

Harassed yet again

The Aberdeen Proving Ground is a place where the army trains soldiers and tests weapons. However, the recent allegations of rape and sexual coercion at Aberdeen are testing our national attitude toward sexual harassment.

The outlook for the battle with sexual harassment is grim. There are too many societal forces that help to create an atmosphere of sexual hostility. Previously, it was assumed that if America could sexually integrate its factories and offices, harassment would simply die out. If only the solution could be so simple. The idea was that if there were more women in the work- or military place, men would get used to the new environment and stop using force as a sexual tool.

Decades ago, similar beliefs caused the racial integration of public schools. It seemed that the solution to racism was to breed familiarity by forcing black and white children to learn together. But there's a lesson to be gained from this experience: Desegregation cannot end bigotry.

Integration of the workplace cannot end sexual harassment. Whether bigotry is sexual or racial in nature, it often exists because of a perceived power gradient between people. Many white bigots aren't racist solely because they fear colored skin or don't understand other cultures. Often, they exploit their greater social status, looking upon minorities with disdain because stereotypes suggest that non-whites are poorer than whites.

Similarly, the men who harass female subordinates do it by exploiting authority. The most accurate model of the sexual harassment phenomenon would recognize that harassment is not about men oppressing women; it's about employers oppressing their underlings.

The employer-employee relationship is essentially one of demand and deliverance. Whatever the supervisor wants, the workers must produce. In essence, this coercive power is why many people want to be boss, have money, attain social notoriety, etc.

The products that laborers surrender to their managers may be material or intellectual, but the relationship breaks down in dysfunction when the employer demands sex. This is because sex is not really a product by nature.

But who ever accused American culture of being natural? Here we package sex and sell it by the pound, gram and fluid ounce. In the books we write and the stories we tell, we treat sex like a commodity, reducing all of us to customers who may or may not be satisfied by whoever our current suppliers are.

A country where both men and women call their sexual relationships "getting some" should not be surprised it has a problem with sexual harassment. As long as pop culture continues to view the sexual relationship as a series of objectified acts rather than a communion between two people, the line between sex as special expression and sex as merchandise will blur.

And some misguided people will react to this confusion by abusing their positions of authority to "get some" of that which should never be demanded or extorted from their subordinates.

It's important to note that people are able to handle positions of influence responsibly. Not all people are racist, and not all authority figures engage in harassment.

But the corrupting nature of power acts in concert with our improper treatment of sexuality to make harassment a virtual certainty in the American workplace. Without a fundamental change in the way we view sexual relationships, the necessary actions that we take to diversify the American work force and promote qualified women will not lessen the occurrence of sexual harassment.

Instead, the future "progressive" work environments will be places where men and women harass each other in equal numbers.

Girls should quit making excuses and tell guys no

Excuses, excuses, excuses. Whenever a girl is asked out, for some reason, a simple "no thank you" seems to be absent from the female vocabulary.

Dating is a ritual that remains (and always will) a widespread practice among college students. Rejection is simply part of the game, but a little honesty in these practices would make the world a better place.

For me it's either feast or famine. I'm either struggling to decide which girl I am more interested in, or I can't get a date to save my life.

As hard as those times of famine are, however, the absence of lame excuses would make it a little easier to handle.

Last year, I experienced a rare occurrence in dating history.

I met a girl named Kim playing basketball, who was pretty cool — not to mention pretty good-looking. So I decided to ask her out.

I called. We talked. I asked. What happened next was the most astounding thing I had ever experienced in my dating career: She simply said "no."

Not "I'd love to, but ..." not "I have a boyfriend of two days and I don't want to ruin it," not "I'm washing my sheets that night," not even "I can't because I used to be friends with your ex-girlfriend, even though she's now engaged." She just said, "No, I don't think I want to do that."

"Holy crab cakes," I said to myself. "That was so cool."

Since I was experiencing the dry spell of my life, rejection came as no shock.

However, this was incredible. I didn't get the date, but I had finally found a girl who would shoot me straight.

