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Forgiveness: A Psychological Mechanism and Young Adult Fiction Motif

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Forgiveness: A Psychological Mechanism and Young Adult Fiction Motif

(TITLE)

BY

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What is Forgiveness?

Emotional forgiveness is a process that allows people to move on from transgressions: replacing negativity with positivity, replacing anger and hate with empathy and compassion. Forgiveness increases happiness, grows friendships, and promotes self-love. Realistic young adult literature often promotes themes related to forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption, a pattern that directly reflects the emotional and social needs of adolescents. Sometimes, protagonists replace negative emotions with neutrality and let go of transgressions without full emotional forgiveness; however, most young adult protagonists learn to forgive and be forgiven throughout their stories. Through analysis of the novels *Everything, Everything* by Nicola Yoon, *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, *Turtles All The Way Down* by John Green, and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, readers can study the exploration of forgiveness in realistic young adult literature. By understanding the processes behind forgiveness and the benefits of the practice, readers can gain a deeper sense of why young adult authors craft realistic fiction with a focus on letting go of wrongdoings. According to Lyena Chavez of McQuade Library, realistic fiction is defined as “stories that could have actually occurred to people or animals in a believable setting. These stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people.” Readers can see how characters react to lifelike, often relatable events in realistic fiction novels. Through this genre, young adults can learn about social or personal issues, their environments, social norms, and more. Realistic fiction can help readers with life’s challenges. Coping with difficulty is vital for adolescents, and authors often choose to show young adult readers how to cope by featuring forgiveness.

According to the study “Forgive and Forget: Differences between Decisional and Emotional Forgiveness,” people must change their emotions in order to forgive in ways that drastically affect their thinking. The study works under the assumption that people can forgive each other in two distinct ways. On one hand, a person can decide to forgive whoever does him wrong, choosing not to retaliate or behave in negative ways toward the perpetrator. His feelings may remain tainted by the harmful event, and he may accept a disdainful attitude toward the wrongdoer. People who say they forgive others in this way practice decisional forgiveness. On the other hand, emotional forgiveness is the practice of replacing resentment, anger, and other negative emotions with empathy and understanding. According to the researchers, “We are not suggesting that decisional forgiveness is not important step in the process of forgiving; however, regarding the process of forgetting our results show that there is no difference between decisional forgiveness and unforgiveness and hence indicate that decisional forgiveness has similar cognitive consequences as no forgiveness at all” (Lichtenfeld 7). Emotional forgiveness creates changes in the psyche of people and causes them to think and act differently. Throughout this discourse, forgiveness will be defined as emotional forgiveness: the replacing of negative emotions with positive emotions.

Some may say that authors harm young readers by teaching them to forgive through empathetic protagonists; negators of forgiveness may cite the illogic of forgetting wrongdoings. They may wonder how people can protect themselves if they forgive those who harm them. However, the presence of forgiveness and even disregard for the wrongdoing does not mean the absence of self-preservation. When a person thinks of a wrongdoer as a human being who has reasons for his actions, he is more likely to forget the “offense-relevant traits” of the perpetrator,

according to the previous study. Essentially, victims who emotionally forgive often forget the harmful traits of the offender but remember the events clearly. The study offers an explanation for this tendency, saying that

From an evolutionary perspective forgiveness serves the purpose of helping ancestral humans to get along with their genetic relatives and to establish and maintain cooperative relationships with nonrelatives. Thus, forgiveness is suggested to be an important process for maintaining beneficial relationships. However, it also seems adaptive to remember painful experiences to avoid similar hurts in the future. Taken together, it seems adaptive to forget not the hurtful experience itself but to change the attitude towards the offender (Lichtenfeld 7).

Humans likely evolutionarily developed to forgive and forget in specific ways. To maintain inner peace and social harmony, they became able to forget the characteristics of others who hurt them and thus maintain a positive attitude toward others. However, victims still remember the experience in order to avoid future pain. In essence, forgiveness is not ignoring an event. It is not forgetting pain. Rather, forgiveness is the ability to think of others with empathy and compassion after being wronged by them, an action that often leads to a forgetting of the perpetrator's offense-relevant traits.

