

Circle of Trust



THE WOMEN WHO TESTIFIED AGAINST HARVEY WEINSTEIN HAVE COME TO LEAN ON EACH OTHER AFTER TAKING DOWN THE DISGRACED MOGUL

BY ELIZABETH WAGMEISTER



NEVER MORE READY
Dawn Dunning (foreground), Miriam Haley (left) and Tarale Wulff arrive in court March 11 for the sentencing of Harvey Weinstein.

Dawn Dunning first met with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in early 2018, nearly two years before she testified in the Harvey Weinstein trial. During a private meeting, Dunning, a former aspiring actor and mother of two small children, revealed a story she had never told.

I TOLD THE D.A. EVERYTHING that happened because I honestly just didn't know what would come out from the defense, so I thought it was best to tell them the whole truth. But I didn't think it would come up in the trial," Dunning says of the time she alleges Weinstein stuck his hand up her skirt during a business meeting, slightly penetrating her with his fingers. The incident occurred in 2004, shortly after Dunning first met the movie mogul when she was working as a cocktail waitress at a nightclub in New York City's Meatpacking District. Weinstein struck up a professional conversation with her and volunteered to help with her acting career, suggesting he would arrange a meeting and even offering to set up a screen test with his company, Miramax. When Dunning arrived at the business meeting that Weinstein scheduled at a swanky boutique hotel, Miramax employees were present in his suite, so the prospect of Weinstein acting inappropriately never crossed her mind.

Prior to disclosing her personal story to the D.A.'s office, Dunning had only spoken up about a separate encounter with Weinstein where she claims he propositioned her for a threesome, alongside his assistant, trying to lure her with the false promise that Charlize Theron and Salma Hayek had exchanged sex for movie roles.

"Not one single human on Earth knew about it, let alone my husband or my parents or my best friends. I had to slowly go

around and tell everyone because the D.A. said this is going to become public, so you should probably tell your family," Dunning recalls of her preparation for the trial. "I told my husband, I told some of my close friends, but I couldn't bring myself to tell my dad."

Dunning recalls the morning her father arrived at her home, in the midst of the 2020 trial, with a copy of *The New York Times* in hand. He read the story and thought the newspaper had printed the wrong information about his daughter.

"My dad had to read about my vagina in *The New York Times*," Dunning says. "That was one of the hardest parts for me, aside from being followed and having to look over my shoulder constantly. I have two small kids, so I wondered if they were in danger or if I was in danger."

In the courtroom, Weinstein's lead attorney, Donna Rotunno, attacked Dunning's credibility. "Wait, wait, I forgot about the time he threw his finger in my vagina," Rotunno said during her closing arguments, mocking Dunning in front of the jury.

Rotunno also challenged Lauren Young's accusation that she was trapped and assaulted in 2013 in a Beverly Hills hotel bathroom, where she was lured under the guise of a business meeting. Rotunno questioned the mental health of Jessica Mann, a hairdresser whose testimony resulted in Weinstein being convicted of rape in the third degree. Rotunno called Annabella Sciorra "the darling of the movement" and claimed that the actor reaped the benefits of a reignited career by saying she was raped by Weinstein in the early '90s. Weinstein's attorney also argued that Tarale Wulff and Miriam Haley obtained civil attorneys Douglas Wigdor and Gloria Allred solely to squeeze money out of her client in anticipation of a "pot of gold" at the end of the trial.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS
The Silence Breakers, a group of women who have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct or assault, hold a press conference in Los Angeles on Feb. 25.



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These six women, who were cross-examined in a courtroom of strangers, willingly gave up their privacy, testifying about gruesome details of their sexual assaults in front of high-profile lawyers, international media and a 12-person jury, which ultimately found Weinstein guilty of a criminal sex act and rape. Following the verdict, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison; he still awaits a trial in Los Angeles, where he faces a maximum sentence of an additional 28 years.

"Justice is a weird thing. I'm not even sure what that means," says Haley, a former "Project Runway" production assistant who served as one of the two key witnesses in the trial. "Obviously it's not going to undo the harm and damage that he did," she says of Weinstein's substantial sentencing. "I am completely convinced that if Harvey Weinstein was not being confined in prison, he would be out there doing what he was doing — he would still be abusing, assaulting and raping people — and he would have felt even more empowered."

Dunning says she can't fathom that Weinstein — now, a convicted rapist — was finally brought to trial. "I'm just still in disbelief," she says of the sentencing.

Wulff was also skeptical that Weinstein would receive a long prison sentence.

