In 1976, when the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion was founded, sexual harassment was not a topic of public concern. That same year, Redbook magazine included a questionnaire asking women if they received unwanted sexual attention on the job. Of the 9,000 women who responded, a startling 88 percent reported harassment. The response was a complete surprise to almost everyone at that time.

Today, sexual harassment stories are featured in newspapers and magazines; TV specials and movies address the issue explicitly. Sexual harassment has been made illegal under the Title VII sex discrimination law, as well as other statutes. Women who are harassed can (sometimes) collect unemployment if they quit their jobs. Feminists have won some victories.

In the process feminists and leftists have come to understand more of the subtle dynamics of power and sex in workplaces (and in universities, where many cases have been documented). Some of us have come to recognize as harassment, dynamics which formerly we accepted as inevitable aspects of male-female interaction in the workplace. Our definitions of what we will accept as "normal" have changed. Along with these changes, our confidence in ourselves as women and as workers defining what we want and need in our lives has grown.

But work on the issue of sexual harassment is not simple. Legal solutions do not encourage the kind of workplace organizing which would
ultimately give women greater power vis-a-vis management. Historically in the U.S. the women's liberation movement, particularly the violence-against-women movement from which AASC evolved, has been separated from the labor movement. Both labor leaders and leftists have been indifferent, suspicious, or even hostile toward organizing around "women's issues." Yet sexual harassment is an issue which combines insights from both the labor and women's movements.

In the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, we see sexual harassment as the intersection of two perspectives: first, as a working women's issue, since the harassment is affected by the unequal power relationships of the workplace; and second, as an issue of violence against women. We feel that these aspects of sexual harassment are interrelated and interdependent. The economic insecurity of working women is intensified by the threat that sexual harassment might escalate from subtle to much more serious and blatant actions involving physical and sexual assault. The threat of such violence has always kept women "in their place" as defined by men, and in the workplace it serves to keep women isolated and powerless.

AASC was founded by three women who had worked in the movement against rape. The violence-against-women movement identified the inequality of men and women and showed how our society was structured around male power and sexism. But because sexual harassment occurs at work and is only one issue among the many problems women workers face, AASC found that it was necessary not only to create separate services for sexually harassed women but also to expand our analysis and explore strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and sexism on the job. The violence-against-women movement had initiated certain strategies and institutions such as rape crisis centers for women to deal with emotional aspects of rape, and shelters for battered women. On a small scale, self-defense skills were shared and women became much more aware of their own relationship to the social system. But these strategies were not viable within a job context. These women had to go to work every day and deal with the harassment each day. Dealing with the emotional aspects of violence against women, or being more self-aware or knowing self-defense, helps to give a woman more control, but it does not confront the issue of economic dependence and survival.

Violence is an underpinning to social control in this society, and the use of it to control women is readily accepted. A woman will not complain to another woman or to a man about sexual harassment if she feels that they condone the behavior. But this is not the only reason why a woman might not complain: the strict hierarchies and regimentation of the workplace discourage any complaint from men or women. People are tracked and expected to stay tracked; it is much easier to fire those who balk than to change the hierarchy of the institution. There is no assumed level of worker support, particularly in cases involving sexual harassment. All of these
factors are part of our analysis of sexual harassment in the workplace, as both issues of violence against women and as an economic issue facing women workers.

Any woman who strives to be economically independent knows consciously or unconsciously, that she is stepping out of place. The threat of violence is a means of pushing her back to validate herself according to a male definition—to "go back to the home" psychologically or actually. Whether women work out of necessity (as most do) or out of choice, the threat of violence tells them they should understand themselves as marginal to the world of paid work. In 75 percent of our cases, subtle harassment does escalate to a more blatant form. Whether women are conscious of it or not, this is part of the reason that women remain powerless and fear to do anything. Women are conditioned to feel that if they confront the issue directly, it will most likely escalate, for sexual harassment at the workplace is an issue of power, and experience shows that pressing the issue will bring on an intensified response. It seems easier to do nothing than to complain, because complaining is stepping out of line, and stepping out of line brings on a display of power and control in our society.

These are some of the reasons why creating strategies to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace is a difficult task. The first step is to challenge women's socialization, to reveal how it disempowers them, and to show how society is structured around their lack of control. The next step is to challenge the workplace structure and to show how women and Third World people are oppressed as workers in a capitalist society. There is no single course of action which will bring about these changes.

