
TOXIC ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP PORTRAYED IN AFTER WE COLLIDED NOVEL OF ANNA TODD

Susan Kartosugondo¹, Yohanes Kurniawan Winardi², Dr. Eka Fadilah³
^{1,2,3} Universitas Widya Kartika

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the signs of a toxic relationship in the novel "After We Collided" by Anna Todd and the negative impacts resulting from such toxicity. This research focuses on the two main characters, Tessa and Hardin's complex relationship. Morgan Lee's theory of signs of toxic relationships was used to discover the signs of the toxic relationship in the narrative. The Interpretive-Qualitative approach is used to analyze this research. The novel's listed utterances and narrations served as the primary data source. The data was collected through reading and understanding the whole novel, then it was analyzed according to the statement of problems and research questions. In analyzing the data, the conversations between the main characters and other characters were used to show the signs and the impact of a toxic romantic relationship between the main characters. The findings of this study reveal that the main character's relationship is afflicted by toxicity, which severely impacts both characters' well-being.

Keywords: Toxic Relationship, Romantic Relationship, Literature Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anna Todd wrote the 2014 young adult novel *After We Collided*. This sequel to the *After* series has garnered 1 billion online reads and captivated readers worldwide. *After We Collided* was the most talked-about online.

After We Collided continues the love story of Tessa Young and Hardin Scott, two young adults who fell in love despite their differences. Their failure to communicate and cheating ruined their relationship. They became one another, and their infidelity poisoned their connection and made it compelling to study. After completing this research, readers may recognize that a real-life incident influenced their problem and decide to apply remedies, model specific behaviors, and include them into their relationships.

Everyone wants a good relationship with mutual caring, respect, compassion, a strong interest in the partner's satisfaction, and shared control and decision-making (Solferino & Tessitore, 2021). Healthy relationships also improve overall functioning, while poor romantic relationships cause sadness and dissatisfaction (Ekoh et al., 2019).

In Anna Todd's *After We Collided*, Tessa and Hardin have a toxic love-hate relationship. This underpins the researcher's in-depth examination because toxicity is frequent in teen and adult love relationships. Their toxic romance alters their personality over time. Hardin and Tessa's personality change is investigated by Morgan Lee (2017) toxic relationship signs which include fighting, feeling drained, being dissatisfied, abusing emotionally and physically, and being insecure.

A toxic romantic relationship is one where the partners do not support each other, compete, disrespect, and lack cohesiveness (Glass, 1995). It is a common development in love relationships, but it might cause conflict with oneself or others (Krismaninggar, 2013). According to Yanti (2023), people who have been in toxic relationships while dating experience psychological effects like fear and trauma when reestablishing a relationship with the opposite sex.

Literary works constantly depict a struggle since their characters resemble actual life, and their destructive connection is portrayed as a subtle psychological attitude adjustment. Literature and popular culture discuss toxic relationships. Riyanto (2020) found that Elise and Remy's relationship turned toxic when they used fixation as self-defense. In "Toxic

Relationships in New Adult Literature" by Karla Spiranec (2018), most New Adult novels promote toxic relationships by fetishizing virginity, slut-shaming, and staying in abusive relationships with manipulative, possessive, and aggressive men. Azzahra & Suhadi (2021) investigate toxic relationships in Anna Todd's Wattpad novel "After" and its detrimental effects.

This study examines the signs of a toxic romantic relationship in *After We Collided*, unlike prior studies that focused on toxic relationships in general. This topic is chosen because, in the modern era, many cases of toxic romantic relationships are unrealized and *After We Collided* has already been read by billions of people, most of whom are teenagers. In the context of toxic relationships, the term "unrealized" refers to the fact that many individuals involved in such relationships may not fully comprehend or recognize the toxicity of their situation. They might be unaware of the negative impact the relationship is having on their emotional well-being, self-esteem, or mental health. This lack of realization can often lead to the continuation of harmful patterns, potentially causing further harm to both parties involved. Literature clearly depicts human life in a civilization, bringing delight, insight, and practical usefulness. Literature is deeply connected to human life since authors write about their observations and personal experiences. Thus, literature can reveal society through authors who contemplate and organize life's phenomena into creative masterpieces. This study is hoped to be beneficial in portraying the abusive relationship through the lens of literature, as well as how it results. This research has two purposes; to reveal the signs of a toxic romantic relationship in the novel and to find out the negative impact of the toxic romantic relationship.

