

To: The Royal Commission into Family Violence

I really appreciate the opportunity to have my say about family violence.

I have been subject to some emotional abuse and one incident of sexual violence with the father of my child. After many attempts at counselling and mediation ~ initiated by me, I did make the decision to take my child away and now we live in hiding. There is some contact with the grandparents on that side but to be honest I find it all very stressful and so this has been irregular over the past ■ years that we have been hopefully, untraceable. (Hence the desire to have my personal details remain anonymous). Hiding removes the threat of future violence but it doesn't help a child who wants a relationship with their father. It is an AWFUL situation!

If it is of any interest, I have also been sexually abused/harassed over the years, I am now ■, the first time I was ■ years old, the older boy next door, as a teen, by my boyfriends ■ coach, there have been so many times in relationships that I have said I do not wish to have sex but it has been forced upon me by means of persuasion, guilt, fear.

Over the years I have been able to be quite honest with the people around me and have discussed sexual assault with the women I meet and have discovered many of them have similar stories. (I'm not one for talking about the weather or celebrities or gossipy things, I tend to like to get right to the stuff that I think matters about 'us'. Sometimes people do shy away; I am socially awkward at best!). From what I have seen and heard my experience is so similar in kind to that of so many other women, it seems almost, frighteningly, to have become something of a 'norm'.

So anyway over the past couple of months I have been keeping track of the police reports of incidents of violence inflicted upon women (and children) by men in our community. I am doing this with a friend who started up a non profit organisation a year ago, maybe two. I feel quite empowered because finally it feels like I am doing something that matters. We also run a Facebook page and slowly over the weeks we are gaining some ground. The organisation is called ■ for women. I am not writing on their behalf; however I will attach a link to the document that I have been working on ■ at the end of this letter.

Violence against women as a 'concept' is something that I have been aware of, it's something that we talk about. Sometimes 'we' do that well, sometimes not so much. Seems, in the media at least, we hear of some pretty dodgy attitudes that really are nothing more than victim blaming. Also the comments in relation to incidents by neighbours, family and friends ~ "they were such a nice family", "he was a good man", "this is such a shock" are indicative of the very powerful and yet subtle manipulations at play.

The media sometimes describe men who kill as 'Monsters'. I think it is foolish to label these men in ways that distance them from OUR community. These

men are manipulative and they live amongst us. They manipulate their victims, AS WELL AS those of us around them. They work to hide their darker sides. It is no accident that people didn't know; it is no accident that people didn't pick up the clues. That is intentional. Calling them 'Monsters' I think is problematic. It comes across almost as an excuse for their behaviour. I think we need to stop doing that and put some more thought into how we recognise these incidents and the ways we report on them. Words matter.

So having the 'concept' of violence against women (perpetrated by men) in my head as a 'thing' and then actually researching and finding these reports, reading about the actual incidents, the level of violence inflicted..... it has really opened my mind to the enormity of the problem and fact that this phenomenon is kind of normal.

I don't think we as a society appreciate how often women are being subject to violent acts!

So there are a couple of things that I think matter and need changing.

1. I think we need to see all the police reports of violence against women in the media. I think we need to bring these stories out and into the spotlight. I think we need to 'know' that this is a very real thing and not just a concept.

When we do that, we acknowledge and give the victim the chance to be heard, we can support them. We can also deal with the problem; the men who do these things. I think if we do that as a community, a society, with the intention to help both the victim and the perpetrator, well you'd like to think that maybe we might find the problem become less of an issue over time. It might help us take some control back and women won't feel left on their own, isolated.

2. I think we need to challenge attitudes around 'Men' and 'Women' in terms of our media representations of them, our portrayals and narratives around gender and stereotyping. As far as I am concerned that means we need to look at the self regulation of advertising.

Not so long ago I wrote to my local, federal member of Parliament, [REDACTED] about a [REDACTED] that was spotted in [REDACTED]. I asked her what we could do to stop [REDACTED] and their hateful, vitriolic slogans directed at women. She then wrote to [REDACTED] on my behalf. I received a response from him last week.

He talked a lot about the Advertising Standards Bureau and compliance and defended self regulation. Can I just say that I have complained to ASB in the past and have had complaints upheld but more often that not the sexist degrading advertisement has served its purpose and the companies are more than happy to take it down, as such, because by the time the ruling has been made that particular campaign is over anyway and the company are ready to move on to something else. Surely some sort of regulation ought to be in

place already so that 'community standards' don't rely on complaints being made after the fact!

So anyway this is how [REDACTED] finished his letter to me.

His words ~

[REDACTED]

I don't think our current system is working. I think sexist and degrading advertising, the use of narrow and limiting stereotypical depictions and representations of women help perpetuate violence against women in our community. I cannot think that these things are not linked. With self regulation in play, the status of women in terms of representations in the media remains precarious at best.

3. I do understand the royal commission is about 'family violence'. However I am of the opinion that male violence is the problem and it becomes 'family violence' when a violent man lives in a home with others... so I'm not really just focusing on that one aspect I think it is all related. I think we need to address male violence.

I think it is really important to keep in mind or at least consider the idea that not every man has to be violent towards his partner in order to instil in her a sense of fear.

I think all women are affected by male violence, not just those who live with it or are personally impacted by it. I think the fear of male violence runs deep. We know that most victims are subjected to violence by someone they know, not a random stranger.

So it seems reasonable to accept that many times when we, women, want to speak our minds we hold back a little for fear of upsetting a man.

When we walk alone there is a little fear in the backs of our mind that there is always the potential of being attacked.

As we live our lives, we 'know' even if only subconsciously that it could happen to us too.

So we already know that, okay, we get it, so don't hold back on making changes that you think might upset US, we're already triggered by our environment, it's too late to worry about sensibilities (in my opinion) Lets focus on the problem, the very real threat, and that is male violence, male perpetrators.

We have had the Royal Commission into institutionalised abuse of children up

here in [REDACTED] the past couple of weeks and it has been really moving hearing people's stories. And knowing that being heard has helped the survivors. We have heard a little of the why these things happened, how it was allowed. I do think if we bring the problem of male violence against women out of the darkness, and into the light, and allow people to be heard and turn the focus onto the perpetrator to explain why he did what he did, well I think we would all benefit. So I think we need the media to share the stories, the police reports of assaults. So that we can know what is happening in our communities.

I believe only about 10% of assaults are actually reported, or something like that. I've been watching the police reports that are posted online and see how many there are, not many of them are reported in the press. I think it would help to do that, to share these amongst ourselves with a whole community focus, Lets know it, live it and change it.

As I have said a couple of times now, I see the problem as predominantly male violence. (I know there are incidents of men dying at the hands of women, there was one yesterday, I know it happens, but it doesn't happen that often and that is not MY issue in this space).

It is 10 mins to midnight and I believe I have to have this submission in to you today so I had better stop now. I wish I had started earlier. I do hope you will at least consider what I have said. Thank you again for the opportunity.

Here is the link to the file [REDACTED] on male violence against women. It is always out of date because every day there are so many new stories and [REDACTED] so much any particular day (my physical health is not very good.)

[REDACTED]

Thank you again and I wish you well with the commission. I really hope we see some action and not just talk. It is time.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
(online as [REDACTED])

P.S. sorry for the rambling nature of my submission. I needed more time to get my thoughts in order. Such is life.