



Silent No More

Triggers. Triggers everywhere. So many survivors must have experienced something similar to me when faced with the media over the last twelve months. Historical cases of sexual violence and abuse are everywhere it seems: Men in the public eye arrested for child rape, charged with rape, guilty of sexual assault..... I have been overwhelmed and amazed by these stories – not because they have revealed institutional abuse and the prevalence of male violence. My amazement is in that so many survivors have spoken out. Not only that, these survivors have been believed.

Because we rarely speak out. Even in the 21st century, the idea of sharing our experience of rape and abuse is frightening and disempowering. Responses include more violence, blame, shame, minimising, humiliation, degradation, disbelief, disinterest and silencing.

As a child, I had a recurring nightmare. It always started the same: I'm in my bedroom and I realise that I'm in danger. I run to my bedroom door to escape but there is no handle. I try to bang on the door, on the floor but they are padded. I start to scream but my voice has gone. I'm trapped, frightened and silenced.

I never reported my experiences of rape and sexual violence. I did speak about them to people I cared for. I spoke out whilst I was in the thick of it. But nothing changed. So I tried to make it change. After two years of systemic rape and sexual abuse, I decided that I could no longer experience it. If it didn't stop, I would die: I knew this. I sat over the breakfast table on Christmas Eve, negotiating with the man who repeatedly raped and abused me and asked him to stop. I promise him I will not see my boyfriend anymore and I will no longer have boys as friends as long as he stops 'doing sex stuff' to me and stops getting people to follow me and report back to him. I was 11 years old. His response was to finish blending the stuffing for the turkey, play Roy Orbison's 'It's Over', cry and then rape me when I am sleeping. I wake up and realise, my voice isn't enough. I've been heard, but it doesn't matter. I don't matter.

Despite the triggering content in the media, the confirmation of abuse by Stuart Hall, Jimmy Saville and the sexual violence allegedly committed by Bill Roache, Michael Le Vell etc etc is at once horrific and empowering to read. You know why? Those survivors that reported their experience are breaking open the silence of sexual violence and abuse. My feelings are of course mixed: I feel immense sadness, anger and pain that so many people have been hurt by the actions of abusive men. I also feel gratitude, strength and hope – these survivors are knowingly or unknowingly empowering those of us who did not report and/or have felt reluctant to speak out. Your voice, your experience matters. YOU matter. I cannot express what your courage and voice has done for me. It may not encourage me to report to the police, but it has already helped me to speak out more, to acknowledge my experience, to put the handle back on my bedroom door. I've found my voice, and alongside you, I am silent no more.

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