READ ALL ABOUT IT

Feminist accused of 'disturbing' the term sexual harassment!

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... we need more than the summarising 'tag', the slogan and the fixed category to deal effectively with sexual harassment (Brant and Too 1994, 25).

If we do our work really well, reality will appear even more unstable, complex and disorderly than it does now (Flax 1990 56, 57).

In this paper I establish the term sexual harassment in the context of the Australian university sector as a site of struggle, opposition and insurrection of knowledge (Foucault
1980, 87). I am not seeking to better 'understand', 'define' or 'measure' sexual harassment but to 'disturb' the coherence of dominant discourses and establish sexual harassment as a site of ambivalent knowledge and competing values. I am following Minson's suggestion that we "never mind the underlying causes of sexual harassment" but instead look at the forms of its "problematisation" (1993, 57). To put it another way, unlike most studies of sexual harassment, I am not seeking to explore why such conduct exists, but to examine how it exists in the public discourses of the Australian university sector.

In doing so, I interrogate or 'disturb' existing discourses of sexual harassment in order to explore the rules of knowledge that underpin its use in Australian universities. I suggest that dominant discourses of sexual harassment in academia act as a largely "unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (Foucault 1980, 83). Rather than accepting these discourses as a 'true' record of sexual harassment, I examine counter-narratives that have emerged in opposition to these dominant discourses, and argue that these discourses offer important alternative positions from which sexual harassment can be examined.

This paper can be seen, then, as an archaeological study of the emergence of 'sexual harassment' as a category used to describe a certain type of behaviour in the Australian university context. A discourse is a highly political system of beliefs, values and practices containing political rules which determine the production of certain subject positions from which individuals may speak. An archaeological study is a synchronic tool of analysis which seeks to excavate a discursive moment or event so that these rules can be isolated (Foucault 1972). Rather than accept standard notions of a commonly understood concept, the archaeologist returns to the threshold of the object or event itself -- its epistemological and theoretical bedrock -- to explore the foundational discourses which serve to produce but also delimit the sayable. Such rules are thus positive and productive in the way in which they allow certain knowledge to emerge, and not others.

This discussion reflects recent questioning by feminists of dominant constructions of sexual harassment. In particular, concern has been expressed about the way in the term has become so entrenched that its use erases the possibilities for other constructions of sexual conduct (Roiphe 1993, Jones 1996). Roiphe notes, for example, that the label sexual harassment, when applied to "nebulous human interchange" will "affect that experience and how we think about that experience", ensuring that targets of unwanted sexual behaviour come to recognise their experiences solely in terms of victimisation (Roiphe 1993, 109-110). Jones (1996, 107) makes a similar assertion with regard to pedagogical relationships:

> Once harassment no longer defines the topic, students feel freer to talk about the complexities of their feelings ... which, they feel, cannot easily be spoken about in a framework that invariably apportions blame, and contains a prohibition.

Like Jones and Roiphe, I suggest that categories and labels, even those produced by 'admirable' feminist discourses, can oppress and repress through their discursive policing of certain types of knowledge (see Mahon 1992, 61). However, like Bacchi (forthcoming, 2), I recognise that it is possible to draw attention to limitations in existing sexual harassment
agendas without "wishing away" either codes of behaviour or grievance procedures" (see also Brant and Too 1994).

In addition to joining Jones and Roiphe in the project of 'disturbing' the epistemological coherence of dominant discourses of sexual harassment, the process of writing -- and presenting -- this paper is in itself 'disturbing' because as a feminist I am in a curious position of wanting to 'disturb' a term that has been widely accepted as a great triumph for the feminist movement (Spender 1984, Brant and Too 1994, Eveline 1994). My title is a play on the recent book from another 'disturbing' feminist, Jane Gallop, titled Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment (1997). In recent times Gallop has been so 'disturbing' on the topic of sexual harassment that her "flashy but unglossed performance of civil disobedience" actually resulted in an accusation of sexual harassment (Gallop 1995a, 1997). In a safer move, I follow Gallop not in civil disobedience but in the deconstruction of existing policies on sexual harassment. The title of this paper also includes a nod to the tabloid sensationalisation which seems to accompany coverage of disagreements between feminists: feminist unity goes largely unnoticed, but when feminists diverge, we are given many opportunities to "read all about it".

