

Navigating the Three Edges of “Catharsis,” “Self-Proclaimed Pariah,” and “Psychic Resilience,” in Erika L. Sanchez’s *Crying in the Bathroom*

Amar Bahadur Sherma

(Ph.D. Scholar at the Department of English, the University of Texas at Arlington, U.S.)

ABSTRACT: *This paper delves into the profound themes of catharsis, the outcast's journey, and the resilient spirit as depicted in Erika Sánchez's memoir, Crying in the Bathroom. Navigating the labyrinth of human existence, the paper illuminates Sánchez's cathartic storytelling, unveiling the depths of the human psyche and the transformative power of vulnerability. Positioned as a self-proclaimed pariah at the intersection of her Mexican heritage and American upbringing, Sánchez's narrative serves as a poignant exploration of societal expectations and cultural dissonance. The analysis delves into her candid discussions on depression and suicidal tendencies, highlighting the intricate interplay of biological and sociological factors. Sánchez's journey towards resilience is examined, drawing influences from Buddhist philosophy and the concept of “Karma.” This exploration contends that her narrative stands as a testament to the potency of storytelling, empathy, and the indomitable human spirit in overcoming adversity. Through a comprehensive examination of Sánchez's work, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of cathartic literature, the narratives of societal outcasts, and the resilience inherent in the human experience.*

KEYWORDS: *catharsis, resilience, pariah, suicidal, discrimination*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the labyrinth of human existence, there lies a constellation of themes that illuminate the intricate corners of our souls. Among these, catharsis, the journey of the outcast, and the indomitable spirit of psychic resilience emerge as profound explorations, echoing the universal struggles and triumphs that shape our shared human experience. Within the pages that follow, we embark on a literary expedition that delves into the profound realms of catharsis, the narratives of outcasts, and the resilient threads that weave through the human spirit. Catharsis, which, Lear (1988) writes “has been widely accepted that by katharsis [a Greek word] Aristotle meant a purgation of the emotions, becomes the canvas upon which our stories unfold. It is a journey through the depths of the soul, where emotions, both tumultuous and tender, are confronted and transmuted. As we navigate the labyrinth of catharsis, I endeavor to unravel the complexities of the human psyche, where vulnerability becomes a source of resilience that refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health regardless of adverse situations (Herrman et al. 2011, p. 259). Resilience, in other words, is a source of strength and the act of releasing, which binds us all in a shared journey of transformation.

The theme of outcasts, “in Weber’s terms, ‘pariah people’ that denotes a group lacking political autonomy, marked by internal prohibitions” (Barbalet 2005, p. 54), emerges as a poignant melody, echoing the stories of those who exist on the fringes of societal acceptance. These narratives illuminate the struggles and triumphs of individuals who defy norms, challenging the boundaries of conformity. Through the lens of their

experiences, we witness the resilience it takes to navigate a world that may not always embrace positive differences. In exploring the lives of pariahs, we aim to foster empathy, understanding, and a collective recognition of the strength it takes to forge a path of authenticity, even in the face of isolation. This collection serves as a testament to the power of storytelling, allowing voices from the margins to resonate and be heard.

Erika Sánchez's journey from being a self-described misfit and disappointment as the daughter of Mexican immigrants in Chicago to becoming an award-winning novelist, poet, and essayist is a compelling and inspiring story. In *Crying in the Bathroom*, she encapsulates a wide range of topics, from sex to white feminism to debilitating depression. Her writing is characterized by its raunchy, insightful, unapologetic, and brutally honest tone, which gives readers a candid look into her life and her thoughts. Her irrepressible laugh, acerbic wit, and singular powers of perception shine through in her essays. Moreover, it is likely a book that resonates with many readers who appreciate the kind of deep, confessional conversations one might have with a close friend. It's a work that allows readers to connect with the author on a personal level and find solace in her unfiltered storytelling. Erika Sánchez's success story is a testament to the multi-faceted themes of the power of self-awareness, perseverance, and embracing one's uniqueness. Therefore, this paper intends to demonstrate why she shares her cathartic experience, proclaims herself a pariah, and overcomes suicidal tendencies through her resilience.

