accountable for their own choices and actions” (Bredbeck). Wu entirely overlooks those themes and accusations, though, in the quotes that she selected from Bredbeck’s speech, resulting in an inaccurate portrait of the speech.



This is not the only instance of the article highlighting examples from the SlutWalk that are not truly representative of the march. About halfway through the article, it says, “Members of a group identifying themselves as ‘gender-fluid anarchists’ requested that they not be identified as ‘he’ or ‘she’ and declared ‘Consent is sexy’ in signs and chants.” The quotation marks around “gender-fluid anarchists” are called scare quotes, which are used to set apart individual words or phrases, rather than whole clauses or sentences that is usually marked in direct speech. As Pajunen explains, “The effect is that what is put in quotation marks is questioned, disparaged, undermined or taken distance from” (12). The author distances herself from the descriptor and makes their identity an attribution, rather than a statement; it thus dialogically opens their self-identification up for criticism or questioning.

Furthermore, even though this particular group wasn’t truly representative of the whole group of SlutWalk participants, the emphasis on them will lead the reader to believe that this small sample of people— which is being highlighted in a way that indicates the author does not intend the reader to take it seriously — is representative of the entire SlutWalk. This plays into Jaworska and Krishnamurthy’s findings that “Feminists are seen as odd [in the media], and engaged in practices that are foreign to the vast majority of ‘regular’ women” (404). Furthermore, this selection is placed higher in the article than Samantha Wright’s explanation of the SlutWalk’s goals and higher than the two sexual assault survivors that the article quotes. This structural choice would thus color the reader’s opinion of Wright and the sexual assault survivors to cause the reader to regard their statements with the same skepticism and lack of seriousness that the reader would feel for the description of the gender-fluid anarchists.

In addition to the placement of the sexual assault survivors’ experiences at the very end of the article, the way that the author frames their experiences further de-emphasizes them. The

first example comes from Hargett: “Hargett said she was sexually assaulted while deployed in Kuwait with the Army two years ago.” A little later, the article says, “Andrea Brown, 24, of Manassas said she was molested first by her uncle when she was 7 and then by her mother’s ex-boyfriend when she was 11.” Again, as in the WJLA article, the author uses the passive voice to describe their experiences of rape, a specific linguistic move that has a strong positive correlation with rape myth acceptance and perceived responsibility of the victim (Bohner 515). Furthermore, the “said she was” construction used in both sentences is a curiously unnecessary one, and is unusual in news reporting. When explaining indirect speech in news reporting, Fahnestock says, “reporting clauses are usually tacked on to the back of claims that are actually paraphrased from sources. The reader takes in the text and then in the end learns that the whole is attributed indirect speech” (311-312). There are two advantages to this, she says:

The content of the paraphrased utterance assumes greater fact status by being taken in first, as an unattributed proposition; in the end, the reader discovers the source, a ‘save’ for the objectivity of the news source. (Citing the source does not necessarily lend credibility to an assertion; an attribution can actually lower the truth status of a claim since what has to be sourced does not have immediate recognition as a fact...).

(Fahnestock 312)

Wu does not follow this standard construction when citing Hargett and Brown. By putting the attribution at the beginning of the sentence, Wu is priming the reader in such a way that immediately lowers the truth status of the women’s claims, creating room for doubt in the reader’s mind as to whether or not these statements of sexual assault can be regarded as factual.

The article also downplays the SlutWalk’s cause by deemphasizing the inspiration for the SlutWalk movement. About halfway through the article, it says, “The first SlutWalk was held in

April after a Toronto police officer suggested that women should avoid ‘dressing like sluts’ to stay safe.” The verb choice “suggested” is a distancing formulation with very little force, making the police officer’s statement sound more innocuous. Similarly, “to stay safe” makes his statement vague — within this construction, the police officer could have easily been talking about staying safe from mugging, or he could have not even been talking about crime at all. By making his statement less precise, it detracts from the original shock value of the quote, and doesn’t even let the reader know that he was speaking specifically about sexual violence.

