

## ANI'S ADVERSITIES AND RESILIENCE DEPICTED IN *LUCKIEST GIRL ALIVE*

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the depiction of adversities and resilience faced by the main character, Ani, in *Luckiest Girl Alive*, released in 2022, a film directed by Mike Barker. This study uses Edith H. Grotberg's resilience as the theory. This study engaged with a qualitative descriptive approach, which centers the analysis on the writer's perspectives. The data were collected by the screen-captured method and analyzed qualitatively. This study identifies Ani's adversities originating from outside the family and within the family. The adversities that affected her the most are from outside the family, for she was raped by school friends, involved in a school shooting, and received social rejection. These adversities promote three factors of resilience actions, such as I Have, I Am, and I Can. Though most of Ani's adversities originate from outside the family, it was the people outside her family who encouraged her. This encouragement gives her the confidence to cope with her difficulties. In conclusion, Ani's positive responses to her adverse situation help her to bounce back. Her resilience results from a combination of the three factors: external supports, inner strengths, and inner strengths.

Keywords: *Luckiest Girl Alive*, Resilience, Adversities

### INTRODUCTION

In the era of advanced technology and global development, resilience has become an important psychological concept that needs attention, especially in today's fast-changing world. Researchers note that resilience is essential for dealing with the increasing number of crises and prolonged difficulties in modern life (Chen, 2025). In line with this, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 11% of children ages 3-17 had current, diagnosed anxiety, and 4% of children ages 3-17 had current, diagnosed depression based on US data from 2022–2023 (CDC, 2025). Additionally, the leading mental health challenge experienced by most youth respondents was anxiety, with 58 percent according to 2023 statistics (*Main Mental Health Challenges Faced by Youth U.S. 2023*, n.d.). The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that 1 in 6 U.S. adolescents aged 12-17 experienced a major depressive episode ("Mental Health By the Numbers," n.d.). Studies also show that building resilience helps people cope better with stress and challenges, which can lower the risk of anxiety and depression. The importance of resilience goes beyond individual well-being to also support social sustainability. Resilience, understood as the capacity to adapt and thrive during

adversity, is seen as necessary for maintaining both personal and social stability (Azam et al., 2024).

The connection between psychology and literature provides a strong foundation for understanding human behavior and psychological processes through narrative analysis. This approach, according to William and Kolupke (1986), studies literature from a psychological perspective by examining characters' motivations and the influence of their past experiences. It is based on the idea by Murray (2003) that people make sense of their lives through storytelling, and these stories become the focus of analysis. Literature functions as a mirror of psychological experiences, offering insights into resilience, trauma, and coping strategies that may not be easily observed in clinical settings. The application of psychological theories to the study of literary works shows how literature can be used as a tool for deeper theoretical analysis of human behavior (Williams and Kolupke, 1986). This framework makes it possible to explore complex concepts such as resilience through the detailed and layered portrayals of characters in both literature and film. Edith H. Grotberg's resilience theory offers a clear framework that groups resilience factors into three connected domains: I Have (external support systems), I Am (inner strength and personal qualities), and I Can (social and interpersonal skills). Grotberg (2003) explains that resilience is not only an individual trait but also the result of interaction between personal, social, and environmental factors. This framework is useful for analyzing characters in literature and film because it provides a structured way to see how different sources of resilience appear and interact within a narrative.

*Luckiest Girl Alive*, directed by Mike Barker and adapted from Jessica Knoll's novel, presents a powerful exploration of resilience through the character of Ani FaNelli, a successful magazine writer whose carefully built life is shaken when she must confront traumatic events from her high school years. The film shows how Ani has shaped her adult identity around surviving sexual assault and school violence, and it reveals the resilience strategies she develops over time. This makes Ani's character an effective case study for examining how resilience can emerge and evolve in response to trauma. In addition, the film's recent release in 2022 ensures its relevance for modern audiences and aligns with current psychological research trends. By analyzing Ani's adversities and resilience through Grotberg's theory, this study contributes to the growing literature on resilience and offers insight into how one individual navigates trauma and recovery. Therefore, the writer analyzes "Ani's Adversities and Resilience Depicted in *Luckiest Girl Alive*" as the central topic of this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Psychology of Literature

