

Generational Trauma and Domestic Abuse in Selected Novels of Colleen Hoover

Tereza Eva Valová

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děkan

doc. Mgr. Roman Trušík, Ph.D.
ředitel ústavu

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématy mezigeneračního traumatu a domácího násilí v románech *Námi to končí* (2016) a *Námi to začíná* (2022) současné americké spisovatelky Colleen Hoover. Mezigenerační trauma definuje traumatické zážitky a emoční strategie, které jsou předávány napříč generacemi, přičemž tento jev úzce souvisí s domácím násilím, vztahovou dynamikou a mechanismem zvládání stresových situací. Cílem této práce je s pomocí literární analýzy prozkoumat, jakými způsoby Colleen Hoover zobrazuje spletnost násilí, traumatu a vnitřního emocionálního a psychologického konfliktu postav, které usilují o to, aby se vymanili z koloběhu zneužívání. Tato práce se zároveň snaží podtrhnout roli současné beletrie jako nástroje pro zkoumání a zvyšování povědomí o složitosti domácího násilí a mezigeneračního traumatu.

Klíčová slova: Colleen Hoover, domácí násilí, rodinné násilí, trauma, mezigenerační trauma, trauma v literatuře, populární beletrie, fyzické násilí, sexuální násilí

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis explores the themes of generational trauma and domestic abuse in Colleen Hoover's novels *It Ends with Us* (2016) and *It Starts with Us* (2022). Generational trauma, defined as a transmission of emotional patterns and traumatic experiences across generations, is closely connected to domestic abuse, relationship dynamics, and coping mechanisms of the victims. Through close literary analysis this thesis aims to examine the way in which Hoover portrays the complexity of abuse, trauma, and internal emotional and psychological conflicts of characters struggling to break the cyclical pattern of abuse. This thesis seeks to highlight the role of contemporary fictions as a medium for exploring and raising awareness about complexities of domestic abuse and generational trauma.

Keywords: Colleen Hoover, Domestic abuse, Family violence, Trauma, Generational Trauma, Trauma in literature, Popular fiction, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world of contemporary fiction has embraced storytelling about difficult and often taboo societal issues, offering an extensive reflection on the emotional and psychological complexities of real life. Among these issues, we can count domestic abuse, trauma, and generational trauma which impact not only directly affected individuals but also families and the social circle surrounding the victims. Domestic abuse remains an issue in nowadays society, affecting more than just individuals and leaving long-lasting consequences. Domestic abuse often goes beyond its immediate impact as it forms into generational trauma, a phenomenon where trauma is transmitted across generations. Among the authors who gained significant popularity creating stories about such themes with emotional depth is Colleen Hoover. She is known for her emotionally intense and character-driven storytelling, and she frequently places these contemporary issues at the core of her narrative. Her novels, particularly *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us*, portray the complexity of domestic abuse and the internal shadow of generational trauma.

This thesis aims to explore how Colleen Hoover's selected novels depict generational trauma and domestic abuse, with a particular focus on the psychological development of characters and the cyclical nature of abuse. By analysing her works, *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us*, this thesis aims to explore how traumatic experiences shape personalities, influence interpersonal relationships, and contribute to behavioural patterns recurring in adulthood. Furthermore, the focus will be on examining the various ways in which domestic violence can be perpetrated, as well as exploring the deep struggle involved in breaking free from the cycle of abuse.

The thesis is structured into three parts, including a conclusion and introduction. The first chapter provides a theoretical background on trauma, its generational transmission, and key concepts of domestic abuse, such as sexual, physical, and family violence. The second part of the thesis is analysis, which focuses on the novels *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us*, examining the main characters' experiences with domestic abuse and trauma. The part of the objective focuses on the protagonist Lily, as she was brought up in a violent household and now finds herself in a similar situation in an abusive relationship, reflecting on the cyclical nature of trauma. This section also focuses on the meaning of the title and explores the themes of healing and recovery after enduring such experiences. The conclusion and the last part summarize the findings and highlight the significance of Hoover's work in the context of contemporary fiction. While her novels have been critiqued for romanticizing

violent situations, they nevertheless raise an awareness about the topic of domestic abuse and the lasting psychological effects of trauma.

1 COLLEEN HOOVER AND HER WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMA AND ABUSE

Colleen Hoover, born Margaret Colleen Fennel, is a contemporary novelist from the United States and the number one New York Times best-selling author, whose twenty-four works have touched millions of people around the world. Hoover was born in 1979 in Texas, she began her career in social work and education but later transitioned to writing. Hoover entered the literary world in an unconventional way when she self-published her debut novel, *Slammed* in 2012 on the internet platform Amazon. What began as a humble project, Hoover's novel soon captured the attention of major publishers, such as Atria, Grand Central, and a Simon & Schuster, putting her into spotlight of literary world, moreover she was seen as a new voice in contemporary romance, which marked a pivotal shift in her career and gained big prominence in romance and new adult genres.¹ Since then, Hoover has published many bestsellers such as *Never Never* (2015), *November 9* (2015), *Ugly Love* (2014), *Without Merit* (2017), and even made a debut in the psychological thriller genre with her novel *Verity* (2018). Colleen Hoover's works primarily fall into the genre of new adult contemporary romance genre. Her work is predominantly based around emotionally compelling stories, explaining contemporary relationships and emotional intimacy, furthermore, she focuses on the exploration of difficulties people in their early twenties face, including self-discovery and complicated relationships. She focuses on emotionally charged themes; a lot of her storytelling is based around traumas and the resilience of love. She first won an award for her book *Confess* in 2015 when she won the Goodreads Choice Award for Best Romance and has won multiple times since, for an example, for the novel *It Ends with Us* in 2016.²

1.1 Author's Experience with Domestic Abuse

The influence of Colleen Hoover's personal encounter with domestic abuse provides her works with unique emotional depth and authenticity. She has been open about her childhood with growing up in an abusive household, and how those experiences shaped her life. She describes that her earliest memories are those of her parents' relationship being violent. At the age of two and a half years old, she witnessed a terrifying accident of her father yelling

¹ Alexandra Alter, "How Colleen Hoover Rose to Rule the Best-Seller List," *The New York Times*, 10 October 2022, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/09/books/colleen-hoover.html>.

² Colleen Hoover, "About Me," [colleenhoover.com](https://www.colleenhoover.com), accessed 12 December 2024, <https://www.colleenhoover.com/pages/about-me>.

at her mother, followed by throwing a television at her.³ Despite the societal norms, her mother divorced her abusive husband soon after that; at that time, Hoover was three years old. At that time, leaving an abusive relationship was rare due to the lack of resources for help. As Hoover explains, her mother's primary goal was to create a safe and stable environment for Hoover and her sister to grow up in. Her mother chose not to speak about the abuse and the experience surrounding that, wanting to preserve their perception of their father. As a result, Hoover remembers having a generally positive relationship with her father, except for that one experience, as she was protected from the full extent of his actions. She has described these moments of challenges her mother had to face as pivotal for her childhood.⁴

This personal history became a foundation stone for her novel, *It Ends with Us*, as the story explores themes of love, abuse, family, and difficult choices of breaking the cycle of abuse. By drawing from her own history, she was able to create both an authentic and relatable narrative, which has resonated deeply with readers. Although she acknowledges that the story she told through Lily and Ryle does not define domestic abuse or that Ryle's characteristics do not correlate with the characteristics of every abuser, as she warns that every instance of abusive behaviour and domestic abuse is different. It provides an important insight into the way abuse can appear and escalate, and how it affects the abuser, the victim, and those around them. Colleen Hoover acknowledges that her novels should not work as a form of universal guide about domestic violence, the aim of it was to spark awareness about it.⁵

For Hoover, writing has served as a powerful form of coping mechanism, allowing her to process and articulate the pain and complexity of the past.⁶ Furthermore, she provides through her storytelling a voice for those who have experienced abuse, as she mentions she wanted to write the book for women like her mother, and particularly for the women who did not understand women like her mother, Hoover being one of them.⁷

³ Colleen Hoover. *It Ends with Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2016), 368.

⁴ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 370.

⁵ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 370.

⁶ Alex Portee, "Why Colleen Hoover Says It's "Bittersweet" That "It Ends With Us" Has Been a Bestseller for so Long", TODAY.com, 11 July 2023, <https://www.today.com/popculture/books/colleen-hoover-it-ends-with-us-domestic-abuse-rcna91742>.

⁷ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 371.

1.2 Books

The contemporary novels *It Ends with Us* and its sequel *It Starts with Us*, both written by Colleen Hoover, captivate readers by both compelling storytelling, but moreover by the complex exploration of trauma, domestic abuse, and coping mechanisms. The first novel, *It Ends with Us*, follows the journey of protagonist Lily Bloom, who goes through her own experience with trauma and abuse in her childhood and her adult relationships. The story intertwines the past and the present, not only revealing the roots of her trauma and the impact of it, but also it narrates the journey of breaking free from the cycles of abuse and emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and relationships. Through the narration of the protagonist's story, the novel explores difficult themes of domestic abuse, self-discovery, the generational impact of abuse, self-empowerment, and love. Its sequel, *It Start with Us*, shifts the narrative focus on the journey of healing and recovery. While the first novel explores the weight of abuse within relationships, the sequel explores the aftermath of abuse and personal growth after breaking the cycle.