In earlier chapters, Sanchez recounts her experience of growing up the foul-mouthed outcast daughter of Mexican immigrants. She discloses ugly truths about finding her truth despite racism, bad relationships, and inherent sexism in America. In her book, she labels herself as "pariah" because she does not conform to societal expectations and standards. Her feeling of being an outcast is evident here:

I've always felt out of place wherever I go. I understand my identity as an outsider very early on, and my way of handling it has always been through writing and laughing about my experiences. Growing up, I always felt like a pariah, a misfit, and a disappointment in my traditional Mexican family and community. I was a foul-mouthed feminist rabble-rouser who dressed in black and was always getting into altercations when I perceived any kind of injustice. (Sanchez 2022, p. 35).

She behaves as if she has her own protocols to comply with. Her intention is to dedicate her story to those "vagabond women like herself who choose to live life on their own terms" (qtd. in Avila). She aims at bringing the existence of brown girls like herself to the fore in the U.S. She writes, "I write for the people. I don't think about white people when I'm writing," (qtd. in Pamila). Her action reflects her willfulness and recklessness. She possesses the characteristics of a feminist who is outspokenly critical of white people.

II. SELF-PROCLAIMED "PARIAH"

Generally speaking, a pariah is a person who is widely despised or rejected by society. Although the term "pariah" historically referred to a member of a low caste in southern India or a social outcast, its usage has undergone transformations over time. In a broader context, a pariah is someone who is marginalized, often excluded and socially stigmatized due to factors like their background, beliefs, or behavior. In "Arendt's 'Conscious Pariah' and the Ambiguous Figure of the Subaltern," Ray & Diemling (2016) mention that "Weber derives the concept of pariah from the Indian caste system, in which the pariah is separated by ritual barriers, exclusion, economic separation, and applies this concept to Judaism as a 'religion of suffering' that places them outside of history:

The problem of ancient Jewry, although unique in the socio-historical study of religion, can best be understood in comparison with...the Indian caste order. Sociologically speaking the Jews were a pariah people, which means...they were a guest people who were ritually separated...from their social surroundings. All the essential traits of Jewry's attitude toward the environment can be deduced from this pariah existence – especially its voluntary ghetto, long anteceding compulsory internment, and the dualistic nature of its in-group and out-group morality. (p. 507)

Ray & Diemling compare compares ancient Jewry to the Indian caste order, asserting that sociologically, Jews were considered a "pariah people." This term implies their marginalized status, voluntary establishment of ghettos, and a dualistic in-group and out-group morality, highlighting their distinct separation from the surrounding society.

Sanchez, the protagonist, proclaims herself as a pariah because her identity gets sandwiched between her inherited culture and new American culture, which leaves her identity in limbo like that of a Jew in the nineteenth century. "Arendt's characterization of the pariah, a social outcast and a Jew, depicts the plight of a marginal individual who does not fully belong anywhere . . . a rebel against his own people and the rest of society" (Elkin 1990, p. 66). Exactly, Sanchez states that "Mexican culture is as foreign to [her] as Tajikistan" (Sanchez 2022, p. 32). The essence of Elkin's argument is that Arendt's characterization of a pariah illuminates the complex and often tumultuous position of individuals who find themselves on the fringes, challenging norms, and conventions within and beyond their immediate social context. This situation of Jews bears some resemblances to that of Sanchez, who sometimes neither belongs to Mexico nor America but somewhere within herself. Her place is herself; she does not allow anyone to direct her but herself.

In the earlier chapters of the book, she describes how she becomes alien to a new culture. She has to tolerate humiliation for being a Mexican or upholding her native culture in the U.S. Her laughter is perceived as weird by her American friends. One of her friends describes her "laugh as a birdcall. One calls it the 'senora cackle.' Another says it sounds like a Mexican grito¹, which is probably why it startles the whites" (Sanchez 2022, p. 27). Furthermore, when she was in a restaurant in Belize, a couple of white families became visibly nervous due to her laughter. She experiences disparities in terms of color and race. In Mexican culture, people "talk freely about poverty in ways that aren't merely clinical" (p. 29); contrarily, in the U.S. as "a people, we have to find humor and meaning in the face of oppression so as not to be defeated by it" (ibid). Mexicans talk shit to others' faces, while Americans talk shit behind others' backs. Her grandma calls her fat and expects her to be slim like most American celebrities even if she is just 11. She wants to speak against social evils like sexual abuse. She confesses that she has "been assaulted in countless ways, and men have definitely tried to rape [her], but it's never happened" (p. 36). As she is not conversant with such occurrences and what she does is perceived as weird activity, she feels puzzled, clueless, and isolated from the new world. She feels like being an unwanted being.

