

# RECOMMENDS

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This month's CMGI Recommends brings together films and theatrical works that resist the sensationalisation of sexual harassment, focusing instead on its aftermath, silences, and enduring effects. Together, they offer clarity rather than closure, prompting reflection on how power operates, harm is normalized, and listening becomes an ethical act.

## Prima Facie (2022)

WRITTEN BY SUZIE MILLER

What is particularly striking about Suzie Miller's *Prima Facie* is its deliberate reversal of perspective, forcing the audience to confront how the law, so often defended as neutral and rational, is structured around disbelief. Rather than staging sexual violence as spectacle, the play interrogates the legal machinery that metabolises such violence into procedure, precedent and technical failure. In doing so, it places its gaze firmly on institutions and on those who uphold them rather than on the act itself.



Performed as a one-woman monologue by Jodie Comer, *Prima Facie* centres on Tessa Ensler, a fiercely ambitious criminal barrister who has built her career defending men accused of sexual assault. Tessa believes, with near-religious conviction, in the purity of the law, that her job is merely to argue well, that guilt or innocence lies elsewhere, and that the system works because it must. The first half of the play barrels forward with breathless confidence, mirroring Tessa's own ascent and her comfort within structures that reward her sharpness and detachment.

The rupture comes when Tessa herself is assaulted by a colleague, a man protected by wealth, pedigree and professional proximity. Miller avoids sensationalism here but does not soften the humiliation either. The stage rain, soaking Comer's body, becomes less a metaphor for rebirth than an extension of degradation, collapsing the distance between private trauma and public exposure. When Tessa later chooses to take the witness stand, the decision may strain narrative logic for a woman acutely aware that "the law on sexual assault spins on the wrong axis," yet it serves a larger truth. Belief in justice is hardest to relinquish precisely when it has shaped one's entire identity.

Though the play can veer into didacticism, Comer's performance grounds it in lived vulnerability. In fleeting moments of solidarity and recognition, *Prima Facie* gestures toward collective listening rather than legal closure. By the end, it offers no easy catharsis, only a stark clarity about how institutions continue to fail those who speak out against sexual harassment.



## **Sorry, Baby (2025)**

DIRECTED BY EVA VICTOR

Eva Victor's *Sorry, Baby* is an unusually thoughtful intervention into the cinematic language of sexual harassment, distinguished by its refusal to grant the act itself narrative centrality. Instead, the film situates harm in its aftermath, in speech hesitated over, in social misalignments, and in the slow recalibration of a life that must continue.

Victor, in her directorial debut, stars as Agnes, a literature student whose attraction to her professor ends in an assault

that is neither sensationalised nor overexplained. The immediate response is emotional numbness, marked by uneasy humour shared with her best friend Lydie. The pain surfaces later, in solitude, in routine, and in Agnes's heightened sensitivity to language and casual remarks that unexpectedly trigger memory.

The film's emotional core lies in Agnes's friendship with Lydie, played with warmth and depth by Naomi Ackie. Their intimacy offers care without demand, allowing Agnes to exist beyond her trauma. By foregrounding humour, tenderness, and ordinary life, *Sorry, Baby* gently challenges fixed ideas of how survivors should behave or heal. It is less a story of recovery than of endurance, attentive to life after harm rather than the harm itself.

## **The Assistant (2019)**

DIRECTED BY TODD FIELD

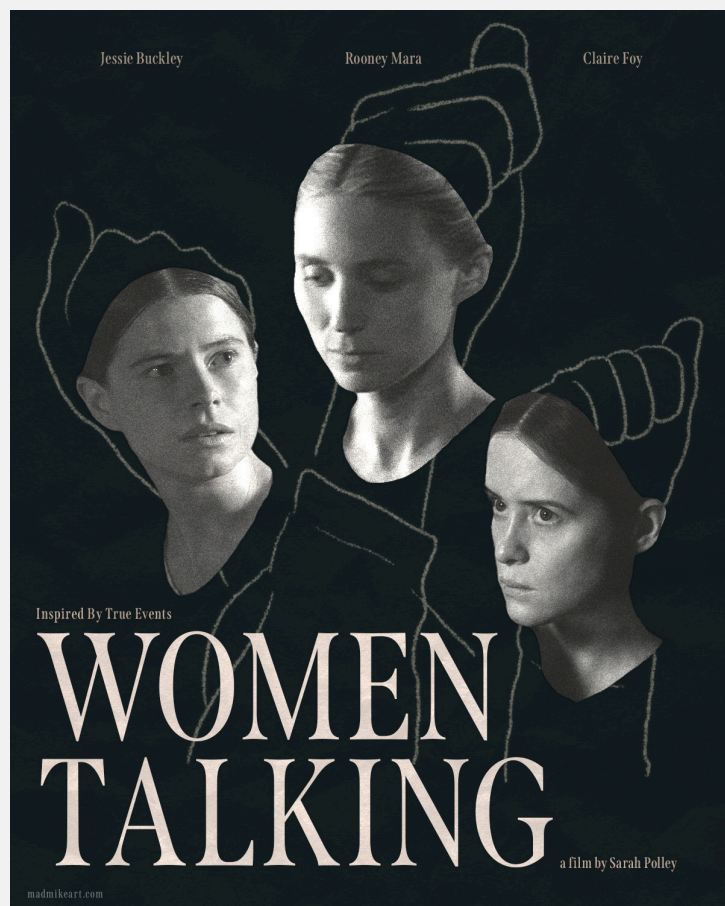
Kitty Green's 2019 drama *The Assistant* centers on Jane, played by Julia Garner, a junior assistant navigating the bottom rung of a predatory media empire. The film meticulously chronicles the subtleties of workplace harassment, exposing the web of complicity and silence that enables abuse to flourish.



