COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Accountability with Teeth[*]

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Abstract Universities worldwide have had policies to combat
sexual harassment since the 1980s. Nonetheless, having policies
in place does not mean that universities are held accountable
for the safety of their students, nor does it guarantee that
perpetrators are held accountable for their deeds. While the
politics of power are always at play when discussing sexual
harassment, at universities it is more complex due to the hierarchy
integral to their structure. This article investigates the trajectory of
the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit at
Cairo University and explores how effective the implementation
of the policy has been in holding the university accountable
to victims of sexual harassment. Making use of accountability
assessment frameworks, it explores how the university can be held
accountable to victims. It focuses specifically on responsiveness,
responsibility, and liability to assess the effectiveness of the
anti-sexual harassment policy, and identifies loopholes that need
to be addressed.

Keywords sexual harassment, accountability, policy,
responsiveness, university campuses, politics of power, culture.

1 Introduction

> Voice needs teeth to have bite – but teeth may not bite
> without voice.
> (Jonathan Fox, 'Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence
> Really Say?')

On 16 March 2014, a girl walked onto Cairo University main campus
wearing a red t-shirt and jeans, and was followed by tens of
male students whistling and making sexist comments. This public
sexual harassment was caught on camera, and therefore made it
difficult for the university community to deny that female students
were being sexually harassed on campus. The incident was an
embarrassment for the university's administration, especially as
the-then president of the university, Gaber Nassar, had been
elected to lead the university in the post-revolution era based
on promises of freedom, liberty, and equity. The first reaction and

public statement made by Dr Nassar blamed the victim, focusing the issue on the way she was dressed. However, this stand could not be sustained as civil society and the university community held the administration accountable. Under pressure from several academic activists, the university proclaimed responsibility and the president of the university stated:

> In my personal and professional capacity, I affirm my full condemnation of the crime of harassment against women, and the perpetrators must be punished. No blame should be put on the victim and she should not be subjected to any accusation. It is a crime that is unjustified… Finally, I want to make it clear that I support all the efforts that combat violence against women inside or outside the university and will not allow any similar behaviour on campus (Nassar 2014).

This statement was an announcement that the university assumed responsibility, would be held accountable, and would hold any perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, it was an indication that there was enough political will to endorse a policy to combat sexual harassment and violence against women on campus. Accordingly, with a lot of support, a policy was formulated and the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit at Cairo University was established to oversee its implementation.

This article investigates the trajectory of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit and explores how effective the policy has been in holding the university accountable to victims of sexual harassment. Making use of accountability assessment frameworks, it will explore how the party that 'sets the rules' can be held accountable to the 'subjects', i.e. the victims, while at the same time holding perpetrators accountable. It will specifically focus on responsiveness, responsibility, and liability in order to assess the effectiveness of the anti-sexual harassment policy, and identify loopholes that need to be addressed.

1.1 Note on subjectivity

It is important to note that this study is based on first-person experiential observation and reflection. As the author of this article, I was able to describe, analyse, and evaluate the effectiveness of the unit from within. As one of the founders and current director of the unit, I was able to access quantitative data that might not have been easily accessible to outsiders. Nonetheless, the navigation through this data had to be supported by insights and personal experience in its analysis. My relationship with the unit investigators enabled me to verify verdicts which to me seemed questionable. During the whole process, as researcher, I aimed at striking a balance between the facts and the personal assumptions and emotions, with commitment towards confidentiality and preservation of the privacy and anonymity of the victims.

2 Sexual harassment at universities

Sexual harassment on campuses is not a new phenomenon nor is it confined to one geographical region or university. As early as the 1970s, Mary Rowe of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) managed to discuss sexual harassment at the university (Rowe 1974), and succeeded in having MIT develop an anti-sexual harassment policy, after which other US universities followed suit.[2] On the other side of the Atlantic, UK universities have also been trying to prevent sexual harassment on campuses. Evonne Leonora Von Heussen's efforts, together with the National Association for Victims of Stalking and Harassment, led to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. In 2010, the National Union of Students (NUS) began campaigning on the issue of sexual harassment, combined with the call to end violence against women and girls, and the taskforce work of Universities UK. This all culminated in the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) producing a legal briefing in January 2015, focusing on universities' obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 (see Universities UK 2016).

