

Case Study #6**The NUS Student-led Gender and Sexual Justice Movement**

In 2019, National University of Singapore student Monica Baey made a call, through social media, for more stringent punishments to be taken against a fellow student who had filmed her in the shower in her residential hall. This incident galvanized the student population to take steps that would encourage the university administration to improve its response to sexual harassment cases amongst the student body.

CATEGORY**KEY ACTORS**

Monica Baey

NUS Students Union

Various Student Organisations

Association of Women for Action and Research

WHO ARE THE ACTORS?

Monica Baey is a student at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She came into the media spotlight in 2019 when she took to social media to call for more stringent punishments against a fellow student who filmed her in the shower without consent. This incident galvanized the student population to take steps that would encourage the university administration to improve its response to sexual harassment cases amongst the student body. It also ignited a national conversation on consent, sexual harassment and assault on campus and in wider society.¹

¹ Sim, Dewey. 2019, April. "Singapore student Monica Baey wants firm action from NUS after the man who filmed her in hostel shower goes 'scot-free'". *South China Morning Post*. (Retrieved on 22 June 2020 from:

NUS Students Union (NUSSU) is a student-run organisation that serves as an intermediary between the student body and the university administration, representing students' interests and concerns. Autonomous from the administration primarily in operations and budget, student leaders from various faculty and non-faculty clubs volunteer to form the NUSSU council, which is headed by an executive committee (NUSSU EXCO).² In the year leading up to the incident in 2019, NUSSU played a role in pushing the administration for amendments to the student code of conduct that would define consent, sexual misconduct, and how the university would deal with offenders. It also recommended steps to be taken by the university to promote a stronger consent culture within the community.

Various **student organisations** and non-official student groups within NUS have also stepped up to support the call for change in NUS' policy on sexual misconduct. In some cases, student organisations have already been advocating for change prior to the Monica Baey incident. The groundwork that was laid by these organisations would eventually serve as a framework for NUS and the eventual committee to review the institutional policy against sexual offences. Salient student organisations include but are not limited to - Gender Collective, enCAPTulate, TFreedom, Yale-NUS' G Spot and Kingfishers for Consent (KFC), etc.³

Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) is the leading gender equality advocacy group in Singapore. Started in 1985, it has carried out research in and advocacy projects around "laws, public policies and mindsets that discriminate against women", including sexual harassment, gender-based barriers, and sexual and reproductive rights. AWARE has been an active participant in the conversation around campus sexual misconduct since as early as 2014, when it released an op-ed emphasising the importance of consent in response to the mishandling of NUS orientation games.⁴ Since then, AWARE has been involved in the movement to build a culture of consent, providing resources to raise awareness of the issue and of the history of sexual misconduct against youth.⁵ AWARE has also inspired a range of civil society organisations that champion anti-discrimination causes in relation to gender and sexuality.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3006950/singapore-student-monica-baey-lashes-out-nus-after-man-who>

² NUSSU. (Retrieved on 22 June 2020 from: <https://nussu.org.sg/about/>)

³ Huiwen, Ng. 2019, April. "Peeping Tom caught filming in NUS hall shower: Thousands sign petitions calling for tougher action". *The Straits Times*. (Retrieved on 22 June 2020 from: https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/peeping-tom-caught-in-nus-hall-shower-thousands-sign-petitions-calling-for-tougher-action?utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=STFB&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1Pjkc6OuCXKyLPmEzQh1YXHMMr2IrguKEoAR_Pdn5vRcOZTpCNW-NaooE#Echobox=1555899587)

⁴ AWARE. 2014, August. *Build a university culture that respects consent*. (Retrieved on 22 June 2020 from: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2014/08/build-a-university-culture-that-respects-consent/>)

⁵ AWARE. (Retrieved on 22 June 2020 from: <https://www.aware.org.sg/about/>)

WHAT'S WRONG?

Institutional disciplinary policies against sexual misconduct have been heavily criticised to be inadequate in dealing with the issue. Some sanctions have been condemned as overly lenient. Consequently, they are believed to be unable to serve as sufficient deterrence against perpetrators. An additional point of discontent lies in the assumptions and intentions indirectly conveyed by the institution through their policies. Decision-making regarding the severity of punishment by the institution would account for the 'likelihood of rehabilitation' and 'potential for future success' of the perpetrator.⁶ Some believed that this effectively allowed perpetrators to get away with their transgression with nothing more than a 'slap on the wrist' as long as they are regarded to have the 'potential to do well'.⁷

Second Strike and You're Out is an example of perceived excessive leniency on the part of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) disciplinary policy.⁸ ⁹ First-time offenders are given a "range of punishments" that include a warning and suspension. However, they are not immediately expelled. Only students involved in multiple sexual misconduct incidents within or without NUS are expelled. This is seen to amount to a 'free pass' for offenders. Only when one is caught more than once would they be punished. This results in an injustice against the survivor of said assault.