According to Murray (2003), the psychology of literature enables scholars to analyze how literary texts reveal unconscious motives, traumas, and desires in both authors and characters. The psychology of literature can be applied from several perspectives: it may study the psychological makeup of characters (character-oriented), explore the psychological background of the author (author-oriented), examine the psychological responses of readers (reader-oriented), or view literature as a reflection of human psychological conflicts in general (Wellek & Warren, 1956). This study emphasizes the character-oriented approach, focusing on the resilience of Ani FaNelli as represented in the film *Luckiest Girl Alive*.

## **2. Adversities**

Adversity refers to the difficult, stressful, or traumatic circumstances that individuals inevitably encounter throughout life. These may include personal losses, illness, poverty, violence, natural disasters, or interpersonal conflicts, all of which can disrupt psychological and social well-being (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Scholars argue that adversity is not limited to extreme events but also encompasses chronic stressors, such as discrimination, family discord, or economic hardship (Masten, 2001). According to Grotberg (2003), there are two types of adversities: Adversities outside the family and adversities within the family. Edith Grotberg's theory of resilience explains that individuals develop the capacity to cope with, adapt to, and recover from hardships through personal strengths, supportive relationships, and external resources. Adversities are not only disruptive life experiences but also opportunities that activate resilience processes.

### **2.1 Adversities Within the Family**

Family-based adversities are among the most impactful challenges individuals can face, as they disrupt the primary environment of security and attachment. These adversities include the death of a parent or grandparent; divorce or separation; illness of a parent or sibling; poverty; moving; accident causing personal injury; abuse, including sexual abuse; abandonment; suicide; remarriage, homelessness; poor health and hospitalization; fires causing personal injury; forced repatriation of family; disabled family member; and parents' loss of job or income ("Adversities Experienced within the Family"). Such challenges test emotional resilience but also provide the context for building coping skills, empathy, and reliance on supportive networks (Grotberg, 2003).

### **2.2 Adversities Outside the Family**

Adversities experienced outside the family reflect broader social, environmental, or political disruptions. These include robberies, war, fire, earthquake, flood, car accident, adverse economic conditions, illegal refugee status, migrant status, property damage from storms, floods, cold, political detention, famine, abuse by a nonrelative, murders in the neighborhood, unstable government, and drought ("Adversities Experienced outside the Family"). These adversities often demand both individual resilience and collective responses from communities and institutions. They challenge one's sense of safety and stability while simultaneously fostering adaptability, resourcefulness, and social solidarity (Grotberg, 2003).

## **3. Resilience**

Resilience theory is based on psychological and developmental research that examines how individuals cope with adversity, recover from trauma, and maintain or regain mental health in challenging circumstances. The theory focuses on the dynamic processes through which people adapt positively to stress, highlighting both internal strengths and external support systems. As Masten (2001) defines it, resilience is "the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development". In literary and media studies, resilience theory provides a framework for analyzing how characters respond to trauma and how they recover, grow, or transform over time.

Resilience is not a fixed trait but a process influenced by various protective and risk factors. According to Luthar and Cicchetti (2000), resilience involves patterns of positive adaptation in

the context of adversity, shaped by individual characteristics (such as self-efficacy, optimism, and emotional regulation) and external resources (such as family, community, and social support). These three groups work together when people face challenges. As Grotberg (2003) points out, people always use a combination of factors from all three areas when dealing with difficult situations.

### **3.1 I Have**

The "I Have" type includes all the outside help and resources that support resilience. These external factors create a strong foundation that allows resilient behavior to grow. Grotberg (2003) identifies seven important types of external support that help build resilience: (1) One or more persons within my family I can trust; (2) One or more persons outside my family I can trust; (3) Limits to my behavior; (4) People who encourage me to be independent; (5) Good role models; (6) Access to health, education, and the social and security services I need; (7) A stable family and community. The most important support is having family members who can be trusted completely and who provide unconditional love.

