

Marin's Resilience as a Victim of Sexual Violence in *Rules for Being a Girl* (2020)

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Abstract

Sexual violence can happen to anybody, including young people. This article discusses the unwelcome sexual advance experienced by the main character in *Rules for Being a Girl* novel named Marin. It aims to find out the factors and processes that help Marin to develop resilience and not fall into negative psychological condition of being depressed or traumatic after the sexual violence incident. The theory used to help analyze the development of resilience in Marin is Ungar et al. and Pessoa et al. The results of the analysis are that there are six factors and processes that enable Marin to develop resilience. They are the access to material resources, the supportive relationships, the understanding of her identity, the power and control, the feeling of social justice, and the desire to create a better environment for others. The analysis also shows that Marin is supported by her school that provides rooms to do meaningful and altruistic activities.

Keywords: sexual violence, resilience, unwelcome sexual advance, school, student

INTRODUCTION

Marin is the main character in a novel titled *Rules for Being a Girl* written by Bushnell and Cotugno (2020). She is a High School student who experiences unwelcome sexual advance from her male teacher whom she admires. Being a young girl, Marin becomes really confused with what happens to her. She cannot decide whether she is right to feel uncomfortable about the incident or she overthinks it. Since she does not know what to do, she decides to write an essay and publish it in the school newspaper where she becomes a member of. She gives a title *Rules for Being a Girl* for her article. People's reactions over her essay are various. Some students see her as an angry feminist and a threat, some see her as being unreasonable, but some appreciate her doing. Along the way, she learns that she is not the only girl who ever experiences sexual violence. The revelation motivates her not to give up and keeps fighting until the school management pays attention to the problem.

As a character, Marin is worth analyzing because she is different from other victims of violence in reacting to the unwelcome sexual advance. Victims of sexual violence usually experience negative psychological effects. The effects include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, shame and guilt, or fear (Anderson et al., 2022; Bentivegna & Patalay, 2022). Instead of dwelling into those negative psychological emotions, Marin channels her confusion in a positive fight. She fights not only for herself but also for other girls who undergo the same experience. Marin's reaction to fight the injustice and not to give up can be called as resilience.

Resilience in the context of sexual violence is the ability of the victims to deal and recover with the negative effects of sexual violence. The ability is not a nature but can be nurtured. It means that someone is not born to be resilient, especially to sexual violence, but someone can learn to be resilient. By keep on learning to be resilient, the person can develop a stronger resilience over time. By having a resilience, the victims of sexual violence's ability are empowered to face and recover from the negative effects that may occur in the time after sexual violence happen. Marin's resilience in coping with the sexual violence that happens to her, then, becomes the main focus of this article.

METHODOLOGY

To help analyzing the novel, the writers used qualitative research, an approach that can help to examine and comprehend social concern (Creswell, 2013). This type of research does not use statistical calculation.

The source of the analysis is *Rules for Being a Girl* novel. This novel is written by Candice Bushnell and Katie Catugno. It was published in 2020 by HarperCollins Publisher in United States and the language is English. It has 293 pages with thirty-seven chapters and an addition of one chapter, the epilogue. The narrative of the novel is in the third-person point of view with its focus on Marin.

The writers followed a procedure in doing data collection. The first step is to read the novel to familiarize with the experiences of the main character, Marin. The second step is the writers tried to find Marin's reactions to her experience of getting sexual violence, in her case is unwelcome sexual advance. Next, the writers collected the proofs of Marin's resilience in dealing with the sexual violence and made them ready for analysis. The analysis itself used the framework provided by Ungar et al. (2007) which is about resilience and by Pessoa et al. (2017) that talks about the resilience of the students at school who experienced sexual violence.

The theory developed by Ungar (2007) is based on a project called International Resilience Project (IRP) which took non-western young people from 14 areas across five continents as the participants. The results of the project show that to become resilient, there are seven clusters of factors and processes that a person should have. The first one is access to material resources. The example given by Ungar (2007) is the availability of the resources that can help the development. The second one is the meaningful and supportive relationships. The third one is identity. Ungar et al. explain identity as having the purpose of life and knowing the strength and weakness of one's values. The fourth one is power and control, which means that having the ability to make decision and change it. The fifth one is cultural adherence, the feeling of engagement toward one's local culture and the practices. The sixth one is social justice. Ungar et al. elaborate social justice as having significant positions and experience in social equality. The seventh one is cohesion, which is translated as a sense of belonging to something greater and of having social or spiritual duty. Ungar et al. added that the agency of young people is central to the resilience.

