

The Impact of Fatherhood in the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Lily's Resilience in Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us*

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Abstract

The study explores the intergenerational trauma that is transmitted through the family system, focusing on how the wounds of one generation shape the psychological and emotional realities of the next. Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* (2016) gives a fictional lens to look at the father's role in transmitting trauma because of his violent behavior. This study examines the paternal influence that plays a vital role in intergenerational trauma, focusing on the child's emotional and psychological effects of her father's abusive behavior and her internal turmoil to redefine the relationship. Through a multidisciplinary approach combining trauma theory, literary analysis, and psychology of self, the study states that Hoover has fictionalized both the incidents of inherited trauma and the possibility of breaking the cycle of abuse. The study proves how essential it is to understand that the fatherly figure of a family can influence the childhood of his own child and how necessary it is to be responsible in the parenting of their child. The study aims to help society understand and overlook for the betterment of oneself and also for the future generation to live in harmony and peace.

Keywords: Intergenerational Trauma, Fatherhood, Child, Parenting, Psychological, Domestic Abuse

Introduction

Intergenerational trauma describes the unconscious transmission of emotional wounds, behavioral patterns, and coping mechanisms from one generation to the next, which is from the parent to the child. Some studies have shown that people may experience this kind of trauma not only of war, genocide, or migration, but also of familial trauma such as abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. In most cases, trauma is passed down through behaviors and emotional patterns from the parent to their children. Researchers state that, "The concept of intergenerational trauma acknowledges that exposure to extremely adverse events impacts individuals to such a great extent that their offspring find themselves grappling with their parents' post-traumatic state" (Yehuda and Lehrner). Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* underlines the strong themes of love, abuse, and resilience. Hoover's narration of the protagonist, Lily Bloom, who has witnessed the abusive behavior of her father towards her mother. In this study, the focus is underlined on her father, Andrew Bloom, who is narratively present in Lily's journal entries, but his abusive behavior has influenced to shape her trauma as well as herself and her identity.

In 2008, a study was conducted with 1019 children who were witnessing Domestic Violence, and they found that domestic violence caused symptoms of psychological maladjustment, including externalizing and internalizing problems. In 2009, the report shows that children exposed to Domestic Violence showed significantly more internalizing or externalizing problems (Doroudchi and et. al). They also found that chronic Domestic Violence was associated with difficult child temperament and internalizing or externalizing symptoms. By examining the psychological dynamics of trauma transmission and the narrative techniques Hoover adapts, this study aims to understand the trauma's legacy within families and its representation in contemporary literature.

Understanding Intergenerational Trauma

The word trauma is seen as the impact of negative events that makes a pattern of memories in humankind. Trauma not only shows an impact on who directly experiences it but also it can spread through the generations, such as family system, psychological development and behavioral patterns. According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth edition (DSM-V), an individual can experience trauma in various ways such as by directly experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, even by hearing of a violent or accidental traumatic event that happened to a close family member or friend, or from extreme or repeated exposure to harsh memories of a traumatic event (Reese et al). Most of the early research based on trauma focused on the Holocaust survivors and their descendants but contemporary research has extended to focus on other groups of people such as Indigenous communities, war veterans and families experienced domestic violence. In *It Ends with Us*, Hoover portrays Lily's emotional and psychological scars after witnessing her mother's pain and father's violence. In contemporary literature, Hoover shows the darker side of the relationship and also the resilience. Cathy Caruth, a leading theorist in Trauma Studies, mentions in her research on trauma, that trauma inherently involves a repetitive structure. The traumatic event was not thoroughly processed at the time of its occurrence, and it continuously

attempts to reassert itself into the individual's psyche. This results in repetition compulsion, a phenomenon where individuals relive the trauma through recurring dreams, flashbacks, and behaviors that seem inexplicably tied to the past event. Cathy Caruth suggests that these repetitions are attempts by the mind to grasp a moment that eluded comprehension, to make sense of an experience that defies easy understanding (Bookey). This dynamic is shown in *It Ends with Us* when Lily chooses her partner which unconsciously replicates her mother's choice of abuse. Lily at her age of 23, decides to get married to Ryle Kincaid, a neurosurgeon who shows aggressive behavior towards her. She silenced his abusive behavior which she justifies or she is confused to look over their love like her mother, who silenced the wounds. Recent reviews and studies have addressed the extensive psychological mechanisms and highlights Hoover's depiction of abuse and particularly the intergenerational transmission of trauma from father to daughter.

Father As The Catalyst Of Transferring Negative Scars

As Carl Jung stated about the Electra complex, the girl child is more attached and affectionate towards their father. They are influenced or even may attract a life partner with the character traits of their father. In that case Lily has chosen Ryle as her life partner with the same abusive behavior of her father. Reese et al. found that fathers' adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) strongly correlated with family dysfunction, which in turn increased the likelihood of adverse experiences for children. Lily's recollection of her father's abuse makes the readers understand the cycle of violence that builds the emotional bags of her adulthood. The father's aggression against Lily's mother, which is repeatedly witnessed by Lily, becomes her foundation in understanding the male dominance. "As his daughter, I loved him. But as a human, I hated him," (Hoover, 15) this reflects that her father is a two faced person as she recollects the memories of her father. Her father was a highly valued person in society, but would always behave harshly and rudely towards her mother, who always silenced those wounds. Another research article has stated that domestic abuse is a 'double intentioned'

