

THE ANALYSIS OF LILY BLOOM'S TRAUMA IN COLLEEN HOOVER'S *IT ENDS WITH US*

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ABSTRACT

This analysis presents the emotional feeling found in Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* especially in the main character, Lily Bloom. The findings show that Lily Bloom's way of coping with her trauma is learned from her experience during her teenage years and adult life. In this analysis, the writer focuses on Lily Bloom's trauma as well in analysis of causes and effects of her trauma and her specific coping-mechanism. The writer uses a psychological approach to analyze the main character's trauma by using the theories of Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman and James Pennebaker. The analysis shows that Lily's trauma reflected in the novel is when she finds comfort in shuffling cards and when she has hallucinations. The causes of trauma is the abusive cycle that her father does to her mother when she is a teenager. Lily Bloom's experiences with traumatic events have negative and positive effects. The negative effects include difficulties in relationships, self-conflict, and being affected by feelings. The positive effect is that she has finally realized, by looking at her life possibilities that she wants to explore things to make them better. She uses expressive writing as a specific coping mechanism to learn about her trauma.

Keywords: *trauma, coping mechanism, expressive writing, psychological approach*

A. INTRODUCTION

People may have experienced traumatic stress in their life that some of them may recover and some others may have longstanding and ongoing symptoms for years or even a lifetime. However, traumatized people's responses are influenced by several factors, including duration, severity, and the presence of previous traumatic experiences. The term trauma is understood as not upon the body but upon the mind according to Freud (1915) whose ideas contributed to the birth of trauma studies. Herman (1992) stated that the psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention from it. It can be understood that

someone with a traumatic experience is not easy to express his feeling or to tell his story even though to his family.

From the novel of Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us*, the main character Lily Bloom grows up in an abusive household that her father abuses her mother repeatedly. Lily's childhood goes through that traumatic events so she gets suffered in her teens. She feels sorry for her mother because her mother never wants to leave her father until her father dies. Later on she finds herself in the same situation as her mother's that Lily experiences a physical abuse when she is 23 years old. Facing psychological stress in her next life that a trauma haunts her, sooner she starts to understand what her mother feels when she is a child. In her understanding, Lily tries to recover from her psychological problem until she realizes how she should react to understand the situation. Becoming wiser, Lily tries to narrate her stories by writing them down on paper and pretending to write them to Ellen De Generous because she doesn't talk to anyone about her situation.

For this study, the writer formulates four research questions: (1) How is the reflection of Lily Bloom's trauma? (2) What are the causes of her trauma? (3) What are the effects of her trauma? (4) How does she cope with her trauma?

This study uses a psychological approach, especially in analyzing trauma. According to Caruth (1996), "trauma" describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. As she stated, when a person experiences traumatic events, the writer can come to the conclusion that the thing about trauma is uncomfortable feelings and rethinking of the incident over and over, so they will begin to combine their past and present, making it difficult for one's consciousness to distinguish reality from fantasy. Herman (1992) stated traumatic disorders exist on a spectrum, differing from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse. Many individuals discover their own ways to cope with trauma in order to live happy and fulfilling lives. Unresolved and unacknowledged trauma can have serious and negative consequences in a person's life and the lives of those around them (Spunout, 2005; Susanto & Andayani, 2021).

In this theoretical review, there are four points which will be explained as the key words to analyze deeply about Lily Bloom's trauma, namely psychological trauma, causes of trauma, effects of trauma and expressive writing as a coping-mechanism.

Psychological trauma. According to Jayne Leonard, psychological trauma is a response to an event that a person finds highly stressful. A person who has experienced trauma may feel denial, anger, fear, sadness, shame, confusion, anxiety, depression, numbness, guilt, hopelessness, irritability, difficulty concentrating (medical news today, 2020).

Causes of trauma. Trauma can be happened to anyone as he or she has a terrible event. Being a victim of a crime, witnessing domestic violence or sexual assault, being abused as a child, surviving a natural disaster, or losing a loved one are all examples of traumatic events, which are uncontrollable events that can happen to anyone (Ohio Domestic Violence Network, 2013).

