

The analysis book review examples

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Introduction

Rape is an act of violence against the will of the victim. It is defined as “forcing the victim to submit to genital, anal and/or oral sexual acts (SECASA, 2012).” The attacker uses physical force, intimidation and threats to control the situation. The victim fears for her life and obeys the commands of the attacker, as her survival depends on the submission and compliance to the demands of the offender. Rape is an arbitrary event in the lifestyle of the victim. It’s unpredictable, sudden, and unexpected (SECASA, 2012). It is a tragic experience that comes with a devastating burden of dehumanization, stigma, shame, trauma, or even isolation. In the book *Lucky*, the author reflects upon her ordeals the night she was raped, and how it impacted her, her schooling, family, and friends.

Rape victims normally exhibit some unique emotional, behavioral, and physical reactions known as Rape Trauma Syndrome. The phrase “Rape Trauma Syndrome” was introduced by two therapists, Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom in 1974 (KCSARC, n. d). It is a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder experienced by victims of sexual assault. It represents the recovery model which the survivors of sexual assault go through. It has three stages: the acute stage (the immediate phase of disruption and disorganization); the underground/outward adjustment stage (the time period during which the rape victims attempt to return to their normal lives as if nothing had happened; and the long-term process of reorganization. The time taken by a victim to recover from sexual assault varies depending on the victim’s experience and the following events. This

paper focuses on the book *Lucky* and discusses how Rape Trauma Syndrome, as coping techniques used by rape victims, relates to the author, Alice Sebold. The findings reveal that Sebold has truly suffered from Rape Trauma Syndrome and her recovery has been greatly influenced by her experience.

The horrible incident

As earlier stated, rape is an act of violence against the will of the victim. Sebold was physically beaten, intimidated, and threatened. She was raped by a brutal, bullying, and ironically concerned and contrite man, in one of the most dangerous places "among the dead leaves and broken beer bottles" (Sebold, 2002, p. 3) where "a girl had been murdered and dismembered." Sebold was, however, lucky to have survived in this kind of environment. The attacker grabbed her from behind, covered her mouth, and threatened to kill her if she screamed (Sebold, 2002, p. 5). The struggle with the attacker left her with serious pain: she bit and cut her lips; she was cut by glass; and her hair was pulled out painfully from the skull as she was being dragged by the hair over the grass (Sebold, 2002, p. 6). Her painful experience because of her resistance and failure to obey the orders of the attacker, made her believe that she "would rather be raped a thousand times" than put her life at risk (Sebold, 2002, p. 7). The attacker forcefully kissed Sebold and ordered her to kiss back. He forcefully inserted his fingers (three or four at a time) into Sebold's vagina, making her bleed in pain, and then inserted his dick (Sebold, 2002, p. 10). He forced her to put his dick into her mouth and suck. After all his horrible acts, the attacker apologized, and even cried. He was remorseful and concerned (p. 12).

After the horrible incident, Sebold finds herself in a severe emotional, mental, and physical pain. Her friends and family are ignorant and not able to understand her overall dirty, disconnected and ruined sensation (p. 29). Sebold's encounter with her attacker (which was purely by chance) makes her press charges against him. In the entire process (from the identification to the prosecution), she spares no insights or emotions. She gets some comfort when the man receives "the maximum sentence for rape and sodomy" (p. 201). This, however, does not make her emotional scars fade out entirely.

Stages of the Rape Trauma Syndrome

The acute stage

This is the immediate phase following a rape. It's accompanied by several emotional reactions resulting from the threats and injuries inflicted by the assailant. The victim goes through physical and emotional shock, and the symptoms include fear, constant anxiety, nightmares, body shakes, disturbed eating, disturbed sleeping, and feeling scattered and not being able to focus. Besides, the feeling of shame, guilt, and self-blame prevents the victim from exposing her ordeals or reaching for support. The victim can either be expressive or controlled. An expressive victim shows outward expressions including crying, restless or tensed. They also demonstrate fear, anxiety, and anger. A controlled victim appears rational and calm, and hides the feelings. The victims are normally faced with the problem of informing the family and friends, not knowing how they'll receive the information. After telling the story, other people (including the family and friends) may misinterpret the matter and allege that the victim gave in willingly. This is

likely to increase the trauma and prolong her recovery. The victim may also find it difficult to seek medical examination. The concern of pregnancy, AIDS, and other STIs becomes unbearable. The victim may also worry about pressing charges.

The underground/outward adjustment stage

During this stage, the victim tries to forget about her horrible experience in order to return to normalcy. It is characterized by high levels of denial and suppression of feelings. The likely reactions include changing schools, changing locations (moving), and changing friends.

The reorganization stage

Healing begins here. During this phase, the victim no longer becomes able to suppress or forget about the experience. Healing begins when the victim is triggered to reflect about the assault. It is a very frustrating stage as the victim cannot stop thinking about the assault. The victim feels overwhelmed, hopeless, anxious, and may experience nightmares. The healing depends on several factors including the victim's previous self-concept, support from family and friends, treatment, encounter with the assailant, and the criminal justice system.

