# Inner Circle Lured Girls for Epstein, Accusers Say: [Metropolitan Desk]

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## FULL TEXT

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Haley Robson was a 16-year-old South Florida high school student when an acquaintance from school approached her at a local pool with an intriguing offer: Did she want to make extra money giving massages to a billionaire in Palm Beach?

She agreed. When Jeffrey Epstein tried to grope her while she was giving him a massage, wearing nothing but a thong, she brushed his hand away, Ms. Robson said in a 2009 deposition for a civil case. But she continued to visit Mr. Epstein's mansion dozens more times, in a lucrative new role: a recruiter of other teenage girls from her school. "I didn't have to convince them," she said in the deposition. "I proposed to them. They took it."

After Mr. Epstein's suicide in a Manhattan jail cell in early August, federal authorities have refocused their investigation on the more than half-dozen employees, girlfriends and associates whom prosecutors say he relied on to feed his insatiable appetite for girls, according to two people with knowledge of the inquiry. Ms. Robson, now 33, is among them.

A review by The New York Times of lawsuits, unsealed court records and depositions, along with new interviews, offers disturbing allegations about how this small cadre of women helped Mr. Epstein lure girls into his orbit and managed the logistics of his encounters with them.

The urgency of the investigation into Mr. Epstein's associates was underscored on Tuesday when about two dozen women offered searing accounts of how he had sexually abused them before a packed courtroom in Manhattan. The judge overseeing the case had invited the women to speak at a hearing to dismiss the indictment against Mr. Epstein in light of his death.

Several of the women implored federal prosecutors to continue investigating the women in Mr. Epstein's inner circle. "Jeffrey is no longer here, and the women that helped him are," said Teresa Helm, who said she was recruited into Mr. Epstein's world 17 years ago. "They definitely need to be held accountable for helping him, helping themselves, helping one another carry on this huge -- almost like -- system."

The United States attorney in Manhattan, Geoffrey S. Berman, whose office brought the charges against Mr. Epstein, said after his suicide that the investigation into the sex-trafficking conspiracy was not finished and prosecutors were committed to standing up for the "brave young women" Mr. Epstein had abused.

One of the women under scrutiny, Mr. Epstein's onetime girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell, has been accused in several well-publicized lawsuits of overseeing efforts to procure girls and young women for him, a charge she has firmly denied.

But Mr. Epstein is also accused in civil suits of relying on an organized network of underlings: those who trained girls how to sexually pleasure him; office assistants who booked cars and travel; and recruiters who ensured he always had a fresh supply of teenage girls at the ready.

None of Mr. Epstein's associates have been charged or named as co-conspirators in Manhattan. But federal authorities are eyeing possible charges that include sex trafficking and sex trafficking conspiracy, the two people with knowledge of the investigation said.

Four women were apparently so instrumental to Mr. Epstein's operation that they were named as possible "co-

conspirators" and were granted immunity from prosecution in a widely criticized plea bargain Mr. Epstein struck with federal prosecutors in Florida more than a decade ago. That deal allowed Mr. Epstein to plead guilty to state charges and to spend 13 months in a county jail rather than face a federal sex-trafficking indictment.

The four women -- Sarah Kellen, Lesley Groff, Adriana Ross and Nadia Marcinkova -- could still be subject to criminal charges in Manhattan. The United States attorney's office has said it is not bound by the Florida agreement.

'The boss'

Three women have alleged in lawsuits that Mr. Epstein's sex-trafficking ring operated as a hierarchy, with the financier and Ms. Maxwell at the top.

"She orchestrated the whole thing for Jeffrey," Sarah Ransome, who sued Ms. Maxwell and other associates in 2017, said in an interview.

Ms. Maxwell, the daughter of the British publishing magnate Robert Maxwell, was Mr. Epstein's longtime companion, managing his homes and introducing him to many of the politicians, celebrities and dignitaries who became fixtures within his social circle.

"They were like partners in business," Janusz Banasiak, Mr. Epstein's house manager, said in a deposition. Mr. Epstein's butler, Alfredo Rodriguez, described Ms. Maxwell in a deposition as "the boss."

Ms. Maxwell has vehemently denied she trafficked girls. Neither Ms. Maxwell nor her lawyers responded to requests for interviews for this article.

But Mr. Epstein's accusers contend in court papers that Ms. Maxwell managed the network of recruiters and helped devise the playbook for how to lure young women into Mr. Epstein's web. Recruiters were allegedly told to target young, financially desperate women, and to promise them help furthering their education and careers, these civil complaints said.

Virginia Roberts Giuffre said in a deposition that she was 16 when she met Ms. Maxwell and was recruited as a masseuse. She said she remembered Ms. Maxwell's sales pitch: If she gave a wealthy man a massage, a whole world of opportunity would open to her.