Effects of trauma. (1) Negative effects: Traumatic experience can effect an individual emotionally, mentally, feelings of fear, physical stress reactions, mentally frustrating (Ohio Domestic Violence Network, 2013). It also include intense anxiety or anxiousness, agitation, difficulty concentrating. It becomes overly prone to stress and anxiety in individual (Shafir, 2022). (2) Positive effects: According to Naik and Khan (2019), people also experience positive changes after trauma. Post-traumatic growth (post-traumatic growth) is a theory that describes the kind of positive change followed by trauma. After several traumatic events, many people grow in strength and resolve, gratitude, emotional intimacy with partners and family, creativity, a sense of spirituality, and life possibilities, according to research on post-traumatic growth (PTG) as cited by Levy (2015).

Expressive writing as a coping-mechanism of trauma. James Pennebaker invented expressive writing as a healing tool when he was depressed for the first time. Despite being a graduate student in psychology, he had never seen a therapist. He wrote about everything that was important to him, including their relationship, his career, and his childhood. He realized how important his wife was to his very survival. Recalling this experience, Jamie realized that he could have people write about upheavals in their lives rather than talk to others. Writing would also be much easier to do in an experimental setting. James, who came up with the idea, tried it on his students in class, and some of them cried while writing about their traumatic experiences (Pennebaker, 2016; Saputra & Andayani, 2021).

In the practice of expressive writing, people feel free to write about their feelings, and it has been studied and identified that expressive writing, such as narrating the traumatic experience through letter-writing, diary entries, or storytelling, can be comforting for trauma survivors. Survivors can work through traumatic events by creating a narrative for their memories. In their book *Opening Up by Writing it Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*, James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth argue that expressing painful, traumatic events, especially in writing, can be very healing for the survivor and that we humans have a need to “reveal ourselves to others” (Pennebaker: 2016; Purwo & Andayani, 2021).

Herman argues that to reclaim the present and the future, we need to understand the past; as a result, understanding psychological trauma starts with rediscovering history (Herman, 1992). Expressive writing occurs as a response from adult survivors of childhood (Batten et al. 2002), which allows them to write about events of their choosing. Expressive writing is also defined as a therapeutic writing technique that individuals can use to express their emotions through writing about a traumatic experience in the past (Bryan & Lu, 2016; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986).

B. RESEARCH METHOD

To analyze the data, a descriptive method is used in this study, because the details used are in the form of terms and phrases. According to Lawless and Heymann (1999) descriptive techniques can be valuable when a problem must be defined. The data source is the novel from which the writer as the instrument

collects data dealing with the problems. While in doing the analysis the writer uses other documents or other previous works as references of the research, especially since this research applies psychological approach so psychological references are mostly used.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To analyze Lily Bloom's trauma in Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us*, the discussion will explain 4 points in order to get the findings of the research, namely reflection of Lily Bloom's trauma, causes of her trauma, effects of her trauma, and expressive writing as Lily's way of coping with trauma.

Reflection of Lily Bloom's Trauma

The reflection of Lily Bloom's trauma can be seen from her behaviors which show the symptom of trauma: "*...shuffling cards just calms me down sometimes and gives me something to focus on.*" (Hoover, 2016: 26). In her journal writing when she pretends to write to Ellen DeGeneres, she states that she is experiencing traumatic symptoms, she finds comfort in shuffling cards, it helps her to focus." *I felt so defeated, but I was too scared to say anything to her about it.*" (Hoover, 2016: 84) In here, Lily is stuck after her mother tells her not to tell anyone about what has happened.

"I walked straight to the kitchen and I opened a drawer. I grabbed the biggest knife I could find and . . . I don't know how to explain it. It was like I wasn't even in my own body. I could see myself walking across the kitchen with the knife in my hand, and I knew I wasn't going to use it."

As the writer explains in the introduction, Caruth (1996) states that people who experience trauma will experience the appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. In Lily's journal writings, she describes how she feels at the time; she grabs the knife in a conscious state, knowing she's not going to use it. It suggests that Lily has been experiencing hallucinations.

Causes of Trauma

When Lily Bloom becomes adult, she meets Ryle Kincaid as her future partner. Ryle shows up to Lily on top of a rooftop clearly upset, and kicks a chair out of frustration. Following that, it reveals that Lily has just returned home from her father's funeral, and Ryle is a practicing neurosurgeon. Despite the fact that they have never met, Lily confides in Ryle what her father uses to abuse her mother.

