

Bakalářská práce

Forbidden Love: Representation of attachment relationship styles in After (novel and movie)

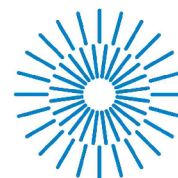
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Zadání bakalářské práce

Forbidden Love: Representation of attachment relationship styles in *After* (novel and movie)

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Zásady pro vypracování:

This bachelor's thesis deals with the topic of un/healthy attachment styles and their impact on the psychological wellbeing of youth. It proceeds from the belief that young adults might not yet be skilled to identify signs of unhealthy relationships and should thus be educated to be able to do so; which is one of the objectives the work seeks to fulfil. The theoretical part of this thesis will outline different attachment styles, describing their effect on romantic relationships. The basic definition of an emotionally abusive relationship will be summarised to illustrate how different attachment styles can lead to unhealthy abusive bonds. Then, the thesis will examine the attachment relationship styles represented in the young adult romantic novel *After* (2014), written by Anna Todd, chosen as this work has been criticised for glamorising abusive relationships to its YA readership. The bond between the two main protagonists, Hardin and Tessa, will be assessed using the aforementioned attachment styles theory. This evaluation will be based on the research outlined by the British psychologist J. Bowlby, later applied by Dr. Amir Levine and Rachel S. F. Heller, M.A. to advise people on how to navigate their relationships. This thesis will, in fact, address both the novel and the film adaptation of *After* to assess whether either of the versions contains a warning against abusive romantic relationships and their impact on one's wellbeing.

Methodology

Close reading of primary and secondary materials. Assessment of attachment styles in *After* and its film adaptation.

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5. dubna 2024

Helena Klobčič

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Anotace: Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá teorií citové vazby, a jejího dopadu na romantické vztahy, dále zkoumá, jak je tato teorie vyobrazena ve vztahu hlavních hrdinů románu *After-Polibek* Anny Toddové a to v jeho knižní i filmové verzi. Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda toto dílo napomáhá vzdělávat mladé dospělé ohledně problematiky nezdravých vztahů a jejich vlivu na psychickou pohodu a jestli toto dílo nezdravé vztahy odsuzuje nebo oslavuje. Dále zkoumá jaký vliv by toto populární dílo mohlo mít na vnímání a chování mladých dospělých v jejich vlastních romantických vztazích.

Klíčová slova: teorie citové vazby, mladí dospělí, romantické vztahy, toxické vztahy

Abstract: This bachelor thesis discusses attachment theory and its implications in romantic relationships. It investigates how attachment theory is portrayed in the protagonists' relationships in Anna Todd's novel *After*, in both the book and the movie adaptation. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the film or its movie adaptation helps to educate young adults about unhealthy relationships and their consequences for their psychological wellbeing, as well as to consider whether it glorifies or condemns these dynamics. It explores how this popular story might affect young adults' perception of this matter and their behaviour in their romantic relationships.

Keywords: attachment theory, young adults, romantic relationships, unhealthy relationships

Introduction	9
1. Attachment theory	13
1.1 History and application of attachment theory	13
1.2 Types of attachment	21
1.2.1 The Secure attachment style	23
1.2.2 The Anxious attachment style	25
1.3 Unhealthy relationship	31
1.3.1 Definition of an unhealthy relationship	31
1.3.2 Attachment theory and unhealthy relationships	32
2. <i>After</i> close reading	35
2.2 Main protagonists' psychological profile and attachment style	36
2.3. Main protagonists' relationship dynamics	39
2.4 The book – excerpts showing the main protagonists' relationship dynamics	40
2.5 Protagonist reflection on their relationship	48
2.6 Other characters' reflection of their relationship	49
2.7 The movie adaptation and its differences in the portrayal of the main protagonists' relationship	50
3. Condemning or glamorising unhealthy relationships in <i>After</i>	52
3.1 Possible effects of the <i>After</i> series on young adults' perception of relationships ..	53
Conclusion	55
Bibliography	57
Appendix: questionnaire for assessment of the attachment styles	59

Introduction

This bachelor thesis discusses attachment theory and illustrates how this theory might help to provide an adequate and thorough understanding of romantic relationships. Exploring attachment theory is beneficial as it alludes to how a relationship might unfold. Specifically, this theory offers insight into romantic relationship dynamics and enables one to understand those dynamics. Moreover, it is universal and thus applicable to every romantic relationship. As Levine and Heller argue, it can be used to analyse the behaviour of those involved in the relationship and foretell the course their relationship might take (2012, 8). Namely, it is possible to outline an individual's psychological profile and how they might influence others who bond with them in romantic relationships (Levine and Heller 2012, 9). Even though the ability to form attachment systems is an inborn mechanism, the actual attachment an individual creates is affected by many factors, including – the parenting style of one's parents and the individual's experience in romantic relationships (Ibid., 15).

It is indisputable that attachment directly affects one's physiological and physical wellbeing. In this thesis, attachment theory is discussed with a particular focus on how beneficial it might be for young adults who are inexperienced in romantic relationships and, more importantly, as Thorová writes, whose psyche is still undergoing development and is thus susceptible to outside influences, such as family, peers and media and technology (2015, 424). Specifically, this thesis applies attachment theory to investigate the protagonists' relationships in Anna Todd's novel *After* (2014) and to discuss the portrayal of the same in the movie adaptation.

The objective is to determine whether this book and its movie adaptation might help to educate young adults about dysfunctional relationships and the consequences these might have for their psychological wellbeing. Namely, the thesis questions whether the works glorify or condemn the dynamics of (un)healthy relationships, and it discusses how they might affect young adults' perception and behaviour within their romantic relationships.

The thesis is divided into three parts, corresponding with the core issues discussed within them. The first part of the thesis deals with attachment theory, which is then used as a lens to examine the relationship between the main protagonists of the discussed artworks. The theory was first formulated by the British psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby, and his findings were published in his book *Attachment and Loss* (1984). The theory deals with various attachment types between a child and an attachment figure (Bowlby 1984, 180). This attachment system forms in an individual's early life and plays a role as a model for all relationships this individual will experience throughout his/her life (Ibid., 181). Specifically, it affects how the individual views intimacy, his/her ability to trust others, and other qualities needed to form strong relationships, which eventually directly affect his/her success in relationships and general psychological wellbeing (Ibid., 181).

The attachment theory was then developed further. Follow-up research has been conducted, among others, by American neuroscientist Amir Levine and psychologist Rachel S.F. Heller, who have focused on the role of attachment in building and sustaining romantic relationships. These scholars discovered that individuals respond to and perceive intimacy in a romantic relationship based on the three most common attachment system styles parallel to those found in children (Levine and Heller 2012, 8). However, they also add that an adult's attachment style in a romantic relationship is influenced not only by the said attachment system style predisposition from early childhood but also by further experience and the actual romantic relationships of the individual (Ibid., 12).

Empirical research has modified attachment theory, but the concepts have become generally accepted. This thesis proceeds from Levine and Heller's research to argue that the main protagonists of the discussed work from the *After* series manifest attachment styles that predispose them to form unstable relationships, which are likely to have a negative impact on their wellbeing. These attachment theorists claim that when two individuals with specific attachment styles bond in a romantic relationship, namely an individual displaying anxious attachment and an individual displaying avoidant attachment tendencies, unhealthy relationship dynamics rather than healthy ones are likely to manifest (Levine and Heller 2012, 77). These findings are used in the thesis to claim that the protagonists' relationship shows elements of unhealthy attachment and, as such, should be warned against as it can potentially negatively influence the work's adolescent fans. This thesis aims to show that notwithstanding its popularity, Anna Todd's *After* should be considered cautiously as it poses a potential threat to adolescents' mental wellbeing.

The second part of the thesis examines the first novel from the *After* series. As stated above, through a close reading, the thesis will discuss the relationship between its main protagonists, Hardin and Tessa. Specifically, it will focus on situations from the text during which the protagonists' attachment styles are perceivable, particularly those in which unhealthy tendencies of their relationship manifest. This relates to the objective of the thesis, which is to warn young adult readers about the impact the characters' attachment styles exert on their relationships and themselves. Similar will be done with the novel's movie adaptation.

The comparison between the two different kinds of media is to identify the differences in portraying the couple's relationship in the original story and the adaptation. Both the book and the movie are considered as some adolescents prefer movies to books, and they only know the story from the movie adaptation. The comparison will evaluate whether the movie adaptation is based on, by that time, a bestselling author somehow changing the dynamic of the couple's relationship to warn its viewers against unhealthy bonds or whether they, too, romanticise it.

The third part of this thesis explores the impact of the popularity of the *After* series. The series has reached over 1.5 billion reads on the Wattpad platform, where it was initially published (Todd 2019, n.p). Moreover, the movie adaptation of the first book grossed 69.7 million dollars (BoxOfficeMojo 2020, n.p). Even though critics have deemed the portrayed relationship as toxic and thus unhealthy, it is trendy among young adults, which might suggest that these might be either unaware of or oblivious to the threat it poses. Indeed, fans have described this love story on social media and online forums, for example, Fandom, in the following way: "When it comes to relationships, it is perfect! When it comes to love, it is perfect." Or "This is reality, real love." Some even say: "You will find your Hardin one day!" You are the Tessa in your life, and only Hardin can make you happy (Fandom, 2023, n.p).

Based on such perceptions of the story among young adults, the influence it may have on them is discussed in this part. Young adults are still very susceptible to ideas imposed on them by parents, society and peers, the latter having the most significant impact on their lives, and those influences can shape their views and beliefs (Kateřina Thorová 2015, 420).

Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes (2021, 129) stated: "Adolescents are qualitatively different from adults, and discrepancies in cognitive, affective, and social development have been widely noted" (2021, 129). Moreover, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for self-control, impulse management, and executive reasoning, is not developed until adulthood (Ibid., 129). Therefore, young adults are very susceptible to their emotions, which they might be unable to regulate efficiently (Ibid., 129).

