

## The Significance of Dysthymia Symptoms in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*

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### ABSTRACT

Colleen Hoover's novel entitled *Regretting You* was first published in 2019. The novel reflects the intricate layers of human relationships of self-discovery, forgiveness, and lifelong family connections. Morgan and her teenage daughter, Clara, is dealing with the tragic deaths of Morgan's husband and Clara's father. As they deal with their grief and try to rebuild their lives, secrets and misunderstandings emerge, straining their relationship and causing them to experience dysthymia. Dysthymia is a lifelong form of depression, according to Michael E. Thase and Susan S. Lang. Then, how the symptoms of dysthymia depicted by Morgan and Clara in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*? Employing a qualitative research approach, the researchers explore the symptoms of dysthymia, including changes in feeling, thinking, and behavior. Morgan and Clara's dysthymia evolves as they navigate the conflicts in the story, mainly due to the grief resulting from their loss. As a result, their mental and emotional health suffers greatly. This leads to the conclusion that their dysthymia exacerbates the tension in their mother-daughter relationship, making it difficult for them to communicate effectively and solve problems, all due to their enduring mild depression.

**Keywords:** *Colleen Hoover; Dysthymia; Michael E. Thase; Regretting You; Susan S. Lang.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Many view literature as a therapeutic tool for promoting mental well-being (MediumMedia, 2021). The discussions in literary works are linked to broader life issues, particularly concerning the individual's loss, which is an important theme. The inevitability of abandonment in life, particularly by close ones, brings profound sadness and loss. When a loved one passes away, every aspect of life becomes a poignant reminder, impacting those left behind and potentially leading to depression, a common and complex mental health condition characterized by persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness (Salah et al., 2018). Numerous studies have explored depression, revealing its prevalence and its often concurrent existence with anxiety.

Depression manifests in varying degrees, ranging from moderate and transient to severe and chronic, affecting individuals differently, with some experiencing it only once while others endure recurring episodes (Bernard, 2018). One type of depression is dysthymia. Dysthymia is a form of depression characterized by persistent low mood that lasts for at least half of all days over two years (Tschiesner, 2023). This prolonged duration often results in individuals losing interest in activities over time.

Unlike severe depression, which presents noticeable changes in mood and behavior, mild depression, like dysthymia can creep in subtly, often unnoticed by the affected person (Farooqi, 2023). This subtle onset can lead to early signs being overlooked or dismissed, contributing to a gradual decline in mental health. Symptoms of dysthymia include feelings of melancholy, emptiness, loss of interest in daily activities, and difficulty completing tasks (Thase & Lang, 2004). Additionally, significant life stressors, chronic illness, medications, and relationship or work difficulties can increase the likelihood of dysthymia in individuals predisposed to depression.

Besides, the researchers focus on Morgan and Clara as subjects due to their past experiences, leading to dysthymia, analyzing their portrayal in *Regretting You* (2019) by Colleen Hoover through the lens of dysthymia theory to understand how their grief manifests (Hoover, 2019). This approach aims to uncover symptoms and causes of dysthymia in the novel, particularly in the context of the main characters' experiences. Moreover, Hoover's *Regretting You* (2019) intricately explores the complexities of love, loss, and family dynamics in the aftermath of Morgan's husband and Clara's father's tragic deaths (Hoover, 2019).

As the mother-daughter duo navigates grief and strives to rebuild their lives, the narrative unfolds with secrets and misunderstandings that strain their relationship. Then, how the symptoms of dysthymia depicted by Morgan and Clara in Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You*? This writing underlines the condition of Morgan and Clara when facing their dysthymia because of a family member's death. It investigates how the grieving process over a family member's loss impacts the psychological well-being of a mother and daughter, specifically examining the manifestation of depression through dysthymia (Hoover, 2019). The research also anticipates demonstrating the correlation between grieving and increased suffering, identifying it as a contributing factor to dysthymia.