"My father was abusive. Not to me—to my mother. He would get so angry when they fought that sometimes he would hit her. When that happened, he would spend the next week or two making up for it. He would do things like buy her flowers or take us out to a nice dinner. Sometimes he would buy me stuff because he knew I hated it when they fought. When I was a kid, I found myself looking forward to the nights they would fight. Because I knew if he hit her, the two weeks that followed would be great." (Hoover: 2016, 15)

In this paragraph, the readers get to learn about the traumatic events Lily goes through for the first time. As a kid, Lily tells her mother to leave him but it becomes the norm of their marriage, as she states on page 16: “But the abuse was inevitable with their marriage, and it became our norm”. Lily anticipates the next abuse from her father. According to Caruth (1996) people who experience traumatic events will start to combine their past and their present; Lily seems delayed in reality because of what happens next after their parents fight.

Effects of Trauma

Negative Effects

Lily and Ryle have become very close. Ryle and Lily attend a dinner with Lily's mother at Bib's Restaurant, which is actually owned by Atlas. Lily is taken back when she sees Atlas, recalling a childhood memory that put her in a bad mood. Atlas is very sweet to her until she moves to Boston, and after they return home, Lily doesn't talk to Ryle about Atlas. Yes, Lily mentioned Atlas when they first met, but he has never met him. When the casserole in the oven burns out, Ryle and Lily are drinking wine in Lily's apartment. Ryle opens the oven door and waves the smoke away. He gets burned after reaching the Casserole without a port and injuring his hand. She starts laughing at him while drinking three glasses of wine, and then Ryle pushes her.

“In a matter of one second, Ryle’s arm came out of nowhere and slammed against me, knocking me backward..... Pain shoots through the corner of my eye, right near my temple..... So much gravity, pushing down on my emotions. Everything shatters. My tears, my heart, my laughter, my soul. Shattered like broken glass, raining down around me.”

“Goddammit, Lily,” I hear him say. “It’s not funny. This hand is my fucking career.” (Hoover, 2016: 138)

Ryle apologizes to Lily; he says everything happened so quickly that he does not intend to push her. Lily is shocked and confused, and she feels angry and sad all at the same time. She can't believe to what has just happened. All she could think about at the time is her father apologizing to her. Lily appears to be under pressure to put her trust in Ryle after what he does to her. She tells herself many times that she needs to be sure she could trust him. In here it can be argued that when Lily comes to have relationship she finds difficulties. It occurs to Herman's (1992): Lily has demonstrated that she has been lasting effect and feeling anxious.

Ryle's apology brings Lily comfort. But Lily still feels disappointed in her heart, and her thoughts are inconsistent. “I can't tell if I'm more disappointed in him or myself. Him for losing his temper in the first place or me for somehow finding comfort in his apology” (Hoover, 2016: 140) Lily is perplexed by her disappointment, not knowing whether she is disappointed because Ryles gets lost his temper or because she easily forgives him, making Lily similar to her mother, who tolerates her abusive father. Another self-conflict Lily has is when she calls Atlas to pick her up after the tense exchange between Lily and Ryle. She decides to write a letter to Ellen at Atlas' House, just like she does when she is sixteen. Lily has conflicting emotions that make her agitated to respond to Ryle, so

knowing that they both want to have the conversation, Lily begins asking him naked truth. At the time, Lily doesn't have much to say to Ryle, so she waits for him to go first and wonders how he will react. Ryle's response to her is that he doesn't know what he supposes to say either, then Lily gathers her emotions and lets off on him.

“Yes. I kept the magnet Atlas gave me when we were kids. Yes. I kept the journals. No, I didn't tell you about my tattoo. Yes, I probably should have. And yes, I still love him. And I'll love him until I die, because he was a huge part of my life. And yes, I'm sure that hurts you. But none of that gave you the right to do what you did to me. Even if you would have walked into my bedroom and caught us in bed together, you still would not have the right to lay a hand on me, you goddamn son of a bitch!” (Hoover 2016: 240)

Lily feels exhausted, she is tired, and she presses her face against pillow so she could barely breathe. “The pain in his voice ripples through me, and when I lift my tearsoaked face to look at him” (Hoover, 2016: 241).

Positive Effects

Departing from Lily's childhood background, it is not so good and not so bad either. Lily grows up in an abusive family; her father is abusive to her mother. In her childhood, she likes to write a letter to Ellen DeGeneres until she turns sixteen. She is a big fan of Ellen. Her diaries are her outlet; whenever she needs to feel better, she writes down her feelings. She writes a letter to Ellen about a homeless man who lives behind her house at the time; Lily's neighbor, Mrs. Burleson, who lives there, has died, and the house is deserted and dark. When she looks at the old house, she notices a small amount of light coming from it.