form of abuse, which acts as a combined attack on women and children. This ‘attack’, refers to the domestic violence that extends to the mother–child relationship, whereas part of the abuse, direct and indirect attempts are made by the perpetrator to undermine the mother–child relationship (Morrison). Through her journal entries, the readers will clearly understand the dark side of her father, which has left an unfading scar on Lily’s childhood and choice of relationships in her later life. The character sketch of her father has a dual role, such as in public, where he behaves as a well-earned and respectful man in society. He shows a contrasting behaviour behind closed doors. He is a violent abuser who dwells in showing the male dominant power and physical strength over his wife. This can be seen as a common behaviour of all domestic abusers in society, where they show a two-faced person in public and private, which makes it hard to believe the dark side of that man in general. In HelpGuide.org document, which guides the domestic abusive victims to overcome their trauma, states that the abuser will control themselves until no one else is around to witness their behavior, then act like everything is fine in public, but then lash out instantly as soon as when alone with their intimate partner (Smith and Segal). In the analysis of Lily’s father’s aggressive behavior which is determined by the societal status and of his alcoholic addiction, where Lily mentions about incident in her journal entry as her father is being late to the home, as he spends time in the bar and so she prepares her mind to witness her father’s violent behavior on her mother. Lily hated her father ever since she was a child. An article about Posttraumatic stress in children and adolescents exposed to family violence, examined children who witnessed domestic violence and found that those experience of trauma is similar to direct abuse, which often internalizes fear, hyper vigilance, and emotional dysregulation, even when children are not physically harmed (Margolin & Vickerman). Lily was confused about her mother’s state of mind, as her mother always chose to stay with her father even after so much physical abuse. Parents also may be unwilling to admit that they are engaging in abusive practices toward their children, either because of fear of intervention by outside authorities or because of social desirability biases

(Pears and Capaldi). Though Lily’s father is not physically present in the novel, narrative presence shows the impact on Lily’s life and throughout her life decisions.

Lily Confronts Her Father’s Wounds with Her Resilience

Judith Herman’s theory of trauma asserts the child’s upbringing in an abusive household can be paradoxical which means that the child can develop two traits of behavior of developing strong mind set or weaker determination. At the age of 23, Lily fell in love with a neurosurgeon, Ryle Kincaid, who had an abusive behavior pattern because of his childhood trauma of aggression after his brother’s death. Lily is the victim of abuse, but then in the initial stage, she also shows the same silenced pattern as her mother, as she believes in her love. She was able to understand the feeling of her mother, which she empathized with. Lily’s decision to divorce Ryle after being physically abused shows her will power to rupture in the intergenerational cycle. The moment reframes her trauma as transformation for the betterment of her daughter. The International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science article states that complex trauma often influences changes to one’s self-perception and identity. Lily’s challenges regarding her self-esteem and her internal dilemmas concerning affection and aggression are indicative of the underlying psychological repercussions (Hassannudin and Bazlan). Lily’s childhood experience of her mother normalizing suffering as a marker of love, was reframed by her when she envisions her daughter’s potential inherited trauma. According to Herman, recovery from trauma requires the rebuilding of the “healing self” through stages of safety, remembrance, and reconnection. Hoover has employed various healing mechanisms such as shuffling of cards to calm her mind and to refocus on something else rather than focusing her thoughts on the violent behavior of her father. Lily used to write journal entries, like venting out her thoughts to make things clear. In her adulthood when she recollects the entries, she understands and compares her the incidents of her father and the present happenings with her partner. Embody Talk: The Official CFTE Blog says, “The

act of telling one's story, whether through writing or spoken word, can help trauma survivors process difficult emotions and reduce the emotional intensity associated with painful memories" (Storytelling and Complex Trauma Healing). Colleen Hoover employs compassionate companion, Atlas Corrigan, who was Lily's teenage boyfriend, reuniting with Atlas gives mental strength and courage to Lily in making a brave decision. By acknowledging her trauma rather than suppressing it, Lily shows her identity as a survivor but not as an inheritor. Her decision defies the patriarchal ideology entrusted by her father and perpetuated by her husband; she has replaced her mother's silence with voice and endurance with self-determination. Hoover suggests that the end of trauma is not achieved through erasure but through reinterpretation. Lily has transformed her father's legacy into a lesson rather than a curse.

Conclusion

Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* makes the readers understand how important it is to know what you pass on to the next generation. Trauma doesn't stop with the person who experiences it, it reflects on the future generation which forms an abusive cycle, especially in case of domestic violence. The storyline is a portrayal of intergenerational trauma through the life of Lily and her determination to break free from the cycle of abuse. When a generation decides to acknowledge the harm, seek support, and build healthier relationships, the cycle is interrupted. It needs a strong courage and self-awareness to break a relationship when so much love and emotional attachment are there in the relationship. Hoover's novel has shown the readers that intergenerational trauma can have a strong impact on a generation, but it can be changed by one decision made. By examining the behavioral pattern of her father, it is understood that being the head of the family is important to show good characteristics that can be passed on to the next generation. Her father's dark side is not seen by the society but behind closed doors he has been abusive and violent towards her mother. His lack of emotional intelligence and the male dominance led him to think that his actions are correct and are not a crime. This study highlights the psychological trauma Lily faces from her father's abusive behavior

resulting in her choice of relationships. She decides to break the cycle that her mother couldn't. The fear, chaos, and pain that her father brought into her life were the warning signs when she saw the same with Ryle. Colleen Hoover's narration of the healing process, Lily's journal entries and finding her real companion, Atlas, exhibits the positive way of ending things. Lily's resilience reflects on the psychology of self, which gives a person to rebuild their self-perspective and identity. By making the right choice, life can be better in all ways. This study aims to emphasize the fact that parents should be more responsible in the upbringing of their children and provide them with a better environment through a legacy that can be passed on to the next generation. A beautiful family starts with a good man. When a man is good to his wife, it goes down to his children, and the whole family is blessed.

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