



العقل المحاصر: تحديد علامات متلازمة المرأة المعنفة في رواية كولين هوفر "انتهى الأمر بنا"
The Trapped Mind: Identifying Signs of Battered Women Syndrome in
Colleen Hoover's It End with Us

Abeer Ali Dinar
Imam Alkadhim University College: Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract

The violence against women such as sexual and physical abuse have been studied extensively in the literary works like poetry, novels and short fiction. Modern literature usually focuses on the representation of gender-based violence as a recurring theme. However, while abusive experiences are frequently portrayed, they are given limited attention especially to the psychological aftermath and long-term consequences of domestic abuse on women. Therefore, the present study aims at analyzing "Colleen Hoover's It Ends with Us", focusing on the psychological impact of violence that the protagonist Lily Bloom faces. The analysis examines how her experiences plays a role in shaping her personality, attitudes and behaviours regarding her father and her intimate relationships. This study employs Walker's theory of the Battered Woman Syndrome as a theoretical framework where a textual analysis of the novel is conducted to examine how Lily's violent upbringing impacts her character development as well as emotional responses.

This theory provides a psychological and legal framework to demonstrate that women who experience from domestic violence are inclined to develop some types of mental illness. The obtained findings reveal a significant lack of public awareness related to domestic violence in that many victims are often hesitant to disclose their experiences, and choose instead to conceal the abuse so as to avoid stigma or social exposure. Furthermore, experiencing domestic violence in childhood undermine the psychological foundations essential for forming healthy relationships.

Email: abeer.ali@iku.edu.iq

Published: 1- 3-2026

Keywords: Domestic Abuse;
Abuse Cycle; Learned
Helplessness; Victim; Batterer.

هذه مقالة وصول مفتوح بموجب ترخيص
CC BY 4.0
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

المخلص

لقد حظي العنف ضد المرأة، كالإيذاء الجنسي والجسدي، باهتمام واسع في الأعمال الأدبية كالشعر والروايات والقصص القصيرة. ويركز الأدب الحديث عادةً على تصوير العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي كموضوع متكرر. ومع ذلك، فبينما تُصوّر تجارب الإيذاء بشكل متكرر، إلا أنها لا تحظى بالاهتمام الكافي، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بالآثار النفسية والعواقب طويلة الأمد للعنف المنزلي على النساء. لذا، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل رواية "النهاية معنا" لكوئين هوفر، مع التركيز على الأثر النفسي للعنف الذي تتعرض له بطلة الرواية، ليلي بلوم. ويتناول التحليل كيف تُسهم تجاربها في تشكيل شخصيتها ومواقفها وسلوكياتها تجاه والدها وعلاقاتها الحميمة. وتستعين هذه الدراسة بنظرية وكر لمتلازمة المرأة المعنفة كإطار نظري، حيث يُجرى تحليل نصي للرواية لدراسة كيفية تأثير نشأة ليلي العنيفة على تطور شخصيتها واستجاباتها العاطفية.

توفر هذه النظرية إطاراً نفسياً وقانونياً لإثبات أن النساء اللواتي يتعرضن للعنف المنزلي أكثر عرضة للإصابة ببعض أنواع الأمراض النفسية. تكشف النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها عن نقص كبير في الوعي العام بالعنف الأسري، حيث يتردد العديد من الضحايا في الإفصاح عن تجاربهم، ويختارون بدلاً من ذلك إخفاء الإساءة لتجنب الوصم الاجتماعي أو الفضيحة. علاوة على ذلك، فإن التعرض للعنف الأسري في مرحلة الطفولة يُضعف الأسس النفسية الضرورية لبناء علاقات صحية.

Introduction

Since the early feminist discourse, researchers (e.g. Aune & Redfern 2013; McCue 2008) have argued that domestic violence is a feminist issue) as it deals with the status and position of women in the household. A feminist perspective usually examines some matter, which are relevant to the subordination of women, gender construction and the unequal distribution of power. These factors contribute to many types of violence. Based on this viewpoint, domestic violence is dealt with as a manifestation of socially constructed gender roles as well as power imbalances.

Furthermore, Tyson (1999: 83) argues that traditional gender roles “exclude women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in academia and corporate world), paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job.” These gender norms place men in the position of authority and decision-making power. Therefore, many researcher (e.g. Flax) argue that men are socially constructed to occupy the role of the breadwinner.