A brief history of the term sexual harassment in the Australian university context locates it unambiguously as a product of the feminist movement. First coined by Lyn Farley in 1974 in the United States (Farley 1978, 12) to describe the working experiences of women, the term sexual harassment was used in public discourse in the Australian university context from about 1978 in women's activist pamphlets such as Rouge, Semper Floreat and Women's Rights' News. The issue rose to national prominence within student movements in June 1981 when the National Union of Students Women's Department co-ordinated a national sexual harassment phone-in. However, the wider university community had yet to face the issue. A study of women's working conditions at the University of Sydney in 1980 by the Association of Women Employees reported that some clerical and administrative staff members had been forced to leave positions because of sexual and other demands from their supervisors. The vice-chancellor was reported in The Australian stating that he would ask for further evidence of such claims because he "had never previously heard of this" (The Australian, 5 November 1980). By late 1982 the issue moved from consciousness-raising to the next stage: policy formulation and implementation, and formalised data collection. In 1984 the passing of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act provided crucial legal and political impetus serving to place the issue of sexual harassment firmly on the public agenda. The gender-specific nature of the Sex Discrimination Act ensured that sexual harassment remained primarily a 'women's issue'.

Dominant discourses

Since 1984 three dominant, or hegemonic, public discourses have emerged through which sexual harassment has been conceptualised by students and staff within the Australian university sector: the bureaucratisation of sexual harassment, the extensive reliance on quantifiable research methods and the location of sexual harassment as contributing to a 'chilly climate' for women. Such accounts of sexual harassment have a dominant status because they have the force of juridical power, are officially sanctioned by the universities,
adhere to 'scientific' constructions of knowledge, and subscribe to widely accepted feminist beliefs about the operation of sex and power in organisations. In the first section of this paper I discuss these three discourses, suggesting that they constitute a unitary and modernist construction of sexual harassment. In the second section I examine how emerging counter-narratives of sexual harassment offer new and 'disturbing' knowledge about sexual harassment by undermining the coherence and rationalities of these dominant discourses.

• **Bureaucratic rational discourse**

The legislative imperative of the *Sex Discrimination Act* dictated that the governing bodies of Australian universities, like other public and private organisations, had to formulate sexual harassment policy statements, grievance procedures and educational materials on sexual harassment. These political tools are embedded within the rational bureaucratic structures of the universities: they are located in official handbooks and documents, sanctioned and produced by the governing bodies of the organisation, and operated by key bureaucratic individuals such as the Director of Equal Opportunity. The importance of bureaucratic technologies within the university system ensures that these formal sexual harassment policies, grievance procedures and educational materials have become entrenched as a dominant 'official' construction of sexual harassment. This hegemonic status is reflected in a results of a survey by the Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee (1996) which determined that by 1996 all Australian universities, both public and private, have policies in place and procedures to be followed when a harassment or discrimination complaint is lodged by a student or staff member.

Accordingly, these policies, procedures and materials on sexual harassment conform to key bureaucratic values of clarity and objectivity: the definition of sexual harassment is rationally expressed in unambiguous terms as verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which is unsolicited and unwelcome. As such, sexual harassment is clearly demarcated from other forms of sexual or romantic behaviour. The grievance procedures attempt to be confidential, objective and fair, and are based upon administrative precedents which are well known and which are followed in similar cases. Educational materials attempt to simplify the issue, offering neat explanations to questions such as "What is sexual harassment?" and "What are the effects of sexual harassment?" Consistent with the bureaucratic need for monitoring, review and benchmarking, there is an organised system of reporting: in most universities statistics on the number of sexual harassment complaints received are produced and distributed so that 'progress' can be measured on a regular basis (Simeone 1987, 117). Above all, this discourse is constructed upon the bureaucratic and legalistic need for certainty: certainty over what behaviour constitutes sexual harassment, certainty over the outcome of complaints processes, and certainty that the process will be fair and objective.