### **3.2 I Am**

The "I Am" type covers the personal qualities and inner strengths that people develop over time to help them handle difficult situations. These internal characteristics form the emotional and psychological foundation for resilient behavior. Grotberg (2003) describes seven key inner strengths that make people more resilient (5). They are (1) A person most people like; (2) Generally calm and good-natured; (3) An achiever who plans for the future; (4) A person who respects myself and others; (5) Empathic and caring of others; (6) Responsible for my own behavior and accepting of the consequences; (7) A confident, optimistic, hopeful person, with faith. Being likable and getting along well with others makes it easier to build supportive relationships. When people are pleasant to be around, others are more willing to help them during tough times. This social skill is connected to understanding emotions and knowing how to interact with people effectively.

### **3.3 I Can**

The "I Can" type includes the practical skills that people use to actively address and solve problems. These abilities turn resilient thinking into effective action. Grotberg (2003) identifies seven essential skills that help people function resiliently (4). They are: (1) Generate new ideas or new ways to do things; (2) Stay with a task until it is finished; (3) See the humor in life and use it to reduce tensions; (4) Express thoughts and feelings in communication with others; (5) Solve problems in various settings – academic, job-related, personal, and social; (6) Manage my behavior – feelings, impulses, acting out; (7) Reach out for help when I need it. Being creative and thinking of new solutions helps when standard approaches do not work. This skill allows people to find innovative ways around obstacles and adapt to changing circumstances. The ability to stick with tasks until completion demonstrates determination and commitment (4).

There are several previous studies on *Luckiest Girl Alive*, both the novel and film, focusing on Feminist Stylistic, Defense Mechanism, and Post-traumatic Growth (Hutasuhut & Rangkuti, 2022; Ismail, 2024; Fitriani, 2024). This study uses the same film; however, it focuses on the topic of adversities and resilience.

## METHODOLOGY

In analyzing the object of this research, the writer used a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Creswell (2017), qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This approach emphasizes the process of inquiry that emerges naturally and holistically from the subject being studied, allowing the researcher to focus on meaning, context, and complexity. The analysis focuses on how the characters draw on personal traits, social support, and emotional skills—categorized as “I Am,” “I Have,” and “I Can”—to cope with adversity and rebuild a sense of agency. The primary source for this study is the psychological thriller film *Luckiest Girl Alive*, released in 2022, directed by Mike Barker, and adapted from Jessica Knoll’s best-selling novel of the same name.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Ani’s Adversities Portrayed in *Luckiest Girl Alive*

The analysis identifies the adversities Ani faces both within her family and outside her family, highlighting how these experiences shape her psychological struggles. According to Grotberg’s theory, the study demonstrates how resilience emerges not only as a response to trauma but also as a continuous process of negotiating identity, survival, and empowerment.

#### 1.2 Ani’s Adversities Outside the Family

Beyond the adversities in her family relationships, Ani also encounters significant adversities in her external environment that profoundly shape her development. These challenges align with Grotberg’s classification of adversities occurring outside the family, such as abuse by nonrelatives, violence in the community, and social rejection. In *Luckiest Girl Alive*, Ani’s experiences at school and within her social circles expose her to trauma, rejection, and hostility, all of which demand resilience and influence the construction of her adult identity. One of the most traumatic challenges Ani faces outside her family is sexual assault during her teenage years. This experience becomes a crucial moment in her life, causing deep psychological harm and exposing her to social problems, isolation, and blame at school.

*Luckiest Girl Alive*  
(00:42:23 - 00:42:30)