Moreover, she discloses numerous incidents of the darker side of American culture that she does not consider internalizing. Her cultural attributes do not become compatible with American ones. Once, a finance guy was "intent on getting [her drunk] and taking [her] to his apartment nearby, claiming he was 'the perfect gentleman'" (Sanchez 2022, p. 36). She adds another story that her boyfriend's friend was "trying to lure [her] into a bedroom to 'lie down and rest' at a daytime high school party when [she] was incredibly drunk" (ibid). She calls them hypocritical. If these American lads were gentlemen, they would never think of taking advantage of her drunkenness but show respect for her condition and help her reach a safe place. She goes on to recall all the despicable events that are characteristic of American culture. More notably, a boy "violently grabbed [her] by the crotch as [she] walked down the hall at school when [she] was six. Even in her later life, she was assaulted. When she was in her thirties, her boyfriend "repeatedly pressured [her] to have sex in a position that made [her] gasp in pain" (p. 37). Not only this much that when someone grows up Brown and poor in America, he is she is compelled to feel like nothing belongs to him/her. Especially, girls are forced to "think white people are lurking in the bushes ready to ruin you, because they are!" (Sanchez 2022, p. 227). In the foreign soil, she confronts hostile cultural environment where sex is taken casually, which is not acceptable for her and her Mexican culture. American boys are after girls to quench their sexual thirst, by demeaning their existence and objectifying them for their sexual pleasure, which has led to a considerable number of Mexican girls to commit suicide in the form of protest. Many people prioritize their well-being and authenticity over living a life that compromises their spirit.

¹ A grito or gritomexicano is a common Mexican interjection, used as an expression or shout.

As a pariah, Sanchez has to grapple with some consequences. Her society doesn't allow women to be funny, as it is thought to be aggressive, masculine, and threatening. Yet she insists on having the right to be funny and insensible. She boldly declares that she "will not hesitate to discuss sex or bodily functions" (Sanchez 2022, p. 37) because she wants to do unladylike things to prove that she is no less than men. When she was very young, she decided to be tough and talk shit. Throughout her childhood, her mom threatened to slap her across the mouth because she didn't approve of what was coming out of her mouth. In high school, she was a regular visitor to the principal's office for talking shit. She argues she hated her high school teachers because they were still narrow-minded. She never hesitated to speak her mind everywhere. When she was 22, she dated a Muslim boy and made him mad by giving a sarcastic response to some Muslim stereotypes. She would often chat with Michael online and their "conversations were always nonsensical and inappropriate" (p. 48). Unlike many, she "often find[s] criticism amusing and conflict rife with opportunities for intellectual exploration" (p. 50). She also divorces her husband whom she met in grad school in 2007. Their married life lasts for only a year and a half because they have different approaches to life. The point Sanchez is making here is that she has not violated any societal norms, but society has unnecessarily felt discomfort about her honesty. There is a big rift between her honest assertions and people's understanding of the true essence of honesty. She is adamant that she is ready to face every challenge that life has to offer.

In addition to her cultural background, her acquired American accent proved to be troublesome for her. She received her teaching assistantship at a junior high school in a nearby suburb, but her accent was not enough to be a member of the teaching community. Her kids were out of control because they disliked her accent because "they were used to British English and believed the American version was inferior. One of them said that it sounded as if [she] were speaking with something in [her] mouth" (Sanchez 2022, p. 74). In spite of being proficient and fluent in American English, her English accent was not appreciated by her students. In the same way, when she tried to avoid her Spanish accent while speaking English, she could not do so because "it was inevitable that it would seep into [her] speech at some point. Once, on the phone with [her] mother, [she] heard [herself] say 'grathias' instead of 'gracias'" (p. 75). And sometimes "the locals laughed at [her] Spanish as if [she] were some sort of yokel" (ibid). Her racial ambiguity (Mexican-American) allowed her to blend in most of the time, leaving her in a dilemma over which was her culture, what her identity was, and where she belonged. In fact, such ambiguous circumstances and hyphenated national identities transformed her into a real pariah.

