

FROM PAGE TO PERCEPTION: EXPLORING THE DEPTHS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH TEXTUAL AND READERS' INFERENCES WITH REFERENCE TO HOOVER'S 'IT ENDS WITH US'

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ABSTRACT

The current textual-empirical study explores how the text demonstrates the theme of domestic violence and how the readers transact with the text and connect the theme with their personal and social observations with reference to It Ends with Us (2016). Since the study is textual-empirical in its nature, to get insights about domestic violence in the text, Walker's theory of violence has guided the textual part. To critically analyze the perceptions of readers to the theme of domestic violence, Rosenblatt's model of reader response theory has directed the empirical part of the study. The literature review on It Ends with Us (2016) has broadly evaluated its exploration of domestic violence, the behavioral complexity of its characters, and its role in raising awareness about violent and oppressive relationships, emphasizing the novel's influence on contemporary discussions on trauma and healing. The empirical data was collected from 6 participants through semi-structured interviews using Kallio's model (2016). The first part of the study was analyzed through close reading of the text, whereas, Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis (2006) helped to analyze the empirical data. The findings of the study revealed that all the phases of the Cycle of Violence were reflected in the novel and the participants demonstrated a profound engagement with the thematic relevancy and proximity, showcasing a nuanced ability to connect with the core themes of the study. These results are important for curriculum designers, literature instructors, and researchers in reader response as they provide significant insights into students' perceptions in relation to fiction.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; Reader Response Theory; Cycle of Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

In a world where love is often painted as perfect, Colleen Hoover's 'It Ends with Us' reveals the gritty truth behind the fairy tale, proving that sometimes the bravest love stories are the ones that shatter our hearts.

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Domestic violence is a heartbreaking societal issue that manifests itself in different forms, affecting folks and kin across the globe, often leaving long-lasting physical and emotional scars. Even in the 21st century, not much has changed in the way women are treated in society. As evident by numerous studies, women are still a target of domestic violence. Despite the modern times, cases of domestic violence are still widely prevalent, signifying the complexities of abusive relationships. Kruger (1994) has highlighted, "All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype" (p. 04). Moreover, the World Health Organization (WHO) organized various campaigns that revealed the startling rates of domestic violence in the current age, highlighting the requirement to address these issues and prevent such abuse (WHO, 2013).

Literature is the mirror of society and it is due to literature that true life can be found (Xingjian, 2023). Throughout the years, various literary works have unveiled the social ills, capturing the complexities and injustices prevalent in the society. Authors enlighten the issues regarding inequality and discrimination, to human right abuses and political anarchy. Quintessential novels like Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre", George Orwell's "1984", and Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" epitomize how literature can shed light on scratchy truths and condemn the wrongdoings of society. Likewise, Colleen Hoover's "It Ends with Us"(2016) is a modern-day novel that addresses complicated subjects such as domestic violence and abusive relationships. The plot initially delves into the past experiences and sufferings which ultimately result in shaping the characters' personalities and highlights the complexities of recognizing and breaking the cycle of abuse. The story emphasizes on the recognition and breaking of the cyclical nature of abuse and seeking help. This novel encourages discussions on domestic violence, cycle of abuse and consent. It also inspires the readers to speak about the complicated abusive relationships.

The readers' response to a text plays an essential role in determining a texts' meaning. According to Rosenblatt (1994), the text's meaning is not solely based on the words but rather on the interconnection between a reader and text. Her theory of transaction emphasizes on the readers' contribution to bring forth their viewpoints and experiences to the act of reading, thus, co-creating the meaning of the text. The reader-response not only enhances the reading experience but also increases the different meanings of a single text.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How the Walker's cycle of domestic violence is reflected in the novel, *It Ends with Us*?

2. What are the perceptions of readers to the theme of domestic violence with reference to the novel, *It Ends with Us*?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Walker's Theory of Cycle of Violence and Relevant Studies

In 1979, Lenore E. Walker presented a ground-breaking theory that radically changed the concept of domestic violence. Walker's Cycle of Violence Theory (1979) provides an important lens through which we can comprehend the repetitive nature of violent relationships while gathering criticism over the years. Walker's "Cycle of Violence" (1979) is a hypothesis that centers on the idea that violent relationships usually cycle through different phases and that the victims usually go through each stage. Walker's theory proposes to explain the complex relationships that support the enduring nature of domestic violence. The tension-building phase, the acute battering incident, and the honeymoon phase are the three major stages of the theory.