"There was this dreamy version of us wanting maximum sentencing, but then there's the reality of the legal system, and we kept hearing it might be in single digits," Wulff says, recalling the day in court when Justice James Burke sentenced Weinstein aloud. "When the [number] '23' came out, my body just fell forward."

Haley believes the verdict and sentencing make a strong statement about the direction society is headed. She says the jury and the judge allowed themselves to be educated in a highly complicated case of he said, she said, with very little hard evidence. "They were informed. They understand. They heard us," she says.

Haley, Wulff, Dunning, Sciorra, Mann and Young are just six of at least 100 women who have publicly come forward over the past three years to accuse Weinstein. Together, they did the impossible. They took down Hollywood's kingmaker, who counted Bill and Hillary as friends, and was compared to God by Meryl Streep at the Oscars.

The week following the 2020 Academy Awards, as Weinstein shuffled into

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— Miriam Haley



FINALLY HEARD
Miriam Haley, a former "Project Runway" production assistant, was one of two key witnesses on which the charges against Weinstein rested; Annabella Sciorra was the first woman to testify in the trial.

the criminal courthouse with the aid of his walker, reporters asked if he had watched the ceremony. Inside the courtroom, women told their horror stories about being preyed upon at The Weinstein Co.'s Oscar parties.

Working with the D.A.'s office for two years, in preparation for the trial, forced the women to relive the trauma they experienced at the hands of Weinstein, but they chose to sacrifice their anonymity, their reputations and their personal relationships.

"I did not prepare for what would come after my testimony — there was a lot of good that came out of it, but for me, personally, the hardest thing that I'm still dealing with is losing a friendship because of it," Wulff says through tears. "Some people don't want to be associated with me coming forward. I think it's important for people to know that. It's the last person I thought I would lose as a friend, and I never thought that would happen, but everyone is entitled to their own opinion."

All three women who spoke to *Variety* for this piece in the month following Weinstein's sentencing say they do not regret taking part in the trial. They recognize the value of their testimony and are hopeful for future generations of women. But now, they are learning how to navigate their lives post-trial, wrestling with media attention and the pressure to use their new platform — not to mention continuously coping with their trauma.

The six women who testified were not allowed to meet one another until the day of the sentencing, when lead prosecutor Joan Illuzzi brought them together in the early morning. Now, with a shared experience that no one else can understand, the women are on a group chat and text each other daily.

"Even if our conversation dies down in a year or two, I know I can call them in 15 years. Regardless of how we were brought together or why, we created something from that," Wulff says of her new support system. "Having them has helped me keep validating what I'm feeling. It's really easy to move on because you feel like you have to, but these girls, their ears will never wear out."

The newfound friends have found solace in an unintended bright spot of the trial: the public's education about sexual assault trauma.

During her victim impact statement at Weinstein's sentencing, Mann — who testified for three days in painful detail about the sexual assaults she suffered over a complex five-year relationship with Weinstein — faced the judge and told him what she learned about rape and trauma throughout the trial. "Rape is not just one moment of penetration. It is forever," she said. Referencing the headline-making moment when she was crying so hard that she had to be helped off the stand mid-testimony, she told the judge, "The day my uncontrollable screams were heard from the witness room was the day

HALEY: RICHARD DREW/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK; SCIORRA: RICHARD DREW/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK

my full voice came back into my power.”

Noting the rape myth that people believe an attack only occurs by a stranger in a dark alley at gunpoint, Wulff says: “I was really uneducated, even though I was a witness in the trial. I was still trying to figure out what I thought rape was a year or more into it. Right before the trial, I was still trying to figure it out, and I had been judging myself based on antiquated ideas of what rape is.”

The outcome of Weinstein’s trial is atypical. The vast majority of sexual assault cases do not end up in a conviction, let alone make their way into a courtroom. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, the country’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, 995 out of 1,000 perpetrators walk away free.

“I think it’s going to change the way the legal system looks at these cases and prosecutes these cases, but I also think it will change the way that things are reported,” Dunning says of the verdict. “When what happened to me with Weinstein happened, I didn’t even know what he did was illegal.”

BONDED FOREVER

Tarale Wulff says the six women who testified are now in a group chat, and text each other daily.

assault and the contagious aftermath of society turning a blind eye, to the literal virus sweeping the country. The women who testified want to do their part to ensure this story does not go away.

“I think Harvey’s sentencing sends a really loud message, and staying vocal about it with the media will keep the volume up so it will keep resonating,” Wulff says. “Right now, we’re all about social responsibility, but it goes beyond coronavirus. It took on a whole new definition because we’re all responsible literally for death right now, so now that it has this highlighted meaning, hopefully, it will now click in everyone’s mind what social responsibility really is — to keep each other accountable to keep each other safe.”

