

UNSLUT

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Information Packet and Discussion Guide



Introduction

Feel free to use this as a script to introduce the film and the mission of The UnSlut Project.

Thank you for joining us for this screening of *UnSlut: A Documentary Film*. The UnSlut Project uses personal story sharing as a means to work against sexual bullying and “slut”-shaming in our schools, communities, media, and culture. Emily Lindin, founder of The UnSlut Project, made this film to inspire and motivate people everywhere to speak up about the dangerous, lasting effects of sexual bullying, “slut”-shaming, and all forms of gender-based discrimination. Today, even as our culture becomes more comfortable with sex, women and girls still struggle to define themselves in ways that include – but are not limited to – their perceived sexuality and sexual behavior.

So many girls are affected by sexual bullying, from one-time comments to intense harassment, and many women experience “slut”-shaming as adults. As you will see, *UnSlut: A Documentary Film* advocates for women and girls everywhere. The existence and continued usage of “slut” as an insult perpetuates the moral rhetoric that shames women for acting, dressing, or behaving in a way that is understood to be suggestive or promiscuous. “Slut”-shaming is also used to blame or dismiss victims of sexual assault. Shaming someone in this way renders her isolated and stigmatized, but due to the existence of the sexual double standard, girls and women often feel pressured to either shame others or be shamed themselves. Through this film, The UnSlut Project aims to inspire women, girls, parents, partners, and people everywhere to rethink the misogynistic culture of compulsive “slut”-shaming we live in and together, create a world “where the word ‘slut’ doesn’t even make sense as insult.”

We encourage you to tweet, Instagram, update a Facebook status, or otherwise use social media to let others know that you are watching *UnSlut: A Documentary Film*. Use hashtag #UnSlut to share your thoughts with us!

Key Things to Know

Use these points to spark discussion after the film.

- The UnSlut Project defines “slut”-shaming as follows: Implying that a girl or woman should feel guilty or inferior for her real or perceived sexual behavior.
- The UnSlut Project promotes gender equality, sex positivity, and comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education for all.
- Since The UnSlut Project started in April 2013, it has expanded to include the stories of people of all genders, ages, backgrounds, and nationalities. These shared stories not only provide hope to girls who are suffering – they demonstrate to us all just how widespread the issues of sexual bullying and “slut”-shaming really are.
- Be part of the solution, not the problem. It is up to each of us to evaluate and take responsibility for our own assumptions and interactions with others.
- “Slut” is an arbitrary term based on the sexual double standard that men are allowed – and often expected – to seek sex, while sex for women is often scorned, criticized, and linked to a lack of morals.
- Sexual bullying and “slut”-shaming have real consequences. Girls who experience “slut”-shaming are at heightened risk for depression and self-harming behaviors, leading some young people to take their own lives.
- The Internet can intensify sexual bullying, but it can also connect and empower us through shared experiences, speaking out, and supporting one another.
- This is more than a “women’s issue.” Everyone needs to be involved in the conversation in order to work toward change.
- Sharing stories and listening to the voices of those who have survived sexual bullying, “slut”-shaming, and assault humanizes the individual and connects us to others who have similar experiences.



“When you call someone a slut, you don’t have to see them as a whole person with a history. You don’t have to see them as a person that makes decisions based on different sets of circumstances that change over time because of different experiences.”

– Dr. Ebony Utley
UnSlut: A Documentary Film

Discussion Questions

“Slut’-shaming: This isn’t simply a female issue, it’s also a male issue, and really a human issue.”

- Dr. Hernando Chaves
UnSlut: A Documentary Film

Questions for All Audiences:

- After watching the film, how do you define “slut”?
- Often, “slut”-shaming doesn’t actually involve the word “slut.” What are some examples of this?
- Have you been the target of “slut”-shaming? If so, how did it make you feel?
- In what different ways do boys/men and girls/women sometimes participate in “slut”-shaming?
- Criminologist Freda Adler has said, “Rape is the only crime where the victim becomes the accused.” How does the film illustrate this?
- After watching the film, has your perception of media representations of female sexuality changed?

Questions for Adult Audiences:

- What is meant by the term “sexual double standard”? How are “slut”-shaming and sexual bullying dependent upon or intertwined with it?
- How can parents make a change at home by addressing these complex issues with their kids?
- All over the world, people are starting to name and combat sexual shaming and bullying. What are some community-level solutions inspired by this film?
- What role do racial and cultural expectations play in “slut”-shaming?
- In what ways does our society view women as defined by their sexuality or sexual expression?
- Transgender women are often the targets of “slut”-shaming. How might their experiences be similar to and different from those of cis-gendered women?
- Which institutional barriers to gender equality seem to be subsiding? Which still stand in the way?
- What is female sexuality? How can we separate it from cultural norms to form a healthy understanding?

Questions for Adolescent Audiences:

- What did you notice about the meaning of the word “slut” throughout the film, as used against those who experienced “slut”-shaming?
- Many of us have participated in “slut”-shaming at some point in our lives. Describe a time you have either participated in or witnessed it. What did you do? How might you have acted differently?
- What are some steps we can take to fight sexual bullying here in our school?
- After watching the film, do you feel that you’re able to identify subtle incidents of “slut”-shaming at home, at school, and in the media?
- What differences do you see between “slut”-shaming on social media versus in-person?
- What are some ways you can start using social media to fight “slut”-shaming?

What Should I Take Away?

