

'[PDF] beingharassed?' Accessing information about sexual harassment in New Zealand's universities

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Abstract

Despite strong legislative protection, sexual harassment is still prevalent in New Zealand and thus remains an impediment to the full achievement of women's human rights as well as undermining the mental and physical well-being of a woman. This paper focuses on sexual harassment in New Zealand universities. Universities are a critical part of modern society not just for teaching and research but also as a place where new generations of leaders will emerge. We undertook a survey of New Zealand university websites to test and compare the ease by which a student who thinks they may be experiencing sexual harassment, could find out about the policies and support services available to them. We highlight the failings found with many websites and make recommendations for improving access to this vital information. We argue that comprehensive sexual harassment information must be made more visible to prevent the acceptance and normalisation of sexually harassing behaviours.

Keywords

sexual harassment, students, university, women, policy, information, services, inequality

Introduction

Despite strong legislative protection and commendable international recognition about the extent of gender equality in New Zealand, in 2012 the New Zealand Human Rights Commission (NZHRC) reported that sexual harassment is still prevalent in many sectors of the economy. Unfortunately the enduring nature of sexual harassment means that it will continue to impede the full achievement of women's human rights (NZHRC, 2012). It will also continue to undermine the mental and physical well-being of women and, as Hill and Silva (2005) argue for other countries, will cause significant and enduring harm to women.

This paper examines how New Zealand universities provide information to students who think they are being sexually harassed. The provision of information is a vitally important resource for students in order to name, identify and report harassing behaviour because this contributes to preventing such behaviour being accepted as normal. It is the universities' responsibility to provide valid and sufficient information as well as adequate and professional help in cases of sexual harassment. When the information is incomplete, difficult to find and/or when there is no appropriate service to provide adequate assistance, New Zealand universities are renegeing on their responsibilities to provide a safe learning environment.

We undertook a survey of New Zealand university websites, to test and compare the ease by which a student experiencing sexual harassment could find the appropriate policies and support services. The findings are reported for eight universities in terms of the visibility and accessibility of the information and the transparency of support services. We also examined the performance of university search engines and the clarity of language used to describe policies, processes and services.

We first define sexual harassment before discussing the difficulties in determining the prevalence of sexual harassment. We discuss the role of universities in reducing the tolerance or

normalisation of sexual harassing behaviours, in order to reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment. After a discussion of the findings, recommendations are offered for how universities can improve the information they provide online.

Defining sexual harassment

We approach a definition of sexual harassment from a critical feminist perspective, concerned with not only the individual behaviours that are eventually labelled as ‘sexual harassment’ but with the conditions within which all forms of gender harassing behaviour are performed and tolerated. Critical feminism offers an interpretation of sexual harassment as a form of systematic discrimination that manifests within an unequal gender system in which dominant forms of masculinity, or ‘hegemonic masculinities’ (Connell, 1987), are privileged over forms of femininity and alternative masculinities (Cairns, 1997). Using this conceptualisation of sexual harassment acknowledges that harassing behaviour is not exclusively experienced by women but can be targeted at any person who challenges or deviates from the masculine norms that dominate in a particular context or social group (DeSouza & Solberg 2004; Lee, 2000; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald 1998).

Sexual harassment may not necessarily be related to sexual desire, but can be an act of defending or maintaining a dominant version of masculinity. Sexual harassment has been exercised in order to maintain male power within male groups (Robinson, 2005), to assert male power over women in front of other men (Larkin, 1997) and to challenge heterosexual men who do not act according to expected masculine norms (Lee, 2000). Conceptualised within an unequal gender system, sexual harassment can be thought of as behaviour which enforces the appropriate ways of acting and behaving in line with the accepted dominant gender norms (McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone, 2012).

How norms are established and maintained then becomes important. Not only does the harassing behaviour itself serve to maintain hegemonic masculine ideals, but so do the discursive practices that describe instances of sexual harassment. The media frequently describes sexual harassment as an individual problem caused by deviant employees, rather than as a symptom of an unequal gender system (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2013). A similar pattern of individualising the ‘problem’ has been noted in the organisational discourse used by universities in their policies, procedures and brochures on sexual harassment (Clair, 1993). Such discourses work to obscure the ways in which sexual harassment is a product of broader inequalities and can discredit those who put forth alternatives to normalising discourses that dismiss sexual harassment as the fault of individuals alone (Eyre, 2000).