Universities all over the world in places such as Australia, North America, and Africa have had policies to combat sexual harassment since the 1980s, with varying levels of effectiveness. Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act 2015 in Canada led to universities reviewing their policies.[3] A recent report by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017: 4) on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities found that policies need to be reviewed since 'only 6% of students thought that their university was currently doing enough to provide and promote clear and accessible information on sexual harassment procedures'.

3 Sexual harassment at Cairo University

Until late into the twentieth century, sexual harassment in Egypt was not spoken of; women had to put up with unwelcome comments and looks as part of their daily experience of being in public spaces. Even when sexual harassment got more aggressive, with groups of harassers touching and groping women, it was still considered a taboo issue and victims of harassment hesitated to report incidents for fear of being stigmatised or blamed.

After 25 January 2011, the silence around harassment as a social problem was broken and the issue became the subject of wide debate. A growing public awareness of the problem of sexual harassment gave rise to many initiatives to combat it. That is not to say that before the revolution there was no violence or there were no efforts to combat violence, but it is to say that the issue of sexual harassment became a pressing problem needing both the efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizen groups on the one hand, and a legal framework on the other, to

eliminate it. Research and initiatives addressing and documenting sexual harassment started to mushroom and have been on the rise since 2011. In early 2014, and in response to NGOs working on combating sexual harassment in society, the government issued a law criminalising sexual harassment and made amendments to the penal code to include the term 'sexual harassment' for the first time in Egyptian law.[4]

While laws applying to street harassers are important, the context of Cairo University as an educational institution with its own particularity needed to be addressed within its own laws and culture. With the ultimate goal of making universities safe spaces and creating an environment conducive to equal opportunity and mutual respect, a group of academics from Cairo University started exploring and researching the issue. In March 2014, a working group, including faculty members, student representatives, and several civil society organisations active in the field of anti-sexual harassment, was set up to formulate an anti-harassment policy for Cairo University.

One of the very first concerns the working group had was to come up with a policy that was contextually relevant to all of the university's community, whether academic staff, students, or administrative staff. The first step taken towards achieving this was to explore the Supreme Council of Universities' bylaws and regulations.[5] It was no surprise that there was nothing on sexual harassment, yet in studying disciplinary actions outlined in the universities' laws, the group was able to outline disciplinary actions to be taken in the case of sexual harassment based on these. With no model to follow, however, the mandate of the unit was unclear. Nonetheless, with the objective of creating a safe university where both males and females had equal respect and opportunities, the unit emulated standard protection policies, focusing on: (1) prevention through awareness raising; (2) intervention, which basically is the processing of grievances; and, (3) referral, where victims are referred to counselling for psychological support.

The ratification of the policy, on 22 June 2014, makes Cairo University (a governmental body) the first national university to endorse an anti-harassment policy that commits to raising awareness about the problem and which enforces disciplinary measures.

What makes this initiative unique is the fact that it is homegrown; the participatory nature in which the policy was developed, as faculty, students, and civil society associations all collaborated to formulate it, gives ownership to the university community, and creates a type of social mobility in support of the initiative.

An important component of the policy is the grievance procedure, outlined below.

1 **Filing a complaint:** The victim is required to file a complaint with the anti-harassment unit coordinator.[6] The victim (according to the instructional pamphlets and videos) should contact the unit coordinator, who in turn is supposed to assess the situation and then pass it on to the executive committee, who in turn passes it on to the president of the university to call for an investigation.