⁶ Channel News Asia. 2019, April. *NUS voyeur given conditional warning as he was 'assessed to have high likelihood of rehabilitation'*. (Retrieved on 29 June 2020 <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/nus-voyeur-conditional-warning-rehabilitation-police-monica-baey-11470014>)

⁷ Teng, Amelia. 2019, April. *NUS Peeping Tom case: Lawyers say warning appears 'unusual' but mitigating factors need not be made public*. The Straits Times. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/nus-peeping-tom-case-lawyers-say-warning-appears-unusual-but-mitigating-factors-need-not>)

⁸ The Straits Times. 2019, April. *NUS' policy on sexual misconduct cases: 'Second strike and you are out'*. (Retrieved on 29 June 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/nus-policy-on-sexual-misconduct-cases-second-strike-and-you-are-out>)

⁹ Note: ex-NUSSU Vice President Hao Jing notes that the 'second strike and you're out' 'policy description' was "at best a misnomer, certainly not representative of any formal policy I knew of, since no one was ultimately expelled from NUS for sexual offences". However, it is also to be noted that NUS Vice-Provost Florence Ling has expressed NUS' policy vis-a-vis sexual misconduct perpetrators as such: "For first-time offenders, because we are an educational institution, we want to give the students a chance. Student offenders who appear before the Board of Discipline for the first time are given a range of punishments, but not immediate expulsion".

Conditional warnings also present a problem. In the case of Monica Baey's perpetrator, the police issued a 12-month conditional warning, citing the perpetrator's likelihood of rehabilitation and remorse.¹⁰ This, however, leaves the standard to which one measures aforementioned qualities up for debate. The police also assert that a prosecution, jail sentence, and permanent criminal record would cause problems for the perpetrator in the future. However, this approach has been criticized for paying disproportionate attention to the welfare of the perpetrator, rather than the survivor.

Lack of Victim Support is also an issue. Prior to April 2019, when Monica Baey's posts on social media gained nation-wide traction, there was no proposal for a dedicated victim care unit in NUS. Additionally, little attention was given to providing healthcare or other forms of support for victims who experience trauma. Survivors of sexual violence often have to deal with the fallout on their own, which is not limited to but may include resources spent in seeking treatment. These inadequacies have been argued to be symptoms of a larger underdevelopment of consent culture in campus spaces.¹¹

Neglect of education on consent culture has been identified by students and activists as a root cause of the issue. Consent culture is defined as one where "the prevailing narrative of sex is centered around mutual consent and bodily autonomy" and this notion of respect underlies all issues involving sex, sexuality, and more.¹² Historically, disciplinary measures taken by NUS included blanket bans and mass cancellation of activities. These attempts have been criticized by NUS student groups as superficial and misguided as they fail to target the underlying biases that result in an unsafe sexual climate.¹³ Commitments made towards institutionally standardized compulsory consent education for incoming students lapsed after the incident in 2016 and failed to come to fruition.¹⁴ ¹⁵ Reactionary institutional

¹⁰ Channel News Asia. 2019, April. NUS voyeur given conditional warning as he was 'assessed to have high likelihood of rehabilitation'. (Retrieved on 29 June 2020 <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/nus-voyeur-conditional-warning-rehabilitation-police-monica-baey-11470014>)

¹¹ AWARE. 2017, February. *AWARE welcomes initiatives to better support sexual assault victims in criminal justice*. (Retrieved on 15 August 2020 from: <http://sacc.aware.org.sg/portfolio/aware-welcomes-initiatives-to-better-support-sexual-assault-victims-in-criminal-justice-system/>)

¹² Canadian Federation of Students Ontario. 2017, October. *Campus Toolkit for Creating Consent Culture*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Consent-Toolkit.pdf>)

¹³ Gender Collective and The G Spot. 2016, July. *Statement of Concern Regarding NUS Provost's Announcement on the Suspension of All Student-Organised Freshmen Activities*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10aUlcj7y0e5fgVAZkhLKFEhYJFnhv6cmvW-WomlGU3U/edit?fbclid=IwAR17FD3ImBEBSVJx0x_pffTa9JGmk-D-egb6O65HI_yGbjfQRdikV7IWFZE)

¹⁴ Based on an interview with NUSSU and information from April 2019 Town Hall.

¹⁵ NUSSU President Richard Wang notes that currently, there are compulsory training and e-modules for all orientation leaders, undertaken on an annual basis. He also cautions that the efficacy of said

attitudes, as opposed to proactiveness towards fostering sexual safety and education, are key criticisms against the university in ensuring it is a safe campus for all.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

NUS orientation games (2014-16)

In **2014**, reports surrounding the sexualised nature of orientation games at the National University of Singapore (NUS) first emerged into the spotlight. According to an article released by the Straits Times, complaints were lodged when a male student was asked to “stripped to his shorts before being blindfolded and bound with tape, as female students licked whipped cream off his neck.”¹⁶ However, such expressions of discomfort were not the first, as similar complaints have been reported since 2008. Following that, AWARE appealed for the need to “build a university culture that respects consent” in response to the 2014 reports. They cited that students could be pressured into silence when witnessing or participating in uncomfortable orientation activities due to their desire to fit in or not to be seen as a “prude”¹⁷. AWARE suggests that such a culture might have ramifications that go beyond orientation.