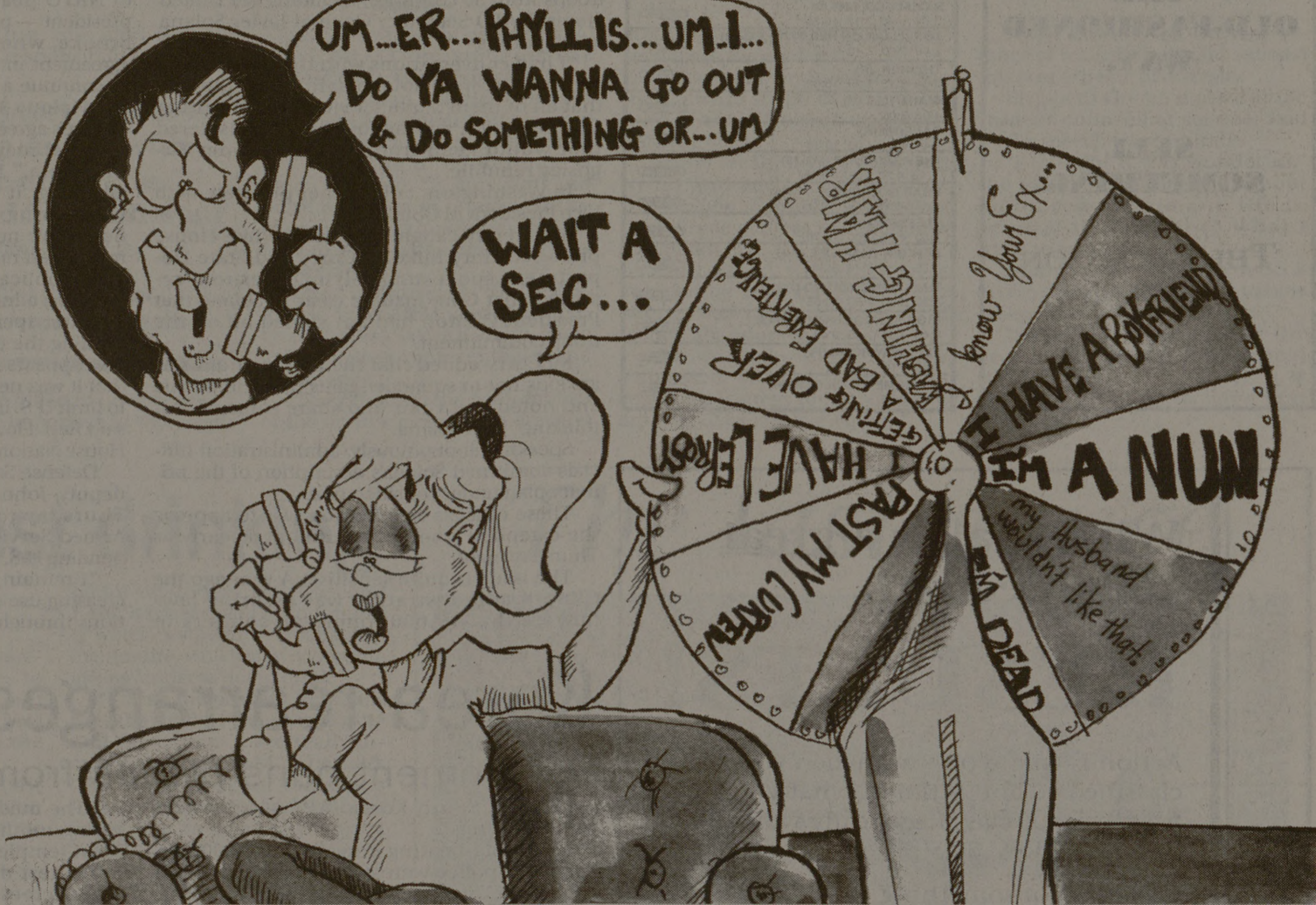
Kim and I are still friends to this day.

Although I know other girls exist who are willing to be as honest as Kim, they are few and far between.

The strange thing is that most girls who give these



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lame-ass excuses aren't bad girls overall. In general they are pretty honest. However, they just can't bring themselves to just tell guys they aren't interested.

It's as if they are worried simply saying "no" will hurt a guy's feelings.

Girls, we are not stupid. Guys can

smell a bulls--t excuse from 97 miles away. Simply saying, "No, I'm not interested," would not only be appreciated by him, but it would save getting that second call from the geek.

Then there are those girls who, when asked out, say "maybe," or "I'm not sure." Indecisiveness is a very unattractive trait. These ladies need to make up their freakin' minds.