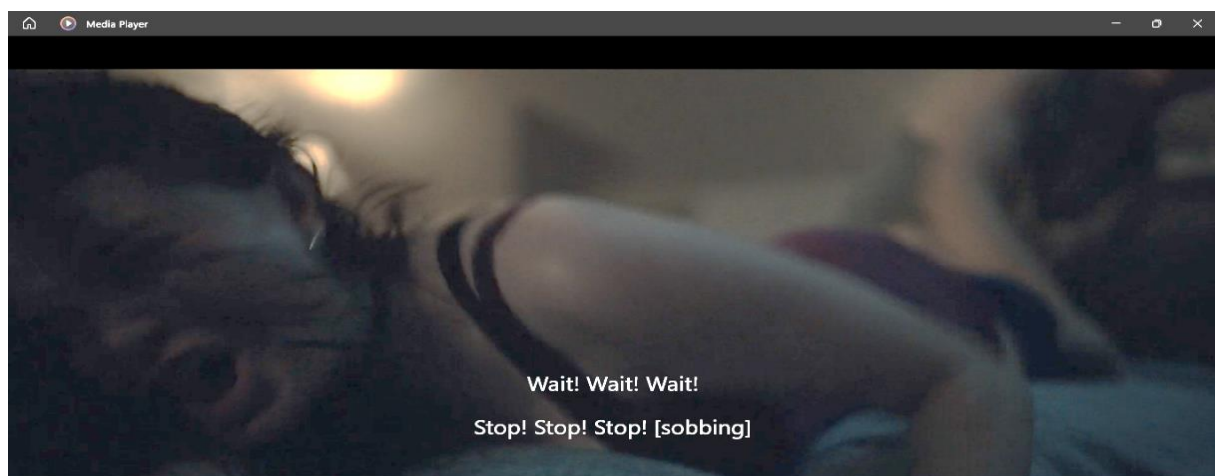
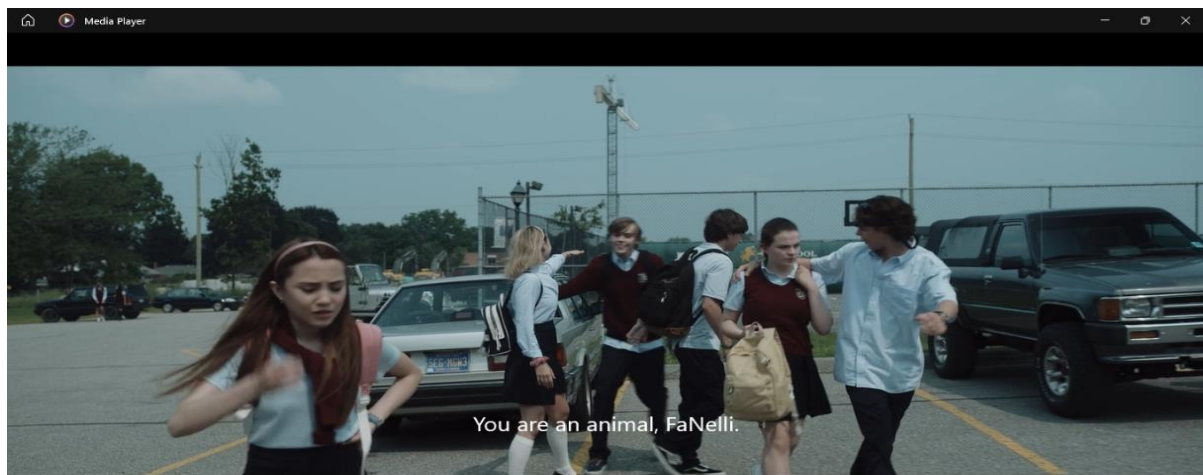


Figure 1. Ani Experiencing Sexual Assault

The first data shows a serious problem that happened to Ani when she was a teenager. She became a victim of gang rape by people she thought were her friends. When Ani was 17 years old and still a virgin, she was sexually attacked by three boys: Peyton, Liam, and Dean. This terrible event happened at Dean's house. Ani was forced to have sex with each of them, one after another. Peyton went first, then Liam, and finally Dean, who was actually Ani's boyfriend. During this awful experience, Ani begged them to stop, but they did not listen to her. This shows how they completely ignored her rights and treated her badly. This situation is a very serious adversity based on Grotberg's theory of resilience. Grotberg explains that adversities are big problems, traumas, or crises that hurt a person's well-being and normal growth. The gang rape that happened to Ani is what Grotberg calls a severe external adversity. This means it is a dangerous threat that comes from outside forces that the person cannot control. This type of adversity is very harmful because it involves being betrayed by people she trusted (her boyfriend and friends). It also happened during an important time in her life (teenage years) and involved sexual violence, which can cause long-lasting mental and emotional damage.