III. CATHARSIS

Erika's depression worsens more when she associates bad happenings with her birth. Her unapologetic and brutally honest writing has intrigued her readers. She confesses bravely that she herself was a problem. Even if she claims to have joked "that [she] was a suicidal fetus" (Sanchez 2022 p. 85), it reflects her suppressed emotions. She defends her point "[t]his is not entirely hyperbolic" (ibid). If she had said "partially" instead of "entirely," there would have been a different connotation. She often relates every bad occurrence with what her mother has been telling her since she was a fetus in her mother's womb. She still remembers what her mother said about her, that when she was seven months old, her mother heard "her cry in her womb" (ibid). She also reveals that she perceives her self-birth: brutal, bloody, and grotesque. Whatever she heard in relation to her birth associations is deeply ingrained in her mind. Even if she goes on to make mistakes, she is not going to have a slight sense of regret because she can rest assured that her birth has doomed her life to misfortunes. And at this point of her life, if people around her do not motivate her, it can result in the regression to same mentality of having been born to turn everything upside down—being doomed.

Sanchez's source of happiness resembles the idea of "catharsis" coined by Aristotle. Sanchez's satisfaction emanates from her revenges on whites or whites' reparation to an immigrant like herself. She mentions overtly "[t]he discomfort on their faces brings [her] such satisfaction. Honestly, [she] see[s] it as a kind of reparation. Only white people's remorse, a sense of guilt, and self-accusation can heal her emotional wounds. Golden (1969), referring to Plato's the *Phaedo* illustrates that "the moment of *katharsis* is the moment of a sublimely pleasant apprehension of reality just as in [Aristotle's] the *Poetics* (under the arguments given above)

it is a pleasurable learning experience in which insights and inferences are achieved about aspects of reality” (p. 152). In other words, the audience experiences a purgation or purification of emotions, particularly pity and fear, through the tragic events depicted in a play. Watching the characters undergo intense suffering and tragedy allows the audience to release and purify their own pent-up emotions. This is exactly what Sanchez wants to achieve, which may be mistaken for "Schadenfreude," a German term, meaning that people “often fail to empathize with others, and sometimes even experience schadenfreude—pleasure at others’ misfortunes,” (Cikara & Fiske 2013, p. 52). To put it another way, how people respond to others’ suffering, however, depends on their preexisting biases toward the target of the misfortune, which contradicts the reason why Sanchez seeks pleasure at whites’ agony. But in all these cases, there is a pleasurable element associated with the experience.

IV. SUICIDAL TENDENCIES

Attending “circulo de oracion,”² in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago every Saturday night where Mexican immigrants would gather to share new challenges on foreign soil to seek emotional and spiritual assistance from one another must have left a deep psychological scar in her. Gradually she developed strange habits, at least for the people around her. Even though she was not 12, she started to internalize the functionality of social prejudices, gender biasedness, violence, male domination, toxic masculinity, etc. She had many unanswered questions inside, which caused a massive disturbance in her psyche. She asked herself, “Why couldn’t women be priests? How was Eve made of a man’s rib? And what were all those sermons about obeying our father and husbands? . . . Why were African children starving to death in commercials during Christmas? Why did men rape?” (Sanchez 2022, p. 88). As nobody answered these questions for her, she ended up an atheist at the age of 12. “Depression” was shapeless and nameless, yet it was with her as if it were her best friend. She was overwhelmed by the size of grief she was putting up with. So, she “found most of [her] solace in reading, writing, and music” (p. 90). She was so disappointed with her life that she was one of those few humans who “was angry at being alive, at having to exist in human form . . . [she] began thinking of suicide” (ibid) when she was just 13. She reiterates the thought of suicide throughout the book.

Sanchez’s suicidal tendency is the consequence of a combination of biological and sociological issues that may contribute to her mental health issues. She reveals that she has lived with depression since she was a kid, which can be connected to some biological problems. She suspects that “she was already having existential crises in [her] mother’s uterus. Ridiculing [her] mental illness makes it less powerful to [her]” (Sanchez 2022, p. 35). She is to share that she has been depressed even before her birth. If someone shares such feelings, it underscores the need for empathy and consideration, and seeking professional help is encouraged. Edwin Shneidman argues that “In almost every pain—psychological pain which I call *psychache*³”(qtd. in Nock 2014, p. 292) is not transferable. He adds that this “*psychache*” stems from people’s distorted and unfulfilled needs. Psychological pain cannot be shared the way a bearer wants to and cannot be gauged. Sanchez shares the plight of pregnant women who cannot decide whether to deliver or abort their unborn babies. She once wept in an airport behind her sunglasses to hide her tears. She was accidentally conceived and could not reach a decision about the fetus growing inside her body. She wandered cities in a state of panic. “Despite wanting to kill [herself she] continued teaching” (Sanchez 2022, p. 185) her students young adult fiction. Furthermore, she shares that “[t]errible food that could make a person more suicidal” (p. 193). At the request of Marcus, her boyfriend, she started running five miles a week to avoid suicidal thoughts. However, while running, she wanted to throw herself into a ditch so that “the earth would open up and swallow [her] whole” (p. 195). In 2015, her friend

² This phrase comes from the Spanish language, which translates into English as a “prayer circle.” Author Erika L. Sanchez is a Mexican-American author who incorporates some native vocabulary into her writings.

