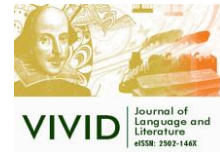


Available online at : <http://jurnalvivid.fib.unand.ac.id>

Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature

| ISSN (Online) 2502-146X |



Literature

Society's Contribution to Silent Tendency of Sexually Assaulted Child as Reflected in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*

Resty Maudina Septiani¹, Eva Najma²

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: May 05, 2017

Revised: July 20, 2017

Available online: September 27, 2017

KEYWORDS

Speak, sexually-assaulted children, silent tendency

CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: resty.maudina@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This research analyzes sexually-assaulted child's silent tendency as depicted in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. This social problem reflects one of social issues in America in 1999. I use sociology of literature theory from Alan Swingewood to analyze social issue in American society. This research uses descriptive qualitative method. I find that Laurie Halse Anderson depicts Melinda's silent tendency is influenced by people around her. Sexually-assaulted child tends to not reporting the assault. It reflects sexual assault issue in America in 1999.

INTRODUCTION

Sexually-assaulted children do not want to talk about being sexually assaulted because of fear, wrong judgement, and untrustworthy feeling they received. One of American authors who brings up this social problem to surface is Laurie Halse Anderson. *Speak*, one among her novels, was firstly published in 1999 [1]. *Speak* is about Melinda Sordino's life which is suddenly falling apart after being sexually assaulted by her senior at the party. Her friends, parents, and teachers do not dig out what is lying behind that tightly closed mouth since that night. Until her art teacher, Mr. Freeman, becomes the only one who recognizes that her silence hides a big scar inside and slowly open it up; sexually-assaulted trauma.

Melinda's silent tendency about the sexual assault influenced by her parents, counselors, teachers and friends trigger me to analyze it further. I believe Anderson is influenced by social issues in America where she lives in 1990s. The title is chosen as it aims to show how Melinda's

closest relatives contributes to her choice to keep the secret of getting sexually assaulted buried deep inside her mind.

After observing this novel several times, I find that Melinda's Friends, family, teachers and counselors influence Melinda's decision to disclosure about the rape. This is one of social issues found in America in 1990s. I use first perspective that literature mirror its age by Swingewood [2].

Previous researches using *Speak* as their object are used before doing this research. First, O'Quinn argues in her Journal *Between Voice and Voicelessness: Transacting Silence in Laurie Halse Anderson's Speak* that *Speak* is challenging the oppression of silence of woman [3]. I found her research tries to explain that silence in sexually-assaulted child is influenced by self-abnegation culture; how they were perceived by the world. O'Quinn uses feminist perspective and both intrinsic and extrinsic approach for her research.

Second, McGee believes *Speak* is an empowerment narrative in the traditional sense because Melinda's power does not come only from speaking about what happened but also from her self-defense which finally help her out of her trauma [4]. McGee uses Foucault's psychoanalytic's approach for his research.

Third reasearch is from Agustin [5]. She believes Melinda is the representation of Laure Halse Anderson and traces back Anderson's story and how this novel contributes to reduce adult sexual violence in society. Agustin uses Alan Swingewood's Sociological perspective & Biographical Approach for her research (pp.1-16).

Based on three researches above, the three of them use the same object as I do but have different focuses and theories. I focus my research on how Melinda's relative indirectly have a part on Melinda's decision to keep silent as she mistrust them. I use Alan Swingewood's first perspective theory that literature provide a mirror to its age [2].

METHOD

In conducting this research, I will follow three steps. First, in collecting the data, both primary and secondary data will be used. Primary data are taken from *Speak* novel by Laurie Halse Anderson. However, I limit my research only to analyze how the author potrays Melinda's thinking as sexually-assaulted victim about her parents, friends, teachers, and counselor. While secondary data, such as American sexual assault statistics and sexual assault report in America, are taken from trusted journals, news reports, and national statistical data. Second, Melinda's thinking that implies reasons of why she keeps silent and mistrust anyone will be analyzed along with secondary data. Third, how it actually reflects social issue will be provided by observing children sexual assault's cases in several news reports will be presented descriptively.

Categorize the article into one of the following: (1) Research article, (2) Technical article, (3) Concept development, and (4) Case study. Divide your article into several headings: Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion, and Conclusions, References, and Appendices

(if necessary). You must follow how headings are written in this template by selecting Heading 1 in the available styles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned by Smith, sexually assaulted victims definitely consider several conditions before telling that person that they are sexually assaulted [6]. Not only close to them, sexually assaulted victims need someone trustworthy, willing to listen and more importantly unjudgemental and really want to know about the assault.

Family's Contribution

The story of Melinda's mind in *Speak* pulls people to notice there might be a big story behind shut mouth and distinct behavior of kids. It all begins when Melinda is actually so frantic that she is being raped at the summer party. She has no idea how to tell her parents after she is raped at the party. She finds her parents are not in the house yet. What makes it even worse is her mom and dad arrives home late separately [1]. When Melinda faces a shocking catastrophe in her life, her parents is in dishamoniuous stage.