With a little life experience in a romantic relationship, they might still be unable to discern acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable. A third major section of this thesis explores the possible effect of these factors on young adults by exploring *After's* main protagonist's relationship together with Tessa and Hardin's wellbeing. Subsequently, this section will examine whether the book or the movie contains any condemnation of or even warning against toxic relationships. Also, the selection of secondary literature is discussed to assess to what extent young adults can be influenced in their behaviour by what is presented to them on the screen and in written works.

1. Attachment theory

1.1 History and application of attachment theory

This chapter introduces attachment theory, its historical context, and its application to enable an understanding of the psychology behind human relationships. This knowledge is used in the second part of this thesis to evaluate attachment and its effect on *After's* protagonists and their wellbeing. Firstly, the history and development of the attachment theory are introduced. Secondly, current research in applying attachment theory, mainly in understanding the psychological wellbeing of young adults, is discussed. This overview establishes the theoretical foundation for the subsequent chapters by summarising and explaining the key concepts and theories related to the subject matter discussed in the latter chapters. To establish the core of attachment theory, attention is directed toward the most essential writings published on attachment theory. Namely to John Bowlby's *Attachment and Loss*, which summarises what attachment is and how it is formed, and the works of Mary Ainsworth, who introduced different attachment styles.

Attachment theory was first formulated by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby during the second half of the 20th century, and his findings were published in his book *Attachment and Loss* (1984). It occurred to him that a bond is created between a caregiver and their offspring as he observed different types of primates, mainly the interactions between a female primate and her cubs (1984, 186). According to Bowlby, primate cubs show attachment to their mother; they spend most of their early months in her closeness, and their survival and wellbeing depend entirely on her (Ibid., 190). They seek their mother's closeness during the day and night; they show upset behaviour when they get separated, and their anxiety can be eased only when reunited with her; also seeking their mother in times of trouble or when they feel scared (Ibid., 191).

Bowlby used his observations to describe the same bonds between human parents and their offspring, as the cubs show similar behaviour to human children and formed the attachment theory (1984, 200). Siegel (1991, 91) summarised this research and proposed the following functions of the attachment system: seeking the physical proximity of the caregiver, which provides protection but, most importantly, has a direct effect on cognitive functions and their development of mainly memory, emotions, and states of mind. Attachment, therefore, is a secure base from which all personal development gets controlled and, as such, plays a vital role in maintaining wellbeing.

Siegel, among others, described the attachment system as "an unborn system in the brain that evolves in ways that influence motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to caregiving figures" (Siegel 1999, 91). It is a system created by evolution to increase the chances of infant survival, and the need to form attachments with caregivers is programmed by genes (Levine and Heller 2012, 26). Bowlby's close colleague Mary Ainsworth built on his research and developed probably the most essential theory in the attachment system field (Ibid., 29).

She designed an attachment system test known as the strange situation test, which aims to determine the quality and typography of the attachment system between an infant and its attachment figure (Ibid., 29).

Siegel describes how she studied the interaction between the infant and its mother during the first year of a child's life; her test consisted of twenty minutes of observation in laboratory settings (1999, 98). The infant plays with his mother during the experiment, and a strange observer is present. Eventually, the mother leaves the infant with the stranger. Both child's reactions during their time without their mother and when reunited are observed (Ibid., 98). Ainsworth noted that children's reactions fall into three categories, and later, she added a fourth one for those children whose behaviour was ambivalent (Ibid., 99). She thus identified three main attachment styles: the secure, the anxious, the avoidant, and a mix between the latter two, anxious and avoidant (Ibid., 99). Ainsworth and Bowlby opened a new field in the psychology of human relationships and explained why human beings form relationships; they explained the bonds between a child and its mother.

Ainsworth and Bowlby opened up a new field in the psychology of human relationships and explained why humans form emotional relationships; they explained the bonds between a child and their mother. Even though Bowlby (1984, 320) stated that the attachment system spreads throughout an individual's lifespan, it was not fully established until his theory was proved by research performed by Mary Main, Cindy Hazan, and Philip Shaver (Levine and Heller 2012, 23). These researchers focused on attachment's implications in adulthood and romantic relationships. Their principal findings were that adults fall into the same attachment categories as children and that these bonds continue and are formed with their romantic partners (Ibid., 23). Hazan and Shaver subsequently designed a simple test to determine adults' attachment styles in romantic relationships (Ibid., 23).

Eventually, Levine and Heller (2012) combined all previous knowledge about attachment theory and expanded research on its implications in romantic relationships. Their objective has been to assess the attachment style of an individual, the attachment style of one's partner, and, more importantly, the psychology of individuals bearing one of the established attachment styles and different protest behaviours (Levine and Heller 2012, 25). In the same way that children reacted to their attachment figure's absence in the aforementioned strange situation test, adults display protest behaviour when their romantic partner, to whom the attachment system binds them, is absent (Ibid., 30). These protest behaviours range from separation anxiety to unhealthy and abusive reactions (Ibid., 30). These protest behaviours play an essential role in deciding whether the romantic relationship will have healthy or unhealthy tendencies and, as such, play a crucial role in a part of this thesis that deals with the romantic relationship of *After'* 's protagonists.

Several academics have considered the implications of attachment on youth and adult psychology. Their research also indicates how one develops a specific attachment style and how this influences one's future life. Another focus of these research studies is the influence of attachment on one's psychological wellbeing and how different attachment styles predict the course of a romantic relationship. As mentioned above, attachment is an individual's natural response in time of need, forming a bond with his or her caregiver (Bowlby 1984, 202). In other words, an individual's attachment style gets activated when he or she experiences distress and gets turned off when sufficient security comes from their attachment figure. As an individual goes through a series of times of fear, distress or anxiety, obtaining sufficient comfort from their attachment figure forms their attachment style (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 19). This cycle begins in the relationship with the parent and continues in the relationship with the romantic partner.

Attachment shapes an individual's view of their romantic partner and influences their view of themselves, their ability to receive sufficient comfort, and their worth in a relationship (Ibid., 19).

The tremendous significance of attachment lies in the fact that the way an individual gets treated by his attachment figure does not only shape his or her attachment style but also shapes his or her expectations, attitudes and beliefs they will have about their future partners and relationships (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 20). Thus, an attachment style an adolescent will form during romantic relationships in his or her teenage years will shape his or her future life: his or her ability to form and maintain romantic relationships, his or her belief about relationships and eventually, his or her beliefs about themselves. The following sections focus on how an adolescent's attachment style influences not only the quality of his or her romantic relationships but also his or her wellbeing.

Allen et al. (2008) published a research paper that shows attachment psychological function. This research showed a link between attachment and delinquency, anxiety and depression, which are important indicators of a person's wellbeing (Ibid., 1406). This paper argues that issues such as anxiety and depression, as well as delinquent behaviour, may be linked with attachment insecurities (Ibid., 1407). The source of these attachment insecurities can be found when their peers or romantic partners do not meet adolescents' attachment needs. This statement only shows the importance of young adults' relationships and the influence the opposite has on their wellbeing (Ibid., 1414). It is also important to note that a negative relationship experience when one's unmet attachment needs results in dissatisfaction in the current relationship and will influence any other relationship that will follow (Crowell and Waters 1994, 33).

An individual whose attachment needs were not once met will become more and more in need of security and proximity of current and future partners, which can lead to developing an anxious attachment style, which is, as has been mentioned above, connected to an increase in anxiety and depression (Ibid., 32). Similar findings were published by Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes (2021, 128), who claimed that positive and healthy relationships support adolescents and help them develop rational skills and autonomy. On the other hand, Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes mentioned that adolescents who are involved in unhealthy relationships: "may experience dating violence, depression, mood swings, problem behaviour, decreased school performance and risky sexual behaviour" (2021, 129). On the contrary, secure attachment is formed when one's romantic partner proves responsiveness in times of trouble (Crowell and Waters 1994, 31).

Romantic partners are responsible for showing each other that they can serve as a secure base; they need to show interest in each other and trust each other – if they do so, they develop a secure bond with each other (Ibid., 32). It is essential to mention that young adults seek emotional closeness with their partner rather than physical closeness (which a child seeks with an attachment figure) (Ibid., 32). Another research paper conveying similar implications was written by Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2014). This paper focuses on the link between attachment and life satisfaction in young adults. It suggests that secure attachment is needed to successfully transition from young adults into adults who can connect with significant others and create supporting relationships (Ibid., 834). Moreover, indicating that secure attachment is linked to long-term benefits in one's wellbeing and life satisfaction at a given moment and can serve as a predictor for overall life satisfaction throughout life (Ibid., 835). Therefore, it is a strong indicator of one's wellbeing.

On the other hand, individuals who display insecure or avoidant attachment have reported negative life satisfaction (Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani 2014, 834). Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani concluded: "The present study sought to explore the interrelationships between parental attachment, peer attachment and life satisfaction in emerging adulthood. Results showed that romantic attachment was the stronger unique predictor of life satisfaction during this stage of life" (2014, 839). This only shows the importance of building healthy and secure relationships during young adulthood as it influences life satisfaction at a given moment and predicts overall life satisfaction later in life.

Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2014, 843) suggest that since romantic relationships of young adults have such a crucial role in predicting lifelong life satisfaction, there should be preventive and intervention programmes which would target young adults and help them develop secure attachment in romantic relationships and promote their overall wellbeing and life satisfaction. They suggest that young adults at risk of forming insecure attachment relationships should receive intervention by reflecting upon and increasing awareness of models that might be or might have formed their view on relationships and attachment (Ibid., 834). Such an intervention could help them prevent creating insecure and anxious attachment bonds with their romantic partners, increase their social and communication skills, and increase life satisfaction (Ibid., 843). These findings are crucial for this thesis as they highlight the importance of fostering positive attachment and relationship models in young adults, increasing their capacity for reflection, and warning them against the possible negative outcome of insecure and anxious attachment bonds.