The narrative unfolds over a single day, tracing Jane's relentless, invisible labor: making coffee, arranging travel, cleaning her boss's private office, and absorbing microaggressions that oscillate between patronizing praise and covert intimidation. These mundane tasks are shown not as banal inconveniences but as disciplinary instruments, shaping Jane's comportment, eroding her confidence, and enforcing submission within a hierarchy that normalizes coercion. Green's meticulous attention to such minutiae underscores a core insight: sexual harassment is as much about institutional orchestration as individual malfeasance.

Notably, Jane's boss remains almost entirely offscreen, his presence felt through muffled laughter, shouted orders, and the anxiety they induce. This choice transforms him into an abstract force, a structural vector of harassment whose effects ripple through colleagues, interns, and HR enforcers alike. The film interrogates the diffusion of culpability: complicity is not limited to the harasser but extends to a workforce trained to absorb, reproduce, and normalize abuse. Garner embodies this dynamic with subtle physicality, from the hesitant glance at a ringing phone to the exhaustion of her posture and the quiet compliance in menial tasks, making visible the psychic labor exacted by an environment engineered to suppress dissent.

Green's vision is at once precise and ethically rigorous. Its significance lies in its insistence on seeing harassment as a networked, social phenomenon, where harm is codified into organizational expectation. In this respect, the film resonates far beyond the cinematic frame, offering a profound, almost ethnographic insight into how institutions perpetuate harm while appearing neutral.



## **WOMEN TALKING (2022)**

**DIRECTED BY SARAH POLLEY**

Sarah Polley's *Women Talking* (2022) is a meticulously humane exploration of sexual harassment and systemic abuse within a secluded religious community. Adapted from Miriam Toews's novel, the film centers on a group of women who, after years of assaults by men in positions of authority, are given a rare opportunity to deliberate on their futures. Polley's focus is deliberately on the aftermath of harm rather than the assaults themselves, creating a reflective, almost philosophical study of power, morality, and agency.

The narrative unfolds primarily in a hayloft, where characters like Ona (Rooney



Mara) and Mariche (Jessie Buckley) debate forgiveness, justice, and survival, while Salome (Claire Foy) voices the visceral anger of those who refuse to submit to abuse. Even Mejal (Michelle McLeod), the youngest, illustrates how harassment shapes belief, expression, and self-perception, emphasizing that the consequences of abuse are both physical and epistemic.

In its insistence on conversation, deliberation, and ethical negotiation, *Women Talking* reframes sexual harassment as a structural and social problem, not merely the wrongdoing of individuals. The film leaves viewers with a profound understanding of the emotional, moral, and communal labor survivors perform when confronting systemic harm, privileging reflection and solidarity over spectacle or simple resolution.

## THE TALE (2018)

DIRECTED BY JENNIFER FOX

Jennifer Fox's *The Tale* (2018) is a rigorously controlled and deeply unsettling examination of sexual abuse, memory, and the structures that allow harm to be misrecognized as intimacy. Starring Laura Dern as Fox herself, the film follows an adult woman confronting a childhood narrative she long understood as fiction, only to recognize it as a record of grooming and coercion.

A key formal intervention lies in Fox's manipulation of memory. The younger Jennifer initially appears older and more autonomous, mirroring how survivors often recall themselves as complicit. When the film corrects this perception, it exposes how power distorts memory itself. Sexual abuse is shown not as a singular act, but as as a sustained process shaped by relational and institutional dynamics.



*The Tale* stands as a landmark of #MeToo cinema, offering not catharsis but confrontation. It is a deeply intelligent and emotionally precise meditation on how sexual harassment operates, how it is remembered, and the courage required to name it.

The monthly newsletter from the [Committee for Managing Gender Issues \(CMGI\)](#) is an attempt to initiate conversations on sexual harassment. We would love to have the community participate. [Please reach out to Geetika Sharma at geetikas@iima.ac.in for queries, submissions, and/or feedback.](#)

If you feel you have been subjected to sexual harassment or if you would like to make any suggestions regarding curbing sexual harassment on campus, please reach out to us at: Email: chr-cmgi@iima.ac.in. Please note that any communication with the CMGI is strictly confidential.