

Actor Johnny Depp's testimony exposes unsubstantiated #MeToo allegations by Amber Heard

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On Friday, actor Johnny Depp underwent a fourth day on the witness stand as part of his defamation lawsuit against his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard, in a Fairfax County, Virginia courtroom.

Depp, 58, filed his lawsuit against Heard, 35, in 2019, seeking \$50 million in damages and \$350,000 in compensatory damages plus court costs. The suit is focused on Heard's opinion piece published in the *Washington Post* in December 2018 ("I spoke up against sexual violence—and faced our culture's wrath. That has to change"), which became a centerpiece of the #MeToo campaign, and its consequences for Depp's career.

In the self-aggrandizing column, Heard, while not mentioning Depp by name, asserted that "two years ago, I became a public figure representing domestic abuse, and I felt the full force of our culture's wrath for women who speak out."

Heard wrote: "Imagine a powerful man as a ship, like the Titanic. That ship is a huge enterprise. When it strikes an iceberg, there are a lot of people on board desperate to patch up holes—not because they believe in or even care about the ship, but because their own fates depend on the enterprise."

She went on, "In recent years, the #MeToo movement has taught us about how power like this works, not just in Hollywood but in all kinds of institutions—workplaces, places of worship or simply in particular communities. In every walk of life, women are confronting these men who are buoyed by social, economic and cultural power. And these institutions are beginning to change."

Depp, however, insists that Heard's claim she was a victim of domestic abuse at his hands was a pack of lies. If proven, that would represent a significant blow to the #MeToo sexual witch-hunt.

When he was asked by his own lawyer on Wednesday what he lost after Heard's accusations, Depp replied, "Nothing less than everything. When the allegations were made, when the allegations were rapidly circling the globe,

telling people that I was a drunken, cocaine-fueled menace who beat woman suddenly in my 50s, it's over." He added, "You're done."

On Thursday, Heard's lawyer Ben Rottenborn continued the cross-examination that began the previous afternoon following completion of Depp's opening testimony where he denied ever physically abusing his wife. On Monday and Tuesday, Depp repeatedly stated he never struck Heard and added, "nor have I ever struck any woman in my life."

Throughout the cross-examination, Rottenborn has challenged the actor's account of events involving Heard. The lawyer focused on Depp's history of drug and alcohol use, which the actor did not deny. In his earlier testimony, Depp freely described his battles with substance abuse and recounted his experiences as a child with an abusive mother.

Rottenborn read aloud text messages from Depp that referenced his drug use during the time he was in a relationship with Heard. Other text messages from Depp related to violent exchanges with Heard, although none of them substantiated claims that he struck or physically abused her.

Also on Thursday, jurors heard a videotaped deposition from Heard's former personal assistant, Kate James. According to *Fox News*, James "described Heard as extremely demanding, calling her at all hours and on weekends but refusing to pay her overtime." The assistant, wrote *Fox*, "who worked for Heard from 2012 to 2015, said the *Aquaman* actress was 'verbally abusive' to her, her late mother and her sister. 'Her mother was terrified of her,' James recalled. 'Her poor sister was treated like a dog that you kick.'"

James testified that during one confrontation over her salary, "Heard allegedly went berserk. 'She leapt up out of her chair, put her face approximately 4 inches from my face. She was spitting in my face, telling me how dare you ask me for the salary you're asking for,' recalled the ex-staffer, who was later fired."

In May 2016, Depp and Heard went through a divorce initiated by the latter, in which she was granted \$7 million by a judge in the settlement. Less than a week later, the actress began publicly accusing Depp of domestic violence.

As we have explained repeatedly, in the upside-down world of #MeToo, allegations of abuse are to be accepted uncritically, regardless of evidence to the contrary or even the reality that the only “facts” provided are from the accuser. In this witch-hunting atmosphere, unsubstantiated and salacious descriptions of sexual abuse or physical battery have been picked up by the celebrity gossip press and hysterical middle-class types and used to throw basic democratic rights, such as those protected by the Fourth and Sixth Amendments, out the window.

This campaign, which has been cultivated by the Democratic Party, along with the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, encourages the preoccupation with race and gender within well-off sections of the upper middle class. It has resulted in the ruination of the careers of numerous artists, actors and others. The latest victim of this reactionary “sexual misconduct” targeting is veteran actor Frank Langella.

The career damage suffered by Depp from Heard’s #MeToo allegations included being fired by Disney as the character Jack Sparrow in the planned sixth installment of the popular *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. And, as reported on the *World Socialist Web Site*, MGM used Heard’s claims in part to block the distribution and theatrical release of the important film *Minamata*, about the devastating impact of mercury poisoning in Japan in the 1970s, starring Depp as the remarkable photographer Eugene Smith.

In a statement to *Variety* on Thursday, Depp said, “Two years have passed with constant talk around the world about me being a wife-beater. So, I’m sure Disney was trying to cut ties to be safe. The #MeToo movement was in full swing at the time.”

At the very least, Depp’s testimony in the trial calls into question the veracity of Heard’s charge of domestic abuse. They show her accusations to be either false or wild exaggerations. It may even be the case, as Depp has maintained, that he was the victim of physical abuse by Heard.

In one specific incident, for example, Depp testified in detail about how, in 2015, while in Australia for the filming of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Heard grabbed a large bottle of vodka that he had been pouring drinks from and threw it at him. The bottle struck his hand on the edge of the bar, he said, and severed the tip of his middle finger. “I was looking directly at my bones sticking out,” he explained.

The injury made headlines, was referred to as an “off-set

accident” and forced a lengthy delay in the production of the fifth installment of the movie series. On the stand, Depp said he lied to doctors about what happened because he “didn’t want to disclose” it.

Meanwhile, audio recordings that Depp made of arguments with Heard indicate that she may well have punched or slapped him on multiple occasions, including one incident where she is heard apologizing for having done so.

Caught up in the #MeToo world of unsubstantiated gossip and rumor, Depp faces a difficult situation. He has never been charged, much less convicted of any crime, but he has been subjected to a partial blacklist due to his ex-wife’s comments. How does he, or anyone else, defend himself in this situation?

The trial has brought the couple’s lives, and the celebrity culture in general, into the light of day. As Depp admitted on the stand, he has significant emotional issues. At one point during the confrontational episode in Australia, he said it was the closest he had ever come to a mental breakdown. These things, along with his history of drug and alcohol abuse, are being used by Heard’s defense team to undermine Depp’s credibility and further demonize him publicly.

Whatever his personal flaws, Johnny Depp is an immensely gifted actor. His talent and significance as an artist have been demonstrated for more than three decades in films such as *Cry-Baby* (John Waters, 1990), *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton, 1990), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Terry Gilliam, 1998), *The Ninth Gate* (Roman Polanski, 1999), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Burton, 2005), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Ciro Guerra, 2019) and *Minamata* (Andrew Levitas, 2020).

Meanwhile, there is widespread public sympathy for him. Numerous hashtags on Twitter such as #JohnnyDeppIsInnocent and #JohnnyDeppDeservesJustice have been tweeted over the past few days. One such message said, “The thing is, Heard’s treatment of Depp HAS been known for years. It’s just that sexism, the media, MeToo movement & mainstream journalists buried it. He waited years to tell his side & to be listened to.”

Cross examination resumes on Monday. Amber Heard is scheduled to take the stand later in the trial, which is expected to last six weeks.



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