



# SLUTTY AND SLUTTIER

STUDYING THE ACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF SLUT SHAMING

BY VINNY TAGLE

ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTINE CAGUIAT

A few months ago, I noticed my Facebook feed abuzz with many female students taking issue over some comments made anonymously on a Facebook group called “Ateneo de Manila Secret Files.” A series of posters implied that women who dressed “sluttily” on campus shouldn’t feel bad if they are treated rudely because their outfits practically invite catcalls and leers. For example, someone said:

“Note to girls: *Kung ayaw niyong mabastos, wag kayong magsuot ng pekpek shorts o spaghetti strap o kahit anong revealing sa campus. Tapos mainis kayo kapag may nang-manyak sa inyo. Malamang? Humihingi yung outfit niyo, eh.*”

guilty of doing it; sometimes women do it to other women too.

But while slut-shaming is faced by many women, each experience varies based on her background. A woman’s race, class, sexual preference and religion are all factors that influence her level of sluttiness and how we react to it. For example, the way a high-earning personality like Miley Cyrus is labeled a “slut” for dressing provocatively and swinging naked on a wrecking ball is completely different from how a foreign man might shout “slut” at a lower-income Filipina walking alone at night, the latter insult taking on a more threatening and assaultive undertone.

(Come on, admit it. That bit of gossip *stuck.*)

Like an enabler who has no qualms about slipping Lindsay Lohan a bump of coke, the media has been more than willing to give us access into the intimate spaces of famous women. And every time they do anything remotely scandalous, their entire lives become a fixture in our daily conversations, as if by virtue of being public figures, we automatically have the right to be privy to and be judgmental of their private lives as well.

Unfortunately, these stories don’t just titillate—they also inform and feed into our social standards on how women should act and behave, especially with



“IF A ‘SLUT’ IS DISRESPECTED IN ANY WAY, IT’S BECAUSE SHE DESERVED IT. IT’S LIKE BLAMING SOMEONE FOR CARRYING A BAG RATHER THAN THE SNATCHER WHO ACTUALLY STOLE IT—WE CONDEMN AND LAY BLAME ON THE VICTIM RATHER THAN THE PERPETRATOR OF THE WRONGDOING.”

Apparently, if girls don’t dress like nice, proper ladies, they should expect to be treated accordingly. What a lot of people don’t realize is that this type of attitude encourages slut-shaming. Whenever a girl is judged for wearing revealing clothes, flirting openly with men or sleeping with multiple partners, it’s an instance of slut-shaming.

Sadly, this kind of thinking also reinforces the idea that if a “slut” is raped or disrespected in any way, it’s because she deserved it. To put it another way, it’s like blaming someone for carrying a bag rather than the snatcher who actually stole it—we condemn and lay blame on the victim rather than the perpetrator of the wrongdoing. And it isn’t only men who are

In order to broaden the way we look at slut-shaming, we need to understand how our other prejudices come into play whenever we condemn women.

## THE PEOPLE VERSUS DENIECE CORNEJO

When the scandal surrounding Deniece Cornejo first broke out, I wasn’t surprised when the story became everyone’s favorite obsession. Didn’t we want the *real* baby daddy of Andi Eigenmann to please stand up? Because Albie Casiño wouldn’t. Didn’t we stay at home looking up the NSFW sex tapes of Katrina Halili and Hayden Kho a.k.a. The One Perv to Rule Them All? Who didn’t hear about that thing that happened between John Lloyd and Shaina

regard to their sexuality, and often for the worse. So when Cornejo shot to infamy overnight, I was disturbed at how her story quickly turned into a morality tale meant to police overt expressions of female sexuality: *That is why women shouldn’t sleep around and let men into their apartments. That is why women shouldn’t come off as “easy.” She probably had it coming.* This is in the same vein of how we treat women who come out as rape victims. When Kat Alano came out as another of Vhong Navarro’s alleged rape victims, some commenters online called her an attention-seeker or someone who was paid to taint Navarro’s oh-so-pristine image.

But what bothered me more about the Cornejo and Navarro scandal was

the way the media framed her story. One recurring fixation was on her economic and family background. Many reports mentioned how she is the poor daughter of a seaman working abroad. Others focused on how she acquired her apartment and questioned whether or not it was given to her, and by whom. Further, the media endlessly speculated on her exact relationship with the various men that played a part in the whole scandal, from the enigmatic Greg Binunus, the Malaysian businessman who owned the condo unit, to the equally infamous Cedric Lee. And because Navarro was an actor attached to ABS-CBN, it was no surprise that it was his home network that did a lot of this reporting. “Deniece’s demeanor doesn’t suggest she was raped,” read one particularly biased headline.

All the reports seem to dance around a sensitive question without explicitly asking it: *Was she underprivileged, and thus a literal whore?* For a woman from a humble background now connected to several powerful and rich men, and currently involved in a sexual assault case—it is all too easy for us to jump to the conclusion that she is a social climber at best and a prostitute or an escort at worst. Never mind that she vehemently denies those rumors or that there is no incriminating evidence to suggest that; the “facts” just seem so compelling, right?

## THE MANY LOVES OF KRIS AQUINO

Looking at the Cornejo case, we see that sexism can be linked to class prejudices. In effect, the media finds pieces about her past to fit into the public’s preconceived stereotypes. They provide a narrative that we can anchor our judgements upon: *Maybe she was a prostitute, that’s why this whole thing happened.*

Let’s compare that to how another woman is often victimized for her sexual decisions: Kris Aquino. As someone who comes from a politically prestigious and wealthy family, the nature of slut-shaming towards her is markedly different.

For most of the men who were romantically attached to her, it’s perceived that in terms of social status, she is “above” them on all accounts. Yes, even while she goes on national television announcing that Joey Marquez gifted her with an STD. Because of that, we condemn Kris not for selling her body in literal terms, but for allowing herself to be used for *more* than her body in exchange for filling her sexual appetites.

The class difference between James Yap and Kris Aquino *must* mean that he used her for her money. Kris Aquino’s proximity to power *must* mean that Herbert Bautista wanted to use her political connections in preparation for 2016.

And each time she finds herself in a messy fallout from a failed relationship, the blame is assigned to her: *She should not have slept around and let herself be used. She*

*should not be tainting her family’s reputation by sleeping with different men.* In this instance, even when the woman is already more powerful to begin with, her stature is used against her. She is portrayed as naïve and feckless.

## WHO ARE YOU CALLING A SLUT-FACED HOBAG?

Knowing how we slut-shame is important for us to know how to stop it. What’s interesting about these two cases is that there are different manners in the slut-shaming of Deniece Cornejo and Kris Aquino based on their class standings. Being consciously aware of what’s going on and how to check ourselves is important to stop this sexist act from continuing.

After all, slut-shaming and victim-blaming comprise the culture that stops women from coming out as victims of abuse. It is the ideology that entrenches women into positions of subordination. And ultimately, it is one of the forces that inhibit women from taking full control of their sexual identities and their bodies. So the next time we think of calling out women who step beyond the lines that we artificially drew around them, we must take a step back and examine what it is about their behaviour upsets us so, and whether there really is something to take issue with. It’s the least that we all could do. ★