THE DEFINITION

In some early articulations, violence against women was more or less synonymous with the existence of a sexist, racist, and capitalist system in which women were, as members of our sex, race, and/or class, violated by individuals (men) and institutions. Now violence against women is more often narrowed to acts of physical harm caused by individual men, like rape or battering and violence in the media.

In the remainder of this article, we use the narrow definition. Work on sexual harassment has gained some focus by narrowing the definition but has lost some insight which came from the broader definition. We have gained a focus on the importance of the ever-present threat of physical violence as a means of maintaining sexism and preventing women from speaking out against more subtle harassment. Sexual harassment threatens not only a woman's job, but also her safety. Narrowing the definition, however, tends to obscure the way subtle acts which degrade a woman or treat her solely as a sex object are violations of her person; violations have strong emotional impact and generate a sense of powerlessness, regardless of whether the woman feels a greater threat to her safety or her job.
Organizing Against Sexual Harassment

The ultimate message of the violence that is present in all aspects of our lives is that there is no escape from male power. That message remains in the linking of rape, battering, and sexual harassment, along with media violence as the core of violence-against-women organizing. The street, the home, the workplace, and even the world of fantasy and escape are dominated by male power, backed up by the threat of physical harm.

There are difficulties here. Power is also the basis of masculinity in our culture. Many women are attracted to men because they are, or at least appear to be, powerful. This attraction, however, is not to men who appear likely to be violent or cause harm. Rather, power seems to offer protection from violence or actual harm. Passive submissiveness, or at least its pretense, is a part of the definition of femininity. It is likely that powerful men will be attracted to women who play out this definition of femininity. Mutual attraction in the workplace can be the beginning of a fulfilling relationship for both people. It can also be a setup for a woman for the abuse of power the man has due to his position in the workplace—one quite likely to be over hers in the hierarchy. It can also be a setup for her due to his ability to wield male social power, regardless of his position in a workplace hierarchy.

Sexual harassment may often stem from a confusion of issues of sexual attractiveness, power, and violence against women on the part of the harasser. The harasser may fail to recognize the power he does have, denying the importance of the fact that he is above the woman in the workplace hierarchy, claiming that he is just approaching her "as a man" and that she is attracted to him because of who he is, not what he does. A woman may find it hard to sort out confusion as well. We suspect that such a confusion would be particularly difficult for a young woman (e.g., student) to sort out in relation to an older man (e.g., her professor) where other issues such as mentoring may come into play. One test of such a relationship is what happens when one person decides to end it. Can they come to a mutual decision about how to handle the resulting tensions? Or is the decision made by the more powerful person, resulting in negative effects on the woman's school or work life?

It is clear that what counts as a violation to one woman will not necessarily violate another. And it is important that women begin to define their own needs, to regain a sense of their own power. It is also important that men begin to see real women, to see women as individuals. Together, these three points are the basis for the Alliance's insistence that only a subjective definition of sexual harassment, one which incorporates the point of view of the person harassed, is adequate politically.

AASC defines sexual harassment as follows:

Any unwanted sexual attention a woman experiences on the job, ranging from leering, pinching, patting, verbal comments, and subtle pressure for sexual activity, to attempted rape and rape. The sexual harasser may be the woman's employer, supervisor, co-worker, client, or customer. In addition
to the anxiety caused by sexual demands, there is the implicit message from
the harasser that non-compliance will lead to reprisals. These reprisals can
include escalating the harassment, poor work assignments, sabotaging a
woman's work, sarcasm, unsatisfactory job evaluations, threatened dem-
tions, transfers, denial of raises, promotions and benefits, and in the final
analysis dismissal and poor job references.

CAPITALISM AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is possible because sexism is an integral part of
capitalism. Male dominance in the family or at home also means male
dominance in the workplace (and vice versa). Sexual harassment expresses
and reinforces this power relationship at work. Bosses, supervisors, manag-
ers, and owners are almost always men, and such occupational segregation
not only perpetuates a close link between sex roles and job functions but also
props up the system of depressed wages for women workers.

Recognizing male dominance under capitalism helps us to understand
sexual harassment at the workplace because men have not only social
control over women, but economic control also. This places women in a
situation of double jeopardy. The two spheres of male power mutually
reinforce each other, creating a situation in which men are socially and
psychologically dominant—sometimes even when women are more highly
placed in the workplace hierarchy. In other words, men can and do exert
power over women even when they are lower in a job hierarchy or are not
"economically fit" in providing for their families.