Hoover's works frequently explore themes charged with emotional complexities, trauma, and toxic relationships. Her novel, *November 9* (2015), follows a story of Fallon and Ben, who meet by accident on the anniversary of a tragic event in Fallon's life. Both main characters are dealing with trauma from the past. As a teenager, Ben experiences a loss of a mother to suicide. In his grief, sadly, he misinterprets it and as a revenge he sets a car on fire which spreads onto the house where Fallon is staying. The fire leaves her with scars for life, altering both of their lives. It delves into the theme of emotional manipulation and self-discovery, as the protagonist lives a fierce romance shaped by the past trauma. *Ugly Love* (2014) presents a narrative with themes of emotional detachment and suppressed grief. The main characters, Tate Collins, a nursing student, and Miles Archer, a pilot, agree on the no-strings-attached relationship as Miles is emotionally closed. They both struggle in the relationship, Tate with unrequired feelings, and Miles is haunted by his past, where with his first love, they suffered the loss of their child. One of her most recent works is *Verity* (2018), which is a psychological thriller that mixes romance and mystery, as well as it explores themes of mind games and violence.

Hoover's ability to create complex novels with the ability to tackle serious themes with sensitivity and her descriptive storytelling has earned her a great fan base and has a big influence on the book community. With her stories and novellas, she appeared on the New York Times bestseller list multiple times.

2 TRAUMA

Trauma, in its simplest form, represents the emotional and psychological aftermath of a painful experience that one has been through. Cathy Caruth says that it is a reaction caused by a distressing event, which can alter the course of one's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.⁸ She also points out that trauma can be broadly defined as an overwhelming experience that refers to the psychological impact of sudden or catastrophic events, which may later result in different symptoms like hallucinations and other experiences.⁹ Trauma often disrupts an individual's sense of normalcy, which stems from the struggle to reconcile with the fractured memories from the past and with the demands of the present. As they try to grapple this challenge, they encounter unresolved emotions and internal conflict, where the mind struggles to process the overwhelming residue of the traumatic event. This can lead to a distorted perception of time, reality, and self. As mentioned by Cathy Caruth, these distortions often manifest in the form of recurring symptoms like hallucinations, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or emotional numbness, which can alter how individuals engage with daily life.¹⁰

Trauma not only affects the mind but also leaves enduring traces on both body and mind as Bessel van der Kolk emphasizes in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, claiming that: "We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body."¹¹ Trauma extends beyond past experiences, it creates a lasting imprint on our mental and physical state over time. What often begins as an overwhelming experience involving intense distress, can develop gradually in an unusual way. Individuals who have experienced distressing experiences often live with lasting consequences, which can persist long after the original event. Trauma alters cognitive thinking and how individuals perceive the world and their role within it. It can distort a person's sense of safety, trust, and self-worth, creating something that influences their relationships, decision-making and overall, their life.¹² Trauma is not exceptional due

⁸ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 11.

⁹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 12.

¹⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 12.

¹¹ Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 21.

¹² Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 206.

to its rarity rather the impact of a traumatic event stems from its overwhelming nature, which exceeds the capacity of human adaptation.¹³

2.1 Impact of Trauma

Even after the traumatic event has passed, it can continuously impact an individual's emotional health, relationship dynamics, and behaviour, often shaping their responses without their conscious awareness. According to Herman, trauma arises when a person is faced with an overwhelming threat, they cannot fight nor escape, causing their natural defensive system to break down, leading to traumatic reactions.¹⁴ This breakdown can lead to long-term disruptions in emotional, cognitive, and psychological functions, which ordinarily work in harmony but may become fragmented.¹⁵ For example, a person might suddenly feel overwhelming fear or may panic in response to a bland situation, such as breaking a glass by mistake, without understanding the underlying reaction. This reaction stems from the brain's inability to process past traumatic experiences, which leads to isolation of emotional response.¹⁶

Moreover, from Herman, we learn that perpetrators avoid accountability for their acts by enforcing secrecy on the victim, they try to silence them and when that fails, they try to discredit them, and as such their strategies further include denying that the things never happened, minimizing that the things were never that bad, or blaming that the victim brought it upon themselves. And the more powerful they are, the more they control the narrative and perception.¹⁷ Apart from the original trauma from the acts, this leads to the further harm through gaslighting, silencing, secrecy, and blame on the victim as well as breaking their sense of trust.¹⁸

Traumatic experiences leave lasting traces on our minds and emotions, as well as on our ability to experience joy and intimacy, furthermore, they leave footprints on our biology and immune systems, as Van der Kolk says.¹⁹ With the impact on our thoughts and feelings, these effects can shape the way one perceives the world, it often diminishes our sense of trusting others, as well as it can make relationship feel forced. Over time, this psychological

¹³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2022), 48-49.

¹⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 49-50.

¹⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 50.

¹⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 50.

¹⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 10-11.

¹⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 10.

¹⁹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 1-2.

burden can lead to patterns of isolation and the feeling of disconnection from oneself or others.²⁰

Part of the impact of trauma Herman describes as a disconnection in which traumatic events deeply obstruct the fundamental connection and the principles that provide structure and meaning to human life.²¹ Our identity and perception are often shaped through our interactions and relationships, victims may question who they are or their worth in relation to others. The experience can create a sense of chaos and disorder in one's life and in the sense of the world, putting the victim into a state of existential crisis.²² Trauma's impact is not just emotional or physical, as it deeply influences the existential and functional part of oneself. Human identity is often built through relationships and social status, when trauma arises, victims may lose sense of worth and their feeling of belonging.

Furthermore, Herman says that the core of the struggle lies in the internal conflict between the want to suppress the memory of these experiences and the insistence to proclaim them aloud.²³ Which highlights the key conflict an individual faces after the distressing experience. On one hand, there is the instinct to avoid or suppress that something so painful happened to protect oneself from further painful emotions and the impacts they bring. On the other hand, there is the equally strong feeling of the need to confront and name these experiences aloud to process them and find a way for relief. Both are forms of defence or coping mechanisms for one to maintain stability and control of themselves.²⁴

2.1.1 Coping Mechanisms

VandenBos explains coping mechanisms as both conscious and unconscious behaviour focused on the adaptation of the individual that decreases the reaction connected to distressing event.²⁵ In the context to domestic abuse these mechanisms or strategies serve as a form of protective response that helps individuals manage their stress and traumas. They serve as a survival strategy, enabling the victims to persist the abuse, navigate their emotions, and adapt to the challenges of an abusive environment.²⁶ As mentioned above, one

²⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 79.

²¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

²² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.

²³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

²⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 68.

²⁵ Gary R. VandenBos, 'Coping Mechanism,' in *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015).

²⁶ Angela E. Waldrop and Patricia A. Resick, "Coping Among Adult Female Victims of Domestic Violence," *Journal of Family Violence* 19, no. 5 (October 2004): 293, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOFV.0000042079.91846.68>

distinction of coping strategies can be denial or engagement, which can also be called active or avoidant coping strategies, it is based on whether an individual makes attempt to do something about their situation or distance themselves.²⁷

In connection to coping mechanisms to domestic abuse, understanding the answer to the often underlying question “Why don’t they just leave?” is critical for comprehending and the relevance on the formation of coping mechanisms. Leaving an abusive relationship is not always a feasible option for survivors or victims, as their ability to do so depends on the circumstances they find themselves in. According to Harne and Radford, barriers such as financial resources and access to housing or other essential resources can make leaving impossible. Furthermore, leaving does not necessarily guarantee safety, as it often triggers the perpetrator’s abusive behaviour, which can continue and escalate.²⁸ Therefore, survivors tend to adapt and cope with the circumstances specific to their case. Furthermore, a significant factor that prevents people from leaving an abusive and toxic relationship is the emotional attachment they have formed towards the person causing them the harm. Just because they have never been like that, maybe it was just a one-time thing, or maybe it is something called idealization. Idealization, according to Atlas Galit, is a defence mechanism that leaves a person to believe the illusion that people and things can be better, perfect, or even better than they truly are.²⁹ The individual may focus on the positive aspects of the relationship, such as moments of affection or promises of change, rather than recognizing the reality of abuse. This mechanism is enormously powerful as there is the desire to preserve the relationship, which can overshadow toxic behaviours.

In their research article, Hyoung S. Lee and Lawrence D. Cohn claim that there are three broad coping strategies that characterize the reaction to a distressing event of an individual.³⁰ According to the research, the first is problem-focused coping that focuses on the active seeking of a solution to the problem. The second being emotion-focused coping, which aims to manage emotional responses to stress without addressing the origin of the problem, including techniques like emotional expression and particularly expressive writing. Finally, avoidance coping is characterized by behaviours that facilitate detachment or

²⁷ Waldrop and Resick, “Coping Among Adult Female Victims of Domestic Violence,” 292.

²⁸ Lynn Harne and Jill Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence: Theories, Policies and Practice* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 37-38.

²⁹ Atlas Galit, *Emotional Inheritance: A Therapist, Her Patients, and the Legacy of Trauma* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022), 192-194.