## **METHOD**

In order to respond to the question posed in this study, the qualitative method is used to investigate specific concepts and written material. The necessary materials, including books, journals, and articles, are taken from online scripts. As part of the data analysis process, sources are gathered and organized, carefully examined, closely related to other topics, quoted in writing, and added to the reference list. 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 are the data and the theory of the research. In other words, Thase and Lang's theory is a tool for analysis, whereas Hoover's short story is the object. Therefore, the study, in this case, focuses on how the dysthymia symptoms experienced by Morgan and Clara can affect their daily lives so that it can change their feeling, thinking, and behavior.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The Emergence of Morgan and Clara's Dysthymia Symptoms

*Regretting You*, published in 2019 by Colleen Hoover, is a poignant and emotionally charged novel that represents the intricacies of love, grief, and the journey of self-discovery (Hoover, 2019). The novel follows Morgan and Clara, a mother and daughter whose bond faces challenges when a tragic accident disrupts their family. Narrated from two different viewpoints, the novel offers a glimpse into the contrasting experiences of the main characters, highlighting the intricate nature of relationships and the profound effects of loss.

The story begins with the main character, Morgan, in her teenage years, wanting to attend her boyfriend's graduation party but suddenly realizes that she has an unexpected pregnancy (Hoover, 2019). This situation causes Morgan to be unable to enjoy the graduation party because she is already aware that she is pregnant, which also heightens her anxious feeling. Those are asserted in the quotations;

*Shit. Shit, shit, shit. (Chapter 1, Page 14)*

*I look out the window, my stomach in knots, my palms sweating, my heart pounding, my fingers quietly counting the days since my last period. (Chapter 1, Page 14)*

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

At thirty-four, Morgan experiences a profound sense of emptiness within herself (Hoover, 2019). This feeling of loneliness becomes particularly pronounced during her birthday dinner, where she observes Chris and Jenny discussing their business and Jenny's return to work after maternity leave, while Clara and Jonah excitedly talk about Clara's aspirations to pursue acting through a film project (Hoover, 2019). This situation highlights Morgan's paradoxical experience of feeling alone despite being surrounded by her loved ones on a significant occasion by following the main rule;

*Now that Clara is getting older, I've been feeling this gaping hole inside me, like it's sucking the air out of each day that passes by, where all I do is live for Chris and Clara. (Chapter 3, Page 42)*

*It's my birthday, and I'm surrounded by everyone important to me, but for some reason, I feel more alone than I've ever felt. (Chapter 3, Page 45)*

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

On another day, Morgan receives a call from a nurse at the hospital where Chris works, informing her of his involvement in a serious accident, she is overcome with shock and disbelief (Hoover, 2019). Morgan tries to reach out to Jenny, her sister, to

confirm Chris' wreck but she cannot be contacted. Then, the doctor confirmed that Morgan's husband and her sister, Chris and Jenny, were already dead. The sudden and distressing news temporarily freezes Morgan's emotions and thoughts. Jonah's assumption that Chris and Jenny were having an affair stemmed from the awkwardness of the two of them riding together until they had an accident, making it challenging for Morgan to come to terms with the reality of the situation (Hoover, 2019). It can be seen here;

*In the midst of my internal hysteria, irritation begins to claw its way out. (Chapter 5, Page 65)*

*It's absurd. It's incomprehensible. (Chapter 5, Page 68)*

On the day of her father's funeral, Clara found it difficult to accept the harsh reality of his passing (Hoover, 2019). She also grappled with feelings of unfairness, believing that Chris and Jenny's deaths should have brought new beginnings for her. However, in contrast, Clara also carried a heavy burden of guilt, blaming herself for the loss of both individuals. In an attempt to escape the overwhelming grief and guilt she experienced, Clara sought solace by engaging in a diversion with Miller. Unfortunately, her mother discovered that her choice to smoke with Miller was a strain on their relationship (Hoover, 2019). Clara's act of disobedience marked the beginning of tension between mother and daughter in some quotation;

*I feel irreparably broken. (Chapter 6, Page 70)*

*It feels unfair. (Chapter 6, Page 72)*

*But part of me is curious if it'll help with the grief. (Chapter 6, Page 75)*

*"It was your father's funeral, Clara!" She is so pissed right now. (Chapter 6, Page 79)*