“so I noticed the light right away. It wasn't bright, but it was coming from that old house. It looked more like candlelight than anything, so I went to the back porch and found Dad's binoculars. I tried to see what was going on over there, but I couldn't see anything. It was way too dark. Then after a little while, the light went out” (Hoover, 2016: 26)

From her bedroom window, Lily looks out onto the backyard. Lily is fascinated by the man who lives there; on her way to school, she notices something moving around behind the house when the man carries a backpack.

Lily asks her friend, Katie, about his name and his name is Atlas: he's a senior. Kattie says to Lily that Atlas smells bad, and Lily can't help and seems to defend Atlas. From her writing that shows Atlas, the writer believes that Lily is a very caring person to treat a stranger like Atlas. “I wanted to yell at her and tell her he can't help it and that he doesn't have any running water” (Hoover, 2016: 27). Lily is the one who doesn't get physical abuse from her father. But, growing up in a household where her parents sometimes get into fights doesn't make her afraid to deal with people; instead, she is brave and wants to help people in difficulties.

Another example shows when she meet Ryle, her future husband for the first time, after her father's funeral, Lily catch a flight straight to Boston and trying to find a rooftop because she really needs a fresh air and silence. She meets a stranger named Ryle Kincaid on a rooftop; he is a neurosurgeon; they don't take too long to find comfort in having a conversation, like before she meets Atlas. So, they start telling each other the "naked truth." Lily is the first to tell the truth, and the naked truth is her father's funeral speech. Her mother, Jenny Bloom, asks Lily to deliver the eulogy for her father, but Lily refuses because she is uncomfortable doing so. She believes that eulogies should be delivered by those who have respect for the deceased, and she has little respect for her father as a result of what he does to her mother. Even so, her mother says that is the only thing her father would have wanted. As a daughter, she loves her father, but as a human, she hates him. Afterwards, Lily starts to give her eulogy, but she makes no mention of her father's good deeds while he is still alive.

“Hello. My name is Lily Bloom, daughter of the late Andrew Bloom. Thank you all for joining us today as we mourn his loss. I wanted to take a moment to honor his life by sharing with you five great things about my father. The first thing . . .” I look down at Ryle and shrug. “That’s it” (Hoover, 2016: 17) “..... I’m not proud of it. I don’t think. I mean, if I had my way, he would have been a much better person and I would have stood up there and talked for an hour.” (Hoover, 2016: 18).

The quotation shows that Lily tells Ryle, about a dream opening floral shop, gardening and flowers as her passion. Six months later, she buys a former restaurant space. The condition of the restaurant looks unused that there is a table, old chairs, and other items, as well as a lot of dust. Then while Lily is cleaning, Allysa comes in because she sees a "Help Wanted" sign outside. She does not need a job, but she says she is happy to help, so she offers to do the designing, and Lily eventually hires her. Lily's vision is to be brave and bold, so she comes up with the idea of using darker colors to celebrate winter and death instead of the sweet side of flowers which she makes clear to Allysa.

”Instead of painting the walls a putrid sweet color, we paint them dark purple with black accents. And instead of only putting out the usual pastel displays of flowers in boring crystal vases that make people think of life, we go edgy. Brave and bold. We put out displays of darker flowers wrapped in things like leather or silver chains. And rather than put them in crystal vases, we’ll stick them in black onyx or . . . I don’t know . . . purple velvet vases lined with silver studs. The ideas are endless.” (Hoover, 2016: 38)

From the quotation, Lily thinks differently and fairly confident about it, it's a new perspective, her interpretation about the idea is very clearly, which makes her arriving at solutions, it is revealed as Levy's theory (2015) people may grow in strength and shows her courage.

Expressive Writing as Lily's Way of Coping with Trauma

Being adult, Lily looks back at her young life, absolving herself of what she thinks or knows at the time. The first writings are about Lily's first meeting with her childhood crush, Atlas, a homeless boy. She starts to write about how she sees someone sneak into the abandoned house behind her house and casually brings up how she shuffles cards while her parents are fighting. She has no friends when she is younger, and the people who are supposed to help her are the ones who cause her trauma, and she never see a professional about what she has gone through. Her coping mechanism of choice is to write in her diary as if she writes a letter to Ellen DeGeneres. It could be argued that addresses the letters to Ellen, she feels better; she seems to be speaking to someone rather than simply writing everything down, Lily's only way to discuss and narrate her thoughts and feelings is to write in a diary and pretend to write to Ellen DeGeneres. "... I was in bed shuffling cards. I know that sounds weird, but it's just something I do. I don't even know how to play cards. But when my parents get into fights, shuffling cards just calms me down sometimes and gives me something to focus on." (Hoover, 2016: 26).