Domestic violence is usually portrayed as a family-oriented issue and is also defined broadly as a recurring pattern of abusive or coercive behaviours, resulting in physical harm, sexual coercion, psychological trauma, emotional distress or financial exploitation of the victim. It essentially involves mistreating one partner by another within the dynamics of an intimate relationship. In this connection, Healey, Smith and O’Sullivan (1998) maintain that domestic violence could be described as the use of violent and controlling behaviours by one adult to exert power and dominance over their intimate partner; this constitutes one type of domestic abuse.

Because domestic violence is a gendered issue, using a feminist lens allows for the examination of gender constructions and the problems arising from them. As argued by Flax, gender relations are shaped and reinforced through every aspect of daily lives. Feminist theory encourages researchers to engage with narratives that bring the public closer to the reality of women’s lives. It seeks to examine and foreground everything that has been ‘suppressed, unarticulated or denied within male-dominant viewpoints. The analysis of the selected literary text through a feminist perspective is of great significance since domestic

violence predominantly impacts women and is closely associated with gender inequality issues. A feminist critique of domestic violence represents a broad and diverse field. Thus, this study focuses mainly on intimate partner violence. According to Anderson, “some researchers have overlooked gender in their analyses of intimate violence, some feminist researchers have failed to consider how power structures formed by factors beyond gender may contribute to domestic assaults” (1997: 657).

According to Tyson (1999), feminist criticism “examines the way in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women.” Thus, the use of this theoretical framework along with related notions like gender roles and patriarchal oppression facilitates a more comprehensive interpretation and understanding of the texts related to domestic violence as a systemic oppression manifestation. As pointed out by Tyson, women encounter subjugation across almost all spheres of cultural and social life.

For the purpose of this study, the oppression of women in the social and psychological domains should be highlighted. Women are most commonly oppressed as a result of their gender roles and societal expectations. Moreover, feminist theory could be used as a critical framework for the interpretation and understanding of domestic violence issues, as it is inherently associated with socially constructed concepts of femininity and masculinity. Both Marxism and feminism share one ground, especially recognizing the fact that women are positioned within hierarchical structures of power which perpetuate inequality. Feminist readings catch the attention of researchers to examine how women are represented in literary works and to take into account the silenced voices of marginalized female characters, even within narratives themselves. Therefore, the use of a feminist lens in literary analysis might contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of women regarding domestic violence as well as the broader socio-cultural systems sustaining their oppression.

Domestic violence does not only involve aggressive beatings and hitting but rather it could also take the form of a simple joke made by the batterer, which is aimed to affect his victim. It could appear as a little push or shove that can be perceived as a sign of what is to come in the future. Domestic violence against a woman may be minor and deemed insignificant; therefore, it is significant for the victim to resist this violence as much as she can.

The victims of domestic abuse often become trapped in a recurring cycle of violence and this makes it difficult for them to leave their abusive partners. Many researchers have studied this phenomenon, confirming the existence of a cyclical pattern of violence within intimate relationships characterized by abuse. This section discusses learned-helplessness and power and control. These two aspects are inter-related and assist in explaining the causes of domestic violence and the reasons why abused women submit to violence.

This research examines the different types of abuses used by the perpetrator against his victim as described in the texts. Besides, it focuses on the central figure of analysis i.e. the abused woman herself. In this respect, Walker’s *Battered Woman Syndrome* is considered as the main theoretical framework. Walker (1979) argues that certain psychological and behavioural responses tend to be consistent though the abuse effect and intensity differ among individual women. In line with this view, subsequent studies, such as Fulu (2013) have revealed notable commonalities in the experiences as well as coping mechanisms of domestic violence victims.

The Battered Woman’s Characteristics

Email: djhr@uodiyala.edu.iq

Tel.Mob: 07711322852

The Walker's concept of the battered woman syndrome was developed in the early 1970s. This concept was first referred to as learned helplessness. Many researchers have criticized this theory, claiming that there is no single profile of a battered woman. However, this study uses this model in order to study the battered women's personalities as presented by Malaysian writers. This also helps in evaluating and testing the Walker's theory out on Malaysian subjects.