Defining sexual harassment further takes us into an extensive body of literature from psychology, human resource management, legal studies and feminist theory. The definitions of sexual harassment used by universities and how these definitions are settled upon are important issues that warrant attention beyond the scope of this paper. While it is important for universities to provide a clear definition of sexual harassment, as well as what is and is not deemed ‘sexual harassment’, in this paper we are primarily concerned with the ability of students to *find* this definition, whatever it may be. Our paper focuses on the visibility and accessibility of policies and services that can assist a student (who may or may not define her/his experience as ‘sexual harassment’) experiencing some sort of gender-based harassment.

The normalisation of harassing behaviour

Gelfand, Fitzgerald and Drasgow’s (1995) typology of sexual harassment provides an inclusive framework for understanding sexual harassment, delineating three broad categories

of sexually harassing behaviour: sexual coercion (such as threats or bribery in exchange for sexual acts), unwanted sexual attention (such as deliberate touching or unwelcome discussion of sexual matters), and gender harassment (such as crudely sexual remarks, offensive jokes, ogling and leering). Research using similar categories shows a correlation between the more 'overt' forms of harassment (i.e. coercion) and the likelihood that it will be labelled as sexual harassment by victims (see Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Stockdale & Vaux, 1993). Shepela and Levesque (1998) found that gender harassing behaviours were less likely to be labelled sexual harassment and suggested that the high frequency of these behaviours was partly responsible for fewer students labelling them as such.

Due to the different interpretations of what constitutes sexual harassment and how to apply the label, data on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the academic context may provide an incomplete picture. Labelling difficulties aside, the frequency with which students report a wide spectrum of harassing behaviours is alarming. In one American study, one third of students reported experiencing physical harassment, such as being touched or forced to do something sexual (Hill & Silva, 2005). An Australian study found that 53.2% of undergraduate women experienced sexual harassment from instructors and 88.1% from other students (Gardner & Felicity, 1996). The prevalence of gender harassment experienced by university students is high in several studies, the number of female students who reported experiencing such behaviour ranging from 20% (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984) to 40% (Fitzgerald et al., 1988), to 60% (Stockdale & Vaux, 1993).

Regardless of whether or not a student defines her/his experience as 'gender harassment' or 'sexual harassment' the consequences are the same. Sexual harassment can cause serious physiological and psychological harm, such as feelings of helplessness, decreased motivation, headaches, sleep disturbances, eating and gastrointestinal disorders as well as decreased morale and lower grades (Hill & Silva, 2005; Paludi, Nydegger, DeSouza, Nydegger & Dicker, 2006).

Sexual harassment in New Zealand universities

As with studies conducted internationally, it is difficult to discern a clear picture about the prevalence of sexual harassment in New Zealand tertiary institutions. However, what is known can be used to infer a broader picture. In 2000, the NZHRC conducted a study of the reported cases of sexual harassment between 1995 and 2000. Less than 5% of complaints made to the NZHRC came from the education sector and the authors suggested that 'this may be due, in part, to the fact that education facilities often have their own channels and formal procedures for preventing and dealing with sexual harassment' (NZHRC, 2000, p. 34). While this may be the case, the finding demonstrates the lack of information captured by the NZHRC about sexual harassment on university campuses.

Information about on-campus records appears to be limited. The New Zealand Union of Student Associations (NZUSA) conducted a Campus Safety Audit in 2012, requesting the records of sexual harassment kept by all tertiary institutions in the country (Dunham, 2013). Over a three-year period, the majority of tertiary institutions reported incidences of sexual harassment in single figures, with two exceptions; Otago Polytechnic reported 46 incidences and Massey University reported 19 incidences (p. 23). Two institutions were unable to provide any figures, as the information was not recorded in an easily extractable way (p. 15). However, it is unlikely that these low figures capture the full extent of sexual harassment on campus, as the figures represent only those instances where a complaint was made.

A study by Nasheri (2005) suggests that sexual harassment may be more prevalent than university records convey. The study examined the prevalence of sexual harassment within

the commerce department of the University of Otago and found that 46% of female students had experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention (defined as unsolicited sexual remarks, questions and/or sexual touching), and 7% had experienced sexual coercion (including all forms of sexual solicitations) (p. 34). Furthermore, 61% of students did not know if the University had a policy dealing with sexual harassment (p. 43).

