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Coping strategies of a rape victim as reflected in Chanel Miller's Know My Name memoir

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ABSTRACT

Memoir is a literary work genre that belongs to the subgenre of autobiography. Most of the memoir showcases the writer's particular moment of life, rather than the reels of their whole life. Chanel Miller, for example, showcases her experience during the aftermath of rape in her memoir, Know My Name. Various definition of rape has one thing in common, which rape is something that happens despite the lack of consensus and that creates stress after it happens. Stressful encounters require a coping strategy to conquer them. This study tries to analyze coping strategies on Know My Name memoir because it is due time for us to recognize how rape has influenced the victim's life to provide better care both physical and psychological wise for rape victims and, even better, to formulate better law to protect the victim. Using descriptive study, the important features were found as Chanel Miller's emotional reactions to choose a way out of the problem.

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1. Introduction

A study mentioned that in the U.S, 1 in 5 women, around 25.5 million women, filed for completed or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2018). A 2018 Violence against women prevalence estimates' report calculate around 6%, with uncertainty interval between 4-9%, of women from the age 15 years and older have been perpetrated by someone except their current or past male-exclusive significant other, like a male family member, friend, colleague, or stranger at least once in their lifetime. These numbers came with a warning for the data users to interpret them with caution. This type of violence is predominantly stigmatized worldwide, espe-

cially in highly quaint and patriarchal societies. The fear of victim-blaming as the dire aftermaths discourages women from disclosing their experiences. The actual occurrence of the victim may be more extraordinary than the reported or estimated numbers.

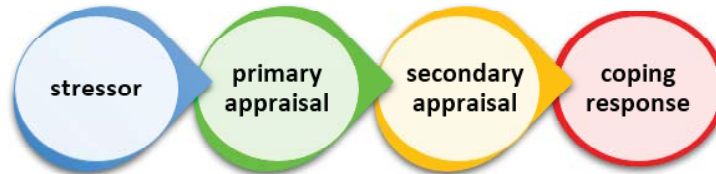


Figure 1. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping model

Another possible reason that made women so opposed to disclosing their experience as rape because it does not meet their self-definition as sexual experience and that they did not classify their experience as rape (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, 2011). Peterson and Muehlenhard (2011) mentioned these varied reasons in their study of 77 female college students who had been non-consensually penetrated. Initially, they did not think that the assailant matched their definition and image of a rapist. The victim believed that the assailant was lovely, loved by everyone, or from a renowned family. Therefore, the assailant did not qualify to be considered a rapist. Secondly, the victims think their behavior did not match as a 'normal' victim. They went self-blaming themselves to seem to be the reason they were violated in the first place instead. One of the participants in the study even positioned herself at fault to be intoxicated—lastly, the victim pictures rape as something that involves brutally violent stunt in action. For instance, someone strikes or jumped out of nowhere, gagged, and pinned the targeted victim down by force. It is safe to say the rape victims are being discouraged from speaking up because of the stigma surrounding the victims' disclosure, the victim-blaming, and the misconception of the rape and the rapist definition.

Coping Strategy

One common approach to describe the different ways people cope with stress is to distinguish between problem-centric, those who try to change the situation, and emotion-centric, those who seek to manage their emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition Lazarus (2013) mentioned coping as a general conception that contemplates ego defenses, which deal with psychological integrity menaces, thus, it implicates someone's efforts in notion and action to deal with stress, regardless their process is stable or adapting over time and through various stressful circumstances.

Individual's judgment of a stressor influences their way of reacting to the stressor. Whether a stressor is experienced as upsetting or not is influenced by a mixture of personal and circumstantial reasons, including capacities, skills and competencies, limitations, resources, and customs

(Mechanic, 1962). Thus, coping strategies differ amongst individuals depending on the person's choice to respond to a stressor.

The ideal coping strategy varies from one person to another depending on the stressor's context to the person's personality traits (Berardi et al., 2019). Thus, several pieces of study on coping have typically found five types of coping. Some researchers, Clarke (2006), Folkman and Moskowitz (2004), and Skinner et al. (2003), for example, include the following types of coping: (1) problem-focused coping, which includes taking direct action and scheming possible solutions to work out of the challenge, (2) emotion-focused coping which refers someone to express their feelings or engage with emotional-releasing & pastimes like meditation or yoga, (3) seeking for understanding means an individual's efforts to comprehend and look for the value of the encounter, (4) help-seeking means involving external resource to resolve the crisis such as going to a therapist. Lastly, some people may choose to respond to the problem by (5) avoiding the problem, which means they would try to keep some distance from the problem or look for a possible way out of the problem. When humans are challenged with a stressful event, they primarily evaluate the situation as either threat or not. Secondly, they appraise whether they have the resources to cope with the challenge efficiently (see Figure 1).