In **2015**, AWARE conducted a survey amongst 500 young adults, ranging from 17 to 25 years old, where it was discovered that one in three had experienced sexual assault or harrasment.¹⁸ It was also reflected that amongst those who responded with personal experiences of sexual assault or harrasment, most were afraid of turning towards their family or friends for help. This was mostly due to the fear of being shamed. Therefore, most young people in Singapore would prefer help in the form of formal support such as counselling, legal counselling, assistance from the police and a helpline, which emphasised the necessity of such support.¹⁹

In **2016**, risque orientation games at NUS were once again brought into the spotlight. The activities include having male students perform push-ups while female students are asked to lie beneath them.

measures may be limited due to the nature of online modules as well as current capacity constraints. Of additional note, this does not include a general consent session for all students bar student leaders.

¹⁶ Sun, David. 2016, July. *Students say NUS orientation camp games increasingly sexualised; some told to re-enact rape scene*. The Straits Times. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/students-say-nus-orientation-camp-games-increasingly-sexualise-d-some-told-to-re-enact-rape>)

¹⁷ AWARE. 2014, August. *Build a University Culture That Respects Consent*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2014/08/build-a-university-culture-that-respects-consent/>)

¹⁸ Sexual Assault Care Centre. 2015, March. *Survey: 1 in 3 young people have faced sexual violence; few seek or receive help*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <http://sacc.aware.org.sg/portfolio/survey-1-in-3-young-people-have-faced-sexual-violence-few-seek-or-receive-help/>)

¹⁹ Ibid.

Reports claim that students were asked to reenact an incestuous rape scene.²⁰ On July 29, NUS responded to such reports by suspending all student-organised freshmen orientation activities until further notice.²¹

Following that, NUS sets up a review committee to issue disciplinary sanctions upon student organizers of the orientation, and more than one student is suspended from campus. The committee subsequently released a report, stating the university's intentions to create a course for all students on issues of consent and sexual respect. In the same year, the issue of inappropriate orientation games had reached the parliament, where Member of Parliament (MP) Louis Ng, filed a parliamentary question directed at then-Acting Minister for Education, Ong Ye Kung, appealing for the introduction of anti-harassment training and guidelines for tertiary education.²²

Emerging awareness work by NUS student organisations (2016 - 2019)

Student organisations responded actively to the events of the NUS orientation games. Gender and sexuality student organisations Gender Collective and G Spot release a joint statement in **July 2016**, urging the university to invest in long-term measures that foster a strong consent culture, rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

In **September 2018**, a group, identifying themselves as Concerned NUS Students, organises to run for the NUS students union's upcoming elections. They ran on a platform to re-organise the union in order to promote greater transparency, encourage the administration to communicate "more openly, accessibly, and transparently", and "promote NUS as an academic community that is open and inclusive of all who are admitted to study here."²³ In addition, their manifesto emphasised the pursuit of justice against students charged by the University for serious offences. Most of the candidates ran successful

²⁰ Sun, David. 2016, July. *Games at NUS camps increasingly sexualised, say students*. The New Paper. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/games-nus-camps-increasingly-sexualised-say-students>)

²¹ Yap, Sean. 2016, July. *Sexualised orientation games: NUS suspends all student-organised activities*. ASIAONE. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://www.asiaone.com/singapore/sexualised-orientation-games-nus-suspends-all-student-organised-activities?amp>)

²² Hingorani, Shailey. 2019, May. *Do universities need help keeping their students safe?* The Straits Times. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/do-universities-need-help-keeping-their-students-safe>)

²³ Concerned Students. 2018. *Be the Change You Want to See*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

http://concernedstudents.mystrikingly.com/?fbclid=IwAR3bLvgTni6VhKQQk3GNEwu2fxJyicXkl-m65qUMOB5gx7wlyil8W_OsCY#our-manifesto)

campaigns and were elected into the union. They would eventually become important conduits between the university administration and the student body in the midst of this controversy.²⁴

In **April 2019**, student group NUS Students United released data on the outcome of sexual assault cases in NUS in the preceeding 3 years: results show that only 1 student had ever been expelled on sexual assault charges.²⁵ Later that month, 500 students signed the petition “NUS Students Against Sexual Harassment”, addressed to NUS administration.²⁶ A joint statement was released by enCAPTulate, Gender Collective, G Spot and tFreedom calling out the inadequate response by NUS.²⁷

The early movement in Yale-NUS on addressing sexual misconduct (2017-18)

In **the latter half of 2017**, several Yale-NUS students began agitating for increased awareness of sexual violence on campus and stronger institutional response against perpetrators. Accounts from Yale-NUS’ Associate Director (Residential Education & Dispute Resolution) Andrew McGeehan outlined how students set up an interactive wall installation for survivor solidarity and drafting a comprehensive commentary/document about sexual misconduct on campus.²⁸ The latter resulted in the formation of a Sexual Respect and Culture Task Force, comprising mainly students and several administrators.