Despite Weinstein’s diagnosis and his legal team likely appealing the verdict this summer, the Los Angeles D.A.’s office has begun the extradition process, signaling its plan to move forward with the West Coast trial, which will rest on four rape and sexual assault charges from two women. Young, who testified in New York, will take the stand once again in L.A., because her alleged assault occurred in California. Many women who have accused Weinstein — including Italian model Ambra Gutierrez, who participated in a successful NYPD sting operation in 2015, though D.A. Cyrus Vance opted not to prosecute the case at that time — are eager to testify to make their mark on the ever-growing fight for women’s equality.

“Honestly, I wish him good health and a quick recovery because those



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HAD WEINSTEIN’S SENTENCING been scheduled any later last month, his court date could have been indefinitely delayed, as courthouses have shut down across the country in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Had his case been tried later in the year, it could have ended in a mistrial, as the court would not have been able to hold the jury in overtime, and the jurors would have been forced to practice social distancing and voluntary quarantining, like the rest of the world.

As if it were a script that Weinstein produced, the fallen mogul is now locked up in a maximum-security state prison, recovering from the coronavirus in an isolation chamber.

Though his team declined to comment on his health, prison officials confirmed to *Variety* that Weinstein tested positive for COVID-19 on March 22, less than two weeks after he was sentenced and transferred from Bellevue Hospital to Rikers Island and then to the Wende Correctional Facility outside Buffalo. Ironically, that was the city in which he got his start with his first entrepreneurial foray, a concert-promoting company that established him as an entertainment-biz whiz and aggressive businessman. While the global pandemic has become the biggest story of our lifetime, as a result, Weinstein’s face was ripped off the front pages, and the headlines swiftly shifted from highlighting the virus of sexual



women have something to say and he’s got to hear it,” Wulff says of Weinstein, adding that she hopes to be in L.A. to support the women during the trial. “The biggest torture will be ego and karma, so I hope his physical immune system is nice and strong.”

With Weinstein behind bars and another trial on the horizon, history books are being written and progress is being made. But there is still much work to be done.

“The trial is just one piece of the whole puzzle, but I think it’s a very important part because there’s so much public interest,” Haley says, sharing that since the trial ended, she has received a torrent of messages on social media from strangers thanking her for giving them the confidence to stand up for themselves in the workplace when they are faced with inequality.

“I hope that this has brought forward more of a feeling of confidence, in terms

SISTERS IN ARMS

Lauren Young, Jessica Mann and the other women who testified were not permitted to meet each other until the day of Weinstein’s sentencing.

of being able to set boundaries and not accept unacceptable behavior. Things take time. Laws don’t change overnight. But when the awareness is there, that gets the ball rolling and gives people more confidence,” Haley adds. “A lot of this went on because people got away with it, so they didn’t think twice. Harvey Weinstein got away with decades of raping people — he obviously thought he was entitled to do that. I think people will become a lot more conscious in the workplace, both in Hollywood and outside of Hollywood.”

Dunning says that behavior like Weinstein’s is old news, and as the workplace continues to diversify, tolerance for harassment and abuse will lessen. “The younger generation is not going to buy into that,” she says. “Men and women are just over it. Enough is enough.”

Wulff, a model who says she was raped by Weinstein in 2005 when she was called in for a nonexistent audition that ended up with Weinstein assaulting her, says she doesn’t know the inner workings of Hollywood firsthand, but is hopeful that the trial will change the entertainment industry’s culture.

“There might be other people like Harvey who manipulate power, so I hope his void is filled with something better, and Hollywood doesn’t allow that to come back in there,” Wulff says. “Our eyes have really opened and we all have been given a golden ticket to call out what we see, and there’s room now for people who have been suppressed to take their moment, but it starts at the top; that might have the Hollywood machine running cleanly.”

Haley says that even though Weinstein is behind bars, it’s hard to shake off the decades-long acceptance of bad behavior, the boys’ club and systems that protect abuse of power. “The paranoia that comes along with going through something like this,” she begins to explain. “Harvey Weinstein still has a lot more resources than me and, in a way, is still in a more powerful position, perhaps, in some odd way, even in prison.”

Dunning, too, calculates the advantages of privilege, but now can find a different result. “When you see what happens in politics or business, I just had the opinion that money and power, you can’t beat them, no matter what,” she says. “So to me, this was a real example of strength in numbers and power to the people: If you come together and fight something huge, you can win.”

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— Tarale Wulff, of Weinstein and his behavior