2 **Investigation:** It is important to note that university law distinguishes between the different categories of the university community. While professors are adjudicated according to provisions of Article 110 of the Law on the Organisation of Universities No 49 of 1972, which starts with a written warning and escalates to termination of employment, students are adjudicated according to Article No 126 of the Executive Regulation No 809 of 1975, which again starts with a warning and escalates to dismissal. As for non-teaching staff, such as teaching assistants (TAs), administrative staff, security personnel, and janitors, they are not governed by the university law and thus the provisions of Article 157 of the Law on the Organisation of Universities No 49 of 1972 shall be applied, which again is graduated from a warning up to final dismissal from the university. The basic difference between the three is that the investigation authority and disciplinary committee differs in accordance with the Supreme Council of Universities' bylaws. Academic staff (lecturers to professors) can only be subject to investigation by the president of the university and are questioned by a professor from the faculty of law assigned by the president. Students and administrative staff are investigated by the legal department in their faculty and it is the dean's authority to command investigations.

3 **Verdict:** After listening to both victim and harasser, and after examining all the evidence and questioning witnesses, the investigator(s) gives an opinion. The results of the investigation are summed up in a memorandum, together with any recommended sanction based on the level of culpability, and sent to the president of the university, as sole holder of executive power for enforcing sanctions in the university.

If a minor sanction is recommended, such as a warning, there is no need for the convening of a disciplinary committee. However, if the investigator considers that there should be more serious sanctions, such as suspension, then the case is reverted to a disciplinary committee that is formed by the president. In the case of professors, the disciplinary committee must have a representative from among the judges of the State Council.[7]

4 **Enforcement of sanction:** After the verdict is signed by the president, a decree is issued and sent to the dean of the faculty to be implemented. Ironically, neither the complainant

Figure 1 **Process**
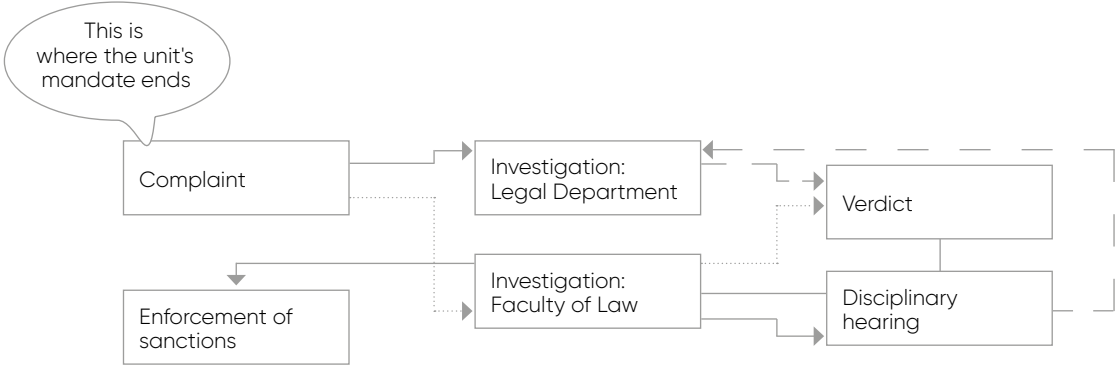
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nor the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit are informed! Once the recommendations are sent to the president of the university, it therefore becomes very difficult to track the case. In fact, the unit is seen as not entitled to any information and is no longer part of the process as the case falls under the legal department's mandate.

4 Evaluating the process

Regardless of how strong the procedures may look, actual implementation is the only judge. The glitches of this reporting mechanism are numerous. First and foremost, it is a very complex multilayered process. Second, it requires highly trained coordinators who are supposed to be accessible and capable of assessing the situation. Third, it assumes that all investigators are up to par and capable of investigating sexual harassment cases just like any other cases they handle. Finally, and most importantly, it alienates the unit from the case as its connection with the case ends at the complaint stage.