It is important to note that attachment, or any other personal characteristic, is a dynamic system. This means those individuals whose attachment style is either anxious or avoidant do not need to have this attachment style as final: "If the attachment figure makes a conscious attempt to be available for, responsive to, and engaged with the other, the target can move to a place of attachment security, regardless of whether the initial attachment with their primary attachment figure is anxious or avoidant" (Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes 2021, 130). On the other hand, if a securely attached individual gets paired with a romantic partner who does not fulfil their attachment needs and is not available, responsive or engaged, a securely attached individual can move on the attachment spectre into being insecurely attached (Levine and Heller 2012, 7). Therefore, young adults should be supported in creating healthy relationships, and healthy relationships should be promoted to them in the media.

This chapter introduced attachment theory, its principal founders, and the implications of their findings. The most important aspect of this chapter is that the attachment style lies in the close correlation between wellbeing and life satisfaction of young adults. It is not only essential but crucial to bring up this problem with young adults as understanding this would increase their wellbeing at a given moment and their overall life satisfaction and lead them into adulthood. Young adults who understand the problematic of attachment and (un)healthy relationships are building a solid foundation for their future development and relationships. Young adults aware of this issue will be given the tools to build successful relationships. On the contrary, young adults who are at risk of developing unhealthy attachments in their early romantic relationships can be at greater risk of experiencing such relationships throughout their lives and at risk of developing symptoms such as those mentioned above.

The next chapter of this thesis focuses on the different attachment styles and the psychology of an individual bearing those, the types of protest behaviours, and methods used to assess one's attachment styles. As this theoretical part of the thesis proceeds, it lays the foundation for assessing the attachment styles of *After's* main protagonists, the dynamics of their relationships, and the implications for fans of this series.

1.2 Types of attachment

This chapter overviews the different attachment styles and their effect on their young adult bearer. As mentioned above, in their study, *Romantic love conceptualised as an attachment process*; Hazan and Shaver (1987) focused on attachment bonds in adults' romantic relationships. The primary purpose of their research was to prove that adults also form attachment bonds towards their significant other and do so in the same way children do towards caregivers (512). They designed a questionnaire to help assess which attachment category an adult falls in (Ibid., 514). The attachment categories stayed the same as had been proposed by Mary Ainsworth – i.e. secure, anxious, and avoidant (Ainsworth and Bell 1970, 50). Later, a fourth one was added for individuals who showed a mix of anxious and avoidant patterns (Ibid., 51). Since then, many other questionnaires and forms assessing a type of attachment have emerged. This thesis is inspired by the questionnaire designed by Levine and Heller (2012, 52-60) and uses it to assess the attachment style of *After's* main protagonists.¹

¹ This questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

Attachment is a trait, and like other personality traits, it tends to stay stable over time (Keelan, Dion, and Dion 1994, 202). Moreover, individuals with different attachment styles differ in the way they deal with conflict, their attitude toward sex, their ability to communicate their needs and their expectations for the relationship and their partner (Levine and Heller 2012, 34). Therefore, as Levine and Heller argue, an attachment style could indicate whether a relationship will succeed and fulfil the needs of each partner involved or whether their needs will not be met because of the incompatibility of styles (2012, 9). Indeed, Simpson and Rholes explained how attachment styles get formed and said: "How individuals are treated by significant others across the lifespan – especially during times of stress – shapes the expectations, attitudes, and beliefs they have about future partners and relationships" (2017, 19). Knowing one's attachment can help individuals understand why they behave in a certain way in a romantic relationship and what they need from their partner in order to feel content in the relationship. At the same time, if an individual constantly feels unhappy in a romantic relationship, attachment theory can help him or her understand why he or she might feel this way.

In the following pages, the psychological profile of each attachment style will be described, and later on, it will be used to assess the attachment style of *After's* main protagonists. Subsequently, the influence each attachment style has on relationships and their course will be discussed. The discussed attachment styles are divided into two categories: a secure one and two insecure ones: anxious and avoidant. It will be highlighted that both insecure styles show similar tendencies (Shaver and Mikulincer 2002, 91). This part finishes with an evaluation of how attachment styles can lead toward unhealthy tendencies in a relationship and which attachment styles are more likely to do so. This is important as it sets a starting point for the evaluation of the main protagonist of *After*.

1.2.1 The Secure attachment style

The secure attachment style can be summarised by the following saying: "I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depending on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me" (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 27). It represents the optimal attachment style. An individual forms this attachment style because his or her attachment figure is responsive in times of need (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 19). Romantic relationships between two individuals bearing a secure attachment style can be viewed as healthy, fulfilling romantic relationships (Levine and Heller 2012, 131). Therefore, it is an attachment style one should strive towards and one that should be shown as an example worthy of following to adolescents who are forming a relationship with a romantic partner.

Levine and Heller argue that an individual with a secure attachment style is reliable and consistent (2012, 65-67). The following paragraph, which provides a summary of Levine and Heller's classification, can be viewed as the profile of a securely attached person. Such individual holds a flexible view of their relationships and can communicate their needs and issues well. He or she is able and willing to reach a compromise during arguments. Securely attached, they are not afraid of commitment or dependency. They do not view relationships as hard work, and they do not play games with their partner. Subsequently, they are willing to become vulnerable and seek emotional and physical closeness with their partner. They include their romantic partner in their life by introducing him or her to friends and family. Lastly, they express positive emotions toward their partner freely (Ibid., 65-67).

Security provided by their attachment style also influences the individuals' inner psyche as these people's behaviour manifests self-reflection and flexibility (Siegel 1999, 118). Such flexibility positively influences their perception and planning skills (Ibid., 118). These people use constructive problem-solving methods, which help them deal with conflict in romantic relationships and enable them to include their partner's viewpoints and their own (Shaver and Mikulincer 2002, 139). Even though they might still experience angry feelings, they can express these negative emotions in a controlled and non-hostile manner and focus on repairing, not damaging, the relationship (Ibid., 140).

Consequently, as Cassidy and Shaver claim, securely attached individuals are more likely to have long-term relationships and are less likely to get divorced compared to the other two attachment styles (2018, 314). Securely attached also report consistent satisfaction levels in their romantic relationships, commitment, and they trust in their partner (Keelan, Dion, and Dion 1994, 202). Because of their attachment style, they view their previous partners positively and stay optimistic about future relationships (Ibid., 211). Securely attached individuals provide their partners with a secure base for life, which serves as a haven during difficult times; they also seek physical and emotional closeness with each other (Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes 2021, 129).

The information mentioned above shows that secure attachment positively contributes to overall wellbeing and should be promoted and sought after. The following pages summarise the two other forms of attachment and outline tendencies towards unhealthy relationships individuals with these attachment styles might have. This is an important aspect related to attachment theory to discuss as from this brief discussion it becomes apparent that attachment can negatively affect an individual's wellbeing, relationships with others, and overall life satisfaction.

1.2.2 The Anxious attachment style

An anxiously attached individual is a person who might describe themselves by the following statement: "I feel that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away" (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 27). The anxious attachment style develops when one's attachment figure is not available, responsive or engaged (Jorgensen-Wells, James, and Holmes 2021, 128). Individuals with anxious attachment style constantly fear abandonment, which results in more clingy behaviour (Ibid., 129). Also, even if they get coupled with a securely attached person because of their experience from previous relationships, they might continue to capitalise on experiences that could indicate abandonment (Ibid., 129).

A more detailed description of an anxiously attached individual reveals that it is a person who wants much closeness, expresses insecurities and worries about rejection, feels unhappy when single, plays games to keep his or her partner's attention, acts out, is not able to express him or herself, and expects his or her partner to read their mind. Indeed, anxiously attached make the relationship about themselves. In fact, they get preoccupied with their relationships. They also believe they must work hard to keep their partner's interest and worry that their partner might cheat (Levine and Heller 2012, 65-67). They are attempting to minimise the distance from their attachment figures and gain their love and support through clinging and controlling behaviour; their inability to keep constant touch with their attachment figure is so traumatising for them that it unconsciously creates an emotion with him that is equivalent to a feeling that their attachment figure died each time they leave (Siegel 1999, 115). All of this significantly affects the wellbeing of anxiously attached individuals in a negative way, and, consequently, lessens the quality of their relationships.

One of the ways anxious attachment affects one's wellbeing is that anxiously attached individuals tend to focus on their distress; they tend to have more negative thoughts and employ stress-managing strategies that increase their distress instead of diminishing it (Shaver and Mikulincer 2002, 141). Anxiously attached individuals are more prone to anger or outraged feelings (Ibid., 143). However, they are less likely to remember bad experiences and view ambiguous behaviour as hostile (Ibid., 143). This anger often gets redirected toward themselves, making them feel resentment, hostility, self-criticism, fear, sadness and depression (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 193). They show a stronger inability to regulate negative emotional memories, which can lead them to adopt a rigid attitude toward novelty, and thus, they might perceive themselves as vulnerable and helpless (Shaver and Mikulincer 2002, 145).

Therefore, a cycle of distress is formed, which can create a chaotic state of mind that affects their cognitive functions (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 153). They tend to sustain their negative feelings and emotions and are guided by the wish to get attention from their attachment figure, making them jealous, angry, needy and more prone to express emotions such as sadness, anxiety, fear and shame (Ibid., 193). Because of this, they can never be sure whether they can genuinely rely on their partner, which increases their anxiety, leaving them in constant distress (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 19). All of this directly affects the wellbeing of anxiously attached individuals. There is evidence of the influence of attachment on self-esteem. Anxiously attached individuals suffer from feelings of self-worthlessness, with their self-worth being dependent on others' approval (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 165). Overall, anxiously attached tend to be self-critical, which only leads to undermining their feelings of self-worth even more (Ibid., 166). Moreover, Siegel indicates that: "Insecure attachment appears to be associated with a higher prevalence of mental disturbance, including anxiety and dissociative disorders" (1999, 114). Namely, a vital link can be found between anxious attachment and risk factors for psychopathology (Ibid., 115). Also, disturbance in emotional regulation, social dysfunction, poor stress response and mental suffering can be observed in individuals with both anxious and avoidant attachment (Ibid., 115, 144).