In the early phase of Tension-building, relationship tension and uneasiness tend to rise. Minor disagreements and disputes occur, and the victim generally tries to prevent tripping off the abuser. Communication becomes tough, and the victim might feel as though they are paddling water. Likewise, Communication falls down, minor disagreements and tensions grow, and the victim remains tense as a result of the mounting tension. The relationship is enveloped by an air of anxiety and ambiguity as the Tension-Building Phase continues. Slight arguments that occur in this first stage of the relationship set an atmosphere for what will follow (Walker, 1979). The victim walks cautiously, hoping not to provoke the abuser's anger. They make an effort, but interaction breaks down, leaving them stranded in a sea of rising stress.

A vigorous rise in verbal, emotional, or physical abuse defines the acute battering incident phase. A violent outburst arises from the maximum tension that has been piling up. Violence is targeted at the victim, causing them to abuse in many various forms. Just like that, as tension becomes violent or abusive, the abuser breaks control and attacks the victim, causing fear and helplessness. The highest point of increasing anxiety and stress is the Acute Battering Incident phase. A strong rush of verbal, emotional, or physical abuse that collapses as the tension approaches its breaking point characterizes this outraged period. The abuser lacks control, resulting in an act of violence thrown in numerous ways towards the victim. The victim finds themselves in a cycle of dread and powerlessness as a result of the previous loving partner being a source of suffering and misery.

Following an important occurrence, the relationship's scene is enveloped in a false disguise of change all through the honeymoon phase. The violator rushes into an uproar of apologies and promises of better upon feeling guilty. They convey affection and make promises of improvement in an obvious sincere effort. At the same time, the person who suffered manages to hope for real change while she yearns for a break from the turmoil. It's a subtle pause where the aroma of fleeting peace and a sense of relief saturate the air. However, the intricacy of human emotions and the intricate patterns that tie victims to their perpetrators lay below this thin shell of healing. Although it gives a brief break, the Honeymoon Phase serves as a vivid symbol of the complex dance between manipulation and vulnerability.

The theory of the Cycle of violence (1979) is valuable for various reasons: Initially, it helps one recognize the violent patterns of their partner. Only after recognition, one can intervene and prevent oneself from abusive relationships. This theory also helps people spread awareness about the cyclical nature of violence. J. Sangeetha, S. Mohan, A. Hariharasudan, and Nishad Nawaz (2022) studied the subject of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by analyzing its diverse dimensions – social, physical, psychological- through the lens of an Indian writer, Meena Kandasmy. In her novel, "When I Hit You" she brilliantly portrays the disturbing suffering of women in abusive marriages. This research highlights the tormenting realities of domestic abuse by juxtaposing Kandasmy's novel with Walker's Cycle of Violence theory. It emphasizes the manipulation and victimization employed by abusers to exert control. The findings stress on the requirement of governmental intervention to provide safety to victims trapped by abusers.

Likewise, Hazarika (2019) explored Walker's theory in his research on "Reading Domestic Violence in Girish Karnad's Play "Naga Mandala", enlightening the cyclical nature of violence and the manipulation caused by the abuser. Walker's theory finds resonance with Indian playwrights such as Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar addressing the dangers of marital violence in their different works. Moreover, Riaz (2020) investigated domestic violence against women in Kerala. He highlights the fact that in most households, the target of domestic violence is women, and the abusers are their marital partners indeed. He uses the "Cycle of Violence" theory by Lenore Walker to identify these abusive relationships. The findings of this study reveal 179 women who disclosed that they had been physically abused in their marital life.

The notion of Battered Woman's Syndrome developed by L. Walker is reviewed in an article by Flynn (2019). This syndrome highlights the "cyclical nature of violence" and leaves an impact on a woman emotionally and

physically. The article reviews various differing theories to comprehend the evolution of Battered Woman's Syndrome.