A battered woman remains in a violent relationship as she is the weaker, fearful partner. Since this is her circumstance, the battered woman will eventually believe that she can never escape her reality. This state of losing hope and accepting the cruel reality is known as learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness, a term coined by Walker, includes symptoms such as 'guilt, fear, anger, shame, and feeling of losing control' (Ristock 2011: 101). Because victims feel that they cannot escape the violence, they learn how to cope with it. At the very same time, they experience different emotions such as guilt. This feeling is mainly caused by the batterers when they shift the responsibility of their aggressive behaviour onto the victim. The opposite of learned helplessness is resistance. While some victims opt for accepting their harsh realities, others resist and intend to put a stop to it. The notion of resistance will be further discussed in the preceding section.

Although domestic violence may be unpredictable, there is a typical pattern that is usually evident. Walker (1979) suggested a theory that proposed the fact that abusive relationships tend to follow a cyclical pattern. According to Walker in *The Battered Woman*, there are three stages in the cycle of abuse. All three stages may take place in a day or they may happen over the course of a month or even months. Though this cyclical pattern serves as a base to understand and foresee domestic violence, it may not fit all domestic violence cases in that some abusers may show symptoms which are not typical of these three stages. Furthermore, not everyone's experience is exactly the same. However, this cycle is helpful in understanding why some female victims remain in an abusive relationship. The three stages identified by Walker are as follows: the Tension Building Stage, the Explosion Stage, and finally, the Honeymoon Stage.

The first stage, called the Tension Building Stage, is a phase in which the abuser starts to show signs of tension. In this stage, some type of abuse, such as physical, sexual or emotional abuse, will occur. Walker reveals that though the abuse may be either physical, sexual or emotional, it is more common than not that abuse in the form of verbal insults takes place. The abuser is noted to be critical and moody in this stage, and the victim is somehow influenced to believe that it is her responsibility to keep her abuser calm. Walker explains that this stage can be likened to a person walking on eggshells. The analogy of a person walking on eggshells clearly captures the feeling experienced by the victim. Every word and action, so it may seem, has to be carefully communicated to avoid any trigger of violence. The victim may also feel responsible for any violence that takes place. This thought may lead her to think that perhaps if she had done things differently, the abuse could have been avoided (McCue 2008: 96).

The next stage, known as the explosion stage, charts a full-blown episode(s) of violence. In this stage, the abuser becomes aggressive. This stage can be especially frightening to those who have already undergone the cycle of violence, as they can predict the type of abuse they are about to be subjected to. According to Ellmore (2004), the explosion stage 'is the most dangerous stage in the cycle of violence, and the symptoms in

this stage include violent behaviours such as hitting, choking, humiliation, imprisonment, verbal abuse and rape' (Ellmore 2004: 134).

The final stage is referred to as the Honeymoon Stage. This stage, supposedly, marks the end of the cycle of violence when the abuser regrets his explosion stage and pleads for forgiveness from the victim. Interestingly, in this stage, the batterer is willing to do whatever it takes to win the heart of the victim. His actions can vary from a simple apology to buying the victim flowers to even making promises to change his crude behaviour. Ellmore (2004) asserts that typically the batterer is given a second chance. Perhaps, in this stage, the victim is overwhelmed by the violence she has just experienced and may be tricked into thinking that the batterer will eventually change his behaviour. Not wanting to end the relationship may be a motivator for the victim to keep giving the batterer a chance. This stage will eventually fade, and Ellmore asserts that 'the cycle will repeat again' (Ellmore 2004:134).

Textual Analysis

Lily Bloom's upbringing was characterized by emotional turmoil albeit the social status and outward respectability of her family; to outsiders, her household appeared ideal although only Lily recognized its dysfunction. She harbored deep resentment toward her father since her tender age due to his persistent abuse of her mother. Besides, Lily struggled to understand and accept the willingness of her mother to stay in the relationship and to forgive her father despite his continual mistreatment. In "*It Ends with Us*", Hoover uses the theme "domestic violence" as a critique of the traditional institution of marriage. This critique unfolds throughout the novel progressively, reflecting not only in Lily's relationship with Ryle but also in her parents' troubled marriage portrayal. In the depiction of violence against women, she offers two alternatives or routes that these women take in dealing with violence. Lily's mother embodies the submissive victim, who remains silenced throughout the novel and does not question patriarchal rulers.