After the death of her husband and sister, Morgan oversleeps to reduce her grief (Hoover, 2019). Morgan must take a new step with her new life, but she is unable to get up to deal with it. Jonah visits Morgan at her house to address the peculiar circumstances surrounding the deaths of Chris and Jenny, revealing the shocking revelation that they were engaged in an affair. This revelation intensifies Morgan's initial sadness, transforming them into a consuming mix of anger and disappointment (Hoover, 2019). Morgan experiences a profound sense of betrayal, as she grapples with the realization that two individuals she held deep love and trust for had violated that bond that is shown in here;

*I figure the quickest way to get from point A (grief) to point B (less grief) is to sleep my way through it. (Chapter 7, Page 81)*

*In my heart, I know that I've been betrayed in the worst way possible by the one person I never thought would hurt me. (Chapter 7, Page 85)*

*I'm angry because I know this is now my new obsession. (Chapter 7, Page 87)*

In contrast, Clara's state following the loss of her father and aunt rendered her incessantly weeping, significantly disrupting her day-to-day existence (Hoover, 2019). Her sorrow was not solely attributable to their demise; she also carried a persistent burden of guilt, attributing their deaths to her actions. The weight of these emotions haunted Clara's life, deeply impacting her overall well-being explored in the following;

*The tears that seemed to only come at night are starting to follow me into the daytime. (Chapter 8, Page 93)*

Furthermore, unaware of the bitter truth, Clara—who interpreted her mother's mourning following Chris and Jenny's deaths as directed at her—became angered and disillusioned with her mother (Hoover, 2019). Besides, the revelation that Elijah was not Jonah's biological child with Jenny but rather with Chris intensified Morgan's frustration surrounding their deaths. Jonah's decision to entrust Elijah to Morgan, as he too struggled to accept the truth, only heightened her despair and further disrupted her daily life. The discovery of her husband's affair with her sister, resulting in the birth of their illegitimate child, Elijah, inadvertently caused Morgan to unknowingly express her feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, and disappointment towards Clara (Hoover, 2019). This dispute also adds to their frustration through their grieving. Those are explored here;

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

*I haven't slept. (Chapter 11, Page 111)*

*I have a perpetual headache and a perpetual heartache, and sometimes I just wish it would end. (Chapter 11, Page 112)*

*I'm just frustrated. (Chapter 13, Page 121)*

*Sometimes I think it's getting better, but then the simplest memories remind me how much it still sucks. (Chapter 15, Page 136)*

The exploration based on the citation of the novel brings to light a cascade of unfortunate events that significantly strained the relationship between mother and daughter, Morgan and Clara (Hoover, 2019). The narrative unearths a plethora of circumstances and revelations that left an indelible mark on their familial bond, leading to a complex and tumultuous dynamic between the two characters.

### **Conceptualizing of Dysthymia Symptoms in Psychological Matters**

Many individuals link depression with feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness in their lives (Steger & Kashdan, 2010). This belief implies that individuals experiencing sadness are more inclined to perceive negative social interactions and feel a lack of connection with others. However, it is widely recognized that depression is a

mental health condition that affects a significant number of individuals, especially in modern times. It arises from a multitude of factors, with mental issues being the most prevalent cause. It is important to note that depression encompasses more than just one type, as there are various forms of the disorder.

Dysthymia or Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD) is a form of depression that individuals should be aware of (Bruce, 2024; Thase & Lang, 2004). As indicated by Arnow and Constantino, the term dysthymia derives from the Greek language and signifies a "bad state of mind" or "ill humor" (Arnow & Constantino, 2003). Dysthymia generally manifests with fewer or less severe symptoms compared to major depression, but it tends to persist over a longer duration (Thase & Lang, 2004). Moreover, dysthymia is regarded as one of the most significant mental health conditions due to its association with long-lasting low mood.

Detecting dysthymia in individuals can pose a challenge for most people. This is primarily because those who experience unhappiness or distress often perceive their emotions as typical (Klein & Santiago, 2003). They have become accustomed to enduring prolonged feelings of grief, leading them to believe that their emotional state is normal. Furthermore, individuals who have grown accustomed to embracing melancholy and depression tend to react negatively when anxiety disorders are normalized. Dysthymia is a direct experience unique to individuals who struggle with this particular disorder.

