From a Hostile Work Environment to a Hostile Courtroom:
SHeroes, Victims, and Martyrs
Kate Troy

Abstract

Lois Jenson was among the first women hired to work at Eveleth Taconite Mines on Minnesota’s Iron Range shortly after the U.S. Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission required the company to reserve 20 percent of jobs for women and minority men in 1974. After enduring a sexually hostile and discriminatory work environment for nine years, Lois filed a complaint against Eveleth Mines alleging sexual harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII).

Since courts previously considered sexual harassment claims on an individual basis, Judge Rosenbaum established a precedent in sexual harassment law when he determined that there was sufficient evidence to certify a class action “hostile work environment” law suit on behalf of all women employed at the mine. The lawsuit would span ten years and proceed through multiple phases including liability, damages, and an appeal before the parties finally settled. The personal costs involved in the litigation were enormous and affected plaintiffs as well as those who spent considerable time representing them. Many of the plaintiffs still struggle with adverse health effects as a result of the intensity and duration of the litigation.