In this novel, Lily's mother is identified as a victim of abuse. She does not only conform to her gender roles, but also suffers from domestic abuse. Hoover provides the readers with many descriptive scenes of physical violence narrated by Lily in her recollection of memories, which shows the trauma her father has caused her:

"As soon as I walked into the living room, I saw him push her down. They were standing in the kitchen, and she had grabbed his arm, trying to calm him down, and he backhanded her and knocked her straight to the floor. I am pretty sure he was about to kill her, but he saw me walk into the living room, and he stopped" (Hoover, 2016, p. 64)

Although Lily's narration is only a memory, it nevertheless carries vivid descriptions of what 'I' has witnessed. The diction used by the writer further emphasize the intensity of the violence the family had to deal with. All these words contribute to the overall mood the writer sets for the readers on domestic violence: damaging and traumatizing. I, as a reader, can just imagine what it could be like to observe these dreadful events. 'I' am sure" illustrates her father's brutal violence towards her mother. He is seen as a destroyer. This indicates that his violence extends beyond physical assault and reveals an intent not just to harm but also to potentially end the life of her mother. Lily's mother, as a victim of abuse, does not show any sense of agency when dealing with violence; her silence and acceptance of violence show learned behaviour. She does not only conform to her gender roles, but also suffers from domestic abuse. Lily's mother fit the depiction of Walker's woman, as she has the inability to place the violence elsewhere. These victims, like the mother, succumb to the

abuse and ultimately believe that they cannot escape it. According to Walker, this is considered the learned helplessness.

Taking Walker's theory of Battered Woman Syndrome (2017) into consideration Lily's mother fits to a large extent most of the characteristics of a battered woman, while Lily's father's barbaric behaviour is not necessarily genetic or innate but rather "considered learned behavior that is used mostly by men to obtain and maintain power and control over women" (p. 8). Moreover, Lily's mother believes that escaping impossible: "she stayed because she thought it was better for me. She did not want to raise me alone" (Hoover, 2016, p. 110). This internalized helplessness makes her more vulnerable, becoming the typical domestic victim. Walker (2017) writes, "such a susceptibility potential could come from rigid sex role socialization patterns that leave adult women with a sense of "learned helplessness" so that they do not develop appropriate skills to escape from being further battered" (p. 11).

Another symptom of learned is helplessness takes the stage of emotional numbness; this can be seen in Lily's mother silent crying. "I heard my mother crying in her bedroom. I wanted to help her, but she tried to hide her bruises". However, Lily's mother instructed her to remain silent about the incident despite her injuries and insisted that she should tell others that she had "slipped on the ice." (Hoover, 2016, p. 110)". Domestic violence has always been viewed as a private matter. Similarly, the issue of hiding the bruises and reflects how cases of domestic violence are hidden from public knowledge. The fact that Lily's mother hides her scars suggests the shame and embarrassment domestic violence victims experience.

Lily's resentment toward her mother stemmed from the latter's persistent efforts to conceal the abuse and present only the favorable image of her father to others. She despised her mother's inability or unwillingness, to report the violence to authorities or expose it publicly. Consequently, Lily vowed that she would not become like her mother. Her animosity extended beyond the lifetime of her father in that the traumatic experiences and emotional scars he inflicted continued to influence her long after his death.

Even after his death, the Lily's resentment and hatred toward her father continued in that the trauma he caused continued to disturb her. She was required to state five positive matters about him during his funeral but she refused to deliver the eulogy. Although she justified her refusal to her mother claiming that does not like public speaking, the real reason was her profound disrespect for her father as well as the lasting emotional damage his abuse had inflicted upon her.

"I just did not want to do it because I feel like eulogies should be delivered by those who respected the deceased. And I did not much respect my father" (Hoover, 2016, p. 19).

This extract demonstrates that Lily's disrespect for her father continued even after his death and this also reflects her complete emotional detachment from him. She simply stood at the podium during eulogy so as to introduce herself but struggled to find any positive words to describe him. She revealed that "there was not one great thing I could say about that man". (Hoover, 2016, p. 20)".