Dysthymia, also referred to as Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD), represents a form of enduring and chronic depression (Thase & Lang, 2004). Consequently, individuals with dysthymia often experience diminished interest in daily activities, feelings of despair, decreased productivity, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Even during favorable circumstances, those with this chronic depressive condition struggle to experience joy, exhibiting traits such as a persistently somber demeanor, frequent complaints, and an inability to derive pleasure from enjoyable activities (Zayed, 2023). While dysthymia typically manifests with less severity compared to major depression, its persistent depressive symptoms can endure for years, significantly impacting various aspects of life, including relationships, academic performance, occupational functioning, and daily tasks (Thase & Lang, 2004; Yoho, 2019).

Regarding dysthymia symptoms, persistent depression is typically characterized by enduring major depressive symptoms that extend beyond the duration of severe depressive episodes (Klein & Santiago, 2003; Thase & Lang, 2004). The diagnosis of persistent depressive disorder entails the presence of a combination of depressive symptoms persisting for more than two years. Initially perceived as a depressive state, persistent depressive disorder is recognized as a medical condition rather than a personality trait. Understanding and categorising such conditions can prove challenging, given disease classification's complex and evolving nature.

Although the symptoms of dysthymia may fluctuate in intensity over time, they share similarities with those of depression. Dysthymia presents as a chronic condition, persisting throughout the day, and its detection can be challenging due to its mood-related nature (Thase & Lang, 2004). While the symptoms of dysthymia may not reach

the severity of major depression, they endure for longer periods. Thase and Lang identify three distinct categories of symptoms associated with dysthymia which include:

a. Changes in Feeling

Regarding this aspect, alterations in emotions related to dysthymia encompass manifestations such as diminished self-esteem, experiencing sadness without any apparent cause, deriving little pleasure from activities that were once enjoyable, feeling irritable, lacking motivation, displaying apathy, adopting a more pessimistic or less hopeful outlook compared to the past, and feeling increasingly helpless when it comes to effecting changes or resolving problems (Thase & Lang, 2004).

b. Changes in Thinking

In relation to this aspect, changes in thinking associated with dysthymia consist of challenges with concentration, difficulties with short-term memory, tendencies towards indecisiveness, engaging in excessive rumination and worries, and the presence of thoughts related to suicide or morbidity (Thase & Lang, 2004).

c. Changes in Behavior

In this aspect, modifications in behavior characteristic of dysthymia entail behaviors such as missing deadlines, experiencing changes in appetite characterized by either loss of appetite or overeating, displaying signs of restlessness or slowed-down movements, and experiencing disruptions in sleep patterns, such as insomnia or excessive sleepiness (Thase & Lang, 2004).

### **Elucidation of Dysthymia Symptoms through Morgan and Clara**

The novel *Regretting You* by Colleen Hoover explores how the two main characters, Morgan and Clara, navigate their depression following the passing of family members. It also offers a poignant portrayal of the human experience, capturing its ebbs and flows, showcasing the intricate nature of relationships, and highlighting the profound impact of loss (Hoover, 2019). This research centers on the experiences of Morgan and Clara with dysthymia. Their accounts of dysthymia symptoms amid their grief are justified by the dysthymia theory, which categorizes based on the indications of changes in feeling, thinking, and behavior.

#### **1. Changes in Feeling**

First, the changes in Morgan's feeling based on the realization of a twelve-day delay in Morgan's menstrual cycle (Hoover, 2019). The startling revelation of her pregnancy strikes her. This unexpected development invokes a tumultuous array of emotions within her, creating a sense of conflict and shock. The fear that ensues is not solely limited to the biological aspect of pregnancy but is also amplified by apprehensions concerning the potential reactions of her family, friends, and society at large in some quotation;

*I look out the window, my stomach in knots, my palms sweating, my heart pounding, my fingers quietly counting the days since my last period. (Chapter 1, Page 14)*

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

The occurrence of depression and anxiety during pregnancy and the postpartum period is a commonly observed phenomenon, ranking among the most prevalent psychiatric disorders (Biaggi et al., 2016). It is not uncommon for fear and anxiety to accompany the unexpected news of a pregnancy. In Morgan's case, the awareness of her pregnancy prior to the graduation party hinders her ability to fully enjoy the event. Subsequently, her emotions shift from excitement for the celebration to a combination of shock, fear, and anxiety following the discovery of her pregnancy. Consequently, the manifestation of shock, fear, and anxiety in Morgan's emotional state is identified as indicative of dysthymia symptoms.

