



Don't be her voice: a response to the silencing of women in #behervoic

The [Kering Foundation](#) was launched in 2009, and combats violence against women focusing on sexual violence in the Americas, harmful traditional practices in western Europe and domestic violence in Asia. They do this through supporting local and international NGOs, awarding social entrepreneurs and organising awareness campaigns.

The intentions with awareness campaigns are most often rather laudable. Seeking to end male violence towards women (though the Kering Foundation refrain from mention the male aspect of violence towards women) is a goal I am very happy to get behind. The problem is rarely with the intention and goal of such campaigns and almost always with the vehicle an organisation uses to move towards that goal.

Last week on 25th November the Kering Foundation launched their latest awareness campaign entitled #behervoic. It has been supported by celebrities and well-known brands including Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, Yves Saint Laurent and Gucci. The campaign consists of men reading women's stories of having been subjected to abuse by men and encouraging all of us to #behervoic. Here are a couple of the campaign videos:

https://www.youtube.com/embed/X_Tuk4bEVcs

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/cRPMBq9I3xo>

As far as I am aware, none of the women whose stories are being told have medical conditions which render them incapable of speech. They are clearly articulate enough to tell their story in a way that can then be read out by a man. So why do they need a man to be their voice? In a world where men's voices dominate every aspect of society, from TV shows to politics to sports, why on earth would a campaign to address male violence insist on centering the voices of men?

I have been subjected to male violence. I do not need anyone (man or woman) to be my voice. I need particularly men (but also women who have not been subjected to abuse) to make space for my voice to be heard. I need them to amplify my voice, not to speak for me.

None of the videos give any details about *how* to end male violence, all just tell us that "together we can break the silence, we must stop the violence". Let's consider what the silence consists of.



Women are silenced by abusive men, who manipulate and control us until we are too fearful or too ashamed to tell our stories. We are silenced by friends and family who tell us “But he’s such a nice man!” And “what did you do to let things get so bad?” We are silenced by social workers and police officers as they misunderstand our situation, shame us and control us. We are silenced by a society who see man’s violence as both inevitable and the fault of women. We are silenced by political decisions which shut down refuges and take away financial welfare that would enable us to break free. We are silenced by our bodies, as post traumatic stress disorder and trauma bonding take control and prevent us being able to speak or even think about the horrific things that have been done to us.

That silence is maintained as a man reads out a woman’s story on an awareness campaign, because he tells her story. We don’t break the silence by telling women’s stories for them. We break it by making space for women’s truths to be brought forth. By sitting in the discomfort of her truth. The silence is broken as we refuse to see women who have been subjected to abuse as the other. As we begin to realise she is our friend, our colleague, our sister. That silence is also broken as we challenge abusive attitudes and beliefs. As we tell that man their sexist joke isn’t funny. As we refuse to conform our children to gender stereotypes and as we protest the use of women’s bodies to sell products^[1]. As we refuse to collude with abusers, whether they be our friend, our father, our boss or the president elect of the united states. That silence diminishes as we protest unjust political decisions and vote based on which party will protect the most vulnerable in society.

Let’s break the silence, but commit to never #behervoice, instead choosing to #promotehervoice #sharehervoice, #amplifyhervoice, #givespaceforhervoice, #listentohervoice, #honourhervoice, #makeeveryoneelselistentohervoice ad infinitum.

^[1] Incidentally many of those brands supporting the campaign are quite adept of the objectification of women, including Alexander McQueen’s “Highland Rape” collection.

We do **NOT** give permission for posts to be reproduced, translated or otherwise published elsewhere. We will not contact people who submit their personal experiences on behalf of journalists, bloggers or other third sector organisations. These testimonies remain the intellectual copyright of their authors and must be treated with the ethical guidelines used by academics for research involving human subjects. Our full guidelines can be read [here](#).