

FORGIVENESS AS A PATHWAY TO TRAUMA HEALING: A NARRATIVE EXAMINATION OF COLLEEN HOOVER'S *REMINDEERS OF HIM*

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Abstract

This study examines the role of forgiveness in the trauma healing process as portrayed in Colleen Hoover's *Reminders of Him*. Focusing on the main character, Kenna Rowan, it explores how she experiences emotional trauma and how forgiveness facilitates her recovery. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a psychological approach, the analysis applies Worthington's model of decisional and emotional forgiveness and Enright's Four-Phase Model of Forgiveness to identify the stages of healing depicted in the narrative. The findings reveal that Kenna exhibits symptoms of psychological trauma, including anxiety, guilt, avoidance, flashbacks, and difficulty maintaining relationships. The study identifies two types of forgiveness—decisional, a conscious choice to forgive, and emotional, a deeper emotional release—and demonstrates how Kenna's journey reflects the four phases of forgiveness: uncovering, decision, work, and deepening. Through self-reflection, acceptance, and social support, she achieves self-forgiveness and re-establishes connections with her daughter and others. The research concludes that forgiveness is a key factor in emotional recovery and that literature can serve as a valuable medium for understanding psychological healing and personal growth.

Keywords: *emotional recovery; forgiveness; psychological approach; trauma healing*

1. Introduction

Forgiveness plays a crucial role in trauma healing because it enables individuals to move forward and reclaim emotional stability. Forgiveness therapy, which emphasizes releasing anger and resentment associated with traumatic experiences, has been shown to reduce post-traumatic stress and encourage post-traumatic growth (Worthington, 2006). This process involves acknowledging the trauma, expressing emotions authentically, and making a conscious decision to forgive. Ultimately, forgiveness liberates individuals from the emotional grip of past pain and allows them to focus on recovery and future well-being. Healing from trauma entails emotional, mental, and sometimes physical restoration after experiencing deeply distressing or life-altering events. It may involve forgiving both oneself and others for the mistakes and harms that have caused suffering.

This research focuses on Colleen Hoover's novel *Reminders of Him* (2022), which powerfully portrays themes of trauma, healing, and forgiveness through the emotional journey of its protagonist, Kenna Rowan—a young mother striving to rebuild her life after five years in prison for a tragic accident that claimed her boyfriend's life. Hoover, an American author renowned for emotionally charged and character-driven works of contemporary fiction and romance, explores the psychological depth of guilt, redemption, and love in this novel.

Kenna's trauma stems from a car accident that killed her boyfriend, Scotty, and from the subsequent imprisonment that separated her from her newborn daughter. Upon her release, Kenna returns to her hometown, reopening emotional wounds for both herself and Scotty's grieving parents, who are now raising her child. The narrative presents healing as a painful yet transformative process. Kenna's journey involves confronting her past actions, seeking forgiveness from others, and learning to forgive herself. Healing also extends to those around her—particularly Ledger Ward, Scotty's best friend and the child's guardian—who struggles between protecting the child and recognizing Kenna's right to be part of her daughter's life.

Forgiveness in the novel emerges as a reluctant but necessary process. It is not only about others forgiving Kenna but also about her own journey toward self-forgiveness. The narrative demonstrates that clinging to anger perpetuates pain, whereas letting go of resentment opens the path to emotional restoration. Through honesty, vulnerability, and gradual emotional growth, the characters reach a point where forgiveness becomes attainable, allowing them to move beyond suffering and embrace renewal.

Previous studies on forgiveness in trauma healing provide two main reasons for selecting this topic. First, empirical research has consistently demonstrated that forgiveness is linked to reductions in post-traumatic stress, depression, and anger. Worthington (2006) and Enright (1996) both argue that forgiveness fosters emotional regulation and helps individuals reconstruct meaning after trauma. Second, forgiveness is the central theme in *Reminders of Him*, making the novel an ideal subject for exploring the psychological dynamics of trauma recovery. Kenna seeks forgiveness from Scotty's family and from herself for the accident that claimed his life, while Scotty's parents struggle with unresolved grief and resentment. Their intertwined pain underscores that healing through forgiveness involves releasing judgment and resentment, leading to genuine emotional peace.