A further unfortunate incident, similar to the sexual harassment incident that facilitated the establishment of the unit, subsequently happened at the university.[8] A student in her second year was verbally harassed by three male students who made sexual comments about her appearance. The student, not knowing about the existence of the unit, filed a complaint with the dean who in turn called for an official investigation. When the student went to the legal department, not only was she belittled and made fun of in front of the harassers, but the investigator asked her 'What were you wearing?'! The humiliation did not stop there. He went further by asking her to go home and get the sweatshirt she was wearing when the incident happened, and put it on to make sure she was dressed appropriately! Doubly traumatised, the student heard about the unit and came to us.[9]

In spite of all the awareness-raising campaigns around the newly ratified sexual harassment policy, it was impossible to guarantee that all legal departments at the various faculties would have the capacity to investigate sexual harassment incidents appropriately. Gehlauf and Popovich (1994) have listed several factors that can influence the handling of sexual harassment complaints in universities and these are mostly based around personal perceptions. The investigator's reactions, therefore, were in line with the Egyptian cultural context where sexual harassment is not well defined. Verbal harassment is not considered actual harassment in this context, and all sexual harassment myths that blame the victim and find excuses for harassers are perceived as undebatable truth.

In an attempt to avoid similar incidents, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit then put in place a centralised system where all sexual harassment cases are presented either at the unit itself or at the president of the university's office. Two female lawyers, trained on how to handle the cases – either psychologically or legally – are assigned to the unit and all questioning now takes place at the unit for reasons of confidentiality and reassurance. This arrangement applies only to students, junior faculty, and administrators. Since the unit still had no say on which law professor undertook any investigation against any academic staff member, the victim and the case in this circumstance were still subject to the professor's personal perception. However, after some negotiation with the university administration, a law professor who happens to also be a member of the unit's executive committee, has now been assigned to investigate all sexual harassment cases filed against professors.

This arrangement has helped the unit on two fronts. First, finally after two years the unit could keep a record of sexual harassment cases and trace identifying patterns, thus enabling it to create more effective interventions. Second, it gave the unit credibility and created a sense of trust that was important for the victims. Ganga Vijayasiri's study 'Reporting Sexual Harassment' (2008) asserts the importance of trust and an enabling culture as two vital factors to encourage reporting. These are achieved to a great extent by this modified reporting and investigation system. Although it is hard to assert that this new system is the direct cause of increased reporting, it is safe to say that it has at least contributed to it.

As can be seen, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit is not involved in any of the investigations, nor does it have the authority to even start an investigation. With no legal authority or investigatory powers, the unit's role has become that of an entity that tries to follow up on cases to ensure victims' rights and fair processes. Nonetheless, with very little authority, it has become difficult to even keep a record of cases.

5 Empowerment and accountability

Before assessing accountability to victims of sexual harassment at Cairo University, it is important to clarify what is meant by both empowerment and accountability in the context of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit. The focus in this article is on the concept of accountability as a contractual relationship in a moral community, within which relevant relationships exist (Schweiker 1993; Shearer 2002; Smiley 1992). Thus, the definition offered by Menocal and Sharma (2008: 5), where accountability is 'the relationship between two parties, those who set or control the application and implementation of the rules, and those who are subject to the rules' is the most relevant to this research. Yet those 'subject to the rules' are not just passive recipients, but rather they are active participants who are aware of their rights and make their own choices. Hence, empowerment in this context is the power to break the silence and speak up about sexual harassment. This simple act of speaking up involves a courageous act of defiance, defiance of both power structures and cultural norms, but most importantly it is a demand for the 'application and implementation of the rules', that is a demand for accountability. Therefore, in order to assess the level of accountability, it is important to investigate both 'voice' and 'response'.

5.1 Voice and response

In the past four years, the unit has mainly dealt with peer-to-peer sexual harassment complaints – 74 per cent of the complaints have been student against student. Complaints from administrative staff amount to 11 per cent of the total, again the majority of which is peer-to-peer harassment. Professors come in third place of those accused of harassment, with 11 per cent of cases against professors. Reports against security guards