The article paints the walk in a postfeminist frame, which in turn makes the march seem more about female empowerment than about raising awareness of sexual assault and rape culture. As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra explain in the introduction to *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*,

Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes...physical and particularly sexual empowerment... It generates and draws strength, for instance, from a rhetorical field that produces buzzwords and slogans to express visions of energetic personal empowerment (the borrowed African American idiom ‘You go, girl!’ the phrase ‘girl power,’ etc.). (3)

The image of postfeminism undermines the activist efforts of feminism, as it constructs feminism as a relic firmly rooted in the past and acts as though the freedom of consumer choice in contemporary times means that structurally-ingrained economic disparities are not an issue. Central to postfeminism is the idea of youthfulness, as the focus on phrases like “you go, girl” and “girl power” might suggest: “the postfeminist heroine is vital, youthful, and playful” (Tasker

and Negra 9). Postfeminist framing and a focus on girlhood abound in *Washington Post*'s article. When describing the SlutWalk, the article says, "'Two, four, six, eight, it is not okay to rape,' the crowd chanted. Women and men brandished handmade signs with slogans such as 'My dress is not a yes' and danced to Cyndi Lauper's 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun.'" Although it acknowledges that both "women and men" were present, the scene painted is a distinctly postfeminist one. The chant quoted is reminiscent of high school cheerleading cheers, associating the SlutWalk with the youthful vitality of teenaged girls. The image of a crowd dancing Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," and the emphasis on the signs being "handmade," further reinforce the emphasis on youth and girlhood. Similarly, the article ends with a quote from Andrea Brown:

"The idea that anyone deserves to be raped is stupid,' she said. Brown and two friends organized a SlutWalk sleepover Friday night, staying up late to choose outfits and make signs. 'We ran out of paper before we ran out of messages,' she said."

The word choice of "sleepover" and the associated image of them "staying up late to choose outfits and make signs" again draw associations of teenaged girls and make the event seem like a fun event with female friends, rather than a protest march. These girly, postfeminist images distract from the fact that the march is about sexual assault, and instead focus the reader in on the fun, girlish qualities of the march.

The way that the author cites Hargett's and Brown's speech downplays their experiences with sexual assault and further draws upon the postfeminist frame. Neither Hargett nor Brown is given direct speech about their sexual assault experiences; rather, the experiences of both are paraphrased. Hargett is instead quoted as saying, "I want people to realize females should be able to go out and wear short skirts and have a good time without getting harassed." Similarly,

Brown's multiple experiences with sexual assault are summed up in a paraphrased sentence; the direct speech attributed to her is "The idea that anyone deserves to be raped is stupid," and "We ran out of paper before we ran out of messages." By choosing to directly cite statements about "short skirts" and "the idea that anyone deserves to be raped is stupid," rather than their experiences about sexual assault, the author is giving these more juvenile words more weight than the actual sexual assaults.

Overall, this article frames the march as a frivolous, post-feminist, female empowerment event, and trivializes the march's cause. Unlike the WJLA article, which highlighted the SlutWalk's controversial nature, this article uses a postfeminist frame to undermine the SlutWalk movement by focusing the reader's attention away from the cause and instead painting the march as a feminine spectacle. The excessive focus on the women's appearances; the misrepresentative selection of participants or details to highlight; and the focus on the individual all contribute to an inaccurate portrayal of what the SlutWalk actually meant to accomplish. Furthermore, the language that the article uses, such as passive sentence structures, actually works against the whole purpose of the SlutWalk by reinforcing rape myths in the reader's mind.