In regard to the specific types of abuse, Bernice (2023) provides valuable insights regarding the social issue of domestic violence prevalent in the novel, *It Ends with Us* in her study. The method of research used in the study is purely textual based. The study investigates how domestic violence is portrayed in Hoover's novel "*It Ends with Us*" while mainly focusing on the protagonist's experiences. Therefore, the study analyzes the particular form of abuse encountered by the protagonist based on psychological perspective. It is identified through Walker's Cycle of Violence (1979) that the protagonist has faced distinct forms of abuse, such as, physical violence, marital rape, and psychological violence. The findings of this study suggest that when facing domestic violence, one should terminate the marriage to survive.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory and the Relevant Studies

Louise Rosenblatt proposed an outline of reader response theory in her revolutionary book titled, "*Literature as Exploration*" (1938/1970, 1978/1994) which ties literature with readers' perceptions. As per Rosenblatt, reading is an active process when a reader reads, they interpret and respond to the text based on their own experiences and emotions, thus the continuity of reconstruction of a text's meaning. (Rosenblatt, 1994) A readers' diverse cultural background plays an important role when they read and interpret the meaning of a text. (Yang, 2002) Preceding knowledge and experiences lets a reader connect to a text on a personal level. (Pearson, 2000)

In her theory of 'Transaction with Text', Rosenblatt explains that the word "Transaction" can be used to label a mutual relationship. (Dewey and Bentley, 1949) Rosenblatt, inspired by Dewey's definition of "Transaction" theorized her "Transactional Reader Response Theory" in which she emphasizes on the transaction happening between both the reader and text. In the transactional method, when readers read the text, their lifetime experiences and feelings are also playing a part. It is due to these experiences that readers are able to relate to texts and categorize themselves with either the characters or with the story. This factor is what impacts the reading transaction and making meaning of the text. Therefore, readers are producing different meanings of the literary texts.

Furthermore, Rosenblatt claimed that both the reader and the text are important for creating meaning of the text in the transactional process. During the transaction process, both the reader and the text remain equally flexible. This flexibility can let the reading experience to be dynamic and collaborative.

In deriving the meaning of the text, the collaboration between a text and reader is essential. The response by the reader can impact in making sense of the text (Bressler, 1998). When a reader engages with a text, they're dealing with a multifaceted and dynamic process of interacting with the aesthetic elements of the text. They not only have a rational understanding of the text but also a sensual understanding of it (Connell, 2000).

In line with various reading styles, Rosenblatt (1994) proclaims that transaction with literary text can take place with different reading styles, that is, aesthetic continuum and efferent continuum. The denotation of efferent reading is that readers pursue data from the text. More consideration or focus is applied to the token, icebergs' tip. Whereas, in the denotation of aesthetic reading, readers share a connection with the text which lets them interpret it on a more personal level. Aesthetic reading carries several responses and works as a stimulus to provoke past experiences (Tompkins, 1980). A literary text owns a certain influence; it enables the reader to face reality of how they live (Pike, 2003). Hence, aesthetic reading style associates with the sensory understanding of readers.

Reader response criticism has resulted in an extensive body of literature. It has had a significant impact on the way many research researchers and practitioners approach readers' interactions with literary texts due to its obvious focus on readers' literary experiences. Schrijvers' (2016) study is also noteworthy in terms of literary effect. This study examines how literary education influences students' social and personal beliefs. It intends to examine the relationships between students' learning experiences and teachers' classroom exercises. According to the findings, almost all students claimed to have learned more about themselves and others from literary works: mostly personal characterization of one's own personality, evaluation of people's behavior, life lessons, and an optimistic attitude towards literature.

Next, Putri and Kasrabowo (2021) researched about the notion of faithfulness in relationships, precisely observing how women maintain faithfulness. The study employs Rosenblatt's reader response theory and investigates the actions and emotions of women. This study discloses both an optimistic and a critical impression of faithfulness. Findings specify that faithfulness is sustained through communication, showing interest, and practicing patience. In a similar vein, Anthony Wilson (2021) agrees with Rosenblatt's reader-response theory in his "The Reader, The Text, The Poem" suggesting that poems are innately communal, nurturing discussion and interpretation. A poem's meaning is developed through a reader's engagement, determined by their interests and experiences. The author advocates for a reader-response model inspired by John Dewey's notion

regarding art, which is all about experiencing. The author also shares classroom examples that endorse discussion and let readers form a connection with poems on a personal level.

Shaikh's (2022) study also applied the reader-response approach to explore the perceptions of undergraduate students about existentialism and life's meaning with reference to the play *Waiting for Godot*. The findings of the study revealed that participants' responses were affected by their social and educational backgrounds. Participants connected existentialist themes that were very close to their life experiences and observations. The participants also reflected that the play raised a sense of questioning among them.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is textual-empirical in its nature. The first part of the study is textual that reveals how the cycles of domestic violence are reflected in the novel under the lens of Walker's theory (1979). The second part of the study is empirical that follows qualitative research design and explores students' perceptions to the selected theme. For qualitative part, the design highlights the rich and contextualized experiences, emphasizing on the intrinsic meanings and reasons from study participants.