Forgiveness to increase happiness

While many forms of literature, especially adult novels, deal with themes of revenge and retaliation, young adult novels tend to express opposite ideals of behavior like forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness proves to be an emotionally healthy outlet to being wronged in adolescence.

Studies show that emotional well-being is tied to the practice: “Forgiveness is conceptualized as an emotional association of positive emotions (empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love) against the negative emotions of unforgiveness. Forgiveness can thus be used as an emotion-focused coping strategy to reduce a stressful reaction to a transgression” (Rana 1122). Forgiveness helps adolescents to cope and thrive. When teenagers can derive positivity out of difficult situations, they practice grit and resilience, which helps them to become emotionally strong. According to the article “Role of Age and Gender in Forgiveness During Student Life,” “Forgiveness and its domains individually contribute significantly to happiness of adolescents, thereby acting as an individual determinant of happiness” (Rana 1122). Teenagers are happier when they are able to release the pain they feel after being wronged. Whether or not the person who harmed them deserves to be excused, victims cope more effectively when they are able to absolve the wrongdoing in their own minds. Perhaps these findings are the reason why authors of realistic young adult fiction often choose for their protagonists to forgive and be forgiven.

Wronged by the person whom she trusted most, Maddy has countless reasons to hold a grudge in the novel *Everything, Everything* by Nicola Yoon. In the book, the protagonist Maddy Whittier deals with a devastating autoimmune disease, “Bubble Baby Disease,” that prevents her from leaving her home; at the turning point of the plot, however, she learns that the illness is fabricated by her mother in an effort to protect her to the point of metaphorical suffocation. Plainly, Maddy is devastated. Each pillar of trust she and her mother built through the years immediately crashed, and she was left to deal with the aftermath. The lies that shaped her life left her with a shaky foundation and uncertain sense of self, as shown when she says “We don’t know anything? Of course we do. We know that I’m sick. That I’m not allowed to leave my

house on pain of death. I've always known this. It is who I am" (269). Maddy faces a schematic shift that has the potential to tear her apart. Her anger in the first-person narration is palpable: "I want to hurt her again and again. My anger is never very far away. I expected it to fade with the passage of time, but it's still right there under the surface of things" (295). Undeniably, Maddy has reason to be furious, hurt, and vengeful. However, even through her anger she works toward cultivating peace in her life.

Empathy is the propeller to eventual forgiveness in the novel. Namely, Maddy learns to feel compassion and empathy for her mother as she struggles with the practice of forgiveness. Before she can release her resentment, she must first understand her mother's actions, which are rooted in the grief her mother felt upon the loss of her husband and son many years previously. When she realizes the truth, Maddy shouts that "'I'm not sick,' I scream. 'I've never been sick. You're the one.' ...Her pain is endless. It falls off the ends of the world. Her pain is a dead sea. Her pain is for me, but I cannot bear it anymore" (277-278). Maddy blames her mother for her pain, rightfully. However, she cannot help but understand that pain is what drove her mother's actions, and thus she automatically feels empathy. She realizes that the results of her mother's anguish have harmed her too much already, though, and she will not allow the destruction to continue. The combination between the feeling of empathy and the desire for freedom swirls within Maddy as she delves into her mother's motivations.

Although Maddy finds forgiveness to be a drudging, difficult process, she is motivated by an adult in her life who knows that forgiveness aids in healing and promotes inner peace.

Maddy's nurse, Carla, pleads with her to consider the potential for reconciliation:

She [Carla] holds my chin. 'When are you going to find it in your heart to forgive her?'

‘What she did is not forgivable.’

‘She was sick, honey. She’s still sick’ (294).