All of this shows in the anxiously attached's romantic relationship and influences their partner. These people feel a great need for closeness to the extent that it can make their partners uncomfortable (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 229). Moreover, they view their partner's need for privacy or autonomy as a sign of rejection, which makes them demand even more intimacy, which can be unbearable (Ibid., 292). They tend to commit too early in a relationship before they get to know their partner, which can make them more vulnerable, increase their risk of getting hurt, and deepen their abandonment cycle (Ibid., 295). Their anxious attachment is so strong that even if they find a partner who is willing to be intimate with no sign of abandonment, they continue feeling anxious (Ibid., 286).

This anxiety negatively affects their relationships over time. Couples in which one partner bears an anxious attachment style reported more conflict during conversations; these individuals were also less accurate in decoding their partner's nonverbal signs (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 298). Moreover, this directly affects their relationship stability, where relationships with anxiously attached individual(s) are more likely to get divorced or break up than securely attached individuals, and they also tend to have shorter relationships than securely attached individuals.

1.2.3 The Avoidant attachment style

An avoidantly attached individual would use the following statement to define themselves: "I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. I find it difficult to trust them completely and difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being" (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 27). Siegel explains what plays a role in the formation of avoidantly attached individuals in childhood, while the same pattern can be said to apply to their romantic relationships: "Parents who are emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, use rejection, and are irresponsible are associated with avoidantly attached infants" (1999, 101).

As a result, avoidant individuals tend to promote their independence and avoid intimacy; they are also dismissive in their romantic relationships and do not seek contact and show anger or distress (Ibid., 99). Furthermore, they are characterised as individuals who send mixed signals, value their independence, devalue their romantic partners, and use physical or emotional distance strategies. They are very rigid and have uncompromising rules about their romantic relationship. They have difficulty talking about emotions and committing. Moreover, in an argument, they tend to distance themselves or explode (Levine and Heller 2012, 65-67).

They put much effort into maintaining independence, control and autonomy in their romantic relationships (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 10). They believe psychological and emotional closeness to their romantic partner is impossible or undesirable (Ibid., 10). This motivates them to employ distancing strategies that suppress their emotions and help them maintain autonomy (Ibid., 13).

The primary emotions they actively suppress are fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, guilt, and distress (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 192). Their romantic relationships can be characterised by the domination of emotional distance and rejection, which creates a low-affect environment for them (Ibid., 123). Avoidant individuals dissociate from all their emotions altogether, inhibiting and viewing them as irrelevant (Ibid., 145).

While anxiously attached individuals tend to view themselves negatively, avoidantly attached individuals see themselves positively but view their romantic partners negatively: "seeing them as needy and overly dependent" (Levine and Heller 2012, 114). Another difference between avoidant and anxious individuals is that avoidant tend to hold distressing material out of their awareness and memory, and they show low accessibility to sad or painful memories (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 142). Because of this dissociation, avoidantly attached individuals are more likely to have unresolved trauma and grief, which can lead to tendencies towards dissociation, disruptive behaviour, disruption of cognitive and coping function and tendencies toward PTSD (Ibid., 137). When it comes to anger, avoidantly attached individuals show dissociated anger. They do not report feeling anger but display its physical signs, concluding that they are unaware of it and get burdened by it because they cannot release this tension (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 143). Strong evidence shows that avoidantly attached individuals score high on hostility and aggression, feeling unexplainable hostility and hatred toward their romantic partner (Ibid., 212).

Avoidantly attached also do not base their self-esteem on their romantic partner's opinion, but they are prone to seek social approval and like to impress others; notwithstanding that tendency, they tend to have a sense of superiority (Ibid., 163). Because of their negative view of their partner and their emotional dissociation, they tend to find it hard to fall in love or even believe that such a thing as love does not exist (Ibid., 291). Furthermore, even in a relationship, they lose interest and passion over time (Ibid., 291).

Intimacy in romantic relationships is a big topic for avoidantly attached individuals. Mikulincer and Shaver (2016, 292) suggest: "Avoidant people's preference for interpersonal distance was expected to interfere with their responsiveness to a partner's bids for proximity and intimacy", which results in decreasing their commitment instead of increasing it as the relationship proceeds (Ibid., 295). All of this bears a significant cost to their romantic relationship. Couples in which one of the partners resembles an avoidant attachment style reported low conversation involvement and satisfaction and lower overall satisfaction with their romantic relationship (Ibid., 308). Mikulincer and Shaver concluded: "Studies have also found that insecure people have briefer relationships and are more likely to divorce" (2016, 315). Their need to avoid intimacy has a significant impact on their sexual life. Because of their discomfort with closeness and negative views of others, even their romantic partners, avoidant individuals are more likely to engage in sex without establishing long-term relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 351). Their fear of emotional closeness often leads them to sexual abstinence or a positive attitude towards casual and uncommitted sex (Ibid., 352).

This chapter gave a detailed overview of the characteristics of each attachment style, dividing them into secure and insecure, the latter consisting of anxious and avoidant types. The following chapter concludes that different attachment styles can lead to forming an abusive relationship, which harms one's wellbeing. This information is needed to see if the *After* story draws an unfunctional relationship.

1.3 Unhealthy relationship

This thesis claims that the romantic relationships of the main protagonists of the *After* series show unhealthy behavioural tendencies. To substantiate this claim, this chapter defines unhealthy relationships and comments on the role one's attachment plays in creating a romantic relationship with unhealthy tendencies.

1.3.1 Definition of an unhealthy relationship

When it comes to unhealthy relationships, different terms are used interchangeably to describe those relationships. Terms such as toxic, abusive and unhealthy relationships have been used. This thesis uses the terms toxic and unhealthy relationship in its discussion of the relationship between Tessa and Hardin because abusive relationships are primarily associated with physical abuse, which does not necessarily happen between these two characters. However, unhealthy behavioural tendencies, which can be observed in the *After* series, stem from protective behaviour typical for anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals, and they could, in some cases, resemble emotional abuse.

Rakovec-Felser 2014 describes an unhealthy relationship as a relationship in which physical, sexual violence or psychological abuse takes place. According to Engel: "Emotional abuse can be defined as any nonphysical behaviour that is designed to control, intimidate, subjugate, demean, punish, or isolate another person through the use of degradation, humiliation or fear" (2009, 11).

The following are examples of forms that emotional abuse can take the psychotherapist lists in her book *The Emotionally Abusive Relationship*: humiliation, negating, domination and control, judging and criticising, accusing and blaming, unreasonable expectations or demands, "silent treatment", isolation, withholding attention or affection, dismissive, contemptuous or condescending look, comments or behaviour, projection and accusation and treats of abandonment (Engel 2009, 12). These behaviours are sought after when evaluating whether *After*'s main protagonists have an unhealthy relationship.

1.3.2 Attachment theory and unhealthy relationships

Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), whose book *Attachment in adulthood: structure, dynamics, and change* offers an overview of multiple research projects focused on attachment, state that there is a link between unhealthy romantic relationships and attachment. They argue that "attachment insecurities contribute to abuse and violence within couple relationships" (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 316). Multiple authors have agreed on this. Avoidantly or anxiously attached have reduced conflict management skills and tend to use manipulation, insults and threats (Ibid., 316). Mikulincer and Shaver conclude the discussion by saying that "attachment researchers have suggested that avoidant individuals are also more likely to engage in acts of violence during couple conflicts" (Ibid., 316). Avoidantly attached people behave in a cold and detached way, which can cause their partner to react aggressively to gain their attention, respect, or love (Ibid., 316). Their aggression does not need to be direct, and often, it is shown as passive aggression consisting of expressions of disrespect, contempt, and violence to gain distance from their partner (Ibid., 316). Anxiously attached individuals, on the other hand, tend to use controlling and aggressive behaviour when their partner does not give them enough closeness, which can cause their partner to become aggressive in order to flee from the situation (Ibid., 316).

This unhealthy behaviour gets magnified when the romantic relationship consists of one partner who is anxiously attached and one who is avoidant. Levine and Heller (2012) call this situation the anxious-avoidant trap: "When two people in a couple have colliding intimacy needs, their relationship is likely to become more of a storm-tossed voyage than a safe haven" (153).

Because avoidantly attached individuals prefer distance and independence, and anxiously attached individuals prefer closeness and dependence, relationships between these two individuals tend to show unhealthy behavioural tendencies (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 316). This inability to act accordingly can result in couples disagreeing about the closeness and intimacy their relationship should have. Such disagreement eventually dominates all of their conversations and traps them in a cycle where they continue to trigger each other's insecurities (Levine and Heller 2012, 157). Levine and Heller expand on this, saying that "while people with anxious or secure attachment styles seek to resolve a disagreement, this outcome is uncomfortable for the avoidant who seeks to remain distant. In order to dodge the possibility of getting closer, avoidants tend to grow more distant and hostile" (2012, 161). The closer the anxiously attached tries to get, the more distantly his avoidant partner behaves and continues to grow hostile toward the anxiously attached one (Ibid., 161).

The information mentioned above about attachment, attachment styles and unhealthy relationships will serve as a frame of reference for the second part of this thesis, which will discuss a popular adolescent novel and its movie adaptation. The relationship of its main protagonists will be evaluated using the attachment theories. Thus, their relationship's storyline will have to be given in the following paragraphs. Their relationship, arguments related to it in particular, will be assessed to determine whether it can be deemed unhealthy, and if so, it will be appraised whether any warning is given to those who might come to love this book and its movie adaptation.

2. The *After* series and attachment

The *After* series has a major adolescent fan base. The storyline was first published on an online reading site, reaching over 1.5 billion reads (Todd 2019, n.p). The author published this story as a fanfiction on Harry Styles, who used to be a part of popular music group One Direction (Bien-Kahn 2019, n.p). When the story's first instalment was published, over 10 million copies were sold. Eventually, the whole series has been made into movies, which have been played both in the cinemas and are accessible on streaming sites (Ibid., n.p).

