

Intimate Partner's Violence as a Manifestation Skill through of Relational Vulnerability in Karen Rose's *Don't Tell*

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is a gender-related violence manifesting the men power over women. In a patriarchal society, women are inferior within hierarchical gender relations. This study is made to disclose the incidence of domestic violence against women that shows how vulnerable women are in a relationship, especially the married one. The result shows that status of a woman, housewife and mother as described by the main character in the novel is considered subordinate and susceptible to multioppression. Extremely, the marriage is such detention for her to be an independent individual. When domestic violence happens toward a wife perpetrated by her husband, between fear and prevalence assumption, society is soundless. This violence is a manifestation of relational vulnerability.

I. Introduction

Violence against women can happen to any women no matter they are or not in relationships. But when it happens to women that are in relationships, it becomes ironic as a relationship is generally expected to give safe feelings and value. The ultimate goal of a relationship is believed by society to be marriage.

The union of women and men in a legal relationship, the so-called marriage, is associated as a legal institution of the basis of family. The marriage is a self-contained unit with roles on a sex basis to perform husbands' and wives' rights and obligations. However, in a patriarchal society, husbands are more likely to be dominant than wives. It cannot be apart from the hereditary of social construction that glorifies men. Dichotomy between women associated as inferior and men as superior figures in the hierarchal status degrades women.

Women's inferiority is a hegemonic construct as a result of gender inequality which is often called 'gender-paradigm' and has been existed for ages. Gender inequality produces oppressions toward women at most of times (Hambur & Nurhayati, 2019). Men's power over women contributes to violence against women and the violence becomes worse when it happens to married women (wives).

Marriage is tradition offering to women by society as the destiny. A woman is nothing without the family and it is enough for her to live in obedience (Beauvoir, 1974). This describes how weak a woman is in both family and society. When a woman is married, she is bound to her new family and her husband becomes her leader and has power to control the whole family. This kind of power is justified by social norms. A married woman just needs to obey her husband and devote her life to the family, nothing else. This phenomenon is believed to be the trigger of domestic violence against woman as the woman is deliberately made powerless and has no right to speak up. Thus, relation in the marriage, between married couple (wife and husband) is vulnerable to woman.

Spousal abuse which wives become victims and husbands are perpetrators will continue to exist. Religious and social doctrines indirectly play a basic role in maintaining this violence. Most often wives are reluctant to seek help. It may be linked to the widespread acceptability of violence against women in society. Even in many countries, both women and men believe that wife-beating is justified in certain circumstances.

Religious teachings strengthen the husband's hierarchy that a husband is the head of the family a wife must be obedient to. Although obedience is not a fashionable word these days, not a few husbands like to use it to keep their power. It becomes a defense for husbands to punish their wives.

In the developing country like Indonesia, the data statistics shows that violence against wives has been always in the first rank. The annual report of National Commission on Violence against Women (Perempuan, n.d.), for instance, for two years respectively, 2019 and 2020, shows that within 2018 violence against women hit 406,178 cases and increased to 431,471 cases. Violence against wives which belongs to intimate partner violence (IPV) always placed the first rank. In line with that, United Nation reports the data that acceptance of wife-beating is generally higher in many countries. It proves that social doctrine on domestic violence is justified. Acceptance of husbands harsh behavior towards wives makes the number of violence is in the alert level (United Nation, 2010).

This study highlights one form of violence against women which is categorized as intimate partner violence (IPV). The term 'intimate partner violence' is recently introduced to broaden understanding of violence in relationships regardless of sexual orientation, marital status, or gender. According to World Health Organization (WHO), intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviors by an intimate partner. Examples of types of behavior are listed below (World Health Organization, n.d.):

- a. Acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating
- b. Sexual violence, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
- c. Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
- d. Controlling behaviors, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

However, this study only focuses on IPV of the married couple. Marriage is the grand-perceived relationship between husband and wife which unfortunately marginalizes woman who are experiencing domestic violence.

In the novel, the protagonist, Mary Grace, is described as a poor wife for being repeatedly tortured and almost dies at the hands of misogynistic and abusive husband named Rob Winters who works as a police officer.

The Mary Grace's state as a woman and mother who is uneducated and economically dependent on husband make a crack to be the victim of domestic violence and powerless to defend herself and ask help from society.