Carla believes that forgiveness is vital, and empathy is a way to let go of wrongs. Maddy needs Carla’s influence in order to consciously work to forgive her mother. In young adult literature, adults sometimes serve as sources of wisdom or agents of change. For some adolescents, the words of fictional adults are the only voices of reason they hear. They may seek out advice from characters in books by studying their words and reactions. Carla serves as this role model in *Everything, Everything*. Often, these helpful adults are not the protagonist’s parents, such as in the case of Carla; from this tendency, readers can gather that many teenagers need a source of wisdom outside of their immediate families. As much as adolescents value independence, the positive impact of a role model cannot be overlooked, and Yoon uses Carla to guide Maddy in her decisions. This choice shows readers that trustworthy adults may recommend empathy and forgiveness as ways of life, even in situations of betrayal.

An entire chapter of the novel is titled “Forgiveness,” which suggests that Yoon sees the innate need for adolescents to forgive and be forgiven for the sake of mental and emotional peace and health. In the chapter, Maddy narrates that “I’m trying to put myself in her shoes, playing games not of cause and effect, but of effect and cause. I go back, and back, and back, and I always end up in the same place. Love. Love makes people crazy. Loss of love makes people crazy” (300). Maddy seems to be developing the ability to view life from the eyes of her mother. She realizes that her mother’s harmful actions are rooted in the depth of love she feels for her family. Although reconciliation is slow, forgetting is likely impossible, and their relationship will never return to its previous state, Maddy gains compassion and understanding as she seeks to

forgive her mother. Yoon shows readers that perpetrators have reasons for their actions, even actions that are inexcusable, and the victim's deep pain can begin to be mended with purposeful empathy and efforts to forgive.

Self-Forgiveness

While *Everything, Everything* protagonist Maddy seeks to forgive her mother, many adolescents find themselves in positions wherein they need to forgive themselves. Teenagers sometimes make mistakes and hurt others, either maliciously or inadvertently. When people cause pain, they often feel guilt and shame for their actions. In turn, when they are not at fault, sometimes they are made to feel guilty by others. Sometimes, they even feel guilt for situations outside of their control. In many cases, adolescents emotionally fare better when they are able to forgive themselves and move forward from their mistakes. The most socially beneficial form of self-forgiveness includes both compassion towards oneself and honest reflection that cultivates changed behaviors.

Research studies find that people experience more positive emotions and inner health when they give themselves grace. According to the article "Two Pathways to Self-forgiveness: A Hedonic Path via Self-compassion and a Eudaimonic Path via the Reaffirmation of Violated Values," "there is some evidence that reducing self-punitiveness is good for individual well-being. A meta-analysis has suggested that self-forgiveness (measured primarily with hedonic trait or end-state measures) is associated with personal well-being" (517). Individuals who are able to replace negative self-image with positive self-image after committing a

wrongdoing tend to be happier than those who ruminate over their own faults. In essence, self-condemnation is an unhealthy state of being, while self-forgiveness promotes inner health.

While self-forgiveness is vital for individual well-being, lack of remorse can cause social and emotional problems. Without personal change, people may make the same mistakes repeatedly, hurting more people in their wake. In fact,

These results suggest that self-forgiveness, as simply a reduction in self-punitiveness and increase in self-compassion, may equate to an act of letting the self off the hook. This process may be somewhat akin to moral disengagement or what has been described as pseudo self-forgiveness, that is, arriving at the state of self-forgiveness but bypassing responsibility (518).

After people harm others, if they self-forgive (feel empathy, compassion, and positive emotions toward themselves) without also taking responsibility for their actions, they do not mature and mend relationships. In turn, those who invest time into changing their behaviors have more constructive experiences of self-forgiveness.