In short, a coping strategy is our natural response when we are stressed. No matter the challenge we need to face, we think about what we should do to overcome it. On the other hand, anything could trigger stress. From the littlest thing such as choosing whether should you wear the red dress or the yellow one or maybe should you spend your money on your favorite musician's latest album or a new bottle of that overhyped serum. Worse, whether should you forgive and forget or stand up your grounds in the courtroom after you are raped, which would be the main discussion in this final report.

Previous studies on literary works has been found, such as Santika (2016) who studied on English dialect in the *Harry Potter* novel, Shalihah (2018) analyzed address terms on *EMMA* novel, and Lailiyah and Yustisia (2018) investigated the sociolinguistics aspect on the *Rainbow Troops* novel. Meanwhile, not so many studies on coping strategies in human artwork have been conducted. Nensia (2020) observed how the women characters in the *Pride and Prejudice* movie coped with their anxiety. Set in the Regency period, the film captures the issues about wealth, marriage, and social class issues as the cause of anxiety. Most of the characters cope with their anxiety by approaching the problem. Though the coping strategy might cause embarrassments, these women did not back off nor avoid the stressor. Differently, this study would like to describe the coping strategy of a rape victim who was covering her identity to the world as 'Emily Doe' for years and later stepped out as herself, Chanel Miller.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative study with a descriptive approach to analyze the coping strategy of the rape victim in the *Know My Name* memoir. The memoir was published in 2019 by Viking, a part of Penguin Random House group of companies. *Know My Name* represents a memoir of what Chanel Miller, the author, has to go through during the rape and the aftermath. Miller's decision to open about who she genuinely is and what she has been through is astounding and inspiring. This book captured her experience from feeling alone, living in a limbo where she believes she is okay,

having to live a double life as Emily Doe at the court then as Chanel at home, to her feeling when she walked out from the courtroom after the sentencing of her assailant. It is all written quite beautifully in the way that it moves the readers. This memoir has inspired many women worldwide, especially those who are the victims of sexual violations, to realize they are not alone in this. They are still important and deserve to be valued despite what has been taken.

In collecting the data, the writers (1) read the work, (2) find the words, sentences by Chanel Miller as the main data analysis, and (3) classify and analyze the words, sentences, or utterances to prove the coping strategies of the book's author. A comprehensive reading of the book needed to be done to get the detailed information prior to the objective of the study.

3. Know My Name Memoir

Chanel Miller is a rape victim known to the world as Emily Doe, or “Brock Turner’s victim.” The name Emily Doe was given to protect her anonymity. She was raped by a Stanford University student swimmer, Brock Turner, behind a fraternity house back in January 2015. She stunned millions with a victim impact statement which she read in the courtroom and posted on various news sources such as *BuzzFeed*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and went viral. The statement is also translated worldwide and read on the floor of Congress around the world. It is also a tipping point to the California penal law, and the withdraw of the judge of this case, Aaron Persky, who condemned six months of imprisonment in county jail to Brock Turner, the assailant. Thousands wrote to her, indeed include fellow sexual assault survivors, to say that she inspires them and gives them the courage to share their own experience of being sexually assaulted at last.

Know My Name is a memoir of Miller’s sexual assault experience and its aftermath. In the Introduction section, Miller (2019) states that she wrote *Know My Name* as a hurt-transforming endeavor to deal with the past and incorporate the memories as her life goes on. In short, this already sums up the whole final report. However, we are not here to learn just about the cream of the top, but we will also learn throughout the entire journey in the book. In this final report, the writer would present Miller’s coping strategy when she realized that she was raped and the aftermath.

First Encounter

Miller’s first encounter with the stressor started when she was woken up somewhere alien, confirmed by the deputy later that she was in the hospital. Her natural reaction was to recall what has happened and where was her current whereabouts. Then when she was feeling something odd, the absence of her underwear, she was frozen in place and questioning herself about what has happened the night before once more. In the early chapter, we will be brought through the constant limbo of confusions and emotions that commonly occurred for rape victims.

As Miller learned that she had been raped, other than bewildered and pondered about it, she opted to maintain her calm composure. This could be seen from how she tried to cheer her sister up during the phone call in the hospital. It could also be seen when she received a compliment for her

calmness from the nurses when measuring and documenting the physical abrasions for evidence. Not only she chose to act calm, but she also expects calmness despite the situation. In her book, Miller (2019) wrote down that she did not want the fuss from her parents, for all she wanted is just everything to go away. This 'everything' could mean anything, from her confusion to be gone, for she finally got the answer of everything to the fact that the rape happens.