²⁴ Han, Kirsten. 2019, September. *In the #MeToo Era, Student Activism Makes a Comeback in Singapore*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://newnaratif.com/journalism/in-the-metoo-era-student-activism-makes-a-comeback-in-singapore/share/xuna/9357e8d9b96de4920a57ba55651c5687/>)

²⁵ Yahoo News. 2019, April. *Group of NUS students surface past disciplinary cases: Only one student expelled in last three years for outrage of modesty*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/group-nus-students-leak-past-125714621.html?guccounter=1>)

Note: it was later discovered that this group only comprised one person, and that the page was subsequently taken down. (Retrieved on 4 September 2020 from:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/man-fired-by-hdb-over-spoof-nussu-facebook-page-now-assisting-police-with-investigations>)

²⁶ The Online Citizen. 2019. *Statement of Concern Regarding Sexual Harassment at the National University of Singapore*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://www.onlinecitizenasia.com/statement-of-concern-regarding-sexual-harassment-at-the-national-university-of-singapore/>)

²⁷ enCAPTulate, Gender Collective, The G Spot, tFreedom. 2019, April. *Joint Statement of Concern Regarding Sexual Misconduct in NUS*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/19wXoKAgm_GGugBYwutnPArXhJoR_yK-znV_U-jOT6aw/edit?fbclid=IwAR2ORCI47q3htLLBlvtXTsUp8dMtNxzjbBS1G0J2fWjgVUaBJuqHbW5A-cY)

²⁸ Based on an interview on 6 July 2020 with Yale-NUS Associate Director (Residential Education & Dispute Resolution) Andrew McGeehan.

In **2018**, the task force launches Yale-NUS' first Campus Sexual Climate Survey and releases a subsequent report based on its results.^{29 30} In **March**, a group of students stage a sit-in to protest inadequate institutional responses.³¹ In **August**, Yale-NUS launches Kingfishers for Consent, a student group aimed at educating peers about safe and consensual relationships and shifting cultural norms that perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence on campus. Members receive comprehensive training on key issues such as violence prevention and workshop planning.³²

Yale-NUS also subsequently updates their Sexual Misconduct Policy and Survivor Support programmes. Changes include improved channels of redress, survivor support, and mandatory consent education.^{33 34 35} According to Associate Director McGeehan, the policy changes and programmes initiated in Yale-NUS would eventually serve as case studies for NUS in the following year, and key players served as consultants.³⁶

Actions taken by the NUS Student Union (2018-19)

²⁹ Yale-NUS. 2018. *Climate Survey Review*. (Retrieved on 3 July 2020 from:

<https://students.yale-nus.edu.sg/climate-survey-review/>)

Note: The report was written by students, with the support of the administration.

³⁰ The Octant. 2018, August. *All The Changes From Aug. 20'S Town Hall And What They Mean For You* (Retrieved on 3 July 2020 from:

<https://theoctant.org/edition/issue/news/all-the-changes-from-aug-20s-town-hall-and-what-they-mean-for-you/>)

³¹ Jie Ying, Yip. 2018, March. *Frustrated At College Administration, Students Stage Sit-In Protest*. The Octant. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://theoctant.org/edition/ix-6/news/frustrated-college-administration-yale-nus-students-stage-sit-protest/>)

³² Yale-NUS. *The Kingfishers for Consent*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/sexual-misconduct/kingfishers-for-consent/>)

³³ Yale-NUS. *Sexual Misconduct*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/sexual-misconduct/>)

Note: Survivor support programs were improved to include first-responder procedures, where Residential College Advisors, Dean's Fellows, the Associate Director for Residential Education, Student Support Team, Assistant Deans and on-campus counsellors are required to be trained in survivor support to provide immediate assistance. Survivor support programs were improved to include first-responder procedures, where Residential College Advisors, Dean's Fellows, the Associate Director for Residential Education, Student Support Team, Assistant Deans and on-campus counsellors are required to be trained in survivor support to provide immediate assistance.

³⁴ Yale-NUS. *Survivor Support*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

<https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/sexual-misconduct/support/>)

³⁵ Yale-NUS. 2016, July. *Orientation Booklet*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020

from: <https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2014/01/Orientation-Booklet-Shorter-19-7-final.pdf>)

³⁶ Based on an interview on 6 July 2020 with Yale-NUS Associate Director (Residential Education & Dispute Resolution) Andrew McGeehan.

In light of the various agitations in preceding years, in **late 2018**, NUSSU leaders present their inputs on the periodic review of the Code of Student Conduct to the Vice Provost for Student Life. Part of the proposed amendments seek to broaden the definition of consent in the Code. With the exception of one point, their proposal was accepted in full, with the consultation of the NUS Office of Legal Affairs and further academics throughout the process.

On **1 February 2019**, the renewed Code of Student Conduct is officially rolled out with the inclusion of a new appendix: in it, comprehensive definitions of Consent and Sexual Misconduct, and several possible examples of such misconduct are provided.³⁷

In **April** of that year, the students union council discussed seeking support from the President of NUS to carry out a study on sexual harassment on campus and conduct a school-wide sexual climate survey. The aim is to better understand the extent of sexual misconduct on campus, and help determine how better to support and protect its students. Similar to an earlier proposal to develop video tutorials on consent, it lacked substantial support from the university.³⁸ Both proposals are only approved and expedited after Monica Baey's Instagram stories, publicly addressing her personal experience with on-campus sexual harassment, comes into public attention later that same month, on **April 19**.