When people practice Eudaimonic self-forgiveness, they strive to become the best versions of themselves after causing harm to others. They examine their goals, values, and paths, seeking to realign their lifestyles to their core morals and values. Those who feel compassion for themselves while also reaffirming their morals have positive experiences of self-forgiveness. In fact, “ Self-compassion and value reaffirmation in tandem might prove useful for therapeutic approaches to the processing of wrongdoing, and related emotions such as guilt and shame, where responsibility needs to be processed and not simply bypassed (532).” People are more likely to become morally aligned and emotionally balanced when they effectively process their

feelings of guilt. By replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk, people can develop a compassionate, kind image of themselves. Compassionate self-awareness helps people to constructively think about their lives, their identities, and their potential. When paired with a healthy desire to change from destructive ways and misaligned values, self-forgiveness can improve the lives of both the wrongdoer and the victim.

In the book *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, protagonist Steve seems to work towards forgiving himself in self-compassionate and Eudaimonic ways. While readers cannot be sure about Steve's need for forgiveness in the book, they can infer that he does feel guilty for others' pain. *Monster* twists through the trial of a teenage boy who is accused of being involved in a drugstore robbery turned murder. Essentially, he is accused of being the lookout for the robbery. Steve, the main character, creates a screenplay based on his experiences. He also writes journal entries that detail his feelings and perspectives. The book is composed of the screenplay script and journal that Steve writes throughout the trial. His attorney advises him to be careful about what he writes because the court could seize the notebook at any moment. Therefore, Steve knows to not incriminate himself through his writing; thus, he is an unreliable narrator. Consequently, readers do not know whether or not Steve feels guilt for contributing to the death of Mr. Nesbitt. As the story is anchored in ambiguity, readers often struggle to reach a conclusion about Steve's innocence or guilt. Readers do, though, see the spiral of shame and confusion that Steve experiences as he tries to decipher who he is inside.

As a suspect in a murder investigation, Steve is made to feel guilty by those involved in the trial. O'Brien, who Steve describes as "the defense attorney with doubts," forces Steve to look at the crime scene pictures of Mr. Nesbitt (10). Like most teenagers would, Steve avoids

looking at the gory pictures when they were passed to the jury, but he is later pressured into viewing them by his own attorney. Miss O'Brien laid them on the table in front of them, and Steve "could tell she wanted me to look at them. I looked at them... Miss O'Brien looked at me - I didn't see her looking at me but I knew she was" (92). Through this action, readers can see that O'Brien does not think of Steve as a young boy; rather, she views him as a potential monster and wishes to observe whether he shows any indicators of guilt. She seems to want Steve to feel guilty and remorseful, though she does not know whether he committed any crimes. Steve has to face this situation and deal with the pain of being blamed for a heinous act.

When Steve thinks of his family, he seems to struggle with the pain they face as a result of his incarceration. He knows that their distress is directly related to his situation, and he seems to feel guilt as a result. He says, "I've never seen my father cry before. He wasn't crying like I thought a man would cry. Everything was just pouring out of him and I hated to see his face. What did I do? What did I do?... I didn't do nothing! But everybody is just messed up with the pain" (115). Steve's questions toward himself are ambiguous. Readers are left to wonder his meaning: is he expressing regret by asking what he did, or is he sharing that he truly does not know why people think he did anything wrong? Also, when he says that he did not do anything, is he minimizing the job of a lookout, or is he stating that he had no part in the robbery? Ambiguity aside, though, Steve clearly feels pain at the sight of his father crying. He likely experiences guilt and does not immediately forgive himself for being the source of his father's emotional state, whether the shame he feels is fair or not. Steve should not feel guilty for his father's tears; he is a child, and he is not responsible for his parent's reactions, especially if he is

innocent. However, adolescence often includes a heightened emotional state, and Steve does seem to feel guilt.

The guilt Steve feels for his family's pain is not a primary focus of his narration, which is likely a result of the self-compassion component of self-forgiveness. Preservation is the reason Steve first seems to let go of guilt. He is upset by his family's pain; however, he is unable to focus on it during the trial. He says, "I saw Mama clinging to my father's arm. There was a look of desperation on her face. For a moment I felt sorry for her, but I don't anymore. The only thing I can think of is my case" (270). Steve considers his own needs and seems to feel compassion and grace for himself throughout the trial. He sees the humanity of himself, as shown when he says "That was what I was thinking, about what was in my heart and what that made me. I'm just not a bad person. I know that in my heart I am *not* a bad person" (93). He sees himself as a worthwhile human being. Steve's self-compassion is part of whole self-forgiveness, and it helps him to handle the emotions of his family.