**WTOP: “Global movement SlutWalk struts into D.C.”**

WTOP 103.5 FM is an award-winning, Washington, D.C.-area radio news station (“NAB announces”). It posted an article on its website about the D.C. SlutWalk the day before the march, on August 12, rather than covering the march itself and posting an article after the event. The article, called “Global movement SlutWalk struts into D.C.” by Meera Pal, frames the event as an effective, internationally motivated way of raising awareness about the relevant issues of slut shaming and victim blaming.

The headline immediately highlights the global aspect of the movement, which lends the movement some credibility; however, this effect is somewhat distilled by the verb “struts,” which is frequently associated with arrogance, or with attention-grabbing birds. The article begins with, “While the name of this international movement tends to raise eyebrows, its message is entirely serious.” By saying the message is “entirely serious,” the article does not provide much dialogical space for the reader to doubt the validity of the movement’s issues and goals. To use Martin and White’s terminology, the use of “entirely” is an intensification of force, which “acts to construe the speaker/writer as maximally committed to the value position being advanced and hence as strongly aligning the reader into that value position.” (Martin and White 152) Within the first sentence of the article, therefore, the movement’s message is being framed as one that needs to be taken seriously, and it is constructed in such a way as to make it difficult for the reader to dissent from the article’s framing. Furthermore, the use of a counter in the form of a concessive clause (i.e., “While the name is this international movement tends to raise eyebrows”) “project[s] on to the addressee particular beliefs or expectations” (Martin and White 121), such that the reader is obligated to agree with the second half of the sentence. In this case,

the use of “While” aligns the reader with the belief that the SlutWalk's message is “entirely serious.”

Also, by immediately introducing the event as part of an “international movement,” the text highlights SlutWalk’s global aspect and further solidifies the movement’s validity in the eyes of the reader. The text reinforces this idea several sentences later, when it describes SlutWalk as a “global movement,” and again closer to the end of the article, where it says, “Since starting in Toronto earlier this year, SlutWalks have been organized in Boston, Dallas, Chicago and Seattle, among other places. Most recently, organizers held a SlutWalk in Delhi, India.” By mentioning the Indian SlutWalk specifically, the text shows that concern about victim blaming is a cross-cultural issue, and therefore further frames victim blaming as something that exists as a global problem.

The second sentence of the article reads, “The protests known as SlutWalks began in Toronto following a police officer’s comment that women shouldn’t dress like ‘sluts’ if they want to avoid being raped or becoming victims of violence.” Unlike the *Washington Post*’s article about the SlutWalk, which cites the Toronto police officer but downplays the language that he used, this article infuses the police officer’s paraphrased language to increase its force. Toronto Police Constable Michael Sanguinetti’s original words were, “Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (“Toronto ‘Slut Walk’ ”). WTOP’s paraphrased version removes the hedging of “should avoid” and changes it to “shouldn’t,” and uses an infused intensification of force, to use Martin and White’s terms (143), by changing “victimized” to “raped or becoming victims of violence.” As explained earlier, intensifying force dialogically contracts a piece of text, making the reader more obligated to go along with the framing that the author has established. The fact that this increase in force is directed at the dialogue that sparked

the whole movement helps to legitimize the SlutWalk movement and make the reader believe this cause is worth becoming shocked over.

The article further legitimizes the SlutWalk by associating it with existing, respected organizations. It says, “Representatives from various groups, such as the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and the D.C. chapter of the National Organization for Women, will hand out information on sexual assault resources. ‘We really want to connect people to those organizations, get people involved and get people to work on these issues,’ Wright says.” Wright’s quote, paired with the specific mentions of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and the National Organization for Women, lends the SlutWalk some credibility — not only is it aligning these established nonprofit organizations with the SlutWalk, but it also suggests that the SlutWalk is able to contribute to the work of those organizations by providing a space in which women can connect to the organizations.