³⁰ Hyoung S. Lee and Lawrence D. Cohn, “Assessing Coping Strategies by Analysing Expressive Writing Samples,” *Stress and Health* 26, no. 3 (2010): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1293>.

avoidance of stressors, through daydreaming or using substances.³¹ Expressive writing, as mentioned above, serves as a valuable coping tool. According to Pennebaker, this technique involves writing about an individual's deepest thoughts and feelings, specifically related to distressing experiences. The writing itself allows individuals to process and release suppressed emotions.³² While problem-focused coping helps to directly address the source of the trauma and distress, and avoidance coping seeks to escape it, expressive writing as part of emotion-focused coping can offer self-reflection and greater understanding of one's emotional well-being, without the need to directly confront the underlying issue.

2.2 Generational Trauma

While trauma is generally perceived as an individual experience, it can stretch beyond an individual and be passed down through generations.³³ This phenomenon is often referred to as generational trauma. Such trauma is a consequence of unresolved family issues. As mentioned above, people who suffer from such trauma tend to suppress the emotions and memories connected with it, unintentionally creating and influencing the environment, where their unresolved traumas are passed down and leave their children to carry the burden of their ancestors.

Pain does not always dissolve on its own or diminish with time. Even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died, even if his or her story lies submerged in years of silence, fragments of life experience, memory, and body sensation can live on, as if reaching out from the past to find resolution in the minds and bodies of those living in the present.³⁴

In essence, this quote introduces the fact that generational trauma can be transmitted silently without conscious awareness. It emphasizes how the pain from our ancestors from the past can subtly shape emotional responses, behaviours, and relationships, as well as the mental and physical state of oneself in the present moment. The impact of traumatic experience does not fade over time or disappear on its own, even if the person who experienced the trauma has passed away, and even when their story has been buried in silence for years, the emotional fragment of the trauma can persist. These fragments of the past can continue to affect the present and may manifest in subtle or overt ways in the life of the living, those

³¹ Lee and Cohn, "Assessing Coping Strategies by Analysing Expressive Writing Samples," 251.

³² James W. Pennebaker, "Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process," *Psychological Science* 8, no. 3 (1997): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x>.

³³ Mark Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle* (New York: Penguin Life, 2016), 1.

³⁴ Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You*, 1-2.

connected to the person who experienced the trauma. In this way, the trauma reaches across time, affecting not only the individual who lived through it but also those around them.³⁵

It has been suggested that trauma leaves lasting traces on both body and mind, however, Mark Wolynn also proposes that the distressing experience might have some positive outcomes, as people can become stronger and more resilient, and thus probably influence the generations in the future.³⁶ This provides a broader view of how trauma shapes intergenerational experiences. It does not solely maintain the legacy of suffering across the generations, but when processed and acknowledged properly, it can provide an opportunity for a better future of their family.

People who have experienced unbearable, possibly overwhelming events that can escalate beyond the capabilities of one to cope with, and in an attempt to protect themselves, tend to block those feelings and unknowingly subvert the necessary healing process.³⁷ This unresolved pain remains submerged until it can find a way for expression, and that can be found in the next generation that follows and can manifest in the form of symptoms that are difficult to explain.³⁸ Understanding this cycle is crucial as it sets the next chapter of breaking the cycle through conscious healing and disruption of the inheritance to create a pathway for recovery.

2.2.1 Breaking the Cycle

While generational trauma can be deeply rooted in families for years and affect individuals in many ways, people can break free from the cycle. Atlas Galit indicates that breaking the cycle represents a turning point in an individual's life and offers a path towards healing and resilience, together with creating a clean sheet for future generations.³⁹ Breaking the cycle starts with the recognition of one's trauma. As Mark Wolynn explains in his book *It Didn't Start with You*, breaking free start with the recognition of the nature of the burden people pass down through generations: "Once we recognize that we have been carrying thoughts, emotions, feelings, behaviours, or symptoms that do not originate with us, we can break the cycle."⁴⁰ It essentially emphasizes that much of the pain people carry is a consequence of

³⁵ Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You*, 53.

³⁶ Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You*, 24.

³⁷ 'Trauma', American Psychological Association, accessed 10 December 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma>.

³⁸ Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You*, 22-23.

³⁹ Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 223.

⁴⁰ Wolynn, *It Didn't Start with You*, 147-148.

unresolved issues within their family. Identifying that these aspects of the nature of the trauma are not inherently ours but are rooted in unresolved traumas and issues of previous generations is a step that opens their door to healing, as Galit explains.⁴¹

Atlas Galit further suggests that the journey towards healing begins with the conscious choice to confront the pain, rather than avoid it.⁴² Furthermore, she emphasizes that unprocessed trauma continues to recur across the generations, and even though individuals may try to heal the pain of the past, true healing requires acknowledging that some thing cannot be changed and letting oneself to grieve and reclaim their own story.⁴³ This highlights what a healing journey may entail, as through this process individuals reclaim control over their lives.

Herman describes the recovery path in three stages. The first one being the establishment of safety. Second, she describes as remembrance and mourning. And the finally is the stage where person reconnects with the ordinary life.⁴⁴ The first stage is foundational to recovery, creating safe space for an individual is an important step to making them feel secure both physically and emotionally. Safety is not only about the condition and environment it focuses on rebuilding personal sense of control and boundaries.⁴⁵ For the second stage, it is critical to name the original trauma and process the traumatic experiences. This stage can be emotionally intense as it can involve remembering and revisiting the grief and emotions connected to the original distressing event, but it is crucial for moving towards the recovery and a sense of normalcy as well as creating a safe environment for next generations.⁴⁶ The final stage is the reconnection, where an individual should be able to move from an isolation and restore social connections.⁴⁷ As recovery can be viewed in stages, it is necessary to treat an individual accordingly to the stage, they find themselves in.

Herman provides a great insight that survivors of child abuse fear that children of their own might endure the same suffering they once faced. To prevent this, they often do extraordinary things to break the cycle of abuse, they find inner strength and determination to create a caring and protective environment.⁴⁸ This highlights how deep fear, and trauma

⁴¹ Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 185.

⁴² Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 263.

⁴³ Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 264.

⁴⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 223.

⁴⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 229.

⁴⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 227.

⁴⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 233.

⁴⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 166.

can become a great motivator for survivors. Encouraging them on healing journey, enabling survivors to confront their past and break free from the patterns of abuse as they focus on the need to create a safe space for upbringing their children.

3 DOMESTIC ABUSE

At its core, domestic abuse is characterized by a pattern of abusive behaviour in a relationship. Harne, along with her colleagues, emphasizes that these behaviours violence can take various forms, including physical, sexual, intimidating, and controlling actions.⁴⁹ While it often occurs at home, the word “domestic” fails to adequately reflect the broader context in which it can occur, because while the home is the place where it would occur the most, such violence can also take place in public places in the presence of strangers. What truly describes domestic violence is the relationship element, whether it involves a partner or a family member, but the bond is central to abuse.⁵⁰

As we learned, trauma is not a rare experience, neither is domestic abuse. As Judith Herman acknowledges: “Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women’s lives that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience.”⁵¹ Despite these forms of domestic abuse being so widespread, they are still socially normalized. Domestic abuse, as common as it is, should never be seen as an ordinary and acceptable part of one’s life. This makes it harder for victims to recognize that such experiences are not acceptable, and it is necessary to ask for help to deal with these challenges.

Domestic abuse is not just a one-time event, rather, it occurs through phases, following the cycle of abuse. Rakovec-Felser suggests that abuse is not constant and shifts between four phases. She names these phases as a tension building, acting out period, the honeymoon period, and finally the calm period. A tension building period is characterized by increased conflict within the relationship. An acting out phase is the stage where the tension outburst into abusive incidents in various forms, physical, emotional, or sexual. After the abusive incident, follows the honeymoon phase, where the abuser will tend to express guilt and remorse in the form of apology, gifts, or other promises. Lastly, it is the calm phase where the abuser returns to normal behaviour, acting like nothing happened.⁵²

⁴⁹ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 1-2.

⁵⁰ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 2.

⁵¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 48.

⁵² Zlatka Rakovec-Felser, “Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective,” *Health Psychology Research* 2, no. 3 (22 October 2014): 63, <https://doi.org/10.4081/hpr.2014.1821>.

3.1 Forms of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse includes a wide range of abusive behaviours. Woman's Aid Federation, a national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children, defines the diversity of domestic violence.⁵³ Harne on the basis of the federation, illustrated in her book says that domestic abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological, or financial violence that appears in close intimate relationships or within the family, and forms a pattern of dominance and control.⁵⁴ Intimate partner violence is a common, but it is crucial to recognize that marital violence often co-occurs with child maltreatment.⁵⁵ Domestic abuse does not solely impact adults, it is frequently extended to children and other beings within the household. Violence against a partner and harm to children can happen simultaneously, creating a broader cycle of abuse and trauma that can affect family dynamics.

This part mainly focuses on the impact of domestic abuse on women rather than men. While acknowledging that domestic abuse affects all genders. This focus is chosen because of the following examination of novels that focus on domestic abuse aimed at the female gender.

