

What's your angle?

By Allison Camper

This past spring, we all watched the Johnny Depp v Amber Heard Defamation trial unfold. The sheer amount of public attention this case received should be no surprise, as eyes have been watching these headlines for years.

Depp and Heard met on the set of *The Rum Diary* in 2009 and by 2015, they were married, but their love didn't last. In 2016, Heard filed for divorce, and a temporary restraining order. Near the end of 2018, *The Washington Post* published an op-ed from Heard, about her opening up about her experience with domestic abuse. Although she never named anyone, the public assumed she was hinting at her ex-husband Depp. But since then, evidence has come out of both of them being abusive to each other. While some pointed out Depp's history of strange treatment towards women, more believed that Heard was a complete fraud, a liar trying to ruin Depp's career, and the abusive one in the relationship. Depp ended up winning the trial, taking home over 10 million dollars, but the judge gave 2 million in damages to Heard in her counterclaim.

Many believe the case could have turned out differently if it wasn't such a spectacle. The entire jury voted for Depp, and many blame the social media frenzy, as it could have tainted the outcome. I mean, if you type "Johnny Depp vs Amber Heard " into Google, *movie* and *memes* pop up before *verdict*. The trial was technically a defamation case against Heard, with Depp's lawyers accusing her op-ed of trying to target him, when the article never named anyone. But as we watched the trial turned into a "He hit me -she hit me first" type, with the internet and jury overwhelmingly supporting Depp, when there was tons of evidence proving that they both abused each other.

What even fewer people know, is that Depp previously sued the British tabloid *The Sun* for libel after they called him a “wife beater” and LOST. *The Sun* backed up their claim, with Heard explaining fourteen different instances of alleged assaults from Depp. Yet despite this, many people jumped onto Depp’s side, without ever knowing any details or facts from the story.

You'd expect at least some support for Heard if most of us dived in head first with no prior information on this, but that's not the case. It actually makes sense that society has a hard time believing not just women, but victims, because we don't want the accused to actually be guilty. Over 60% of rapes go unreported, and less than 6% of rapists ever spend a day in prison. In 2017, when this case first started building, less than 50% of all domestic violence in the US was even reported to the police. But whenever women try to speak out, people are quick to assume they're lying. Many run to a successful man's defense on the small possibility that the woman is trying to ruin his life, ignoring the greater chance that he ruined hers. But does this mean that the over 200,000 reported sexual assault cases last year were fake? Absolutely not. Yet so many men and women alike tend to hold onto the thought that a female victim could always be lying, maliciously trying to tear down a man's life.

A recent example of this that comes to mind is the singer Rex Orange County. Alex O’Conner (his real name) was charged with six counts of sexual assault in two days, but part of his fanbase is waiting until the case reaches the court room in January to even consider the chance of their favorite singer ever doing something like that. Yes, it was easy for the world to turn against someone like Harvey Wienstien, a creepy rich old man, but people don't want to let go of the idea they have in their head of their favorite British pop singer, and that's the critical issue.

I'm not saying to mindlessly believe every woman, but all accusations of violence need to be taken seriously. It takes so much bravery for victims to even speak up, and everybody deserves justice and a fair trial, and we did not give that to Amber Heard. Her and Depp's trial was partially swayed by the public outburst. The backlash the trial received was overwhelmingly in support of Depp, many called Heard a psychopathic liar, without ever hearing the full story. Maybe this will teach us not to form such strong opinions on stories we don't even know, and that celebrity trials on trauma and abuse should not be such a spectacle like this ever again. This case should show as a whole that we need to reflect on how we react to victims trying to tell their story. Are we really giving everyone a fair chance for justice?