Figure 2 Total reports of sexual harassment to the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit
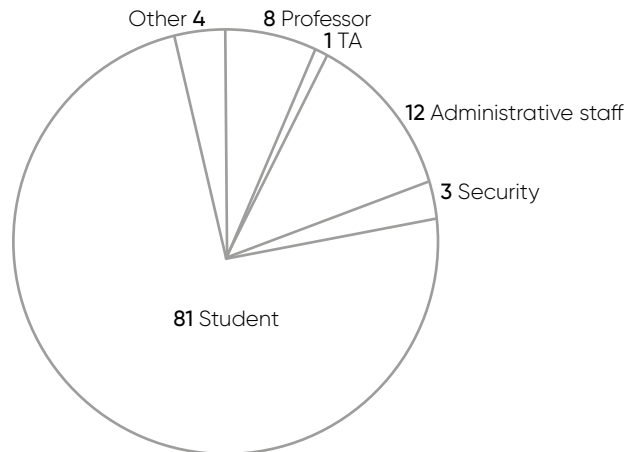
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Table 1 **Sanctions applied**

| Verdict	Student	Professor	Employee	Other
Suspended for a specific duration	5	1		
Subject to disciplinary board	16	3		4
Formal warning	15			
Verbal warning	2	2		
Investigation retained due to the absence of complainer	6			1
Investigation retained due to lack of evidence	11	2		
Suspension from work on half payment basis			2	
Salary deduction			3	
Termination	1			2

Source Author's own.

are 4 per cent, while reports against technicians and janitors represent only 3 per cent.

Apart from 8 of the 109 cases, complaints were from students. Most grievances have been about verbal abuse; however, sanctions vary, based on the investigators' judgement as to the gravity of the incident (see Table 1).

The number of cases that have been closed is alarming. A total of 13 cases were closed for lack of evidence, while another 7 were closed due to the absence of the complainant. Both reasons are of concern since this could be an indication of lack of trust or lack of confidence in the results. Plus it also raised the issue of 'evidence' that needs further consideration. In three cases, sanctions were imposed on the complainant because the report implicated her.[10] Similar to other universities, 'tension between complainant empowerment and concerns about legal liability is built into the institutional fabric of the university as its practices, rules, and interests systematically constrain the handling of sexual harassment complaints' (Kihnley 2000: 70).

From statistics available for cases over the past four years (2014–18), it has become clear that the actual implementation of a verdict is rare, especially if the accused is a professor or a high-ranking administrator. For example, out of the eight cases filed against professors during the past four years, only one professor was subject to suspension for two academic years,

Figure 3 Timeline of complaint process
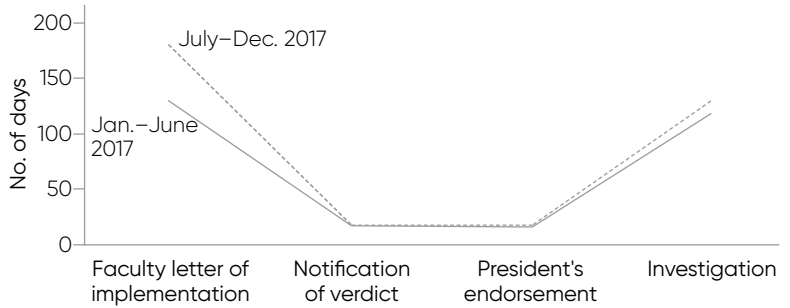
Source Author's own.

while the other three were subjected to disciplinary hearings: one was acquitted, another got a verbal warning, and the third has no verdict as yet.

Table 1 shows that as long as it is a student, employee, technician, or janitor, the university holds responsibility and tries to ensure that disciplinary action is taken against the harasser. Yet challenging the impunity and power of professors needs different strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider both empowerment and accountability in degrees. If we look at the numbers, it becomes obvious that there is a direct relationship between numbers of reports and responsiveness, since the response to the large number of student-against-student reports, and the enforcement of sanctions on non-teaching staff testify to both empowerment and accountability. However, if compared to student-against-professor reports, it becomes clear that there is neither absolute empowerment nor absolute accountability.

Another challenge to responsiveness is the time span each case takes. Although the average total time is 55 days, very close to the verbal agreement that a case is resolved within a maximum of 50 days, this is misleading, as some cases take much longer while others take a much shorter time.

As can be seen from Figure 3 showing the number of days that each action within a case took during the first and second halves of 2017 (El Said 2017), the investigation legitimately takes a long time, yet the time a faculty takes to implement a sanction is the longest. In one case, where the verdict was the suspension of a student for a month, by the time the faculty was notified, he had already graduated. If this is indicative of anything, it shows that a response is not always timely.