The discrepancy between the prevalence of sexual harassment found by Nasheri and the rates reported by in the Campus Safety Audit (Dunham, 2013), as well as the lack of awareness about the policies of universities, provide critical reasons for expanding our understanding of sexual harassment in campus environments.

The role of universities in reducing the tolerance, acceptance and prevalence of sexual harassment

The normalisation of harassing behaviour and uncertainty about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour can be reversed by improving awareness about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour: the harassed highlight the unwanted behaviour and the harasser learns that such behaviour is not acceptable (Stein, 1995, p. 150).

Improving awareness about sexual harassment and a university's stance on it requires that information be clear and accessible to both staff and the diverse student body. The NZUSA Campus Safety Audit Report recommends that universities ensure their harassment policies and procedures are online so that they can be found by anyone, at any time (Dunham, 2013, p. 5). In light of the finding by the Australian Human Rights Commission, that 'the Internet is the most common preferred source of information about sexual harassment across all age groups' (2012, p. 55), we stress the importance of having good online information available.

A body of research is developing in the area of online information seeking. In particular, this research has sought to identify factors which restrict, enable and encourage online information seeking, as well as information literacy. While the majority of research has been in the area of information seeking on topics such as illness, health and wellbeing, a growing body of literature is concerned with both how people seek information in an academic environment, and the factors which seem to facilitate effective information seeking.

Broadly speaking the main conclusion derived from the literature is that no general conclusions can be drawn. Seiter (2004), for example, highlights the wide variety of information seeking capability amongst students, resulting in an equality of benefits derived from online services and information. Those with more sophisticated online skills and a higher proficiency in a home country's language will be better equipped to acquire valued information than students with less developed skills (Barron, 2006). The clear implication of such research is that when it comes to issues of welfare and safety, simplicity, accessibility and plain language use seem to be overriding concerns (Eastin, 2005).

The meta-finding of research into information seeking amongst university students, however, is that as individual student competency is highly variable (due to language proficiency, socio-economic background, cultural background) (Mansourian et al., 2008), universities need to design their online support services with accessibility and clarity as the prevailing guiding principles.

We acknowledge that online provision of information is far from the only source of support available to students and staff who have experienced sexual harassment. University staff members also need to be prepared to provide information about sexual harassment policies, processes and support services. Asking staff members was another of the preferred ways of accessing information about sexual harassment (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012).

However, there are indications that staff may be poorly informed about the processes for dealing with sexual harassment complaints. Nasheri (2005, p. 43) reports that 18% of staff in a university department did not know if there was a sexual harassment policy at all. As a mid-career academic woman, one of the authors has had students, both post-graduates and undergraduates, reporting sexual harassment. In all cases, she had difficulty in establishing what the procedures were and advising students of their options before making a formal complaint. In all cases the student declined to record a formal complaint.

Methodology

Following our critical constructionist preferences, we were interested in tracking how certain practices offered important information on the power dynamics and political preferences of an organisation (Townley, 2008). In other words, we work with the notion that dominant discourses of organisations are maintained and supported through a myriad of smaller micro-practices and discourses. Townley recommends that constructionist research focus on what may appear to be superficially mundane practices, the how of organisational practice, rather than the why. Such a focus, she states, offers rigorous insight into the workings of power within organisations and sectors in comparison to a more speculative focus on motives. Following this logic, we examined the provision of information on sexual harassment as a way to better understand wider issues such as how universities prioritise gender equality and student/staff safety.

The authors sought to examine how easy it is to find information about sexual harassment policies and services using a university's website. The survey was carried out over two weeks in November 2012, examining the websites of the eight universities in New Zealand: University of Auckland (Auckland); Auckland University of Technology (AUT); Massey University (Massey); Lincoln University (Lincoln); University of Otago (Otago); University of Waikato (Waikato); University of Canterbury (Canterbury) and Victoria University of Wellington (Victoria).

Putting ourselves in the position of a student experiencing sexual harassment and searching for advice, we used the website of each university to find out what information is available. While we do not pretend to understand the mindset of a harassed student looking for help, we followed a systematic process that seemed logical to two of the authors as graduate students at a New Zealand university, one an international student, the other a domestic student.

In order to assess each university website we followed the same steps, subjecting them to an equal comparison. First, we conducted a search using the website's search function on 'harassment'. Within the results we looked for any relevant policies, information or services related to sexual harassment.

