



## This thing with 'victim' and 'survivor'

I've been thinking about this thing with using the words 'victim' or 'survivor' to describe women who have experienced Sexual and Physical violence at the hands of men. I know these words are contentious for many of us and I've been pondering why and what other word we could use.

The real problem I have with these words is that they imply a level of passivity in our survival. A victim is someone who is victimised, they are defined by the abuses being done to them. I hate the term victim, and it was this label that held me back from speaking my truth about my abuse for so long. I didn't feel like a 'victim' and I certainly didn't want to be described as one.

For a while, 'survivor' has worked for me. It felt a little better than 'victim' but now I'm questioning this. It's taken me some time to pin down why, what could be wrong with 'survivor'? For me the answer boils down to: people are 'survivors' of tragic accidents, of plane crashes, and Tornadoes. They are people who were 'lucky'. Who escaped death due to chance or fate. This does not begin to cover how a woman 'survives' male violence. And it in no way speaks to our experiences of escaping that violence, of our struggle after, and most importantly it in no way describes the deliberate and considered nature of the abuse we experienced.

The more I thought, the more I realised that there was only one group of survivors who fit with the experience of women who have experienced male violence: Soldiers.

And then it made sense. 'Survivors' of male violence are the ones on the front lines of the war against women. We are the ones that went into battle. We fought, we were wounded, but we made it. We came back from the battle a little broken. In need of healing and care. We are 'Veterans'.

The more I think about this word, the more it speaks to my experience. 'Veterans' are treated with respect, there is a reverence in how we talk about them. They are held up as heroes. And that's what women who have experienced male violence are.

The problem with victim and survivor is that they engender pity. We feel sorry for victims and survivors. But we don't want your pity. You can keep it. We want your mother-fucking respect! We deserve to be treated with reverence. We deserve to be looked up to as the heroes that we are. There should be memorials for all our fallen sisters. Walls with the names of women who were lost in the battles of the war against women. There should be a remembrance day for those fallen women, and their stories should be told to small children to inspire them.

And those of us not fallen, well we deserve to be cared for, just like all those male soldiers returning from war. Perhaps if we were considered veterans, there would be homes dedicated to helping these women. And I don't mean the shelters we have now, staffed by amazing women doing the best they can. I mean whole facilities, which are well funded, with dedicated specialists giving top-notch physical and psychological therapy.

Perhaps, if we were called veterans our PTSD would be taken seriously. It would be understood



and accepted, because we have been to battle. We have seen the worst of the enemy. Watched our sisters fall beside us. We have looked death and destruction in the face. And yet still we are here. You can't not be affected by that.

So here's my new word: Veterans. Women who have experienced male violence don't need or want your pity. We are fucking WARRIORS. We are strong and we are resilient. So show us the respect that we deserve.

[Storify of a conversation on this post](#)

We do **NOT** give permission for posts published as [personal experiences](#) 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.