- Start talking about it! We will only overcome the issues of “slut”-shaming and sexual bullying if people start to speak up and share real, individual experiences. If you’re comfortable doing so, share your story through The UnSlut Project online and start talking to friends, peers, partners, and family members.
- *Stop* talking about it! “Slut”-shaming is so normalized in our culture that it can be easy to get swept up in it, but it is important to break the habit. Make a point to stop participating in “slut”-shaming and learn to correct yourself when you do – starting with ourselves is the first step toward change.
- Educate others about the damage that is caused by “slut”-shaming and sexual bullying. Sharing *UnSlut: A Documentary Film* with them is a great way to start!
- Join our ongoing social media campaigns to add your voice to the movement against “slut”-shaming. Follow The UnSlut Project on Twitter (@UnSlutProject) and Facebook and join our email update list.
- When you hear others using “slut,” challenge them to define what they mean when they use that word. Asking them to “define ‘slut’” is a great way to start a conversation without making them defensive.
- Support The UnSlut Project and become a walking conversation starter by ordering your own Define “Slut” shirt from our website.



“Once we start noticing, we can’t stop noticing. We can’t not see the ‘slut’-shaming that is everywhere in our culture.”

- Dr. Shira Tarrant
UnSlut: A Documentary Film

Additional Information

“What’s heartbreaking about ‘slut’-shaming and sexual violence is that 100% of these incidents are avoidable. We can stop it – it just takes a little bit of effort and the most basic human decency.”

- Mick Foley

UnSlut: A Documentary Film

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines “slut” as “a woman of a low or loose character.” The word is most commonly used to verbally abuse girls and women who are perceived as being too sexual, not sexual enough, too attractive, not attractive enough, too friendly, not friendly enough... etc.
- Most people do not recognize that they have internalized the sexual double standard, yet both men and women believe that women are judged more harshly than men for engaging in the same sexual behaviors (1).
- Evidence for gender distinctions is particularly strong for attitudes toward casual sex outside of relationships (2). Studies consistently find that attitudes about gender differences are greater with regard to casual sex than sex within a relationship (3).
- In a 2011 nationally representative survey of students in grades 7-12, 56% of girls and 40% of boys reported experiencing sexual bullying or harassment within the past school year, with 87% of those harassed reporting negative effects of the bullying, including school absences and poor sleep (4).
- One third of girls and one quarter of boys in grades 7-12 reported witnessing sexual harassment at their school within the past school year; 56% of those students witnessed it more than once (5).
- Based on reported “slut”-shaming among girls who are not sexually active, sociologists have concluded that “the label ‘slut’ is not really about objecting to the sexual behavior of a girl, but is used as a weapon to hurt girls and women. It is frequently not about the sexual behavior of the target” (6).
- One in six women in America will be the victim of attempted or completed rape, one in four will be the victim of sexual assault, and over 75% will experience sexual harassment. Victims of sexual assault are three times more likely to suffer from depression and six times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Four out of five assaults are committed by acquaintances (7).

1) Data from the College Social Life Survey, Paula Armstrong, 2011.

2) Data from *A Double Standard for 'Hooking Up': How Far Have We Come Towards Gender Quality* by Rachel Allison and Barbara Risman.

3) Data from *A Meta-Analytic Review of Research on Gender Differences in Sexuality 1993-2007* by Jennifer Peterson and Janet Shibley-Hyde.

4) Data from The American Association of Women's 2011 study of a representative group of 1,965 students. The study defined harassment as “unwelcome sexual behavior that takes place in person or electronically.”

5) Ibid.

6) Data from Dr. Maureen McHugh's current study *Sex Roles*.

7) Data from the Rape, Abuse and Incest Nation Network (RAINN).

Resources

Do you need help? Do you know someone who might? Do you just want to find out more about sexual bullying and “slut”-shaming? Here are a few resources to help you get started.

- What to Do If You’re Being Sexually Bullied is a resource for young women created by Emily Lindin for the Crisis Prevention Institute. (Visit www.unslutproject.com/resources.html).
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a free hot line operated 24 hours a day for those in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. (Call 1-800-273-TALK)
- Use the Crisis Text Line when you’re in crisis, anywhere, anytime. A live, trained crisis counselor receives the text and responds quickly. They'll help you move from a hot moment to a cool calm to stay safe and healthy – all through text message. (Text 741741)
- The Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN) is the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States. Use their online hotline to get immediate help 24 hours a day. (Visit www.rainn.org or call 800-656-HOPE)
- Project Anti-Bully is a non-profit organization run by students to raise international awareness about bullying in schools. Participate in their awareness campaigns like Define It, Chalk for Change, and Hands for Courage. (Visit www.projectantibully.com)
- TeensHealth is resource for information on a wide variety of teen mental and physical health issues including sexual bullying, cutting and sexual health. TeensHealth is produced by Nemours, a large non-profit organization dedicated to improving children's health. (Visit www.kidshealth.org/teen)
- The Body Positive empowers girls to overcome the unrealistic body image standards set by the media’s portrayal of beauty to overcome negative body talk, feelings and conflicts, to the effect of happier, productive, healthy lives. (Visit www.thebodypositive.org)
- The It Gets Better Project uses personal story sharing in a similar way to The UnSlut Project, focusing specifically on sending the message to LGBTQ youth that they can survive bullying and lead happy, fulfilled lives. (Visit www.itgetsbetter.org)
- Check out books on gender and sexuality by Leora Tanenbaum and Feona Attwood; follow Dr. Elizabeth McClintock’s blog on Psychology Today, “It’s a Man’s, and a Woman’s, World”; read *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and The Myth of the Slut* by Emily White; “Why Women Aren’t Welcome on the Internet” by Amanda Hess; and “Birds of a Feather? Not When It Comes to Sexual Permissiveness” by Dr. Zhana Vrangalova, Rachel E. Bukberg, and Gerulf Rieger.

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