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| Victoria University of Wellington |
| Display of potentially offensive Salient images. |
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# Executive Summary

The Victoria University of Wellington Library is planning to publish the student magazine entitled Salient online as part of the New Zealand Electronic Text Collection (NZETC). The NZETC is managed by the Digital Initiatives Team at the Library. While scanning Salient staff noticed a number of images that could potentially offend readers. The images include nudity, violence, victims of war and images depicting suicide/execution. The Library currently has no policy in place to deal with such images in the NZETC. This report recommends the development of a Collection Development Policy for the NZETC and also an Image Display policy for the NZETC. Both of which should be made publicly available. It also recommends that all the offensive image content be made available but that the NZETC website architecture be modified to prevent these images from being displayed in search engine result pages.

# Introduction

The New Zealand Electronic Text Collection (NZETC) has been integrated into the Victoria University of Wellington Library which serves the university academic community. The Library’s goal is to support learning, teaching and research at Victoria University of Wellington. Library materials are offered without censorship to ensure that the integrity of each item is maintained. Similarly the NZETC digitises material as it is printed and will only correct errors introduced during the digitisation process. The Library will only restrict access to items in accordance with rulings from the Office of Film and Literature Classification Board and the New Zealand Film and Video Labelling Board.

The Digital Initiatives Team is currently digitising Salient, the Victoria University of Wellington student magazine, issues from the 1960s to add to the NZETC. During the process of scanning Salient staff noticed a number of images that could possibly offend or upset readers. This report will present research into the display of similar images by other institutions, a review of relevant literature and offer a set of possible solutions.

The NZETC website currently has over 50000 images but has no policy on how to display offensive images.

The potentially offensive images from some of the 1960s Salient issues include:

* nudity (both women and children)
* casualties of war (adults and children)
* violence
* images depicting suicide or executions
* drug use

It is planned to continue digitising other decades of the Salient magazine in the coming years. It is possible that similar images will appear in Salient issues from the 1970s and 1980s.

# Salient Magazine

The Salient magazine is Victoria University of Wellington’s longest running student magazine. The Salient offers an insight into student life and gives the student viewpoint on important issues of the time. The Digital Initiatives Team believes that the Salient magazine is a valuable addition to the NZETC collection. Salient offered its readers a critical view of events such as the Vietnam War by attempting to show the war in an uncensored or sanitised fashion. Political activism increased during the late 1960s at Victoria University of Wellington which corresponded with Salient covering issues such as the Vietnam War, racism, abortion and nuclear testing.

# How Images are Displayed on the NZETC

The NZETC has a policy of representing works online as closely to the printed copy as possible. All images are exposed to search engines and encoded with a caption or heading that accompanies them in the original work. If an image does not have a caption staff assign descriptive metadata to the image. Images can be viewed in context with the surrounding text or magnified without this context. Researchers accessing the NZETC from search engines can view images in their magnified form without the context of the original work.

The only instance where the NZETC deliberately withhold images is when the image depicts mokamokai. The mokamokai policy could be used to cover images of human remains in other works such as Salient but the evidence to support this policy was gathered specifically with mokamokai as the focus of consultation. Because family members are able to identify mokamokai it was decided that it would not be appropriate to make these images available without family consent.

The NZETC’s policy to withhold mokamokai was made after conducting extensive consultation and is consistent with the practice of other institutions such as Te Papa. The policy states that the NZETC will “present the text with all associated images except those depicting mokamokai or human remains”.

# NZETC Users

The aim of the NZETC is to provide researchers at a tertiary level with research materials from New Zealand and the Pacific but the collection is freely accessible to any person with internet access. The collection is also fully exposed to search engines and maintains a high ranking in search results. The majority of NZETC users access the collection through Google searches. The collection is also linked to from many other websites.

Some readers may not wish to view the identified Salient images without warning and some are not suitable for children using the NZETC. NZETC content is also harvested by other institutions such as DigitalNZ, who have a different target audience and may not wish to expose their users to this content.

# Literature Review

There is a wealth of literature on censorship in libraries and library ethics but unfortunately there is a lack of research on digitisation projects and how to deal with offensive content. Most libraries advocate making all information available to users and to avoid censoring material, however the online environment is different to the physical library in terms of accessing material.

Paul Dalgleish writes that private material in archives [and libraries] is “effectively protected due to practical barriers of access.” For example the time it takes to travel to view the record, limits of indexing and browsability. A phrase to describe this concept, ‘practical obscurity’, was coined by Archives NZ.

Three themes were present in the literature. Firstly, that institutions dealing with offensive content should have visible written policies to help deal with complaints and defend selection choices. Barbara Jones writes that developing a written policy will help to defend challenges made against the selection of items (p72). Dalgleish argues that it is important to develop policies and procedures that reflect community concerns (p68). Dalgleish also states that if an item is identified as being possibly offensive then a defensive procedure should be established to help with complaints (p78). Jerilyn Marshall describes developing a policy to help staff deal with offensive material being displayed on public access PCs (p14). Despite this policy never being used it is still there for staff if necessary.

