The Bridge That Binds Us:
Exploring How Self-Forgiveness Can Help People Live a Content Life

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at exploring the importance self-forgiveness to help people live a content life. Self-forgiveness is a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own mistake while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward one-self. Self-forgiveness itself is still an underrated topic because there has not been a lot of research into it. This article explores the reason behind the difficulty of self-forgiveness and ways that someone can take to self-forgive. Moreover, we use Conceptual Analysis of Self-Forgiveness, a psychological approach. The finding of this article is in the form of a novella. The novella tells a story using a contemporary fantasy genre, about a girl and a boy, Luci and Von, who are struggling with their past guilt. After spending time together, Luci is able to muster up the courage to apologize which helps her forgive herself and Von also learns the truth about the accident that happened in the past then visits his dead parents' grave which also helps him forgive himself and move on.

Keywords: self-forgiveness, novella, contemporary fantasy

INTRODUCTION
Novella, in a simpler term, is like a short novel. Novella allows development of themes and characters more than short stories but without the elaborating structure of a full-length book/novel (Silverberg, 2000). According to Tony Whedon, a prize-winning author, there can be changes in the tenses with flashbacks or flash-forwards within novella but with a more compressed time (Kimber, 2016). Moreover, form is also a crucial feature in novella which means that novella does not have a lot of subplots and only focuses on one major storyline that centers around one turning event (Fuchs, 2019). This will help keeping the storyline to the point and we can focus on exploring and developing the main storyline in the story. Not only that, novella is chosen in the hopes to spark Indonesians reading interest. A study by Central Connecticut State University found that Indonesia was the second last out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest (TheJakartaPost, 2016). Thus, a novella can be a good start for Indonesians as novella is not very long so it will be faster to be read by people who want to get in the habit of reading.

We decided to use contemporary fantasy as the genre for my novella. Contemporary Fantasy is a genre where the setting is set in a contemporary setting but with characters that are supernatural (have special abilities) and usually are coming to terms with themselves and others (Burcher, Hollands, Smith, Trott, & Zellers, 2014). Thus, we can create an intriguing story by combining magical and ordinary aspects. It can also explore the depth of the characters and how they will get to know themselves and the world.

In this article, we explore how important self-forgiveness is on helping people to lead a content life. The goal is to understand the actions that make it difficult for people to forgive themselves and the actions they can take in order to start forgiving themselves. Self-forgiveness itself is actually considered to be a 'stepchild' of forgiveness research since it receives less attention than interpersonal forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

According to Enright and the Human Development Study Group, self-forgiveness is, "a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged wrong [sic],

while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself," (Krause & Hayward 2012, p. 361). It has also been argued that self-forgiveness is more difficult to do than interpersonal forgiveness (wrongdoings of others) because our wrongdoings lead to self-defeating and overthinking or shame or guilt which can provoke negative emotions, withdrawal, anxiety, insecurities, desperation, and risk physical well-being (Pandey, Tiwari, Parihar, & Rai, 2020). Not only that, in reality, our inner guilt is trying to come out and be healed but our fear of facing it is so strong that we avoid it and sometimes even project it to other people because of what we hate about ourselves deep down (Tipping, 2007).

Self-forgiveness brings a lot of benefits to mental as well as physical health. A study on self-forgiveness in relation to physical and mental health conducted by Don E. Davis, Man Yee Ho, Brandon J. Griffin, Chris Bell, Joshua N. Hook, Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Cirleen DeBlaere, Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Charles J. Westbrook, psychology professors and psychologist (2015), showed that self-forgiveness is indeed directly related to improving mental and physical health. For mental health, it showed that self-forgiveness was able to lower depression and anxiety whereas for physical health, it showed that self-forgiveness was able to lower heart rate, lower white blood cell counts and higher para-sympathetic in the blood circulation which are signs of improved physical health (Davis et al., 2015).

The creative work is a story about Luci, a 17-year-old girl who is struggling with her own past and guilt and Von, a 17-year-old boy who also struggles with his past choice and guilt. After spending time together, Luci feels guilty for what she has done to Von's family in the past and musters up the courage to apologize which helps her forgive herself. Von also learns the truth about the accident in the past then visits his dead parents' grave which also helps him move on and forgive himself.

For the theoretical framework, we use the Conceptual Analysis of Self-Forgiveness by Julie H. Hall and Frank D. Fincham. Hall and Fincham argue that self-forgiveness has been overseen by psychological researchers. Self-forgiveness is a process in which an individual releases any negative feeling toward themselves after doing something wrong and gains self-respect and self-acceptance (Hall & Fincham, 2008). In their journal, they stated that when someone is unable to forgive themselves, they will avoid the victim of their transgression or thoughts, feelings, and situation related to the transgression. The avoidance happens because they thought it would reduce the occurrence of painful thoughts or feelings of the transgression. Thus, when someone is able to self-forgive, such avoidance is no longer needed.