Second, Morgan's existence is centered around catering to the needs of Chris and Clara, suggesting a challenge in reconciling her parental identity (Hoover, 2019). In the age of thirty-four, this circumstance evokes a profound sense of emptiness within her. Morgan's sentiment of prioritizing the well-being of others signifies a longing to rediscover an individual essence beyond the realms of relationships and parental duties. Furthermore, the focus on the lives of Chris and Clara underscores a recurrent pattern of selflessness on Morgan's part, where her personal needs and desires are subordinated to the welfare and demands of her family that is shown in here;

*Now that Clara is getting older, I've been feeling this gaping hole inside me, like it's sucking the air out of each day that passes by, where all I do is live for Chris and Clara. (Chapter 3, Page 42)*

*It's my birthday, and I'm surrounded by everyone important to me, but for some reason, I feel more alone than I've ever felt. (Chapter 3, Page 45)*

Individuals who possess a mentality of selflessness are frequently immersed in the needs of others, resulting in enduring stress (Horkovska, 2023). As a consequence, they commonly grapple with challenges like anxiety, depression, feelings of resentment, and burnout. Moreover, this recognition triggers a sense of depression in Morgan as she confronts the realization that her existence has predominantly revolved around tending to the needs of Chris and Clara, thereby inhibiting the pursuit of her own aspirations due to early pregnancies during her teenage years. In this case, Morgan's selflessness is a sign that she experiences the symptoms of dysthymia.

Third, when Morgan arrived at the hospital to confirm the news about her husband's wreck (Hoover, 2019). Morgan experiences internal hysteria as a result of her feelings of fear and panic. This situation increasing irritating sense of Morgan's mental and emotional disorders in the following quotation;



*In the midst of my internal hysteria, irritation begins to claw its way out. (Chapter 5, Page 65)*

The combination of uncertainty regarding Chris' welfare, extended delays in information retrieval, and challenges in communication not only amplify Morgan's distress but also heighten feelings of irritation and worsen her underlying mental and emotional issues. This challenging situation hints at a potential link to dysthymia, a persistent form of depression marked by prolonged periods of low mood and a diminished interest in life (Halverson, 2019). Furthermore, the shifts in Morgan's emotional state mirror the fluctuations she experiences amid this difficult circumstance.

Fourth, following the death of Chris and Jenny, Clara experiences a profound disarray in her life and surroundings, sensing an irreparable brokenness within her being (Hoover, 2019). This signifies Clara's struggle with profound grief over the loss of two significant individuals in her life—her father and aunt. The perception that her world is functioning abnormally underscores the turmoil stemming from this bereavement which indicates in the following quotation;

*I feel irreparably broken. (Chapter 6, Page 70)*

The term denotes a profound sense of desolation and melancholy, compelling Clara to grapple with envisioning a future devoid of her loved one. This emotional state induces a lack of drive stemming from the intensity of her sorrow, leading to feelings of depression. In the aftermath of a distressing event, it is customary to experience sorrow and despondency and exhibit symptoms akin to those of depression and dysthymia (Thase & Lang, 2004). The absence of Clara's father and aunt leaves her adrift in a sea of fluctuating emotions, characterized by uncertainty regarding the future and a quest to rediscover purpose or guidance. Consequently, Clara's challenges in visualizing her life post a significant loss represent a common response to the upheaval and ambiguity precipitated by profound sorrow.