This section of the bachelor thesis discusses the first book of the *After* series. First, a brief overview of the story is given. Then, the psychological profile of the main protagonists is described. Their romantic relationship is subsequently evaluated to ponder whether their relationship shows unhealthy behavioural tendencies. Since the book is written using first-person narration (Tessa), the following paragraphs evaluate particularly how she feels about the relationship with Hardin. However, how other characters feel about their relationship will also be documented. This section ends by listing the differences in how their relationship is portrayed in the novel and its film adaptation to evaluate whether either of the formats romanticises unhealthy relationships.

2. *After* close reading

The story, narrated in the first person, follows an adolescent girl, Tessa, who starts her first year at a university. From the book's description of Tessa, it seems that she is different from other girls in the story. While she is, at least at the beginning, focused on education, wears modest clothes, does not drink alcohol and has been dating her neighbour for many years, the other girls do the contrary (Todd 2019, 41). Tessa shares a room with Stephany, a girl with dyed red hair covered in tattoos and piercings, who wears revealing clothes and spends her time partying. It is Stephany who introduces Tessa to her friend group, where she meets Hardin (Ibid., 50). Hardin is infamous for changing girls while never properly dating them; his face is full of piercings, his body is covered in tattoos, and he keeps insulting people, thanks to his misbehaviour and alcohol abuse (Ibid., 14, 17, 19, 51, 54, 158). One day, Tessa attends a party during which Hardin's and Stephanie's friends play truth or dare. Tessa is dared to kiss Hardin, but she declines (Ibid., 58).

From that moment on, the text suggests that Hardin is always around her. In fact, she ends up having an affair with him and, consequently, breaks up with her boyfriend. After this incident, however, Hardin says they are only friends (Ibid., 176). Their romantic relationship resembles a roller coaster ride: they spend time together, arguing and ignoring each other, only to come back together (Ibid., 70, 102, 113, 141, 148, 183, 204). It might thus be not easy to be convinced when they tell each other they are in love (Ibid., 269). After Tessa's mother finds out about her daughter's new relationship, she stops paying for Tessa's dorm. Nevertheless, this punishment contradicts what Tessa's mother probably had in mind as Tessa and Hardin move in together. As their relationship, which is filled with arguments, proceeds, Hardin isolates Tessa from his/their friend group. Eventually, she meets them and finds out why Hardin showed romantic interest in her in the first place. The text details that after they had first met, Hardin then made a bet with his friend over a large amount of money that he would take Tessa's virginity (Ibid., 579). Even though he now claims to be in love with her, he never tells her about the bet, and eventually, she is told about this fact by Hardin's friends (Ibid., 580). The first book from the *After* series ends with this incident.

2.2 Main protagonists' psychological profile and attachment style

Tessa is 18 years old and is described as an organised, determined adolescent girl (Todd 2019, 19). As mentioned in the plot summary above, she does not drink alcohol, wears modest clothes, and is not sexually active (Ibid., 41). She is the only child and grew up only with her mother after her alcoholic father left them when she was ten years old (Ibid., 25, 60). As the text details, her mother has been overbearing and has always pushed her to pursue her education diligently (Ibid., 10, 78, 320, 520, 533).

Tessa describes her relationship with Hardin in the following words: "From our first encounter Hardin changes [sic] my life.... I am certain that my heart and my life will never be the same, not after Hardin crushed into them" (Ibid., 1, 2). Her relationship with Hardin begins mainly because of mutual sexual attraction (Ibid., 95), and she mentions that it happened against her better judgement and that Hardin makes her crazy (Ibid., 104). She wonders when he will mistreat her again when she is with him. She is surprised each time he behaves nicely and feels anxious that she will lose him (Ibid., 118, 121, 123, 170). As their relationship proceeds, she makes him jealous several times (Ibid., 127, 225). On many occasions, she describes Hardin using words such as cruel, toxic and someone she should be afraid of and someone who will torture her (Ibid., 176, 322, 337, 377, 476).

Because of Hardin, Tessa says that her life has become challenging: "My life was much more simple before I met Hardin, and now after it is complicated and stressful" (Ibid., 311). She starts drinking alcohol, she starts lying, and she cuts off her mother (Ibid., 311, 315, 520, 533). On occasions, she feels the need to hit him; she feels pathetic because of her behaviour and feels as if she is becoming mentally crazy (Ibid., 179, 208, 346, 567). As mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis dealing with specific behaviour typical for different attachment styles – this kind of behaviour is connected with anxiously attached individuals (Siegel 1999, 115). She realises that Hardin might have a negative impact on her since she says: "I am under his control. Right now, Hardin is my anchor. I just pray that he doesn't pull me under" (Ibid., 246, 270). However, simultaneously, she ignores the fact that their relationship is potentially harmful and feels rather amazed that he says: "It's you. You are the person that I love most in the world" (Ibid., 370). Consequently, she admits to loving him more than anyone else and claims she is a better person because of him, and hence she feels alive thanks to him (Ibid., 329, 359, 458, 544),

even though at other times he seems to be the cause of her problems. Her assessment of their relationship, as the following quote illustrates, is rather shortsighted and suggests how imbalanced Tessa is: "Loving Hardin is raw and exciting; it sparks my every nerve, and I can't get enough of him. I never want to be away from him. Even when he drove me crazy, I missed him" (Ibid., 389).

Such behaviour resembles that of someone with anxious attachment. Tessa tries to get her partner's attention by making him jealous, which is something Cassidy and Shaver mention as characteristic of the anxiously attached (2018, 193). She constantly worries that Hardin might leave her, she is not sure how he might treat her, thus she obsesses over the relationship, another sign of an anxiously attached individual (Levine and Heller 2012, 65-67). On occasions, she is doubting herself and feeling not good enough, which is also typical for anxious attachment (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 165).

Hardin is 19 years old; he only wears black, has tattoos, and has several piercings (Todd 2019, 19, 54). He is often described as rude and uses foul language (Ibid., 14, 17, 100, 113, 141, 224, 579). He is famous for having casual sex and never committing to any relationship (Ibid., 51, 124, 150, 325, 336). Even when living with Tessa, he introduces her to others as his friend, not a partner (Ibid., 454). As the book is written from Tessa's viewpoint, it is impossible to see what Hardin thinks in situations; only his reactions, comments, and actions are used to assess his attachment style. He is also described as moody and bipolar, constantly switching between avoidant behaviour and bursts of friendly treatment of the female protagonist (Ibid., 102, 103, 117, 141, 142, 414). He gets angry when someone mentions his parents and reacts aggressively when Tessa tries to talk with his father (Ibid., 113, 224). He also becomes distant after a sexual moment, and he shows anger when he is asked personal questions (Ibid., 117, 414, 565).

Moreover, Hardin is struggling with alcohol and becomes very aggressive both verbally and physically (breaking furniture, hitting walls, getting in a fight) when intoxicated (Ibid., 138, 185, 475, 477). Many times, he admits to saying painful things to Tessa on purpose just to hurt her, and he even threatens her in front of others that he will destroy her (Ibid., 183, 352, 527). He constantly changes between giving her his attention and ignoring her, but simultaneously, he is jealous when she talks to another man and tends to interrupt those interactions (Ibid., 127, 177, 502).

Though he shows jealousy when Tessa talks to another man, he kisses a different girl in front of her while they are in a relationship to take revenge on her (Ibid., 328). Because of jealousy, he also checks her phone and deletes texts she gets from her ex-boyfriend (Ibid., 340). It is important to stress that his relationship with Tessa started as a bet that he would take her virginity, and even though they start living together, the truth is never mentioned, and he uses the money he won from the bet to get the apartment they are living in (Ibid., 579). He also tends to solve arguments by having sexual intercourse instead of discussing the issues (Ibid., 481). At the same time, Hardin claims to love her the most in the world and to change to be good for Tessa (Ibid., 148, 370, 480).

His stepmother describes Hardin as an unhappy person who has never told his mother he loves her (Ibid., 347). Hardin grew up with an alcoholic father in an unstable home that was marked by constant arguments between his mother and his father (Ibid., 301). Because of alcoholism, his father got into debt, and when the debt collectors arrived at his house, they beat and raped his wife, and Hardin was watching the whole scene (Ibid., 523). After that, his father left and lived with his mother until he went to the university where his father works (Ibid., 523).

There are many reasons to claim that Hardin has an avoidant attachment style. The main argument is that he prefers casual sex and avoids relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 351). Hardin also shows an unwillingness to share information about his past and everyday life, and he shows anger when he feels that Tessa wants to control his freedom, which is typical for an avoidant individual (Simpson and Rholes 2017, 19).

Furthermore, Hardin's alcoholism shows a tendency toward disruptive behaviour, and he also shows verbal aggression and hostility toward Tessa in argument, which is also typical for avoidant attachment (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 142). Therefore, their romantic relationship can be classified as a relationship between anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals.

As mentioned earlier, relationships between individuals with these specific attachment styles can show tendencies toward unhealthy relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016, 316). An unhealthy relationship is any relationship that shows an inclination toward behaviour used by one or both partners to control, punish, demean, intimidate, or isolate one's romantic partner (Engel 2009, 11).

2.3. Main protagonists' relationship dynamics

This part of the thesis focuses on specific examples of the main protagonist's behaviour that could indicate unhealthy tendencies in their relationship. The storyline of their relationship is followed with excerpts showing how they first met and Hardin's reaction to Tessa's endeavours to create closeness. The book's excerpts described in the following section consist of mainly very emotional events; more than twenty arguments are described in the novel, but not all of them are quoted below. The excerpts which are quoted below were chosen based on the following criteria: the same events can be found in the movie version, the second criterium was that each excerpt shows the main protagonist's attachment style (using the definition described in the thesis and questionnaire designed by Levine and Heller 2012) and the last criteria was that the behaviour described in the excerpt can be qualified as unhealthy (based on definition described in this thesis). The chapter also includes the main protagonist's reflection on their relationship and the reflection of other characters. A further focus is driven on the movie adaptation, how their relationship is portrayed, and whether it condemns or tries to romanticise it.