6 Accountability for whom?

There are around 260,000 students, comprising the majority of the university community. There are also, however, administrators, faculty, security, and janitors with different levels of power and

influence. Working with students has been easy and rewarding. Many students got involved with the unit's awareness-raising campaigns and volunteered to form what we have termed the 'students' team', which currently has approximately 1,000 student volunteers. Most of the faculty, however, still resist engagement with a lot of cynicism and sarcasm. Several attempts at addressing the staff have been made, such as holding awareness events at the faculty club, or addressing the different departments' councils. Though there is no open hostility, there is, however, very minimal cooperation and very limited participation.[11] In short, it is reasonable to say that the unit has not been welcomed among university staff. It has been made to look like a student activity that does not involve the rest of the university community and, more importantly, does not challenge any power relations or threaten the hierarchy of power.

A greater focus on students, on the assumption that they were the most vulnerable, led to the silencing of a very important strata of the university: young scholars, demonstrators, and assistant lecturers. It is true, as Menocal and Sharma have shown, that 'not all voices are equal or equally heard. It remains unclear who is actually excluded by some of the spaces and mechanisms created to encourage "voice" and "participation"' (2009: xi). Ironically, the most muted voices are not the most vulnerable, i.e. students and administrative staff: in fact, the most silenced voices are those of graduate students and TAs. Recent research conducted at the university to assess the extent of sexual harassment on campus found that nearly 48 per cent of the researched sample of graduate students and TAs had been exposed to sexual harassment (Amer 2014), yet almost none had been reported. Out of a total of 109 complaints, only two official complaints have been made from a graduate student against her supervisor; while there has been a number of verbal complaints, in each case the student refused to officially file the complaint. This is evidently due to the fact that reporting their research supervisors will put them at higher risk and threaten their status. One of the complainants who filed an official complaint subsequently decided to stop investigations and drop all charges; the other insisted on continuing in spite of efforts made by the professor's colleagues to stop her.

7 Accountability and power

Power and fear are both at play when it comes to disclosure of sexual harassment cases, as noted by Billie Wright Dzeich and Linda Weiner as early as 1990 in their book *The Lecherous Professor: Sexual Harassment on Campus*. While peer-to-peer harassment can be as harmful as professor-to-student harassment, professor-to-student harassment is much more complex with multiple layers of power dynamics. As Leila Whitley and Tiffany Page (2015: 39) correctly note, 'the intensely hierarchical structure of relationships inside the university... [coupled with]... the power inherent in the teaching relationship

creates an unequal dynamic that can leave students vulnerable to abuses of that power'. Stories of sexual abuse are many, yet the amount of courage needed to file a complaint against a professor is enormous, especially given that the structure can put the victim at a disadvantage. The total number of official complaints against professors during the life of the unit has been just seven (see Table 1). Three of the cases were based on collective complaints, where both male and female students complained about the professor's attitude towards women students and sexist remarks they had made about them. Though the three cases ended with the professor only receiving a verbal warning, the fact that they were collective complaints put pressure on the university and thus some sort of sanction was enforced. On the other hand, individual cases have rarely resulted in sanctions and many attempts at pressurising the student have been made.

According to research '[a]ccountability challenges power and vested interest' since 'more transparency about abuse, corruption or other forms of wrong doing can create an image in public opinion that things are getting worse, while the opposite is the case' (Theisohn 2006: 20). The only case where a graduate student insisted on filing an official complaint with the unit put the accountability of the university to the test and exposed how power and accountability are at odds. After months of investigations and questioning, the investigator could only reprimand and recommend a written warning because there was not enough evidence to indict the professor. While the woman was sufficiently empowered to come forward and speak, she did not have any leverage to hold the university accountable. In fact, the consequence for the student was much graver than the sanction on the professor. The department where she was registered for a doctoral degree has tried to dismiss her for lack of academic seriousness, in that she failed to submit parts of her dissertation for a few months, disregarding the fact that there was an ongoing legal dispute between her and her supervisor.