Fifth, after knowing that Chris and Jenny's affair, Morgan grapples with a cascade of emotions, including anger and irritation (Hoover, 2019). Subsequently, the persistence of this anger compounds Morgan's emotional turmoil, ultimately culminating in an obsessive fixation on the situation. This shows in the following quotation;

*I'm angry because I know this is now my new obsession. (Chapter 7, Page 87)*

Chris and Jenny's affair does not solely trigger Morgan's anger and irritation but are further exacerbated by the erosion of the fond memories shared with them. This amalgamation of emotions leaves Morgan in a state of desolation and profound self-deprecation. Furthermore, Morgan is not only contending with the sorrow of losing Chris but also mourning the shattered trust and the idealized perception of her relationship with Jenny. Betrayal can sow seeds of doubt in one's trusting nature (Lee & Selart, 2015). This intricate interplay of trust and sorrow gives rise to an

extraordinary emotional turmoil, leading Morgan deeper into a state of depression and dysthymia symptoms.

Sixth, Clara's emotional experience of crying in the theatre, coupled with feelings of guilt about her father and aunt's death (Hoover, 2019). This highlights a profound and evolving aspect of her grief, which is explored here;

*The tears that seemed to only come at night are starting to follow me into the daytime. (Chapter 8, Page 93)*

The quotation highlights Clara's tears throughout the day as a testament to the enduring presence of her grief, particularly linked to feelings of guilt, which permeate her daily routines. These unresolved emotions infiltrate Clara's day-to-day existence, impacting her emotional well-being. While dysthymia may not manifest as severely as major depression, the enduring depressive symptoms experienced by individuals with dysthymia persist over the years and manifest as notable hindrances in their relationships, academic pursuits, professional endeavors, and daily activities (Hurley, 2022). As such, the lingering and unresolved nature of Clara's grief, specifically intertwined with the burden of guilt surrounding her father and aunt's deaths, disrupts her daily life and mirrors the chronic and persistent characteristics of dysthymia symptoms.

Seventh, Clara's emotional state transitions to one marked by hurt, sadness, and disappointment subsequent to her exchange with her mother's stern demeanor (Hoover, 2019). This reaction unveils her sense of disillusionment, underscoring a disparity between her envisioned expectations of maternal support or empathy and the actuality of their interaction that shows in the following quote;

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

Grief and mourning can be transient experiences that individuals eventually overcome, or they can persist and potentially contribute to mental health challenges (Lovering, 2022). Moreover, heightened emotional responses linked to mourning can influence communication patterns and interpersonal relationships. Clara and her mother are navigating their respective grief in manners that influence their interactions. Additionally, Clara's heightened feelings of sadness and disappointment towards her mother indicate potential signs of dysthymia symptoms.

Eighth, Morgan is grappling with a multitude of intense emotions, including overwhelming grief, anger stemming from the betrayal involving Chris and Jenny, and frustration triggered by Clara's defiance (Hoover, 2019). These overwhelming experiences have led to a compilation of complex and draining emotions for her. Consequently, Morgan perceives Clara's reactions as a channel through which she can unburden herself and express her own emotional turmoil as shown in the following quote;

*I'm just frustrated. (Chapter 13, Page 121)*

Stress and frustration represent manifestations of dysthymia influenced by underlying feelings of sadness. During periods of stress, individuals may inadvertently

redirect their dissatisfaction and sorrow towards loved ones, inadvertently utilizing them as a vent for their emotions (Thase & Lang, 2004; Zayed, 2023). In Morgan's scenario, a blend of frustration, grief from her husband and sister's demises, and the betrayal from Chris and Jenny's liaison cultivates a sense of dysthymic despair. Furthermore, the emotional burden Morgan bears is amplified by the discord stemming from Clara's defiance.

## 2. Changes in Thinking

First, the changes in Morgan's thinking start when she faces unexpected teenage pregnancy (Hoover, 2019). Morgan's realization clouds her ability to think clearly, eliciting self-criticism and self-blame as she grapples with selflessness. This explores in the following quote;

*Shit. Shit, shit, shit. (Chapter 1, Page 14)*

Morgan's contemplation of selflessness and self-blame leads her to harbor concerns for herself, ultimately culminating in feelings of self-loathing. Upon discovering her unexpected pregnancy, Morgan grapples with self-hatred, a common feature in individuals with a depressive disposition characterized by a constant sense of sadness, diminished self-worth, self-criticism, and an overarching feeling of helplessness or hopelessness towards life (Chung, 2020; Poole, 2023). Furthermore, the interplay between Morgan's notions of selflessness and self-loathing hints at potential symptoms of dysthymia.

