

Lawsuit Accuses Former Associate of Harvey Weinstein of Rape

[nytimes.com/2023/04/07/style/sara-ziff-fabrizio-lombardo-rape.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/07/style/sara-ziff-fabrizio-lombardo-rape.html)

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Fabrizio Lombardo, the former head of Miramax in Italy and a close associate of Harvey Weinstein, has been accused of rape in [a lawsuit](#) filed on April 6 in New York State Supreme Court. The suit was brought by Sara Ziff, a former model and the founder of the Model Alliance, an advocacy group for models and fashion creatives.

The suit alleges that Mr. Lombardo, assaulted Ms. Ziff in a New York City hotel in 2001 when she was 19.

Ms. Ziff is suing Mr. Lombardo, as well as Mr. Weinstein, Disney and its subsidiaries Buena Vista and Miramax, for abuse and negligence under the Adult Survivors Act. The A.S.A., which was passed in May 2022, extended, until November 2023, the rights of sex crime victims to bring civil claims that would otherwise have expired under the statute of limitations.

Mr. Lombardo — whom Mr. Weinstein [once credited with saving his life](#) and whose 2003 wedding involved Mr. Weinstein as his best man — often figured on the sidelines of the many stories about Mr. Weinstein’s predations on young women. He was named in the sexual harassment [class action suit](#) brought against the Weinstein Company and numerous related entities in October 2018. But this is the first time he himself has been accused of sexual assault in a court of law.

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It is also the first time Ms. Ziff has spoken publicly about her own experience, despite being instrumental in helping others tell their stories of sexual abuse, specifically creating a help line for survivors at the Model Alliance.

“It’s taken over 20 years to process this,” she said in an interview in advance of filing the suit. “I couldn’t even talk to anyone about it for the first few years, let alone imagine taking legal action.” When the A.S.A. was passed, however, she said she began to reconsider.

Image



Sara Ziff, receiving a CFDA award for Positive Social Influence in 2021. Credit...Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

Efforts to reach Mr. Lombardo were unsuccessful. Disney did not respond to emails and phone calls requesting comment.

Imran H. Ansari, a lawyer for Harvey Weinstein, wrote in an email: “Certainly Mr. Weinstein had no control over any alleged conduct by Mr. Lombardo, nor would he have any reason to know what Mr. Lombardo was doing nor where Mr. Lombardo was at the time that Ms. Ziff alleges she was raped. As such, Mr. Weinstein firmly denies that he has any liability for the alleged conduct of another.” (Mr. Weinstein was sentenced to a combined 39 years in prison for sex crimes in New York and Los Angeles.)

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According to the lawsuit, Ms. Ziff met Mr. Lombardo in 2001 when she was considering becoming an actress; her agents brokered the meeting. Mr. Lombardo later invited her to a screening of a Miramax movie and said it would be a chance to meet Mr. Weinstein, then at the height of his power in Hollywood.

After the screening, the lawsuit says, Mr. Lombardo invited Ms. Ziff for a drink at the Mercer and said both Mr. Weinstein and his brother, Bob, would be there. When Ms. Ziff arrived, Mr. Lombardo brought her to a penthouse suite, with no one else present.

The lawsuit says that after making advances and being told by Ms. Ziff she had a boyfriend, Mr. Lombardo “pivoted her around onto the bed on her back,” lay on top of her and raped her.

“Ms. Ziff was in shock and lay in the bed, frozen. Mr. Lombardo fell asleep. Ms. Ziff woke up early the next morning, confused and alone in the hotel room. She walked home to her apartment, took a long shower, and cried,” the suit reads. The suit also says Ms. Ziff did not speak about the rape to anyone at the time. A few years later she told a fellow model, Caitriona Balfe (now an actress), about the assault.

Ms. Balfe confirmed that Ms. Ziff had told her about the rape during a fashion show season in Milan around 2005.

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Ms. Balfe said she and Ms. Ziff never thought about making it public. “We were so young, and the crazy thing is as models we were being put in these really compromising situations all the time, and you just kind of accepted them,” Ms. Balfe said.

Image



Sara Ziff modeling in the Marc Jacobs Spring 2004 show. Credit...Photo by J. Vespa/WireImage, via Getty

Now 40, and the mother of a young daughter, Ms. Ziff acknowledged that while her experience may have shaped her decision to go into advocacy and become the public face of models' rights, she herself had been reluctant to do what she helped other models do.

“I feel more comfortable focusing on the discussions around policy,” she said. She and the Model Alliance are currently working on a new bill, the Fashion Workers Act, which focuses on regulating management agencies in order to prevent these abuses from happening. Co-sponsored by State Senator Brad Hoylman, the bill was introduced in the New York state legislature last year and will be reconsidered during the upcoming legislative session, after it was not passed the first time.

However, Ms. Ziff said, she had spent the last decade talking to other survivors, and in helping other people, she began to feel it was “the responsible thing” to come forward.

“I’ve been very anxious about it and at times wondered if I even want to go through this process,” she said. “I’ve spoken to other people who’ve gone through it and every single one of them says it’s a nightmare. But no matter how much I’ve tried to ignore it or minimize it, this is not my burden to hold.”

In 2017 Ms. Ziff filed a report with the New York City Police Department, though it did not lead to any charges. That was the year Mr. Lombardo was accused by four women, including the actress Asia Argento and the model Zoe Brock, of being Mr. Weinstein’s enabler — and employed by Miramax in part for that purpose. Mr. Lombardo emphatically denied the allegations in an interview with The New York Times.

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Mr. Lombardo never appeared in court during the class action suit, and it was later settled as part of the Weinstein Company bankruptcy filing.

“I’ve always been frustrated by the fact that those people seem to escape any kind of accountability,” Ms. Ziff said. She said that when the A.S.A. was passed, she remembered going to the bill signing with the governor and with other women she had come to know over the years who had spoken out about their abuse and trauma.

“It felt like here was a real sense of possibility that perhaps we could do something about what happened,” she said, “even if it happened a very long time ago.”

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