

The Prominence of Psychosocial of Dysthymia Sufferers in Colleen Hoover's Novel *Regretting You*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the psychosocial of dysthymia sufferers in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*. The novel follows the story of a mother and daughter, Morgan and Clara, who lose their family members because of an accident that causes them to suffer dysthymia. This article investigates Morgan and Clara's psychosocial of their dysthymia through their grieving over a family member's death. Dysthymia is a type of chronic mood disorder characterized by long-term depressive symptoms that are less severe than those of major depression but persist for an extended period. Then, how is the psychosocial of dysthymia sufferers represented in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*? The researchers took the data of this analysis by reading the novels thoroughly, approaching the analysis from Morgan and Clara's perspective, compiling a list of dialogues and narratives, and categorizing the collected data into specific themes. Using a qualitative method, the researchers in this analysis underline the comparison of psychosocial between Morgan and Clara illustrated in the novel. In conclusion, Morgan and Clara's experience of dysthymia during the loss of family members enriches their psychosocial changes in a mother-daughter relationship. The article highlights the prominence of psychosocial aspects through Morgan and Clara's dysthymia based on the novel.

Keywords: *Colleen Hoover, Dysthymia, Psychosocial, Regretting You.*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works, including novels, poetry, and various forms of writing, offer valuable avenues for exploring emotions, experiences, and perspectives (Aras, 2015). Numerous individuals consider literature to be a beneficial resource for enhancing mental health and overall well-being (MediumMedia, 2021). The relationship between literature and mental illness is a complex and multifaceted topic that has garnered significant attention from scholars across various disciplines. Literature, whether in the form of novels, poetry, or drama, often serves as a medium through which individuals can explore and understand the

complexities of the human mind, including its struggles with mental illness such as depression.

Depression, which is often categorized as a mental illness, is a mood disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and lack of interest in activities (World Health Organization, 2022). The relationship between mental illness in the broader sense and depression involves a complex interaction between biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Mental illness encompasses a wide range of conditions that affect a person's thoughts, emotions, and behavior (World Health Organization, 2022).

Depression is a specific type of mental illness on this spectrum, but it can also occur alongside other mental health disorders or conditions. Some mental illnesses may predispose individuals to an increased risk of depression, while depression itself may contribute to or exacerbate other mental health challenges, such as dysthymia.

Dysthymia, a subtype of depression, is differentiated by the duration and severity of symptoms. It is characterized by low mood and feelings of hopelessness that persist over a long period of time, usually for at least two years in adults (Klein & Santiago, 2003; Thase & Lang, 2004). In contrast to major depressive disorder, whose symptoms are more intense but also episodic, dysthymia is chronic and ongoing. Although the symptoms of dysthymia may not be as severe as those of major depression, they can still significantly interfere with daily functioning and overall quality of life. The association between dysthymia and other mental health conditions, including depression, underscores the complexity of mood disorders. Dysthymia can co-occur with major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, and other psychiatric conditions, thus having a worse impact on a person's mental well-being.

Besides, dysthymia not only affects an individual's mood and mental state but also influences their social interactions, relationships, and overall psychosocial well-being. Individuals with dysthymia often experience difficulties in various psychosocial areas. For example, the persistent feelings of sadness,

hopelessness, and low self-esteem associated with dysthymia can hinder the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships (Poole, 2023). Social withdrawal, reduced interest in activities, and reduced energy levels can lead to social isolation and feelings of disconnection from others (Kameo, 2022).

Additionally, the chronic nature of dysthymia can affect a person's work or academic performance, as well as their ability to carry out daily activities and responsibilities. This can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and frustration, further exacerbating the psychosocial challenges associated with the condition (Melrose, 2017; Yoho, 2019). Additionally, psychosocial factors can also influence the onset, course, and outcome of dysthymia. Adverse life events, such as trauma, loss, or chronic stress, may contribute to the development of dysthymia.

Furthermore, the researchers focused on Morgan and Clara as subjects because of their past experiences, which led to dysthymia, analyzing their depiction in psychosocial aspects in the novel *Regretting You* (2019) by Colleen Hoover through the lens of dysthymia theory to understand how their sadness manifests and influence his social life (Hoover, 2019; Thase & Lang, 2004). This approach aims to reveal changes in the psychosocial aspects experienced by the two main characters when experiencing dysthymia in the novel.