Monica Baey takes to Instagram (18-19 April 2019)

In November 2018, NUS undergraduate Monica Baey was filmed in the shower without her consent by fellow student Nicholas Lim. After reporting the incident to campus security and the police, the perpetrator was suspended for a year, made to attend counselling sessions and perform compulsory community service, banned from Eusoff Hall and compelled to write an apology letter to Monica.³⁹ The authorities also issued him with a 12-month conditional warning.⁴⁰

Monica found the penalties insufficient, and posted a series of Instagram stories from 18-19 April 2019 recounting the details of the incident and demanding institutional change from the university - she called for "real consequences for perpetrators that commit such acts", and she sought assurance that "NUS will

³⁷ National University of Singapore. *Code of Student Conduct*. (Retrieved on 3 July 2020 from: <http://nus.edu.sg/osa/resources/code-of-student-conduct>)

³⁸ Based on an interview on 19 December 2019 with exco members of NUSSU, including President, Richard Wang

³⁹ Based on an interview on 7 August 2020 with NUSSU President Richard Wang. Wang notes that these were sanctions levied by the school. Sanctions issued by the court are separate.

⁴⁰ Seah, L. 2019, April. *A Detailed Timeline of the Monica Baey Incident*. Alvinology.com. (Retrieved on 3 July 2020 from: <https://alvinology.com/2019/04/23/monica-baey-nus-nicholas-lim-instagram-petition/>)

reprimand [these perpetrators] seriously so other potential perpetrators know they will face punishment”.

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NUS subsequently issued a press release announcing its intention to “review the current disciplinary and support frameworks”,⁴² but the movement had begun. Monica Baey’s stories received attention from both the national and international media, and articles detailing previous sexual misconduct cases arose. This coverage sparked outcry from fellow students, the public and the Minister for Education himself.

Students’ response was swift and immense - within days, the petition “NUS Students Against Sexual Harassment” had received 500 signatories⁴³, concerned student organizations had issued a joint statement⁴⁴ and a group of NUS students (NUS Students United) would release a history of sexual assault cases in a bid to demonstrate the administration’s insufficient response towards perpetrators.⁴⁵

On 22 April, NUS announced that a Town Hall would be held soon. On the same day, then-Minister of Education Ong Ye Kung denounced the penalties in Monica Baey’s case to be “manifestly inadequate”⁴⁶. It was a sentiment shared by NUS President Tan Eng Chye, who sent an email to alumni the next day, apologizing for the university’s inadequate response to the same incident.⁴⁷

On 25 April, the Town Hall was held and over 400 students and staff attended the event, including Monica Baey. The event left many students disappointed with the administration’s response - two days later, an

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² How, M. 2019, April. *NUS responds to case of student being filmed in shower, committee to be convened*. Mothership. (Retrieved on 10 July 2020 from <https://mothership.sg/2019/04/nus-responds-monica-baey-filmed-shower/>)

⁴³ The Online Citizen. 2019. *Statement of Concern Regarding Sexual Harassment at the National University of Singapore*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.onlinecitizenasia.com/statement-of-concern-regarding-sexual-harassment-at-the-national-university-of-singapore/>)

⁴⁴ The G Spot. 2019, April. Facebook. (Retrieved on 10 July 2020 from <https://www.facebook.com/GSpotSG/posts/2163797037037498>)

⁴⁵ Yahoo News. *Group of NUS students surface past disciplinary cases: Only one student expelled in last three years for outrage of modesty*. (Retrieved from: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/group-nus-students-leak-past-125714621.html>)

⁴⁶ Channel News Asia. 2019, April. *NUS' penalties for sexual misconduct case were 'manifestly inadequate': Ong Ye Kung*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/ong-ye-kung-moe-penalties-sexual-misconduct-nus-monica-baey-11468688>)

⁴⁷ Teng, Amelia. 2019, April. *NUS president Tan Eng Chye apologises for how sexual misconduct case was handled*. The Straits Times. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/nus-president-tan-eng-chye-apologises-for-how-sexual-misconduct-case-was-handled>)

Open Letter criticizing the Town Hall had garnered the support of 300 NUS students.^{48 49} A group of dissatisfied students - convinced that the university's response was insufficient after the Town Hall - would later form the organization Students for a Safer NUS (referred to amongst the student body as 'SafeNUS').

The Review Process Begins

On **30 April**, the review committee holds its first official meeting. On the following day, a list of its members is released via email. Madam Kay Kuok, member of NUS' board of trustees and chair of Yale-NUS' governing board, would head the committee. Of additional note, the committee boasts significant student representation, with 3 out of its 8 members as student leaders.⁵⁰

Over the next two weeks, the committee consulted representatives from student groups and hostels, and subject matter experts. On **15 May**, the committee publishes its recommendations, calling for tougher sanctions against sexual misconduct offenders and to set up a victim care unit.⁵¹ Over the next three weeks, the committee held further engagement sessions with the wider student body and commissioned an independent research consultancy to conduct an online survey to gather the views of the entire student body.