How Rape Trauma Syndrome, as coping techniques used by rape victims, relate to Sebold

Sebold actually suffered a Rape Trauma Syndrome. She went through several emotional reactions. The impact of the incident made her feel shock and disbelief. She had the feeling of fear (fear of death, mutilation, and physical injury). She also had a feeling of humiliation, guilt, shame,

embarrassment, degradation, anger, revenge, and self-blame. The misunderstanding, especially with her father, made her feel irresponsible and shocked (p. 59) as the father could not understand why she had to give in to the attacker. Because the assailant didn't have the knife in the tunnel, her father thought that she gave in willingly. This traumatized her further. The physical impacts were pain all over the body, injuries and cuts. The vagina, which was the assailant's centre of focus, had serious pain, irritation, and bleeding. Sebold couldn't fall asleep, and when she did, she would do it fitfully (p. 50). Her behavioral reactions included fear and confusion. She was greatly impaired in many aspects, ranging from her ability to solve problems, accomplish tasks, to the ability to absorb new information. During the acute phase of Rape Trauma Syndrome, Sebold was very vulnerable emotionally. Sebold's world was surrounded with violence everywhere. Everything was tainted (p. 80), and things did not end up gloriously with the boyfriend and everybody else. She reports, " After telling the hard facts to anyone from lover to friend, I have changed in their eyes. Often it is awe or admiration, sometimes it is repulsion, once or twice it has been fury hurled directly at me for reasons I remain unsure of" (p. 61). Reporting this matter to her family and friends made her feel comforted, or rather disgraced in equal measure. However, this is a recovery technique that helped in one way or another. Furthermore, she reported the matter to the authorities, and as soon as she met the assailant, she pressed charges.

During the time when Sebold was trying to return to her normal life (during the underground or outward adjustment phase of the rape trauma

syndrome), she tried to block thoughts of the rape from her mind. She tried not to talk about the experience or other related issues.

She simply wanted to forget it. She never wanted to go to college; and if she did, then was for the simple reason of going far away (p. 81) to recover from her emotions. Her compulsions towards dieting, losing weight, boyfriends, makeovers, reckless behavior, and heroin, all pointed towards her desire to destroy and escape from her emotions (p. 235). Sebold tried heroin, drinking, and cocaine in order to destroy her emotions. However, drinking had drawbacks and cocaine made her sick. She settled on heroin and loved it, and recklessly went into odd places, and smoked black tar. Sebold only came to realize that she was probably suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder when she read about herself quoted in a book. The sentence read, “ When I was raped I lost my virginity and almost lost my life. I also discarded certain assumptions I had held about how the world worked and about how safe I was” (p. 239). Even after the trial, Sebold could not stop hating her body (p. 203). She obsessively exercised and dieted. Substance abuse and eating disorders are normally the reported reactions used as coping techniques by rape victims.

The healing of Sebold was largely dictated by her experience during the assault. She was only 18 years old when this occurred. She did not know her assailant (the attacker was a complete stranger). As compared to other rape victims, Sebold had not consumed any alcohol prior to the attack, and did not dress in any provocative manner. Above all, she was a virgin, and this was the most horrible way of breaking her virginity. The beatings, the pain,

the fact that she was forced to suck the assailant's dick, and the revelation that a girl was killed at the same spot the night she was raped, all increased her trauma and nightmares. All these experience prolonged Sebold's recovery. However, the recovery was accelerated by the fact that she survived at a place where some people never made it again alive. She was really lucky, thanks to the assailant's knife that disappeared in the darkness. Despite this, Sebold still experienced post traumatic stress disorders, eating disorders and sleep disorders. Sebold is such a strong character that narrating the whole story during the trial, and focusing how she frustratingly narrated the story to her father, does not give her trauma. Don't forget it is Sebold's strong character that made her write this book for you and me to know what she actually went through. I believe this greatly helped in her long-term recovery.

Considering Sebold's encounter with the assailant during and after the assault, the assailant's remorse, and concern does not offset any of the pains inflicted by his actions. It is quite ironical, abusive, and almost unforgivable, to feel remorseful after all the dehumanizing acts. The fact that he was a stranger also accelerated the trauma. The good news, however, is that Sebold could recognize him when they met. This made it possible for her to press charges. The justice system bore fruits and brought some comfort to Sebold when her assailant received the maximum sentence for her offences (which included rape and sodomy). This was a sweet moment in the life of Sebold as justice was finally done. This further accelerated her long-time recovery. The impact of the rape was so powerful that it lasted for a very long time. Sebold redefines rape as not just a forcible intercourse, but rather

“ to inhabit and destroy everything” (p. 124). Her life was literally destroyed. In her reflections, she remembers graffiti of a student who was made to stay in school by her attackers (p. 55). The picture of the victim showing her legs spread open, and a group of male figures lining beside her, makes Sebold’s trauma transform into a punchline.

Lucky is not only about Sebold. The book also tells about the people who were in her life before and after her sexual assault. Her loved ones were not perfect, and failed to act rightfully before and after the rape. Despite everything, she continued to love her family and friends, not understanding why they behaved, or rather not behaved so. Sebold did not receive the necessary support of her family and friends. This further prolonged her recovery. Though the narrator ensured that the offender was brought to book, she was not good either. She turned into alcohol and drugs, and ended up sleeping with several guys for the simple reason of rape trauma syndrome.

Though sensitive as it is, the author has told her story without rant or whine. She tells the story with dignity, as a victim who has actually recovered from the rape trauma syndrome. The rape trauma syndrome doesn’t constitute a mental illness or disorder. It is a natural response to the trauma of rape, as experienced by Sebold.

References

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