The deep-seated resentment of Lily toward her father left her with significant emotional and psychological trauma. Because she has grown up in an abusive household, she yearns for a partner who sharply contrasts with the abusive nature of her father. Researchers (e.g. Gustafsson et al., 2022) pointed out that women exposed to domestic violence during childhood might experience long-term emotional and psychological challenges, such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Gustafsson et al., 2022). When Lily decided to break this cycle, she did her best to make better choices in her

relationships, and opted for engaging just with men she perceives as trustworthy and suitable. She cautiously approaches relationships, taking time to understand her partners. When Lily first meets Ryle Kincaid on the rooftop of his apartment, she is immediately drawn to his appearance and described him as a “beautiful and well-manicured man” (p. 8). As their conversation progresses and they share intimate and personal truths, the flirtatious behaviour of Ryle begins to impact Lily and stirred unexpected emotions within her.

“You asked for the most recent thought, so I gave it to you. You are beautiful. I am a guy. If you were into one-night stands, I would take you downstairs to my bedroom”. Lily “Well, I am not into one-night stands” (Hoover, 2016, p. 21).

The casual attitude of Ryle toward one-night stands makes Lily feel uncomfortable, and consequently the behaviour conflicts with her moral boundaries and personal values. Unlike Ryle, she lacks the impulsiveness which is needed for fleeting encounters and viewed them as incompatible with her sense and principles of self-respect. “I tend to become jaded easily because no one ever meets my standards. I feel like I am on an infinite search for the Holy Grail. ... I could never sleep with someone if I did not see it going anywhere” (Hoover, 2016, p. 23).

Lily remains firm in her convictions” as she is guided by an idealistic desire to find the perfect partner. After their initial meeting on the rooftop, she and Ryle go their separate ways, only to meet again on many later occasions by chance.

Lily also takes on the position of being both the employer and a friend of Ryle sister, Alyssa, at this point in the story. When Alyssa invites Lily to attend a birthday party, Lily expected to eventually run into Ryle. Lily had mixed emotions; she is both scared and thrilled at the prospect of seeing him. At this point in the story, Lily received an arrangement of lily from Ryle. This act is perceived as one which leaves Lily “confused about his motives.” Lily is “against hope, that his attraction to her is real and actual. The difficult part of this experience for Lily is to be in a relationship with someone of the type known as “cobras,” which “become less stressed, their heart rates slow, and they actually appear more purposeful in their dangerous behaviour.” “In relationships, the partners of women could be formidable if they are cobra-type, since they are perceived by other women as non-dangerous.”

Although Ryle seems to be a desirable and composed partner, his reluctance to commit shows how traditional gender roles privilege men. His admission that the mere thought of marriage rejects him to underscore his narcissism, and reflects a conscious rejection of emotional vulnerability, thereby reinforcing male dominance. On the contrary, this rejection provokes the desire of Lily to be the woman who is capable of “changing his mind,” and positions her in a dependent and submissive role even before their relationship formally begins.

Based on this viewpoint, the male character glorification symbolizes the subtle domination of the female counterpart. Although Lily consciously attempted not to feed the ego of Ryle, she did so unconsciously through her desire to become his partner. It is vitally significant to indicate that the idealization of Ryle is not solely grounded on his physical attractiveness but is also further enhanced by his social and professional standing. The social class impact is a recurring element in Hoover’s narrative. Early in the first chapter, readers observe the admiration of Lily upon discovering that Ryle is a neurosurgeon, a revelation that intensifies her fascination with him, underscoring the preexisting gender hierarchy between them. The accumulation of traits that define the superiority of Ryle elicits in Lily a sense of gratification whenever he offers her even minimal gestures of approval or attention, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

“I like that he doesn’t even know me, but for whatever reason, I’m not considered most people to him” (Hoover, 2021, p. 16).

What typically applies to Lily in Walker’s study is that she does not belong to those traditional women where sex roles are clearly defined and separated, but “Instead, the original data surprisingly indicated that the women in the present study perceived themselves as more liberal than most in such attitudes” (p. 12). Though supposedly liberal, they accept their partners’ abusive behaviour consciously or unconsciously because they perhaps convince themselves of the romantic image they have had of the relationship, hoping that this romanticism would be regained. This proves to be an illusion, for men like Ryle, equality between sexes is more an abstract concept than real.

A closer look at what Walker calls the seven “psychological signs and symptoms” of Battered Woman Syndrome, most of which, if not all, definitely apply to Lily. The first of these signs, according to Walker, is re-experiencing the traumatic events intrusively. What is happening to Lily since the very beginning, and does not end with the end of the novel, is that her memories with her father never leave her and she re-experiences each and every one of them as a flashback of mentally imagery-based impressions that intrude into her mind involuntarily, causing her intense distress and disruption. Many pieces of evidence show how frightened Lily feels.