In addition, Hoover's *Regretting You* (2019) intricately explores the complexities of love, loss, and family dynamics following the tragic deaths of Morgan's husband and Clara's

father (Hoover, 2019). As the mother-daughter duo navigates grief and attempts to rebuild their lives, the narrative unfolds with secrets and misunderstandings that weigh on their relationship. Then, how is the psychosocial of dysthymia sufferers represented in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*? This paper outlines the conditions of Morgan and Clara when facing dysthymia due to the death of a family member and investigates how the process of grieving for the loss of a family member has an impact on the psychosocial mother and daughter, specifically examining the manifestation of depression through dysthymia (Hoover, 2019; Thase & Lang, 2004). This study also anticipates demonstrating a correlation between psychosocial and dysthymia and identifying it as a contributing cause to dysthymia.

METHOD

To address the inquiry outlined in this research, a qualitative approach is employed to explore specific concepts and written material. Through descriptive analysis, both online text is scrutinized to elucidate the correlations between the novel and the concept of psychosocial in individuals experiencing dysthymia. This investigation integrates literary concepts and ideas from cultural studies. The analytical process involves a thorough examination of the novel, comparing its themes with the concept of psychosocial, scrutinizing dialogues and written narratives, incorporating pertinent quotations into the article, and compiling a comprehensive list of references from primary and secondary sources. Colleen Hoover's

Regretting You (2019) and *Beating the Blues: New Approaches to Overcoming Dysthymia and Chronic Mild Depression* by Michael E. Thase and Susan S. Lang serve as the primary data and theoretical framework for this research. Furthermore, the study concentrates on exploring how Morgan and Clara's experience of dysthymia impacts their psychosocial well-being, thereby influencing their cognition and behavior in their daily lives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Delineation of Psychosocial through Morgan and Clara's Dysthymia

Colleen Hoover's novel *Regretting You* was first released in 2019. It is a crucial and emotional novel that represents the themes of love, grief, self-discovery, and the intricate mother-daughter relationship (Hoover, 2019). The story revolves around Morgan and Clara, a mother and daughter whose bond undergoes challenges following a tragic incident that disrupts their family dynamics. Narrated from two distinct perspectives, the novel provides insight into the contrasting experiences of the protagonists, shedding light on the complexities of relationships and the profound impact of loss. Those asserted in the quotations:

I'm too scared to drink now, because if I am pregnant, I have no idea what that could do. (Chapter 1, Page 14)

Morgan's psychosocial development commenced during her adolescent years (Hoover, 2019). At a juncture where she wished to attend her boyfriend's graduation celebration, she unexpectedly learned of her pregnancy. This unforeseen

circumstance not only prevented her from fully enjoying the graduation festivities but also engendered worry and anxiety that encumbered her social interactions.

Everyone around me seems to have a purpose, yet I feel like I've reached the age of thirty-four and have absolutely no life outside of Clara and Chris. (Chapter 3, Page 47)

I swear, sometimes I forget who I was or what I loved before I got pregnant with Clara. (Chapter 3, Page 48)

At the age of thirty-four, in her role as a housewife, Morgan becomes cognizant of the absence of a distinct purpose in her life when juxtaposed with the seeming direction and fulfillment present in Chris and Clara's lives (Hoover, 2019). This comparative prompts her to contemplate the significance of her existence, ultimately leading her to surmise that her life appears devoid of purpose as she has wholeheartedly devoted herself to Chris and Clara. The realization of this lack of purpose instigates a questioning of the significance of her selfless commitment to her family, subsequently impacting her social interactions and surroundings.

If I had to describe myself with one word based on my behavior today, it would be whiny. (Chapter 3, Page 50)

While finishing her birthday board and considering her goals, Morgan starts to feel a twinge of jealousy (Hoover, 2019). Being mindful of her own ambitions and desires, she causes Morgan to once again ponder her own traits in light of Clara's. Morgan's perception of a

change in Clara leads her to reevaluate herself in comparison.

My mouth falls open in offense. "Predictable?" (Chapter 3, Page 50)
I don't think she was trying to be mean, but predictable is not something I wanted to hear. (Chapter 3, Page 51)

Encouraged by Morgan's sense that her personality has evolved, she articulates a wish to comprehend how her daughter views her (Hoover, 2019). When Clara describes her as "predictable," Morgan is startled and struggles to accept it. This dissimilarity suggests that Morgan had anticipated a different description and had a different self-perception compared to how Clara sees her.

I know she's hurting, but she's not the only one. (Chapter 8, Page 91)

Clara surmised that her mother's heightened tone may have been influenced by the strain of grieving the passing of her father and aunt (Hoover, 2019). Clara's acknowledgment of her mother's suffering serves as a revelation of her own feelings and encounters. This implies that Clara perceives her mother's emotional outburst as possibly rooted in the distress and sorrow she endured following the loss of her father and aunt, thereby impacting the dynamic of the mother-daughter relationship.