Second, Morgan occasionally loses sight of her former self and the passions she once held dear before her pregnancy (Hoover, 2019). This shift may be attributed to her shift in priorities, leading her to prioritize the needs and well-being of Chris and Clara above her own desires and aspirations. Despite being unable to pursue her dreams and romantic prospects, Morgan consciously opts to devote her existence to Chris and Clara which explored in the following quote;

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

The quotation illustrates Morgan's sense of self-loss consequent to her unforeseen pregnancy, resulting in a lapse in her self-awareness and priorities. This inadvertent forgetting of oneself is attributed to the impact of the unexpected pregnancy on Morgan, signaling a period of heightened stress. Stress, anxiety, and depression can detrimentally affect one's cognitive functions, leading to forgetfulness (Schultz, 2023). These changes in Morgan's thought processes, as a result of her stress, anxiety, and depression, align with the characteristics associated with dysthymia symptoms.

Third, Morgan denies Jonah's assertion that Chris and Jenny are potentially engaging in an affair (Hoover, 2019). She firmly maintains that their notion of betrayal is inconceivable and beyond belief. The idea of such deceit appears so unlikely and implausible to Morgan that she struggles to come to terms with it and comprehend its rationale. This shows in the following quote;

*It's absurd. It's incomprehensible. (Chapter 5, Page 68)*

Denial functions as a defense mechanism that offers individuals a shield from anxiety, often acting as a strategy to circumvent the confrontation of stress or distressing emotions (Cherry, 2023). In this instance, Morgan's staunch rejection and unwillingness to acknowledge the prospect of betrayal by Chris and Jenny is a typical response aimed at evading feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, Morgan's perception of the betrayal as nonsensical and incomprehensible suggests her inclination to avoid addressing stress, conflict, threats, fears, and anxieties, which aligns with the characteristics associated with dysthymia symptoms.

Fourth, Clara experiences a feeling of injustice towards the serene weather on the day of her father's funeral, highlighting a disconnect between the solemn occasion and the seemingly pleasant external setting (Hoover, 2019). Within this context, Clara wrestles with the disparity between her internal grieving process for her father and the external environment, which remains unaffected or notably tranquil.

*It feels unfair. (Chapter 6, Page 72)*

Clara's sentiment of unfairness is an emotional expression evoked by the solemn and sorrowful circumstances she finds herself in. When confronted with loss, individuals often interpret their sorrow as a form of depression (Effa, 2023; Farooqi, 2023). For Clara, the feeling of unfairness stems from the profound loss of her father and aunt, who held significant importance in her life, rendering it challenging for her to maintain a positive outlook. Thus, in Clara's situation, her frustration and sense of injustice amidst her grief serve as indicative signs of dysthymia symptoms.

Fifth, Morgan's contemplation of a heightened level of betrayal by Chris and Jenny underscores her profound realization and the significant emotional repercussions of the betrayal which represent in the quote here;

*In my heart, I know that I've been betrayed in the worst way possible by the one person I never thought would hurt me. (Chapter 7, Page 85)*

Morgan's thought, as indicated in the quote, highlights the magnitude of the betrayal and its profound consequences on her trust and view of an individual she had previously considered trustworthy (Hoover, 2019). It also reveals attributes of a melancholic personality. Persistent depressive disorder or dysthymia presents difficulties in sustaining a positive perspective, even in moments of happiness, often marked by continual melancholy, frequent grievances, and an inability to derive pleasure (Thase & Lang, 2004). Moreover, Morgan's confrontation with such a melancholic disposition may indicate symptoms of dysthymia.

Sixth, following the revelation of the distressing truth about her husband's affair and her sister's betrayal, and the discovery that Elijah is Chris' biological son, Morgan is overwhelmed with emotions, leading her to cry unwittingly (Hoover, 2019). This outpouring of emotions results in a persistent headache and heartache for Morgan that shows in the quote here;

*I have a perpetual headache and a perpetual heartache, and sometimes I just wish it would end. (Chapter 11, Page 112)*

The quotation depicts Morgan's despair and sense of hopelessness. While dysthymia and depression both incite deep feelings of sorrow and hopelessness, their distinguishing features lie in the intensity and enduring nature of their symptoms (Frothingham, 2021; Perry, 2021). In this instance, the statement suggests that Morgan was engulfed by emotional upheaval following the disclosure of her husband's infidelity with her sister and the revelation concerning Elijah's biological parentage. Overall, the manifestation of Morgan's despondency and hopelessness indicates that she is exhibiting symptoms consistent with dysthymia.