Pessoa et al. (2017), particularly focus on how the school provides environment that can strengthen the resilience of the victim of violence. Schools that make available meaningful school activities, encourage altruistic activities, and accept diversity helps student to be resilient. On the other hand,

schools that offer insufficient resources, have conservative model, tolerate discriminative practices, and individualization of failures.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Marin is experiencing unwelcome sexual advance when her teacher asks her to come to his house. The sexual violence starts because Mr. Bex wants to take Marin home. However, instead of taking her straight home, he invites Marin to stop by his apartment for a while with the excuse of returning Marin's book that he borrowed. As soon as Marin enters his apartment, the man manipulates Marin's mind. After that, he makes an unwelcome sexual advance by touching Marin's cheek and kissing her lips.

“I don’t have time to register any of it though, because that’s when Bex puts his free hand on my cheek, ducks his head, and kisses me.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p. 56)

Marin does not expect Mr. Bex to touch her cheek and kiss her. She is too surprised by Mr. Bex's sudden action. She does not have time to take any action to prevent it. After the sexual violence occurs, Marin withdraws and steps back from Mr. Bex, heads for the door, and runs home, not caring how cold it is.

“My brain shorts out for a second, lights flickering during a thunderstorm. Suddenly every panic response in my body comes screaming to life.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p.56)

“Um, I say again, taking another step toward the doorway. I thunder down the narrow stairs and hoof it all the way home, even though it’s freezing.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p.57)

Marin decides to talk about the sexual violence that Mr. Bex did to her best friend, Chloe. She recounts the chronology of the incident, which starts with Mr. Bex, who offers a ride home, takes Marin to his apartment with the excuse that he wants to return the books, and ends with Mr. Bex, who suddenly kisses her. Below is the conversation between Marin and Chloe.

“So Bex offered to give me a ride home after school yesterday.”

“He did?”

“I’m saying it out loud, but – “I tilt my head back against the edge of the bed and tell her the rest of the story, ending with the kiss...” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p. 62)

The above conversation shows that Chloe is shocked when she hears Mr. Bex drops Marin off after school. Marin's goal in telling Chloe is to ask her best friend for advice.

After the incident, Marin writes an essay on the school blog entitled *Rules for Being a Girl* and makes various efforts to speak up. During the protest, she learns that other people also experience the same thing. Then, she decides to fight for other victims of sexual abuse too. Therefore, she is eager to expose the bad abuse her teacher did to her and the girls in school. Apart from writing essays on the school blog, Marin also reports to school officials and creates a feminist book club. This attempt elicits all kinds of reactions from people. Some oppose her efforts, and some support her.

The opposition to Marin's effort can be seen when she writes an essay entitled *Rules for Being a Girl*. Many people protest that her actions are considered detrimental to men. One of them is Jacob, Marin's boyfriend. Below is the conversation between Jacob and Marin.

“It just... didn’t make me feel very good, that’s all.”

“Why not? I mean, It’s not about you.”

“Maybe not,” Jacob encounters, “but everybody’s going to think it is. Like, is this really what you think all guys are alike?” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, pp. 87-88)

From the conversation above, it can be concluded that Jacob objects to Marin's writing on the school blog. Marin should not have written things like that because the writing puts men in degrading position, that men are bad.

The support that Marin gets to fight against sexual violence occurs when she writes an essay with Chloe who also writes a post on the school blog entitled *Letter from the Editors: The Whole Truth*. The article published on the school's blog seems to have caught the attention of various parties. Articles written by Marin and Chloe are printed on the front page of the newspaper. Below is a sentence stating Marin and Chloe's writing, which will be printed on the newspaper's front page.

“Our piece goes to print on the front page of the paper the following Monday. I take care of the editing, and Chloe somehow messages to keep the whole thing a secret from the rest of the staff, including, of course, Bex.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p. 274)

Marin's efforts to be able to fight sexual violence that occurred in her school are supported by several people. First, Chloe helps her write a school blog called *Letters from the Editors: The Whole Truth*.