In such difficult and heartbreaking time, Parents' role is strongly needed. However, children who find their parents disharmonious mostly think they have no time left as it has been used for their own problem

Nowadays, people are frantically busy making money [7]. On the day before Thanksgiving Melinda's mother is still busy working extra until morning. She does not even notice her daughter is there looking at her sad as her laptop spends more time with her compare to Melinda; her daughter (57-58) [1]. Therefore, Melinda's parents do not communicate each other or with her like family supposed to be. Posted note is their communication platform.

Parents sometimes are too busy with themselves that they forget their children may think they have no time to listen and do not want to listen. As Abramovitch reports Corey Feldman in an interview of recalling memories how he was molested [8]. Feldman's father chose to attend his company's party in his office and let other man takes care of his child, spends time with his child, and put himself as his son's father. He does not realize that leaving his child with this man giving more time his son and this man spending days without being watched. That is the chance this man molested Feldman without getting caught. It is depicted partially in *Speak*. Melinda's parents are busy working that Melinda at the end feels they have no time to listen to her. Melinda is slipped off their watch. When the reporter asks him whether he tells his father or not, Feldman says "as a child you don't really do that. My parents were both very abusive and very selfish and were more interested in what was happening with themselves than what was happening with my life (para. Question 19)."

It is depicted in *Speak*. Melinda often thinks her parents are selfish that they do not really care of what is happening with Melinda. Another case is also depicted in *Speak*. Melinda keeps thinking her parents would not believe her and would take her explanation as justification. One of Larry Nassar's victim tells her parents but they do not believe their daugther. As Mencarini

(2017) writes “they didn’t believe her.” [9] The victim says to her parents that Nassar penetrated her vagina with his fingers and exposed his erect penis to her (para.6) but, no one contacted police. As Mencarini reports, Larry Nassar was gymnast team doctor in 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. He later later respected nationally and became a longtime team physician for USA Gymnastics (para.4).

Some sexually assaulted children do not want to tell anyone that they are raped because of fear that they would not been believed. They are afraid of being accused making a story or imagining as they are just children.

Melinda’s parents do not encourage her to talk to them openly; they do not engage her to talk to them. I strongly believe that Melinda’s decision to disclosure about the assault from her parents is because Melinda’s parents are too busy and disharmonious which later made them untrustworthy. Laurie Halse Anderson tries to show that parents often do not realize that their children lack of affection as they are too busy with themselves.

Friends’ Contribution

Melinda is the object of bullying in the school as nobody is getting bothered and intrigued for her silence. People hate her because she calls the cops when she was at the party, which is a little wild, and they believe she wants to break the party. A large amount of people believe something they believe is true without even getting bothered whether it is really the fact.

As can be seen on page 28 [1], the girl whose brother is arrested at the party because Melinda called the cops does not want to dig deeper the reason she calls the cop. What she cares is her brother is arrested because of Melinda and it infuriates her. This tradition incredibly pulls some sexually-assaulted youngsters to jump into conclusion that none would actually willing to listen to their problem. In the situation where people there hate her immensely, there is no way to get them trust her (if she tells the truth) but would accuse her making a justification. Melinda does not speak up as fear, shame, distrust silence her. Friends influence Melinda to keep silent and hide her trauma inside. Logically, Rachel as Melinda’s best friend should ask Melinda of what happen since the night at the party but she does not. Instead, she decides to hate her even makes people hate her (136).

However, in *Speak* Melinda’s friends bully her without knowing her reason calling the cop that night because she is sexually-assaulted. In contrast, as exemplified by Tiffany Lopez, her friends (other trainees) do not bully her but they know she is sexually assaulted and discourage her to speak up. As Mencarini reports, Lopez was a softball player at MSU and enrolled in 1998 [9]. She remembers Nassar sexually asault her 10 times from touching her vagina until penetrated her vagina with his ungloved hand and tries to talk to other trainees. The first trainee convinced her that Nassar would not do anything inappropriate, the second shows concern, the third defends Nassar that she was given the best medical care possible. The third even reminded her if she report Nassar she would add stress to her family as her family has just lost her mother (para. 33-48). As can be seen, the trainees discourage her to report Nassar by blaming her that

Nassar is a professional gymnast doctor that gives her the best medical treatment and even warning her to not burden her parents by her problem.

I strongly believe that accusation pulls victim to disclosure. As long as most people judge a rumor is true than it is the truth, victim believe telling the real truth merely seems like a justification. The second is ignorance and individualism. Eventhough people know the truth, some people do not want to help or defend the victim as they believe it is for their own safety.

Teachers', Principles' and Counselors' Contribution

Anderson indicates faults teachers or counselor make. Teacher like Mr. Neck is described as a subjective teacher that would believe his assumption over everything else. If he personally has a feeling for instance he has a feeling that Melinda is a troublemaker, he keeps thinking that way as he believed his experience in teaching gives him superpower to detect troublemaker student (p.7).