The leering boss chasing his secretary around the desk is a universal
image of sexual harassment. Implicit here is the threat of job-related repri-
sals for not complying with his demand, a threat which results from the
"office-wife" mentality. This view represents the secretary as the girl in the
office who takes care of the boss at work while he's away from his wife at
home. The "office-wife" mentality or the creation of the home in the
workplace sets up a situation in which a woman is there to meet the needs of
her boss. The boundaries concerning what a secretary actually has to do to
fulfill her job responsibilities can and often do get fuzzy. The experience of
women in these traditional jobs illustrates the fact that male power and
dominance forms the basis for male-female relationships in the workforce.

The following are all ways in which capitalism has incorporated sexism,
reinforcing male power and reaping increased benefits by the "superex-
ploration" of women:

1. The ideology that views women as a reserve labor force that
   works only when men are preoccupied with other activities, such
   as war.

2. The ideology that women belong at home, when in fact women
   must work to support themselves and/or their families.
3. The reserving of high-paying jobs for men by tradition and by current practice. This is justified by the myth of men's natural superiority as well as the definition of women as wife and mother, not worker.

4. The idea that women workers are only part-time or transitory help, rather than full-time steady help.

The function of these myths and ideologies is to increase the vulnerability of women workers and to justify the discrimination women face at work. Sexual harassment is only possible because of these myths and it, in turn, makes the position of women workers even more vulnerable.

Sexual harassment is a complex phenomenon. The two sources of power we are dealing with—male power and class power—overlap and support each other in a variety of ways.

Sexual harassment plays an important function in maintaining sexism and the exploitation of women at work. The effects of sexual harassment on women lead to low productivity, low morale, and high turnover among women workers. This simply reinforces sexist beliefs that women are not good workers, that they should only work certain jobs, and that men should have more power, higher wages, and higher status.

It is clear that sexual harassment is a function of sexism in society and of the sexist organization of work. Sexual harassment, as one expression of male power and sexuality, is a tool to maintain the system of male domination. Our understanding of this problem and of the possible strategies to challenge it must include an analysis of both male power and the structure of the capitalist workplace.

FIGHTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

AASC’s work around sexual harassment reflects two goals: (1) assisting women who have been sexually harassed in their workplace or school, and (2) challenging sexual harassment as a built-in condition of work and education for most American women. Challenging the institution of sexual harassment requires a confrontation with the structures of power that perpetuate it: capitalism, sexism, racism, heterosexism, and ageism.

AASC has assisted individual women from unorganized and unionized workplaces. We have worked with women who organized themselves to work as a group against particular harassers or for workplace and school grievance procedures. We have worked with women in workplace-based women’s groups, both union and non-union.

Sexual harassment, like all other occupational hazards, is more difficult for unorganized workers to confront than for those in unions. Too often, workplace advocacy groups have failed to seriously address the situation of unorganized workers because the unions have traditionally acted as the primary avenue for providing information and resources about occupational
Organizing the Unorganized

hazards to workers. This has been particularly true in the occupational safety and health movement as most advocacy groups work closely with regional labor councils and do very little outreach to unorganized workers.

Only 11 percent of women workers are unionized. And until recently most unions have not been interested in “women’s issues,” meaning that it has taken some struggle to place sexual harassment on the union agenda. For both of these reasons, AASC has chosen to make contact with women workers independently through a telephone hotline rather than by working through unions or other workplace organizations.

We have found in our work, whether with unionized or with unorganized workers, that at times our goals conflict. A strategy that most expeditiously stops the harassment of an individual woman is not necessarily the same tactic that challenges the power structures and ideologies that allow and create harassment. Many women find that the best way to deal with particular situations of harassment is to leave them. This reaction might be the best “solution” for the individual woman, but it leaves the woman who takes her place vulnerable to the harasser. Many women are fearful, often with good reason, of the risks involved in pursuing strategies which might have a more lasting effect on the workplace.

Although we recognize the conflicts between these goals and try to raise consciousness about the importance of challenging the institution of sexual harassment while fighting a specific harasser, we also remain committed to a woman’s right to decide what action she wants to take in a given situation. As an advocacy group, we offer support and information about possible risks and benefits, but women who are harassed must make their own decisions if they are to regain a sense of their own power, a sense which is generally undermined by harassment. Furthermore, they are in the best position to assess the possibilities and risks of various actions. And they must live with the results. This means that we are limited in our ability to challenge an individual’s decision, even if we disagree.