3.1.1 Physical and Sexual Abuse

A significant part of domestic abuse includes physical and sexual abuse. These forms of abuse highlight the serious nature of domestic abuse as it can result in death, serious injuries, or disability, as well as mental distress.⁵⁶ This indicates the dual nature of domestic abuse, as it is harmful both to our mental and emotional well-being, as well as the physical health. Perpetrators often use force, control, and intimidation as tools to inflict harm. Physical violence, according to Harne, can be depicted through examples such as being punched, slapped, hit, bitten, pinched, kicked, pushed, shoved, burned, strangled, or beaten. And additionally, while not explicitly mentioned, physical violence also involves the use of weapons and random objects to impose harm on the victim, which can include basic household items such as knives, belts, scissors, furniture, and furthermore, the use of hot tools such as hot irons and cigarettes.⁵⁷ This demonstrates the wide range of methods used

⁵³ "What Is Domestic Abuse?", Women's Aid, accessed 29 November 2024, <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/>.

⁵⁴ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 4.

⁵⁵ Ola W. Barnett, Cindy L. Miller-Perrin, and Robin D. Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010), 18.

⁵⁶ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 7.

⁵⁷ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 3.

by abusers to dominate and uphold power and control over the victims. The inclusion of everyday objects as items in violation acts highlights that the abuse is not limited to the strength of the perpetrators, as they can use anything to enforce their power and cause harm to the individual.

In many cases, physical violence can be accompanied by sexual violence and often carried out immediately following the physical assault to further reinforce control and dehumanize the victim.⁵⁸ Sexual violence can be described as rape and humiliating range of pressured, unwanted and coerced sex. These acts are not only a violation to the victim's body and dignity, but they also serve as a tool for the abuser to assert power and dominance.⁵⁹

Blame plays a significant role in the experience of domestic abuse. As Ola W. Barnett and her co-workers explain, the pain of being assaulted is already overwhelming, but on top of that, victims often face the societal tendency to blame the victims of domestic violence for the abuse, and in some cases, victims tend to blame themselves.⁶⁰ This tendency intensifies the emotional and psychological burden on victims, often resulting in the feeling of shame, guilt, and worthlessness, which can make it significantly harder for them to seek help.⁶¹ The belief that they are the ones responsible for the abuse may amplify feelings of fear of judgement from others, isolating the victim from getting access to help and other resources.

3.1.2 Family violence

"Society tends to think of the family as a relatively safe place, a safe harbour, a place of sustenance and care. [...] Regrettably, this view of families is idealized."⁶² In reality, for many, the family becomes a place with domination of harm and fear, where abuse and control replace the idea of safety, care, and love. The reality is cruel, harsh, and even thought to be unlikely, but far from that lies the truth that this phenomenon is far too often a source of maltreatment and abuse followed by trauma. Understanding why family violence occurs requires complex knowledge of characteristics that interplay, such as individual, societal, cultural, and relational factors.⁶³ Ola W. Barnett suggests that it is the societal male

⁵⁸ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 4.

⁵⁹ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 4.

⁶⁰ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 361-362.

⁶¹ Rakovec-Felser, "Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective," 63.

⁶² Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 2.

⁶³ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 36-37.

dominance, an idealized perception of the family, certain family norms and behaviours, together with the influence of the media, that collectively contribute to creating a cultural tolerance for violence within families.⁶⁴ These types of factors not only normalize violence within families but also preserve harmful stereotypes that should be unacceptable in nowadays society. The perception of an idealized family discourages talking about abuse openly due to the fear of disrupting familial harmony. When authorities try to intervene in these disruptions within the families, their primary goal is to keep the family together and prevent the violence from occurring again.⁶⁵ However, this approach may not always be as effective as anticipated, as the prevention can be mismanaged or fail to recognize the root of the problem within the family.

Battering women and mistreatment of children is well known, but furthermore family violence includes child sexual abuse, child neglect, marital rape, sexual assault, stalking, elder abuse, and battered men.⁶⁶ Each of these examples of violence carries distinct consequences. Understanding that abuse does not only mean a physical maltreatment is essential for developing effective intervention and support programs that are made-to-measure to the different situations victims find themselves in.⁶⁷ Ola W. Barnett and her colleagues also debunk the societal myths about family violence, one of them being that love and violence cannot coexist. Which does not mirror the reality, as physical violence is not defined by the lack of love, rather by power and control. Violent partners can still be in love and have a family, as also they can still hit each other.⁶⁸

3.1.3 Impact on Children

The effect of domestic abuse extends to more than just the immediate victim, as it can leave scars on children exposed to it. Harne and Radford said, on the basis of many studies, that children can be witnesses of domestic abuse in several different ways. For instance, they might overhear it, which can be just as traumatic as witnessing it firsthand, because the sounds of violence can trigger their imagination, which can lead them to imagine the worst possible outcomes.⁶⁹ As a result, children without directly witnessing the abuse can develop

⁶⁴ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 10.

⁶⁵ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 5.

⁶⁶ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 36-37.

⁶⁷ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 37.

⁶⁸ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 36.

⁶⁹ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 57. See also Caroline Abrahams, *The Hidden Victims: Children and Domestic Violence* (London: NCH Action for Children, 1994); Peter G. Jaffe, David A. Wolfe, and Susan Kaye Wilson, *Children of Battered Women* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1990)

a profound trauma as a result of the traumatic experience, which can manifest in feelings of fear of the parent, anxiety, and mental health challenges further in their life.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Barnett claims that children who are part of the abuse or are witnesses of an abuse in a family have a greater tendency to engage in violence themselves later in their lives.⁷¹ Growing up in an environment where abuse is a normalized part of their life can influence understanding of relationships and conflict resolution. As a result, children may replicate the patterns of aggression they witness or potentially can develop aggression themselves as a result of the frustration of what they had to witness. Atlas Galit further develops the argument that abused children have trouble regulating their own feelings. They observe abusive relationships where love and hatred are intertwined, stating: "...the people you love are also those you hate."⁷² This duality explains the emotional turmoil children may experience. Children depend on their parents for love and safety, which are fundamental needs during their development, however, when the same person is the source of the pain and frustration, it creates deep internal struggle. For children in development, it can create a barrier for their understanding of emotions and relationships.⁷³

Survivors of child abuse may wish that growing up would bring them a form of escape and freedom. However, growing up in an environment where violence is always present shapes their personality that leaves the survivor with fundamental problems connected to the ability to trust, maintain their independence, and pursue their ambition.⁷⁴ As Judith Herman explains, while adulthood may provide survivors of child abuse a physical escape, the psychological impacts will remain, deeply influencing their sense of themselves and how they perceive the world.

⁷⁰ Harne and Radford, *Tackling Domestic Violence*, 58.

⁷¹ Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 3.

⁷² Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 219-220.

⁷³ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 124.

⁷⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 161.

4 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOVELS

This part of the bachelor's thesis focuses on the analysis of Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us*, with the focus on the central themes of domestic abuse, generational trauma, and breaking the cycle of abuse. The analysis aims to explore how these themes are reflected through character development and thematic representation, emphasizing the psychological effects of abuse and the repetition of patterns across the generations.

4.1 *It Ends with Us*

The novel *It Ends with Us* follows a narrative of protagonist Lily Bloom's present experiences with the intervention of flashbacks through journal entries addressed to Ellen DeGeneres, revealing her past. This dual timeline allows the reader to understand Lily's present situation and her perception of love and relationships. The plot is mainly about the themes of love, trauma, and abuse, and resilience.

The novel opens with the protagonist Lily Bloom, who lives in Boston, introducing her situation of processing the death of her father after attending his funeral in Maine. She reflects on her relationship with him, but instead of mourning, she reflects on his abusive behaviour towards her mother. This first scene immediately introduces the central theme of domestic abuse. Then she meets another protagonist, Ryle Kincaid, an ambitious neurosurgeon on a rooftop in Boston. Their conversation is instantly revealing of Ryle's emotional barrier as Ryle expresses his aversion to relationships, while Lily tells him about her dream to open a flower shop. This interaction establishes the novel's romantic plotline.

Lily's present narrative is interwoven with journal entries from her adolescence, which she used as a means of processing her emotions and experiences, highlighting the importance of writing as a coping mechanism. These entries provide the reader with insight into her adolescence and her first relationship with a young homeless boy, Atlas Corrigan, whom she helped. What started as a compassion for the young boy and the need to help him developed into a deep emotional connection. However, the challenges they had to face ultimately led to their separation.

The central narrative revolves around the romantic relationship between Lily Bloom and Ryle Kincaid, although their initial encounter does not suggest that either of them is ready for a serious commitment, they meet again months later. As Lily pursues her dream to open her flower shop, she befriends Allysa Kincaid, Ryle's sister, although she does not

know it at first. This connection serves as the link that brings Lily and Ryle back together, allowing their relationship to gradually evolve over time. Despite Ryle's known aversion to a deeper connection, he suddenly becomes very invested in Lily. His charm, intelligence, and success make him seem, in the eyes of Lily as the ideal partner, so she eventually falls in love with him. However, early into their relationship, Ryle's violent tendencies emerge when he loses his temper and pushes Lily. He expresses immediate remorse, but in Lily, it awakens memories from her past about her parents' abusive relationship. In the end, she rationalizes his behaviour as an anomaly and a momentary lapse in control, which was reinforced by his following actions of regret.

Tension in their relationship intensifies during the time as Lily's past resurfaces, particularly with her teenage love, Atlas Corrigan. Atlas, now a successful owner of a restaurant, re-enters Lily's life through an encounter in his restaurant on coincidence. Atlas immediately recognizes warning signs of abuse in Lily's relationship, but she reassures him that everything is all right. Atlas's presence triggers Ryle's feelings of insecurity, possessiveness, and the situation escalates into more conflict in the relationship between Lily and Ryle.