Several sexually assaulted children try to tell someone that they are sexually assaulted, but they are being blamed or silenced by even powerful or authorized people. Larissa Boyce is one of USA Gymnast that is sexually assaulted by Larry Nassar when she was 16. As Mencarini reports, Nassar penetrated Boyce's vagina for treatment of back pain in 1997 at his MSU office [9]. She acknowledges it was not normal, but she trusted her doctor. He penetrated her several times. She does not recognize it as sexual assault when other trainees are suspicious at Nassar asking them to leave the room because of Boyce. Then, in the late 1997 or mid 1998, Boyce talked to Kathie Klages what Nassar did to her. Kathie Klages was MSU's Gymnastics coach. However, Boyce says that Klages warned her to keep silent as the complaint would destroy not only Nassar but Boyce as well. This is why Boyce quit gymnastics without telling her parents or police what had happened "after I had talked to Kathie, I felt like I had a dirty mind. I felt like something was wrong with me. And she silenced me that night. I didn't want to talk to anybody else about it after that (para.17-29)." If we take a look back on her thinking about Mr. Neck, Melinda is also silenced by Mr. Neck. Eventhough Melinda has not tell him she is sexually assaulted, personal judgement based on his 24 years teaching experiences discourage Melinda to speak up as she believes he would not believe her.

I strongly believe that stubborn personality, personal belief, and ignorancy are also triggering victim's mistrust and decide to not disclosure.

Breaking Silence: Trust, and Situation

Trust

Not like others, Melinda's art teacher Mr. Freeman does not ask her to speak up. Instead, he keeps waiting and building trust between him and her. While she is completely angry remembering the assault, she releases it by telling about it through her tree project as reconstruction. Instead of pushing her to say something, Mr. Freeman convinces her that if she wants to say something he would listen after complementing her project progress (p.121-123). He even describe human just like tree to encourage Melinda to speak up as it is okay and normal to have scar, and just like tree, you can cut the scar or rotten branch and grow a new branch or

start a new “you.” When Melinda hands her tree project, she sniffes and wipes her eyes. Mr. Freeman once again offer trust, he does not demand her to talk but showing his sympathy by saying “you’ve been through a lot, haven’t you?” and that is the time Melinda decides to tell him (p.297-298).

I believe Melinda trusts Mr. Freeman and want to tell him because he does not ask her to speak up. Instead, he keeps waiting and his support build trust between him and her. He convinces that whenever Melinda wants to tell him, he is there for her.

Situation

Recalling memory of sexually assaulted that is severely painful is inevitable when Melinda knows Rachel is seeing Andy. Thinking he would do the same what he had done to her makes Melinda wants to save her ex-bestfriend, Rachel (p.149). She hates Rachel for getting her wrong this whole time, but Melinda does not want Andy destroys her too, just like her. This situation then makes her tell Rachel that she was raped at that party. However, when Melinda tells the truth that Andy did it, she is mad and accuse Melinda is jealous with her (p.184). This kind of reason why Melinda does not want to disclosure. After bravely telling Rachel and torturing herself, accusation and hatred is what she gets.

CONCLUSIONS

Speak sends a deep moral message that family, friends, and authorized person as part of society play a role in influencing sexually-assaulted child to bravely speak up about the assault. *Speak* reflects social issues that sexually assaulted child often feel that disclosure is the best option as close relatives are too ignorant, selfish, and discouraging. *Speak* provides mirror to its age as believed by Swingewood is proved.

I strongly believe *Speak* reflects silent tendency of sexually assaulted children in America in 1999 is influenced by society. Laurie Halse Anderson implies trust from relative’s victim and understanding to save other children by speaking up as one among other things that might help sexually-assaulted child to speak up. It is important to encourage sexually assaulted victim to believe that speaking up would help them heal their trauma.

REFERENCES

- [1] L. H. Anderson, *Speak*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999.
- [2] A. Swingewood and D. Laurenson, “The Sociology of Literature.” Schocken Books Inc., New York, 1972.
- [3] E. J. O’Quinn, “Between Voice and Voicelessness: Transacting Silence in Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*,” *Alan Rev.*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2001.
- [4] C. McGee, “Why Won’t Melinda Just Talk about What Happened? *Speak* and the Confessional Voice,” *Child. Lit. Assoc. Q.*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 172–187, 2009.
- [5] W. Agustin, “Reduction Of Young Adult Sexual Violence As Reflects In Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*,” Universitas Andalas, 2016.

- [6] S. G. Smith, "The Process and Meaning of Sexual Assault Disclosure," Georgia State University, 2005.
- [7] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Washington, D.C. Married Parents' Use of Time, 2003–06," 2008.
- [8] S. Abramovitch, "Corey Feldman on Elijah Wood Hollywood Pedophilia Controversy: 'I Would Love to Name Names' | Hollywood Reporter," *hollywoodreporter.com*, 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/corey-feldman-elijah-wood-hollywood-897403>.
- [9] Matt Mencarini, "Larry Nassar and a career filled with 'silenced' voices," *Lansing State Journal*, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2017/06/01/larry-nassar-and-career-filled-silenced-voices/358394001/>.