³*Psychache*, a term coined by suicidologist Edwin Shneidman, describes an excruciating form of psychological distress characterized by profound emotional pain, torment, suffering, and deep-seated anguish. Shneidman's theory posits that when psychache remains unaddressed, it becomes a significant contributing factor to suicidal tendencies. In nearly every instance of suicide, psychache is identified as the root cause.

Jackson and her parents spent some days with her and returned. On their return, she “spent almost the entire day on [her] couch. [She] called a suicide hotline, but no one answered” (p. 197). After her birthday in Jersey, she, with her mother, knelt and prayed in an empty Catholic church to fix things. She argues that “desperation makes us do such strange things” (p. 201). On the same day, she told her mother that in “her diseased mind, she thought [she’d] somehow get [her] family’s blessing to kill [herself], leaving her mother panicked. “Essentially, as an individual runs out of options for reducing his or her *psychache*, his or her desire for suicide grows stronger, resulting in more severe suicide attempts and smaller probability of survival” (Nock 2014, p.293). She was trying every possible treatment process like Dr. Petrov decided to take her off Prozac⁴, and prescribe Abilify, an antipsychotic to treat both bipolar disorder and schizophrenia⁵.

Her depression and suicidal tendency seemed to remain with her permanently. As a child, she could veer her attention off the pain she was carrying for a short time. Catholicism could not ease her pain because her depression was so often debilitating. And she wished there could be something to ameliorate her pain. She had her first psychiatric hospitalization at 15. She always believed that she was afflicted with spiritual deficiency. The more she grew, the more desperate she was for spiritual relief to get rid of her deeply rooted pain inside. She could cry only in the bathroom—the only place that served as an outlet to her anguish. As mentioned previously, she received support from her friends, families, and boyfriends, yet her worsening psychological situation did not seem to come to an end, indicating that she would end her life as the ultimate salvation.