Steve seems to take a Eudaimonic approach to life after the trial, which contributes to positive self-forgiveness. Steve practices self-forgiveness through value reaffirmation after his incarceration. He realizes that some of the people he spent time with in his neighborhood were destructive, like Bobo and Osvaldo. After returning home, he chooses to focus on improving his own life through filmmaking. He wants to reclaim his own values and develop his own identity on his own terms. He says, "I have been taking movies of myself. In the movies I talk and tell the camera who I am, what I think I am about" (280). He uses film to examine his own character. He says,

I want to know who I am. I want to know the road to panic that I took. I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image. When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away? What did she see? (281).

Steve wants to know what matters to him and how to prevent any situations like the trial from every happening again. He compares who he is to whom others see him to be. He seems to have been swept up into a world in which he does not belong, in which he is powerless. His road to panic was likely a result of being pulled by others: perhaps in the convenience store, in the neighborhood, and into jail. His identity was formed prematurely, and thus it was not his own. Now, he realizes that he needs to determine his true self in order to be in charge of his own life. Steve uses value reaffirmation as a way to let go of his past trauma and cultivate his identity as he transitions into adulthood and works toward forgiving himself. For Steve, forgiveness of self requires both self-compassion and eudaimonic growth. He seems to move forward as a result of the process of self-forgiveness.

Steve does not fully know himself at the end of the novel, nor does he seem to have complete inner peace. Rather, he struggles as he seeks self-awareness and self-forgiveness. While in jail, Steve does not even recognize himself. He says, "When I look into the small rectangle, I see a face looking back at me but I don't recognize it.

It doesn't look like me. I couldn't have changed that much in a few months. I wonder if I will look like myself when the trial is over" (105). By the end of the novel, he realizes that he wants to be able to recognize himself. He desires an identity he can understand, an identity of his own. He needs to form his self-image, his values, and his true self before he forgives himself fully.

After all, it is difficult to forgive an unknown person. To feel true self-compassion and self-empathy, and thus reap their benefits. Steve must first know himself.

Friendship and Forgiveness

Like forgiveness, friendship is a protective factor that allows adolescents to have higher levels of emotional well-being; in fact, the two factors are directly tied to each other. According to the study “Forgiveness and Friendship Protect Adolescent Victims of Bullying from Emotional Maladjustment,” “Having a best friend is likely to reduce the effect of victimization on depression scores in more forgiving participants, compared to less forgiving participants” (Barcaccia, et al. 430). Friendships based in forgiveness and grace are strong and healthy, and relationships like these help adolescents cope with their problems. The study about friendship, forgiveness, and emotional well-being proceeds to interpret the reasons for the results, saying that, “On one hand, being a forgiving person may help cement friendships, on the other hand, friends may also moderate impulsive desires to be unforgiving” (432). When people interact with each other closely, conflict is bound to occur. During the formative years of adolescence, when young adults are coming of age and growing into themselves, hurtful mistakes are common within friendships. Forgiving is a necessary component of most relationships, and the choice to forgive prevents ongoing strife and bitterness.

Turtles All the Way Down by John Green, a novel about a young woman coming of age while dealing with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, delves into the mutual pain and forgiveness between two best friends. Protagonist Aza Holmes fights her own brain every day and neglects her best friend Daisy in the process. Daisy writes short stories that she publishes to the internet;

gradually, she begins to present Aza in a less than flattering light, calling her “Ayala.” Ayala is selfish, annoying, and negative. Aza discovers the stories and is deeply hurt, saying “Ayala, Aza. Beginning of the alphabet to the end and back. Gave her compulsions. Gave her my personality. Anyone reading it would know how you really feel about me. Mychal. Davis. Everyone at school, probably” (214). Aza feels humiliated and betrayed. Daisy responds by saying that “I’ve been writing them since I was eleven, and you’ve *never read a single one*” (214). Daisy’s choices were bred out of feelings of rejection and invisibility because she feels that Aza does not care for her. Fights like this can seem commonplace for young adults; readers most likely identify with the root feelings of rejection that both Aza and Daisy feel. Upon conflicts, some friendships disintegrate and others strengthen, and readers can learn from Aza and Daisy’s story how to repair broken trust through forgiveness.