The article also emphasizes the legitimacy of the SlutWalk movement by staying focused on the message of the event, rather than on the scandal of the march’s visual appearance. A little more than halfway through the article, it says, “While the movement has received quite a bit of publicity for the type of clothing worn by previous SlutWalk participants in other countries, Wright is quick to point out it’s not about attire. The movement is not about the clothes, just as sexual assault is not about the clothes.” Again, as in the opening sentence of the article, the author uses a counter to direct the reader toward the belief that the SlutWalk is “not about attire.” Furthermore, the use of “point out,” rather than “says” or “comments,” is, according to Martin and White, an endorsement of Wright’s point of view (98), which further reinforces that the author is directing the reader to believe Wright’s statement. The author also says that the movement has received publicity thanks to “previous SlutWalk participants in other countries,”



thereby putting both time (“previous”) and physical distance (“in other countries”) between the controversy of the SlutWalk’s physical appearance and the D.C. SlutWalk and thus removing the D.C. SlutWalk from the realm of controversy. It’s worth noting, however, that the publicity from other SlutWalks was not restricted to participants in other countries — as the article itself says, SlutWalks had already happened in many major cities in the United States, and there were plenty of controversial outfits at the SlutWalks that happened in the United States (see Appendix E) (“Thousands Attend Boston’s ‘SlutWalk’ March”).

The next sentence, “The movement is not about the clothes, just as sexual assault is not about the clothes,” has an unclear attribution. It is preceded by Wright’s indirect speech and is immediately followed by a direct quote from Wright, but the sentence itself is not directly attributed to Wright. The lack of attribution turns it into a bare assertion, thereby making it a monoglossic utterance that presents no dialogistic alternatives for the reader (Martin and White 99). By refusing to acknowledge the possibility of other alternatives, the sentence forces the reader to accept that both sexual assault and the SlutWalk are not about the clothing of the victims or march participants. This is a significant linguistic move, as this is not a universally accepted viewpoint — multiple studies have shown that about 20 percent of college men and women believe that a woman is either “asking for trouble” or partially responsible for rape if she wears provocative or revealing clothing (Edwards et al 766). This partially fulfills Worthington’s criteria for progressive reporting on rape, as it is actively avoiding the “sexist stereotypes that either blame the victim or mitigate suspect responsibility” (Worthington 345).

The article includes several quotes that are focused specifically on raising awareness of victim blaming and explaining what the problem is. The author quotes Samantha Wright, the D.C. SlutWalk organizer, fairly early on in the article; drawing from the rules of the inverted

pyramid, this means that the author considers Wright's contributions to be of importance to the article.

Samantha Wright, founder of SlutWalk D.C., says she decided to organize the walk after she saw the movement spreading across the country. 'Victim-blaming is something that is universal and I really really wanted to bring the conversation here,' she says. 'I wanted people to know that this attitude is out there and people really do blame victims for sexual assault.'

Slightly later in the article, the article states, "Nobody deserves to be sexually assaulted. There is no exception to that rule, no matter what you think their clothes are saying,' [Wright] says." Then, at the very end of the article, the SlutWalk D.C. spokesperson, Carmen Rios, is quoted with an explanation of victim blaming:

"A lot of times victim-blaming is the knee-jerk reaction of everyone around you when you've been sexually assaulted," Rios says. "It's 'Why were you there? Why were you with these people? Why were you wearing that? Why were you by yourself?' And the bottom line really is that all of those things don't matter because women and all people should be able to do whatever they want and live lives free from violence."

These quotes together take up about 37 percent of the word count of the article; even though Rios' quote comes at the end of the article, which de-emphasizes it a bit, the sheer amount of space the quotes are given in the article places an emphasis on these explanations in the reader's mind. This focus on defining the issue is a step in the right direction toward meeting Worthington's criteria for progressive reporting on rape (Worthington 345). Although it does not address any of the social structures that cause and normalize gender violence, it does acknowledge that this normalization exists through victim blaming.

