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"Sexual harassment is not about sex, it is about power." -Gretchen Morgenson

An unwanted sexual advance, an offensive touch, and suggestive comments illustrate examples of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined by Stephanie Riger as, "unwanted sexually oriented behavior in a work context." However, sexual harassment does not only appear in an occupational environment, and this form of harassment is not limited to a specific race, a specific gender, or any certain lifestyle. Today, throughout the United States, men and women are filing sexual harassment lawsuits as if sexual harassment were no great matter. A line needs to be drawn to distinguish what is and is not sexual harassment, but since sexual harassment is so subjective, a simple line becomes harder to draw. Some people want punishment for hostile environment harassment, but what constitutes a hostile environment? According to Morgenson a hostile environment includes "hazing, joking, and sexually suggestive talk between men and women who work alongside them." Lately, it seems that Americans are making sexual harassment an excuse. People are crying sexual harassment like the little boy who cried wolf.

Sexual harassment has become such an issue due to the large number of cases presented. When Anita Hill, law professor at the University of Oklahoma, brought allegations of sexual

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harassment against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, the whole world started listening. This case was "the most celebrated sexual harassment case of our time," according to Martha Chamallas, and "Hill's revelations prompted women to tell about their own encounters with sexually harassing behavior-both in private and in public." This case gave women a reason to report sexual harassment, and sexual harassment would no longer be overlooked. Women would no longer have to "flatter" their bosses, as Erica Jong had to.

Consequently, since Anita Hill came out and voiced her opinion, it seems that the issue of sexual harassment has become a security blanket for men and women, and filing lawsuits of sexual harassment have created a new money making scheme. In 1996 my place of employment received two allegations of sexual harassment. In the case I testified in court that I never saw any event of sexual harassment that the lady in question described. The jury threw out her sexual allegations against our employer, and she was sentenced for embezzlement. In this case, sexual harassment was her security blanket against her employer. When she heard that she was being charged with embezzlement, she decided that she might be able to plea bargain if she proved that sexual harassment took place.

When allegations of sexual harassment hit home,

it has become clear to me that something needs to be done. Employers need to safeguard themselves by understanding the definition of sexual harassment. Employers need to know their employees and be
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aware of their employees' values. Knowing that sexual harassment is an issue of power and not sex, women need to prove to men that they are not submissive objects. Jong states "just as men can use sexuality for power, women can use anti-sexuality for political power," and I agree with her. The issue that women should be lobbying for is equality. If women cannot stand up to their bosses and show them that they too are powerful, then women will never achieve equality.

Similar to my story, in the Supreme Court case of Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, Sidney Taylor was accused of sexual harassment by a former employee, Michelle Vinson. Michelle testified that in order to advance in her occupation she had to have sex with her supervisor. Undoubtedly, she did have sexual relations with her supervisor, but she never refused his advances, according to her affidavit. In Taylor's testimony, he told the court that he never made advances or even had sexual relations with her. Furthermore, Taylor testified that Vinson's accusations were the result of an earlier dispute over business. The court found that even if a sexual relationship had taken place, that Michelle acted willingly, and that this relationship had nothing to do with her employment to the bank. This is another example of how the issue of sexual harassment has become grounds for a lawsuit and a money making scheme.

Not only are women making money out of sexual harassment cases, but "peddlers of sex harassment advice have, of course, their own money making agenda," according to Morgenson. "There

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are a lot of bad consultants taking advantage of the fact that sexual harassment is in vogue." In fact, the government has granted aid to certain agencies whose job is to try and combat sexual harassment. The irony is that in Morgenson's view, sexual harassment is decreasing, while the number of sexual harassment consultants has increased. Jennifer Coplon, a consultant, believes that the number of consultants has increased because sexual harassment is overall employment issues, the biggest concern among cooperations. If women would not use sexual harassment as a cry for help, then maybe cooperations would not have to pay consultants to educate businesses.

Prevention is the hardest phase of sexual harassment because it is almost impossible to understand what one considers harassment. Morgenson described it best when she pointed out that "Behavior that one woman may consider harassment could be seen by another as a non-threatening gag." Riger suggests that policy makers and employers need to "think like a woman" in order to define sexual harassment. By understanding what might be offensive and suggestive to a woman, employers can

safeguard themselves against law suits. Since feminists have forced the court to believe that sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination, then equal opportunities for employment need to be implemented. Also, prevention can be accomplished by installing organizational mechanisms, such as hierarchies. If more women were in higher levels of authority, then cries of sexual harassment will be reduced. The key to prevention is
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education, and as long as the employer knows his employees, then the chance of sexual harassment is diminished.

Even though there are almost too many cases of sexual harassment reported, one cannot afford to overlook one case as a false allegation. At the University of Oklahoma, an international student who made accusations of sexual harassment was recently expelled from school. Since the University failed to act upon her allegations, she decided to take the matter into her own hands, which ended her education at the University of Oklahoma. It will never be known whether or not that her allegations were true.

Sexual harassment is an issue that cannot be overlooked. With proper knowledge and education, prevention is necessary. Maybe, punishment for wrong allegations should be drafted into legislation. I agree with Erica Jong when she suggested that "sexual hot-button issues like harassment serve to distract us from focusing, for instance, on the fact that women continue to be underpaid." Until something is done to prevent sexual harassment, women and men will use sexual harassment as their security blankets and money making schemes. I want to emphasize to women that sexual harassment is not a money making game, and by crying sexual harassment out loud, women lose their power. As Jong demonstrates, "If we take our power and use it as badly as men have used theirs throughout the centuries, we will not have brought about the world of equality we seek."