Hall and Fincham also elaborate that Robin S. Dillon, a psychology professor, provides examples of actions that need self-forgiveness such as one's own wrongdoings, racist thoughts, wishing the death of a parent, or sexual excitement over violence. Hall and Fincham add that it is different when people forgive themselves after doing a terrible act compared to when their character flaw triggers the act. For example, someone accidentally hit their friend once because of heat in the moment versus someone who always responds to situations by hitting/abusing others. For the person who accidentally hit their friend, it is easier to forgive themselves because they know that they are not a violent type of person. Meanwhile, the person who always uses violence when responding to a situation will find it harder to forgive themselves because they will blame themselves for having that violent characteristic (Hall & Fincham, 2008).

Hall and Fincham develop a model of self-forgiveness as a motivational transformation to see how self-forgiveness unfolds overtime and to identify some emotional, social variables associated with self-forgiveness. According to the model, the motivational shifts that characterizes self-forgiveness can be seen from changes in four different variables: (a) emotional variables such as guilt, (b) social-cognitive variables such as perceived forgiveness from the victim, (c) behavioral variables, such as apologizing, asking for forgiveness, and

making amends, and (d) offense-related variables such as building a god and strong relationship with the victim after the offense. The study also shows that an average person is able to be more forgiving of his or her transgression over the seven weeks after the offense (Hall & Fincham, 2008).

We apply into the novella's characters the actions that make someone hard to self-forgive and the four variables which support the motivational changes within an individual who wishes to self-forgive. For Luci, one of the main characters, she has difficulties to forgive herself because of her own wrongdoings and she also has a struggle with her character flaws. Moreover, she first tries to avoid the victim of her transgression, which is Von, the other main character of the story. Afterwards, she uses the emotional variables which is feeling guilty about the transgression that she did in the past. As time goes by, she forgives herself by using the behavioral variables which are apologizing and asking for forgiveness from Von. The offense-related variables also help her forgive herself. Throughout times, she and Von build a good relationship and that helps her forgive herself and slowly be at peace with herself and her surroundings.

Von, the other main characters, uses the emotional variables which is also feeling guilty for what he did in the past, that is wishing his parents were dead. After that, he avoids his hometown, the people there, and even his parents' grave by moving to another city because his hometown reminds him of his dead parents and his guilt. Eventually, after knowing the truth that he is not the one who entirely caused the death of his parents, he uses behavioral variables which is apologizing to his parents' grave. Then, he uses the social-cognitive variable which is perceiving that his parents have already forgiven him based on the sign he sees when he apologizes at his parents' grave. He also uses the behavioral variables by apologizing to Luci for turning a blind eye when she is bullied at school. After that, he is be able to forgive himself and be at peace with himself.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK
Here we present the concept of the novella which encompasses its theme, characters, plot, and conflict.

Theme
The novella focuses on how making peace with the past can help people move on and forgive themselves. The theme appears when the main characters go through different conflicts and processes such as acknowledging mistakes in the past, confronting it, and fostering themselves with compassion before finally being able to make peace and forgive their past selves.

Characters
1. Luci, 17 years old.
Luci is an orphan who suffers from prosopagnosia or more known as face blindness, which makes her unable to see or differentiate faces including her own. She has a dark brown eye color. Her parents passed away and then she lived with her aunt. Her aunt was not capable of taking care of her so, ever since that, she has been moving from one house to another. Luci has loved to draw ever since she was a teenager. Because her vision or sight of the world is different from those around her, she can pour her imagination and vision into drawing without any restriction. Her disease is also an inconvenience in socializing; thus, she could not fit in and girls at school bully her. She does not think highly of herself at all and she is insecure. Luci also has a habit of rubbing her hands on her pants whenever she is anxious or nervous. Luci is able to see people's souls through colors, so that is her trick that helps her a little in differentiating people. The color of the soul that she sees reflects the emotional state of that person, so if someone is happy then the color would be bright. However, her magical ability is super biased

at the beginning because it reflects how she sees herself and the world. Towards the end, Luci uses her ability to motivate her into making things right with herself and Von.

2. Von, 17 years old.
Von was the only child in the family. However, he is now an orphan because his family died in a fire and it gave him a huge burn mark on his face. He is unhappy at home, but he is happy around his friends and is the life of his group at school because he is naturally smart and friendly. After the fire accident, he becomes more insecure. He used to be an active out-door boy so he has tanned skin. Von is able to see someone's future when they touch and it used to be his favorite thing but after the fire, he can only see a specific past, which is of his parents' death and he feels haunted by it.

3. Bridgette, 20 years old, Luci's close friend.
She is currently working as a nurse in Modjohaus City. She and Luci knew each other because they used to be neighbors and Bridgette instantly gravitates toward Luci because of her nurturing trait.

4. Mr. Leonardo, 50 years old, Von's father.
He is a strict, hotheaded and violent person. He always beats up Von because he sees Von as a mannerless troublemaker.

5. Mrs. Leonardo, 48 years old, Von's mother.
She is a workaholic and sometimes she is cold to Von. She is very submissive to her husband.

6. Irene Lim, 35 years old, Luci's aunt.
She is an alcohol and drug addict and is very messy. She loves Luci but her grief and addictions kill her.