• **Quantitative research methods discourse**
A correlative dominant discourse of sexual harassment in the Australian university context is the large number of quantitative studies of sexual harassment. Such studies generally attempt to definitively 'measure' the rates of sexual harassment in certain locations and 'test' various definitions of the term sexual harassment. Much of this data is from the United States (see Benson and Thomson 1982, Lott, Reiley and Howard 1982, Baker, Terpstra and Larntz 1990, Bursik 1992, Fitzgerald and Shulman 1993, Garlick 1994, Arvey and Cavanaugh 1995) but is widely cited in application to the Australian university context, both by academics and bureaucrats (Satour, Savery and Bickley 1988, Gardner and Allen 1996, c.f. Crosthwaite and Swanton 1986). This discourse also conforms to bureaucratic rationalist principles and methods of inquiry. Indeed, the survey, with its rational and quantifiable knowledge claims, is highly favoured by within university bureaucracies and government departments (Reinharz 1992, 83; Brant and Too 1994, 8; cf. Wise and Stanley 1987) and is symptomatic of the bureaucratic desire need to reduce complex events to simplistic, easily reproduced data. The status of such knowledge is based upon the widespread scientific belief that only quantitative research methods can obtain an 'accurate' (read: objective) reflection of opinions or events amounting to the 'truth'.

As Gutek explains, defining sexual harassment means setting boundaries on the term and differentiating it from other forms of sexual behaviour, and other forms of harassment (1985, 7). As such, quantitative studies of sexual harassment create categories and divisions, and make certain value judgments and assumptions about sexual harassment, seeking to reduce the complexity and ambiguities of sexual harassment into neatly tabulated data. On the whole, these studies, accordingly, do not move beyond the boundaries of accepted rationalist knowledge about sexual harassment: they do not question the assumption that sexual harassment can be objectively measured and compared between sites, that an overarching definition of sexual harassment is possible and that sexual harassment can be accurately understood in numerical terms.

- 'Chilly climate' discourse

The third dominant discourse in which sexual harassment is situated in the Australian university context is an explicitly feminist discourse which situates sexual harassment as a patriarchal form of power exercised for the sole purpose of the oppression and repression of women. Sexual harassment in this discourse is just one aspect of a range of strategies which are designed to belittle and disenfranchise female students and staff, contributing to a 'chilly climate' for women. The term 'chilly climate' originated in the United States and was first widely used to describe the cultural environment for women students at American universities (see Hall and Sandler 1984, McKinney 1991). This discourse is widely favoured among feminist academics' assessment of their own experiences in the university system in Canada (Smith 1987, Backhouse, Harris, Michell and Wylie 1989, Haberman, Sardi and Morton 1992, Hornosty 1995), Great Britain (Ramazanoglu 1989, Acker 1992, Bagilhole 1993) and Australia (Thornton 1989, Allen 1990, Luke and Gore 1992, Luke 1993, Brady 1995, Castleman et al 1995, Lewis 1995). In Australia commentators detail in particular the way in which the move towards increasing corporate managerialism (Coleman 1995), economic rationalism (Yeatman 1995) and the use of contract labour has compounded the invisibility of women in universities, in both general staff and academic positions.
This approach has none of the pretension towards scientific objectivity associated with quantitative and bureaucratic discourses and as such is an implicit critique of Enlightenment epistemology and bureaucratic rationality. Much information is conveyed by means of an autobiographical account of the author's experiences and is highly emotional and personal in nature (see Carraher et al 1995, Brady 1995, Bart 1996). However, I would argue that this discourse is dominant because it has long been accepted as the feminist position on sexual harassment in the Australian university system and elsewhere (see Dzech and Weiner 1990, Paludi 1996, Mead 1997). In addition, in the 1990s, this discourse is becoming increasingly accepted within the bureaucratic and academic structures of Australian universities. This is reflected in the growing number of mechanisms adopted to address the issue of women's employment progression in academia. Such progress can, perhaps, be attributed to the large number of key proponents of this discourse who themselves work, often in senior positions, within the academic and bureaucratic structures of the universities: such women include Associate Professor Jill Blackmore, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity) Eleanor Ramsey, Professor Alison Mackinnon, Professor Ingrid Moses, Professor Lesley Johnson and Professor Ann Curthoys. As such, this discourse in 1997 "partakes in the power to shape and instil institutional policy" (Gallop 1995a) through bureaucratic mechanisms.