Even worse are those women who say "yes" with no intention to date the guy, but only to get a free meal. These little girls are a disgrace to their kind and should have their scrunchies and hair

clips taken away for a week.

Women are amazing and wonderful creatures. Despite their silly little hang-ups, life would not be nearly as fun without them. They should always be treated with respect. However, the games have got to stop.

It is a well-known fact that any good, healthy relationship is based on trust and honesty. So why are these elements lost when someone is searching for the man or woman of their dreams?

Ladies, if a guy asks you out and you don't want to go, be honest. Remember the famous words of the former first lady Nancy Reagan: "Just say no."



Rwandans won't find more aid

Last week, many international aid agencies were forced to pack up and leave hundreds of thousands of refugees behind after fighting resumed on the eastern border of Zaire.

And it's about time. Many of us can recall when the ethnic conflict in Rwanda appeared on television screens across the world two years ago. The images of countless faces of starving refugees with nowhere to go haunted viewers.

But consciences were quieted once it became apparent that international aid agencies were providing assistance in the form of refugee camps.

However, behind the facade of aid workers providing assistance to innocent people laid the grim reality: The Hutu militants, who were largely responsible for the conflict in 1994 comprised a large portion of the refugee population that was being assisted.

And not only did they receive assistance from the agencies, they also used the camps as a location for military training exercises and for kangaroo courts — even killing other refugees in front of aid workers.

While many aid organizations questioned the ethics of providing assistance to war criminals, it was difficult for workers to look beyond the humanitarian issue and realize that their presence was only fueling the conflict.

Now that they have been forced out of the area because of attacks on the camps and the offices of the aid agencies, many relief organizations are faced with the question of what they should do once they have the opportunity to return.



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One choice is to set up refugee camps only in Rwanda to lure the refugees back to their homes.

Yet the knowledge that many refugees would remain stranded in Zaire without food or shelter tugs at the humanitarian strings of their hearts.

While it may seem cold and heartless to purposely refuse aid to people in need when the opportunity is there, in this case it is almost critical to quenching the flames of ethnic conflict that have already consumed countless lives.

Alternatives to completely closing the camps have also been offered, such as sending in U.N. troops to separate the true refugees from the militants or bypassing the militant leaders and giving food directly to refugees.

However, these solutions have no teeth. Not only would enforcing them require the commitment of U.N. police troops — which hasn't been given so far — but it also would be difficult to determine exactly who was a refugee and who was not.

Many agencies have already realized this. Doctors Without Borders pulled out its support in December of 1994. And Alison Campbell, spokeswoman for Care International, described decisions to operate camps in eastern Zaire as "dumb — dumb for us, dumb for the region... We would be unwilling to return to the status quo."

It may be heartbreaking for many of those workers to leave behind people to whom they've dedicated two years of their lives to saving, but they and the coordinators of the relief operation must realize that it takes more than a big heart to end a war.

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Texas A&M University

Sul Ross deserves respect from Ags

Regarding Aja Henderson's Nov. 13 column, "Sullivan Ross rededication sullies A&M":

Once again Henderson has done it. I feel it is necessary to come to the defense of one of Texas A&M's sacred landmarks.

There is a statue of Sul Ross because of his contributions to this great university, Henderson said it herself. Ross was the president of Texas A&M at one time and "he did big things for Aggieland."

How many Aggies recognize Ross as a slave owner? How many students hold him in high regard because of this? Also, how many former presidents of the United States owned slaves? Do we discredit what they did for our great nation?

If people choose not to smile when passing Sully, that's fine. But do they also choose to frown using many pieces of currency?

Lastly, take a look at the Civil War. It was mainly fought over state rights — slavery was a minor part of the whole picture. How can Henderson or the rest of us discredit great things people do because they disagree with their political, religious or any other belief?

James Hemenes
Class of '96

Aggies should not excuse prejudice

Regarding Darrell Abramowitz's and Matt Lucas' Nov 14 letters:

Aggies never cease to amaze me with their close-mindedness. I shouldn't be surprised since prejudiced embodied in tradition and opinion seems to be so popular around here. But a few prejudice comments or jokes never hurt anyone, right? Who really believes institutionalized racism really exists?

Pete Serafin
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