Ryle's abusive behaviour gradually escalates and reaches a critical turning point when, during an argument, Ryle attempts to leave, and she follows him. He pushes her off the staircase. Upon regaining consciousness, Ryle tries to gaslight her, distorting the reality and to evade responsibility for his actions. Lily remembers what happened and does not believe him. He, in full rage, calls her a liar and storms out of their apartment. After this incident, Lily and Ryle attempt to set boundaries for how they will approach future conflict.

Despite their reconciliation, Ryle begins to be more jealous and possessive. The breaking point occurs when Ryle finds Lily's journals detailing her past with Atlas. This moment escalates into an argument where Ryle completely loses control and uses physical and sexual violence. This is one of the crucial moments for Lily. As hard as it is for her, she realizes that no matter how much Ryle claims to change, his abusive behaviour persists. The weight of this realization leads Lily to think about the difficult decision to leave Ryle, even made more difficult as she finds out that she is pregnant.

The novel concludes with the birth of their daughter and Lily's decision to leave and divorce Ryle. This decision symbolizes her resilience and the conscious choice to end the cycle of domestic abuse. Unlike her mother, Lily refuses to continue with another cycle of domestic abuse with her daughter, and she chooses autonomy instead. Furthermore, Lily

starts a new chapter of her life, embracing single motherhood while ensuring that her daughter maintains a relationship with Ryle. Highlighting the importance of external and social support in the healing process are her supportive friends and family she is surrounded with. Additionally, she reconnects with Atlas, though the novel does not place emphasis on their romantic journey. Instead, the focus is on Lily's personal strength to end the cycle, growth, and empowerment.

4.2 *It Starts with Us*

It Starts with Us is the sequel to *It Ends with Us*, continuing the story of Lily Bloom as she starts her new life after ending an abusive cycle in her family. Told from alternating viewpoints of Lily and Atlas, the novel explores themes of recovery, love, and the challenges after breaking the cycle of abuse. As the novel focuses more on the romantic relationship between Atlas and Lily, the analysis will be shorter than the first novel. This novel provides a look into life after breaking the cycle of domestic abuse.

The novel opens with Lily adjusting to single mother's life with her daughter, while trying to figure out how to approach fragile and tense co-parenting dynamics with Ryle. The reunion with Atlas Corrigan reignites their connection. While Atlas expresses a desire for a relationship with Lily, she remains hesitant due to the fear of Ryle's possessive nature and his volatile behaviour.

Atlas's perspective provides deeper insights into his past experiences, revealing more about what he endured as a homeless teenager. His narrative also dives into personal challenge he must face as he discovers that his estranged mother, who neglected him and abandoned him has another son, Josh, his half-brother, who is trying to find him after experiencing issues with his mother. Determined to give him a better life, Atlas tries to rekindle with him and begins to navigate and build a family for both.

Further into the narrative, Lily and Atlas's relationship deepens, which makes Ryle's possessiveness and controlling behaviour escalate, creating tension within their co-parenting dynamic. His resentment towards Lily's new relationship makes Lily worried about his potential for an abusive behaviour. However, Lily chooses her independence and refuses Ryle to dictate her choices. She prioritizes her and her daughter's well-being and chooses a future with Atlas. The novel concludes on a hopeful note, depicting Lily, Atlas, Emerson, and Josh embracing a new family dynamic.

As the novel dives into other topics and evolves more around Atlas's narrative, the analysis will involve less parts from this novel.

4.3 Analysis of the Themes and Characters

Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* explores complex themes of love, trauma, cyclical abuse, and resilience. The novel allows reader to examine how past experiences shape individual's present perceptions and relationships. With the intervention of protagonists' past and present, Hoover allows the reader an insight into psychological consequences of domestic abuse and cognitive processes which are shaped by our past.

This section will analyse novel's central themes of generational trauma and domestic abuse alongside with the exploration of character development of protagonist Lily Bloom.

4.3.1 Domestic Abuse

The novel first introduces the theme of domestic abuse in the very first scene when Lily shares what they call a naked truth with Ryle about her late father. She describes how his anger during arguments often escalates into physical violence against her mother. Furthermore, she expresses how the abuse became inevitable and a norm within their marriage and household. As she reflects on her past, she acknowledges the guilt she feels now for not taking an action, realizing that it made her feel "just as guilty."⁷⁵ This part provides a reflection on the normalization of domestic abuse within familial structures. Lily acknowledges that the violence became a norm in their household, illustrating that prolonged exposure to domestic abuse in any form can lead to normalization of abuse. The end part of the quote that reveals the guilt and moral conflict experienced by the bystander of domestic violence. Children raised in the abusive household often struggle to distinguish between right or wrong in the context of a relationship. They may believe that the abuse is an unavoidable aspect or even a normal part of a romantic relationship to the point where it may be difficult to recognize unhealthy and dangerous dynamics in life.⁷⁶ For some, the realization may come in adulthood, allowing them to break free from these patterns, however, others may unknowingly remain within the cycle, seeking out relationships with similar dysfunctional dynamics they witnessed in their upbringing or fail to recognize the abuse within their relationship. Children trapped in an abusive household may further believe that they are

⁷⁵ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 16-17.

⁷⁶ Rain Newcomb, "RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING: The Dangers of Dating Violence," *Daughters* 7, no. 2 (April 2002): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1293>.

somehow responsible for the abuse. As adult survivors can continue to view themselves as guilty for not intervening and take the shame and guilt of the abusers upon themselves.⁷⁷

[...] When that happened [abuse], 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.

This part summarizes the cycle of abuse, as mentioned before, alternates between four stages: tension building, acting-out period, the honeymoon phase, and lastly the calm period.⁷⁸ Lily illustrates this cycle by describing how her father would get triggered, then he would lash out at her mother, physically or verbally, forcing control and dominance over the victim. This represents the acting-out phase. Following that would be the honeymoon phase and calm period during which the abuser would create a false sense of reconciliation with the victim, leading the victim to believe that the abusive behaviour is temporary and abnormality. This is, as Lily describes it, the time when he would buy them stuff and take them out, creating this feeling of love and security. From the child's perspective, the sense of love and safety becomes distorted as they associate affection and nice gestures only as a resolution to previous conflict. Lily, as a child, finds herself looking forward to the abuse and the aftermath as she has internalized a wrong perception of relationships and well-being, where cycles of abuse are followed by moments of reward and affection. This makes her believe that love and safety are conditioned upon the abusive cycle, developing her inaccurate understanding of healthy relationship dynamics.

Further into the story, the journal entries depict how violent the abuse was and what was a part of it. In one entry, Lily describes an incident that occurred during a heavy snowfall when her mother arrived home and parked in the garage to carry the groceries in. However, while doing so, Lily's father pulled into the driveway and started honking impatiently and frustrated that he could not park inside immediately after arriving. Lily continued to unload the groceries, however, her mother recognized his anger and appeared scared. Then she instructed Lily to continue unloading as she went to move the car.⁷⁹ Shortly after, Lily heard a crash and, assuming someone had slipped on the ice, she went to investigate. While initially

⁷⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 153.

⁷⁸ Rakovec-Felser, "Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective," 63.

⁷⁹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 109.

Lily could not locate her mother, she then realized her father had pinned her against the hood of the car, choking her, yelling at her that she does not respect how hard he works with a look that Lily described as “full of hatred.”⁸⁰ Lily, panicking, attempted to help by jumping on her father’s back, trying to hit him in the side of his head. However, she was suddenly thrown off, hurting her head. After regaining consciousness, she then discovered that her father had left, while her mother helped her with her head injury.⁸¹

This part provides a complex depiction of domestic abuse and psychological processes of the victim, the witness, and the abuser. The act of choking signifies an extreme form of intimate partner abuse, it is a tactic used to exert dominance and maintain control, an example of the behaviours described in the Power and Control Wheel developed by Pence and Paymar.⁸²

The abuser’s statement about his hard work not being respected, implies that he views his action as justified and that the victim provoked this action by herself, shifting the blame on the victim. This shows how abusers use tactics to evade accountability and victim-blame to maintain control. By blaming and gaslighting the victim, the abuser creates a sense where his violent behaviour was a consequence of not being appreciated, which creates sense of guilt, self-doubt, and helplessness in the victim. As it continues, Lily’s mother does not fight back, which can indicate that she has internalized the abuse, believing that she deserves it, or that she understands fighting back would trigger more abusive behaviour. Her passivity underscores the psychological effects of prolonged abuse.

Lily’s perspective as a witness adds an important layer as she transforms from a passive observer to an active intervenor. However, this excerpt still signals the helplessness of victims of domestic abuse. Though Lily tried to intervene, the power imbalance remains evident, as the excerpt suggests she was thrown off by her father and even harmed herself. This moment foreshadows the physical dominance of her father held over her and her mother. This excerpt demonstrates how the abuse extends beyond the immediate victim to a bystander, which can affect the whole family dynamics.

As the passage continues, her mother takes her down to the hospital to get her injury examined. During the ride, Lily recalls that her mother said only one thing: “When they ask

⁸⁰ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 110.

⁸¹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 110.