What the above discussion of these three discourses of sexual harassment illustrates is that sexual harassment in the Australian university context has been dominated by discourses which are rational, bureaucratic and quantitative, and which are driven by the need for consensus and certainty. A dominant perspective on sexual harassment has prevailed: that sexual harassment is unwanted, inappropriate and illegal behaviour that is no longer to be tolerated in the public sphere and particularly the academic workplace. It is accepted that the appropriate way in which to regulate such behaviour is through the just and objective operation of bureaucratic and legalistic sexual harassment policies and grievance procedures. I do not mean to claim that there is mass solidarity over the definition, procedures and legal rights for perpetrators over the issue of sexual harassment -- in private these issues still raise much heated debate -- but to suggest that the public discourse of sexual harassment in universities has been largely marked by uniformity and certainty.

I would argue that, as such, a modernist approach to sexual harassment has prevailed: dominant discourses, entrenched in public consciousness, operate as a largely coherent meta-narrative of sexual harassment. As such, fundamental terms, distinctions, categories and assumptions have remained largely taken for granted. These discourses are marked by a modernist predilection for binary conceptualisations which construct knowledge in linear and oppositional formulations: such dualisms include the beliefs that power resides in patriarchal structures; that the sexes are in uniform opposition, and that sexual conduct which is sexual harassment is clearly separated from consensual romantic encounters. It is generally assumed that there is a male perpetrator and a female target. Power is thus unambiguous and bifurcated: the power of the males comes from their superior positions in academic and bureaucratic university hierarchies and from their status as males in a patriarchal society. Women, accordingly, have little power. As a result, the 'truth' of sexual harassment becomes firmly set: that any sexual conduct within the university site comes to be seen as oppressive and repressive. There is little recognition that sexual conduct may be a site of conflicting and ambiguous emotions for women: emotions which include pleasure and pain.
In particular, I would argue that the ‘chilly climate’ discourse, a continuation of the radical feminist discourses which emerged in Australia and elsewhere during the 1970s which asserted that the exploitation of women is a feature of capitalist patriarchal society (see Kaplan 1996, Sullivan 1997), is underpinned by modernist epistemological tenets. It bears the hallmarks of grand social theorising which are increasingly under interrogation within the postmodern moment: there is an attempt to reflect the experiences of all women and to generalise about the motives and actions of all men (cf. Wise and Stanley 1987, 15). It is underpinned by an essentialist libratory rhetoric which assumes that women need to be freed from the stifling strictures of patriarchal academic structures in order to be able to freely participate in the organisation as women. Accordingly, within this discourse sexual harassment is approached in an unambiguous manner: it is seen as a discourse of power and not sex in which men deliberately position women as sexual objects.