2.4 The book – excerpts showing the main protagonists' relationship dynamics

The main protagonist's first dialogue happens at a party with Hardin's friends; Tessa is dared to kiss Hardin, which she declines and leaves and goes into Hardin's room; Hardin follows her (Todd 2019, 57). They argue, but as the night proceeds, she eventually kisses Hardin and cheats on her boyfriend (Ibid., 63). Their first interaction happens in the following way: "What part of 'No One Comes Into My Room' did you not understand?"

Hardin booms. His angry expression scares me, but somehow humors me at the same time.

"S-sorry. I . . ." "Get out," he spits, and I glare at him. "You don't have to be such a jerk!" My voice comes out much louder than I had intended.

"You're in my room, again, after I told you not to be. So, get out!" he yells, stepping closer to me.

"Why don't you like me?" I demand, staring up at him "(Ibid., 58).

Even though this is the first time they talk together alone, Hardin is emphasising boundaries and shows aggressive behaviour in the form of yelling. Levine and Heller's (2012, 53) questionnaire defines an avoidant individual who: "emphasises boundaries in the relationship and doesn't want to invite you to his or her place" (2012, 53). Mikulincer and Shaver (2016, 212) suggest that avoidantly attached often unexplainable hostility and hatred toward their romantic partner, which shows itself in Hardin's angry reaction toward Tessa. According to Engel (2009, 11), dismissive or intimidating behaviour can often indicate unhealthy relationships; Hardin is trying to use both in this situation. Tessa also shows her anxious attachment by demanding that Hardin tell her why he does not like her.

They continue seeing each other, and Tessa is considering breaking up with her boyfriend, but Hardin tells her he does not date and that seeing each other cannot be considered a relationship. After this, they stop talking (Ibid., 124, 127).

Another significant milestone is when Tessa receives a call from Hardin's stepbrother saying that Hardin is drunk in his house, destroying furniture and demanding to see her (Ibid., 141). Tessa rushes to rescue:

"No, I don't need your pity," he interrupts.

"It's not pity. I'm just trying to—"

"Trying to what?"

"Help you. Be here for you," I say softly.

"You are so pathetic. Don't you see that I don't want you here? I don't want you to be here for me. Just because I messed around with you doesn't mean I want anything to do with you. Yet here you are, leaving your nice boyfriend—who can actually stand to be around you—to come here and try to 'help' me. That, Theresa, is the definition of pathetic," he says.

"You don't mean that." I think back to a week ago when he was laughing and tossing me into the water. I can't decide if he is a great actor or a great liar.

"I do, though; go home," he tells me and raises the bottle to take another drink. Reaching across the table, I snatch it from him and toss it into the yard." (Ibid., 141). The argument proceeds. Tessa leaves and gets intoxicated as well. Hardin follows after her, apologising, saying he wants to be good for her, and asking her to spend the night with him, which she agrees to (Ibid., 148).

Levine and Heller's questionnaire describes avoidantly attached as someone who: "during an argument needs to get away or explodes, does not make his or her intentions clear, sends mixed signals, devalues you" (2012, 52-54). In this excerpt, Hardin shows all of these behaviours. The unhealthy tendency of their relationship shows itself in Hardin's usage of humiliating language, condescending comments and criticism (Engel 2009, 11). Tessa's anxious attachment manifests in her need to stay close to Hardin. She is "preoccupied with the relationship" (Levine and Heller 2012, 59). She also shows poor stress management – another sign of an anxiously attached individual (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 144).

Tessa and Hardin continue to see each other, and on one occasion, they meet Hardin's father, who invites them for lunch. Tessa agrees, and Hardin reacts in the following way: "What the hell, Tessa! What the fuck was that?" he screams at me.

People walking by start to stare, but he continues. "What kind of game are you trying to play here?" He moves toward me. He is angry—beyond angry.

"There's no game here, Hardin—didn't you see how much he wanted you to come over? He was trying to reach out to you, and you were so disrespectful!" I'm really not sure why I'm yelling, but I'm not going to just let him shout at me.

"Reach out to me? Are you fucking kidding me? Maybe he should have reached out to me back when he was abandoning his family!"

"Stop swearing at me! Maybe he is trying to make up for lost time!"

"You don't know shit about him, Tessa!" he screams and shudders with anger. "...So don't try to lecture me—mind your own damn business!"

He gets in the car, slamming his door closed. I scramble in, afraid that he might leave me here, he's so mad so much for our argument-free day.

"Fine," I say, feigning calm. "I will mind my own business, but I'm accepting the invitation to dinner tonight whether you go or not."

Like a wild animal who's been riled up, he turns in my direction. "Oh no, you're not!"

Retaining my fake calm, I say, "You have no say in what I do, Hardin, and in case you didn't notice, I was invited. Maybe I should see if Zed wants to join me?"

"What did you just say!?" The dirt and dust start flying all over as Hardin jerks the steering wheel and pulls onto the shoulder of the busy road.

But through the chaos in the car, that bubble of hope grows again at Hardin's jealousy. I know his feelings are more of a competition thing than actual concern over my being with him, but it still makes my stomach flutter.

"Well, if you don't go with me, I will have to invite him." I would never actually do it, but Hardin doesn't know that" (Ibid., 224, 225).

In this excerpt, Hardin's avoidant attachment shows itself in his angry reaction to Tessa's request to meet her family. As mentioned by Levine and Heller (2012, 52), he shows that he values independence and emphasizes boundaries in the relationship. At the same time, Tessa shows her anxious attachment. Hardin refuses to allow her to get closer to him by meeting his family; therefore, she uses manipulation and creates jealousy to force him into opening up more in the relationship – a characteristic of an anxiously attached individual (Cassidy and Shaver 2018, 229). They eventually have dinner with his family, but Hardin only introduces her as his friend (Ibid., 233). Unhealthy tendencies manifest themselves in Hardin's and Tessa's controlling behaviour towards each other and Hardin's demeaning language (Engel 2009, 11).

The storyline continues and Hardin intrudes on Tessa's date with her boyfriend and tells her he will date her. Tessa ends her relationship with her boyfriend and goes into a relationship with Hardin (Ibid., 269). Hardin continues to keep his distance, leaving without telling her where. Once Tessa discovers he went to a party with his friends, she also decides to go there (Ibid., 316). When she arrives, she finds Hardin with a different girl, and none of his friends know that Hardin is in a relationship; Tessa starts drinking and kissing another boy to make Hardin jealous (Ibid., 233). Hardin requests to talk to her: "Go to hell, Hardin." My anger boils over, and my hand flies up and smacks him hard.

"What the hell is your problem? You were the one kissing Zed!" he yells.

"You're not seriously trying to blame me! You lied to me and played me like a fool, Hardin! You feed me that bullshit about wanting more and beg me to stay the night with you just so you can use me! What was the point —what did you get out of it—oh, besides a blow job?" I scream.

"You're overreacting," he says flatly, and it takes everything in me not to slap him again.

"I'm overreacting? You didn't tell your friends about us—you didn't tell me about this party, and then you left me standing in the parking lot like a dumbass while you left with Molly, of all people! Then I show up here to find Molly on your lap, and then you kiss her..." I say.

"You kissed Zed right in front of me! And I didn't tell you about the party because I don't have to! He barks.

"So why even waste your time with me? Why even follow me out here, Hardin?" You thought you could come out here and say sorry, and I would accept and stay a secret, your boring little hidden girlfriend."

"Girlfriend? You thought you were my girlfriend?" he howls.

"No . . . I," I start to say.

"You did, didn't you?" he says, laughing.

"You know . . . I did," I admit. I am already humiliated, so I have nothing to lose. "You fed me that bullshit about wanting more, and I believed you. I believed all the shit you said to me, all the things you claimed never to tell anyone, but I'm sure that was all bullshit, too. I'm sure none of that even happened." I shrug, giving up completely. "But you know what? I'm not even mad at you; I'm mad at myself for believing it. I knew how you were before I started to fall for you. I knew you would hurt me. What were your words? Will you destroy me? No, ruin, you'll ruin me. Well, congratulations, Hardin, you won," I sob." (Ibid., 328).

After this, Tessa leaves with one of the other boys, but Hardin runs after her (Ibid., 328):

"Tessa . . . "Hardin calls

"I have said everything I have to say to you, Hardin. I am done listening to you and your bullshit—now leave me the fuck alone!" I scream. I am aware everyone's eyes are on us, but I have had enough.

"I . . . Tessa, I . . ."

"You what? You what, Hardin?" I scream even louder.

"I . . . I love you!" he yells.

"You're sick, Hardin, you're really fucking sick" (Ibid., 328).

Hardin's avoidance demonstrates itself in the fact that even though he requested Tessa to end her relationship with her long-term boyfriend, he does not consider her his girlfriend. He does not state the facts to his friends – he continues to "send mixed signals" and uses "physical and emotional distancing strategies" (Levine and Heller 2012, 52-53) – he goes to the party alone. He does not tell his friends about his new romantic relationship. At the same time, he does not feel the need to tell her about his plans and gets offensive when

she requests it – which is also typical for avoidantly attached (Siegel 1999, 99). Tessa's anxious attachment demonstrates itself in the fact that she needs to see where Hardin is – she is "suspicious that he might be unfaithful", she "acts out" and "plays games to keep partner's attention" (Levine and Heller 2012, 58). She uses manipulations to create jealousy in Hardin to try to get him closer to her, and she even uses violence – which can be seen in anxiously attached individuals (Siegel 1999, 115, 144). This scene shows the humiliating behaviour of both protagonists toward one another, demeaning behaviour, and dominating and controlling behaviour (Engel 2009, 11). This scene also shows that Tessa's behaviour toward Hardin starts to bear more unhealthy patterns, and her disbalance starts to show itself. It is also the first scene where physical abuse takes place as Tessa hits Hardin. It is starting to show more clearly how imbalanced both protagonists are and that their relationship is abusive.