On **10 June**, the board of trustees accepts the review committee's recommendations in full.⁵² New sanctions include a minimum one year suspension, expulsion for severe offences, requirement of a certificate of rehabilitation by a counsellor and/or medical professional prior to returning to campus, a notation of disciplinary action on the offender's transcript, and a no-contact protocol between the victim and offender.

⁴⁸ Yahoo News. *Over 300 NUS students issue letter to criticise town hall meeting on sexual harassment* Yahoo News Singapore. (Retrieved on 24 June 2020 from: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/300-nus-students-issue-letter-criticise-town-hall-meeting-sexual-harassment-150758256.html>)

⁴⁹ Sulaiman, David. 2019, April. *NUS Student Union "extremely disappointed" in how town hall session was run.* (Retrieved on 4 September 2020 from: <https://mothership.sg/2019/04/nus-student-union-town-hall-disappointed/>)

⁵⁰ Zheng, Zhangxing. 2019, May. *NUS review committee on sexual misconduct to submit full recommendations by mid-June 2019.* (Retrieved on 8 August 2020 from: <https://mothership.sg/2019/05/nus-review-committee-monica-baey-meets/>)

⁵¹ Teng, A. 2019, May. *NUS committee proposes longer suspensions and expulsion for sexual misconduct offences.* The Straits Times. (Retrieved on 24 June 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/nus-committee-proposes-longer-suspensions-and-expulsion-for-sexual-misconduct>)

⁵² NUS. *Building a Safer Campus.* (Retrieved on 6 July 2020 from: nus.edu/safer-campus)

Its report introduced a new disciplinary framework which grants the person who reported the case a greater voice in its proceedings. They will be provided updates of the disciplinary process, consulted for clarifications, accompanied by a care officer during board hearings, and granted an avenue to request a review of disciplinary outcomes in exceptional circumstances.⁵³

Additionally, a Victim Care Unit (VCU) was announced, which aims to provide personalised continuity of care to survivors of sexual misconduct, be the central point of contact, and act as the interface between victims and NUS' disciplinary and care units. It would be staffed by trained and experienced care officers to support survivors from the point of incident until special care is no longer required. The VCU would also work closely with other support networks at the University to ensure a holistic support network is provided for victims.⁵⁴

The committee concludes its report, highlighting areas of improvement to be pursued in campus physical security and educating students and staff on consent and respect. The sanctions framework will be reviewed every two years.^{55 56}

There are mixed opinions on the efficacy of these changes. NUSSU President Richard Wang is supportive, stating that, in terms of moving in the direction of promoting a culture of consent and respect, the changes made by NUS "have served [that] purpose".⁵⁷

Conversely, SafeNUS co-founder Carissa Cheow was critical of the Review Committee's policy changes, arguing that they did little to improve the situation:

⁵³ NUS. *Review Committee Report*. (Retrieved on 6 July 2020 from:

<https://myportal.nus.edu.sg/studentportal/alerts/all/docs/survey/Review-Committee-Report.pdf>)

Note: "exceptional circumstances" is elaborated in article 34 of the Review Committee Report as "where there has been a serious procedural irregularity or breach in the disciplinary proceedings, or where evidence which was not previously available has subsequently emerged or become available, or where other compelling and exceptional circumstances exist"

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The Straits Times. 2019, May. NUS committee proposes longer suspensions and expulsion for sexual misconduct offences

(Retrieved on 24 June 2020 from:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/nus-committee-proposes-longer-suspensions-and-expulsion-for-sexual-misconduct>)

⁵⁶ Based on an interview on 7 August 2020 with NUSSU President Richard Wang: NUS did not just set up a victim care unit, but also reformed the student conduct unit (think of it as a prosecutorial/court clerks sort of unit that facilitated BoD hearings) into the office of student conduct reporting directly to the provost. A/P Stella Tan is heading it, who is a Raffles hall residential fellow who's got a background advising AGC in prosecuting sexual crimes.

⁵⁷ Based on an interview on 7 August 2020 with NUSSU President Richard Wang.

“An inordinate amount of attention for example was placed on two things: penalties and security. I will go on the record both as a survivor and an organizer to say that neither will make us safer, and both will instead make us feel even less safe. But they’re incredibly attractive to institutional decision-makers because they will appear to the public as concrete steps that signal their seriousness.”⁵⁸

Andrew McGeehan also expressed that he felt minimum sanctioning policies and punitive measures may not be appropriate.