An examination of excerpts from the novel highlights a series of terrible events that put enormous strain on the relationship between mother and daughter, Morgan and Clara (Hoover, 2019). The narrative reveals various circumstances and revelations that greatly impact their familial

relationship, resulting in diverse and turbulent dynamics between the two individuals. This narrative progression also has a transformative effect on their social lives, leading to increasingly large and uncontrollable changes, which are exacerbated by the dysthymia they experience.

Psychosocial as the Aspect of Dysthymia Concept

Most individuals are familiar with the prevalence of depression as a mental health condition that many people experience, especially in contemporary times (Hidayat, 2020; Ishizaki & Mimura, 2011). This is often triggered by various factors, with mental health issues being the most commonly cited cause. It is crucial to recognize that depression encompasses a wide range of manifestations beyond this general understanding, with numerous types existing worldwide. Dysthymia, also known as Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD), is a specific form of depression that warrants attention (Frothingham, 2021). According to Arnow and Constantino, the term "dysthymia" originates from the Greek words meaning "bad state of mind" or "ill humor" (Arnow & Constantino, 2003). Dysthymia typically presents with milder or less severe symptoms compared to major depression, but it persists for an extended duration (Arnow & Constantino, 2003; Perry, 2021; Thase & Lang, 2004). Additionally, dysthymia is considered a significant mental health concern due to its association with prolonged periods of low mood.

Dysthymia, as described by Michael E. Thase, M.D. and Susan S.

Lang in the book *Beating the Blues: New Approaches to Overcoming Dysthymia and Chronic Mild Depression*, is a debilitating condition that brings about unhappiness, distorts one's self-perception, and hinders interpersonal relationships (Thase & Lang, 2004). Consequently, individuals with dysthymia, known as dysthymic individuals, may struggle to navigate their lives effectively, leading to instability in their relationships. Their tendency to internalize feelings of misery can result in self-blame and a propensity to attribute their melancholic state to external factors (Halverson, 2019; Klein & Santiago, 2003).

Moreover, Dysthymia is a form of chronic depression that results in a lack of interest in daily activities, diminished self-worth, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and challenges in maintaining productivity (Farooqi, 2023; Klein & Santiago, 2003; Tschiesner, 2023). Individuals with dysthymia may find it challenging to experience positivity even in favorable circumstances. Thase and Lang elaborate on the causes of dysthymia, particularly in the realm of psychosocial factors, which they categorize into three examples:

1. History of depression

A prior history of depression substantially increases the chances of experiencing repeated depressive episodes. Each instance raises the risk of enduring depression long-term, potentially because the brain becomes more accustomed to the depressive state with each successive episode (Thase & Lang, 2004).

2. Poor coping strategies and cognitive distortions

The experience of loss in human life, often linked to significant events that impact self-worth, is a contributing factor to depression, particularly when individuals adopt a pessimistic explanatory style (Sarmi, et al., 2023; Thase & Lang, 2004). This involves attributing setbacks to personal fault and exaggerating the permanent nature of the loss, leading to heightened risk through rumination and self-criticism, which can transform difficulties into overwhelming disasters. On the contrary, individuals resilient to depression tend to approach losses with a less threatening attitude, refraining from negative interpretations and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth (Sarmi, et al., 2024; Jelita, et al., 2024). Such individuals protect themselves by focusing on forward progression, employing an active coping strategy that emphasizes problem-solving and engaging in activities that serve as distractions, thereby reducing the likelihood of depression (Oktavia, et al., 2023; Thase & Lang, 2004).

3. Anxiety

Anxiety and depression often occur together, as fear and sadness, which relate to threat and loss, are closely linked emotions. It is common for over 95 percent of individuals with depression to also experience anxiety, and more than half of those with anxiety disorders to go through significant episodes of depression (Thase & Lang, 2004; Wirnoto, et al., 2023).

The Continuation of Psychosocial in Morgan and Clara's Dysthymia

In Colleen Hoover's novel *Regretting You*, the protagonists, Morgan and Clara, grapple with depression following the loss of their loved ones (Hoover, 2019). The story explores the experiences of Morgan and Clara as they contend with dysthymia, a condition that contributes to their psychosocial transformations (Hoover, 2019; Thase & Lang, 2004). The novel illustrates how their narrative of psychosocial shifts amidst mourning is substantiated by the concept of dysthymia, shedding light on the complexities of mental health and grief in the characters' lives. Additionally, their psychosocial changes were heightened by the painful aftermath of their family members' deaths (Goldsmith, 2020; Thase & Lang, 2004). The discussion are explored in the following quotations:

I cry with Elijah at night. (Chapter 11, Page 112)

I cry in the shower. (Chapter 11, Page 112)

Morgan's escalating tears were prompted by the discovery of Chris and Jenny's affair following their deaths (Hoover, 2019). Moreover, Jonah's choice to discontinue caring for Elijah upon realizing that the child was not biologically his further compounded Morgan's anguish. Unintentionally weeping beside Elijah, Morgan prolonged her emotional turmoil into the night, subsequently impacting her daily routine.