We noted what information could be found on sexual harassment procedures, processes and services for students. We searched for a policy that dealt with sexual harassment, information on the process for making a complaint (both informal and formal), and for services available for students. In the policies that were accessible from the websites, we compared the definitions of sexual harassment and considered how accessible the language was for students. We considered the range of options available for students to inform themselves on the issue of sexual harassment and available support. When following instructions for whom to contact, where roles or titles were referred to, e.g. 'Harassment Coordinator', we conducted further searches to see whether contact details for this person were available.

Drawing on the literature on sexual harassment, and information seeking in a university environment, we particularly focused on the following criteria:

1. **Visibility:** How straightforward is it to find information on harassment support services and policies? We evaluated the search functions of each university's website, assessing the relevance of the results returned for a search on 'harassment'.

2. **Accessibility:** How accessible or interpretable is that information for a range of students? The language used to describe harassment support and complaints procedures was taken into consideration, with more informal language being considered more desirable for a diverse audience of predominantly young (aged 17-26 years) students, with a large proportion of students with English as a second language.

3. **Transparency of process:** Is it clear what making a complaint will entail and how a complaint should be managed? We examined the procedures described within the policies and services and highlighted what we perceived to be potential barriers to students' reporting incidences of sexual harassment.

Research findings

All universities have some information on harassment procedures on their websites, however there is a great degree of variability in the ease by which this information can be found and the specificity of the information for students experiencing sexual harassment. The following section discusses the findings from the survey and highlights the best features from within the sample¹.

Visibility

The first step in the survey was to conduct a search on the term 'harassment' and assess the results for relevance. We hoped to find a policy explaining how a university defines and deals with sexual harassment, as well as information about services available to students.

How visible the policies were depended on the design of the website, as well as the titles used for sub-pages or documents. Logically-titled policies such as Waikato's 'Sexual Harassment and Harassment Policy' were the easiest and quickest to find. Waikato was the only university to use the term 'sexual harassment' in the title of the policy, while others simply used 'Harassment'. More difficult and less intuitive to find were those universities that dealt with sexual harassment in a more general behaviour policy, such as Victoria, which has a 'Student Conduct Statute' and a 'Staff Conduct Statute', or Otago's 'Ethical Behaviour Policy'. Having a policy within a generic title was better than not having one accessible at all, which was the case for Lincoln and AUT.

In many cases information about sexual harassment services was located within a policy, and only within a policy. Waikato had comprehensive information in its Sexual Harassment and Harassment Policy, detailing the role of the network of Harassment Contact People as the first point of call and their responsibilities in guiding a complainant through the process.² However, we are not confident that a student would search within the detail of a policy for information on services, nor should they be required to. Other universities have sub-pages on their website which explain the process. Such pages were generally easier and quicker to find than scanning through policies to find information about services. Locating information on a university-wide section of the website seemed more relevant to us than having information about sexual harassment within a sub-section of the website, such as human resources. Massey, AUT and Lincoln had sub-pages with specific information for students, with logical titles such as 'What to do if you are being bullied or harassed'. Titles such as these made us more confident we would find relevant information by following the link.

The design of the Massey and AUT websites were the easiest to decipher, when compared to others such as Victoria and Auckland, which were text-heavy, with relevant results for students practically invisible in the results list. Another distracting feature, common to many of the university website search functions, was the number of research papers with ‘harassment’ as a key word appearing before student services in the search results.

Downloadable information targeted towards students was available on the websites of Victoria and Auckland, however these were returned as PDF files, and illogically titled. For example, on the Auckland website the file appears as ‘[PDF] beinghaRassed?’ in the results list. This document provides a flowchart of the complaints procedure created by the University’s Students Association (AUSA). While this is a very simple and straightforward design, the brochure provides limited options for action to students, and uses legal terminology to describe the complaints procedure, with no direct contact details. It also refers students to AUSA, while the University’s policy refers students to ‘WAVE’ (Student Welfare, Student Advocacy, Student Voice and Student Education).

On VUW’s website, we found a document titled ‘What’s ok DL v3.indd’ which, when opened, was a brochure detailing the services available to student victims of sexual harassment. This useful resource was buried within the screeds of text in the search results which, with a different title, could easily become more visible.

Physical accessibility

Once information is found, the clarity of that information is important so that students face as few obstacles as possible to receiving help or reporting harassing behaviour.