There are times, for example, when an individual woman may get more immediate results in her efforts to stop sexual harassment by complaining to a sympathetic person in the hierarchy than by organizing with other women. We’ve seen a concrete instance in a local hospital. A high-ranking hospital official was dismissed for sexual harassment after a secretary complained to a powerful doctor in the hospital. The doctor was a woman and understood her complaint; the doctor’s father had also been a prominent figure in the history of the hospital. Even so, nothing was done by Personnel until the doctor put her complaint on behalf of the secretary in writing and threatened further action if the secretary was not protected. Although the harassment stopped, the secretary felt no greater sense of power in the workplace. Personnel went on to suggest that she should be transferred, and she had to continue to rely on the good will and understanding of the doctor.

Several other secretaries had been harassed by this hospital official.
Their organizing against him might have been less effective in stopping the harassment than the doctor’s intervention was, given the harasser’s power in the hospital and the expendability of the secretaries. On the other hand, they might have formed the core of a secretaries’ organizing group that could eventually force changes with more long-term and truly empowering effects. Taking up sexual harassment as an organizing issue would have been more progressive over the long term. In the meantime, though, a number of secretaries might have lost their jobs or undergone intensified harassment.

Even if the secretaries had filed a joint complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a sex discrimination complaint leading to suit against the hospital, they would have faced a trade-off in their lives. They might have forced the hospital to pay for damages and forced it to institute grievance procedures. Thus they might have gained some power vis-a-vis the hospital. But they would have given several years of their lives over to a stressful court battle for whatever they gained in money or in precedents. A lawsuit becomes an act of self-sacrifice to try to establish even a meager legal precedent for other women. And these legal protections may be revoked (as we now see Reagan attempting to do with current guidelines against sexual harassment) by hostile presidential directives or legislation. In the end, the secretaries might wish they had simply found other jobs. Thus the goals of assisting individual women may conflict with the goal of challenging sexual harassment as an institution, along with the power structures which perpetuate it.

This conflict exists both in unorganized and unionized workplaces, but it is more prominent in the unorganized workplace where detailed channels for grieving do not exist. We have also seen cases of union women who face these same dilemmas because they have no real representation or their interests as women by the union. This backdrop is an important one to keep in mind as we look at potential strategies for fighting sexual harassment. We will first look briefly at sexual harassment and unions, and then move on to look more closely at the situation of unorganized workers.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND UNIONS**

AASC has provided information and programs for various union locals about sexual harassment and has helped women who approached us to raise the issue in their unions. Over the years, we have seen an improvement in the response of unions to this problem, but the basic framework from which unions approach workplace issues—as a simple conflict between management and workers—tends to obscure conflicts based on gender or race. Current controversies over affirmative action and the threat to traditional seniority rights illustrate the bind many unions are in—Which workers’ rights are to be protected and which are to be sacrificed? The rights of women workers are not generally seen as a priority.

In fact, sexual harassment and affirmative action often go hand in hand.
Complying with affirmative-action guidelines is often a condition of receiving public money. Many companies initially hire women, then systematically subject them to sexual harassment; the women either quit or are fired during their probation period. In many contracts, management is not required to justify the firing, and employees on probation are not entitled to union representation. Either way—quitting or being fired—the company can claim it met its responsibility in good faith.

Evidence of sexual harassment being used as a union-busting technique also exists. When the Steelworkers were attempting to organize Canadian bank workers several years ago, members of management began harassing those tellers who were most pro-union. Again, some women chose to quit, while others agreed to stop their union organizing efforts if the harassment would stop.

Given the widespread attention to sexual harassment as a serious problem, most unions would probably support a union member who was harassed by a member of management. Happily, the cases that have come to AASC’s attention in which union officials chose to ignore such complaints are greatly outnumbered by the success stories. The most dramatic of these occurred in October 1979, when 1,400 workers walked out at Simpson Plywood in Washington state to protest several instances of women in the International Woodworkers of America being sexually harassed during job interviews. Women were asked to take off their blouses, asked if they wore a bra, and asked if they were willing to have sex with the supervisor. One woman filed sex discrimination charges with the Washington Human Rights Commission and the EEOC. She was fired after filing. The firing triggered the strike, which spread to Simpson plants in California and eventually involved over 3,000 workers.