Lily implores Ryle not to raise her expectations unless he is genuinely committed to pursuing a serious relationship. This is because she longs for emotional stability and mutual dedication. Although she deeply desires the presence of Ryle in her life, she insists that it must come with a transformation in his attitude toward relationships. Over time, Ryle comes to an agreement to make this change out of love for Lily, and also his decision fills her with optimism. Because Lily is persuaded that she has found the ideal partner, she interprets his commitment as the achievement of her long-held aspirations for genuine security and affection.

Lily approaches relationships with heightened caution and idealism in her pursuit of the right partner because of her past trauma. She strives to establish a stable and nurturing bond with a man who contrasts sharply with her father, someone who is able to offer genuine love and respect rather than abuse. Her determination stems from a deep-seated fear of repeating the experiences of her mother and becoming trapped in a similar cycle of suffering. Her fear of Ryle, imagining him a manipulative one, is only based only on her traumatic experience. It took her a long time to dismiss the feeling that Ryle is not “the vicious man who smashed her mother” (Hoover pp. 248-249).

Not far from this are the second and third signs of Battered Woman Syndrome, according to Walker, namely high levels of arousal and anxiety and the avoidance and numbing of emotions. Throughout the novel, Lily does not stop being easily aroused, uncontrollably anxious and avoiding Ryle. At this stage in the narrative, Lily has developed both a friendship and a professional relationship with Ryle’s sister, Alyssa, whom she employs. When Alyssa invites her to a birthday celebration, Lily anticipates encountering Ryle and feels a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Her uncertainty stems from Ryle’s earlier gesture of sending her a bouquet of lilies, which leaves her questioning whether he intends to pursue a romantic relationship. Lily decides to go to the party with a friend in the hopes that his behaviour is evidence of real affection so she will not have to go alone. When she is perceived by Ryle as being with another man, his jealousy and annoyance will be apparent, and Lily will be both confused and frustrated by the reaction. When she discovers

later that she is featured in a large, grainy picture in the apartment of Ryle, from their rooftop meeting, Lily is compelled to confront him about his behaviour.

“Stop flirting with me. Stop hanging pictures of me in your apartment. Furthermore, please stop sending me flowers. Because when you do those things, Ryle. It hurts (p. 89)” (Hoover, 2016, p. 89).

Lily pleads with Ryle to raise her hopes only if he finds himself seriously interested in entering into a committed relationship, as she aspires to attain the utmost level of emotional balance and companionship in her life. Initially, Lily strongly aspires to have Ryle by her side, but this should accompany his transformation in his perception of love and commitment in a relationship. Eventually, Ryle agrees to attempt this, driven by his affection for Lily, and she starts to recognize this as the sign she waited for to discover her perfect match in her life. Lily’s very reactive and cautious attitude towards relationships is radically affected by her traumatic experiences, which in turn shape both her emotions and her judgments. Her very conduct indicates her attempts to regain control and escape into patterns of her childhood. Lily aspires to possess an inverse of her father as her partner, someone who is able to provide her with utmost affection and respect, mainly due to her fear of reliving her mother’s traumatic life, which is filled with violence and loss of her autonomy and dignity.

The fourth sign of Battered Woman Syndrome, according to Walker is disruption in interpersonal relationships, which needs no evidence as the novel is replete with examples of how Lily’s father succeeds in turning her into a pariah exploited by Ryle, the man she loved. After their marriage, Lily experienced abuse at Ryle’s hands constantly. His abuse is not limited to physical violence; he also manipulates Lily mentally, and this is evident every time he beats her and ingrains in her consciousness quite the opposite. That she had fallen down the stairs: “he shoved me so hard, I fell backward onto the stairs. I just fainted, starting up at him, shocked” This incident marks the beginning of physical abuse. Her shock reflects disbelief that someone she loves could harm her. The life experiences of Lily encompass both witnessing and enduring domestic violence, first as a child observing her father’s abuse toward her mother, and later as an adult reliving similar patterns of mistreatment in her relationship with Ryle.