As Director of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit, the reaction I received when I followed up the complaint with the relevant parties in the dispute felt for me as if professors were invincible, and that accountability has its limits when dealing with those in positions of privilege. The universal phenomena of 'complaining women' as 'disrupting departments, placing reputations and careers in jeopardy, and interrupting other students who are also academically dependent upon the sexual harasser', as noted by Whitley and Page (2015: 44), resonated with the responses that the unit was receiving from those who shared their experiences. Whereas the unit sees its role as pressing for accountability, some in academia see this role as a vilification and causing undue reputational damage for faculties.

It became apparent that as long as the unit works with students, it is 'safe' as we are not treading on anybody's toes or challenging any power structure. If the offender is a peer, there are few obstacles to accountability, as in the case of student-to-student harassment or employee-to-employee harassment. Reporting a grievance against a peer is also less risky, and so it was easier for women to report peers. Reporting research supervisors, however, will put a complainant at higher risk and threaten their status.

Structures of power in a male-dominated domain such as the university inevitably influence the degree of accountability. The university as an institution is hierarchal by nature with complex power relations, which allows for various types of abuse including sexual (Osborne 1992; Kihnley 2000; Whitley and Page 2015). Within this hierarchal context, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit is trying to empower women and give them voice, with the view that, as Alina Rocha Menocal and Bhavna Sharma explain, increasing voice will make the institution more responsive and thus more accountable. The means by which the unit attempted to give voice was through creating an effective reporting mechanism. Nonetheless, an effective reporting mechanism does not guarantee 'effective voice' (Menocal and Sharma 2009: 8).

8 Accountability with no teeth

As Fox (2015: 357) has noted, 'Voice needs teeth to have bite – but teeth may not bite without voice'. It would be a naive assumption to believe that a rise in numbers of complaints means greater 'voice' or greater accountability. As Menocal and Sharma (2008: 66) have rightly stated, a 'linear causal relationship in which increased voice automatically results in greater accountability cannot be assumed and could lead to unrealistic expectations about what increasing citizens' voice alone can achieve'. Whereas an increase in reporting is an increase in empowerment as victims speak up, and could be considered as a marker of success. According to Janet Beer in her speech at the Universities UK Conference to address harassment, 'One measure of the success of university communities effectively beginning to tackle sexual violence and misconduct are disclosure and reporting levels' (2017). Yet it is important to have a responsive system that can be accountable to victims of harassment. Menocal and Sharma (2008: 30) conclude that '[l]inking "voice" and "accountability" can only be meaningful when citizens have the knowledge and power to make demands, and those in positions of power have the capacity and will to respond'.

The Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit has made an impact and attracted a lot of attention, being the first of its kind in the Middle East. The support of the administration and its association with the president of the university gave it power and authority. Nonetheless, very important elements are missing. The UNDP *Institutional Arrangements to Combat*

Corruption: A Comparative Study (2005) determines seven factors for the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies: (1) independence; (2) a solid and comprehensive legal framework; (3) strong political backing; (4) adequate financial, human, and technical resources; (5) adequate powers of investigation; (6) a coherent and holistic strategy; and (7) support of society at large. Out of these seven factors, the unit only has a 'coherent and holistic strategy' that is based on the three-pronged approach of prevention, intervention, and referral.

Similar to any anti-corruption body, the unit needs to have its independence. Despite the appearance of power, in reality, with no budget, the unit has no autonomy which is necessary for any independent body. Secondly, the fact that the unit was invented 'on the spur of the moment' by a decree from the president of the university and since it is unprecedented and is not part of the university's organisational structure, there is no sustaining legal structure, making it fragile and dependent on the goodwill of the university's council. Finally, and most importantly, it does not have any investigatory powers, making it dependent on the university's legal department which in many cases represents a chauvinist culture that blames the victim.