This situation represents what Grotberg calls an "extreme adversity" or crisis that puts many people's lives in immediate danger. According to Grotberg's theory, this type of adversity is particularly harmful because it involves violence, creates fear for survival, and affects many people at the same time. The school shooting becomes a traumatic event that not only threatens physical safety but also creates long-lasting psychological damage for everyone involved. Grotberg explains that when adversities involve violence and life-threatening situations, they can have very serious effects on a person's mental health and development.

***Luckiest Girl Alive***  
**(00:58:38 – 00:58:42)**



**Figure 2. Ani is Rejected by Her School Friends.**

The data shows Ani facing social rejection from her school friends. In this scene, one of her school friends says to her, "You're an animal, FaNelli." This hurtful comment is made by the same group of boys who sexually assaulted her - Peyton, Liam, and Dean. The situation happens at the school gate, which is a public place where other students can see and hear what is being said to Ani.

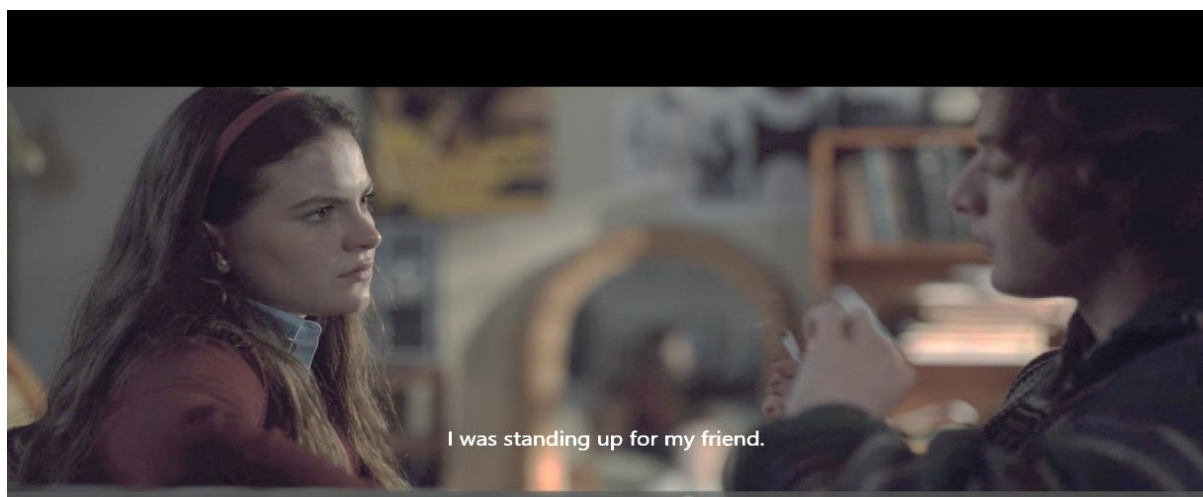


The word "animal" is particularly cruel because it suggests that Ani is not human or does not deserve to be treated with basic respect and dignity. Grotberg explains that this type of verbal abuse is a form of adversity that attacks a person's identity and self-image. When the perpetrators of sexual assault also become the ones who publicly humiliate their victim, it creates what Grotberg calls "perpetrator-inflicted secondary adversity." This means that the same people who caused the original trauma continue to cause more harm through social rejection and verbal abuse. This social rejection at the school gate is especially harmful because it happens in a public setting where other students can witness Ani being humiliated. Grotberg's theory points out that public humiliation makes adversity worse because it damages a person's social reputation and makes them feel isolated from their community. This type of adversity can lead to feelings of shame, loneliness, and social anxiety that can last for a long time.

## 1.2 Ani's Resilience Portrayed in *Luckiest Girl Alive*

Ani FaNelli's life is marked by profound adversities both within her family and outside in her social environment. Her story also demonstrates how resilience emerges in response to these challenges. According to Grotberg's theory, resilience is built through the interplay of personal strengths (I Am), external supports (I Have), and interpersonal skills (I Can). In *Luckiest Girl Alive*, Ani embodies these dimensions of resilience as she develops coping strategies, reconstructs her identity, and strives to assert control over her narrative despite the trauma she has endured. Her resilience is not portrayed as a simple triumph over hardship but as a complex, ongoing process of negotiating between vulnerability and strength.