"If the guy likes you, then, you know, it will work out for you," Ms. Giuffre, in a deposition, recalled Ms. Maxwell telling her. "You'll travel. You'll make good money. You'll be educated."

Ms. Giuffre took the job. Soon, she said, she became Mr. Epstein's "sex slave," not only providing sexual favors to him but also to some of his acquaintances, including politicians and prominent businessmen.

"My whole life revolved around just pleasing these men and keeping Ghislaine and Jeffrey happy," she said in the deposition. "Their whole entire lives revolved around sex."

The 'lieutenant'

Just below Ms. Maxwell in the chain of command was Ms. Kellen, another high-ranking employee, who has been accused in multiple lawsuits of scheduling girls for sex sessions with Mr. Epstein in his Palm Beach mansion.

She was called the "lieutenant" in one lawsuit. David Rodgers, Mr. Epstein's pilot, said in a deposition that Ms. Kellen was "like an assistant to Ghislaine."

Ms. Kellen kept the names and numbers of all the girls who gave Mr. Epstein erotic massages, according to Palm Beach police reports and Ms. Robson's deposition. She would call them whenever Mr. Epstein was in town, asking the girls if they were ready to "work," the reports and Ms. Robson said.

"She saw herself as the boss," said Spencer T. Kuvin, a West Palm Beach lawyer who represented several accusers in lawsuits. "Sarah was really running that organization, bringing girls and getting them in and out of the Palm Beach home."

Ms. Kellen, who sometimes goes by Sarah Kensington or Sarah Vickers, did not respond to requests for an interview. Her lawyers also did not respond to requests for comment.

Multiple girls told Palm Beach detectives that when they arrived at Mr. Epstein's mansion, Ms. Kellen would escort them upstairs to Mr. Epstein's bedroom and lay out the massage table with the various oils and lotions that they were to use on him, according to police reports.

In an interview, Ms. Ransome said Ms. Kellen and Ms. Maxwell also gave her tips on how to give Mr. Epstein erotic

massages, including how to rub his feet and best satisfy him sexually.
"It was Ghislaine and Sarah Kellen that showed me how to please Jeffrey," Ms. Ransome said.
The assistants
Ms. Groff, Mr. Epstein's executive assistant for almost 20 years, was one of the possible co-conspirators named in the 2008 plea deal Mr. Epstein's lawyers worked out with the United States attorney's office in Miami.
She said in a 2005 interview with The Times that she answered Mr. Epstein's telephone and managed his schedule, which included meetings with prominent scientists, Wall Street executives, foreign dignitaries and American politicians.
Over the years, she said in 2005, she formed a special bond with the financier, anticipating his needs. "I know what he is thinking," she said at the time.
But Ms. Ransome said in her lawsuit that Ms. Groff, now 53, also arranged travel and lodging for the seemingly endless stream of adolescent girls and young women who provided Mr. Epstein with erotic massages.
In a recent interview with The Times, Ms. Ransome said Ms. Groff communicated directly with her, repeating Mr. Epstein's promises to help her obtain a fashion degree.
Ms. Groff's lawyer, Michael Bachner, said his client worked as part of a professional staff, making appointments, taking messages and setting up meetings. "At no time during Lesley's employment with Epstein did she ever engage in any misconduct and never knowingly made travel arrangements for anyone under 18," Mr. Bachner said.
Ms. Ransome also alleged in her lawsuit that she was instructed by Mr. Epstein's associates to go on a diet and to lose about 11 pounds to maintain her slim figure. In one email exchange reviewed by The Times, Ms. Ransome told Ms. Groff she was monitoring her weight for Mr. Epstein. "Please could you also let him know that I am now 57 kg and that everything is going well," Ms. Ransome emailed Ms. Groff in 2007.
Another of Mr. Epstein's assistants, Ms. Ross, was also named as a potential co-conspirator in the 2008 plea deal.
When Palm Beach police were investigating Mr. Epstein around 2005, Ms. Ross removed three computers from the Florida mansion, Mr. Banasiak, the house manager, said in a deposition. The police noted in their reports that the computers, which they had reason to think might contain photos of naked girls, were missing when investigators arrived.
"She show up one day with gentleman," Mr. Banasiak said. "And she told me that they are moving out those computers."
Ms. Ross, who went on to study accounting and is based in Miami, did not respond to calls or emails seeking comment.
'The more you do, the more you make'
Ms. Marcinkova, a former model and pilot, had come under police scrutiny in Palm Beach in 2005.
A 16-year-old told detectives she was giving Mr. Epstein a massage when Ms. Marcinkova entered the room naked, according to Palm Beach police reports. Mr. Epstein then told the girl she could make an extra $200 if she performed oral sex on Ms. Marcinkova, and the girl reluctantly agreed, the reports said.
That encounter was the first of many sexual trysts the teenager told the police she was coerced into having with both Ms. Marcinkova and Mr. Epstein at his Palm Beach mansion, according to a police incident report.
Police records also show that investigators had indications that Ms. Marcinkova might have been underage herself when she became involved with Mr. Epstein.
Ms. Marcinkova, who later used the last name Marcinko, declined to answer questions about Mr. Epstein's alleged abuse of girls when she was deposed in a lawsuit, invoking the Fifth Amendment.
Reached by The Times, Ms. Marcinkova's lawyers, Erica T. Dubno and Aaron Mysliwiec, said "like other victims, Nadia Marcinko is and has been severely traumatized" and "needs time to process and make sense of what she has been through before she is able to speak out."
Prosecutors may face thorny legal issues in deciding whether to charge some of Mr. Epstein's associates, like Ms. Robson and Ms. Marcinkova, who may have initially been victims themselves.
Determining criminal liability is always a complex decision if a person has been exploited for sex, then used as a

pawn to recruit others, said Lauren Hersh, a former sex-trafficking prosecutor in Brooklyn who now leads World Without Exploitation, an anti-trafficking organization.

"But for their own exploitation, they wouldn't do that," she said. "It becomes really, really tricky."

Ms. Robson, a former stripper and Olive Garden worker, was not among the four women given immunity in the Florida plea agreement. But her role in Mr. Epstein's operation was significant enough that Palm Beach Police detectives had planned to charge her more than a decade ago, according to an affidavit by the lead detective in Palm Beach.

She was also sued twice, and she described her role in Mr. Epstein's operation in a deposition.

When Mr. Epstein would fly into Florida, Ms. Robson said she would get a call on her cellphone from Ms. Kellen, who would tell her how many massages the financier needed for the upcoming visit. The two of them would hammer out logistics.

"I would have a girl that would be available for those dates and times," Ms. Robson said in a 2009 deposition.

Ms. Robson told lawyers she made $200 for every high school girl she brought to the Palm Beach mansion. She recruited the girls from her high school, including one who was 14. When she brought a 23-year-old, Mr. Epstein balked. Too old, he told her.

The girls knew what they were getting into, Ms. Robson said. The rules were unspoken, but understood.

"The more you do, the more you make," Ms. Robson said in the deposition. "If you were topless, if you were working in your thong, your bra, you're going to make more than a hundred."

Reached by The Times, Ms. Robson said, "I have nothing to say. I would appreciate if I was not contacted."

Douglas McIntosh, a lawyer who represented her in a civil case in Florida, called Ms. Robson "a lovely young lady," but declined to answer questions about her involvement with Mr. Epstein.

In her deposition, Ms. Robson said that she had debated suing Mr. Epstein, but decided against it.

"I just thought it was the easy way out," she said. "And then I decided this is my life and I have to take responsibility for my own actions because I did volunteer."

**Photograph**

Sarah Kellen, left, and Ghislaine Maxwell, the daughter of the British publishing magnate Robert Maxwell, have been accused in lawsuits of helping Jeffrey Epstein recruit teenage girls and young women for sex. (PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICK MCMULLAN, VIA GETTY IMAGES); Lesley Groff, below, who said in 2005 that over the years she had a formed a special bond with Mr. Epstein, anticipating his needs. (PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX RAPP/PATRICK MCMULLAN, VIA GETTY IMAGES) (A25)

## DETAILS

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|---|---|
| **Subject:** | Massage; Deposition; Criminal liability; Immunity from prosecution; Public prosecutors; Girls; Conspiracy; Criminal investigations; Human trafficking; Sex offenders; Victims of crime; Civil actions; Court hearings &proceedings; Sex crimes; Teenagers |
| **Location:** | United States--US; New York; Florida |
| **People:** | Epstein, Jeffrey; Maxwell, Ghislaine; Robson, Haley |
| **URL:** | https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/nyregion/jeffrey-epstein-ghislaine-maxwell.html |
| **Publication title:** | New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y. |
| **Pages:** | A.1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Publication year:** | 2019 |
| **Publication date:** | Aug 30, 2019 |
| **Section:** | A |
| **Publisher:** | New York Times Company |
| **Place of publication:** | New York, N.Y. |
| **Country of publication:** | United States, New York, N.Y. |
| **Publication subject:** | General Interest Periodicals--United States |
| **ISSN:** | 03624331 |
| **Source type:** | Newspaper |
| **Language of publication:** | English |
| **Document type:** | News |
| **ProQuest document ID:** | 2282208287 |
| **Document URL:** | https://rlib.pace.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/inner-circle-lured-girls-epstein-accusers-say/docview/2282208287/se-2?accountid=13044 |
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| **Last updated:** | 2019-08-30 |
| **Database:** | U.S. Major Dailies |

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