The lack of these elements makes accountability and answerability questionable. Jonathan Fox asks a very important question: 'Is "answerability" enough to "count" as accountability, or does the concept necessarily require the inclusion of the capacity to sanction as well?' (2015: 353). He states:

> [F]rontline accountability campaigners, operating in institutional contexts that combine high risk with little means of recourse or redress, are likely to be quite strategic about investing their limited political capital primarily in forward-looking, preventative approaches. (*ibid*.)

The question then becomes whether the unit should follow his advice and confine its work to prevention, and if so how is accountability to be factored in, and more seriously what will happen to the credibility of the unit itself?

9 Conclusion

It is important to note that addressing sexual harassment is a very thorny issue as it challenges both structural and cultural power structures. It is important to be able to work within the system to reform it. It is also important – borrowing Chris Linder's title – to develop a power-conscious framework that would dismantle these power structures (Linder 2018).

After several years of work, it has become obvious that the campus community cannot be dealt with as a homogeneous community. Hierarchy is an integral part of the higher education system; therefore, it is necessary to tailor the message in response

to this hierarchal structure. Furthermore, and more importantly, is to reconsider the measures that would guarantee that in spite of the different legal procedures for each category of the community, there is enough transparency to ensure fairness.

In order to ensure accountability, it is mandatory to shift the focus 'from the avoidance of liability to the need to educate learners and educators on the effects of sexual harassment, the myths surrounding sexual harassment, and the role that culture plays in the perception of sexual harassment' (Smit and du Plessis 2011: 40). Having vertical accountability, whether upwards or downwards, is not enough for creating a campus free from harassment. There needs to be horizontal accountability, where peers hold perpetrators accountable to ensure a zero-tolerance policy. Although it has been noted that horizontal accountability is integral to academia (Lindberg 2013), when it comes to sexual harassment, it takes more than informal norms and sets of regulations; it takes a change of culture that does not tolerate sexual harassment, and a change of perception. However, this will not happen until there is a cultural change that genuinely incriminates sexual harassment and hence enforces what Lindberg (2013: 14) calls 'reputational accountability'.

Nonetheless, it is no small feat that the discourse around sexual harassment at the university has changed. A spillover effect is taking place, giving more credibility to the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit and empowering more victims. To sum up, I can say that we have been taking giant steps towards achieving our goal, 'a safe university for all'.

Notes
1 Maha El Said, Professor, Cairo University, Egypt.
2 See the **United States Department of Justice website** for an overview of the law and its implications for educational institutions.
3 See **Legislative Assembly of Ontario website** for more information.
4 Article 306A of the penal code was amended to criminalise harassment in the form of words, gestures, and actions expressed in person or through other means of communication. Although the amendment criminalises sexual harassment, it still falls short of civil society ambitions, especially in that it defines key concepts narrowly, such as limiting harassment to

the 'intent to receive sexual gratification', and marital rape is not mentioned. Furthermore, it focuses on the defendant's motivation, rather than the harm done to the victim, ignoring the survivor's feelings of humiliation and intimidation.

5   The Supreme Council of Universities is a governing body that oversees all universities in Egypt; see its **website** [in Arabic].

6   Due to the massive population of students (around 260,000), it was found sensible to appoint unit coordinators at each of the 25 university institutions and faculties. Ideally, each faculty is supposed to have two coordinators for liaison between the faculty and the unit.

7   Egyptian Disciplinary Courts are part of the judicial section of the Egyptian State Council. It is mandated with the disciplinary procedures for employees of the highest level of management and their equivalent thereof. Accordingly, all disciplinary committees for professors have to have a member from the State Council.

8   It is unfortunate that changes to the situation concerning sexual harassment only happen as a reaction to a scandal or grave situation. The law criminalising sexual harassment was passed only after nine women were sexually assaulted during celebrations of El Sisi's election. The unit was established due to another scandal when a student was harassed by a group of students on campus.

9   The victim in this case needed intensive psychological support, which she received through the unit.

10 In two of these cases, the girl was accused of insulting the harasser using obscene language. The victim had no witness, but the perpetrator had witnesses.

11 The unit holds several public events such as marathons, cycle rallies, and on-campus marches. In spite of the fact that the-then president of the university participated, less than ten professors have taken part.

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