Secondly, there are many approaches to dealing with offensive material but the consensus seems to indicate that using common sense as a guide is the best way forward (Hughes p.70). Duthie writes that no law or regulation is absolute which makes it difficult to rely on such things to guide you in your decision making (p89). Marshall writes that there is ‘no usual’ way to face these challenges (p13) and Anderson argues that librarians should follow their own conscience when dealing with challenges of personal and professional ethics (p103). New Zealand’s Broadcast Standards Authority (BSA) suggests that visual and verbal warnings should be considered by people displaying content that might disturb (p5).

A third theme around censorship was present in the literature. The majority of authors reviewed called for libraries to avoid censorship. It is important to note that several of them were referring to censorship in traditional library practice and not when developing an online collection. Jones writes that we should avoid censoring materials due to possible harm to minors (p72) and that using such materials as a centrepiece for differing viewpoints is the best approach (p90). Duthie argues that the worst forms of censorship are self-censorship and inappropriate or misleading cataloguing (p90). New Zealand's Broadcast Standards Authority sets broadcasting guidelines and states that current norms of good taste and decency should be taken into account. The BSA also requires broadcasters to treat people/children who have been humiliated with care and sensitivity. Dalgleish warns that what individuals and communities will tolerate is complex (p68) and Anderson suggests that library functions are human targeted and that libraries are morally responsible to their users (p102). The Smithsonian Institution has developed a Digital Asset Access and Use Policy which defines sensitive content as material that can “give offense if inappropriately used or displayed”. The Smithsonian will restrict such materials if access to them is requested.

# Consultation

Internal consultation with Library Technology Services staff took place through a presentation of the potentially offensive images at a team meeting and a second meeting to confirm if teammates agreed with the recommendations of this report. Teammates were shown all images that had been identified and none were deemed to be too offensive to display on the NZETC. It was decided that the difficulties in determining what images would be offensive to NZETC readers would also apply to staff members working on the collection. This could lead to inconsistent decisions about what images should go online being made across the team. It was agreed that no elegant complete solution would be possible. A good faith attempt to reproduce Salient that is culturally acceptable and technically possible solution was the best outcome.

At the time of writing, communication with four other organisations has taken place. Firstly DigitalNZ were consulted and are in favour of including Salient in its entirety with when they next harvest the NZETC. However they have asked for these images to be given consistent metadata in order to control the display of them at a later date if necessary. The National Library of New Zealand is working on guidelines around what kind of images can be accessed with restriction.

Te Papa was also contacted about how they deal with offensive images in their collection. They have a policy to not show human remains, this is consistent with their Kōiwi Tangata policy that restricts access to Taonga to a few internal staff and iwi. Images in their photo collection depicting nudity are also withheld due to difficulties in offering the necessary collection context.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification provided advice it would not be illegal to display an image of a young naked gir publishedl in Salient if in context with the article it was originally printed with. The relevant section of the *Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993* is:

**3** Meaning of objectionable  
**(1)** For the purposes of this Act, a publication is objectionable if it describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.  
  
**(1A)** Without limiting subsection (1), a publication deals with a matter such as sex for the purposes of that subsection if—  
  
**(a)** the publication is or contains 1 or more visual images of 1 or more children or young persons who are nude or partially nude; and  
  
**(b)** those 1 or more visual images are, alone, or together with any other contents of the publication, reasonably capable of being regarded as sexual in nature

# Display Options

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| **Solution** | **Pros** | **Cons** |
| 1) Display no images that may offend users. | No chance of upsetting users. | Censoring these images will mean researchers miss out on a crucial component of some Salient articles. |
| 2) Display images but without meaningful metadata. | Images are available to users who wish to read Salient. Search engines are unlikely to index images. | Introduces poor metadata into our system and means institutions that harvest our collection are unable to expose the content effectively. Images would not be retrievable through the NZETC search engine.  This option would, in effect, censor these images. |
| 3) Only display images in context with the article they were printed in. Where images normally appear a note would be inserted informing users to refer to the full page thumbnail. | Allows readers to view images in context with the text that accompanies them. Presents the images in the same fashion as the original work. Prevents unwanted reuse of these images. | This is not part of normal NZETC workflow. Thumbnails are very small and readers may miss out on seeing the images. Content partners (eg: DigitalNZ) do not harvest our thumbnails. |
| 4) Display images with full metadata but restrict search engines from linking to them. | Allows readers to view magnified copies of the images. Allows readers to search the NZETC for these images. External readers who wish to read the Salient can still see the content in its entirety. | We would be hiding these images from our largest source of traffic. Could prevent some users from accessing our content depending on their search strategy. |

# Recommendations

It is recommended that images be displayed in context and be fully searchable by the NZETC search engine. It is recommended that all images from the Salient be restricted from search engines as specified in option 4 above. This is because of the difficulties in deciding what might offend readers and how this might be applied by consistently by staff members who have different views on what is offensive. Technically this solution is also easier for staff to implement.

Publishing these works in full allows academics and researchers access to the Salient in its original form on the NZETC website. The potentially offensive images are important in conveying the nature of Salient at the time. Restricting offensive images from search engines will prevent users searching for such images from seeing them without the necessary context.

This report recommends that the NZETC develop a policy that states how it will deal with images of this nature, and that it be applied retrospectively and in future projects. The policy should state that the NZETC will determine if images in other collections should also be restricted on a case by case basis.

It is also recommended that the NZETC display a written collection development policy on its website. A mission statement that defines the aims of the collection and its target audience would also help NZETC staff in dealing with possible complaints.

# Resources

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