Based on the quotes, Morgan's tears, beyond her control, indicate that her emotional turmoil is heightened by this situation (Hoover, 2019; Rieckmann, 2020). This also

signifies the deep emotional impact that the revelations of her husband's affair and the truth about Elijah's paternity have had on Morgan's overall mental and emotional state. The revelation has significantly affected her psychosocial well-being, as the breakdown of trust in her relationships and the loss of support in caring for Elijah have left Morgan feeling emotionally overwhelmed, ultimately leading to her experience of dysthymia (Thase & Lang, 2004).

*“That’s not the way to the front door!” I yell. (Chapter 13, Page 121)
I feel terrible for snapping at her.
(Chapter 13, Page 121)*

Morgan is burdened by regret for her harsh reaction toward her daughter, driven by a deep sense of frustration stemming from the troubling circumstances she recently faced (Hoover, 2019). The discovery of her husband's affair with her sister evoked feelings of anger and frustration in Morgan. Unfortunately, she unintentionally directs these emotions toward Clara, expressing her bottled-up resentment and agitation through sharp remarks.

The quote indicates that Morgan's remorse stems from realizing that she unfairly directed her built-up anger and frustration towards her daughter (Tilghman-osborne et al., 2014). Furthermore, Morgan's emotional reaction is influenced by her dysthymia, a chronic mood disorder characterized by persistent low mood and feelings of hopelessness (Thase & Lang, 2004). Dysthymia amplifies negative emotions, making it more difficult for individuals to effectively manage their responses (Rieckmann, 2020;

Thase & Lang, 2004). Moreover, the distressing circumstances of uncovering her husband's and sister's affair have intensified Morgan's psychosocial stressors. These external pressures, combined with her internal struggles related to dysthymia, contributed to her heightened emotional reaction towards Clara.

I don't like it. (Chapter 16, Page 151)

When Clara attends Jonah's class, she notices Jonah's tense or mournful expression (Hoover, 2019). Connecting his mood to her own feelings, Clara takes on the blame for the sorrow she detects in Jonah's face following the loss of her father and aunt. She dislikes the burden of feeling accountable for Jonah's hidden sadness, causing her to once more link it to her behavior, especially when he is instructing in the classroom.

The statement suggests that Clara struggles with discomfort and dissatisfaction when feeling responsible for Jonah's perceived distress. Clara's tendency to connect Jonah's emotional state to her actions may indicate a manifestation of psychosocial elements (Bruce, 2024; Thase & Lang, 2004). The psychosocial context, which includes the loss of her father and aunt, has contributed to Clara's increased sensitivity and feelings of guilt (Thase & Lang, 2004). Additionally, Clara's remark, which links her emotional well-being to dysthymia, a chronic mood disorder, suggests that dysthymia can impact one's perception and intensify feelings of guilt, self-blame, and a sense of obligation for others' emotions (Johns

Hopkins Medicine, 2024). By addressing both her emotional struggles and the psychosocial elements in her life, Clara experiences dysthymia.

I'm not sure this is something we can fix on our own. (Chapter 25, Page 215)

This is definitely rock bottom.
(Chapter 25, Page 220)

Clara was surprised when she came home and saw her mother kissing Jonah in the kitchen (Hoover, 2019). Startled, she called out to her mom, and both were equally taken aback. Feeling angry, Clara retreated to her bedroom, assuming her mother was having an affair with Jonah following the deaths of Chris and Jenny (Hoover, 2019). Morgan, feeling unable to resolve this difficult situation alone with Clara, believed she needed outside help. She felt uncertain about whom to confide in, as the two people, Chris and Jenny, who had always supported her, were no longer alive. Morgan considered seeking therapy, but also thought it might be too late, as the recent event hadn't changed anything in her relationship with Clara.

The quotation suggests that Morgan acknowledges the intricacy and seriousness of the situation regarding Clara's perspective on her relationship with Jonah (Hoover, 2019). Dysthymia hinders one's ability to cope effectively and make rational decisions in challenging circumstances (Tschiesner, 2023). It is plausible that Morgan's own emotional state contributes to her belief that the situation necessitates external assistance to navigate and address the underlying issues.