The exploration of forgiveness in Hoover's novel also resonates with broader social contexts. As highlighted by Indonesian scholars such as Lestari (2020), forgiveness and emotional resilience are vital components of psychological recovery in trauma survivors. This perspective reinforces the idea that literature reflecting these themes can provide valuable insight into real-world emotional healing processes. Thus, this study aims to analyze forgiveness as a key mechanism of trauma recovery, emphasizing its relevance both within the literary narrative and in the lived experiences of individuals coping with emotional pain.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychology of Literature

Literature and psychology share a focus on human reactions, perceptions, emotions, conflicts, and social issues through various concepts, methods, and approaches. An author's representation of life is influenced by their intentions, views,

beliefs, and value judgments. They inspire readers to explore the unknown and uncover the meaning of life. Literature promotes self-awareness and allows individuals to explore their identities. Most scientific research, fine arts, and literature place a strong emphasis on humanity and existence.

There is a close relationship between literature and psychology. Cohen (1971: 348) thought that psychology helps to clarify some literary problems, and literature presents insights to psychology. To gain deeper understanding, literature can be studied by various approach includes psychological approach. Conversely, Cohen (1971: 351) assumes that the psychologist's manner of conceiving and representing the personality is supported by the intuitive representations made by novelists, dramatists, and other creative writers. It can be seen that there is mutual relationship between literature and psychology.

2.2 Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the balm that heals wounds and commitment to relationships. Practically everything important psychological relationships, people get hurt. Without healing the wounds, relationships will fall apart quickly. However, a lot relationships last. We argue that such patience is possible because people can forgive the pain they suffer, ask for forgiveness for the injuries they cause and receive any forgiveness that is offered to them.

Enright (1996) defined forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her”.

Worthington & Jiménez Robles’s (2022). REACH Forgiveness model is an acrostic or acronym that cues each of three key steps to forgiving others. The model begins by asking people to identify the most difficult thing they ever successfully forgave. It helps people see that there are physical, health, psychological, relational, and spiritual benefits to forgiving but that forgiving is but one alternative for dealing successfully with injustices. Thus, the forgiveness intervention is for people who wish to forgive. No one should ever be forced or coerced to forgive. People are shown that forgiveness involves both a decision to forgive and an emotional transformation. First people are led through the **REACH** Forgiveness five steps:

R = Recall the hurt. To heal, you have to face the fact that you’ve been hurt. Decide not to be snarky (i.e., nasty and hurtful), not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to treat the other person as a jerk.

E = Empathize with your offender. Empathy is putting yourself in the other person’s chair. Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to him or her. Pour your heart out. When you have had your say, sit in his or her chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy.

A = Altruistic gift. Forgive as an unselfish, altruistic gift. After all, an offender does not deserve to receive forgiveness. To help you want to give the gift of forgiving, try to remember when you wronged someone and that person forgave you. By forgiving altruistically, you can give that same gift to someone who hurt you.

C = Commit. Once you have forgiven, write a note to yourself—something as simple as, “Today, I forgave [person’s name] for hurting me.” This helps forgiveness last.

H = Hold onto forgiveness. The self-addressed notes of commitment (above) help us because we will almost surely be tempted to doubt that we really forgave. We can re-read our notes. We did forgive.

There are two kinds of forgiveness: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness.

1. Decisional Forgiveness

Decisional forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate choice to forgive someone who has caused harm, even if feelings of hurt remain (Worthington et al., 2007). Unlike emotional forgiveness, which involves a deeper emotional transformation, decisional forgiveness focuses on controlling one's behavior toward the offender and acting in a non-retaliatory, constructive way. It is the intention to treat the offender as a valued person, possibly for years, despite lingering resentment or hate (DiBlasio, 1998; Exline et al., 2003). This may include eliminating negative behavior in non-continuous relationships (McCullough et al., 2003) or restoring positive behavior in ongoing close connections (Finkel et al., 2002). While decisional forgiveness serves a behavioral purpose, emotional forgiveness aims for affective transformation.

According to Enright (2004) and the Human Development Study Group, forgiveness involves both a cognitive decision to forgive and an emotional component, which entails reducing negative affect and increasing positive affect. These two processes—decisional and emotional forgiveness—are distinct yet interconnected and can be observed separately in personal experience. Since they represent different aspects of the interpersonal forgiveness process, they do not always produce the same effects on distress and well-being. Research shows that decisional forgiveness is linked to reduced hostility and rumination, which in turn support psychological and social well-being (Baker et al., 2017; Kurniati et al., 2017).