“I don’t think minimum sanctioning allows for the nuances of every situation and if there is a minimum sentencing not appropriate to what the survivor wants, it would inhibit them from reporting. We cannot treat all sexual incidents the same if we want to be survivor-centric.”⁵⁹

Moving Forward and Further Advocacy

Yale-NUS Associate Director Andrew McGeehan said that Yale-NUS College continues to engage their students in conversation about sexual wellness and remain responsive to feedback. Examples include supporting students with setting up events related to sexual assault and consulting focus groups of students who have been active in sexual wellness activism on campus. A second sexual climate survey was sent out in March 2019 and concerned students also set up a continued iteration of the survivor solidarity wall in 2020.⁶⁰

Moving forward, NUSSU President Richard Wang shared that NUS looks to welcome diverse voices and discussions, to move the institutional culture to be “more open”.⁶¹ Likewise, SafeNUS has also been working to be more intersectional in terms of its organizational structure, noting that having diversity within the group allows for greater depth and awareness on the ways that different groups within society experience violence and allows for these perspectives to help educate the group’s readers and followers.

Mr Wang also encourages student interest groups to partake in shaping university policies by proposing concrete and specific ideas. He stresses that the students union is presently in a position to push

⁵⁸ Based on an interview on 31 July 2020 with the founding committee of Students for a Safer NUS (SafeNUS).

⁵⁹ Based on an interview on 6 August 2020 with Associate Director of Student Life Andrew McGeehan

⁶⁰ Based on an interview on 6 August 2020 with Associate Director of Student Life Andrew McGeehan.

⁶¹ Based on an interview on 7 August 2020 with NUSSU President Richard Wang.

proposals to NUS' senior management and is better equipped to be representative of student interests. Underpinning this change is an empowerment of the union. Wang attributes this change to two key factors - communication and trust. First, as the senior administration and NUSSU council began to work more closely and with greater frequency over the April 2019 issue, mutual trust was built.⁶² Secondly, NUSSU has been working on bettering its communication with the student body. One facet of this is getting the message out about what the union is and has been doing for students. This is crucial in terms of visibility, which again builds trust.⁶³ He admits, however, that more work needs to be done on bettering transparency between the university and the student body at large.

According to SafeNUS co-founder Luke Levy, the university administration has also been collaborating with SafeNUS on initiatives such as the 2020 NUS Sexual Climate survey, the distribution of 'consent culture booklets' to select Freshmen Orientation Programmes/residential colleges and a sexual assault first responder training planned for 2020.⁶⁴

WHAT STRATEGIES WERE USED?

1. Awareness and Baseline Context of Sexual Climate on Campus

Much of the work of the earlier years before the events of the social media movement worked towards building a baseline of knowledge and language of sexual misconduct awareness. When NUS came under media scrutiny for their sexualised orientation games in 2014, AWARE released an op-ed in the Straits Times Forum urging universities to "build a university culture that respects consent" which served as a first step in addressing the issue of sexual misconduct in universities.⁶⁵ The strong condemnation from a widely respected NGO on issues of gender and sex sent a strong message that NUS' policies were due for change.

In 2015, AWARE released survey results that revealed 1 in 3 of the 500 young people they interviewed has experienced some form of sexual violence in their lives.⁶⁶ It also reflected that most young people in

⁶² Note: As of August 2020, Wang cites that senior management consults student leaders more proactively, running drafts of circulars through them before policy papers are released.

⁶³ Note: In 2019, NUSSU introduced the 100 day report, which details what the student union has done in the first 100 days since taking office. It was released via email to all NUS students.

⁶⁴ Based on an interview on 31 July 2020 with the founding committee of Students for a Safer NUS (SafeNUS).

⁶⁵ Jalote, S. 2014, August. *Build a university culture that respects consent*. AWARE. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2014/08/build-a-university-culture-that-respects-consent/>)

⁶⁶ Sexual Assault Care Centre. Survey: *1 in 3 young people have faced sexual violence; few seek or receive help*. (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from:

Singapore would prefer help in the form of formal support (counselling, legal counselling, assistance from the police and a helpline), emphasising the necessity of such facilities. Releasing these survey results and suggested solutions, on the heels of an ongoing controversy about sexual conduct in university orientation activities, provided concrete evidence that this was not an isolated incident but part of a larger trend that educational institutions should pay attention to.

Soon after, in November 2015, the Gender Collective and the G Spot launched the “Doing It Right” campaign on campus, involving talks and workshops aimed at educating students about sexual wellness.⁶⁷ AWARE was invited to a UTown Roundtable about sexual assault and residential living, which allowed them to connect with the NUS administration. Working with gender-focused student groups helped AWARE to bring its advocacy on sexual wellness onto campus in a conversation with university staff.

In 2018, Yale-NUS students created a Survivor Solidarity Wall where students put up anonymous stories of sexual assault to raise awareness of such issues on campus. A group of concerned students also wrote a letter expressing their unhappiness at the inadequacy of the school’s policies regarding sexual misconduct and posted it to each residential suite. They also held a sit-in protest as a visible sign of their discontent.⁶⁸

2. Agitating for Change beyond Punitive Measures

Students and student organisations alike, in the intervening years between the initial Orientation games saga outbreak and the events of April 2019, have continued to push the envelope in attempting to engage the university to take more proactive measures in ensuring the safety of students with regards to sexual misconduct. Instead of settling for stop-gap measures, they continue to push for systemic overhaul. This agitation may have resulted in quicker, more efficient actions on the part of the institution in 2019.