We acknowledge the conflicts for unions in handling sexual harassment between co-workers. As mentioned earlier, most unions are not prepared to step in to resolve sex- or race-based complaints and need to develop methods of intervening in such conflicts between union members. The results of this neglect are seen in increasing friction between female and Third World workers and the white men who control the unions.

Examples of unions creatively handling cases of coworker harassment are quite rare. Union women around the country report being discouraged from filing a grievance against a union brother. Grieving is often viewed as a divisive act, one that allows management to discipline union members. In contrast, the harassment itself is not often seen as divisive, nor as violating a union’s “brotherhood” codes. In cases where grievances are filed, the union is placed in a difficult position; they are obligated both to support the woman’s grievance (by EEOC guidelines) and to represent the harasser if he is disciplined by management.

Of course there are strong positive reasons for unions to take sexual harassment seriously, and to deal with it before it takes place. In times where unions need to increase membership and organize workers in new
Organizing Against Sexual Harassment

fields, a firm stand against sexual harassment can make a difference. This proved to be a pivotal issue in a recent strike at Boston University by clerical and library workers. District 65 of the UAW won a specific clause in its contract which prohibits harassment, provides a definition, and indicates that grievances will be handled quickly. Fearing similar success during an organizing drive at hospitals in the Harvard Medical Complex, administrators launched a series of training sessions on sexual harassment for all women employees.

Sexual harassment also forms an important bridge between traditional health and safety issues (e.g., noise levels in factories, presence of toxic substances) and other issues relating to the quality of the working environment. After a black woman was raped by a white man in a bathroom at a General Electric plant in Massachusetts last year, the Women’s Committee of Local 201 of the International Union of Electrical Workers took action. In addition to responding to the specific event, they distributed a survey to women on all shifts of all of GE’s plants. The survey sought to determine the extent of sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced by women, and how safety concerns affected their choice of shifts with pay differentials. By linking sexual harassment and sexual assault with other workplace safety issues, they increased the awareness of all union members. Women from the United Mine Workers and United Steel Workers of America have also included sexual harassment and sexual discrimination with traditional health and safety issues when picketing or taking other job actions.

The legal (EEOC) requirement for workplace training on sexual harassment can be useful for initiating educational programs in locals where they don’t already exist. Following the incident at GE described above, the union incorporated workshops into its regularly scheduled business meetings. Films and speakers from community women’s organizations were used to encourage internal discussion between men and women on societal images of women, the effects of these images on men and women who work side by side, and sexual harassment. Co-workers can learn to respect each other’s definitions of appropriate workplace behavior as they become conscious of sexism and its effects. Unions can distribute literature from sexual-harassment groups, sample contract clauses, and case histories from other locals or unions. Stewards can be trained to assist women and to mediate between co-workers. Women’s committees, health and safety committees, or union officials can use general membership meetings to inform members about how to report sexual harassment (a specific person, preferably a woman, should be designated as the recipient of such complaints) and how to meet the required standards of proof.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND UNORGANIZED WORKERS

As mentioned earlier, AASC’s work is largely conducted via a telephone hotline. This approach has both positive and negative consequences. We do reach the unorganized woman worker who often has no other
Organizing the Unorganized

resources to help challenge the workplace problems. From the vantage point of offering emotional support and basic information about potential strategies and options, our work is both valuable and successful; however, from an organizing perspective, there are many limitations. Our contact is almost always with an individual woman in a workplace who is experiencing sexual harassment in isolation. The one-to-one nature of this contact places us in the service-provider role rather than in a position to catalyze organized action. We can (and do) make suggestions that involve soliciting co-worker support and taking action in conjunction with other workers, but collective action in an unorganized workplace is so difficult (and often even harder when sexual harassment is the issue) that many women choose to pursue a strategy that does not involve a lot of publicity and reliance on co-workers.

Whatever theories we hold, it is crucial to understand the ways in which sexual harassment and complaints resulting from it are experienced in the unorganized workplace.