2. Emotional Forgiveness

Emotional forgiveness is the process of replacing negative, unforgiving emotions such as resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, anger, and fear with positive, other-oriented emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love toward an offender or group (Worthington, 2007; Exline et al., 2003). This emotional transformation often occurs gradually and may happen unconsciously. Models of forgiveness, such as Fitzgibbons' (1986), highlight that an emotional act of forgiveness typically follows a decision to forgive, especially when the offender is perceived as deserving pardon. Emotional forgiveness, by reducing negative affect and fostering positive emotions, is associated with greater benefits for distress reduction and well-being compared to decisional forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2007b; Sun et al., 2014; Webb & Toussaint, 2020).

2.3 Trauma Healing

Trauma healing is a complex process addressing the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of traumatic experiences, which may lead to symptoms like anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Harvey, 2002:5, 23). It encompasses various forms of recovery, such as physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and holistic healing, aiming to foster resilience and growth in trauma survivors. In psychological and narrative contexts, trauma healing often involves forgiveness—a deliberate choice to release anger or revenge without condoning the harm—which can promote identity

reintegration, emotional resolution, relational repair, and spiritual transformation. Enright's Process Model of Forgiveness (2000) describes four phases in this process: uncovering emotional wounds, making the decision to forgive, working to develop empathy and reinterpret the trauma, and deepening emotional release leading to personal growth and potential reconciliation.

This research is also supported by several previous researchers.

1. Worthington (2022)

He explains that trauma healing is complex and individual. Forgiveness aids trauma recovery by fostering perceptions of trustworthiness, creating a desire for reconciliation, and encouraging behavioral change. Reconciliation is difficult without mutual trust but can be supported by forgiveness. Forgiveness includes both *decisional* and *emotional forgiveness*.

Difference from current research: This study focuses on applying Worthington's model within a literary context (*Reminders of Him*), rather than examining forgiveness in real-world social settings as in Worthington's work.

2. Hardman (2022)

He investigates *forgiveness therapy* for complex trauma survivors from the perspective of secular therapists. Forgiveness is viewed as an intrapersonal process involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, distinct from excusing, condoning, or forgetting. Findings show that forgiveness therapy can reduce complex trauma symptoms and promote post-traumatic growth.

Difference from current research: Hardman's research involves direct therapeutic practice with real clients, while the current study analyzes the forgiveness process through a fictional character in a novel.

3. Putra (2023)

He examines the relationship between forgiveness and wounded inner child in adolescents. Results indicate a significant negative relationship: higher forgiveness corresponds to lower wounded inner child, and vice versa.

Difference from current research: Putra's study focuses on childhood and adolescent trauma using a quantitative method, whereas the current research explores adult trauma through a qualitative narrative analysis in literature.

3. Research Method

A clear understanding of the conflicts within a literary work is essential for accurate interpretation and for enhancing the value of literary research. This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach within a psychological literary framework, which is appropriate for exploring the subtleties and complexities of human emotions, perceptions, and behaviors as reflected in literary texts. The qualitative design emphasized interpretative analysis over numerical measurement, focusing on the meaning and emotional depth of the characters' experiences.

As Creswell (2014) explained, qualitative research involves clarifying the study's intent, specifying the research design, reflecting on the researcher's interpretive role, employing multiple data sources, following structured recording protocols, and ensuring analytical validity. This approach enabled the researchers to address the

research questions systematically while maintaining flexibility to accommodate emerging patterns throughout the analysis.

The primary data for this research were drawn from Colleen Hoover's *Reminders of Him*, supported by secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, and theoretical writings related to trauma, forgiveness, and psychological literary criticism. The data collection followed Creswell's (2018) steps, which included defining the research scope, reading and rereading the novel to gain a comprehensive understanding, identifying passages relevant to the research focus, taking analytical notes, and organizing these notes into thematic categories for systematic analysis.

The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, aimed at identifying recurring themes related to trauma and forgiveness. The analysis addressed two central research questions: (1) the stages of forgiveness in the trauma healing process as represented in the novel, and (2) the ways in which forgiveness contributes to the emotional recovery of the characters. The findings were interpreted using a descriptive method, ensuring that the conclusions were both systematic and grounded in the text's psychological and thematic contexts.