Further, these modernist discourses contain little understanding of the need to explore localised or contextualised instances of sexual harassment: sexual harassment is deemed to be the same behaviour regardless of geographical or cultural location. This is clearly an important omission. I would argue that the regulation of sexual harassment in the public space of the Australian university system is premised at a fundamental level on the modernist construction of academia as a monastic environment in which the physical and sexual have long been viewed as unwelcome intrusions in an ideally asexual and disembodied space. As Thornton (1989) notes, in the university the theorem propounded by the man of reason is that the more intrusive the corporeal, the less the degree of rationality. As such, these dominant discourses are inextricably linked to the still largely modernist environment in which they flourish.

Postmodern counter-narratives

These three discourses are not, of course, the only ways in which sexual harassment is talked about on Australian university campuses; in the 1990s new ways of looking at sexual harassment have emerged, primarily from the United States, some of which are starting to be discussed on Australian university campuses (Paglia 1992, Roiphe 1993, Garner 1995, Gallop 1997). This new knowledge about sexual harassment has emerged in the form of counter-narratives which 'disturb' the previous certainties of dominant discourses. As Peters and Lankshear explain, counter-narratives are unofficial narratives which are played in and around official narratives and which emerge as oppositional responses (1996, 1). These counter-narratives are postmodern because they function as a critique of modernist meta-narratives which issues from a basic scepticism of the grand historical and philosophical claims of the enlightenment project (Peters and Lankshear 1996, 2). However, these narratives do not simply replace or oppose these dominant narratives. Instead, they embrace the terrain and knowledge of dominant discourses and, surpass them, exposing them as outdated and inadequate. The notion of the 'post' in postmodernism is here taken to refer to a moving beyond, an interrogation of, modernism, rather than a direct replacement of all modernist knowledges. This follows the claim of Lather and Ellsworth that the postmodern is a space positioned between the "no longer" and the "not yet" (1996, 70).
The counter-narratives on sexual harassment in the Australian university context provide three important aspects to the debate on sexual harassment that was previously missing from dominant discourses: a recognition of the importance of the site of the university as a unique location for certain power-knowledge constructions to emerge about sexual harassment, the recognition of the importance of the desiring body, and the recognition that sexual harassment can be, and in fact can only be, ambiguous, messy, dirty and uncertain. In the last few years these discourses have become established in the public consciousness, in particular via the medium of the mass media. As Mead (1997, 10) explains, large-scale shifts on issues such as sexual harassment rely on how public space is managed, how public debate is conducted and who counts in the public domain. However, these counter-narrative discourses do not have the social, cultural or educational prominence of the discourses described above: for various reasons they occupy a public space that is shady, questionable and illegitimate. Indeed, rather than threatening, they represent knowledge that is frequently viewed as subversive, 'disturbing' and dirty. Following Grant, dirt is understood as "cultural matter out of place" (1996, 1).

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**The First Stone**

The first counter-narrative discourse is Helen Garner's book *The First Stone: Some Questions About Sex and Power* (1995) which details the events following an alleged incident of harassment of two female university students by their Master at a residential college attached to a prestigious metropolitan university in October 1991. At the core of the book lies Garner's comments about young feminists and their use of legal remedies to deal with particular incidences of harassment. Garner is scathing and supercilious: "He touched her breast and she went to the cops?" (1995, 15, italics in original). Garner's attitude towards sexual harassment has been aligned to key "blockbuster" texts (Rowlands and Henderson 1996, 9) from the United States which position sexual harassment as a rigid code wielded by puritanical feminists attempting to regulate sexuality and desire, and thus committing young women to a sexless, joyless existence.

