

Sexual harassment warrants new definition

by Jennifer Lessard
News Editor

The subject of sexual harassment has been avidly addressed in the news since Judge Clarence Thomas, Supreme Court nominee, was accused of it by a former employee, Anita Hill.

Thomas was the individual on trial before the Senate Judiciary Committee, but the hearings and his confirmation yesterday affect not only the personal and political reputations of him and his accuser, but also the personal and professional actions of the public at large.

According to the Fri., Oct. 11, issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, 42% of women surveyed by the U.S. Merit System Protection Board in 1987 reported being sexually harassed on the job. The same edition also quoted Jean Dugan, an

aide to Senate Democrat Quentin Burdick of North Dakota, saying, "Sexual harassment is a power thing, which is why it happens more on Capitol Hill than anywhere else."

Yet, it happens elsewhere too. Recently, at Clackamas Community College, a gender equity committee has addressed this same topic, not toward employees, but students.

The main difficulty in dealing with the topic of sexual harassment, in both the U.S. Senate and at CCC, is in defining it. There are no hard and fast rules to judge this situation. It is very possible that in the near future Legislatures will come up with a new definition. Until then, the *New American Heritage Dictionary* defines harassment as, "to irritate or torment persistently, to wear out, exhaust,

to impede and exhaust by repeated attacks or raids." The definition by law states, "harassment is making one uncomfortable in their surroundings," or "any act that serves to annoy or alarm another person."

Does this mean telling jokes or light hearted stories, complimenting a member of the opposite sex, or asking for a date? When is it considered sexual harassment? Is it still as described by an individual interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal*, "the boss chasing the secretary around the desk," or more?

There are different opinions between men and women that have been aired recently in the news. According to Barbara Ley Toffler, senior partner at Resources for Responsible Management, a Boston Consulting firm, "There isn't a woman over 35 who hasn't

experienced some form of sexual harassment." As quoted in the Oct. 11 issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, Toffler explained that "everyone knows exactly what Anita Hill is talking about." Whether Thomas was guilty of the accusations or not is not the issue to many people. The fact that the subject is addressed gives women a chance to slam men, and men a chance to feel threatened and try their best at explaining their actions. According to Suzanne Garment, author of "Scandals and The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics", she "can not think of another scandal where there has been such a strict division between the sexes."

What does this all mean? It means that men should be very careful and realize that these jokes and stories meant to be light-hearted

can be taken the wrong way. They need to look out because their every word can be misinterpreted.

According to one individual interviewed on KATU-Ch. 2 news at 5:30 p.m. Oct. 13, "A lot of men don't seem to get it that what they are doing is considered sexual harassment." Some women feel that the worst offenders of true sexual harassment won't even attempt to mend their ways.

The verdict is in on Thomas, and his confirmation will directly affect his life. But how did the hearings, broadcast across the nation, affect attitudes toward sexual harassment? The hearings didn't give us a better definition to work from, so what now? Will men be more careful in their actions toward women; will women speak out more against men? Time will tell.

What is your definition of sexual harassment?



"When you hear about parents sexually harassing children. The dominating party taking advantage of a weak party."

Narcis Damian



"When it is an insult or put down to you. When it's not a joke anymore. There's a fine line and when you cross it it's not funny."

Kirk Southworth



"After you say that you aren't interested, they keep bugging you or hassling you."

Bernadette Feehan



"If you tell someone you're not interested and they keep bothering you and won't stop."

Valerie Zacher



"Bugging someone physically. Forcing them to do something and not taking no for an answer."

Scott Zacher



"When someone harasses someone of the opposite sex. Saying rude things."

Cindy Lauinger



"Sexual harassment could even be with the eyes. Any man who makes you feel uncomfortable about who you are and what you're doing is sexual harassment to me."

Sandy Palmer



"Grabbing."

Craig Inman



"When it goes past your comfort zone."

Meko Thomson



"Guys bothering girls against their will."

Tony Lewis



"Sexual harassment is when a man takes advantage of his position to intimidate a woman into doing what he wants her to do."

Debra Haggard



"It doesn't necessarily have to be a man. A woman can harass a man just as easily."

Tracy Newhart

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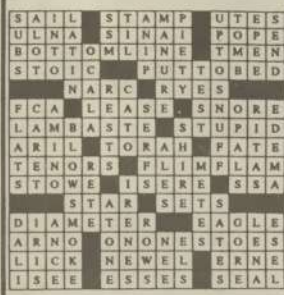
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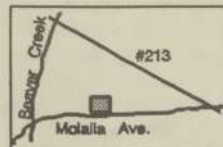
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"Making a woman feel uncomfortable in the workplace or anywhere. Whether it be verbally or physically. If a woman enters a room full of men and one of them says 'nice legs,' that would be an example."

Kim Lauterbach

Photos by Vivian Johnson
Quotes gathered by Heidi Branstator