4. Discussion

In this part, the analysis focuses on how trauma and its manifestation save the main character's psychology at emotional state in Colleen Hoover's novel *Reminders of Him*. It is also about decisional and emotional forgiveness portrayed in the novel, and the role of forgiveness in facilitating the trauma healing process in Colleen Hoover's novel *Reminders of Him*.

4.1 Trauma and its Manifestation

Trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that can affect an individual's mental health and emotional well-being. In the context of Colleen Hoover's novel *Reminders of Him*, trauma can manifest in various ways in the main character's psychology and emotional state. They are emotional disturbances, avoidance, flashbacks, and lack of relationships.

1. Emotional Disturbance

Emotional disturbance refers to a range of mental health conditions characterized by intense, persistent, or recurring emotional experiences that interfere with individual's daily life, relationships, and overall well-being. The main character may experience emotional disturbances such as anxiety, depression, or uncontrolled anger. It can be seen from the quotation below:

I know they hate me, and they have every right to hate me, but part of me has been living with them for the past four years in Diem. My hope is that they've found a sliver of forgiveness for me through my daughter. (Hoover, 2022: 67)

In this quotation, the character expresses deep feelings of guilt, anxiety, and emotional pain. The sentence "*I know they hate me, and they have every right to hate me*" shows that she constantly blames herself and believes others are right to reject her. This self-blame is a common sign of depression. Her words "*part of me has been living with them for the past four years in Diem*" suggest she has not been able to move on emotionally and keeps reliving her past mistake. This reflects emotional distress and anxiety, especially as she worries about how others feel about her. Finally, the hope that "*they've found a sliver of forgiveness*" shows she is still holding onto a small amount of

hope, which helps her cope with her guilt. However, this hope also shows her ongoing need for acceptance and forgiveness, which is often present in people suffering from depression and anxiety.

2. Avoidance

The main character may avoid situations or people that remind them of the traumatic experience. Kenna's avoidance can be seen from the quotation below:

When I see their house, my fear becomes audible. I make a noise in the back of my throat that surprise me, but it's taking all the effort inside me to keep my tears at bay. I wish I'd have waited until dark. I feel like an open target. Vulnerable to whatever is about to come at me. I want to hide. I need more time. I haven't even practiced what I'm going to say yet. I've thought about it constantly, but I've never practiced out loud. My breath become harder and harder to control. I put my hands on the back of my head and breathe in and out, in and out. (Hoover, 2022: 72)

This quotation reflects Kenna's strong avoidance response when faced with the possibility of confronting her past. Her physical and emotional reactions such as fear, difficulty breathing, and the desire to hide are signs of psychological avoidance. She says, "*I want to hide. I need more time*", which shows her attempt to delay or escape from a stressful situation. Avoidance is a common coping mechanism in individuals dealing with trauma, anxiety, or guilt. Kenna's hesitation to approach the house, her regret about not waiting until dark, and her lack of preparation ("*I haven't even practiced what I'm going to say*") all highlight her discomfort and fear of rejection or confrontation. Furthermore, her effort to control her breathing shows a physiological stress response, which often occurs during moments of emotional overload, commonly associated with avoidant behavior in trauma survivors.

3. Flashback

The main character may experience flashbacks or unwanted memories of the traumatic experiences. It can be seen from the quotation below:

Imagine you hear a car door slam, and you breathe a sigh of relief, only to fall to the floor when you see the police at your door. Imagine hearing things like "I'm sorry," and "accident" and "car wreck" and "didn't make it." imagine yourself not dying in that moment. Imagine being forced to go on, to live through that awful night, to wake up the next day, to be asked to identify his body. His lifeless body. (Hoover, 2022: 69-70)

This quotation illustrates a clear example of a flashback, which is a vivid and distressing re-experiencing of a traumatic event. The repeated use of the word "*imagine*" shows how the character is mentally reliving the night she lost someone she loved. Though it is framed as imagination, the detail and emotional intensity indicate that the memory is deeply ingrained and emotionally painful. Flashbacks are a common symptom of post-traumatic stress and often occur involuntarily. In this case, the memory of the police visit and hearing words like "*accident*", "*car wreck*", and "*didn't make it*" shows how the trauma is still active in the character's mind. The emotional

reaction feeling like dying, being forced to go on, and identifying the body reveals the lasting psychological impact of the event. Overall, this quote shows how flashbacks can cause the person to mentally return to the moment of trauma, experiencing the pain as if it is happening again, which can severely affect emotional well-being and daily functioning. Another quotation about Kenna being flashback can be seen below:

I get out and walk back to where the cross is. I shake it side to side until the dirt loosens around it, and then I pull it out of the ground. Did he die in this very spot? Or did he die in the road? I may not have killed him with my actions, but I definitely killed him with my inaction. *I thought you were dead, Scotty. But dead people can't crawl* (Hoover, 2022: 1).

