

Alexander v. Yale

On July 7, 1977 four female undergraduates and one male professor filed a class action suit against Yale University charging that the university condones sexual harassment of its women students and that this constitutes sex discrimination in violation of Title IX. It is a class action suit because the issue is larger than the individuals involved; sexual harassment of women students is widespread enough to warrant the setting up of a grievance procedure to deal with the problem. In fact, as news of the investigation leaked out, the number of reported complaints snowballed. The plaintiffs estimate that 75 undergraduate women (out of 2000) are sexually harassed each year.

What are the charges?

Plaintiff 1 alleges that she was forced to have sexual relations with her professor which made it intolerable to continue studies necessary to her career goals.

Plaintiff 2, because of the lack of an adequate procedure, was forced to waste time, effort, and money investigating the matter and demanding relief.

Plaintiff 3 had a friend who was sexually harassed; her distress increased upon being convinced that there was no avenue for complaint. This experience damaged Plaintiff 3's confidence in her male professors and the university, hindering her ability to take advantage of the educational opportunities at Yale.

Plaintiff 4 is a faculty member who contends that the atmosphere of sexual harassment poisons faculty-student relationships and stands in the way of a proper learning environment.

One of the original undergraduate plaintiffs ended her status as a plaintiff because she did not feel she could fully participate in the case while on a Leave of Absence during the present academic year. She was also concerned about her vulnerable position as an undergraduate while involved in a controversial suit.

Two undergraduate women, beyond the original plaintiffs, have asked the court for permission to join the suit.

Plaintiff 5 alleges she was sexually harassed by the coach of the athletic team on which she was participating. As a result of the experience she is no longer participating.

Plaintiff 6 alleges she was offered a higher grade in return for sexual relations with the professor. When she refused she received a lower grade.

What do we want?

We want a proper grievance procedure. We have been asking the university for many months to set up a committee that would deal with complaints of sexual harassment. This committee would decide the validity of complaints and appropriate action to redress injuries.

What are the issues?

1. Sexual harassment is sex discrimination, whether in education or employment. In our society, where women as a group have a disproportionately smaller share of the wealth, power, and advantages than men as a group, sexual harassment, by imposing sexual criteria on women that are not imposed on men in similar situations, creates a barrier to women's opportunities for and access to resources that would allow them to improve their situation.

2. Women are sexually harassed because they are women. They are singled out for disadvantages for no reason related to performance on the job or potential as a student. Yet, their refusal to comply sexually often results in educational or occupational deprivations.

3. Yale's refusal to investigate the problem or to establish a grievance procedure condones sexual harassment. Women come to Yale and other colleges to study. They should be treated as scholars and human beings--not as playthings or sexual objects for the faculty.

4. The right of a private individual to sue in Federal District Court for enforcement of Title IX is important because H.E.W. is understaffed, overworked, and very slow, as a rule, in investigating complaints. W.E.A.L. and N.O.W. L.D.E.F. have filed as amici curiae (friends of the court) supporting the plaintiffs' private right of action under Title IX.

Suing Yale is very expensive. Since it is in the university's interest to prolong the case and drain the plaintiffs' resources, it will probably become more expensive. We desperately need money. Please make checks out to the CAPP STREET FOUNDATION. Send checks to the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, Box 4761 Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06520. The Caucus will also provide more information upon request.