Although Mary is a fictional character, she reflects the victim's situation of domestic violence in the real life. The victims could have power to fight against such poor conditions by: (i) working, (ii) being intellectuals by joining associations, (iii) reaching socialist transformation, and (iv) rejecting to internalize the—other (Tong, 2010).

If a woman has a job to do outside the house and is more knowledgeable by socialization, and financially strong, she becomes more self-confident and knows what to do to defend her life and dignity.

II. Method

This study is a library research with descriptive method. It uses sociological approach to literature. It involves the perspective of both sociology and literature. These broad approaches can be unified and called a sociology of literature. Sociology of literature is related to literature and social phenomena that are revealed in the literary works, as quoted from (Ratna, 2003, p. 25) that

“Sociology is the study of literature and literary engagement of social structure”. Social structure which consists of class status, ideology communities, and other social order can affect authors then expressed in a work.

Sociology of literature is concerned with man’s social world which can be reflected in man’s literary works. Novel, for instance, as one of literary products that becomes the major literary genre of industrial society that reflects the man’s world. (Laurenson, 1972, p. 12) stated that “the novel can be seen as a faithful attempt to re-create the social world of the man’s relation with his family and his roles within family, politics, tensions between groups and social classes.”

The relationship between sociology of literature and social issues in a literary work, like relationship of gender inequality and power and conflict, needs more detail theories as an integral part of sociology such as feminism.

Feminism is used in this study as the analytical tool to analyze Karen Rose’s novel entitled *Don’t Tell* as the object of this research material. Gender crimes such as domestic violence or specifically in this study is called intimate partner violence which is a clear barrier freedom of women in this novel can be precisely reviewed using feminist study.

III. Result and Discussion

There are more than one victim of domestic violence or intimate partner violence (which later will only be written as IPV) done by the antagonist abusive man Rob Winters, but this study only discusses IPV experienced by Mary Grace as a wife. The IPV is a result of relational vulnerability within marriage.

A. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Little Mary has a horrible experience of violence. She becomes the victim of violence committed by her own father. When she grows up, she’s married to an abusive cop and unluckily she’s got the same poor behavior from her husband. The behavior of violating makes her the object of violence for the second time. Rob Winters, the man whom she is married with, has a temperamental nature and frequently commits acts of violence against women. Not only does his wife become the victim of domestic violence, but also his girlfriends named Holly Rupert (Rose, 2007: 130) and Sue Ann Broughton (Rose, 2007: 25).

Mary Grace experiences four basic forms of violence namely physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual violence, and controlling behaviors.

1) Physical Violence

Among violences, physical violence is easier to be proved as it leaves scars and they can be seen. This violence is also a key common element addressing IPV.

Mary Grace has experienced terrible physical violence during married. She becomes a “punching bag” for she is frequently beaten and hit by her husband (Rose, 2007, p. 340).

Unfair sadistic treatments as if become her daily consumption. Injuries to her body become common since then, broken arms for many times, lots of burns and cuts as described by her below.

“A few radial fractures—from twisting my arm. Broken arms”—she closed her eyes and counted—“five, maybe six times. A broken leg or two. Maybe three. Once he broke my jaw and I had to have my teeth wired. That was an interesting one to explain away. Lots of broken ribs and bruises.” And burns and cuts, she thought, but those injuries were a lot harder to recount” (Rose, 2007, pp. 340–341).

The data above shows that slapping, hitting and beating are vicious, but these brutal actions look lighter than the extreme actions she ever receives, that is being pushed away from upstairs and cause multiple contusions, even worse, paralysis as the following sentences.

“She has a broken arm, so severely broken we had to pin it in two places... Multiple contusions on her face and to the back of her head. She has a deep cut over her eye... She has ... there is some paralysis” (Rose, 2007, pp. 1–2).

In another time, violence nearly kills her and kills the fetus inside her womb because that time she is pregnant. This truth can be seen from the quote below when she tells her present lover after being disappeared from Rob's life the following years in the future.

"Rob pushed me down the stairs that night."

He swallowed, his throat visibly working. "And you broke your back."