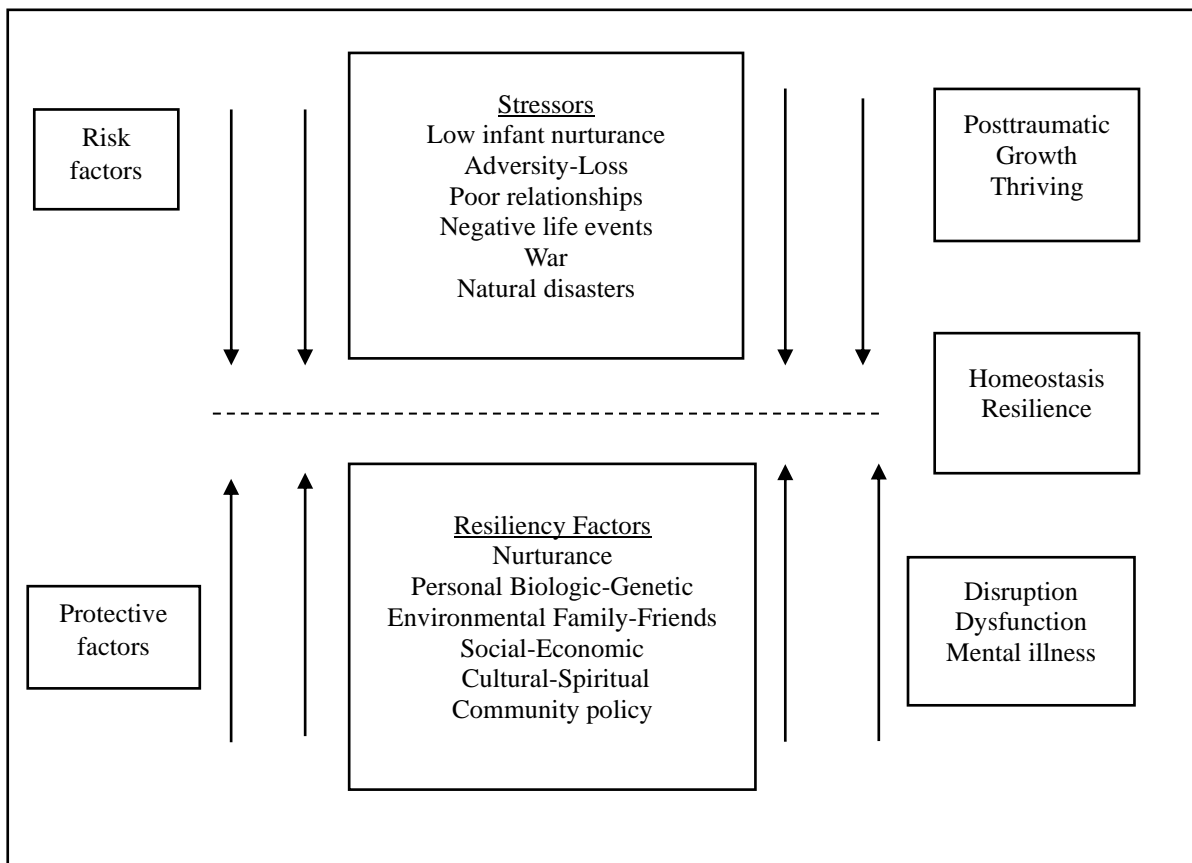
V. POWER OF RESILIENCE

Resilience, fundamentally defined as positive adaptation in the face of adversity, has been explored by researchers from diverse fields such as psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and biological disciplines like genetics and neuroscience. Despite lacking a consensus on an operational definition, the conceptualization of resilience varies between viewing it as a personal trait or a dynamic process. Early research focused on individual strengths in surviving trauma, expanding over time to encompass a broader range of adversities across the lifespan. Researchers also emphasized the role of systems, including families and communities, in fostering resilience. Definitions acknowledge the interactive and context-specific nature of resilience, encompassing biological, psychological, and social factors. While there is no universal agreement on the definition, most recognize multiple sources and pathways to resilience, underscoring its intricate and dynamic nature. So, Herrman et al. (2011) opine that there is a growing interest in this dynamic interaction and interactive models of resilience. One of these models, developed by them illustrates the factors that enhance or reduce homeostasis or resilience (Figure 1).

⁴Fluoxetine is a medication classified as an antidepressant, and its mode of action primarily affects the brain. This drug has received approval for the treatment of conditions including major depressive disorder (MDD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and panic disorder.

⁵ Schizophrenia is a persistent neurological condition that impacts a fraction of the U.S. population, affecting fewer than one percent. During active phases of schizophrenia, individuals may experience symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, incoherent speech, cognitive difficulties, and a notable lack of motivation.

Figure 1: Factors that enhance or reduce homeostasis or resilience



Explorations in genetic studies focusing on resilience offer new insights into how genes interact with the environment (Genes × Environment). It has long been recognized that the development of mental disorders is associated with a genetic predisposition in conjunction with an individual's past and present life experiences. In *Crying in the Bathroom*, Sanchez weakens herself, believing that her present miserable life is predetermined because she learns about her weird behavior of childhood from her mother and concludes that she was born that way. In contrast, Davydov et al. (2010) suggest that resilience results from complex interactions across genetic, environmental, experiential, social, and cultural factors, emphasizing its intricate and multi-level nature. What is particularly noteworthy is the emerging evidence indicating that social experiences can induce significant and lasting alterations in gene expression. These changes can subsequently impact an individual's later behavior and even be passed on to the next generation but compassion, effort, and determination are essential.

Explorations in genetic studies focusing on resilience offer new insights into how genes interact with the environment (Genes × Environment). It has long been recognized that the development of mental disorders is associated with a genetic predisposition in conjunction with an individual's past and present life experiences. In *Crying in the Bathroom*, Sanchez weakens herself, believing that her present miserable life is predetermined because she learns about her weird behavior of childhood from her mother and concludes that she was born that way. In contrast, Davydov et al. (2010) suggest that resilience results from complex interactions across genetic,

environmental, experiential, social, and cultural factors, emphasizing its intricate and multi-level nature. What is particularly noteworthy is the emerging evidence indicating that social experiences can induce significant and lasting alterations in gene expression. These changes can subsequently impact an individual's later behavior and even be passed on to the next generation but compassion, effort, and determination are essential.