Being sexually harassed often means losing your job no matter what you do. A woman's job is on the line whether she rebuffs the harasser but doesn't tell anyone, acts to stop the harassment, decides under pressure to comply with the demands, or ignores the harassment and hopes it will go away. In each of these cases, we have seen women who were eventually fired on the pretense of poor work performance or insubordination, or who were forced to leave an intolerable situation of constant harassment. We are not saying that it is useless to fight sexual harassment in the workplace or that a woman should leave as soon as the harassment begins. Rather, we are saying that there is no safety in staying quiet and trying to keep the problem between herself and the harasser. In fact, we have found that a woman's greatest protection in keeping her job is to speak out and let everyone know exactly what is happening and how she feels about it.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is to overcome the many myths and fears that cause women to remain silent. Many people still believe that sexual harassment doesn't really occur unless the victim provokes it or tries to "sleep her way to the top." Thus, a woman who complains of sexual harassment is often confronted with a barrage of questions that implicate her and play on any feelings of self-blame she may already be experiencing. Women who complain of sexual harassment are often seen as troublemakers and humorless prudes who "just can't take a joke." The chances of retaliatory action, ranging from increased harassment and work sabotage to firing, are high. Some co-workers will be afraid to associate with the "troublemaker" in the workplace. Harassers are often in a position to fire employees who step out of line, so taking any action at all entails great risks. And finally, for many people sexual harassment is difficult to talk about because it means talking about sex and sexual violations—taboo topics in our culture.

These factors forcefully keep women isolated and silent about their
experiences with sexual harassment. Many women feel too embarrassed or afraid to speak out about the harassment and also believe that it is safer to remain silent. Remaining silent ensures that a woman will remain isolated and unprotected from any action the harasser chooses to take. If the harassment continues and a woman decides to try to grieve at a later point, she will have no witnesses or support, or if it gets to a point that she can no longer tolerate, she has no verification that she has been forced out of her job.

These real experiences are a starting point for evaluating the options for confronting sexual harassment. On the one hand, our understanding of the many dangers and complex power struggles does not allow us to paint a hopeful picture for sexual harassment victims, but on the other hand, our experience does suggest that taking collective action in an unorganized workplace may well be worth the risk.

With this in mind, we would like to suggest some specific tactics that can be used to fight sexual harassment. The first option we will discuss involves varying levels of co-worker support and does not rely on utilizing formal grievance procedures within the workplace. The first step in pursuing any course of action is to break the isolation of sexual harassment. This can be done in a number of ways. Placing leaflets about sexual harassment in bathrooms or publicizing the name of the harasser can be an effective means of communication. Another option might be to survey your workplace to determine what the incidence of sexual harassment actually is. This information is particularly helpful in validating individuals' experience and in convincing those who might be skeptical that sexual harassment is a "real" workplace problem. This can be done discretely and safely. There is also the option of discussing your situation with as many co-workers as possible, and then perhaps forming a workplace safety committee that would meet regularly to discuss the situation and to decide on group action.

The following is an example from our caseload of a successful strategy that resulted from the women in a workplace talking and acting together. A new man/boss was hired, and he soon began harassing many of the 14 secretaries in the typing pool on the sly. Their tentative efforts to talk to each other about it made them aware of the problem and revealed that each of them felt threatened and isolated as well as very angry. Together the women decided that each time he called one of them into his office, a co-worker would accompany her so no one would ever be alone with him. If he insisted on speaking with only one woman, then the other would leave the door to his office open as she went out. The situation placed the man in an extremely awkward position and made it very difficult for him to continue his harassment. He quit within a month. This story exemplifies one of the wide range of options available to women who truly have the support of their co-workers.

Each of the tactics offers a chance to fight sexual harassment but they all require a willingness to raise the subject within the workplace and then to
take responsibility for educating those who don't take it seriously. These strategies certainly help a woman who is actually being harassed by creating a network that can help develop a plan of action as well as offer support. It is also very helpful to pursue one or all of these tactics before a situation of harassment actually occurs. If sexual harassment has already been discussed in a workplace, the climate is better for responding to a specific instance of harassment.

We have successfully used two other options for fighting sexual harassment outside of traditional workplace solutions to problems. The first is an educational picket in front of the worksite. For obvious reasons, this strategy is not realistic unless a woman has quit her job or knows that she will inevitably have to leave anyway. Pickets certainly have the advantage of drawing public attention to the problem of sexual harassment and embarrassing the employer by pointing a finger at a specific workplace.

