



Impact of Weinstein Trial Verdict: 5 Critical Points

Following the announcement of a split verdict and conviction on 2 of 5 counts in the criminal trial of Harvey Weinstein, here are 5 critical points to keep in mind.

MORE MUST BE DONE TO CONTINUE TO SHIFT HOW WE TALK ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AND PEOPLE WHO COMMIT ABUSE.

It's clear even in the wake of #MeToo, misconceptions about sexual harassment and assault, a lack of understanding of people who sexually offend, and baseless ideas of how "real victims" behave after an assault persist. Experts recognized the testimony presented to be consistent with how many other survivors of sexual assault respond. Despite this, it is disappointing to see the outcome influenced by misconceptions and stereotypes about how victims respond.

THERE ARE REAL AND UNDERSTANDABLE REASONS WHY VICTIMS DELAY REPORTING AND STAY IN CONTACT WITH THE PERSON WHO ABUSED THEM.

People who commit sexual violence often strategically target victims and exploit their vulnerabilities to force them into silence. They may use threats, manipulation, and verbal abuse to make it clear that they won't be believed and would face dire consequences for reporting.

Similarly, many times, victims maintain contact in an effort to avoid angering their abuser and mitigate the risk to themselves by acting the way they think the person wants them to act. This is because people who commit acts of sexual assault have already demonstrated that they can be very dangerous and intimidating and have groomed the victim to feel responsible for the abuse they are experiencing.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, ASSAULT, AND ABUSE WILL ONLY END WHEN THESE BEHAVIORS ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AND NO ONE IS THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE.

Sexual contact without consent is sexual assault. This fact remains true regardless of how you perceive the judgement, character, or motivations of the victim. This case is an example of what happens when we don't respond to victims -- dozens more are sexually harassed, assaulted, and abused.

People who commit acts of sexual violence also use tactics of manipulation to shield themselves from accountability. They may abuse celebrity or authority status and the illusion of trust that comes with it. They may groom the individuals and systems they are surrounded by to tolerate and excuse their abuse. This is why it is so imperative that we must continue to hold those who commit sexual violence accountable, regardless of their position in the community, their power, their fame, or their wealth.

SURVIVORS NEED MORE OPTIONS AND OUR SUPPORT.

The dynamics of this case remind us that while the criminal justice system is an important avenue for some survivors to seek justice and healing, it cannot be, and is not, the only one. Only after there was an outpouring of allegations in the public eye did prosecutors act to investigate the reports of Weinstein's pervasive sexual abuse. This trial demonstrated the widespread challenges encountered by victims of sexual assault across the country. Still we also know most victims never make a formal report to law enforcement, and most rape cases rarely make it to trial.

Not only is the criminal justice system a limited option for survivors, but it also cannot become more effective in a vacuum. Victims always have and always will consider their own social circles and those of the person who assaulted them when deciding whether to tell others. For some, this case is so far removed from their own experiences that it may have little influence. For others who were assaulted by a person in power, it may have more bearing.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES SAFER BY SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AND HOLD THOSE WHO COMMIT ABUSE ACCOUNTABLE.

What is most important for us to recognize is the way we talk about this case, the victims, and the issue as a whole will be heard by people around us. What we say will influence the people we know and the choices they make. Our words demonstrate whether sexual harassment, assault, and abuse will be taken seriously and shape whether survivors in our own lives feel safe and supported.

We all must also do better in understanding and anticipating the true nature of sexual victimization and traumatic response when victims share what has been done to them. We must stop expecting victims to behave as they do on television and in the movies. Instead, we must give victims the opportunity to find support and safety in our communities.

ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation.