

Opinion: Julia Ormond is speaking for a generation of women who won't be silenced

[cnn.com/2023/10/11/opinions/julia-ormond-harvey-weinstein-lawsuit-stewart/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/11/opinions/julia-ormond-harvey-weinstein-lawsuit-stewart/index.html)

Opinion by Sara Stewart

October 11, 2023



Actress Julia Ormond attends the "Rememory" Premiere of the 2017 Sundance Film Festival at Library Center Theater in Park City, Utah.

Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Images

Editor's Note: [Sara Stewart](#) is a film and culture writer who lives in western Pennsylvania.

The views expressed here are solely the author's own. View [more opinion](#) articles on CNN.

CNN —

There's a question I find myself asking when watching movies from previous decades: Whatever happened to *that* actress? She was so good and then just ... not around anymore. It comes up with depressing frequency, as the films of the 1980s and 1990s are my absolute favorites.



Sara Stewart

Todd Thompson

The tally of names is lengthy, and it's annotated with highly-publicized rumors about this or that performer being, as it is so often (and tellingly) put, *difficult*. That word always struck me as awfully vague, but for many years there was no counternarrative to disprove or unpack it.

Recently, one of those actresses I always wondered about came forward: Last Wednesday, *Variety* reported that Julia Ormond is suing Harvey Weinstein for sexual battery, also naming the Creative Rights Agency (CAA), The Walt Disney Company and Miramax for their alleged negligence.

Ormond's claim alleges that Weinstein sexually assaulted her in 1995 after a business dinner and that Ormond told her agents about it, and that they advised her against speaking out about it. She is suing CAA, of which her former agents, Bryan Lourd and Kevin Huvane, are now co-chairs, for negligence and breach of fiduciary duty.

"Harvey Weinstein categorically denies the allegations made against him by Julia Ormond and he is prepared to vehemently defend himself," a representative for Weinstein told CNN in a statement. "This is yet another example of a complaint filed against Mr. Weinstein after the passing of decades, and he is confident that the evidence will not support Ms. Ormond's claims."

CNN has reached out to representatives for Miramax, The Walt Disney Company and CAA — along with Lourd and Huvane, who are not directly named as defendants in the lawsuit — for comment. CAA told Deadline in a statement that it "takes all allegations of sexual assault and abuse seriously, and has compassion for Ms. Ormond and the experience she described in her complaint. However, the claims that Ms. Ormond has levied against the agency are completely without merit."



(from left) Megan Twohey (Carey Mulligan) and Jodi Kantor (Zoe Kazan) in She Said, directed by Maria Schrader.

JoJo Whilden/Universal Pictures

Opinion: He killed Hollywood movies about women. But he couldn't bury this one

The mid-1990s was when Ormond was making a big splash, her career just kicking into high gear: She starred in the Western melodrama “Legends of the Fall” in 1994, alongside Brad Pitt and Anthony Hopkins, and in 1995 she co-starred in “First Knight” with Sean Connery, as well as a high-profile remake of “Sabrina” with Harrison Ford and Greg Kinnear. It was also, ironically, only two years after the so-called “Year of the Woman” at the Oscars.

An interview with Ormond, now 58, was published **[on]** Monday in Rolling Stone. It includes awful, if unsurprising, details from the lawsuit about what happened when she told her agents at the time. Ormond alleges that, rather being her advocates, her agents suggested that if she reported Weinstein, she wouldn’t be believed, and Weinstein would damage her career. In addition, after the incident and her disclosure of it to her agents, Ormond says CAA lost interest in representing her and her career was damaged dramatically anyway.

Can you believe it? Of course you can.

It is sickening and infuriating to read. And the nausea is compounded once you start backtracking to the accounts of other women in the film industry who have come forward, years later, with stories of their own: Annabella Sciorra, Darryl Hannah, Ashley Judd, Mira

Sorvino, Rosanna Arquette, Heather Graham, Claire Forlani, Rae Dawn Chong, Salma Hayek, Uma Thurman. A handful escaped having their careers blacklisted into oblivion by spurning the advances of Weinstein and others, or reporting actual assaults. Many didn't.

A recent survey conducted by Women in Film six years after the #MeToo movement began has some promising findings — many women in the industry say they feel significant progress has been made — but for me one of the starkest details was that “for people who identify as former entertainment industry workers, nearly half say the reason they left the industry is because of abuse or misconduct.”

One respondent summed up my own sense of cynicism about how much bad behavior still lurks in the industry: “I strongly feel that #MeToo has done nothing except teach men how to hide their behavior better.”



Actor James Franco attends the 2017 Governors Awards, on November 11, 2017, in Hollywood, California. / AFP PHOTO / VALERIE MACON (Photo credit should read VALERIE MACON/AFP/Getty Images).

VALERIE MACON/AFP/AFP/Getty Images

Opinion: James Franco controversy spotlights Hollywood's perpetual blind spot

Given the statistics about the incredibly low number of people who report sexual assault — the Brennan Center for Justice cites a 2016 Justice Department analysis finding that 80% of rapes and sexual assaults are not reported — it stands to reason there are

many, many more stories yet untold by women in Hollywood. And these are women who are likely to have the media take an interest in sharing their stories when they do come forward, for better or worse. What of all the ones who've been victimized outside the spotlight?

Unsurprisingly, CAA has accused Ormond of a shakedown, saying her team asked for a payout in order to keep its name out of the lawsuit. This is one of the classic retorts to women who speak up: She's only in it for the money. Or the fame (as if having your assault and your private life dissected publicly is a kind of fame anyone would wish for). Why would she only bring it up now, after so many years? To that last one, I have experienced a firsthand answer.

Throughout my career as an entertainment journalist, I've found women who worked in the industry in the 1980s and 1990s to be full of the most interesting, if often the bleakest, stories.

I have heard countless anecdotes about the ways in which women were forced to go along to get along, to pretend that gross misogyny was just a big joke, to dodge and weave physically and psychologically to avoid unwanted advances. Many eventually opted to leave the industry altogether. The ones who stay radiate a world-weariness that makes my heart hurt, though I'm so glad their contributions to the film world are there.

It's satisfying to see Ormond's case taking aim not only at her alleged attacker, Weinstein, but at the circle of people alleged to have been positioned to defend him. In my profession you're required to take a supplicant position to these folks, the ones who control the high walls surrounding the talent. They are the first line of defense and, when these jobs are held by bad actors, they compound the trauma.

I once wrote an awards-season story about an actor/director accused of sexual harassment by multiple women on his team. The case has since settled out of court, so it's impossible to say what the truth of it is; my aim was simply to call attention to the allegations in advance of this person being publicly celebrated.

I got a call from one of his representatives, who tried to talk me out of the story. I was told I was embarrassing myself, that what I was writing was baseless, that this person had clearly done nothing wrong. It was a tiny glimpse into industry pushback, and, I can only imagine, nothing compared to making a firsthand allegation against a famous man.

In her Rolling Stone interview, Ormond is clear-eyed about knowing what comes along with going after a predator so publicly — even one who's already behind bars. “I've been caught in this trap of, I'm going to face horrendous backlash of maybe never working again if I speak out, and I love what I do and don't want to lose that,” she told the magazine, “but I don't want to participate in it as a hypocrite either. I am seeking accountability for myself and hoping that will bring further change.”

In the aftermath of the character assassination of Amber Heard, of the increase in followers for alleged sexual predator Russell Brand, of the millions of unnamed women who've been subjected to sexual harassment at work in the film industry and literally every other industry in the world — I'm hoping against hope that Ormond succeeds.