The second tactic is to send a warning letter to the harasser. At the request of a worker, AASC sends warning letters that let the harasser know that his behavior is illegal, and perhaps more importantly, that someone else knows what he is doing. We have found, however, that warning letters sometimes have the effect of escalating rather than stopping the harassment. This option should be chosen only if a woman is prepared to deal with more blatant and direct forms of harassment. Another type of warning letter is one that is sent to the employer rather than the harasser. The employer is legally liable for providing a harassment-free environment, and this type of warning has been helpful in forcing companies to adopt policy statements and grievance procedures concerning sexual harassment.

Another option is to file a grievance through company policy if such a grievance policy exists. Most women will utilize this type of strategy more readily than they will pursue one of the other options outlined here. Filing a grievance is an individual action that does not involve public outcry such as telling the story of being harassed to other co-workers. It is a legitimate channel for grieving (from the employer's perspective) so that it is seemingly safer in terms of keeping your job. The reality is that many women who file grievances for sexual harassment are subjected to harsh recriminations on the part of the employer, the harasser, and even some co-workers. These women are often without support or protection of any kind because they have filed as an individual without soliciting support and aid within the workplace. Even so, the myth tells us that we should be "good" workers and follow company policy. If a woman chooses to pursue a legal strategy ranging from filing for unemployment to lodging a complaint with the EEOC, she must first use the employer's existing channels for complaints and give him or her an opportunity to rectify the situation.

We recognize that a workplace policy on sexual harassment is something to get excited about only if workers maintain some awareness about its potential misuse. It doesn't necessarily offer much protection for a sexual
harassment victim; it implies that individual solutions to the problems of sexual harassment are possible, and that women workers can rely on management to take care of their problems. In many cases, the harasser and the person administering the policy are so close that a woman might not even be able to file a complaint.

The issue of using company policy only becomes more complicated when the harasser is a co-worker rather than a supervisor or part of management. We have seen instances in which a worker files a complaint against a male co-worker out of desperation and lack of options and then is appalled to find out that she loses complete control over the process and over what might happen to resolve the situation.

In other words, when the harasser is disciplined or fired, it may be for reasons other than the harassment: perhaps he is personally disliked; maybe he is not wanted in the workplace because of union work, his color, or his national background; possibly the management is religiously or morallistically opposed to sex, or the owners fear negative publicity or legal action. Issues of worker harassment, union harassment, and racism then come into play. Any individual "victory" in getting a harasser fired can also be a defeat for those of us who see sexual harassment as being rooted in broader power relationships. When anti-sex attitudes prevail then the liberation we seek is undermined by a limited vision of who we are as people and a view of sexuality which is ultimately anti-woman. If only women who can afford a lawyer and are not intimidated by the legal system (or by publicity about the actions taken against them) can be effective in stopping harassment, men will simply choose easier victims. Here the conflict between helping a woman and confronting power structures is deepest.

It is still worthwhile to have a policy against sexual harassment on the books. There are those occasions in which the policy provides just enough legitimacy and safety for a woman to pursue some form of direct or collective action with a minimal amount of protection. A stated policy and grievance procedure also helps clarify before the fact how the employer might respond to sexual harassment and helps to make that response consistent. With no clear policy outlined before, the employer can justify any action he or she chooses to take and simply use sexual harassment as a tool for selective punishment of certain employees. Given that women who are being sexually harassed often feel forced to go to Personnel at some point during the experience, it is better to have a policy than not to have one. The key is to be very clear about the limits and potential abuses of such a policy.

Sexual harassment is a complicated issue. Fighting it requires an understanding of how sexism, racism, and class privilege operate in our society and in the workplace. Sexual harassment occurs within the work setting because of strict hierarchies which result from and reinforce capitalist economic organization. These class hierarchies are not always structured along race and gender lines, although we have found that race, class, and gender
often coincide. When trying to decide what to do about sexual harassment, we have to take all of these exploitative systems into account.

As leftists and feminists, we can understand why sexual harassment occurs and in many ways it comes as no surprise that it does. What has not been acknowledged to date is the very real bind a woman experiencing harassment is in. We constantly hear about all the problems with the legal system and with using formal or institutional channels to grieve. But along with these very necessary critiques must be a serious understanding of the limited options that do exist. We must be as concerned with protecting the woman being harassed and her right to take action as we are with the potential (and probable) misuse of formal complaint channels. This requires not only extensive education about sexual harassment and ways to fight it, but also concerted action by both female and male workers within a workplace before harassment ever occurs.