⁸² E. Pence and M. Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model* (New York: Springer, 1993), 62.

you what happened, tell them you slipped on the ice.”⁸³ These words bring Lily to tears as she thought that this incident would be a breaking point and that her mother would finally leave the abusive relationship. However, in that moment, she realized that if her mother were unwilling to leave her abusive husband after he hurt their daughter, she likely never would.⁸⁴

This reaction of Lily’s mother reflects the emotional abuse and manipulation which traps the victim in the cycle of an abusive relationship. Her instinctive reaction to lie about the incident underscores how fear and control shapes victim’s responses, prioritizing avoiding further conflict at the cost of their own and children’s safety. As well as it shows the impact of prolonged abuse as Lily’s mother believes that protecting the abuser’s reputation and avoiding seeking justice is the safest option, developing a coping mechanism in the process. By portraying this experience through the perception of both victim and witness, it illustrates how domestic abuse can extend to more than the immediate victim. For Lily, witnessing the situation created a psychological turmoil, as she clings to the hope that this would be the breaking point, the last thing they both, her mother and her, had to endure. She faced the emotional conflict and the realization that her mother would continue to protect the abuser. This highlights how children who witness abuse are often loyal to the victim and fear the abuser, which makes them powerless and helpless in the situation of abuse as they want to help to protect the victim, in this case the mother, but fear further action from the abuser, the father. This psychological conflict creates trauma, as it can deeply affect their sense of safety and may internalize the abusive behaviour as normal. Furthermore, it can develop into issues connected with trust and socialization.

In one instance, as revealed through Lily’s journal entries, she overhears her parents fighting. When she goes to see what is happening, she witnesses her father trying to assault her mother. As the situation intensifies Lily thinks about interviewing, but her mother manages to slip away. Lily is desperately urging her mother to call the police. However, her mother refuses, which makes Lily frustrated, saying: “Mom, he was trying to rape you!”⁸⁵ However, her mother responds by downplaying the severity of the situation, saying: “...It’s not like that, Lily. We’re married, and sometimes marriage is just... you’re too young to understand it.”⁸⁶ This statement reflects deeply integrated societal beliefs that have united unconditional consent and obligation within a marriage, which has blurred the lines between

⁸³ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 110.

⁸⁴ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 110.

⁸⁵ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 155.

⁸⁶ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 155.

abuse and social roles. Furthermore, this quote shows how victims develop coping mechanisms. Rather than acknowledging the violation and battery, she states that it is something normal and an aspect of a marriage.⁸⁷ Lily's mother has a deeply integrated idea that a marriage comes with obligations, despite dissatisfaction. Furthermore, it shows that she has accepted her suffering by justifying her husband's action. Additionally, this quote shows another side of domestic violence and that is sexual abuse.

First time Lily experiences abuse herself happens a few months into her new relationship with Ryle. During the preparation for a dinner, Ryle burns his hands and Lily, finding the situation amusing, laughs at the mess they made. When she wants to inspect Ryle's hand, still laughing, Ryle becomes frustrated and pushes her, Lily falls and injures herself. Ryle, upset about the potential impact on his career, first fails to recognize the actions he made. It takes him a minute to realize that he has hurt Lily, at that point he begins to apologize, referring to the incident as an "accident," as something unintentional.⁸⁸

His initial concern was not for Lily but for his career, which signals self-centred behaviour. This moment reveals the emotional conflict within Lily, where she recognizes parallels between the event she experienced with Ryle and the abuse she witnessed in her parents' relationship during her upbringing. Furthermore, this passage highlights the early signs of abusive traits in Ryle and Lily's relationship. Ryle's choice of words plays a significant role in shaping how Lily interprets the event, which is a common pattern in domestic abuse. By naming the incident as an "accident," he tries to imply that his action was not intentional and therefore not abusive. This minimization downplays the severity of the event, making it seem like an anomaly and a one-time thing. It is a common manipulation tactic used by abusers to avoid responsibility. As the relationship progresses, this tactic makes it harder for Lily to recognize warning signs of abuse. Later in the novel, when another violent incident occurs, Ryle again employs this tactic of minimization and downplays the situation. During an argument, Ryle becomes enraged and leaves their apartment. Lily, emotionally unstable and afraid, follows him, hoping they can sort out the situation. She catches up with him on the staircase, but in his anger, Ryle pushes her, causing her to fall down the stairs and lose consciousness.⁸⁹ When Lily regains her awareness, Ryle is sitting next to her, checking her injury on her head. However, when she asks what happened, Ryle

⁸⁷ Sascha Griffing et al., "Reasons for Returning to Abusive Relationships: Effects of Prior Victimization," *Journal of Family Violence* 20, no. 5 (October 2005): 345-346, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-005-6611-8>.

⁸⁸ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 186-187.

⁸⁹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 230.

immediately fabricates an answer, insisting that she tripped and fell off the stairs. Though Lily is still unwell, she indicates that he is lying, because she remembers he pushed her. Ryle, in denial insists on the fact that she caused the fall herself. This gaslighting attempt makes Lily angry, and despite her state, she orders him to leave the apartment, even though he insists on staying as he acknowledges that she is hurt.⁹⁰

This scene not only demonstrates the escalation of abuse in Ryle's behaviour, but it also highlights how Ryle is more reliant on gaslighting, which makes Lily question her own perception of what truly happened. With the attempt to gaslight Lily, Ryle tries to make himself not accountable for what happened. Furthermore, this moment marks a pivotal change in Lily's awareness. Unlike the previous instance, she actively resists Ryle's manipulation. By not accepting Ryle's gaslighting, she begins to recognize the cycle of abuse and tries to distance herself. However, it leaves her in an emotional state, where despite recognizing the abusive and manipulative behaviour, she grapples with emotions of love and longing for Ryle.

The pivotal instance, when Lily experiences domestic abuse, is when she gets home, and Ryle is there waiting on her in the dark, holding a Boston magnet from her past with Atlas. His attitude is alarming, she cannot sort out if he is angry or seeking intimacy. When Ryle starts to ask about the magnet, out of fear, Lily lies about its meaning to her. He begins to kiss and touch her, Ryle becoming more forceful, pulling her hair, demanding her to take off her shirt, and read an article. This article is about Atlas's restaurant, where Atlas mentions the text that is written on the magnet, which is connected to someone who means a lot to him. This triggers Ryle's jealousy and possessiveness, escalating into more abusive behaviour.⁹¹

This passage serves as a clear example of how multifaced the domestic abuse can be, illustrating how abusers employ manipulation, emotional control, and physical violence to assert dominance and power over the victim. Ryle uses manipulation and sexual tension, which leaves Lily in the state of confusion and psychological distress. The progression from subtle emotional pressure to physical aggression, like pulling her hair, represents a common pattern of escalation of the abuse. Ryle's demands to perform certain acts illustrate how

⁹⁰ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 233-234.

⁹¹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 263.

abusers often blur the lines between intimacy and dominance. Ryle's physical and sexual dominance over Lily threatens her autonomy and further indicate his power over her.

As Lily retreats to their bedroom, finding out that what really triggered Ryle were her journals, which he had read. He follows her into the bedroom, enraged by her past with Atlas, he physically and sexually forces himself on her, trying to assault her. Terrified, Lily tries to calm him down, but he refuses to back off, biting her tattoo on her shoulder. Ryle then tries to sexually assault her, and when she fights back by biting his tongue, he reciprocates by headbutting her, knocking her unconscious.⁹²

This scene demonstrates how Ryle's intense jealousy overrides any sense of empathy and respect for Lily as a person. He continues to assert his power over Lily, even as she tries to fight back. The act of headbutting her in response to her resistance shows how the abusers leave the victim with limited possibilities of escape or self-defence. Ryle's violent reaction underscores the power imbalance in their relationship. Additionally, it highlights the cycle of abuse, where when the victims attempt to regain control, they are met with further punishments.

4.3.2 Generational Trauma and the Impact on Characters

Generational trauma, as mentioned before, is a transmission of emotional, psychological, and sometimes behavioural wounds through generations.⁹³ This theme plays an important role in the novel *It Ends with Us* and is explored through the protagonist Lily Bloom, who was exposed to domestic abuse and abusive behaviour during her upbringing, which shapes her life in adulthood. This encounter shapes not only her perspective but also her relationships and reactions. The novel portrays how trauma can be inherited through direct exposure to distressing events, but also through emotional responses and the cognitive framework surrounding love and abuse.

Lily's parents' relationship shapes her view and response to the abusiveness in her own life, illustrating how domestic violence can impact an individual and be passed down through generations. As mentioned before, when Lily's first experiences abuse in adulthood herself, she gets flashbacks to when her father hurt her mother, but instead of Ryle's voice, she hears her father's voice apologizing to her mother.⁹⁴ Further on, as Lily is still conflicted about the

⁹² Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 265.

⁹³ "What Is Generational Trauma? How The Past Affects The Future," 23 February 2023, <https://wellbeingcounselling.ca/what-is-generational-trauma/>.