Auckland’s website was particularly difficult to follow. Unlike other universities, there was no specific page or division found on the University’s website that explained sexual harassment procedures or policies. Seemingly relevant looking results led to sub-pages of a specific faculty or course information, which may be disconcerting to students from other faculties. Other results that looked as though they would lead to information, required multiple steps, clicking through several links to get to a point of contact. Having to navigate through multiple pages increases the chances of a student choosing a different path to the one we took, potentially leading to irrelevant pages.

Poor accessibility is also seen in the process outlined in Auckland’s policy. The policy itself provides students the option of contacting the ‘Student Advocacy Service WAVE’. The contact information for WAVE is not listed within the policy, requiring students to conduct further searches for WAVE’s contact details. The policy also directs students to the Student Information Centre, but provides only a general 0800 phone number used for all student information rather than specific to sexual harassment information.

AUT’s site is a good example of accessibility; the first search result returned entitled ‘Harassment Prevention and Support’ contains the definition of harassment and logically provides a hyperlink to another relevant page titled ‘What to do about harassment and bullying’. On that page the contact people are described and hyperlinked sentences redirect the user to the contact information, with brief profiles of the contact people also provided. A number of these are women. The website is easy to search, logical to follow and clear information is provided.

Clarity of language

Of those universities that had an accessible policy dealing with harassment, all made reference to the Human Rights Act 1993 (HRA 1993) where sexual harassment is defined. In many cases the wording of this definition has been adapted in the actual text of the policy. Important words within the HRA 1993 were excluded from Massey’s definition, which omitted that sexual

harassment is 'unlawful'. In some instances, in place of a definition of sexual harassment the reader was referred to the HRA 1993 Section 62 and the Employment Relations Act 2000.

As the wording of this definition is abstract, relying on the HRA 1993 definition alone may not allow a student to recognise what they are experiencing as sexual harassment. Many universities supplemented the HRA 1993 definition with specific examples of behaviours that a university student may expect to encounter, such as 'Invading a person's personal space' and 'Persistent comments or images placed in social networking sites, for example Facebook and Twitter' (Auckland) 'sexual or smutty jokes; repeated comments or teasing about someone's alleged sexual activities or private life' (Massey). Waikato also supplements its definition with a sentence on what sexual harassment is not i.e. 'mutual social interactions or relationships freely entered into do not constitute sexual harassment'. Lincoln also provides examples of what harassment is not i.e. occasional compliments; behaviour based on mutual attraction; developing friendships, sexual or otherwise, between consenting adults. All of these examples are common experiences for university students. Universities should take care with what is and is not defined as sexual harassment. Within 'relationships freely entered into' there may still be the risk of sexually harassing behaviour. A consensual relationship does not mean that all behaviours that occur within that relationship are consensual.

The language used on AUT's pages describing student services was clearly written with students in mind. A range of options for how to proceed are offered in plain English, which is particularly important to international students. The language used by Massey was also noticeably different from other universities. It is supportive of students who may be distressed, using encouraging language, for example: 'Making the decision to complain about someone who has been harassing you is a brave and positive step.' It divides processes into those for students and staff, and is directed towards students (the staff instructions link opens the policy as a PDF).

Another useful feature seen on Massey's website was a description next to search results of what you will find if you click the link, i.e. 'Click here to find out if the behaviour you are experiencing is, in fact, classed as harassment' whereas most other universities showed a random portion of the text from within the policy. Massey's approach is more instructive. Students are advised to contact a Harassment Contact Person (HCPs), which is hyperlinked to another page with pictures and contact details for the HCPs at each campus. There are several women acting as HCPs with contact details readily available.

Transparency of process

We found that many universities had non-transparent processes for dealing with sexual harassment. By non-transparent we mean that a student must first make contact without knowing who they are contacting, or what help they may be able to receive once contact is established.

In other instances contact people were referred to by their titles, rather than their names. For example at Waikato, by clicking on the link 'Student Services', further down the results page, one is led to a page where the complaints procedure is described, the Harassment Policy is acknowledged and one contact is provided – to the Office Supervisor with a direct phone number only. The office supervisor will 'direct you to the appropriate person'. This indirect and non-transparent process may make students apprehensive and reluctant to seek further information or lodge a complaint.

Another factor that may discourage formal reporting is those processes where it appears as if students are only directed to one person. For example, Otago's policy directs students complaining of other students' behaviour to the University Proctor for complaints. As the Proctor and Deputy Proctor are both male, the lack of female representation may dissuade female students from making a formal complaint.