Overall, this article works to legitimize the SlutWalk movement, and does so by drawing more attention to the problems with the police officer's speech; by linking the SlutWalk to other legitimate, local organizations; and by making it clear what victim blaming is and how it is an issue. It also legitimizes the movement by positioning it within an international context, repeatedly emphasizing that many other locations around the world had also held SlutWalks. Although the article acknowledges that there has been some controversy over the SlutWalks, it is quick to distance the local movement from the controversy, instead positioning the controversy as being pertinent only in other countries, despite evidence to the contrary. By legitimizing the SlutWalk, the article is challenging previous news discourse surrounding sexual assault. This is particularly noteworthy since WTOP does not appear to market itself as a progressive news organization, and yet it is producing coverage that challenges previous literature on mainstream news media, illustrating that it's possible for mainstream news media to produce respectful coverage of sexual assault issues.

## Conclusion

None of the articles examined in this thesis provide truly progressive coverage of the SlutWalk movement, as laid out by Worthington's criteria for progressive reporting on sexual assault issues (345). All three articles focus on merely the broader goals of the SlutWalk movement, overlooking the demands laid out by the organizers of the SlutWalk DC march that include concrete societal changes like access to medical care, affordable reproductive health care, and an "end to the deportation of undocumented people who report sexual assault, rape and domestic violence" ("SlutWalk D.C. Demands!"). The articles also all fail to pay "attention to the role of social structures such as law, gender, race, and class in causing and normalizing gender violence," which Worthington lists as an essential component of progressive reporting on rape and sexual assault issues (344-345). In fact, the WJLA and *Washington Post* articles, through the linguistic constructions and methods of including voices in their reportage, actually reinforce the very stereotypes that the SlutWalk is working to dispel. WJLA's article delegitimizes the movement by focusing on the controversial aspects of the SlutWalk, and the *Washington Post* distracts the reader from the movement's message entirely by framing the event as a postfeminist spectacle.

However, as this thesis shows, there is some hope for successful reporting — WTOP's article presents the SlutWalk as a more serious and meaningful activist event. While it does not meet all of Worthington's criteria for progressive reporting (345), it takes steps in the right direction by thoroughly explaining the issue of victim blaming and by actively addressing the sexist stereotypes around sexual assault victims. This challenges some of the previous literature

on news coverage, and shows that a mainstream news organization can cover feminism and sexual assault accurately and respectfully.

The application of an evaluative framework to these three news articles made it possible to tease out the subtle differences in framing that would have been missed in other types of analysis. For instance, both the WJLA article and the WTOP article use the idiomatic image of raised eyebrows to indicate the potential controversy that the march could create. Previous studies that focused on lexical collocates (Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 409) may have considered that the repeated image would mean that the ideas expressed in each article were the same. However, as the evaluative framework in my analysis shows, the context surrounding the image in each article results in a very different interpretation of the event. The evaluative framework also illustrates that a news article doesn't just create a narrative through the voices that are included (Fahnestock 307), but by the evaluative language surrounding those voices. Furthermore, this analysis allows academics and journalists to observe the ways in which seemingly small decisions regarding word choice can have large implications on the reader's interpretation of an event.

As the SlutWalk movement continues — and as it continues to generate commentary and news coverage — it provides a wealth of opportunities for further research. This thesis focused solely on the text in news reporting, but there is plenty of multimodal news coverage that could be further researched. The WJLA article, for example, was accompanied by a video clip from the station's television broadcast about the SlutWalk, and the *Washington Post* article also had a photo gallery of images from the march. Also, further research should be done on the actual rhetoric of the protestors as conveyed by their clothing choices and their protest signs, as there are different types of simple yet powerful arguments that are made against sexual assault and

rape myths through the signs at the protests (see Appendix F). Further research could also be done on the differences in media coverage of the various SlutWalks that occur around the globe — as noted earlier, the *Washington Post* dedicated two longer articles solely to the New Delhi SlutWalk (Lakshmi), and the sheer difference in the amount of coverage between the New Delhi SlutWalk and the Washington, D.C. SlutWalk hints that there may be differences in the ways that SlutWalks from different countries are covered.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A: WTOP, "Global Movement SlutWalk struts into DC"*

WASHINGTON - While the name of this international movement tends to raise eyebrows, its message is entirely serious.