When Aza crashes her vehicle with Daisy in the front seat, the guilt she feels increases, which magnifies her need to be forgiven and forgive herself. She says that “A woman came in and took me away to get a CT scan, and I was sort of relieved to be away from both my mom and Daisy for a while, not to feel the swirl of fear and guilt over being such a failure as a daughter and a friend” (221). When a character wrongs another, often the shame of the action further separates the two of them. The character who feels guilty distances herself from others as a response to the guilt. Aza sickens herself by replaying the car accident in her mind, unable to imagine her best friend being able to forgive her. When she believes their friendship is irreparable, her emotional health suffers, which shows the deep importance of forgiveness when adolescents hurt their loved ones.

Many teenagers benefit from being friends with people who forgive easily. After all, adolescent egocentrism sometimes results in young people accidentally hurting the feelings of each other. While Aza struggles with the pain she causes, Daisy seems to wish to immediately put the problems and painful past behind them. She serves as a model for a character who is perseverant and quick to forgive. In their conversation about the errors of their pasts, Aza says, “‘Listen,’ I said. ‘I’m really sorry’” and Daisy responds with “‘Me too, but we have forgiven each other and now we will live happily ever after’” (238). Daisy believes that since they discussed their problems and seemed to resolve them, they should be able to return to ‘normal’ within their friendship. However, Aza, while eager to reconcile with Daisy, struggles to forgive herself.

Aza broods over her mistakes and faces anger and resentment toward herself for most of the novel; by the resolution, though, she realizes that the emotions of others should not always be her primary concern. She tells Daisy that “I’m so sorry I haven’t been a good friend. I can’t stop thinking about it” (226). As a foil to Daisy’s attitude of moving forward, Aza seems to be confined in her own self-hate. She even calls herself a demon when she drinks hand sanitizer to cleanse herself (229). By herself, Aza is unable to overcome her guilt and see her situation clearly. With Daisy and her mother’s help, though, Aza seems to develop some compassion and understanding for herself. Daisy says, “‘Jesus Christ, Holmesy, you can sure hold a grudge against yourself. You are my favorite person. I want to be buried next to you’” (238). Aza’s mother tells her to “Be kind to yourself” (280). Daisy and Aza’s mother’s fierce loyalty shows Aza that she herself has worth, even though she makes mistakes. She is taught by her loved-ones that self-forgiveness is just as important as giving others grace.

Many times, people feel guilt and shame for behaviors that should not warrant such self-deprecation. Not every action needs to be forgiven, and Aza's growth in self-acceptance allows her to finally see that as the book nears its conclusion. With time, Aza even begins to gain confidence in her choices and defend herself in fair ways. She asserts that "I know you're not trying to make me feel pressure, but it feels like I'm *hurting* you, like I'm committing assault or something, and it makes me feel ten thousand times worse. I'm doing my best, but I can't stay sane for you, okay?" (247). Aza wishes to stay sane and clear her mind; however, she knows that she must do so for herself. Pressure from others, even her mother, does not help her to heal, so she has to learn to let go of the guilt she feels for hurting her mother. With support and time, Aza is able to work through her guilt and forgive herself. She realizes that not everything is her responsibility, and she cannot always control the emotional effects of her actions on others. She knows that she cannot "stay sane for you." She has to focus on herself. Each person has his or her own struggles, and Aza cannot be held liable for fixing all of them; instead, she sometimes needs to take care of herself without worrying about others.