Garner's account is highly controversial, and has been bitterly opposed by many other feminists, not the least because she situates herself as a feminist but still 'disturbs' well-established notions about power and sex. In doing so, she threatens the certainty of key feminist and bureaucratic knowledge about sexual harassment. In direct contravention to dominant discourses on sexual harassment, Garner suggests that sexual harassment is sexual conduct which is misguided and ill-judged rather than premeditated power-play which is a product of patriarchal power/gender relations: she positions sexual harassment as a sexual rather than a power discourse (c.f. Curthoys 1995, 207; Davis 1997, 78). Underlying Garner's approach is the concept of Eros, defined as "the excitement that flashes through you when a teacher explains an intellectual proposition and you grasp it - or when someone tells and joke and you get it" (Garner 1995a, 11). Garner thus posits power as residing in certain bodies -- the young, the beautiful, the provocative -- rather than in patriarchal structures. For example, the young female complainants, portrayed by Garner as youthful, effervescent and engaging, are powerful because of their youth and beauty (1995, 59).
There are 'disturbing' consequences of this discursive location. Firstly, the assertion that sexual harassment is about sex (and not just power) appears to be accompanied by an understanding that, accordingly, a provocatively dressed woman is naturally more likely to attract the unwanted sexual attention of a male than one dressed in a more modest manner. Eros, as the motivational force driving sexual harassment, is understood as biologically determined rather than socially constructed (see for example, Oakley 1995, 23; Editorial, The Courier Mail 10.8.1995, 14; Paglia 1992, 50). This notion has been, and continues to be, strenuously resisted by many feminists who denounce that the sexual attractiveness of the target is irrelevant because sexual harassment is not about sex but about power (Sedley and Benn 1982, 9; Zetlein 1995, 12; Wilks 1995, 14; Cook 1997, 219-221). The recognition that sexual harassment may involve sexual desires is, however, an important addition to the public debate on sexual harassment. The assertion that sexual harassment is simply about power exercised in a rational and patriarchal manner fails to acknowledge that power is frequently about desires which may be irrational and impossible, and, at times, sexual. If sexual harassment is simply a product of rational power discourses, then it is hard to see why many cases of sexual harassment do not conform to a simplistic structural and patriarchal power dynamic but instead are frequently messy, dirty, unfair and, often, involve conflicting sexual desires (see for example, Dzeich and Weiner 1994, Legge 1993, 1995, Garner 1995, Wark 1995, Gallop 1997). Although some accounts of sexual harassment (xx 1997, O'Neill 1995) can be clearly seen as an abuse of patriarchal and structural power, this needs to be recognised as an inadequate conceptualisations of all cases of sexual harassment.

A further consequence of the recognition that sexual harassment may be a result of a complex dynamic of sex and power has led to a questioning of reliance on sexual harassment grievance procedures and both civil and criminal legal avenues through which targets of sexual harassment may pursue complaints. According to Garner, Eros defies the equality and legality of sexual harassment grievance procedures: it is the "dancing force that we can't legislate or make fair" (Garner 1995a, 11). The assumption is that if sexual harassment arises from power or sexual relations which are desiring, irrational and messy, it is difficult to see why rational, structural and bureaucratic grievance procedures should be followed. This is a key change in public debates about sexual harassment in the university system in Australia: up to this point there was almost no public questioning about the importance and reliability of sexual harassment grievance procedures as a way in which to resolve issues of sexual harassment. Like many feminists involved in the debates over Garner's book, (see Duncan 1995, 75; Kenny 1995, 11; Porzsolt 1995, 11; xx 1995), I believe that university sexual harassment policies and grievance procedures are valuable avenues of complaint for the targets of sexual harassment, however, unlike many such commentators, I do not see them as sacrosanct and beyond interrogative reach. New knowledge about sexual harassment should present new challenges for equal opportunity practitioners to formulate new, perhaps non-bureaucratic, strategies to assist targets of such harassment.

- Pedagogy and the desiring body

Another counter-narrative discourse of sexual harassment is the recognition that the desiring, and in some cases sexual, body, rather than intrusive, is in fact a vital component of the pedagogical processes (Gallop 1995, 79; Jones 1996, 102; McWilliam 1996, 9; Luke
1996, 286). Luke, for example, offers a reading of the academic body, noting that "the cultural codes that operate among student in the reading of texts or listening to lectures also extends to their 'reading' of the lecturer's body, the knowledge she offers, and her performance of that knowledge" (1996, 286). McWilliam, like Gallop (1995, 1997), argues that the body, the sexual and the erotic, although unwelcome at times, are inherent aspects of pedagogical exchange (1996, 9). The emergence of this discourse reflects the increasing use of the term pedagogy which focuses attention on the conditions and means through which knowledge is produced (Lather 1991, 15).