"No, not that time. That would have been the second time - after I finally got up the nerve to take out a restraining order. This was the first time I tumbled down the stairs." She did not miss the way his face tightened, but he did not say a word. "This was the first time ..." Caroline felt her lips tremble, her eyes fill. She dreaded the memory of what came next. It was a memory she'd always managed to stuff back down, but tonight it simply would not. "I ... I lost my baby that night" (Rose, 2007, pp. 342-343).

Physical violence is experienced by Mary many times. The data above describe how a poor Mary must experience this kind of sadism from her own husband. It is very ironic. A husband who is supposed to protect, even commits to do violence that threatens his own wife's life.

2) Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse as one key element addressing IPV in the novel covers threats and intimidations. It is hard to prove because it is intangible but this form of violence causes fear and trauma to the victim and further makes prolonged effects to other violence.

The novel describes kind of violence that Mary Grace goes through the depression, insecure feeling due to her husband behavior which threatens her life. For instance, when she is cared in the hospital after being pushed from the stairs by her husband, she's got emotional violence through verbal threat uttered by Rob Winters. She is threatened not to give confession to others about what actually happens to her as described below.

"One word," he breathed into her ear, so low no one would be Able to hear. "One word from your idiot mouth and next time I'll finish the job, I swear t 'God." He nuzzled, his lips a seemingly caressing her outer ear. "Understand?" (Rose, 2007, p. 3).

Threatening can also be seen from the following sentence "Rob told me if I told anyone he'd finish the job" (Rose, 2007, p. 363). The job in this context is telling anyone about the real fact of violence she's got so far from her husband.

Not only is threatened, Mary Grace is also intimidated by her isolated state. It intimidates her life for she is separated from social life. Isolation is controlling behaviors which will further elaborated.

3) Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a core element in addressing IPV. The relations between husband and wife cannot be enjoyed by Mary. She feels tense and insisted to have sex with Rob Winters, her husband. Being physically forced to have sexual intercourse against her will and having sexual intercourse out of fear are categorized as sexual violence.

Rob's compulsion committed against Mary causes pain that is embedded in her mind. It is totally contrast when she does it with Max willingly and lovingly, her lover in the future. It can be seen from the sentences below.

"—It did not hurt, Max." For the first time, she knew what God ordained. For the first time she'd given her body freely. For the first time there had been the ultimate pleasure. For the first time there had been no ripping, tearing pain (Rose, 2007, p. 305).

4) Controlling Behaviors

One prominent controlling behaviors in the novel is Rob Winters isolating Mary Grace from the world. Mary is not allowed to have chance to interact with the surrounding neighbors. In other words, she is locked up in the house. She is deliberately conditioned only in the house to take care

of the domestic stuff. It shows her life which is isolated from other human beings, as the following sentences.

She was still running away. Not from places anymore, but from people. How long would she allow Rob Winters to keep her isolated from other human beings? (Rose, 2007, p. 87).

In line with the data above, a statement from a detective supports Mary's state of being isolated: "...it follows that he kept her isolated. She had no friends, her parents were dead. No siblings" (Rose, 2007, p. 226).

Isolating Mary from outer world is to facilitate Rob's power and control over Mary for an abusive purpose. It reduces her opportunity to be rescued or escape from him.

The isolation gives domino effect for Mary Grace. Being isolated means running nowhere and it gives Rob Winters huge opportunity to harm Mary Grace even more especially in economic violence.

Economic violence is unfamiliar in our society but it does actually exist. Mary Grace is a house wife who always depends on her husband to fulfill the needs since she does not work and is hesitated to work outside. Unluckily, Rob Winters, her husband, is very full of consideration and underestimates Mary. Dependence in economy is one of key factors of a woman becomes so helpless. Economic sufficiency is represented through the have of money or wealth as a symbol of power. A wicked man who knows this chance will take benefit to control over the woman, like what is done by Rob Winters to his wife. He weakens Mary's position from her economic helplessness. Her limitation in administering money can be seen in the following quote "She hadn't had any credit cards. He's never allowed it. Mary Grace could not be trusted with more than twenty bucks at a time, much less a credit card" (Rose, 2007, p. 44).

Instead of fulfilling his wife's need, he distrusts her in managing money for the whole family. His statement indicates that he never gives Mary sufficient money to take care of his household.