Based on the research procedure of the study, this study was conducted in two phases (Textual and interviews). Initially, in the first phase, we collected the data from the text itself to answer the first research question. According to McKee (2001) textual analysis is the path towards collection of information about how other humans make sense of the world. The textual analysis approach allows us to review the text from a specific lens. In this study, we have analyzed the novel, *It Ends with Us* through the lens of Walker's *Cycle of Violence* (1979). In the second phase, we collected the data by conducting interviews to answer the second research question. To know the readers' perceptions, interviews were conducted by semi-structured formats. This method encourages participants to vocalize their opinions, perspectives and experiences in a natural and comprehensive manner.

For semi-structured interviews, Kallio's et al. (2016) framework for developing a qualitative semi-structured interview guide was employed. Kallio has identified several steps for the appropriate data collection via semi-structured interviews i.e., identifying that semi-structured interviewing is the appropriate data collection method, retrieving and using previous knowledge, formulating a preliminary interview guide and pilot-testing the guide, and presenting the complete interview guide.

The method of sampling used for this study was a purposive sampling. Data for the second research question was collected from 6 participants (3

males and 3 females) between the ages of 20-28 who were students of undergraduate and master program. The participants were selected on the basis of their reading of the selected novel, *It Ends with Us*. It was ensured that the selected participants would have read the selected novel and could deliver in-depth understanding and inclusive information about the theme under analysis, intensifying the study's legitimacy and relevance. Participants belonged to diverse ethnic groups and social classes.

In this study, we have analyzed the data in two different patterns as per the phases of data collection. The pattern used to analyze data for the first research question is through the close reading of the text. The text, *It Ends with Us* is critically analyzed through the lens of Walker's Cycle of Domestic Violence (1979), a theory distinguished to examine abusive relationships. The findings are presented with textual evidence. Both the quotations and textual lines are highlighted which justify the alignment between the selected novel and Walkers' Cycle of Domestic Violence. The pattern used to analyze data for the second research questions, the data is analyzed through Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis (2013). The model suggests six interconnected steps to analyze the interview data.

In this study, we highly prioritize the ethical aspects embedded within our research methodology. We have followed the ethical framework of respecting each individual's autonomy and have interviewed people who had given their voluntary consent. Each interviewee was given detailed information regarding the purpose of this study and the procedure that was involved. They have also been given full liability to withdraw from the interview at any time they feel at unease. To maintain the privacy of the participants, all the data collected in this study was anonymized and stored securely. Our research also ensured to respect cultural sensitivity and diverse perspectives without any bias. By following these measurements, we aimed to conduct a research which not only advances our knowledge but does so with utmost respect for the integrity of participants involved.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Cycle of Violence in the Novel, *It Ends with Us*

Initially in the novel, we see the protagonist, Lily's traumatizing childhood due to her parent's abusive relationship. The following textual lines reveal that the mother, Jenny, has raised her child and spent her own life in a constant tension building household. As the textual lines reveal: *"Dad got home late tonight, which means he went to the bar after work. Which means he's probably going to instigate a fight with my mother. Which means he'll probably do something stupid again"* (p.64). These lines highlight the constant dilemma

that the child has endured and her innate thought to her father coming home late means trouble in paradise. It also hints towards alcoholism being the reason behind father's aggression. It is due to his drunken state that he picks unreasonable fights with his wife and creates a miserable environment at home.

It's important to know that when your bubble bursts, it leaves a mark on you. A dark shadow falls upon the tree of hope. The following line signifies the nervousness Lily encounters: *"The anger in Ryle's voice makes me nauseous"* (p.263). The air is filled with anxiety and ambiguity as Lily slowly grows familiar with the outrage of her partner.

Every violent encounter between the victim and abuser is initiated with verbal anger at first, then comes the unpredictability of their anger accompanied by the physical aggressive behavior. *"He's going to leave me. Or, he's going to hurt me"* (p.230). It shows that the abuser will either threaten to leave them or physically harm them, either way, causing distress to the victim. The representation of the agony and helplessness that the victim experiences at the hand of the abuser is portrayed in the novel as, *"I have no idea if I'm supposed to hate him, or be terrified of him, or feel bad for him. How can I be feeling all three?"* (p.232). These lines emphasize on the sense of impotence at the face of disaster. The confusion that fills the victims with agony, leaving them drained and wiped out.

