

**BOOK REVIEW**

# Know My Name

Edited by Chanel Miller

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Chanel Miller is the Emily Doe of the infamous Brock Turner rape case in the USA. In autumn 2019, she forwent her anonymity to publish her powerful memoir, *Know My Name*. In it, she depicts her attempts to seek accountability through the criminal justice system for the devastating sexual assault committed against her by the Olympic-hopeful Stanford student. In a classic example of DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender—Freyd, 1997) she describes how Turner and those around him, including sections of the media, created a narrative of his “victimhood” and the loss of his glittering future as a potential surgeon and athlete due to the rape accusations and trial. In contrast, we see the criminal justice process reduce Miller to a faceless victim whose main characteristic was being drunk and unconscious at the time of the assault, with all the baggage of victim-blaming that carries.

Miller sets the record straight by closely acquainting us with her humanity—who she was and is before, during and after the rape and trial—and the impact on her, both of the rape and of the secondary traumatisation caused by the criminal justice process. As a result, we see the humanisation of Emily Doe, into whom she splits and places her trauma, and how she then re-integrates this traumatised self. Indeed, her account is a clear illustration of dissociation—a deft move of the psyche that supports survival during intolerable circumstances. Miller generously offers us a front row seat in her journey to bring these two parts of her self—the traumatised Emily Doe and the resilient, talented, gentle and strong Chanel Miller—back together. What she describes, however, is not a re-insertion of her traumatised self into her “pre-rape” self, but the creation of a new self that has been irreversibly changed by the rape and trial.

This integration of traumatic/dissociated experiences is both the bedrock and the holy grail of much therapy. Whilst Miller describes a journey that includes psychotherapy (she doesn't specify any modality), her experience illustrates that trauma integration is not the sole prerogative of the therapy room and the locus of “recovery” does not lie in an either/or dualism of *self-help* or “*other-help*”. She charts the choppy course of her own journey as a one-foot-in-front-of-the-other path of intuitive actions that encompasses both. This resonates with my experience as a childhood abuse survivor, a psychotherapist, and a peer-community leader. In the book *#MeToo: counsellors and psychotherapists speak about sexual violence and abuse* (Lee & Palmer, 2020) I write about the paucity of good therapy for survivors and point out that at times, our profession actually causes harm. When faced with this absence of good and safe therapy we muddle through, forging a path away from abuse and its legacy, using whatever tools, people and places we can find. For Miller, this includes compassionate support from people in the criminal justice system; her family's solidarity and non-pathologising responses; the steadfastness of her partner throughout the justice process and as he witnesses her experiencing the visceral impacts of her assault; the support of therapists; the role of art; the power of connection to other survivors who “get it” (a common phrase used during the many Survivors' Voices peer gatherings I have co-facilitated) and lastly, the significant role of writing in her life.

Miller instinctively turns to writing during her long and trauma-inducing journey through the criminal justice system, allowing her to externalise what might otherwise sit within her, unmetabolised. I share Miller's instinct. I

understand the desperate need to vomit out in written form the harm done to me by unaccountable people and systems which all too often operate with impunity. At least, by writing it down, I leave a tangible trail that says "This is NOT OK" whilst that pernicious impunity persists. I am similarly driven by a deep need to place onto the paper the truth of my experience, my reality in the face of systematic family, cultural and institutional denial, silencing and gaslighting. Miller quotes Anne Lamot: "Remember, you own what happened to you". Having been raised in a violent family that abuses you then says "Nothing happened. It's nothing! Stop crying", forcing you to sit at the table and eat with those who have caused you harm, I cannot over-emphasise the power that has been available to me through pen and ink. On page after page, I have quietly and persistently recorded the truth in the face of such crazy-making denial. Both my own and Miller's experiences reflect research about the therapeutic benefits of writing (Pennebaker, 1997) and speak of the need for therapists to recognise it as one possible tool for therapy. For example, the reading out loud of client writings to support integration, the use of writing in between sessions, and the possibility of reading what can't yet be said out loud.

It is because of her impetus to write that we now have Miller's incisive account. However, this book was not her first written output from her journey as a survivor. In the weeks before sentencing, she writes her Victim Impact Statement with a feverish, unstoppable drive. The resulting statement, in the form of a letter to her rapist, is a sophisticated act of refusal to accept his dehumanisation and objectification of her. Awe fills the courtroom as she reads it out to him, yet a double shock ensues. The impact of her *Impact* Statement is negligible. The judge hands out a lenient six-month sentence to Turner who, despite a unanimous guilty verdict, persists in his denial. As an ex-probation officer, I have written many pre-sentence reports and am fully cognisant of the fact that his denial alone should have been seen by the judge as an aggravating factor in sentencing. The judge cites damage to Turner's promising career as reasoning for his lenient sentence. Miller, who throughout the book skilfully draws parallels between her case and the forces at work in the socio-political realm (Trump, Kavanaugh, incel terror attacks, Cosby, Nasser, Weinstein ...) drives a sharp blow to the paradigm of social privilege and elitism underpinning the sentence: "What happens to those who start off with little to lose? Instead of a 19 year old Stanford athlete, let's imagine a Hispanic 19-year-old working in the kitchen of the fraternity commits the same crime ..." The judge later suffers his own fate as a consequence of his appalling sentencing decision, the outrage of which galvanises survivor activists, resulting in him being the first US judge to be recalled from the bench in 86 years.

The second shock is the turning point that offers hope. Her Victim Impact Statement is placed on BuzzFeed, goes viral, and comes to the attention of people in high places. However, it is the postbags of letters from ordinary people, many themselves survivors, that sustain Miller in the bleak months ahead (which would go on to include an appeal by Turner). "I was surrounded by survivors, I was a part of a we". Peer support, as the #MeToo movement attests to, is a global and online phenomenon as well as a neighbourhood-based force for healing. It deserves more resourcing, development and research attention (Konya et al., 2020).

I smiled in recognition when Miller described her journey as one of *Turning Pain into Power* as this is the title of our Survivors' Voices Charter, which advocates for safe, meaningful and effective survivor engagement by organisations (Perôt & Chevoux, 2018). Its application is much needed, especially in the criminal justice system. Our original title for the Charter was in fact *Turning Shit into Gold*, and it is this desire to transform our lived experience into a force for good that motivates me and the many survivor-activists who engage in writing, research, peer-support and campaigning. *Know My Name* stands as a landmark testimony of one woman's such transformation of pain into power, shit into gold. From victim to survivor. From Emily Doe to Chanel Miller.

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