B. Relational Vulnerability

IPV is a social phenomenon that has been lasting for aeons in civilization. In a hierarchy, there is one who is acclaimed to have a higher position. The gender hierarchy, for instance, man is ordained to have higher strata over woman. Dichotomy between male and female which marginalizes women glorifies man's class.

The glorification has existed and admitted by society, especially patriarchal society. Hence, the acceptance is also enforced in the micro environment, that is family. In a family, a man especially a husband/father is believed to be the controller of family. The family members consisting of mother and children must subject to him. It is a breath of fresh air to a man to act arbitrarily.

Most of society in this world is patriarchy. In a patriarchal family, nurturing daughters and sons are surely different. Since they are kids, they are introduced by parents what to do by gender. Lesson of power control is taught either indirectly or directly to the kids. A girl, for example, is taught to do household, be able to do kitchen stuff, beautify herself and later in the future deliver babies. In Indonesia's old mind-set, a woman's function is familiarly known as 3 M (*masak, macak, manak*). Even, some label it as "*konco wingking*" with the assumption *wingking* or behind is where a woman should be. On the contrary, a boy is taught to be a leader with all attributes given to him. The parenting does not teach how to place female and male as partners in life.

The social stereotype which praises the man's class is often used by men to degrade women. In the novel, Rob Winters' action to violate his wife in the form of physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence as elaborated in the previous shows his superiority over his wife's inferior position. He disparages women in general and his wife in particular. His wife must be submissive to him.

Rob's perspective on women's submission to men is supported by his interpretation of the verse in the Bible that justifies and uplifts position of a husband over a wife. It can be seen from the following quote: "The husband is the head of the household and has every right to discipline his wife and children. It's Biblical" (Rose, 2007, p. 251).

The word 'discipline' above is assumed by Rob to make Mary subject to him to do or not to do whatever he orders. It includes allowing him to be mad at and harm her when she does something wrong according to him.

Such mind-setting is ironically supported by other woman, like Mary's mother. Although her mother knows that Mary is experienced abuses and violence done by her husband, she advises to back to him and be a good wife as seen in the following quote: "She lectured me. Told me a wife's place was by her husband. That I should concentrate on being a better wife so Rob wouldn't be so mad at me all the time" (Rose, 2007, p. 341).

Misogynistic Rob Winters violates Mary Grace with all useless attributes associated to her as a woman. According to him, women which are socially constructed as weak, defensive, inferior, etc, are useless beings that ever exist. In the following quote, he shows his hatred on women: "He'd always thought God brains wasted on women" (Rose, 2007, p. 358).

The quote above is another glorification that establishes confidence of men in the hierarchy. Patriarchal relations and norms that support male dominance over female requires obedience and it prevails both in society and family (marriage). Husband's control of household wealth and decision-making accepted by norms strengthens his position.

The male glorification gives contribution to power abuse and violence. That what happens to Mary Grace. Mary's relation is influenced by stereotypes of man's power over woman agreed by society. It offers a chance to misuse the power. Violence against her is a manifestation of how vulnerable her relationship is in the corridor of patriarchal system. Such system keeps her dominated and subordinate. In the name of the head of the family to rule, the system allows her husband to oppress and dominate her as a wife whose strata is lower.

IV. Conclusion

Intimate partner violence (IPV) can vary into many relations, one is husband and wife relations. Husband and wife are bound to legal institution named marriage. Within marriage, a husband has power and authority to control the household. It includes wife, children and other members of family. Such power control is agreed by society and norms follow. It makes a husband lulled and potential to misuse the power and be dominant. To show his power and strengthen his dominance, many do violence in the domestic area, husband to wife or father to children.

In the novel, Rob Winters abuses his power to stay dominant and make his wife, Mary Grace always subject to him. It is like remain forever because people consider disputes arising in the household is natural. Even in a particular community, instead of making disciplined, the husband is allowed to do violence against wife.

Personal interpretation of religious dogmas that has developed in the community allegedly contributes to woman marginalization. Rob Winters also uses his interpretation on this to emphasizes he is the head.

In the end, forms of slapping and isolating with his term of disciplining the wife provide justification. It is assumed reasonable. Meanwhile, Mary as the abused or victim of domestic violence or IPV stays in violent relationships for quite long because of her fear of retaliation, lack of alternative means of economic support, concern for her children, lack of support from family and friends, and still many other reasons.

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