Canterbury's 'How to Raise a Concern' sub-section demonstrates good transparency of process. Once the page was found, the sub-section itself provided comprehensive and user-friendly information, with a step-by-step process for making a complaint, as well as a video of the University Grievance Advisor introducing herself, the services available and the university's commitment to ensure complainants are not discriminated against. While this section is an excellent resource, it needs to appear higher in the list of results for terms such as 'harassment'.

The next section of the paper will offer a succinct discussion of the results in relation to the literature highlighted earlier. The paper will conclude with some practical recommendations we believe arise as a result of the research.

Discussion

This section will begin by examining the results in light of the information seeking literature. In other words, we will interpret the data from a relatively technical perspective. It will continue by considering the data in light of the gender-cultural-political issues raised in the literature review.

Eynon and Malmberg's recent empirical research on online information seeking practices of young people supports previous conclusions that 'the context and situation of an individual will effect what, how, and why they search for information online' (2012, p. 526). This is instructive for understanding the information seeking behaviours of a diverse range of students who think they may be subject to sexual harassment. Our research highlighted inadequacies of information provided by New Zealand universities. While some of the failures highlighted by our research may be attributable to our own information seeking skills, the basic lack of visibility, accessibility, clarity of language and transparency discovered in this research is still of concern. Scholarly understanding of information-seeking behaviour is consistent in its finding that the individual context is variable, meaning that one cannot assume that all students, even a majority of students or staff, will be capable or willing to track through pages of dense policy-jargon-filled text in order to find assistance. For particular groups of students, such as those for whom English is not the first language or who are part of minority ethnic groups, this is even less likely.

Exploring the provision of advice and information regarding sexual harassment revealed other shortcomings. We do not claim to represent the totality of diversity within a university environment. Nevertheless, as one of the authors is a Pacific Islander, another a European second-language English speaker and the third a Pakeha New Zealander, we feel that we have some insight to offer from the perspective of cultural diversity. Focusing on the seemingly mundane processes of information seeking highlighted a worrying consistency, of a failure along the four dimensions of visibility, physical accessibility, clarity of language and transparency of process, regardless to which one of us 'tested' the system.

Following our critical constructionist theoretical and methodological preferences, we believe that our results are helpful in illuminating the power dynamics and prioritisation of New Zealand universities. It is beyond the scope of the research to state whether or not the universities examined represent masculine hegemonies. Nevertheless, the results indicate a lack of prioritisation of information and support services for sexual harassment, which we know is widespread. The prominence afforded research articles on harassment over and above practical support for victims is one vivid indication of the discursive priorities of universities.

New Zealand universities provide a poor level of information and support for students who think they may have been subject to sexual harassment. Such a finding indicates that there is a systemic issue of sexual inequality within New Zealand higher education. While there has

been some improvement in addressing the 'gender gap' that exists between male and female academics, Baker (2009) suggests that the managerial climate emerging in New Zealand universities will have gendered effects. Institutional priorities are now focussed on international reputation and research outputs, as evidenced in the introduction of the Performance Based Research Fund, which monitors and rewards individual research outputs (Baker, 2012). Such priorities might privilege male academics, who are more often able to accommodate the demands that such institutional priorities present (Baker, 2009, 2012).

Recommendations for accessing information

Given that the Internet is a preferred source of information, we recommend universities pay greater attention to the content and presentation of policy and service information online so that students can find information quickly and take action that is appropriate to their situation. High visibility and easy accessibility should be the guiding principles of information provision for victims but it is also critical to ensure that the process and the bodies or individuals available to assist students are clearly identified.

It is important to have an adequate search engine that will directly lead to the desired search result as the first necessary step in the process of providing support to the victims of sexual harassment. A search engine leading directly to the relevant information through the typing of the problem in plain English (such as 'harassment', 'rape', 'inappropriate behaviour', etc.) into the search engine would be the most efficient and effective.

Information about services and procedures should be clear and concise and provide the reader with the support and complaint procedures in a logical and transparent manner. Providing hyperlinks to additional information made finding additional information much easier and quicker. Bearing in mind that the university environment is becoming increasingly international, the language used should be plain and comprehensible to all. One way to make sure that the definitions and descriptions of what constitutes sexual harassment are contemporary, comprehensible and linguistically penetrable is to ask students to define it and describe it (Hill & Silva, 2005). For example, 'Twitter' harassing is a new mode of sexual harassment and is often excluded from behavioural examples provided by the universities.

