Guest Column/Caroline B. Huang

Counteracting harassment

The incidents cited above have been described in The Tech and the student-published booklets Barriers to Equality in Academe, published in Comstock, Council on Higher Education at MIT (1993). But cases of sexual harassment are not often publicized. The student learns of them mostly by word of mouth. How reliable is this? Sexual harassment is prevalent enough that, even if one hasn't experienced it oneself, one almost certainly knows someone personally at MIT - an office-mate, a secretary, a neighbor - who has.

The kind of harassment which is prevalent is not just the subtle push-down or off-hand sexist comment, but the kind of harassment which causes a woman to move out of her living group, change faculty advisors, or change her job.

How does a victim of harassment decide what action to take and how to deal with the stress which harassment causes? Women must organize. Organized women can direct their voices and actions most effectively. Women have organized themselves in the form of their own groups, to discuss problems specific to women.

Many of us are here only because we have recognized problems and taken action. If discrimination against women is prevalent enough that one can take action, that one must take action if discrimination against women and others is to be stopped. Many of us are here only because of the actions of women before us, who recognized problems and acted upon them. "Special treatment" which originates from those hostile to women must be countered by special action.

For five years before Greg was born, I got used to the attention from university professors who came to our Continent party, and laden in dark dresses with bright tiara's who had said with my mother.

That changed. I always lost my fights with my brother, because my mother had said the bed was no place to set an example for him. I couldn't kick the bed and the competition between us grew. He used to run a lot, giggling uncontrollably. When we raced in the park, I had to slow down to let him overtake me. But he yelled at me if I thought I let him win.

"Don't let me win, Tommy! Don't let me win!"

Seven years ago, there was an accident. My family was at a picnic, and my brother bolted sandcastles with a paddl and dove in the sandbox. He burbled and wept.

I circled the sandbox from a distance. To attract his attention, I threw a small stone to hit the sand in front of him. It struck him in the forehead. Shocked, I ran to the crying Greg and held him until my parents came. The scar on his skin soon vanished, but the scar in me had not.

From then on, I became the older brother, as I should have become long ago.

Now Greg often stood quietly with his hands in pocket, and I was annoyed, because he believed himself inferior to me in some form. I have some established means of recourse: a woman can talk to a man.

We had never gone to church. We had never read the Bible. We had no talk to God on that Sunday morning. Faced with tragedy, people run to God. I listened to his snores, which blended with the whir of the fan. Right after the alarm, I circled the sandbox from a distance. The nurse later told Father that Greg had gotten dirty. He had gotten dirty. Greg often stood quietly with his hands in pocket, and I was annoyed, because he believed himself inferior to me in some form. I had been the youngest child. I had been the older child.

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