This quotation demonstrates a form of flashback, where the character, Kenna, mentally relives the traumatic moment connected to Scotty's death. Her visit to the site of the accident triggers vivid memories and emotions. Although the scene takes place in the present, her thoughts reflect a deep emotional recall of the past, especially when she says, "*Did he die in this very spot?*" and "*I thought you were dead, Scotty. But dead people can't crawl.*" These lines show how the trauma is still fresh in Kenna's mind. She is not just remembering the event she is re-experiencing the guilt and confusion that followed. Her statement, "*I definitely killed him with my inaction*", reflects deep self-blame, a common emotional response during flashbacks in individuals with post-traumatic stress.

4. Lack of Relationship

The main character may struggle from healthy relationship with others due to the trauma they've experienced. It can be seen from the quotation below:

I was praying Scotty's parents just needed time. I assumed, ignorantly, that they would eventually see a need for me to be in Diem's life. There wasn't much I could do from my isolated position in the world, but now that I'm out, I've thought long and hard about how I should go about this. I have no idea what to expect. I don't even know what kind of people they are. (Hoover, 2022: 67)

This quotation reflects Kenna's experience of a lack of connection and estrangement from Scotty's parents and her daughter, Diem. Her words show that she has no existing relationship with them, as seen in her uncertainty: "*I don't even know what kind of people they are.*" This indicates a complete emotional and social distance. Kenna's "*isolated position in the world*" highlights how her time in prison and past trauma have left her socially disconnected and without meaningful relationships. Her hope that "*they would eventually see a need for me*" suggests that she longs for connection, but her lack of communication and shared experience with Scotty's parents has created a barrier to forming bonds.

4.2 Types of Forgiveness

There are two types of forgiveness, decisional and emotional forgiveness.

1. Decisional Forgiveness

Decisional forgiveness is a decision to treat the offender as a valuable and valued person. It is possible to carry out the decision faithfully for years and still feel

emotional unforgiveness, resentment, and even hate. Decisional forgiveness can be seen from the quotation below:

Ledger is gripping the top of the truck, leaning in my doorway. His head is resting against the inside of his raised arm. His eyes are red, but his expression isn't filled with hatred. It isn't even filled with anger. If anything, he looks apologetic, as if he knows his outburst scared me and he feels bad. "I'm not mad at you." He presses his lips together and looks down. He shakes his head gently. "It's just a lot to process." (Hoover, 2022: 257)

This quotation shows decisional forgiveness, which refers to a conscious decision to let go of anger or the desire for revenge, even if emotional forgiveness has not fully developed. In this scene, Ledger shows signs of choosing not to stay angry at Kenna, despite his emotional struggle. His words, "*I'm not mad at you,*" and his calm body language ("*he looks apologetic*") suggest that he has decided to control his emotional response and approach Kenna with understanding rather than hostility. His statement, "*It's just a lot to process,*" shows that while he may still feel conflicted, he is making a deliberate effort to move past his anger. This moment reflects how decisional forgiveness can be an important first step in rebuilding broken relationships, especially in situations involving deep hurt or betrayal.

2. Emotional Forgiveness

Emotional forgiveness is the emotional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions such as resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, anger, and fear, with positive other oriented emotions such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love. Emotional forgiveness can be seen from the following quotations:

"I'm not here to upset you," Grace says. Her voice is gentle. So is her expression. I shake my head, "It's not . . . I'm sorry. I need a minute before I can . . . talk." (Hoover, 2022: 299)

This quotation shows the beginning of emotional forgiveness through Grace's change in tone and behavior toward Kenna. Her words "*I'm not here to upset you*" and her *gentle voice and expression* indicate a shift from anger or blame to empathy and compassion. Emotional forgiveness involves not only deciding to forgive but also letting go of negative emotions like resentment and replacing them with understanding. Kenna's emotional reaction "*I'm sorry. I need a minute...*" suggests that she is overwhelmed by this unexpected kindness, which reflects how deeply she has been affected by past rejection. This moment represents a softening in their relationship and the emotional openness that allows forgiveness to take root. This scene marks an important step toward healing and reconciliation, showing that emotional forgiveness begins when someone chooses to respond with gentleness rather than judgment.