⁹⁴ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 188

incident, she feels that she wants to “lash out” at him and react as she wishes her mother had done. But fighting within her, she wants to believe that Ryle is nothing like her father and that this was just an accident.⁹⁵ This part highlights the impact of generational trauma. Lily’s experience of abuse in her adulthood relationships triggers flashbacks to the moments she witnessed the abuse between her parents. In that moment, she does not even hear Ryle’s voice as she hears her father’s voice apologizing to her mother. This association highlights how trauma from one generation can influence the perception of future generations. Lily’s mind links Ryle’s actions to her father’s behaviour, reflecting the trauma stemming from growing up in an abusive household. Furthermore, we can see internal conflict within Lily that makes her want to escape the abuse. Her desire to “lash out” at Ryle reflects her suppressed emotions stemming from witnessing her mother’s helplessness in the abuse. This emotional turmoil is a longing to change the situation and take control, yet Lily struggles to focus on the present reality of the abuse itself. However, her desire is met with denial and justification that Ryle is nothing like her father. This denial is a form of self-protection as she wants to believe that her love is safe and healthy, unknowingly suppressing the fact that she is repeating the very same act she once hoped to escape.⁹⁶

Flashbacks are an essential element throughout the novel, serving as a tool which highlights the deep impact left by past trauma. As mentioned before, during a moment when Ryle attempts to sexually assault Lily, she instinctively closes her eyes, trying to cope with what is happening, the only image she can see is her father forcing onto her mother. This is pivotal, as it evokes feeling of fear and triggers an unresolved hatred she has towards her father. This reinforces her strength to fight back, and she tries to escape. However, as mentioned before, Ryle’s physical dominance overpowers her, and despite fighting back, he headbutted her into an unconscious state. The emotional weight of the flashbacks triggers more than fear, but also anger. The vivid memory of her helpless mother suffering fuels Lily and provides her with the strength to fight back as she tries to regain some control. This aligns with trauma theory from Herman, who suggests that individuals who grew up in an abusive household may experience flashbacks that can trigger emotional responses such as rage.⁹⁷ However, she is met with the reality of power imbalance in her abusive relationship.

⁹⁵ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 188.

⁹⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 120.

⁹⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 162.

In one scene from Lily's journal entries Lily recalls how her mother once warned her against calling the police after her mother was abused by her father, fearing that it could damage her father's career. When Lily insists that the police need to be involved, her mother assures Lily that doing that would only escalate things and encourages her to wait till the next day as things will "be better".⁹⁸ When Lily points out that her father attempted to assault her mother, Lily's mother dismisses it, refusing to acknowledge the severity of the situation, framing it as a complex and normal part of marriage, and for Lily, that she is too young to understand.⁹⁹ Further in the story, Lily, as an adult, finds herself in a similar situation. After experiencing abuse from Ryle, she contemplates calling the police but hesitates. The thought of pressing charges makes her feel overwhelmed, and she fears the impact it would have on his career.¹⁰⁰

Here are two situations illustrating both Lily's mother and Lily herself rationalizing the perpetrator's behaviour and prioritizing societal expectations and the abuser's reputation over their own safety. In the first excerpt, Lily, as a child, struggles to understand why her mother would remain in such an abusive relationship. However, the second excerpt shows, as an adult, Lily now finds herself in a similar position, making the same decision as her mother, subconsciously understanding the emotional and psychological complexities behind the decision of leaving an abusive relationship, especially when love and societal pressures are involved. Lily's experience reflects how victims often internalize the patterns they observe in childhood, which demonstrates how upbringing or experience of abuse can make a difference on the tolerance for mistreatment in adulthood. Despite living within an abusive household and witnessing her mother's position toward her father as an abuser, Lily, in a similar way, hesitates to act against her husband Ryle, mirroring her mother's actions and justification for staying in such a relationship.

In the first excerpt, her mother asserts that calling the police will make it worse, which can reflect the widespread belief that arguments, and furthermore, domestic violence, should be handled privately rather than through legal intervention.¹⁰¹ This statement highlights the

⁹⁸ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 155

⁹⁹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 155-156.

¹⁰⁰ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 268.

¹⁰¹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 155

fear of victims that seeking the help of authorities may not always lead to protection, but could trigger the abuser, which can escalate the abuse within a household.¹⁰²

Cycles exist because they are excruciating to break. It takes an astronomical amount of pain and courage to disrupt familiar pattern. Sometimes it seems easier to just keep running in the same familiar circles, rather than facing the fear of jumping and possibly not landing on your feet.¹⁰³

This quote summarizes the psychological and emotional difficulty of breaking free from generational trauma, particularly concerning domestic abuse. The quote emphasizes that breaking the cycles requires immense pain and courage. The fear of the unknown and stepping away can be so overwhelming that people may choose to stay in harmful but familiar situations, as it often may seem safer to remain within the cycle than to risk the uncertainty that comes with the change.¹⁰⁴ Lily exemplifies this struggle. Having to grow up witnessing her mother as part of an abusive relationship, she initially finds herself rationalizing Ryle's behaviour. However, her decision to leave Ryle, despite the love and longing she feels for him, symbolizes the pain, but the necessity of personal choice of a better future.

4.3.3 Ending the Cycle

After she gave birth to their daughter, Lily makes a painful decision to divorce Ryle and finally end the cycle of abuse, even though Ryle promised to get help, which many of perpetrators are not even capable of thinking about. Ryle refuses to accept her decision because he hopes they can still be a family. Lily greatly exemplifies to him how hard the decision she is making is and what impact it will have on their daughter. She asks him what would he do if their daughter one day came to him and told him that her boyfriend was violent to her, what would he do if her daughter came to him and told him that her husband pushed her down the stairs and said it was an accident and what would he do if one day their daughter came to him and told him that her husband tried to sexually assault her. In this moment, there is a realization in Ryle which marks the understanding of what he had done to Lily, as he answers her that he would beg her to leave that man and never take him back.¹⁰⁵ By shaping the conversation around their daughter, Lily subtly shifts the perspective from

¹⁰² Rakovec-Felser, "Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective," 64.

¹⁰³ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 360.

¹⁰⁴ Galit, *Emotional Inheritance*, 223.

¹⁰⁵ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 358-359.

herself as the victim and putting Ryle into a tough position, compelling him to consider how he would react if their daughter faced the same treatment as he treated Lily. This forces Ryle to view the situation without his self-serving justification he used, and his realization that he would beg her daughter to leave, marks the moment of first time acknowledging his actions and the consequences of them.

In one part, mentioned further in the thesis, Lily expresses her awareness of how the exposure of the child to abuse within partners and the family shapes perception of relationship, love, and the feeling of security.¹⁰⁶ Lily acknowledges that Ryle possesses positive qualities as a father, at least in the present moment, however, she knows that his uncontrollable temper and outbursts would have far more lasting impact on their daughter. Which can play a crucial role in shaping her understanding of love and safety, as it would impact the environment where the child would be raised. As Lily reflects on her childhood, where she witnessed the abuse, she recalls how it conditioned her and refuses to let the history repeat itself.

Lily's decision to break the cycle of generational trauma and abuse in her family is a challenging decision, and it would be far more difficult without the support surrounding her. While she demonstrates personal strength, her journey towards breaking the cycle is enabled by the people in her life, who offer her emotional and physical support. Her mother, her husband's sister, and Atlas serve as essential characters who help Lily to cope with the life's challenges during this difficult period.

Lily's mother plays an important role in Lily's decision. Though her own experience may have been different, as she never left her husband, who abused her and Lily, it is her mother's words that encourage Lily to break up the relationship. When Lily comes to her to confront her about her own relationship, her mother acknowledges the difficulty of leaving an abuser. She expresses regret for not leaving but explains to her how every incident slowly pushes the limit of what a victim is capable of enduring, to the point where they start to believe that staying is easier than trying to leave. She says: "Eventually, you lose sight of your limit altogether, because you start to think 'I've lasted five years now. What's five more?'"¹⁰⁷ Her mother's testimony that she once found relief when her husband used "only a slap"¹⁰⁸ demonstrates how victims learn to cope with the abuse to the point they minimize

¹⁰⁶ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 360.

¹⁰⁷ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 335.

¹⁰⁸ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 335.

and rationalize it. By sharing this experience, she prompts Lily to leave now, rather than leaving later, where it will have far more lasting impact than now. She sheds light on Ryle's behaviour and explains to her that if he genuinely loved her, he would leave her himself, rather than risking hurting her again.¹⁰⁹

Ryle's sister, Allysa, further reinforces Lily's decision to leave, despite her familial ties to Ryle. Initially, Lily fears that if she left her brother Ryle, it would mean losing her friendship she built with Allysa. However, when Lily finally opens about the abuse, Allysa, respond with both sadness and firm support that she needs to leave Ryle. She says that Ryle might be her brother, and she loves him and wishes that Lily could find a way to forgive him but more importantly as her best friend she says: "[...] if you take him back, I will never speak to you again."¹¹⁰ Indicating her resentment to what Ryle did to her. Allysa's response is crucial as it breaks the common perception of family loyalty.

Finally, Atlas, serves as a significant source of emotional support, and his presence serves as a reminder of what healthy and respectful relationship should look like. As a character who understands the severity of abuse, as someone who have experienced firsthand as a child, he recognizes the abuse early on in Lily's relationship. While Lily's past with Atlas is a trigger for Ryle's jealousy, he tries to not overstep boundaries or interfere in their relationship. Rather than pressuring Lily to leave, he provides her with his phone number for a time when she would need it. When Lily, after the last incident with Ryle, finds herself in a position with nowhere to go, he offers her a safe space to recover.