### *Luckiest Girl Alive* (01:07:06 – 01:07:10)

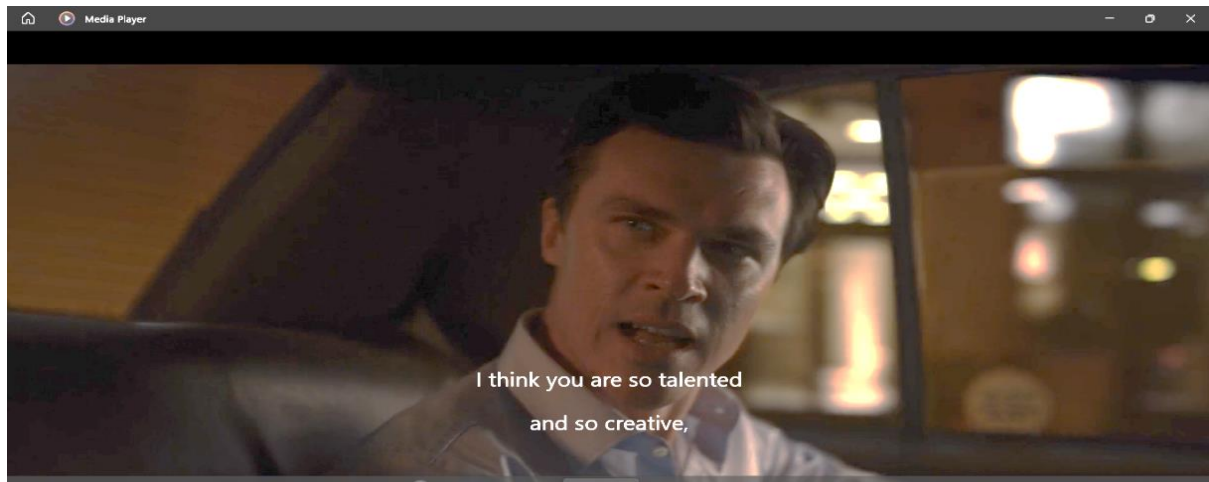


**Figure 4. Ani's Friend, Arthur, Supports Ani.**

The data shows Ani demonstrating resilience when dealing with the sexual assault trauma through support from her friend Arthur. This situation takes place at Arthur's house, where Ani receives important emotional support that helps her cope with her adversity. Arthur shows his support by defending Ani against their classmates who have been mocking and making fun of her, calling her a "loose woman" or suggesting that she is a prostitute. Arthur stands up for Ani and protects her from these cruel comments and social judgment. According to Grotberg's theory of resilience, this situation demonstrates what he calls "I HAVE support from one or more people I can trust" factors of resilience. Grotberg explains that resilience comes from

three main sources, and "I HAVE" refers to the external support that a person receives from others. In Ani's case, Arthur represents a trusted relationship that provides her with emotional support and protection. This type of support is very important for building resilience after experiencing trauma.