This counter-narrative, on a fundamental level, 'disturbs' the primary assumption underpinning dominant rational discourses on sexual harassment which is that sexual conduct has no place in the university as a public site occupied by the rationalities of the mind rather than the passions of the body. This construction is frequently applied to the pedagogical process, which has long been situated as a public enterprise which is intellectual and pastoral but one in which the private, personal and sexual desiring body is an illegitimate intruder (Dzeich and Weiner 1990, Purkiss 1994, Paludi 1996). As Sullivan notes, sexuality has been marked out as an intensely private sphere of human activity (1997, 102). This is an important discursive development, however, because it reflects growing recognition that sexual harassment is just one way of viewing the regime of sex and power that circulates in the university context: viewed outside of the strictures of the term sexual harassment, unwanted sexual conduct may in fact be surprising, pleasurable and productive.

This counter-narrative discourse, which links pedagogy to the body, also further explicitly challenges the dominant discursive construction that power is hierarchical and patriarchal. This dominant conception of power, when applied to students and teachers, leads to the assumption that all sexual behaviour in the university system (particularly that of students by their teachers) is harassment because students lack the power to freely consent to sexual conduct. The student, usually female, is presented as an innocent and powerless ingenue who "may not realize until too late" or who may "still be confused" or who may "worry about how a rejection will affect her grades". The effect will be "devastating" (Dzeich and Weiner 1990, 41, 44). The academic becomes the 'god' professor (Pringle 1988, 124) who "has absolute control ... students are completely at the mercy of his (sic) judgment or whim. And both he and they know it (Dzeich and Weiner 1990, 43, see also Paludi 1996, Zalk 1996). Commentators stress that, in addition, certain groups are even more vulnerable to such victimisation: women in non-traditional fields, women of colour, students who are economically disadvantaged (Paludi 1996, 5, De Four 1996, 51). Male students, it is asserted, do not have the same problem because social conditioning allows men to be viewed as sexual people and competent professionals at the same time (Stites 1996, 131),

However, rather than simply accept the power of the teacher as superior to that of the student, Jones, for example, suggests that the power of the teacher is only relative to the power which the students themselves grant. Using Foucaultian notions of circulatory power she explains:

The apparently all-powerful teacher's authority to confer grades and legitimized judgment on the student's work, to "give" to the student (or not), is mirrored by the student's imminent loss of faith, loyalty, and admiration, her
potentially negative judgment of the teacher’s skill and knowledge, even her competition with the teacher as an academic (Jones, 1996, 102).

In Jones’ model of power a male academic would only have informal power as a authoritative male if this power was granted to him by the student. Morris puts it another way: "Fuck me or I'll fail you' is the brute message of abusive pedagogy. Whatever happened to the other story? the one I remember so well from my own days as a student in the 1970s- 'pass me or I'll tell" (qtd in McWilliam 1996, 9). This is an important challenge to the accepted notions of power within dominant discourses of sexual harassment: power is able to be recognised as shifting, relative and ambiguous rather than entrenched. This offers, I would argue, important avenues for women students in particular to imagine themselves as sexually assertive rather than passive: again, sexual harassment emerges as just one possible conception of sexual conduct in the public pedagogical site of the university.

Conclusion

I would argue that although some of the suggestions provided by the counter-narratives to dominant discourses of sexual harassment are deeply ‘disturbing’ -- in both a personal and an epistemological sense -- they offer a widening of accepted knowledges about sexual harassment. As such, rather than seeking to erase or simply rebut them, feminists should instead embrace the challenge they provide. I would argue that they are important additions to the regime of knowledge about sexual harassment in several ways.

