

Hi everyone, my name is Sophie Johnston and I am the current Student Representative Council President at UNSW. I want to first thank everyone for coming, staff, academics, and leaders of the university; it is incredibly important for us to be having this conversation tonight. One of the biggest barriers to combatting gendered violence and sexual assault is the difficulty in starting the conversation. This is an issue that has been ignored not only by universities, but by society as a whole for a very long time. UNSW has a responsibility to its community to take a proactive step in counteracting this culture. This starts tonight. It is not pretty to talk about sexual assault. Or about gendered violence. And it most definitely isn't easy to talk about rape. This is why so many incidences go unreported and is the reason we have a very naïve view of sexual violence. We deter so many people from reporting because it is much easier to focus on the successes of an institution, rather than its failures. However, it is honourable to be able to acknowledge that we have failed; but that we refuse to continue to fail on this issue. Not all people who cat-call or make sexist and derogatory comments are rapists. But we need to understand that these behaviours and attitudes do objectify women and glorify these hyper-masculine traditions. These are the attitudes that lead to sexual violence. And they should never be tolerated at UNSW.

These behaviours and attitudes manifest in very different ways. And it is important for us as a University to understand how our very integrated and small community creates an environment where these attitudes can easily manifest. We have a very large queer community, who experience sexual and gendered violence in a very specific way. We have a large international student cohort, students with intellectual, physical, and mental disabilities, indigenous students, people of colour, college students, women, all experiencing sexual and gendered violence in very different ways. We cannot call ourselves a diverse or multicultural university, until we can provide safety and equal opportunities for everyone at UNSW.

It is important for us to be having this conversation tonight, because education is the first step we need to create a safe campus for all people. We would be ignorant to believe that a chant within a college is an isolated incident and we would be doing ourselves an injustice to believe it is unique to a college. This is a societal problem. And UNSW is not exempt from that. We have a culture that has existed for a very long time in all spaces around the university. It is much more than a college problem, it exists in the classroom, the roundhouse, and within academic communities. We need to educate our students and our staff to form respectful and consensual relationships always.

It is important for us to be having this conversation tonight, so that we can finally put the structures into place to ensure our campus is safe for everyone. We cannot expect that policy changes alone will lead to an entire culture change. But the university does have the responsibility to put the mechanisms into place that will allow this change to happen. We need a transparent and accessible reporting system for victims and third party victims of sexual violence. Tonight you will hear about the launch of UNSW's new website for resources, reporting and support networks. We need to ensure we have the staff and counselling services to support victims, rather than incriminate them. Tonight you will hear about UNSW's 24 hour phonenumber to deal with victims in urgent need of support. We need to clearly outline as a University how perpetrators of sexual violence will be dealt with on both an academic and legal level. This will be achieved through a specific UNSW policy around harassment, sexual assault and gendered violence. We need to train our staff, and people in leadership or authoritative positions about developing respectful and consensual relationships always; by implementing prerequisite training modules around consent.

This is just beginning. And I guarantee the road will not always be pretty. However to achieve real and lasting change we need to be transparent, honest, and very open throughout our entire process. We need to be respectful of our intersectional community, and give a voice to all students; whether its women, queer students, international students, college kids, people of colour, or students with disabilities. The Student Representative Council will continue to work with the university to ensure we provide the UNSW community with the processes, and support networks we desperately deserve to feel safe on campus. Our SRC Women's collective will continue to roll out the campaign against sexual and gendered violence and I urge all of you to get behind the campaign. We have a long way to go. But tonight we have the opportunity to start to forge a new culture at UNSW. A culture of respect, of equality, and of inclusivity. It is very important that we have this conversation tonight.