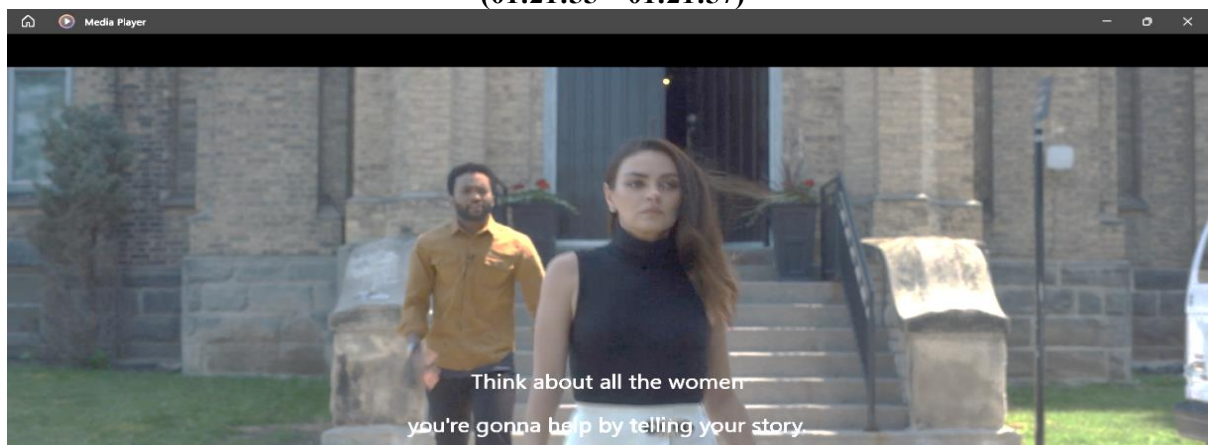
*Luckiest Girl Alive*  
(00:36:58 – 00:37:32)



**Figure 5. Luke Said Ani is Talented and Creative.**

In the car scene, Luke turns to Ani and tells her, “I think you are so talented and creative.” The privacy of the car creates a more vulnerable space, allowing the words to land with greater sincerity and intimacy. Ani’s reaction — a mix of surprise and quiet reflection — shows how deeply such affirmation affects her, especially given her usual struggles with self-doubt and rejection. The confined setting makes the exchange feel personal, as if Luke is speaking directly to Ani’s inner self rather than her social identity. This moment reflects Ani’s “I Am” resilience, which centers on inner qualities, self-awareness, and personal identity. Luke’s words help Ani see herself beyond trauma and stigma, affirming that she is defined not by what happened to her, but by her creativity and talent. “I Am” resilience grows when individuals recognize positive traits within themselves and can internalize affirmations that strengthen self-esteem.

*Luckiest Girl Alive*  
(01:21:55 – 01:21:57)



**Figure 6. Ani’s Decision to Speak Up**



During her media interview, a reporter encourages Ani by saying, “Think about all the women you’re gonna help by telling your story.” The scene underscores Ani’s tense but determined posture as she faces the weight of speaking publicly about her trauma. The words shift the focus away from Ani’s individual pain and toward the broader impact her voice can have. This moment repositions Ani not just as a survivor but as someone capable of creating change.

This moment reflects Ani’s “I Can” resilience, which relates to problem-solving, communication, and taking purposeful action. By choosing to tell her story despite fear and stigma, Ani demonstrates her ability to transform adversity into advocacy. According to Grotberg’s framework, resilience is not only about withstanding hardship but also about using skills and strengths to respond productively to challenges. For Ani, the reporter’s words frame her storytelling as an act of empowerment: she is capable of helping other women by breaking the silence surrounding abuse and rejection.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals that Ani faces multiple adversities both outside and within her family. Outside the family, Ani faces traumatic events such as sexual assault, the school shooting where she is being blamed, and ongoing social rejection that excludes her from her communities. Within the family, she struggles with emotional neglect from her mother and the absence of a sense of comfort at home. Ani’s struggles highlight how trauma can come not only from direct violence and public events but also from private and intimate family relationships that deeply affect her identity and emotional stability. Despite these adversities, the findings also show that Ani developed resilience across all three of Grotberg’s categories: I Have, I Am, and I Can. Ani draws on external support, however limited, such as encouragement from teachers, friends, and her mother’s practical actions (I Have). She builds inner strength and self-awareness through recognizing her talents, creativity, and identity beyond trauma (I Am). Furthermore, she actively engages in problem-solving and advocacy, whether by asserting herself in family conflicts, escaping danger during the school shooting, or telling her story to help others (I Can). These expressions of resilience reveal Ani’s ability to survive and transform her pain into strength, showing how resilience is not the absence of suffering but the ability to navigate it and create meaning beyond it. This study suggests that further research may expand the analysis of resilience in *Luckiest Girl Alive* on other characters, such as the male characters, to provide broader insights into how they respond to adversities compared to the female characters..

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