The following lines reveal the bafflement of the protagonist, *"My heart begins to smash against the walls of my chest. It's pounding because I'm terrified of him. It's pounding because I hate him. It's pounding because I've missed him"* (p.319). These mixed feelings of Lily signify the chaos she feels at her heart. The man who once gave her all butterflies is now the reason behind the bee stinging her heart.

In the second phase of acute battering, Walker highlights the violent outbursts of the abuser towards the victim. The abuse can be of several forms, be it physical, emotional, psychological or sexual. The abuser is violent and aggressive to the extent that they will do anything to simply harm the victim. In the novel, *It Ends with Us*, we see Lily's mother as the victim to the abuse caused by her aggressive partner and Lily herself as the victim to Ryle's aggression.

4.2 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is a destructive form of mistreatment that leads to physical discomfort upon an individual. Physical abuse can be of various forms such as, pushing, kicking, punching, slapping, or choking. The protagonist's mother, Jenny has been a victim to domestic abuse her entire marriage life. Lily

has grown up watching her mother beaten up on various occasions. *"I opened the garage door and didn't see my mom. I just saw my dad behind the car doing something. He had her pushed down on the hood with his hands around her throat. He was choking her"* (p.110). These lines highlight not only the abuse Lily's mother endured but also her fathers' attempt to murder her. The hatred is simply presented in his attempt to choke her to death.

Hoover also represents physical abuse in the context of the main character. Lily herself witnessed Ryle's aggression in a physical form of abuse, not once but twice: *"In a matter of one second, Ryle's arm came out of nowhere and slammed against me, knocking me backward. There was enough force behind it to knock me off balance."* (p.185). In these lines, Ryle pushes Lily backward with high force ultimately harming her. Physical abuse is always initiated first with forceful pushing. The force that Ryle exerted to push Lily signifies his determination behind the act. *"You fell down the stairs."* Ryle says. *But I didn't fall. He pushed me. Again. "You pushed me," I say through tears. It's all I can think or say or see"* (p.232). These lines represent the continuity of Ryle pushing Lily with high exerted force which ultimately physically harms Lily. She is tormented with these bitter and horrible actions of Ryle. The unpredictability of his actions has shaken Lily to the core.

4.3 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is an act of violence where the abuser sexually harasses and assaults the victim, exploiting their right of consent. The abuser imposes physical intimacy on the victim which can result in not only psychological trauma for victims but also physical and emotional. In the novel, Hoover has portrayed sexual abuse between Lily's parents at first:

"They were on the couch and he had his hand around her throat, but his other hand was pulling up her dress. She was trying to fight him off and I just stood there, frozen. She kept begging him to get off her and then he hit her right across the face and told her to shut up. I'll never forget his words when he said, "you want attention? I'll give you some fucking attention." (p.154).

These lines represent the marital rape of Jenny Bloom. It is an act of aggression taken out sexually on Jenny. Andrew's statement of *"you want attention?"* signifies his personal insecurity and lack of self-reflection. Jenny kept begging him to get off her but Andrew only grew to be more aggressive. Hoover has skillfully presented this violation of boundaries, which is widely recognized as a human rights issue.

Hoover also portrays the sexual abuse experienced by Lily in her relationship with Ryle: *"His hands are digging into my shoulders as he pushes me toward the bed. I start trying to fight him off of me, but it's useless. He's too*

strong for me. He's angry." (p.265). These lines highlight the resistance and lack of consent on Lily's behalf but Ryle is too strong physically for Lily. He forces himself onto Lily aggressively and intensely.

In accordance with the text, Ryle's statement of, *"I'm not angry, Lily," he says, his voice disturbingly calm now. "I just think I haven't proved to you how much I love you"* (p.265). represents his manipulation. In these specific lines, Hoover has masterfully portrayed how abusers tend to exert themselves on victims sexually in the name of love. They manipulate the victim into believing that they are making love to them when in reality they are taking out their aggression on them. *"Ryle, please." I'm sobbing, trying to push him off of me with any part of my body. "Get off of me. Please."* (p.265) Lily feels constrained and disgusted with Ryle's sexual exertion. She feels tortured and agonized under the control of Ryle. Questioning how she is in love with a man who physically hurts her.