4.3 The Pathway of Forgiveness in Trauma Healing Process

In Colleen Hoover's novel *Reminders of Him*, forgiveness plays an important role in facilitating the trauma healing process for the characters. There are some key aspects of forgiveness in this research such as self-forgiveness and the phases of forgiveness in healing process.

1. Self-forgiveness

Kenna's struggle to forgive herself for her past mistakes is a significant theme. She grapples with guilt and shame, which hinders her ability to move forward. Kenna's self-forgiveness can be seen from the following quotation:

I feel like a weight has been lifted. It's not the weight of the anchor that keeps me tethered under the surface that won't be lifted until I get to hold my daughter. But a small portion of my pain has attached to his sympathy, and it feels like he's physically lifting me up for the air, allowing me a few minutes to breathe. (Hoover, 2022: 258)

This quotation reflects the early stages of self-forgiveness in Kenna's emotional journey. The metaphor "*a weight has been lifted*" symbolizes a partial release of the heavy guilt and shame she has carried. While she admits that the full burden remains ("*the anchor that keeps me tethered*"), she also recognizes a moment of relief and emotional healing, supported by someone else's empathy. Her statement that "*a small portion of my pain has attached to his sympathy*" shows that the compassion she receives from Ledger allows her to begin forgiving herself, even if only briefly. Self-forgiveness often begins with external validation or understanding, which can help a person start to accept their own humanity and mistakes. This passage illustrates that self-forgiveness is a gradual process, and even a small moment of emotional support can create space for healing and personal growth.

2. Phases of Forgiveness in Healing Process

There are four phases of forgiveness in healing process. They are uncovering phase, decisional phase, work phase, and deepening phase.

a. Uncovering Phase

This is the first phase where the individual confronts and explores the pain caused by the trauma, recognizing the depth of emotional and psychological injury. This phase can be seen from the following quotation:

When you didn't move, and I realized your arm was just dangling against the road that has somehow become out ceiling, my first thought was that you might have passed out. But when I pulled my hand back to figure out a way to right myself up, it was covered in blood. Blood that was supposed to be running through your veins. I immediately scooted closer to you, but because you were upside down and still in your seatbelt, I couldn't pull you to me. I tried pulling you, but you still wouldn't budge because the car was on top of part of you. Your blood was everywhere. (Hoover, 2022: 243)

This quotation represents a key moment in the uncovering phase of trauma healing, which involves revisiting and expressing the painful details of a traumatic experience. In this passage, Kenna describes the moment of the accident with vivid and emotional detail, recalling the blood, her fear, and her inability to save Scotty. By recounting this memory, she is not only confronting the trauma but also beginning to process and verbalize her guilt and pain. The uncovering phase requires individuals to bring hidden emotions and memories to the surface, often for the first time. Kenna's description is raw and specific, showing that she is reliving the trauma as a way to understand and communicate her truth. This act of revealing allows her to begin

emotional processing, which is essential for moving forward in the trauma healing process.

b. Decisional Phase

In this phase, the person makes a conscious choice to forgive, not to excuse or forget the harm, but to let go of resentment and the need for revenge. It can be seen from the following quotation:

“I’m not mad at you.” He presses his lips together and looks down. He shakes his head gently. “It’s just a lot to process.” I nod, but I can’t speak because my heart is pounding and my throat feels swollen, and I’m not sure what to say. (Hoover, 2022: 257)

This quotation exemplifies the decisional phase of forgiveness, where a person makes a conscious choice to release anger even before their emotions have fully shifted. Ledger explicitly states, “I’m not mad at you,” signaling an active decision to let go of resentment. His words (“It’s just a lot to process”) acknowledge the complexity of his feelings, but he still chooses to withhold anger. His gentle head shake and lowered gaze show that he is regulating his outward response, a hallmark of decisional forgiveness. Ledger’s statement and body language demonstrate this first step toward rebuilding trust, even if deeper emotional forgiveness comes later.

c. Work Phase

This phase involves developing empathy and compassion for the offender, reinterpreting the trauma in ways that reduce its emotional grip. It can be seen from the following quotation:

“I’m a part of everything that’s been tearing you down all these years, and I’m sorry Kenna. I’m so sorry.” I place my hand over his chest, right over his heart. “It’s okay. What I wrote doesn’t change anything. It was still my fault.” He eventually pulls back far enough to assess me. He must see something on my face that makes him want to comfort me because he presses a soft kiss to my forehead while brushing my hair back tenderly. He kisses the tip of my nose and then plants a soft peck on my lips. His kisses feel like both forgiveness and promises. I imagine mine feel like apologies to him, because he keeps coming back for more every time we separate. (Hoover, 2022: 258-259)

This quotation reflects the work phase of trauma healing, which involves not only emotional acknowledgment but also active steps toward repair and reconnection. In this moment, both Kenna and Ledger engage in mutual vulnerability such as apologizing, comforting, and physically expressing forgiveness and care. Kenna’s statement “*It was still my fault*” shows her continued acceptance of responsibility, a key part of emotional processing. Meanwhile, Ledger’s words “*I’m sorry Kenna. I’m so sorry*” demonstrate that he is also confronting his role in her pain. These expressions of shared accountability are hallmarks of the work phase, where individuals begin rebuilding trust and connection through honest interaction. Their physical gestures such as touch, forehead kisses, and comforting actions symbolize more than affection; they represent emotional labor and healing in action. These are not just feelings but practiced

behaviors that reinforce progress and commitment to growth. In summary, this quotation shows how both characters are no longer just processing pain. They are actively working through it together, which is the essence of the trauma healing work phase.

d. Deepening Phase

In the last phase, the individual experiences emotional release, sometimes even meaning-making or personal growth, leading to reduce suffering and potential reconciliation. It can be seen from the following quotation:

My eyes meet Grace's, and she can see the agony in my expression. "Grace . . ." My voice is a whisper. She immediately walks over to me and pulls me in for a hug. It's an amazing hug. A forgiving hug. "Hey", she says, soothingly. "Hey, listen to me." She pulls back, and we're about the same height, so we're eye to eye when she takes the juice from me and sets it aside. Then she squeezes both of my hand reassuringly. "We go forward," she says. "That's it. It's that simple. I forgive you and you forgive me, and we go forward together and give that little girl the best life we can give her. Okay?" I nod, because I can do that. I forgive them. I've always forgiven them. (Hoover, 2022: 308)

This quotation represents the deepening phase in the trauma healing process, where individuals begin to fully internalize forgiveness, restore trust, and commit to a shared future. In this scene, Grace and Kenna move beyond initial reconciliation into a deeper emotional connection, marked by empathy, acceptance, and mutual forgiveness. Grace's comforting actions *pulling Kenna in for a hug, squeezing her hands*, and saying "*We go forward... I forgive you and you forgive me*" demonstrate not just forgiveness, but a genuine desire to rebuild the relationship with emotional depth and mutual commitment. This is a core aspect of the deepening phase: forming new meaning and stability after trauma. Kenna's internal response "*I forgive them. I've always forgiven them.*" shows that she is also ready to move forward emotionally. The trauma no longer dominates her identity or relationships; instead, she's embracing healing and connection. This moment illustrates how both characters have progressed from emotional pain to a place of shared healing, which defines the deepening phase in trauma recovery.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that *Reminders of Him* portrays trauma as a profound psychological struggle and forgiveness as a transformative pathway to healing. Through the character of Kenna Rowan, Colleen Hoover illustrates how unresolved guilt, anxiety, and avoidance behaviors manifest as trauma symptoms, while gradual acceptance and forgiveness—both decisional and emotional—become mechanisms for recovery. Using Enright's Four-Phase Model, the analysis demonstrates how the narrative moves through stages of uncovering, decision, work, and deepening, culminating in self-forgiveness and reconnection. This study contributes to psychological literary studies by showing how narrative empathy and forgiveness can be conceptualized as mechanisms of trauma recovery within fictional representation.

The findings imply that literature can serve as a reflective tool for understanding emotional resilience, self-healing, and moral growth. In educational contexts, integrating psychological literary analysis into reading and writing curricula can encourage students to engage empathetically with complex emotional themes. Future research may extend this study by examining other contemporary novels that depict forgiveness and trauma from cultural or gendered perspectives, especially within Indonesian or Southeast Asian contexts, to enrich cross-cultural discussions on emotional recovery and moral development.

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