The protests known as SlutWalks began in Toronto following a police officer's comment that women shouldn't dress like "sluts" if they want to avoid being raped or becoming victims of violence.

This Saturday, local organizers are bringing the global movement to the nation's capital with SlutWalk D.C.

Samantha Wright, founder of SlutWalk D.C., says she decided to organize the walk after she saw the movement spreading across the country.

"Victim-blaming is something that is universal and I really really wanted to bring the conversation here," she says.

"I wanted people to know that this attitude is out there and people really do blame victims for sexual assault."

The march will begin with a rally at 11 a.m. Saturday in Lafayette Square and will continue down the National Mall toward the Washington Monument. It ends at the Sylvan Theater, where speakers from various women's support networks will speak at 1 p.m.

"People in Washington have a really unique ability to effect change in our culture and our country," says SlutWalk D.C. spokesperson Carmen Rios.

Representatives from various groups, such as the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and the D.C. chapter of the National Organization for Women, will hand out information on sexual assault resources.

"We really want to connect people to those organizations, get people involved and get people to work on these issues," Wright says.

While the movement has received quite a bit of publicity for the type of clothing worn by previous SlutWalk participants in other countries, Wright is quick to point out it's not about attire.

The movement is not about the clothes, just as sexual assault is not about the clothes.

"Nobody deserves to be sexually assaulted. There is no exception to that rule, no matter what you think their clothes are saying," she says.

Since starting in Toronto earlier this year, SlutWalks have been organized in Boston, Dallas, Chicago and Seattle, among other places. Most recently, organizers held a SlutWalk in Delhi, India.

The global movement is designed to take back the word "slut" and combat different attitudes toward women that hold them responsible when they are victimized.

"A lot of times victim-blaming is the knee-jerk reaction of everyone around you when you've been sexually assaulted," Rios says.

"It's 'Why were you there? Why were you with these people? Why were you wearing that? Why were you by yourself?'

"And the bottom line really is that all of those things don't matter because women and all people should be able to do whatever they want and live lives free from violence."



*Appendix B: WJLA, "Slutwalk march to end victim-blaming in sexual assaults"*

Started in Canada earlier this year, so-called Slutwalks have been held in several U.S. cities and in other countries.

Today, it came to D.C. and raised plenty of eyebrows -- which is just what organizers say they intended.

It's been likened to bra burning of the 1960s: Young women promoting a cause in an unconventional and controversial way.

It's called the Slutwalk.

Promoted as a march to end victim-blaming for sexual assault, thousands have participated in similar rallies that have taken place across the world, including London and Australia, since the Spring.

"It definitely gets people talking about it and it's created this global discussion about sexual assault that we've never seen before," said Samantha Wright, a D.C. Slutwalk organizer.

But the Slutwalk isn't without controversy. With some calling it misguided with a tone and frivolity that distracts from an important and serious message.

"It's just ridiculous to conflate this with a good issue with celebrating sluts," said one detractor. "Lets face it, sluts, if you want to use that term, are not empowered women."

Maryland State Delegate Ariana Kelly is a speaker at Saturday's event. She said she understands the controversy but also understands the cause. She was raped as a teenager and then accused by an emergency room doctor of being promiscuous.

"We need to change the way as a society we work with and think about victims and survivors of sexual assault," Kelly said.

Kelly says that every generation has a way of communicating that resonates with them. And if it takes something called Slutwalk to create a global conversation, then she's all for it.

*Appendix C: Washington Post, "SlutWalk DC marchers protest sexual assault and a culture of victim-blaming"*

Sarah Lisenbe, wearing an off-the-shoulder top, short skirt, fishnet stockings, and boots, was on her way to a rally downtown Saturday morning when several men began verbally harassing her.