2. METHOD

This study applied descriptive-interpretive research. The researchers used exploratory research questions to guide the study, then collected the data relevant to the study to answer the research questions, and systematically delivered a descriptive-interpretive grasp of experiences based on the data collected. The data source of this research was from the novel *After We Collided* by Anna Todd. To collect the data, the researchers read and understood the whole novel, then reviewed and synthesized the content of the novel to figure out and locate any information referring to the main discussion.

After collecting all the data needed for this research, the data was then analyzed using the toxic relationship theory that serves as the main theory. The researchers analyzed the material according to the statement of problems that have been proposed before. The data used was from the quotation from the conversation between the main characters and other characters that showed the signs and the impact of a toxic romantic relationship between both main characters. It was also analyzed from the behavior or things that the main characters do after experiencing a toxic dating relationship.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION SIGNS OF TOXIC RELATIONSHIP

There are five signs that can be found in this novel, and they are as follows: frequent fighting or fighting constantly, feeling tired or drained, emotional abuse, physical abuse, insecurity, and playing the blame game.

a) Fighting Constantly

In the story of "*After We Collided*" practically every interaction and exchange between Hardin and Tessa resulted in a quarrel between the two of them. According to Morgan Lee (2017), having a conversation with someone is a symptom of verbal action that is related to the indicator of a toxic relationship. The act of intentionally causing mental harm to another person by the use of words, such as argument, blame, or humiliation, is

known as verbal violence. Their conflict is demonstrated through the following quotations:

“You can’t sit here and tell me that you don’t believe that I love you.”. “I know you don’t, it was all a game to you. While I was falling in love with you, you were using me.”(p.27)

Both of them finally engaged in what can be accurately described as a form of verbal violence brought on by heated disagreement and fury. According to Morgan Lee’s explanation (2017), the statement mentioned earlier is a sign of verbal violence in a toxic romantic relationship because it demonstrates a persistent struggle between the two parties whenever they meet and communicate. It is clear from that remark that their relationship was built on a foundation of lies.

b) Feeling Drained

According to the definition provided by Morgan Lee, feeling drained in a relationship is a circumstance in which an individual feels weary as a result of the people who surround them; in this particular instance, Tessa felt exhausted as a result of Hardin. Tessa’s energy level was low as a result of the toxicity emitted by Hardin’s energy, and she lacked the motivation to engage in any activity. Love, hate, boredom, and a sense of being drained are just a few common feelings in romantic relationships. Romantic partnerships frequently have an effect on the psychological characteristics of the people who are in them. (Georgis, 2014; 36 Jacobus, 1999; Mishra Tarc, 2011b; Robertson, 2011).

Her mental resources were taxed since she had to spend so much time dealing with Hardin, who was a toxic person. Tessa depleted all of her reserves by investing them in an unhealthy relationship. As evidenced in the following quotations:

“I can’t comprehend how my life came to this, how I ever got to this point.”

“... I was close with my mother and I had this idea of how my life would be. And now I have nothing. Literally nothing... ” (P. 14)

c) Emotional Abuse

According to Morgan Lee, emotional abuse is the behavior of one person in a relationship to attack their partner, such as insult, to make them feel better. When one person uses another’s feelings against them in order to criticize, disgrace, shame, blame, or otherwise manipulate them in any other way, this is an example of emotional abuse. The manifestation of emotional abuse is witnessed in the constant belittlement and demeaning language used by Hardin toward Tessa. He repeatedly employed derogatory terms and criticized her appearance, intelligence, and personal choices. These relentless verbal assaults diminished Tessa’s self-worth, eroding her confidence and sense of identity. This can be seen from the quotation below:

“I don’t know why you got all dressed up just to go to my dad’s when I am not even going. It’s weird” he snaps out of nowhere. I roll my eyes and mentally bang my head against window. I knew this behavior wouldn’t last. I ignore his insult and just wait for the next.” (P. 49-50)

d) Insecure

According to Morgan Lee, insecurity can be characterized as an excessive worry about one’s relationship. One is said to suffer from insecurity in love when they have feelings of unease, worry, or doubt over themselves or their romantic connection. Friends, family members, and other important people become extra attachment figures for the person with whom it is possible to have a close relationship (Lafontaine, 2021). Due to the fact that the toxicity density of Hardin and Tessa’s relationship was on another level, Tessa’s family did not approve of the couple’s relationship very much. Tessa’s mother did not like Hardin for the same reason, which is that she was overly concerned about her daughter’s illness. Hardin’s feeling of insecurity is as seen in the following quotation:

“Couldn’t we have her mom come here? I would love to meet her,” Trish responds. Oh no. “No, her mother is . . . not very fond of me,” he says. “Why not?” “She doesn’t think I’m good enough for Tessa, I guess. And maybe because of how I look.” (P. 126)

e) Blame Game

Morgan Lee defined when one person in a toxic romantic relationship constantly points the finger at the other for everything that goes wrong and refuses to take responsibility for their actions; this indicates the blame game. As people spend longer time in romantic partnerships, they are more likely to place blame on the victim and exonerate the offender of culpability (Lelaurain et al., 2021). Within the context of this book, Hardin placed the blame for his toxic behaviour towards Tessa on Tessa herself.

“What the—what the actual fuck, Tessa? You kiss some guy at a fucking club, then have sex with me? Who are you?”... “Wow.... you are unbelievable. My Tessa would never kiss a fucking stranger at a club!” ... “And just to let you know, while you were kissing that guy? I was fucking Molly.” (P. 88-89)

THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF TOXIC ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

a) Psychological Impact

A toxic romantic relationship always leads to feeling numb, regardless of one's level of ignorance. Tessa appears to be a portrayal of the true victims of love in this work. The toxic nature of Tessa and Hardin's relationship may be contributing to her mental health problems. Continual instability, emotional abuse, and instability can all have a compounding effect on mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These potentially harmful psychological effects may have long-term consequences for the individual's overall well-being as well as their ability to build healthy connections. Sometimes the damaging effects of a toxic romantic relationship occur without the person even being aware of them. Tessa had a hard time controlling her feelings during the course of this book. This is connected to an indication from Morgan Lee (2017) that involves a feeling of exhaustion.

“I can see my breath coming out in front of my face in hot spurts through the cold air. I can’t feel the cold, though. I can’t feel anything.” (P.10)

b) Social Impact

Couples who are perceived to have unhealthy and toxic romantic relationships are often looked down upon by society, which views them as a problem that should be addressed. The frequency and poor mood of the toxic romantic relationship encourage the people in the surrounding area to perform some acts as their natural response. The same is true for the characters in the story as they respond to Tessa and Hardin's toxic relationship. Some psychologists and sociobiologists contend that individuals tend to react in particular ways to different environments and that human behavior is genetically predisposed in a particular direction. (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). Since Tessa was made out to be the victim, it is not hard to see why individuals in their immediate environment have taken Tessa's side and shown her greater sympathy as a result.

“It’s really coming down out there,” Landon says as he rushes me inside. “Where’s your coat?” he scolds playfully, then flinches when I step into the light. “What happened? What did he do?” My eyes scan the room, hoping that Ken and Karen aren’t downstairs. “That obvious, huh?” I wipe under my eyes. Landon pulls me into his arms, and I wipe my eyes again. I no longer have the strength, physical or emotional, to sob. I’m beyond that, so far beyond it.”

c) Physical Impact

Throughout the narrative of "After We Collided" Tessa's physical well-being becomes noticeably affected.

“I force myself to let out every scream—literally, as in screaming as loud as I possibly can and until my throat is sore—before I arrive in my hometown.” (P. 18)

Tessa's physical distress is evident through the quoted passage above. Her act of screaming to the point of a sore throat suggests a visceral release of pent-up emotions. This intense physical expression showcases the toll of her emotional turmoil on her body. The act of screaming serves as a coping mechanism, highlighting the palpable connection between her psychological struggles and their tangible impact on her physical state.

4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the main goals are to identify toxic romantic relationship portrayed by main characters in the novel "After We Collided" by Anna Todd and examine the negative effects of this toxicity on the main characters. The analysis reveals that the characters' relationship is filled with toxic signs, including constant fighting, emotional abuse, insecurity, and blame games, all aimed at undermining their self-worth and maintaining control. The toxic dynamic has significant impacts on the main characters, Tessa and Hardin. Tessa experiences a loss of self-identity, self-doubt, and emotional turmoil, while Hardin struggles with unresolved trauma and an inability to form healthy connections. Overall, the novel emphasizes the importance of recognizing the warning signs of toxicity and highlights the destructive nature of such relationships, prompting readers to reflect on cultivating healthy communication and emotional well-being in their own relationships.

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