Personal Appraisal

Earlier, it was mentioned that we primarily evaluate whether the stressful circumstance is a threat before we determine whether we can overcome it and finally organize a strategy to cope and overcome the problem at hand. Funnily enough, it was found that Miller's decision to press charges was somewhat impulsive. It is reflected when she and her sister received a call from the detective in the driveway. When the detective asked her whether she would like to press charges, she asked back what press charges mean at first. She also asked for her sister's opinion first to decide. Miller also wrote in her book that she did not know that her *yes*, her decision to press charge would reopen her body, would scrape all the cuts and wounds raw, also force her legs open. The secondary appraisal also reflected on the same event when Miller thought that the evidence needed for the case is obtained and that her perpetrator was already put behind bars, so it is only a matter of whether he commits the assault. At this point, she thinks that she got the essential resources to file a pressing charge against her perpetrator.

Coping Strategy

A coping strategy contains a series of emotional reactions that eventually led someone to choose a way out of the problem. In this case, Miller's first emotional reaction was to self-hate. This was her reaction after scrolling through the news and a police report on her desk ten days after the assault. Her response was to think that she suddenly hated herself and did not want any of this. She blamed all her pain on Emily, her alter identity (Miller, 2019), then she chose to do what she had always done, detaching and keep going. Later that night, the self-hate develops further into anxiety to tell her parents about the experience. She was afraid if they would be disappointed in her and lose her parent's trust. She remains composed even "stood smiling like an insane person" (Miller, 2019, p. 43) after she tells her parents. Miller's following emotional reaction is anger which was reflected on the very next day event. When she was scrolling through her browser again and come across an article which stated that the Stanford swimmer, Turner, "denies alleged rape" (Miller, 2019, p. 45).

Another emotional reaction that we would find in this book is when Miller 'trained' herself to avoid eye contact with people, avoid specific routes and opt to walk around many blocks after she was catcalled during her printmaking summer workshop in Rhode Island. Later, she found out that "you are allowed to be cautious, but you do not always have to be afraid" (Miller, 2019, p. 86). However, her emotional churn is not yet resolved. When she was staying with Lucas, her boyfriend, she had an outburst after her boyfriend remind her that it was the time for a scheduled call with her attorney, Alaleh.

After she had the outburst, she decides that it is about time for her to tell somebody instead of bottling it up inside herself. Thus, she agreed to go to therapy. Later in the book, we will be brought into the ups and downs from Miller's point of view when the trial was postponed for more than a year. Eventually, the trial happened, and whenever she must be in the courtroom, it feels like reopening the old wound. Her victim impact statements were posted in BuzzFeed and went viral within days. It elicits many people to send her letters, mostly to thank her because Miller has shed light to them that they are not alone. In this phase, she learned more about how sick society is, how easy it is to belittle a victim, and how the victim always puts in the negative light, which has to be changed. Throughout her journey, Miller said that healing is not always about advancing, moving on. She learned that healing is about "returning repeatedly to forage something" (2019, p. 323). Miller wrote this book, *Know My Name*, as a way "to go back to that place" (2019, p. 323), back to the wound, and to finally "... dust myself off, and go on" (2019, p. 328).

In the beginning, Miller tried to solve her problem by detaching and putting up the calm façade. Over time we were brought to where she starts expressing her emotions instead of bottling up everything inside. Later, we were brought to where she decides to try living a life far from home, far away from where all this began. Then fast forward to when she chose to close this chapter of her life by appreciating people around her, the simple thing she found or made, and finally living with grasping these memories.

It would not be able for someone to decide which one is her coping style because she has already been through everything. Did she seek understanding? She did since day one. Did she try to avoid the problem? She did at some point by detaching, by making herself avoid every odd, by closing her memory off in her jar. Did she cope with more emotion-focused activities? She did, too, at some point. She expresses her bottled-up anger, and she goes to a printmaking summer workshop to release the pent-up emotions. Was she seeking help? Yes, she goes to a therapist at last. Problem-focused coping? Well, in the end, she chose to embrace her memories and write a book about them. So, what is her coping strategy then? It takes strategies to solve a problem or to cope with stressful encounters. When we have a problem, it becomes possible for us to choose more than just one coping strategy. After all, it all comes down to the depth of the problem for you and your capability to solve that.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

Based on the study on the memoir, the writers presumed that the coping strategy of a rape victim is reflected in Chanel Miller's literary work, *Know My Name*. The concerns and issues about losing the sense of who you are, what are you living for, of the torturous waiting game, endless confusion, persistent blaming, insensitive comments, of rage, and to cope and to fight for what should have always been yours, to stand on your ground, are being assembled beautifully in this book. The memoir is so personal and raw, so it is apparent for us to see the coping strategy that must be chosen by a rape victim. Lastly, this study comes with limitations, since this work is only analyzed on the coping strategy of the victims, there are many responsibilities to conduct further discussions about the *Know My Name* memoir.

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