Taken aback, Lisenbe changed into capris before joining friends for SlutWalk DC, an event at which men and women dressed provocatively to raise awareness about the issue of blaming victims for sexual violence.

As Lisenbe marched down 15th Street NW toward the Washington Monument, she said she felt more comfortable in the less-revealing clothing — but was also aware that her discomfort with the men's comments was an example of the very issue she had come downtown to highlight.

"I realized in retrospect that this is what today is all about," said, Lisenbe, 25, of Arlington.

"If we truly want to stop slut blaming, we have to take a really hard look at how feeling shame has not only hurt us but enabled our own denial," said Andrea Bredbeck, a freelance writer who delivered a keynote speech Saturday afternoon.

Bredbeck told the crowd that her first boyfriend's father sexually assaulted her in the middle of the night. "No matter what your gender, what you wear, you are never responsible for being assaulted," she said to cheers and applause.

The first SlutWalk was held in April after a Toronto police officer suggested that women should avoid “dressing like sluts” to stay safe. Since then, SlutWalks have been organized in cities across the globe.

The crowd rallied at Lafayette Square in the morning and marched to the National Sylvan Theater at the base of the Washington Monument. More than a dozen speakers took the stage.

“Two, four, six, eight, it is not okay to rape,” the crowd chanted. Women and men brandished handmade signs with slogans such as “My dress is not a yes” and danced to Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Want to Have Fun.”

One woman taped “SLUT” across her sunglasses. Members of a group identifying themselves as “gender-fluid anarchists” requested that they not be identified as “he” or “she” and declared “Consent is sexy” in signs and chants.

“We want to improve dialogue about sexual assault victim blaming,” said Samantha Wright, who organized Saturday’s event. “It’s a peaceful protest aimed at starting conversations and raising awareness.”

Many of the women who marched Saturday shared personal experiences with sexual assault and harassment.

Stephanie Hargett, 25, said she drove three hours from Hampton, Va., to represent women who have been attacked and harassed while serving in the military. Hargett said she was sexually assaulted while deployed in Kuwait with the Army two years ago.

“I want people to realize females should be able to go out and wear short skirts and have a good time without getting harassed,” said Hargett, who had transformed her uniform into a cropped top and short shorts and wore fishnets with boots for the event.

Andrea Brown, 24, of Manassas said she was molested first by her uncle when she was 7 and then by her mother's ex-boyfriend when she was 11.

"The idea that anyone deserves to be raped is stupid," she said.

Brown and two friends organized a SlutWalk sleepover Friday night, staying up late to choose outfits and make signs. "We ran out of paper before we ran out of messages," she said.

*Appendix D*



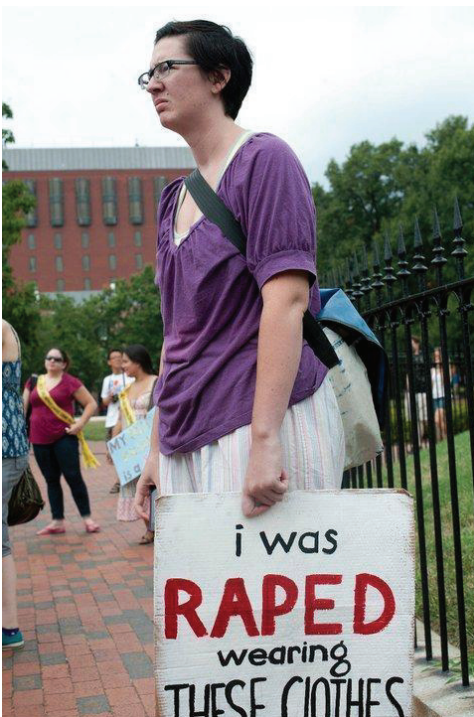
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Appendix E



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Appendix F



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