7. Jules, 43 years old, Luci's aunt/distant relative.
She has a huge pride. Luci stayed with her for a while, and during which, she learns about Luci's condition. She refuses to take care of Luci afterwards

Plot
Luci is an orphan who lost her parents at a young age and since then has been moving from different households of her distant relatives. Luci also suffers from prosopagnosia or face blindness which makes her unable to differentiate faces but she is able to see people's soul through colors. Five years later, she is sent to live at her aunt's friend place. Coincidentally, that is Von's house. Von is the only child in the family and he is a cheerful boy around his peers even though he is always alone at home because his parents are workaholics and very strict. He has the ability to see someone's future when he touches a person's hand.

As Luci is living in Von's house, Von avoids her because he feels jealous of the attention Luci receives from his parents. However, his father is actually sexually harassing Luci and trying to rape her. Luci tries to tell Von's mom but she does not believe her. One day, Von foresees that a fire would occur at his house but he does not tell his parents. On that same day, Von's dad tries to rape Luci again and while she is struggling to escape, Von's dad accidentally nudges a candle and the fire spreads around the house and kills Von's dad. Luci escapes the house by jumping on the window and meets Bridgette, her old friend in the train station and she decides to follow Bridgette to Modjohaus City.

When the fire happens, someone calls Von and he goes back to his house and tries to save his parents but he is too late and he gets hit by the fire. After the accident, his ability changes from

seeing the future to seeing the vision of the fire whenever he touches someone or things on the city so he buys gloves to cover his hand.

In Modjohaus City, Luci meets with Von and she does not know it at first. Von tries to reach out because Luci is the closest person he has to a family but Luci tries to avoid him after she finds out. Soon, they start to work together in a company which forces them to spend a lot of time together and in time, they grow closer. Von tells Luci about his guilt toward his parents and Luci wants to apologize and tells Von the truth but she is too scared. Then, after some time, she musters up her courage to confess the truth and apologize. Von is shock by the truth and back on the place he stays in, he opens his glove and touches an important book from his old house which shows him the vision of what really happened in the fire.

After finding out the truth about what happened in the fire, he meets with Luci and they both talk it out. Luci feels really guilty but she wants to make it right and after that, they are able to forgive themselves and make peace with the past. Von is able to visit his parents grave and apologize to his parents as well.

Conflict
There are two types of conflict in the creative work, which are Man vs. Man and Man vs. Self. Man vs. Man, or usually known as external conflict, is a conflict where the protagonist's needs are the opposite with other people (MasterClass, 2020). The main characters, Luci and Von, struggle with each other and with other people because they are treated badly by them. Von has more of an external than internal conflict because of his conflict with his parents, especially his violent dad.

Next conflict is Man vs. Self, or internal conflict, which means the antagonist is coming from within the character (MasterClass, 2020). Luci has more of an internal than external conflict so she struggles to forgive and make peace with herself. She is constantly battling with her own thoughts. This causes Luci to confuse between what is truly right and causes Luci to lose confidence in herself. Her thoughts also make her doubt herself and keep her from doing the right things and in the end, she has to defeat her thoughts. Von is struggling with his inner self and this results in him not being able to make the right choices as time goes by.

CONCLUSION
This creative work was created in hopes to show people how important self-forgiveness is for our lives. The main characters represent people out there who also have made mistakes in the past and are still struggling to forgive themselves. Throughout the work, readers can follow their respective journey to self-forgiveness.

The causes that make the characters hard to forgive themselves are made clear. For Luci, they are many things in her past but what makes her feel even more guilty and terrible about herself is when she kills Von's family by setting the house on fire (chapter 8 in the novella). Even though it is accidental and for self-defense, Luci still feels guilty about it because she feels that she does not need to kill Von's father to defend herself. She also thinks of herself as a bad person so she struggles with how to be a better person and if it is even possible for her.

Von, the second main character, struggle to forgive himself mainly since he does not do anything to prevent his family's death although he has the premonition (chapter 6 of the story). Thus, he believes that he is the one who caused his parents' death. He also wishes for his parents to die a couple of times throughout the story and that contributes to his guilt even more.

Then, the novella shows ways of how someone is able to forgive themselves by adapting variables from the Conceptual Analysis of Self-Forgiveness theory. For Luci, her journey to

forgiving herself involves emotional, behavioral and offense-related variables from the said theory to help Luci forgive herself. In Chapter 7, after killing Von's family, she immediately feels and recognizes her guilt for killing his family but she does not do anything about it yet because she is still too afraid. When she finally meets Von in Chapter 10, they start to build a relationship overtime because they have to work together. Then, Luci confesses and asks Von for forgiveness in Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 of the story. After that, she is able to forgive herself and at peace with herself.

Next, for Von, his journey of self-forgiveness, which starts in Chapter 9, takes into account the emotional, behavioral and social-cognitive variables from the theory to help him forgive himself. Von first tries to seek forgiveness from a higher being (God) but it does not help him. In Chapter 12, after Luci confesses the truth and asks for his forgiveness, he uses his power to finally learn the truth about the accident. He realizes that it is not entirely his fault and that the fire is simply an accident. Towards the end, he finally goes to his parents' grave and apologizes to them. At the graveyard, he sees a sign that he believes is a way for his parents to let him know that they forgive him.

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