



Lalonde, Julie S. (2020). Resilience is Futile: The Life and Death and Life of Julie S. Lalonde. Toronto: Between the Lines.

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Julie S. Lalonde's book, "Resilience is Futile: The Life and Death and Life of Julie S. Lalonde," is a memoir of courageous vulnerability as Lalonde tells her story of a teenage love slipping inexplicably into a damaging relationship of abuse and stalking. Her dissemination of her traumatic story from starry-eyed high school student to prominent public speaker and advocate outlines the experiences and effects of abuse that often go untold. Lalonde's boyfriend, Xavier, starts off as an amicable and doting partner, but within a few months devolves into a possessive, aggressive abuser who will use any means to assert dominance over his girlfriend, Julie Lalonde. His verbal abuse eventually turns physical as well, and Lalonde sees the fighting spark in herself slowly die out as his violence and manipulation carries on for months and years. To combat the powerlessness she feels in her relationship with Xavier, Lalonde is forced to ignore her physical and mental health in order to fill every second of every day with school and work. Her admirable diligence and success in the world prove that it can be impossible to know what someone is going through behind closed doors, and affirms that abuse can happen to anyone, but it is never their fault. Lalonde's book reveals that the reality of abuse is underreported and downplayed to the detriment of its victims. Her memoir is a brave account of a *real* story, a life, that was permanently

altered by abuse and stalking, as well as an implicit call to action to advocate destigmatization and support for survivors of abuse.

The memoir starting with Julie Lalonde as a young teenager highlights the early normalization of precursory attitudes towards women that fuel the double standards implemented against them within and without the schoolyard, and into the future. Lalonde emphasizes the impossible position girls are put in when subjected to the torment of their male classmates. Their inappropriate and unwanted flirting (harassment) is not often discouraged, as the excuse “boys will be boys” exonerates them from any consequences for bad behaviour. Girls’ choice in conduct is not equally authorized. Regardless how they feel about it, Lalonde says, girls are taught “from a young to take cruelty from boys as a compliment,” whereas boys are taught “to shroud their affection in brutality” rather than kindness (p. 13). This is how Lalonde justified teenaged Xavier’s antics during school together—she “prioritized the *intent* of his actions over the *impact* of his actions” as they made her, and undoubtedly other girls, uncomfortable (p. 17; my emphasis). Thus began her years-long bond and struggle with him.

Denial, disassociation, and overworking herself were the main coping mechanisms Lalonde uses to endure Xavier’s abuse and stalking, since help from any institutional level did not provide much reassurance, or any at all. Because the police, law office, restraining order judge, and counselling service made a bad situation worse, Lalonde uses whatever remaining means she can just to get through the day-today. This even causes her serious physical symptoms including digestion problems, debilitating migraines, and disruptive night terrors. The coping, Lalonde insists, that women have to do alone for lack of support is “absurd, unhealthy, and unsustainable”

(p. 183). Outwardly, it looks like “success,” but it must not, cannot be romanticised or normalized any longer. Again, the double standards crop up as the world cannot decide what it wants women to be. Later in her career, Lalonde explains: “when I finally came out about my years of trauma, that pain was dismissed by people who refused to accept how someone who was traumatized could be in pain and still get shit done. My resilience was used to erase my pain” (p. 181). If she whines about her trauma, she is attention-seeking and weak. If she puts on a calm mask and mentions the difficulty of getting through some days, she is attention-seeking and a liar who must obviously be fine. Her frustration, and that of all women like her, comes out loud and clear through the pages, demanding to be heard.

In desperation to help her common woman, Lalonde tried to leave her trauma in the past by helping victims of abuse get through their right now and make it to the future as she does. This is no small feat, she realizes, the cards are stacked against women from the start, as if “[i]t wasn’t enough that women were subjected to discrimination, violence, and neglect... [they] also ha[ve] to perform [their] trauma in a very precise way in order to get any semblance of justice” (p. 125). So that is what Lalonde does her work and wrote her memoir for—to bring these injustices to light and say “*no more.*”

Because it does not need to be this way; we need to attend to the fact that male patterns of abuse are more a product of their socialization and environment than their genes, and this is promising. Despite what a Canadian General purports in the book, Lalonde insinuates her disagreement to the justification that men are naturally “biologically wired in a certain way” (p. 165) that gives them a propensity to violence and rape, as this is not the whole, or possibly even

the true, picture. Her experience back when she was young in high school, along with her devastating visit to the Royal Military College of Canada, points to some environments setting worse examples for young men than others.

When Lalonde joins a women's protest march at which a shooting breaks out, it is all she can do to reconcile this male shooter as an acquaintance of her colleagues. Where had it all gone so wrong? She is deeply upset by the deaths of three women she does not even know, but their *stories* are just like hers, and it could have just as easily been her who did not make it. The system is broken and she sees that mirrored everywhere. She has survivor's guilt, which is exacerbated by her continued mental struggle, despite her abuser's death. She admits, "I hated myself more and more for not being well. I was supposed to be free," (p. 189) unlike those three women and so many more like them who are not. But it is not her fault she was assaulted any more than it is her fault that she lived while they did not. In a final moment of clarity, Lalonde mourns the young woman she once was who "had big dreams and felt invincible. That innocent, carefree young woman I was is dead. She's never coming back. To let go of Xavier, I ha[ve] to let her go too" (p. 190). She is able, by the end, to finally acknowledge and mourn "the younger part of [her]self whose potential will never be realized" (p. 192)—to finally mourn what *never* happened, what died, what could have been, if it were not for Xavier's abuse and manipulation. Her mission is to continue fighting back against the Xaviers.

Her vibrant detail and heart-wrenching candour throughout this recount of her abuse, and hard-earned deliverance from it, a deeply impactful experience for Lalonde's audience. This book, her lived experience and life's work as published memoir, serve the function of "get[ting] audi-

ences to think critically about their role in ending sexual violence” as she has done (p. 135). The memoir is an intimate glimpse into a personal account of what and why abuse in relationships occurs, which supplements the practical, clinical work that Lalonde does as a Sexual Violence and Bystander Intervention seminar speaker. In sharing the humanity behind the shroud of stigma that society has placed on victimized women of sexual abuse, Lalonde encourages collective empathy and “teach[es] people bystander intervention and the importance of taking the harder path” in the name of instigating positive change in the world (p. 162).

Lalonde’s intended audience includes the general public who enjoy the voyeurism and learning experience that is inherent in memoir outlining an individual’s unique experience, as well as scholars including the disciplines of sociology, psychology, women’s studies, and English, as her book exemplifies compelling storytelling and insight into the mind of woman. While her book naturally contains heavy subject matter that may be upsetting for some readers, I found her overall testimony and spirit of educating the masses made “Resilience is Futile: The Life and Death and Life of Julie S. Lalonde” to be a nonetheless illuminating and important deep dive into a deeply uncomfortable but deeply real reality.