Letting Go Without Reconciliation

While many young adult protagonists center their relationships around forgiving and being forgiven, others overturn the norms by demanding fair treatment; however, even these characters learn to let go of bitterness. Literature that focuses on protest and social justice like *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas tends to have similar themes of standing up for oneself in relationships. The novel is by an African American woman and is written from the perspective of a black teenager, Starr, whose friend is unjustly shot by a police officer in front of her. Starr,

though timid and shaken at the beginning of the novel, develops her own voice and assertiveness as she eventually speaks at a protest. Starr pledges to continue speaking about injustice for the memory of her friend and the future of her community. The last lines of the novel read: “Khalil, I’ll never forget. I’ll never give up. I’ll never be quiet. I promise” (444). Starr is not focused on forgiving the law enforcement officer because she first wants to ensure that no other young men are murdered. Starr feels anger and hostility; however, these are not her primary reasons for continuing the conversation. She wishes to change the treatment of black people by police officers. Her motives are altruistic and selfless, and Starr prioritizes social justice over any personal reasons to let the murder go emotionally.

In her friendships, Starr exhibits a similar demand for fairness. Her former friend, Hailey, doubts Starr’s beliefs, makes racist comments, and even unfollows her Tumblr profile due to her social justice posts. She often perpetuates stereotypes and makes fun of the races and cultures of others, as shown when their mutual friend says that “I told you guys my grandparents visited, and it was their first time celebrating Thanksgiving. Hailey asked if we ate a cat. Because we’re Chinese... She claimed it was a joke and laughed. I laughed, and then you laughed” (251). Hailey sees no problems with her actions and becomes hostile when Starr confronts her. Starr and Hailey clash over foundational beliefs, so much so that Starr cannot maintain peace. They fight, and Starr says “I kick and hit at Hailey, cuss words flying out of my mouth” (342). Starr does not ignore their problems or forgive Hailey; instead, she physically fights her, an embodiment of her fight against the justice system and social hierarchy.

Although Starr does not ‘turn the other cheek’ upon Hailey’s classless remarks, she does still find value in being able to let go of pain. Hailey soon apologizes to Starr, but her apology is

hollow and misleading. Hailey texts that she is sorry ““About the decision, she says. And that you’re upset with me. Haven’t been myself lately. Just want everything to be how it used to be.” The sympathy for the case is nice, but she’s sorry I’m upset? That’s not the same as apologizing for her actions or the garbage she said. She’s sorry I reacted the way I did” (433). Hailey’s lack of a true apology causes Starr to decide that she will not reconcile with Hailey. Instead, she chooses to let go of the anger and hurt she feels as a result of Hailey’s lack of friendship, saying that “...I don’t have to wait around for her to change. I can let go. I reply: ‘Things will never be the way they used to be’” (433). Hailey and Starr are not friends anymore, and Starr never confirms that she fully forgives Hailey, but she chooses to replace negativity with peace by letting go. Angie Thomas shows her readers that sometimes people do not reunite, sometimes wrongs cannot be forgotten, and yet inner equilibrium is found when one is able to move on from the transgressions faced.

Final Thoughts

In all, readers of young adult realistic fiction likely see forgiveness as a recurring motif in the books they read. The motif matches with psychological research that shows the vital importance of forgiveness in order to cope through adolescence. By developing protagonists who forgive and are forgiven, authors show that the developmental needs of adolescents are universal. From *Everything, Everything*, readers can learn what forgiveness entails and how it positively impacts the emotional state of people. In *Monster*, readers can see that people must forgive themselves and reaffirm their values in order to move forward. *Turtles All the Way Down* teaches that friendship thrives when people show each other grace and forgive themselves. Through the

plot and characterization in *The Hate U Give*, readers can see that relationships should not always continue with toxic people and unfair situations should be stopped. However, by replacing negative emotions with positive emotions, people can improve their own lives. Authors create stories that universal truths, creating psychologically beneficial examples for young adults. By reading realistic young adult fiction, adolescents can learn to better cope with difficulty and improve relationships.

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