



# Women in Libraries

Volume 21, Number 1

November 1991



## Sexual Harassment To Report or Not To Report

The scrutiny of Anita Hill and the charges she raised against Judge Clarence Thomas in recent weeks has brought a lot of attention to the subject of sexual harassment. For many people awareness is being heightened. Some feel justified in coming forward now that they have named their experience. Others may just as likely shrink from reporting a sexual harassment experience due to fears of "revictimization."

One question regarding the decision to report or not to report a case of sexual harassment is that of definition. What is sexual harassment? The term has been used to cover a multitude of behaviors from "anything that makes you feel uncomfortable" to actual physical assault. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines it as any unwanted physical or verbal sexual attention which is used to intimidate a person into submission. In an article published in *Public Personnel Management Journal* (10, no.4, Winter 1981: 402-407), Jennifer James suggests five guidelines to identify sexual harassment. It is usually repetitive, one-sided, and unwelcome. It also involves power of a physical and/or managerial nature. The fifth identifying feature is that the victim cannot get the harasser to stop.

Who are the victims of sexual harassment? Numerous studies have shown that anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment. Usually, though, the victims are women. More specifically, they are single women who have had post-secondary education who are working in non-

traditional positions with a peer work group composed predominantly of the opposite sex and supervised by the opposite sex.

Perhaps the most important issue in the decision to report sexual harassment concerns the atmosphere of the institution in which the victim works. Unfortunately, it is still not uncommon for the victim to be blamed for the harassment or to be told that she or he is overly sensitive and should ignore the whole thing. A growing number of institutions, however, are becoming more aware of the problem and have written policies and appointed committees to hear grievances. Experts say that the best case scenario would be to have a written sexual harassment policy outlining specific investigative and disciplinary procedures accompanied by mandatory workshops conducted at all levels of the work force. The policy statement would function to protect both the victim and the accused by ensuring that the complaint would be taken seriously and that due process would follow. Institutional encouragement to report sexual harassment could also be supported by incorporating the issue into employee surveys and by establishing hotlines to receive reports of harassment with confidentiality.

In the end, the decision to report or not to report an incidence of sexual harassment is a very personal one. Until our society's consciousness is further raised about the issue, the decision will perhaps also be a difficult one.

☒

# For Your Information

## Censorship of Feminist Opinions?

The following is a reprint of a letter from Susan Hildenbrand:

A persistent puzzle for those doing historical research in librarianship is the lack of feminist or women's interest material in professional library literature. Some recent experiences may shed light on the question. Historians, such as Dee Garrison, researching in library literature, note with amazement how little protest is expressed by library women over their status. Maybe the phenomenon is simply censorship in support of a professional image.

In December of 1990 an article appeared in *American Libraries*, written by a woman public librarian, indicating that women in public libraries were not choosing books suitable to the interests of male readers. Several of us were irate about this and I wrote a lengthy response. Too lengthy, I was told, and so it could not be published as either a letter or column (On My Mind). Diedre Conkling, chair of the Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship wrote a shorter letter, that was, it seems, too late. (She later showed that it was common for letters in response to articles to appear months and issues after the original article.)

While all this was taking place, several of us were working to establish a women's interests group in the International Federation of Library Associations. It was called to my attention that a piece had appeared in *WLW Newsletter* on the, er, patriarchal structure of IFLA meetings. This piece had been rejected by *American Libraries* as presumably too controversial since it allegedly attacked a foreign organization.

What is going on here? 1) The historical record is being distorted. It is being made to appear that American library women silently and submissively accept denigration and insult. 2) Intellectual freedom is once again exposed as something that gets little more than lip service. 3) Questionable editorial judgment is being displayed. Surely it is professionally more stimulating to print letters reflecting disagreement and controversy. The only letters printed on the article questioning women's competence were by men and two were highly laudatory and one was mixed in its praise.

It is important to note that the two incidents of rejection took place under two different editors. This is not a matter of personalities; it is a matter of institutionalization. *American Libraries* seems determined to present to the world a picture of bland, middle-class professionalism. Outsiders, such as budget-cutters or the incredible self-appointed censors may make troubles for us, but we are just one big happy family with relatives overseas who are basically just like us. This is patently untrue. When I expressed my indignation over the article bashing women in public libraries to a woman academic librarian, I was told that I was "too sensitive" and that there really was something the matter with public libraries and/or librarians. (The speaker feels herself immune evidently and is ready to believe bad things about women in public libraries.) All of us know of the negative attitudes expressed towards certain specialties, particularly children's work and cataloging. Attitudes towards non-professionals are sometimes primitive. Clearly we are not one big happy family and it might be a significant service to the profession to illuminate some of the tensions rather than to put a happy face on them.

One can speculate that there is also the traditional sense of malaise at the presence of "all those women" among many professional leaders both men and women. Some writers have mentioned the "badge of shame" mentality.

I am willing to send copies of my unpublished letter to anyone interested. Susan Hildenbrand, School of Information and Library Studies, Buffalo, New York 14260

Dee Garrison. *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*. New York: Free Press, 1979.

Carol Hole. "Click! The Feminization of the Public Library: Policies and Attitudes Make Men the Great Unserved." *American Libraries*, 21: 1076-1079, December 1990.