Ryle’s manipulation leads Lily to cognitive difficulties. She is undeniably a typical example. Scarce are the memories and the incidents that she goes through and she can clearly recognize. Her mental distractions and lack of concentration lead her to a total loss, lack of self-confidence, and a state of absolute uncertainty. There is nothing in her mind about which she is certain. Every single activity is under close observation and scrutiny, but all of them go nowhere. The woman is confused as to how she actually started to bleed on occasions, as she ‘had been living in a total cognitive blockage’.

When Lily finally accepts the fact that Ryle is an abusive partner, she finds it very difficult to accept the fact that the man she loves is the same person she is being abused by. The process undergone by Lily is reflective of the experiences of many victims of domestic violence, as the reality of abuse can be very difficult to accept. In order to reach the point of acceptance, Lily follows certain steps, the first of which is the confrontation and working through of the emotions and psychological upheaval she is under as a victim of abuse, and this is the first step in her healing process.

“...sometimes the things that matter to you most are also the things that hurt you the most. And to get over that hurt, you must sever all the extensions that keep you tethered to that pain” (Hoover, 2016, p. 280). The acknowledgment of her trauma is an essential element for Lily in order to accept the reality of her situation. In recognizing the toxicity and abusive

nature of Ryle's behaviour, Lily is, then, able to recognize and accept the fact that she must walk out of this relationship in order to gain liberation and healing. In doing so, Lily is then able to move towards gaining emotional closure.

The sixth symptom of Battered Woman Syndrome is health issues and issues with body image. In many cases of domestic violence, there always follows a period of calm, usually following episodes of violent conflict, remorse, and promises of improvement. Lily and Ryle's experience is no different, and this is enough for Lily to trust this relationship so much she ends up marrying him. Not, however, for long, as his possessive behavior becomes apparent once more as his jealousy is triggered by locating Lily's old friend's phone number, Atlas, hidden inside her phone case. Without giving Lily the chance to tell him what's happening, his behavior spirals, and, in violent outbursts, he pushes her in the hallway as she approaches him, causing her to fall down the stairs. After Lily becomes conscious, she finds herself in bed, feeling very confused as she observes Ryle's behavior, so nonchalant compared to other abusive situations, and this is because, for the first time, Lily is actually hurt, yet Ryle claims she merely fell and is not distressed, as this clearly never happened, and she is only being foolish about it all. Gaslighting is evident here, as all the fault is assigned to Lily, as she is then presented as being deceptive and accountable for all she's endured.

Although Lily is now hurt and beaten after the incident, the male character is taking advantage of the incident as well to hurt her psychologically through manipulation and mind games, as well as attempts to destroy her identity. The approach adopted by Ryle to take advantage of Lily's blackouts and make her believe in his stories, causing her intense guilt and remorse, is perfect within the discussion by Wages (2015) on domestic violence, as she writes:

The normative feminist theories contend that the pursuit of power by the perpetrator, as well as the element of violence and intimidation, is driven by the sociocultural roots of patriarchy. In this case, the normative theories focus on the way in which the gender hierarchy enables men to establish dominance and control over their partners, thereby ensuring female subordination and oppression (Wagner, 2015, p. 234). What Wagers calls external power is seeking to have control over others, as "batterers have low self-esteem, low self-worth, and are highly dependent on their intimate partners for a sense of identity and a sense of social connection" (p. 236). Ryle evidently needs women like Lily, a woman he can control and use to prove his self-worth.

As Lily regains consciousness, her vision is obscured by the blood covering her eyes, preventing her from seeing clearly "my body was sore in places I did not even realize he had touched, my breast had been bitten through and blood poured down from my lower lip" (p.331).

In the researcher's opinion, sexual abuse is directly/ indirectly linked to the notion of power. By committing various actions that are linked to sex, the batterer has successfully dehumanized his victim. Sexuality and self-respect go hand in hand. By touching her and making her feel uncomfortable, the batterer has definitely caused damages to the victim's sense of self-respect. "Late traumatic and psychological consequences of rape are not uncommon, especially among women who have been repeatedly victimized.

As Lily regains awareness, she feels Ryle embracing her and repeatedly whispering that he loves her and regrets his actions. Sensing his emotional instability and fearing another outburst of anger, she attempts to pacify him by reassuring him that everything is fine and that his behavior was merely a consequence of being upset. After both of them are fast asleep, Lily very gently gets out of bed and in one moment of clarity, she erupts into sobs.