In a nutshell, the portrayal of physical, sexual or emotional abuse is a thought-provoking exploration of the complexities surrounding these issues. Based on the character's experiences, Hoover represents the deep influence of abuse on individuals and the complicated decisions they face in breaking the cycle.

The third cycle of Honeymoon phase is also very much evident in the novel. In the novel, there have been several occurrences where the abusers have apologized and promised to be better. For instance, when Ryle pushed Lily in anger for the first time, he immediately apologized: *"I'm so sorry, it all happened so fast. I didn't mean to push you, Lily, I'm sorry."* (p.186). It identifies that abusers initially are more guilty and considerate. They are likely to make up for their aggression and violent side by giving various explanations to the victim. *"I was upset and angry. And sometimes when I feel that much emotion, something inside me just snaps. I didn't process my strength against yours. I fucked up, Lily. I fucked up."* (p.241). Ryle bears the weight of his actions and apologizes. He also tries to justify his anger with past trauma. *"There are things I can't control. I get angry. I black out. I've been in therapy since I was six years old"* (p.241). Justification of mistakes is a complex aspect of an abuser's character. Justifying their mistakes on post trauma should not excuse their behavior. Ryle's mention of his therapy hints that he is expecting Lily to cut him some slack and feel sorry for him. This is one of the manipulative traits that the abuser has. *"You are my world, Lily. My world"* (p.324). Ryle also tries to make Lily feel significant by giving her reassurance that she means a great deal to him and that he cannot bear losing her. Moreover, Lily gives chances to Ryle because she is in love with him. *"Just because someone hurts you doesn't mean you can simply stop loving them"* (p.321). It underscores the idea that love

doesn't fade just because you are hurt, it involves a lot of forgiveness and a willingness to work through dark times. Throughout the novel, *It Ends with Us*, Walker's theory of Cycle of Violence can be foreseen evidently. By employing the theory of Cycle of Violence on Hoover's novel, a pattern of violence can be acknowledged. It is important to recognize the pattern of abusive relationships in order to break the cycle. It is crucial that communities and institutions come together to address the root cause of violence and take a stand against it for survivors.

4.4 Participants' Perceptions towards the Theme of Domestic Violence in relation to the Novel, It Ends with Us

Participants delved into multiple facets of the theme of domestic violence. Initially, they were able to closely connect to the theme of domestic violence with reference to their personal experiences and provided several examples from their social observations. Participants correspondingly discussed different factors that strengthen the notion of domestic violence. Some participants also gave references of different texts and drama serials. A few participants similarly reflected on how the novel can affect the readers both psychologically and emotionally. Most participants had different suggestions and ideas on how we can put an end to the disturbing concept of domestic violence. Each of the themes is explained in detail in the following subsections.

4.5 Participants' Perceptions of Domestic Violence in relation to Personal Life Experiences and Social Observation

Participants gave very limited responses when it came to the question of their personal life experiences in relation to domestic violence. One of the participants was reluctant to share how she had endured domestic violence whereas five of the participants' responded that they have not suffered any kind of domestic violence. The reluctant participant felt guilty to acknowledge what she had suffered. She quoted, *"If I say yes I feel very guilty and if I say no, I feel like I'm being dishonest"*. This highlights the phenomena that domestic violence is a matter that has not been discussed more openly that is why it creates a feeling of guilt and betrayal when the victim acknowledges it.

Each participant felt deeply connected to the theme of domestic violence in regard to their social observation. They gave various differing examples connected to their family members, relatives and house helpers. One of the participants gave an example of the traumatizing events that her friend had encountered with her parent's abusive marriage. The abusive events she witnessed her mother went through caused an eternal fear in her psyche

regarding the concept of marriage. The participant specified, *"When she used to see her father beating her mother, she had in mind that I won't be marrying the same person, because the whole marriage culture, or marriage system was so scary for her"*.

Another participant spotlighted her observation of how not one or two but several of her cousins and relatives have had abusive marriages, the participant further quoted, *"One of my cousins even had to die because of domestic violence"*. This represents the horrifying gruesome image of the domestic violence abusers who are willing to go to any extent in order to exert their power over their partner.