<http://sacc.aware.org.sg/portfolio/survey-1-in-3-young-people-have-faced-sexual-violence-few-seek-or-receive-help/>)

⁶⁷The G Spot: Yale-NUS Gender and Sexuality Alliance. 2016. *Unconscious gender bias affects women academics, say professors* (Retrieved on 24 July 2020 from <https://yale-nusthegspot.tumblr.com/>)

⁶⁸ Mothership. 2018, March. *Yale-NUS students hold silent sit-in protest, unhappy with school policies*. (Retrieved from <https://mothership.sg/2018/03/yale-nus-students-protest/>)

In 2016, Gender Collective and G Spot released a joint statement on the importance of fostering consent culture, instead of relying solely on punitive measures.⁶⁹ Alongside tFreedom, they followed this up by launching the annual Sexuality & Gender Month, to educate and raise awareness about related issues.

This emphasis continued in 2018, with the founding of Yale-NUS student group 'Kingfishers for Consent', as well as NUSSU student leaders' proposed amendments to the Code of Student Conduct, which included a comprehensive definition of consent. In the same year, NUSSU would also hold internal Focus Group Discussions that would form the basis of recommendations to the university's senior administration calling for videos on consent to be developed.

According to NUSSU President Richard Wang, these recommendations would be greenlit in 2019 after the Monica Baey incident. He also observed that NUS's line of 2019 compulsory consent modules bore some resemblance to their recommendations.⁷⁰

It should also be noted that in addition to fostering consent culture, other non-punitive policy changes undertaken by NUS include integrating increased security measures in residential facilities and the establishment of the Victim Care Unit.⁷¹

3. Continuity and Consistency

For years, students have continuously engaged the university with proposals and ideas to better the university's sexual climate and policy. The sustained nature of this work is important as the efficacy of advocacy depends in part on the amount of pressure activists are able to place on governing institutions reticent towards proactive change. Often, this force comes in the form of popular local support for a cause. In order to build a large base of popular support, activists must lay the groundwork for the organisation of this eventual movement. Groundwork comprises facets mentioned above, such as awareness-building and the provision of alternative solutions. Equally important is the aspect of consistency. It is a signal to both to the governing institutions and the broader public that sexual assault is a serious issue, and that there is significant desire for meaningful change amongst university students.

This can be seen in the engagement of various student organisations with the university in the years preceding, as well as after, April 2019. Saliently, this sustained work allows the building of a community,

⁶⁹ The Straits Times. 2016, July. '*Sexualised' uni camps spark fierce debate*. (Retrieved on 18 July 2020 from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/sexualised-uni-camps-spark-fierce-debate>)

⁷⁰ Based on an interview on 19 December 2020 with NUSSU President Richard Wang.

⁷¹ Ibid.

creating a space for students interested in issues of sexual justice to come together. As the community grows and its work gains traction and publicity, the public gains familiarity with the movement, and arguably becomes more receptive to the advocacy of these organisations.

4. Fostering Solidarity

Besides engaging upwards (ie the university), student organisations also engage laterally - they create and sustain spaces of safety and support within the community. Solidarity culture is especially critical for creating safe spaces for survivors and the larger community, as well as to build community-led accountability mechanisms that serve as alternatives to formal mechanisms. Issue surrounding sexual respect and consent cut across various student spaces, thus illustrating the need for collective action and solidarity building within this realm.

Solidarity building had taken two main stratas during this incident. One was that the inadequate initial response undertaken by the administration prompted the coordination of a joint statement released by various student groups across NUS and Yale-NUS including enCAPTulate, Gender Collective, G Spot and tFreedom. A collective statement of this nature was vital in illustrating how strongly students felt about the particular issue, holding the administration accountable for their response as well as future follow-up actions. This contributed to major administrative response such as the Town Hall held to discuss student concerns regarding sexual assault.

Secondly, it was precisely this solidarity building which engendered the creation of SafeNUS. The coming together of several student groups across the university pointed to the gaps in the existing student group system as well as the imperative for a larger student group which could be geared towards addressing cultures of sexual respect and consent. SafeNUS was ultimately born out of a need for a more sustained community which would have the capacity to hold the university accountable, whilst creating safe spaces within the larger university.

Moving forward, SafeNUS Co-founder Carissa Cheow expressed her desire to see a university community-led broad-based coalition comprising student groups advocating for various social justice causes. "We all need to come together and pool our strategies and experiences towards concrete and long-lasting systemic change."⁷²

⁷² Based on an interview on 31 July 2020 with the founding committee of Students for a Safer NUS (SafeNUS).

CONCLUSIONS

When Monica Baey spoke out about her sexual assault experience, she rallied students and the public alike, and the overwhelming support galvanised the movement against sexual misconduct on NUS campuses. The media and public pressure moved the school administration to implement new sexual misconduct policies. While the effectiveness of these measures remains to be seen, this event displayed the potential of student advocacy and the impact it can have in agitating for change .

Conversations about consent and respect, and agitation for continued structural changes need to continue on campus. Student organisations like SafeNUS and an increasingly vocal and aware student body hint at a positive trajectory in sustaining awareness and engagements on this issue.

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