“We write this letter today to shine a light on a dark place at Bridgewater, and also in the hope that any other student who has had a similar encounter—be it with this particular teacher, another authority figure, or someone else at this school—will feel safe and supported should they choose to come forward.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, pp. 272-273)

From the quotation above, it can be concluded that the case of violence committed by Mr. Bex does not only happen to Marin but also to other girls. It is just that none of them spoke up out of fear.

Second, Ms. Klein gives Marin a book called *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay when she knows about the case between Marin and Mr. Bex. This book later gave Marin the idea to form a feminist book club. Below is what Ms. Klein said to Marin;

“She holds out the book for my inspection—this might be a good place to start. You know, if you’re not happy with the way things are around here, you ought to do something about it.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p.95)

In this club, Marin meets with people who support her actions against the sexual violence that Mr. Bex committed against her.

Third, Gray Kendall. He reads Marin's article *Rules for Being a Girl* on the school's blog. He is amazed by Marin's brave actions against Mr. Bex. For that reason, when he knows that Marin has formed a feminist book club, Gray decides to join as a form of support for Marin. This can be seen in the excerpt from the novel below.

“I thought it was ballsy how you fought with Mr. Beckett though. So I came to support.”
(Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p.104)

After all the efforts Marin made, the school finally took decisive action by expelling Mr. Bex from school because he is proven to have sexually violated female students at school. Below is Mr. DioGuardi's statement that Mr. Bex is kicked out of the faculty.

“I just want to let you both know that Mr. Beckett has been removed from the faculty.”
“Really?”
Mr. DioGuardi nods. “Other students have already come forward.” (Bushnell & Cotugno, 2020, p.283)

The findings show that Marin, who initially is shocked and confused with Mr. Bex's unwelcome sexual advance, does not fall into the negative psychological condition, such as depression or paranoia. Instead, she develops resilient attitudes. Using the framework provided by Ungar et al. (2007), the writers can say that Marin's resilience is developed because there are factors and processes mentioned by Ungar et al. that facilitate the development. As a student, Marin has the access toward resources that help her to become resilient. In this case, Marin has her school newspaper to express her anger and feeling of injustice. The second factor that Marin has is supportive relationship. Marin's friends, Chloe and Gray Kendall, and Marin's teacher, Ms. Klein support her in her attempts to fight against sexual violence. The next factor is identity. During the process of fighting, Marin becomes really understand that she is right to fight for the violence that happens to her. She becomes more deeply in believing her cause. She also knows that her strength is her ability to write and to make people understand about how bad sexual violence is. ar et al. explain identity as having the purpose of life and knowing the strength and weakness of one's values. Marin also possesses the fourth factor, the power and control. She can make decision for her own life and change her life to a better one. Other two factors that Marin has are social justice and cohesion. The novel shows that Marin does not only fight for herself but she also fights for other girls who experience the sexual violence. She is able to fight because she can write and she is a member of her school newspaper club. In short, Marin is in the position to fight for social justice. Another reason is that she has the sense of belonging to the greater good; she fights for other people to get the justice. The only factor that cannot be seen is the fifth factor, which is the cultural adherence because the novel does not really talk about the culture in society where Marin lives.

Additionally, using the framework of Pessoa et al. (2017), the writers found that Marin's school supports her development of to become a resilient person. Her school provides a facility in the

form of school newspaper for her to voice her opinions. She is also allowed to establish a feminist book club. Another thing that is provided by her school is that it supports Marin's efforts to altruistic activity to help other victims of sexual violence and prevent other girls experiencing one.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis that has been done, the writers found that Marin as a victim of sexual violence in the novel *Rules for Being a Girl*, develops resilience shown in her various efforts to fight against the sexual violence. Even though in the beginning she does not always get support, she does not give up. Additionally, she tries to gain support so that victims of sexual violence can speak up. She does this resistance for herself and others who experience similar incidents so that the perpetrators receive sanctions and the victims get justice and protection. The factors and processes that make her able to develop resilience is the access to material resources, the supportive relationships, the understanding of her identity, the power and control, the feeling of social justice, and the desire to create a better environment for others. Other than that, Marin's school also facilitates her to develop resilience. Her school has activities that enable her to do meaningful efforts for the victims of sexual violence. Moreover, Marin's school also provides her with opportunity to do altruistic activities.

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