Peer harassment at MIT will be studied

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The nature and extent of sexual harassment, however, varies widely among departments and even more from one person to the next.

"Every individual reacts differently to a particular incident," Rowe explained. "The extent of harm done can range from none to real academic and emotional damage."

Women who have been at the Institute longer seem to be more affected by the problem, Berman said. "After several years and an accumulation of incidents, they become more and more sensitive to what is really happening," she added.

Graduate students experience other forms of sexual harassment, she said. In graduate work, networks formed among students and invaluable discussion of work are accomplished largely in informal meetings, such as lunch, Berman explained.

"This automatically happens for men, but women are not made a part of this unless they assert themselves," which men interpret as aggressiveness, she said.

The clear minority of women, who compose less than one-fourth the student population, is a prime cause of the problem, said Arthur C. Smith, professor of electrical engineering.

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