Feeling overwhelmed by fear and the question of what she will do, Lily chooses to call Atlas, whose phone number she remembered. Lily is then immediately driven to the hospital by Atlas, but only after she insists they go to a different hospital than the one where Ryle is working, suggesting her compassion and willingness to safeguard his professional integrity, as is often seen in cases of psychological entanglement in abusive relationships, regardless of the level of violence she is being subjected to.

Finally, Lily finds the strength to walk out on the abusive relationship after realizing she is pregnant with the child of Ryle's. Despite the conflict, she is experiencing, loving the child but hating the father, Lily chooses to reject those feelings and embrace this decision. This is mainly because Lily is well aware she should not subject her child to the same abusive childhood she went through. In this case, Lily should be commended for taking this crucial decision for the sake of her unborn child. Despite her lingering affection for Ryle and her desire for the relationship to succeed, Lily prioritizes her child's well-being, demonstrating both emotional resilience and personal growth.

"I know that I have to do what is best for her. For the relationship, I hope she builds with her father. I do not make this decision for me, and I do not make it for Ryle. I make it for her".

"Ryle?"

"When he glances at me, he is smiling. Nevertheless, when he assesses the look on my face, he stops."

"I want a divorce". (Hoover, 2016, p. 358)

What Lily has been trying to do during and after her horrifying experience with Ryle is indefatigably "calculating, evaluating and reassessing" her own behaviour so that she can figure out what has been happening to her and manage to grope her way toward realizing the ugly truth about Ryle, the love of her life, thus firmly resisting, defending herself and not only surviving, but also regaining her long-lost self-esteem and relief from feeling of guilt. In the process, although she is too late to recollect herself, Lily could save not only herself but also her baby.

The above excerpt illustrates the conscious decision made by Lily to prioritize her daughter over her relationship with Ryle. She recognizes that, had it not been for her child's future, she might have been tempted to reconcile with him and attempt to repair their relationship. However, acknowledging the painful reality of her circumstances, Lily compels herself to leave, selecting her child's safety and well-being over her emotional attachment. This decision signifies a empowerment moment as she breaks free from the abuse cycle in order to ensure a healthier future for her daughter. Her decision to end this marriage reveals that she realizes the cyclical nature of abuse and chooses to end it for herself as well as her daughter; this refers to her recovery.

Conclusion

The psychological struggles of Lily Bloom's character, *It End with Us*, portray the complexity of Battered Women's Syndrome, to wit, denial, learned helplessness, and finally, empowerment. The graphic and very real portrayal by Hoover tries to humanize the victimization of women within abusive relationships, contradicting the myth that women remain in abusive relationships because they are weak. The text makes it clear that women will never really commit violence no matter how much they love.

Finally, the social surroundings of the family were also instrumental in sustaining domestic violence, proving that victims respond differently to violence according to their surroundings and situations. Lily, contrary to her mother's helplessness, questions violence and patriarchal

supremacy. From the outset of the novel, Lily is conscious about the injustice she suffered, and she is an agency for her mother. Her persistent questioning of her mother's submissive behaviour finally helps her understand that the victim should not suffer in silence. Lily realized the value of agency and protection in relationships. Inheriting her mother's struggles, Lily refuses to suffer the same fate and avoids risking her security for any reason related to any man. Thus, her choice to leave husband Ryle is the essence of the novel, and it encapsulates Lily's learning lessons from her mother's traumatic experience.

References

- Aune, K. and Redfern, C. 2013. *Reclaiming the F Word: Feminism Today*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Anderson, K. L. (August, 1997). Gender, Status, and Domestic Violence: An Integration of Feminist and Family Violence Approaches. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol. 59, No. 3 pp. 655-669. National Council on Family Relations. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/353952>
- McCue, M.L. 2008. *Domestic Violence: A Reference Handbook*. California: ABC-CLIO, Inc.
- Ristock, J. L. 2011. *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*. Madison Avenue, New York: Routledge.
- Walker, L. E. 1979. *The battered women*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Tyson, L. 1999. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Garland Publishing Inc: New York.
- Healey, K., Smith, C. & O'Sullivan, C. (1998). *Batterer intervention: Program approaches and criminal justice strategies*. National Institute of Justice, United State.
- Ellmore, J. V. 2004. *Fighting for Your Life: The African-American Criminal Justice Survival Guide*. Phoenix, Arizona: Amber Books.