

On Muting R. Kelly: 6 Things to Consider the Next Time You Hear 'Ignition'

Is your moral compass stronger than your love for Fiesta?

 by Mia Arderne

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In light of the R. Kelly investigation, the documentary *Surviving R. Kelly* and the many news articles surrounding the musician and his alleged sex crimes, many of us have recently asked ourselves this question: Do I still listen to artists who are documented abusers? This, really, is your personal choice, but here are 6 things to consider the next time you hear one of his songs:

1. Cancel One, Cancel them All?

Many people and radio stations (by no means all) have stopped playing R. Kelly. Logically, it should follow that if you stop listening to/playing/streaming one alleged abuser, you should apply the same rule to the rest. *Cancel one, cancel them all* is an argument for consistency. If you stop streaming R. Kelly, should you do the same for XXXtentacion, 6ix9ine, Dr Dre, Ozzy Osbourne, Michael Jackson, Chris Brown etc. Of course, what you listen to is a personal choice. And with the sprawling list of accused abusers getting longer every day, how do we keep track and navigate this? Should we curate our music accordingly? Is your moral compass stronger than your love for *Fiesta*? This is something to consider. This brings me to my next point – Spotify had this very problem with **inconsistency**.

2. There Was a Spike in R. Kelly's Music Streams Following the Documentary

Spotify streams of R. Kelly's music **increased** immediately after the *Surviving R. Kelly* documentary launched. The daily streams in the US more than **doubled** following the airing of the show. This comes after a Spotify controversy last year when Spotify briefly implemented a policy against allegedly abusive artists. In **May** last year, Spotify removed all R. Kelly and XXXtentacion music from its playlists.

This '**hateful content**' **policy** was cancelled three weeks after it was announced. Spotify was quick to backtrack when they were criticised for regulating some artists and not others. Spotify was scrutinised for selective **punishment** and not applying the same policy to other artists accused of abuse and sexual misconduct such as Dr. Dre, Michael Jackson, Gene Simmons and Chris Brown.

3. It's Still a Bop. Now What?

When you hear R. Kelly, even if you're enjoying the track for a few seconds in spite of yourself, it might be a good opportunity to remind yourself of the facts, think about them for a second, or even allow it to spark to a discussion about predators. Here's something: Imagine him crafting these lyrics to his disturbing relationship with a fifteen-year-old girl, because that's likely how the song came into being.

R. Kelly has, very publicly, been accused of having sex with minors. He **married** 15-year-old Aaliyah when he was 27. Although R. Kelly has settled **lawsuits** spanning two decades (including a child pornography charge regarding him having sex with and urinating on a thirteen-year-old girl), he has **never been convicted** of a crime. There've been recent allegations of a **sex cult** whereby R. Kelly controlled the movements and eating habits of the women and girls who lived with him. According to the documentary, a former employee of R. Kelly **alleged** that the musician used recorded sex tapes as a form of insurance to stop women from speaking.

4. Let the Collaborative Artists' Apologies Remind You That We're All Learning

Since the launch of the six-part docuseries, *Surviving R. Kelly* on 3 January, artists (including **Lady Gaga** and **Chance the Rapper**) have apologised for working with R. Kelly and his estranged daughter has called him a '**monster**'. Celine Dion has also pulled "**I'm Your Angel**" from streaming services. The issue of abusers in our music, our communities, our families, our workplaces – remains triggering, messy and hurtful. It's important to continue grappling with how to speak out against it, how to have conversations around it, and how to improve.

5. Survivors Are *Still* Coming Forward

R. Kelly is under **investigation** in Georgia – the investigation was opened because of the interviews that surfaced in the *Surviving R. Kelly* documentary. The Fulton County District Attorney’s Office has reached out to women who shared their stories on the show (from sexual harassment to sexual abuse). Attorney Kim Foxx has urged survivors to come forward in order to build a criminal case against R. Kelly, she quoted as **saying**, ‘We cannot seek justice without you’. Since then, **more survivors** have come forward. The recent allegations include one woman accusing R. Kelly of **inappropriate conduct** at her grandmother’s home in Chicago’s in the 80s and another accusing him of misconduct in his Chicago warehouse studio in 2002.

6. There Are R. Kellys Everywhere

As **Zukiswa Wanner** writes, many of us have had R. Kellys in our lives, in the form of uncles, teachers, family friends and others. Sexual predators and pedophiles often go years, lifetimes even, without being held accountable, without being stopped, without being exposed. Listen to survivors. Believe survivors.

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