The second evidence of Lily's expressive writing is when her writing makes a time jump of 6 months, it is significant that readers can get to see Lily's growth and how she separates herself from her childhood. Lily has the same experience as her mother as an adult. Ryle has hurt her a few times in their relationship. The first time Ryle hurts his hand and Lily laughs, he becomes enraged and pushes her.

The last diary is when she rereads as an adult about Atlas after seeing him for the first time in years; she feels the need to read about Atlas in the past to find closure because she is currently in a new relationship with Ryle. This part of her diary is when her father finds out about Atlas and her father hits Atlas with a baseball bat. After this, Lily stops writing the diary because she wants to take a break. However, Lily finds it difficult to write a letter to Ellen, she knows exactly the only thing that can make her feel better is to let it out on paper but she is still processing about what happens to Atlas and to think about it alone. In this case she feels so much pain. "*I think I'm going to take a break from writing to you for a while. Writing to you reminds me of him, and it all hurts too much.*" (Hoover, 2016: 161).

Here, she distances herself from her trauma; as stated by Herman (1992), we get the rediscovery of history from this passage; she acknowledges what she has gone through, yet she feels like she needs to write it down at least one more time. When Ryle physically abuses Lily, he pushes her and chokes her. Lily calls Atlas to pick her up, and they go to Atlas's house. Concerned about the complex feelings she has, she decides to write down her feelings like she used to as a teenager while hiding in Atlas' place and staying away from Ryle. Lily writes the last entry.

"The last time I wrote to you, I was sixteen. I was in a really bad place and I was so worried about Atlas. I'm not worried about Atlas anymore, but I am in a really bad place right now. More so than the last time I wrote to you" (Hoover, 2016: 209). From the quotation, it is seen from that passage that Lily builds her stories on the last time she writes; she finds nothing better than not writing them

down on paper. According to Pennebaker, “we need to reveal ourselves to others” (Pennebaker: 2016, 1), in this case Lily finds a way through expressive writing. Lily realizes that what she used to think actually is harder than what she now experiences. It is seen that Lily needs to understand her past to start a better life (Herman, 1992) she uses expressive writing as a coping mechanism as a teen and able to reread it as an adult. She finds healing from reading her old journals.

In the last chapter, Lily finally breaks the cycle of abuse. She decides after the baby is born and tells Ryle that she wants to divorce because she thinks about the baby’s life: “It isn’t until this moment that I finally make a decision about him, about us.” “About what’s best for our family.” (Hoover, 2016: 265) She knows that if she keeps the relationship with Ryle, it will be bad for their daughter because Lily is afraid of losing control of his emotions and hitting her. Thus, the cycle ends here; Lily doesn’t want it to repeat in her daughter’s life. (cf. Susanto & Andayani, 2021; Purwo & Andayani, 2022).

The writer does not find Lily seeking professional help or therapy treatment to cope with her trauma in the story of this novel, instead she does narrate her trauma in her diary, such as in letters she writes when she is fifteen years old, which gives the readers a flashback (Saputra & Andayani, 2021).

D. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the reflection of Lily Bloom’s trauma in the novel is that she finds comfort in shuffling cards while her parents in a fight situation and she also has experienced hallucinations. The analysis also finds the causes of trauma that Lily Bloom’s father is abusive to her mother when she is a kid. Another discovery is the trauma's negative effects on Lily, such as how she is affected by feelings in relationships and how she is sometimes trapped in her mind and finds it difficult to confess her feelings. The positive effects, she is finally resolve the trauma by looking at her life possibilities, she has courage to dealing with people and wants to explore things to become better. In this study it also finds Lily’s way of coping her trauma by using expressive writing. It is proven that Lily pretends to write to Ellen DeGeneres, she lets it out through writing since teenager and be able to look back her stories as an adult. She finds a way out from her relationship with Ryle from understanding to her mother’s situation which she never thinks about, Lily is genuine to finally break the cycle of abuse. (cf. Saputra & Andayani, 2021; Purwo & Andayani, 2022).

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