Firstly, there is a new acceptance of the need to better understand the role of sex and desire in sexual harassment rather than to repeatedly assert that sexual harassment is 'not about sex but about power'. This involves, I think, a broader acceptance of sexual discourses in feminist theorising not just as negative but as productive and, possibly, pleasurable. The importance of the body of literature linking pedagogy to the body, for my purposes, is that it situates the university as a site in which sexual desire and the erotic play a legitimate (although often subversive) role within the academic and pedagogical site. I look forward to further exploring this relationship in future research, seeking to establish discourses on the sexual and desire as and ambiguous and thus open to different interpretations. Ultimately, I think this is where Garner's interpretation of Eros falters: it is just as rigid as that which it seeks to replace. When sexual harassment is positioned within the uncertainties of the 'impossibilities of desire', certain dominant forms of knowledge immediately become suspect: in particular the bureaucratic regulatory regime and quantitative studies, both of which seek to pin sexual harassment down rather than open the concept up to new possibilities.

Secondly, I think that sexual harassment should no longer be accepted as a neutral concept which operates according to the same discursive rules regardless of the site or context. More attention needs to be paid to the location of various forms of sexual harassment: as such, I would argue that the university must be recognised as a distinct site from that of the street or the private sector. The university is a preeminent site of power-knowledge production through its formal research and pedagogical role. As the site of formal
pedagogical exchange, a particular relationship, involving certain types of desiring subjects, exists between and among students and teachers in a university. When the site is accepted as a key discourse of knowledge production in its own right, then sexual harassment will be seen as part of a wider regime of regulation and reward through which a variety of sexual and power-based discourses operate (cf. Currie 1994, Bacchi, forthcoming).

Thirdly, the counter-narratives discussed here illustrate that sexual harassment does not have to be viewed simply in terms of structural or patriarchal discourses of power. Instead, there is an acceptance that power can be sexual, structural, gender-based, circulatory, repressive, liberatory and pleasurable. Power is thus exposed as more complex and uncertain than the dominant discourses allow. I would suggest that such a conception of power as multi-faceted allows better understanding of the importance of race, ethnicity, class, facial appearance, body size or shape, socio-economic status or religious persuasion in the dynamics of sexual harassment. Along with this comes a better understanding of the possibilities open for individuals to assess sexual harassment sexual behaviour by others within the university; possibilities include personal intervention, formal procedures, pleasure, resistance, and encouragement. Victimisation instead becomes just one point on a range of possibilities.

This paper, then, using archaeological methods of inquiry, has excavated discourses of knowledge about sexual harassment in the Australian university context, seeking to expose the epistemological bases of dominant discourses in terms of their discursive rules which allows only certain knowledge to emerge as 'true'. I suggest, ultimately, that postmodern counter-narratives, which have emerged as public discourses in recent times, offer important new knowledge about sexual harassment which will, hopefully lead to further 'disturbing' research on the term sexual harassment in the Australian university context.

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References


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Dominant discourses

- Bureaucratic rational discourse
- Quantitative research methods discourse
- 'Chilly climate' discourse
Postmodern counter-narratives

- The First Stone
- Pedagogy and the desiring body

Conclusion

- Understand the role of sex and desire
- Explore localised sites of sexual harassment
- Situate power as circulatory and diffuse

Discourse

A discourse is a highly political system of beliefs, values and practices containing political rules which determine the production of certain subject positions from which individuals may speak.

Archaeology

An archaeological study is a synchronic tool of analysis which seeks to excavate a discursive moment or event so that these rules can be isolated (Foucault 1972). Rather than accept standard notions of a commonly understood concept, the archaeologist returns to the threshold of the object or event itself -- its epistemological and theoretical bedrock -- to explore the foundational discourses which serve to produce but also delimit the sayable. Such rules are thus positive and productive in the way in which they allow certain knowledge to emerge, and not others.