This outside support system, from Lily's mother, Allysa, and Atlas, exemplifies how breaking free from an abusive relationship and putting an end to the cycle of trauma requires external support and encouragement. While personal decision and strength is crucial, survivors often need external support to navigate the challenges they may face after leaving the perpetrator.¹¹¹ While Lily demonstrates the lucky part of the victims, not all survivors have the resources necessary to leave the perpetrator, as well as they lack the social support needed in those tough times.

Lily's decision to divorce Ryle may end to the cycle of abuse, but it further influences her life and decisions after it. Despite choosing to leave Ryle, she does not want to erase him from her daughter's life, she needs to find a way to navigate co-parenting with him, which

¹⁰⁹ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 336.

¹¹⁰ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 315.

¹¹¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 89.

provides her with challenges, as Ryle's jealousy is still at play. Ryle's presence creates tension and anxiety within Lily as she wants to start rebuilding her life and reconnect with Atlas.

One of the most significant realizations Lily has after the divorce is how she reacts to anger due to the past experiences. When Atlas becomes visibly angry over the harm Ryle had caused her, Lily's initial reaction is fear. However, she can quickly recognize that Atlas's anger is not directed at her, as he is frustrated due to the protectiveness he feels towards her. This moment serves as a contrast to the rage she experienced with Ryle and her father, and the frustration Atlas expresses out of care. Acknowledging the distinction is a crucial step in her healing process, as she has associated that male anger relates to abuse and danger. However, from this point on, she can begin to distinguish that anger may stem from care and protection, rather than a need for control or dominance.¹¹²

All throughout the novel, Lily remains deeply affected by Ryle's behaviour, which shapes her decision and interaction long after their marriage has ended. Even though their marriage ended over a year ago and they function on a co-parenting level, she still fears that she needs to be careful around him, as any step forward in her personal life might be a trigger to him. When, on one instance, Ryle visits her apartment and finds out that she had someone over, he completely loses himself with jealousy and rage, pinning her down against a door.¹¹³ Though he eventually pulls away and leaves, his anger still bubbles in him when he sends a series of angry and full of hate messages. Lily chooses not to respond, as she realizes that his fury comes from her moving on. When he finally comes to apologize, Lily realizes that she has been protecting him for far too long, never pressing charges and not telling anyone about his violent outbursts, allowing him to be seen as a respectable man. In this moment, she decides to tell him that further aggressive outbursts will be told to her lawyer. This act enrages him, and he lashes out, trying to say she is nothing against her.¹¹⁴

These moments in the novel encapsulate the ongoing struggle after ending an abusive relationship, Lily must face. Even though their marriage ended, she still fears his volatility and his actions when it comes to her personal life. This shows the trauma, and the power abusers hold over their victims even after the relationship has ended. One of the key aspects of this moment is the fear and protection Lily feels when it comes to Ryle. She feels that she

¹¹² Colleen Hoover, *It Starts with Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2022), 182.

¹¹³ Hoover, *It Starts with Us*, 206-207.

¹¹⁴ Hoover, *It Starts with Us*, 227-230.

needs to tiptoe around him and protect him at all costs when it comes to his behaviour, as she never wants to trigger him or cause harm to their daughter. By staying silent, she let him be seen as a respectable, good man. She tries to reclaim power by threatening him with legal actions, which seem to only trigger him more. His reaction, where he uses verbal degradation and emotional abuse, is mostly an attempt used by abusers to maintain dominance.

Lily in that moment, realizes that: "...the hardest part about ending an abusive relationship is that you aren't necessarily putting an end to the bad moments. The bad moments still rear their ugly heads now and then. When you end an abusive relationship, it's the good moments you put an end to."¹¹⁵ She finally realizes that it was the love in their marriage that blinded the severely bad moments. But now, she sees Ryle's actions for what they truly are.

Lily's realization is a powerful acknowledgement of how hard it is to leave an abusive relationship. Lily explains how the effects of abuse remain long after the relationship is over. Though this is not the case in every abusive relationship, she still must communicate with Ryle as they try to be good parents to their daughter. Ryle's presence means that he still has some influence over her life. Which serves as a reminder that the abuse does not have to disappear when survivors leave. However, it also serves as another step on her healing journey as she recognizes that her love towards Ryle was what blinded her and stopped her from taking action. She has a chance to free herself from the power he holds over her, as she does not have to mourn the love that once existed. She can separate the good from the bad and regain her autonomy.

4.4 Meaning and Impact of the Title *It Ends with Us*

The title *It Ends with Us* carries significant thematic weight as it underscores the novel's central message about ending the cycles of abuse and intergenerational trauma. As it represents the protagonist Lily Bloom's great decision to end the abusive pattern of domestic abuse within their family to ensure a better future for herself, and furthermore for her daughter to not grow up witnessing or reliving the same experiences she endured in her upbringing.

My mother went through it.

I went through it.

¹¹⁵ Hoover, *It Starts with Us*. 231.

I'll be damned if I allow my daughter to go through it. I kiss her on the forehead and make her a promise. "It stops here. With me and you. It ends with us."¹¹⁶

Although the novel itself describes the abuse and the cyclical character of trauma, it also dives into the power of resentment and the importance of breaking the cycle of generational trauma. Lily's declaration functions as the novel's most powerful moment. By recognizing the generational cycle of abuse, she acknowledges the need to break the pattern that has recurred within her family. She ensures that her daughter does not experience the same trauma she and her mother faced. Lily's journey demonstrates that while trauma can shape one's perceptions and their behaviour, it does not have to define their future. The novel with this underscore the self-realization, self-worth, and emotional strength needed to end the cycle and create an environment for the process of healing. Lily refuses that the love she has for Ryle to justify the abuse within their relationship.

Lily reflects on her past experiences, stressing the importance of protecting her daughter from witnessing the aspects of abusive relationships. Although she still carries a significant amount of love for Ryle, she refuses it to justify the harm that he has caused. As Lily states, "I don't want her to see her father at his worst. I don't want her to see him when he loses his temper with me to the point that she no longer recognizes him as her father."¹¹⁷ She acknowledges the psychological and emotional scars that children who grew up in abusive households carry. She emphasizes how it does not matter how many good memories and moments you might have with the abusers, it is those worst moments which remain with you for far longer than the good ones. She fears that this would sway the perception of her daughter of Ryle as her father, just as the abuse she witnessed as a child shaped her connection with her father and understanding of relationships. This realization underscores Lily's understanding of breaking the cycle of abuse for the sake of future generations.

¹¹⁶ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 361.

¹¹⁷ Hoover, *It Ends with Us*, 360.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the topic of generational trauma and domestic abuse portrayed in the novels *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us* by Colleen Hoover. Moreover, the part of the objective was to show the severity of how trauma can influence more than just an individual, and how victims cope with abuse and trauma. Lily's character is profoundly shaped by her childhood experience as she witnessed her father's abusive behaviour towards her mother. This early experience evolved into unresolved trauma in her adult life, leading her into a similar circle of abuse in her relationship with her husband Ryle. This emphasizes how an early exposure to domestic abuse can significantly influence adult relationships and behavioural patterns. Despite recognizing the abusive patterns in her relationship, Lily initially rationalizes her husband's behaviour, subconsciously mirroring the behaviour of her mother and developing a form of coping mechanism. Hoover's novel here underscores the key component of generational trauma - internalized dysfunction in relationships and emotional responses. This demonstrates how victims of trauma can unconsciously replicate similar dynamics that they have been exposed to, resulting in a repeated cycle of abuse throughout generations.

Domestic abuse in Hoover's novels is not portrayed as a singular incident, but rather as an engraved cyclical pattern. Lily's experience shows how victims often remain in such cycles due to emotional attachment to the abuser, fear, and societal pressures. These factors can also be seen in her mother's behaviour, who chose to endure abuse in silence for many years. This portrays a parallel between Lily and her mother and highlights the fact that the absence of intervention leads to a repetition and normalization of the abuse.

Furthermore, the narrative introduces the crucial theme of breaking the cycle. Lily's eventual decision to leave Ryle, initiated by the birth of their daughter, represents a turning point in her personal development. By choosing to leave Ryle, she not only redefines her story, she also takes a critical step of protecting her daughter, consciously deciding not to pass on the cycle. Hoover emphasizes that such development is rarely possible alone. Lily's ability to make life-changing decisions is enabled by a supportive environment, which includes encouragement of her mother, emotional support from Ryle's sister, and the presence of Atlas, her friend and future romantic partner. This emphasizes the importance of external support in enabling victims to escape abusive relationships and the need of personal strength for the possibility of healing and recovery.

Both *It Ends with Us* and *It Starts with Us* offer a literary exploration of the complexities of domestic abuse and generational trauma. Hoover, through Lily, highlights the psychological consequences of exposure to domestic abuse and explores the internal struggles victims face when attempting to break free from the cyclical pattern. Hoover provides an insight into the transmission of generational trauma and how such experience shapes personality, emotional responses, and affects interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, her stories function as a tool for raising awareness. Through both realistic, accurate and emotional storytelling, she emphasizes the complexities of the abuse, and the resilience required to overcome it. While her novels should not serve as perfect resolutions to these issues, they offer a powerful exploration of the emotional, psychological, and social side of domestic abuse and generational trauma.

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