One of the participants discussed how she has witnessed domestic violence incidents in her own family. She quoted, *"One of my family members was very abusive with his wife and his wife, for a very long time, didn't take any initiative to go to the court or to tell anybody from her family or friends that I'm being beaten up by my husband"*. Despite being prevalent in society, domestic violence is an issue where the victim lacks the safety to discuss what they are going through. The idea of confiding in a friend or family member or seeking legal support from court seems almost impossible since this matter is somewhat neglected in the broader societal conversation.

4.6 Participants' Perceptions in relation to Factors that Strengthen Domestic Violence

Participants reflected on multiple factors that strengthen the practice of domestic violence, among which the most common elements were the role of education, the financial dependency on your partner, the patriarchal system, the weak judicial and legal system, having children, and the influence of media. In the context of cultural values, few participants discussed how our culture is highly contributing to the continuous strengthening of domestic violence. One of the participants stressed on the idea that our cultural and religious values have given a dignified role to the husbands, where they are considered as *"Mijhazi Khuda"*-next to god. Along with that, the patriarchal system of Pakistan has these predetermined roles for both men and women, which is another frightening element of domestic violence. Another participant added that, *"To be very honest, I would say patriarchy has a huge role in it. Men, because they have such huge responsibilities, financial responsibilities to look after their families, oftentimes they take their stress out in abusive ways. Or children who have grown up in abusive homes who, like I said, fail to identify that it's a bad thing, think it is okay to hit their wives."* It is due to this patriarchal superiority that many abusers think they can contribute to the perpetuation of this domestic violence.

With correspondence to the financial responsibilities, almost all participants emphasized on the notion that financial dependency is one of the saddening factors of domestic violence. The prominence of dependency for the victim is an underlying element why the victims are silent and enduring the abuse. One among the many participants' expressed, *"I think if you are financially dependent on someone, leaving them is not advisable. Obviously, you will have to earn your bread and butter and that takes a lot of courage and time and streamlining of things."* Another participant articulated that most victims of domestic violence are women who get married at an early age so they lack the basic skills and education to earn their bread that is why they cannot financially support themselves. Similarly, three participants reflected that for the sake of their child's future, many victims choose to remain quiet.

In continuation with the theme, one of the participants shared how one of her friends who had been the victim of domestic violence commented on her encounter with violence as, *"It's okay if he slapped me this time, maybe he won't next time"*. The fact that victims draw curtains on their abusive relationships highlights the notion of guilt in their resistance to acknowledge the wrongdoings of their partner. Also, one participant focused on how it is due to the hope they hold within themselves of a better tomorrow that they disregard the toxic reality of their abusive marriage. Moreover, two participants also shed light on the abuser's capability of emotionally manipulating the victim.

Lastly, several participants discussed the significance of social acceptance of domestic violence. They expressed that domestic violence in itself is a stereotype in our society and the survivors of these abusive relationships are victims who have silently endured this violence. To speak up about domestic violence means to actually acknowledge that it is an issue that society lacks tolerance for. One of the participants mentioned, *"You will accept that abuse in order to just be acceptable by society because even if you leave your spouse, at the end of the day society will blame you"*.

4.7 Participants' Use of Intertextuality: Relatability of Domestic Violence Theme

Some of the participants found the theme of domestic violence so relatable that they gave examples from different articles and drama serials. One participant emphasized on the example of the contemporary drama serial, *Mannat Murad*. The participant highlighted that the drama portrays the gruesome image of how men are under family pressure which is why they tend to be abusive in relation to their intimate partner. The participant had also read

several comments on social media which all highlighted the relatability of the drama serial.

4.8 Participants' Perceptions in relation to the Effect of the Novel, It Ends with Us on the Readers

Participants came up with various responses on how the novel had a thought-provoking effect on them. Most of the participants emphasized on the novels' portrayal of mixed feelings throughout, among which one of the participants revealed that, *"It reaffirmed the idea that life is not a fairy tale"*. Another participant discussed how this novel gave a new perspective to the theme of domestic violence as it showcases how abuse can be covered in romance.

One of the participants verbalized the negative effect of reading this novel, as it gave birth to feelings of fear and doubt regarding the marriage system. Accordingly, she highlighted the positive effect of it as well, that victims should take a stand for themselves and withdraws from abusive relationships.