### 3. Changes in Behavior

First, the changes in Morgan's behavior appears when she caught Clara with Miller in the theater (Hoover, 2019). Following her departure from her father's funeral with Miller, Clara was observed by Morgan, detecting the scent of cigarettes. This led Morgan to conclude that Clara was smoking with Miller, resulting in Morgan feeling frustrated with Clara as explored here;

*"It was your father's funeral, Clara!" She is so pissed right now.  
(Chapter 6, Page 79)*

Anger often emerges in reaction to perceived unfairness, dangers, or improper actions (Gordon & Raypole, 2022). The connection between anger and depression can exhibit itself in diverse manners. Additionally, dysthymia can influence how sorrow is expressed, leading to ongoing feelings of tension and anger (Hidayat, 2020; Thase & Lang, 2004). In Morgan's situation, her frustration shows her difficulty in expressing grief, as she redirects these emotions towards Clara in an attempt to manage the challenging circumstances she is facing.

Second, Morgan copes with her grief over the deaths of Chris and Jenny by sleeping excessively (Hoover, 2019). She uses oversleeping as a way to postpone confronting the truth of their loss and the difficult emotions that come with it which explored here;

*I figure the quickest way to get from point A (grief) to point B (less grief)  
is to sleep my way through it. (Chapter 7, Page 81)*

The quote illustrates how the death of her family members intensifies Morgan's grief. Additionally, the co-occurrence of grief and depression can lead to oversleeping, a common symptom of dysthymia. This excessive sleeping experienced by Morgan is a result of the combination of grief and dysthymia symptoms, such as low energy and disinterest in activities (Thase & Lang, 2004). Consequently, oversleeping can be viewed as one of the indicators of dysthymia symptoms in Morgan's experience.

Third, after Jonah brings Elijah to Morgan for four days, Clara notices Morgan's unkempt appearance and asks if she has slept (Hoover, 2019). This prompts Morgan to realize that she has not had any sleep yet which shows in the quote;

*I haven't slept. (Chapter 11, Page 111)*

Morgan's realization highlights that enduring sleep disruptions, such as insomnia or erratic sleep schedules, are signs of dysthymia. Her awareness that she had not slept for over four days indicates a significant disruption in her sleep routine, showcasing the impact of dysthymia on her sleep patterns. Furthermore, individuals with dysthymia may struggle with basic self-care tasks due to lack of motivation and feelings of fatigue, leading to changes in their habits (Harvard Health Publishing, 2014; Thase & Lang, 2004). Morgan's lack of attention to personal hygiene, evident in her dishevelled appearance and unchanged clothing, reflects challenges and alterations in her routine self-care practices.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of Colleen Hoover's *Regretting You* (2019) indicates that Morgan and Clara are both manifesting symptoms of dysthymia, which appear to be closely intertwined with their respective life circumstances. This conclusion is drawn by examining the three key aspects of dysthymia symptoms. Starting with the changes in Morgan's emotions, the evidence reveals a significant transition from happiness upon graduating from high school to persistent worries about her future due to the unexpected teenage pregnancy, which continues to impact her life into adulthood. This emotional shift exemplifies the impact of her circumstances on her emotional well-being.

Similarly, Clara's emotional changes can be attributed to losing her father and aunt. Initially experiencing grief, she has since developed a pervasive sense of guilt, blaming herself for their deaths. This sense of guilt remains a constant presence in Clara's life, complicating her search for happiness and causing ongoing emotional struggles. Additionally, the alterations in feelings, thoughts, and behavior exhibited by both Morgan and Clara align with the recognized characteristics commonly observed in individuals displaying symptoms of dysthymia. These observations further support the connection between their circumstances and the development of dysthymic symptoms.

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