Sanchez almost gives up hope of getting out of her depression when medical science seems unsuccessful. She often shifts her attention to the darkest places. She believes that there is nothing left to try for her treatment. She, after Mother's Day, "convinced [herself][she] was damaged beyond repair after the abortion and would never have children" (Sanchez 2022, p. 196). Any mother would be traumatized at the thought of not being a mother again. She saw doctors routinely and reports were positive, yet she "was certain that [her] life was ruined" (p. 197). When medical interventions do not work, then people place their trust in supernatural beings or godly existence. Consequently, one weekend, Jen takes her to a Hindu ashram in New York to help with her speedy healing process. There she meditates and begs the universe to deliver her from the never-ending horror. In almost every culture, people ultimately seek refuge from miseries, series of failures, and pain in a holy place and so does Sanchez, which offers her a glimmer of hope.

Contrary to what most readers' belief that Sanchez will live with depression until her death, she slowly starts to demonstrate incredible resilience. George Vaillant defines resilience as the "self-righting tendencies" of the person, "both the capacity to be bent without breaking and the capacity, once bent, to spring back" (Goldstein 1969, p. 30). Resilience is primarily defined as the "presence of protective factors (personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets)," which empower individuals to withstand life stress (Kaplan et al. 1996, p. 158). Nonetheless, a crucial element of resilience involves the perilous, unfavorable, and threatening life situations that lead to an individual's susceptibility (ibid.). At any given moment, an individual's resilience is computed by evaluating the ratio between the protective factors and the adversities they face. One month after aborting her abortion, a miracle happens. She decides not to remain alone. She is surrounded by her family and friends. She is occasionally visited by Marcus. More importantly, her mother keeps feeding her, and everyone showers her with love and motivation. She starts to run; her skin clears up and she does not feel like a monstrosity. She begins to improve mentally. She is surprised at an ECT nurse practitioner's announcement that she has excess serotonin in her body, which accelerates her speedy recovery from mental disturbance. She begins feeling normal again. It looks like a dream because she "thought depression would always be part of [her] life" (Sanchez 2022, p. 206). She looks at the sky and thanks it for giving her back to herself. Perhaps she expresses gratitude to God, even if she was an atheist.

Even if she was skeptical about the power of Buddhist philosophy earlier, her gradual beliefs in Buddhism and its "karma" empower her to be more resilient. Initially she had excuses for not attending the rhythmic chanting of Buddhism. Sanchez tells us that there was an exuberance she had never witnessed before and it was unsettling. However, she now "feels embarrassed" for herself for considering their kindness an anomaly. In the beginning, she "was skeptical but intrigued by the practice nonetheless. In theory, [she] wanted to learn more about the philosophy, but there were times [she] couldn't get out of the fetal position" (Sanchez 2022, p. 98). Her new friend Andry came to her life as a rescuer who constantly prodded her to attend Buddhist meetings. She now believes that he was really "handling [her] an elixir to save [her] life" (ibid). Over the time, she learns the Buddhist principle of law of cause and effect that is backed by science. It's "Karma, which is the spiritual principle of the practice, therefore, makes perfect sense to [her]" (p. 99). Time makes her not believe in fate or previous life but in the action of "Karma", finding resonance with science. The spiritual concept of "Karma" begins to make perfect sense to her as it aligns with the interconnectedness of actions and consequences. Harvey links psyche with "Karma" and claims that it "is the psychological impulse behind an action that is 'karma', that which sets going a chain of causes culminating in karmic fruit. Actions, then, must be intentional if they are to generate karmic fruits" (Harvey 1990, p. 39-40). The psychological drive propelling an action is the essence of "Karma," initiating a series of causes leading to karmic outcomes. For actions to yield karmic fruits, intentionality is crucial. Both Sanchez and Harvey emphasize how every action done leads to an outcome. Actions and results are inter-connected.

Finally, she ascribes her positive transformation to her adherence to the tenets of “Karma” which is evident when she says, “I see my own life as a transformation of the karma I inherited. If she did not come in contact with Buddhism, her life would be more agonizing because “Buddhist philosophy began to teach [her] to embrace [her] pain, to hold it with tenderness and compassion, to accept it as one of the many facets of being human” (Sanchez 2022, p. 103). Women hardly get opportunities for agency in a patriarchal society across the world. So, as a woman, she “found Buddhism liberating and empowering” (Sanchez 2022, p. 110). As a result, she “didn’t have to revere a man or subjugate [herself] in any form. It wasn’t a faith powered by shame or guilt” (ibid). Buddhism’s teachings enabled her to confront pain with compassion and acceptance, providing a means to navigate the complexities of human existence. In the context of a traditional Latinx household, she found Buddhism to be liberating and empowering for women, offering an alternative to traditional structures that often limit opportunities and agency. The faith, as she perceives it, is devoid of shame or guilt and allows her to avoid subservience, providing a unique source of strength and autonomy.

