**Concerned student letter about National Student Safety Survey.**

Dear Bettina Arndt,

I am a student at an Australian University and I was recently asked to complete the 'National Student Safety Survey' designed to examine students perceptions of safety at Australian universities and experiences relating to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

As I was completing the survey I was shocked and alarmed at how the survey had seemingly been deliberately constructed in a way likely to produce results that will exaggerate perceived rates of sexual violence on campus and thereby distort and manipulate public opinion and policy. The authors have applied definitions of sexual assault and harassment that are so broad they conflate normal interactions between men and women with heinous and brutal acts of violence. This is an injustices to survivors.

To start the survey, the authors asked us whether we have experienced any unwanted sexual acts or contact that 'happened because someone physically forced you, threatened you, or made no effort to check whether you agreed or not'. We were then given a list of potential unwanted interactions ranging from touching over clothes and kissing to anal and vaginal intercourse. On the next page, we are told that any of these experiences would constitute a 'sexual assault'. Really? According to this vague definition any sexual encounter in which consent has not been explicitly communicated could be considered a 'sexual assault'. Is every awkward, uncomfortable or cringeworthy sexual experience that is an inevitable part of being a young person learning to navigate the intricacies of adult relationships a 'sexual assault'? This definition of sexual assault is not able to distinguish sexual violence form ordinary consensual sexual encounters. It is so broad that it is meaningless. Applying this definition, any sexually active person could conceive that they have been the victim of what was once considered the most heinous and reprehensible of crimes: 'sexual assault'. Are the authors of this survey really trying to equate an awkward kiss to a woman being stalked and forcefully raped at knife point? The conflation of these two incomparable circumstances is a disservice to survivors of sexual violence.

The survey authors enact a similar fallacy when enquiring about experiences of sexual harassment. They define sexual harassment as 'unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favours or conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated'. They then list experiences which they assert constitute instances of sexual harassment. These ranged from being 'stared at' or someone 'touching you, hugging you, or invading your personal space' to having 'a sexual video of you posted online without your permission'. Being stared at is now considered a reportable sexual offence and equivalent to having a sexual video being posted online without permission?

This survey represents a shameful attempt to inflate statistics about sexual violence on campus by applying definitions of sexual assault and harassment that are so broad they cannot be distinguished from ordinary interactions between men and women. It is encouraging young women to perceive any uncomfortable or awkward sexual experience as a violent sexual violation and it is casting benevolently intentioned young men as sexual predators. How many men will undeservingly have their lives and reputations shattered because of this rhetoric?

The authors of this survey are causing moral panic, hysteria and producing empty, misleading statistics. They are extorting the painful experiences of those who have suffered true violent crime for their own twisted ideological and political agendas. They are diminishing and invalidating the experience of the very people that they purport to advocate for.

I have decided to send this letter anonymously because I am concerned about the repercussions that speaking out on this may topic have for my future.

I would like to disseminate this letter further because I think that it is important to speak out on this issue. However, I am concerned about the reputational damage that may occur should this letter get traced back to me. Do you have any advice on how I should approach this?

Thank you for the important work you do.

Yours faithfully,

A concerned student