The language of policies and other relevant material on sexual harassment offered by universities should be adjusted to become more supportive towards students: it should unambiguously state that people matter more than institutions. Protecting the institution from potentially unfounded accusations and avoiding scandal is important. However, protecting students from potentially violent or distressing behaviour should be the first priority.

Another important aspect of support provision to the victims of sexual harassment is supplying friendly and anonymous advice prior to making a formal complaint. Having some form of contact whereby victims can remain anonymous is recommended for many reasons. Women victims of sexual harassment are most likely to feel shy, embarrassed of their experience, afraid of being judged or have lower self-esteem than the women who do not share the same traumatic experience (Paludi et al., 2006). Others may not be completely sure whether they have been subjected to harassment or not (as stated by Paludi et al., 2006, but see also Jaschik-Herman & Fisk, 1995; Jaschik & Fretz, 1991) and need some help to determine this. Online chat is one example of how to make the support ad hoc, direct, friendly and anonymous if required.

If the potential victim of sexual harassment wishes to further discuss the issue in person with a professional s/he should be able to have easy access to the contact details of the relevant person(s). Due to the delicate nature of the sexual harassment and the vulnerability of those harassed, contact details should be as visible as possible and supplied on every relevant search page to encourage victims to seek assistance.

Confusion regarding who to contact in cases of actual or suspected sexual harassment and what kind of help could be expected from the contacts provided, should be avoided. Students should be able to easily identify who is their first point of contact, what that person will offer and how to contact them. It should be clearly stated which people will be involved in the process, who is in charge of each particular step throughout the resolution/complaint procedure and what their respective roles are (i.e. people/person in charge of grievances and formal complaints, people/person in charge with helping the victim deal with the effects of sexual harassment, etc.). To encourage more students to report sexually harassing behaviours, the process needs to be transparent and unthreatening.

Improving awareness of sexual harassing behaviour will require more than just providing adequate information. The NZUSA report provides results of a student relationship survey, which gauged students' opinion on the services their university provided to prevent and discourage sexual harassment (Dunham, 2013). Many respondents in the survey felt that their institution did not do enough to prevent sexual harassment (56%), and that 'putting up posters advertising harassment contact people isn't enough' (p. 18). The NZUSA report also shows that where harassment *prevention* policies and programmes were in place, more cases of harassment had been reported, which bolsters the argument in favour of harassment prevention policies and programmes (p. 14) in addition to policies for dealing with harassment.

Conclusion

The research conducted focussed on eight universities across New Zealand in order to assess the visibility and accessibility of information and services provided for those experiencing sexual harassment. The research found that universities have much room for improvement. Given the prevalence of sexual harassment in the university setting internationally, and acceptance of some forms of harassment, the poor performance of New Zealand university websites should be taken seriously. As more people rely on web services for information, a university website can be viewed as an essential dimension of the institution's cultural environment. An inaccessible, jargon-heavy web service surely contributes to the creation and/or perpetuation of an alpha-masculine cultural environment, with gender rights relegated to the inconvenient or irrelevant by university policymakers and implementers.

Comprehensive sexual harassment information must be made more visible, so that harassing behaviours can be identified as unacceptable and victims are encouraged to report it. Although not the only solution, it is a relatively easy first step towards addressing sexual harassment in New Zealand universities. Further recommendations for how to improve information and programmes for harassment prevention and resolution are provided in the NZUSA Campus Safety Audit (Dunham, 2013).

The underlying intent of this research is to highlight the need to remain vigilant about addressing unequal power relations in society and its public institutions. Hopefully this paper will move the discussion further, and encourage those working in universities to take another look at the information, services and policies for sexual harassment within their institutions and share their insights among themselves. 'Hope and impetus for change come from ... efforts to normalise the conversation about sexual harassment and other forms of gendered violence' (Stein, 1995, p. 159), a conversation which will lead to better strategies for addressing sexual harassment.

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Notes

- 1 Since the initial survey of websites in November 2012 we have noticed several changes to some websites, as it is common for universities to make changes at the end of the university year. Nevertheless, the findings presented later in this paper may be useful to take note of in the redesign of websites.
- 2 While Waikato's service stood out along with the Harassment Contact People provided by Massey University, the Network is currently suspended and under review.

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