

I want to thank Ms Orr for bringing this motion to the Assembly.

In writing this speech I was trying to think how to convey what even the most subtle experience of sexual harassment is like and where it starts.

Think of your most cringeworthy moment – think of where you have embarrassed yourself -you feel a sense of horror, you feel the blood rushes up your neck to your face, your heart beats faster, your stomach feels sick – and all your head wants to do is get the hell out of there. It's a physical, emotional and mental response. Its quite horrible.

So now, go to the office meeting – the professional workplace setting – the scene surrounding you is something that you have dreamed of – you are at the table!! If you have read US corporate executive Sheryl Sandbergs book - you are Leaning in.

Then the man sitting on your left – starts talking to you, his body language is directed at you, the way he looks at you is intense, his attention is on you, he speaks only to you – suddenly, instantly you get that flood of a feeling of embarrassment – which, coincidentally is the same physical, emotional response as when you feel threatened.

This situation manifests itself in you being incredibly conscious of your own behaviour and you withdraw – you know he is watching. You make yourself small, you can't think straight.

That's just the beginning, that's just a look and a feeling.

I want to dispel a myth about sexual harassment – that its nice to have the attention from a, superior or a colleague at work. Its not. From the moment it starts, as I have described, it's a deeply embarrassing, threating situation. If the attention of the colleague was on you because you were a super star at work, bring it on – everyone likes to be recognised and acknowledged for their good work. Sexual harassment is attention that has nothing to do with

your good work – it is an explicit articulation of a power imbalance that is sexual in nature. The second you first experience that feeling that I described, that feeling of embarrassment, dread - it's a massive problem.

I'll go a step further, using my own experience as an example – to talk about the process of making a formal complaint - In my case, I made my complaint with the support of my workplace, ANU, to the Vice-Chancellor of Auckland University of Technology, Derrick McCormack. I naively believed that once I had exposed the nightmare that I had been living for two years, that an institutional professionalism, institutional self-preservation, and basic right vs wrong would kick in.

It did not. The perpetrator, Dr Abbott, remained in his job, with no repercussions for his behaviour whatsoever – I was the one who was going to have to change my behaviour and my career was the one that was going to be impacted.

As I discussed in my inaugural speech in December, I reached a point of desperation and I ended up going to the New Zealand media.

The significant media attention resulted in Dr Abbott losing his job. The backlash on AUT was so significant, that it resulted in the University commissioning one of NZ's leading female QC to conduct an independent inquiry into sexual harassment at AUT. The report was finally released a few weeks ago.

The report found that Vice Chancellor, Derrick McCormack was aware of Dr Abbott's long standing 'health' issue – which is called alcoholism – and was well aware of other complaints of sexual harassment and poor behaviour before mine.

The QC Kate Davenport reported on my story stating:

A feature was also the need to protect Dr Abbott's reputation and not to start an investigation which in itself might damage his

reputation. If AUT had viewed the complaint as one impacting on Dr Abbott's ability to carry out his role at AUT (ie one of sexual harassment/harassment and not a personal matter) I consider that it is likely that the investigation would have continued...

.... No one can now say what conclusion AUT would have reached if they had widened their inquiry into Dr Abbott's conduct However, AUT did not do this and it is this failure that I am most critical of – the failure to take formal action. Even with the information known, the response by AUT was muted and Dr Abbott did not even receive a disciplinary warning.

The reason I share this is to highlight what happens in these processes. All I ever wanted was a fair investigation. This situation started for me four years ago. I have had to very publicly expose myself to expose him. As much as the experience of sexual harassment was a very destructive one, the process of making a complaint and having that complaint ignored and disrespected has equally been a devastating process. Although I feel vindicated from the findings of this report, AUT Vice Chancellor Derrick McCormack is still in his job – despite it being him who was the person, the man, who made every single decision the QC is most critical of and because of his failure to act historically - that allowed for significant harm to come to me. My experience highlights how workplaces protect those in powerful positions, powerful men protecting other powerful men – to the detriment of their institution and to either employees.

While sexual harassment may be the behaviour of one individual, it is a workplace problem, it is a cultural problem. I speak to workplaces across the ACT – reflect on your own culture, having appropriate policies, codes of practice and reporting structures in place is so critical – it protects you as an employer and protects workers. Any workplace in Australia could be the next parliament house. Review your policies and practices – they will work to protect everyone.

I welcome and support Ms Orr's motion to help bring about this cultural change in the ACT.