There is a silence between them until Tessa decides to ask Hardin if he loves her, which he denies. (Ibid., 365). Eventually, Hardin says that he loves her after discovering that she was on a date with a different man (Ibid., 370). When Tessa's mother discovers that Tessa is in a relationship with Hardin, she disapproves of the relationship and stops paying for Tessa's dorm. Hardin offers that they move together, and Tessa agrees (Ibid., 409). Levine and Heller describe anxiously attached individual as someone who: "agrees to go on joint vacation, move in together, or spend all of their time together early in a relationship" (2012, 57). While living together, Hardin disappears and becomes unreachable; after two days, he returns intoxicated and with signs of a physical fight (Ibid., 516): "Where the hell were you?" I yell as I enter the room. "Are you drunk?" I gape.

"Maybe," he answers.

"You have some nerve, Hardin! I scream.

"Stop yelling. I have a killer headache," he groans and lies on the bed.

"Do you think this is funny? Is this some sort of game to you? If you aren't going to take our relationship seriously, then why did you ask me to move in with you?"

"I don't want to talk about this right now. You're overreacting; now, come over here and let me make you happy. "...

"No, Hardin," I say sternly. "I'm serious. You can't just stay out all night and not even offer me an explanation."

"Jesus. Would you chill the fuck out? You're not my mother. Stop fighting with me and come here," he repeats.

"Get out," I snap.

"Excuse me?".

"You heard me; get out. I will not be that girl who sits at home all night waiting for her boyfriend to come home. I expected you to at least come up with a good excuse—but you haven't even tried! I'm not going to give in this time, Hardin. I always forgive you way too easily. Not this time. So either explain yourself or get the hell out."

"In case you forgot, I am the one paying the bills here, so if anyone is going to leave, it will be you," he says with a blank stare.

"Did you get in a fight again?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yes, Hardin! It does matter. Is that what you were doing all night?"

"Nothing. Jesus," he groans. "You are always on my case."

"I'm always on your case? What did you expect to happen when you stumbled in here after being gone all night and day? I need answers, Hardin—I am sick of you not giving me them" (Ibid., 516).

This argument again shows their attachment style. Tessa is anxious about not knowing what Hardin is doing, and she forces him to answer her questions. This situation also shows what Levine and Heller (2012, 153) described as the anxious-avoidant trap – the closer Tessa tries to get to Hardin, the more he pushes her away. Hardin sees her question as a personal attack and gets defensive. He even uses aggression by raising his voice to keep his distance (Siegel 1999, 99). Unhealthy tendencies are again shown in how the protagonists communicate with each other – there is much demeaning language, controlling behaviour and accusations (Engel 2009, 11). While Tessa was mostly a receptor of Hardin's aggressive behaviour in the beginning, now she is becoming more aggressive herself – she uses foul language, threatens him, and raises her voice, as shown in this excerpt.

Their arguments and Hardin's distancing continue until Tessa learns about the bet from Hardin's friends. Hardin bet with his friends over a large sum of money that he would take her virginity, which was a reason for him to start a relationship with her. The money was used to buy Tessa a car and pay for their flat. However, he never told his friends they lived together (Ibid., 572). Tessa discovers the truth in the following way: "How could you do this to me? You . . . you . . . I can't. "

"I know I messed up—" he begins.

"You messed up? You messed up?" I scream. "Why? Just tell me why. Why me?"

"Because you were there," he says. "And a challenge. I didn't know you, Tessa. I didn't know that I would fall in love with you."

"You're sick. You're fucking sick!" "You ruined everything!" I scream. "You took something from me that wasn't yours, Hardin. That was meant for someone who loved me, loved me truthfully. It was his, whoever he is, and you took that—for money? I ruined my relationship with my mother for you. I gave up everything! I had someone who loved me, someone who wouldn't hurt me the way you did. You are disgusting."

"I do love you, Tessa. I love you more than anything. I was going to tell you. I tried to get them not to tell you. I never wanted you to find out."

"What did you do with the money, Hardin?"

"Your car . . . the paint . . . and the deposit for the apartment. I thought if I . . . I was going to tell you so many times once I knew it wasn't just a bet anymore. I love you—I loved you the entire time, I swear it," he says.

"You kept the condom to show them, Hardin! You showed them the sheets, the bloody fucking sheets. Oh my God! I'm such an idiot. While I was reliving every detail of the best night of my life, you were showing your friends the sheets."

"I know . . . I don't have any excuse . . . but you have to forgive me. We can figure this out," he says.

"Forgive you?" I laugh madly. "You have ruined my entire life—you know that, don't you? Oh, of course you do. That was your plan the entire time, remember? You promised you would 'ruin me.' So congratulations, Hardin" (Ibid., 572).

This last excerpt shows how unhealthy their whole relationship is. Hardin's avoidance manifests itself in the fact that even though they have been living together, he never told her the truth about the bet and continued lying to her. The ultimate proof of emotional abuse in their relationship takes the form of the fact that he isolated her from his friends so she could not discover the truth.

Engel described an unhealthy relationship as one in which the following behaviours occur: humiliation, negating, domination, and control, judging and criticising, accusing and blaming, unreasonable expectations or demands, "silent treatment," isolation, withholding attention or affection, dismissive, contemptuous, or condescending look, comments or behaviour, projection and accusation (2009, 12). Most of these behaviours were described using the excerpts mentioned above.

These six excerpts were used to demonstrate their relationship dynamics and attachment styles. Hardin's attachment was proved to be avoidant, and Tessa's attachment was proved to be anxious. Both protagonists showed unhealthy behaviour towards one another. Therefore, their relationship can be described as one with toxic and unhealthy tendencies. Making it a relationship young adults should be warned against.

2.5 Protagonist reflection on their relationship

So far, the statement that their relationship is unhealthy has been proven. This part of the thesis will evaluate whether Tessa views the relationship as such. She only reflects on their relationship on a few occasions, and only twice did she mention that their relationship is constantly undergoing an unhealthy cycle and that Hardin is toxic to her (Todd 2019, 181, 337). At other times, she seems unhappy with the arguments, but she continues to view them as full of anger, passion and love, and she seems to accept the dynamics (Ibid., 372). Hardin describes their relationship as one that makes him better even though it is full of arguments (Ibid., 269). Therefore, Tessa, at the beginning of the relationship, admits that there are unhealthy tendencies but stays in the relationship and calls all those arguments and clashes in their attachment – passion (Ibid., 372).

2.6 Other characters' reflection of their relationship

Only three other characters reflect Tessa and Hardin's relationship. Tessa's roommate, a part of Hardin's friends' group who knows about the bet, says twice that Tessa should be careful and stay away from Hardin (Todd 2019, 125, 183). Tessa's mother disagrees with the whole relationship mainly because of Hardin's appearance but does not evaluate his character (Ibid., 408, 534). Tessa's ex-boyfriend warns her that Hardin will only use her and after he will leave (Ibid., 268). However, since Tessa becomes increasingly isolated from her friends and family when they move together, there is no objective evaluation of their relationship from another character in the book.

This chapter reviewed the relationship and provided excerpts from the book that show the protagonist's attachment style and the unhealthy tendencies of their relationship. The next chapter will examine the movie, how their relationship is portrayed on the screen, and whether it conveys the same atmosphere as the book. Both are used later in evaluating whether the original book or its movie adaptation warns adolescents against such relationships or if they try to romanticise them.

2.7 The movie adaptation and its differences in the portrayal of the main protagonists' relationship

The book is written in the first person, and the narrator does not leave much space for exploring Hardin's viewpoint. The movie, on the other hand, follows a similar storyline but offers more focus on Hardin. The movie begins with Tessa saying: "My life before him was so simple and decided, and now after him, there is just after" (Gage 2019, n.p). It ends with Hardin saying: "You once asked me who I love the most in this world. It is you" (Gage 2019, n.p). The movie uses techniques such as music and camera, which change the tone of their relationship compared to the book; the main credit is slow and romantic and plays at several places in the movie. The book focuses mainly on their arguments as they happen on each occasion the protagonists meet and the sexual side of their relationship. In the book, Hardin uses foul and demeaning language toward Tessa on several occasions. However, this fact is entirely omitted from the movie, as is Tessa's constant eagerness to make Hardin jealous.

The core of the bet is also different; in the movie, Hardin does not bet to take Tessa's virginity, but instead, he says he will make her fall in love with him, and after, he will leave her. This fact makes the book more focused on the sexual aspect of their relationship, but the movie focuses more on Hardin trying to make her fall in love with him. He does not swear at her, ignore her or send mixed signals. Instead, he is reaching out, taking her on a romantic hike, on a restaurant date; they have several picnics, he is holding her hand in public, takes pictures of her, introduces her to his family and does not hide the fact that they are dating from his friends. He is more open about his family and his past; he is portrayed as a man broken by his parent's divorce, which causes him problems with anger management and alcohol. Tessa looks very happy, and her anxiety is shown in the movie just once when Hardin leaves without saying where the same excerpt is described in this thesis.

In the movie, Hardin is portrayed as more open and loving. In the movie adaptation, Hardin's attention is more constant; he does not hurt her as much, so discovering the truth about the bet leaves her more devastated than in the book. In the movie version, Tessa does not show anger toward Hardin but complete devastation because there is no warning sign. Even though all of the above – mentioned novel extracts can be found in the movie, they do not take the same form as in the original. There is no yelling, swearing, or demeaning or controlling behaviour from either of the protagonists. However, this does not change the fact that Hardin is manipulating Tessa and that their relationship is unhealthy because Hardin was never truthful.

The way their story ends in its movie version differs significantly. Hardin writes Tessa a long letter exposing his deepest thoughts and feelings. The movie focuses on Hardin, showing that he regrets his actions and reminisces. After reading the letter, Tessa and Hardin meet in his favourite place, and he tells her that he loves her the most in the world.