4.9 Participants' Perceptions in relation to End Domestic Violence

Participants were asked to share their opinions on how we can put an end to the concept of domestic violence and they provided various suggestions on how to eradicate this social stigma. The most repeated suggestion was to build awareness programs and campaigns to create awareness among victims hence they can identify and acknowledge that they are being exploited. One of the participants conveyed, *"A lot of women do not have access to education in our country especially so building those awareness programs and telling women what is okay and what is not is one of the things that is definitely very important"*. Likewise, some participants reflected that there should be a stream of job opportunities and different organizations should be built so they can financially support these victims who have been dependent on abusers.

Several participants also reflected on the necessity of improvising our legal framework so there can be protection for the victims of domestic abuse. One participant commented that, *"We have to fight against these culprits; they should be punished and held accountable for their actions"*. Similarly, two participants highlighted how we need to implement certain strict rules and regulations and how people should be taught from a young age about what consequences their actions will bring.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal that the participants deeply connected with the themes presented, as they diligently mirrored their own life experiences. This thematic alignment allowed students with the opportunity to draw meaningful connections and share personal stories. This observation supports Rosenblatt's theory, which suggests that when the literary themes of a literary text closely reflect an individual's experiences, it fosters their ability to relate and engage with the material. It is important to address discussions on domestic violence with sensitivity and subtlety, recognizing that the issue affects individuals of both genders. However, when critically examining the interviews, genders were exposed through the distinction in the willingness to open up about domestic violence. The novel, *"It Ends with Us"* represents the negative role of men in relation to domestic violence, this also contributes to a societal perception that discourage men to talk openly about such sensitive topic. It was observed that male participants were more reluctant and hesitant to discuss openly about this social dilemma as they were more stoic and less vulnerable than women. In contrast to male, female participants, as observed by their responses were more open to the discussion of domestic violence. They fully participated and addressed their thoughts over domestic violence with several examples from social surroundings as well.

In the evolving landscape of family dynamics, traditional roles have long played a part, but what happens when these roles become more constraints than comforts? The data observed that men, mostly regarded as the breadwinners, might not be as accustomed to domestic violence as women. Rosenblatt suggests that readers' deep responses are engraved in their previous capacities. *"An intense response to a work will have its roots in the capacities and experiences already present in the personality and mind of the reader."* (Rosenblatt, 1994) Assigning specific roles based on gender norms can confine individuals to predetermined responsibilities. Men are often bounded with the external responsibilities and lack significance exposure to households. Whereas women are mostly bound in the four walls in household matters and have enough exposure to the domestic issues. They grow under the dominant figures of their father and brothers so when they were given the platform to speak, they had more experience to share.

It is necessary to realize that victimization transcends gender, affecting individuals irrespective of their backgrounds. The matter of victimization in the context of domestic violence is a sensitive topic that sometimes precedes outside traditional gender narratives. The responses by the participants provided an insight that a great percentage is of women who faces domestic violence mostly, but it is important to analyze beyond gender stereotype where

men are also subjected to the violence, not only physical but mental torture. Men often face the difficulty of choice between his mother and wife. The complexity of choice and pressure leads to a mental torture.

6. CONCLUSION

At the heart of this research lie discoveries that collectively reshape our understanding of the theme of domestic violence. The richness of our findings of the first research question lies not only in its clarity but also in the layers of complexity that define the dynamics of Cycle of Violence (1979) by Walker. All three phases from the Cycle of Violence are highlighted with textual evidence. The diverse perspectives of readers unveiled in our findings of second research question are through the lens of these semi-structured interviews where different themes become evident. The recurring themes from all the participants include personal life experiences, examples of social observations, factors that strengthen domestic violence, intertextuality, effect of the novel and suggestions in how to end domestic violence.

Limitations of this study include reliance on the available data, which may not fully capture the complexity of domestic violence. The selected participants were very less in number which is the primary limitation of this study. Underreported cases and the reluctance of several rural area readers in their willingness to discuss this matter is another limitation of this study. The research conducted in English language may experience limitations in completely capturing the perceptions of readers in relation to domestic violence. However, the study might have been affected by temporal context since domestic violence is a vast theme that changes the perceptions over time. Despite the autonomous security and respect, interviewers may feel obligated to align their responses with expectations. This can affect the authenticity of data.

Acknowledging the study's limitations underscores the need for further advancements in research, particularly in incorporating student's reactions to literary texts. This study had selected a very limited number of participants which is why this same research can be conducted on a broader level by opting a larger group of participants for their perceptions. This research can also be done by choosing participants from a rural background. This study can also be conducted on other novels as well.

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