Additionally, the psychosocial impact of the recent tragedies involving the deaths of Chris and Jenny adds another layer of complexity to the scenario. The loss of these significant individuals in Morgan's life heightens her feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness, leading her to experience dysthymia (Roberts, 2022; Thase & Lang, 2004).

I feel it might be counterproductive to my mental health. (Chapter 26, Page 225)

Clara and Lexie arrive at school, with Lexie proceeding to her class while Clara heads towards Jonah's classroom (Hoover, 2019). Clara intentionally disregards Jonah as she passes by him, feigning ignorance about any previous interactions between them. Despite Jonah's reminder to refrain from using her phone during class, Clara continues to exchange messages with Lexie covertly. She defiantly assures Jonah that she will comply once she finishes her conversation, unfazed by the reactions of those around her. Only when Jonah addresses her by name does Clara turn to face him, acknowledging his authoritative stance as the teacher (Hoover, 2019). While she had previously held respect for this aspect of Jonah, her anger towards his affair with her mother and the lingering memory of their kiss fuel her defiance towards and dismissal of his directives.

The quotation suggests that Clara is concerned about the potential adverse effects of complying with these authority figures on her emotional and psychological well-being (Montijo, 2022; Thase & Lang, 2004). With Clara's past experiences

and the intense emotions she is grappling with, such as anger and betrayal towards Jonah and her mother, her mental health is influenced by both psychosocial and individual factors. The psychosocial context encompassing the affairs, along with the intricate dynamics it has spawned within her family, probably play a part in contributing to Clara's emotional upheaval.

My whole life, I thought I had these great examples of love and family and humanity around me, but it was all bullshit. (Chapter 34, Page 275)

After uncovering her father and aunt's illicit relationship, Clara's belief in the affection they had shown her shatters (Hoover, 2019). Previously, she had held them in high esteem, making this discovery feel like a betrayal of the love they had appeared to offer her. Consequently, Clara becomes disenchanted, questioning the sincerity of all love received and given, including her relationship with her boyfriend, Miller.

The unraveling of her father and aunt's affair challenges her comprehension of love and familial dynamics, affecting her sense of self, trust, and connections with others. These encounters contribute to Clara's prevalent feelings of dissatisfaction, typical characteristics of dysthymia (Thase & Lang, 2004; Yoho, 2019). The amalgamation of her emotional disillusionment and the persistent low mood attributed to dysthymia intensifies her uncertainties and negativity towards love, encompassing her relationship with her boyfriend, Miller. Furthermore, this disillusionment is

associated with both dysthymia and psychosocial influences, impacting Clara's emotional state, interpersonal connections, and overall perceptions of love.

She did everything she could to shield me from the truth, even if that meant unfairly taking the blame.

(Chapter 34, Page 279)

Clara contemplates her mother's altruism, acknowledging that Morgan, who became a mother at a young age, has consistently placed the welfare of Chris and Clara at the forefront (Hoover, 2019). Clara ponders her mother's selfless actions and comprehends the significant influence that Morgan's early experience of motherhood has had on her own life. Despite the obstacles they encountered, Morgan consistently placed her children's well-being above all else (Hoover, 2019). Nevertheless, Clara also recognizes the sacrifices her mother made, notably in protecting her from certain truths, even when it meant unfairly shouldering the blame.

The quotation underscores the intricate relationship between Morgan's altruism, the existence of dysthymia, and the psychosocial effects on both mother and daughter (Thase & Lang, 2004). It acts as a poignant acknowledgment of the sacrifices and emotional complexities faced by parents, especially those grappling with mental health issues, as they endeavor to protect their loved ones from harm while managing their own internal struggles.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, Morgan and Clara exhibited

symptoms of dysthymia as they underwent the grieving process following the loss of family members, leading to psychosocial transformation. The development of dysthymia in Morgan and Clara was caused by various psychosocial factors. Morgan's life was greatly influenced by the challenges she faced after becoming a mother to Clara at a young age and prioritizing family responsibilities. These challenges impacted Morgan's thoughts and behaviors.

Nevertheless, Morgan and Clara experienced psychosocial changes

following the deaths of their closest family members, Chris and Jenny, which altered their perspectives on life and led them to feel a shift in their realities. The psychosocial changes in both the mother and daughter escalated alongside the unfortunate events that befell them, ultimately resulting in them experiencing dysthymia. Additionally, the distrust and misunderstandings between Morgan and Clara further highlighted their psychosocial changes, causing a strain in their mother-daughter relationship.

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