The movie makers use many techniques to soften the whole story and the original relationship so that it sometimes seems like a romantic adolescence story. All of these techniques, including music, showing them enjoying romantic dates, playing card games and having pillow fights, cover the idea that it is a very romantic relationship, and they help to cover Hardin's alcoholism, poor anger management and the fact that he has been untruthful since the beginning. The book cannot cover the toxicity of their relationship as it cannot use the same techniques as a movie can.

3. Condemning or glamorising unhealthy relationships in *After*

This thesis already explored the attachment style of the main protagonists and labelled Tessa as an individual bearing an anxious attachment style and Hardin as avoidantly attached. This was proven on many occasions during the story in the original book. Their relationship also fulfilled the requirements of an unhealthy or toxic relationship with emotional abuse as manipulation, demeaning one's partner and aggression described on several occasions. This chapter investigates the thesis objective and determines whether the *After* story educates adolescents about unhealthy relationships and condemns them as such or whether it romanticises them and portrays them as something desirable.

The best argument for deciding would be using Tessa's own words when evaluating and comparing her previous relationship to Hardin: "It's totally different with Hardin than it was with Noah. Loving Noah was comfortable and safe; it was always calm. Loving Hardin is raw and exciting; it sparks my every nerve, and I can't get enough of him. I never want to be away from him. Even when he drove me crazy, I missed him and had to fight myself to stay away" (Todd 2019, 389).

On another occasion, after a big argument, Tessa remarks: "This is us, all anger and passion and love" (Ibid., 373). Tessa sees their arguments and scenes as a way of expressing passion. Therefore, it is something desirable for her. She even compares being in a relationship with a securely attached boyfriend, and she labels that relationship as comfortable, safe and calm. Reflecting upon her past and current relationships, she concludes that her current relationship is more passionate and exciting, making her previous healthy relationship less valuable and desirable.

What she calls passion is only the side effect as none of their attachment style needs is met (Levine and Heller 2012, 153). She wrongly misrepresents this as something that should be part of every relationship and views it as true love. As a narrator in her story, she carries this message to over 1.5 billion young adult readers (Todd 2019, n.p).

The movie, on its own, carries a similar message. Tessa and Hardin's relationship is portrayed as a big love story, a love young adults should wish for. Neither the original nor the movie version offers a reflection that calls out specific unhealthy tendencies in their relationship and calls them unhealthy. Even though Tessa calls Hardin toxic on several occasions, and once she says their relationship is undergoing an unhealthy cycle, overall, she describes it as passionate and as one that makes her feel alive (Todd 2019, 176, 322, 337, 377, 476). Therefore, it is labelled as a desirable love relationship. It is safe to say that *After* might be romanticising an unhealthy relationship instead of warning against it.

The last chapter of this thesis evaluates whether this can influence adolescents who read and watch the movie and whether it could shape their beliefs and expectations about romantic relationships.

3.1 Possible effects of the *After* series on young adults' perception of relationships

So far, it has been proven that attachment in romantic relationships significantly affects young adults' wellbeing and affects their future relationships as well. Also, using excerpts from the *After* book and movie, it was proposed and shown that this story portrays unhealthy relationships against which neither the original book nor its movie adaptation bears strong warnings. The question that is left to answer is whether reading about and watching movies with unhealthy relationships influences young adults in such a way that it would increase their chances of being in one.

Multiple research projects were conducted on the possibility of changing one's behaviour based on what a person is exposed to on television and other forms of entertainment; this research is cited below. For the sake of this thesis, research focusing on young adults and the changes in their romantic relationships based on their exposure in the media is used.

Ruiz-Palomino et al. (2021, 7) proved that media exposure affects young adults' knowledge, attitudes, opinions and behaviour. They concluded: "Individuals who are heavily exposed to television begin to adapt and develop dysfunctional relationships, beliefs and romantic ideas" (Ruiz-Palomino et al. 2021, 8). What young adults observe in the media suggests what an ideal relationship should be like (Ibid., 8). Especially if there is constant exposure to similar themes, young adults tend to incorporate this view into their lives, which leads them to believe that their partner should behave the same way as in the media (Ibid., 14). Similar findings were concluded in research led by Shapiro and Kroeger (1991, 229), which concluded that individuals more exposed to popular media have more unrealistic beliefs about romantic relations.

Vaterlaus et al. (2017) researched the effect of both movies and books on young adults. This research concluded that exposure to media influences one's belief about love and sexual relationships. Adolescents who participated in this research noted how popular media brings up what should be typical, expected, and a must regarding romantic relationships (Ibid., 2). In addition, participants noted that movie characters serve as role models for them and that adolescents need to mimic and act on the behaviour presented to them by popular media, leading them to have unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships (Ibid., 10).

Vaterlaus et al. concluded, "Entertainment media was perceived to have an influence on expectations for adolescent romantic relationships: albeit unrealistic relationship expectations" (2017, 15). Young adults are eager to fit in their society, which leads them to mimic them: "The characters in media were perceived to be accepted and popular, which makes them desirable role models for adolescents. And then adolescents "mimic," "act," and "imitate" the behaviours in media to satisfy these desires" (Ibid., 11). Young adults, therefore, mimic what is presented to them, including adopting unhealthy behaviour because it might be part of the popular culture (Ibid., 11).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis offered insight into attachment theory, its role in young adults' romantic relationships, and the influence of specific popular media on what young adults believe about romantic relationships. The first part of this thesis established what an attachment is and its role in achieving one's wellbeing and long-time commitment in romantic relationships. Three attachment types and their role in wellbeing and relationships were described. The most crucial information was that a person's attachment can change depending on their romantic relationship. Most young adults experience romantic relationships, and the attachment style of their partner affects their attachment style and experience and shapes their beliefs about future romantic relationships.

Moreover, research has proven the link between popular media and young adults' relationship beliefs. Young adults are undergoing development and are susceptible to outside influences such as media, which can shape their opinions about relationships. The *After* series reached great popularity among young adults, with just the written story reaching over one billion individuals and, as such, being able to influence their view of romantic relationships.

Several excerpts from the books were chosen to demonstrate the relationship dynamics between the main protagonists, and a thorough assessment of their attachment style and relationship was offered. Based on academic literature, their relationship was labelled as unhealthy, and it was evaluated whether the book or the movie conveyed a warning against this relationship toxicity.

Given all the facts, it was decided that none offer this, which might lead to romanticising unhealthy relationships, which could have a detrimental influence on young adults who are exposed to this story in either its written or movie versions. Healthy attachment and healthy relationships are some of the leading indicators of one's contentment and wellbeing, and as such, they should be promoted. At the same time, books or shows showing unhealthy relationships should offer a reflection on these relationships and show warning against them rather than romanticising the abuse and portraying it as passion.

This thesis opens many interesting questions for further research. In the future, it would be interesting to explore why some forms of abuse are often associated with passion, as this is not the first popular book to display unhealthy romantic relationships. Another interesting question would be why most of these stories are aimed at young adults. Happy and healthy romantic relationships can build healthy and happy families, which can contribute to a functional society, given that it is crucial to research different fields of influence that shape romantic relationships.

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Appendix: questionnaire for assessment of the attachment styles

Levine and Heller (2012) questionnaire for assessment of the attachment styles

	TRUE		
	A	B	C
If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I'll probably be indifferent; I might even be relieved.			<input type="checkbox"/>
If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I'll worry that I've done something wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
If my partner was to break up with me, I'd try my best to show her/him what s/he is missing (a little jealousy can't hurt).	<input type="checkbox"/>		
If someone I've been dating for several months tells me s/he wants to stop seeing me, I'd feel hurt at first, but I'd get over it.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometimes when I get what I want in a relationship, I'm not sure what I want anymore.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I won't have much of a problem staying in touch with my ex (strictly platonic)—after all, we have a lot in common.		<input type="checkbox"/>	

	TRUE		
	A	B	C
I worry that if my partner leaves me I might never find someone else.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
It makes me nervous when my partner gets too close.			<input type="checkbox"/>
During a conflict, I tend to impulsively do or say things I later regret, rather than be able to reason about things.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
An argument with my partner doesn't usually cause me to question our entire relationship.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
My partners often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry that I'm not attractive enough.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Sometimes people see me as boring because I create little drama in relationships.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I miss my partner when we're apart, but then when we're together I feel the need to escape.			<input type="checkbox"/>
When I disagree with someone, I feel comfortable expressing my opinions.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I hate feeling that other people depend on me.			<input type="checkbox"/>
If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, I don't let it faze me. I might feel a pang of jealousy, but it's fleeting.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, I feel relieved—it means s/he's not looking to make things exclusive.			<input type="checkbox"/>
If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, it makes me feel depressed.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I may wonder what's happened, but I'll know it's probably not about me.		<input type="checkbox"/>	

	TRUE		
	A	B	C
I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
My independence is more important to me than my relationships.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer not to share my innermost feelings with my partner.			<input type="checkbox"/>
When I show my partner how I feel, I'm afraid s/he will not feel the same about me.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I am generally satisfied with my romantic relationships.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I don't feel the need to act out much in my romantic relationships.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I think about my relationships a lot.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I find it difficult to depend on romantic partners.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I tend to get very quickly attached to a romantic partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I have little difficulty expressing my needs and wants to my partner.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I sometimes feel angry or annoyed with my partner without knowing why.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I am very sensitive to my partner's moods.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I believe most people are essentially honest and dependable.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I prefer casual sex with uncommitted partners to intimate sex with one person.			<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm comfortable sharing my personal thoughts and feelings with my partner.		<input type="checkbox"/>	

	TRUE		
	A	B	C
I often worry that my partner will stop loving me.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I find it easy to be affectionate with my partner.		<input type="checkbox"/>	
I fear that once someone gets to know the real me, s/he won't like who I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I find that I bounce back quickly after a breakup. It's weird how I can just put someone out of my mind.			<input type="checkbox"/>
When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and incomplete.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
I find it difficult to emotionally support my partner when s/he is feeling down.			<input type="checkbox"/>
When my partner is away, I'm afraid that s/he might become interested in someone else.	<input type="checkbox"/>		