## Lesbian Writers Fund

The Astraea Foundation in New York has created a special fund for Lesbian Writers through a generous gift from Joan Drury. Each year five writers will be awarded \$11,000 each to pursue their work. The Fund encourages lesbian writers

from across the country and from diverse backgrounds to apply. Applications will be available after December 1, 1991 from: Lesbian Writers Fund, Astraea Foundation 66 Broadway #520, New York, NY 10012

# Equality Award

The Equality Award Committee selects an individual who has made a significant single or sustained contribution towards promoting equality between men and women in librarianship. Examples would include activity in such areas as pay equity, affirmative action, legislation and education. Any librarian, trustee or person working in a library, a library-related institution, organization, association or a subdivision of any of these is eligible for the \$500 cash award and certificate donated by Scarecrow Press. You can participate in the selection process by nominating

worthy individuals. Complete the nomination form below and send it to: Madeleine Tainton, Lorette Wilmot Library, Nazareth College of Rochester, P. O. Box 10996, Rochester, NY 14610.

The nominations must be received by December 1, 1991 to be considered by the Committee. The committee has to make its recommendation in early February. Send your nominations in right away so that they may receive ample attention.

## ALA EQUALITY AWARD 1992 NOMINATION FORM

I wish to nominate the following for the ALA Equality Award:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following categories best represent the area in which the nominee contributed to equality. (You may check more than one.)

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Discrimination in librarianship                      | Legislative       |
| Comparable worth/pay equity                          | Education         |
| Group effort (institution, professional association) | Minority Concerns |
| Research/publication                                 | Other             |

Please provide a short narrative description of the activities of the individual or group which you feel qualifies the nominee for the ALA Equality Award. Please include when and where the activity(ies) occurred.

If there are any documented reports of the activity(ies) please cite and attach if possible.

What impact do you believe this work has had on individuals? On the library and information science profession? Outside the profession?

Attach additional information as available.

**DEADLINE FOR NOMINATION: December 1, 1991**

SUBMITTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_



1984 Margaret Myers  
1985 Anita R. Schiller  
1986 Kay A. Cassell  
1987 Kathleen M. Heim  
1988 Kathleen Weibel  
1989 Sanford Berman  
1990 Betty-Carol Sellen

# Lesbian Fiction Contest

Guidelines for the annual Lesbian Fiction Contest are currently available from Spinsters Book Company, P.O. Box 410687, San Francisco, CA 94141. First-time writers and previously published authors are both encouraged to enter

the contest. Winners will be awarded with a \$1,000 cash prize plus royalties. Manuscripts must be submitted between January 1 and February 28, 1992.

## Acquisitions Notes

*Selected Bibliography for Integrating Research on Women's Experience in the Liberal Arts* compiled by Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne, sixth edition, 1988. Cost is \$8 per copy (including postage). Make check payable to Susan Van Dyne. Send orders to: Susan Van Dyne, Director, Women's Studies Program, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063.

An annotated guide entitled *Minority American Women: A*

Research Guide by Ruth Dickstein and Maria Segura Hoopes is now available as Occasional Publication #10 from the Southwest Institute for Research on Women. The guide gives diverse sources of information on minority women, emphasizing Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and urban African Americans. Copies may be purchased from: Women's Studies/SIROW, 102 Douglass Bldg., University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721. Cost is \$6. Make check payable to the University of Arizona.



## 1991 Council Elections

The Feminist Task Force endorsed thirteen candidates for the 1991 Council election. Eight were successfully elected:

Ginnie Cooper  
Ruth Gordan  
Eliza Dresang  
Ichiko Morita  
Audrey Eaglen  
Jane Robbins  
Elizabeth Futas  
Gail Warner

The Feminist Task Force's endorsement of presidential and council candidates is an annual activity which occurs as part of the Midwinter conference agenda. Task Force members who are unable to attend Midwinter can participate in candidate endorsement by sending their recommendations to: Deb Gilchrist, Pierce College Library, 9401 Farwest Drive S.W., Tacoma, WA 98498

### Women in Libraries

*Women in Libraries*, the Newsletter of the American Library Association's Feminist Task Force, is published five times a year, from September to June.

Beginning with Volume 22, Number 1, Fall 1992, *Women in Libraries* will be published four times a year.

Julia Phipps, Editor  
Hamilton College

Dorothy Granger, Contributing Editor  
Pacific Oaks College

Diedre Conkling, Managing Editor  
Lincoln County Library District

Send articles, comments, or books for review to Julia Phipps, Burke Library, 198 College Hill Road, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY 13323. (315) 859-4480.

To subscribe, write to Diedre Conkling, Managing Editor, *Women in Libraries* c/o ALA, SRRT, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.

Subscriptions are \$5 for individuals, \$8 for institutions prepaid, or \$10 for invoiced subscriptions. Make check payable to *Women in Libraries*.

**Women in Libraries**  
American Library Association  
Office for Library Outreach Services  
50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611



### **We need your support.**

Renew your subscription and tell a friend. As always, we continue to bring you news of the activities of women's groups at ALA conferences and information about publications and events pertinent to women's lives.

Clip the subscription coupon and send it to American Library Association, Office for Library Outreach Services, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Enclose your check payable to ALA/SRRF/FIF, and note "For *Women in Libraries*."

Check one.

Enclosed is my check for a one year subscription to *Women in Libraries*, \$5 for an individual, \$8 for an institution.

I wish to be billed, for \$2 additional.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_