VI. CONCLUSION

Summing up, this paper delves into the intricate themes of catharsis, the journey of the outcast, and the resilient spirit in Erika Sánchez’s *Crying in the Bathroom*. Positioned within the labyrinth of human existence, catharsis emerges as a transformative exploration of the soul’s emotions. Sánchez, a self-proclaimed pariah navigating the crossroads of her Mexican heritage and American upbringing, becomes a poignant storyteller reflecting the struggles of those on society’s fringes. Her autobiographical narrative follows her evolution from a misfit daughter of Mexican immigrants to a positive-minded Buddhist follower, emphasizing her unfiltered and unapologetic storytelling. As a pariah, she grapples with societal expectations, cultural dissonance, and experiences of discrimination. The paper explores her cathartic journey, unveiling vulnerability, resilience, and a pursuit of authenticity. Sánchez’s candid discussion of depression and suicidal tendencies reveals the complex interplay of biological and sociological factors. The narrative concludes by spotlighting Sánchez’s path to resilience, influenced by Buddhist philosophy and the concept of “Karma.” Through her transformative narrative, the paper contends that Sánchez’s story stands as a testament to the potency of storytelling, empathy, and the unwavering human spirit in conquering adversity.

VII. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my teacher, Dr. Erin Murrah-Mandril, Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas at Arlington, Core Faculty for the Centre for Mexican American Studies, and author of *In The Mean Time: Temporal Colonization and the Mexican American Literary Tradition* for sharing her thoughts on Erika Sanchez’s book *Crying in the Bathroom* and providing her constructive feedback on my writing. In addition, my sincere thanks go to my classmates who also shared their takes on different themes that the book revolves around.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lear, J. (1988). Katharsis. *Phronesis*, 33 (3), p. 297–326. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182312>.
- [2] Herrman H, Stewart DE, Diaz-Granados N, Berger EL, Jackson B, Yuen T. (2011). What is Resilience? *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56(5), p.258-265. <https://doi:10.1177/070674371105600504>.
- [3] Barbalet, J. (2005). Max Weber and Judaism: An Insight into the Methodology of ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.’ *Max Weber Studies*, 5.2(6.1), pp. 51–67. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24581974>.
- [4] Sanches, E. L. (2022). *Crying in the Bathroom*. Penguin Random House.
- [5] Avila, P. (2022). Erika L. Sánchez wants women of color to feel seen in 'Crying in the Bathroom': 'I write for my people.' *USA TODAY*, 2022,

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/books/2022/07/11/erika-l-sanchez-crying-in-the-bathroom-new-memoir-interview/10008252002/>.

- [6] Ray, L., & Diemling, M. (2016). Arendt's 'conscious pariah' and the ambiguous figure of the subaltern. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19(4), p. 503-520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431016628261>.
- [7] Elkin, T. B. (1990). A study of the pariah in Hannah Arendt's theory of action. University of Massachusetts Amherst, Master's Thesis.
- [8] Golden, L. (1969). Mimesis and katharsis. *Classical Philology*, 64(3), p. 145-153.
- [9] Cikara, M., & Fiske, S.T. (2013). Their pain, our pleasure: stereotype content and schadenfreude. *Ann. N.Y. Acad.*
- [10] Nock, M. K, ed. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*. Oxford UP.
- [11] Davydov, DM, Stewart R, Ritchie K, et al. (2010). *Resilience and mental health*. *Clin Psychol Rev*, 30, p. 479-495.
- [12] Goldstein, H. (1997). Victors or victims? In D. Saleebey (Ed.). *The strengths perspective in social work practice*, 2nd ed, p. 21-36.
- [13] Kaplan, C. P., Turner, S., Norman, E., & Stillson, K. (1996). Promoting resilience strategies: A modified consultation model. *Social Work in Education*, 18(3), p.158-168.
- [14] Harvey, P. (1990). *Introduction to Buddhism*. Cambridge University Press.