

The impact of cohabitation on the character Todd Gilbert in A.S.A Harrison's *The Silent Wife*

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Abstract

The practice of living together without marriage is common in some communities. Marriage serves to legalize the relationship between men and women, allowing them to share a home legally. The term "cohabitation" refers to couples who live together without being married. However, cohabitation can lead to various issues, including infidelity, conflicts, and even dangerous situations. This study employs a descriptive analysis method, utilizing library research techniques grounded in Sigmund Freud's developmental theory (psychoanalysis). In the novel *The Silent Wife* by A.S.A. Harrison, the consequences of cohabitation manifest as infidelity, disputes among characters, and the deterioration of friendships, ultimately leading to murder. Analyzing the novel through intrinsic and extrinsic approaches reveals that the events affecting the character Todd Gilbert directly result from cohabitation. This situation leads to the development of a new self-concept for Todd and significantly influences his attitude in addressing both internal and external conflicts.

Keywords: *Todd Gilbert; Cohabitation; Behavior; Psychoanalysis*

Introduction

Human beings were essentially created as pairs to complement one another. This intelligence should guide humans in all their actions, including interactions with the opposite sex—men and women. The process of interaction between men and women is regulated by laws and other regulations, which ensure that such interactions are recognized as lawful by both religious institutions and the state. Cohabitation refers to couples living together without the formal bond of marriage. Although cohabitation is not a new phenomenon, its existence remains a controversial behavior, it continues to be a controversial practice. (Aprilia, 2016, p. 4). Meanwhile, (Hasan and Nasma, 2008, p. 48) explain that *cohabitation* is not the same as marriage. Marriage is not merely a bond; it carries a sacred meaning as an act of worship to God. In contrast, *cohabitation* is merely a bond without any normative

foundation. On the other hand, Beets found, that cohabitational unions are less stable (Beets, 2009, p. 236).

According to Bachrach in (Coast, 2009, p. 2), cohabitation may be narrowly defined as “*an intimate sexual union between two unmarried partner who share the same living quarter for a sustained period of time*”. Another term of “cohabitation” according to (Dariyo, 2003, p. 149) refers to a man and a woman living together without the bond of a legal marriage. Cohabitation refers to the practice of living together without the legal bond of marriage. According to (Sudanto, 2017, p. 142) many countries maintain that issues of morality should not be questioned, as the state does not have the right to interfere in matters of personal morality and public decency. When the state regulates cohabitation, it effectively intrudes into the private lives of individuals. Cohabitation involves a man and a woman living together in the same household

without being married. (Wirasila and Dwipyana, 2020, p. 2).

Cohabitation is a lifestyle that emerged in the 1960s during the Sexual Revolution. The Sexual Revolution was a form of protest by the youth group at that time (Baby Boomers) against the state's policies and Western politics, which seemed very rigid. Cohabitation is closely tied to a lifestyle where men and women live together outside or before marriage. It can be a "trial" process or a mutual agreement to avoid entering a "committed, permanent marriage bond." Cohabitation has indeed become a lifestyle closely associated with premarital sex (Kurniawan, 2020, pp. 57–58). Cohabitation has become a very common phenomenon that leads to the use of contraceptives and the increasing number of divorces and open marriages in the history of Western societies (Kurniawan, 2020, p. 58). The concept of human needs includes sex and love, but many people are reluctant to legitimize it. It is no wonder that such a relationship style develops rapidly in society, as it is seen as an enjoyable path for their emotions.

In terms of criminal law today, *“there can be no criminal sanctions imposed on individuals who engage in sexual relations outside of a legitimate marriage, provided that both parties are adults or not bound by marriage to others and the act is consensual.”* The balance of life in society can occur if the laws regulating it are implemented, respected, and/or not violated. Therefore, if some of these norms (both written and unwritten) are violated by society, it can be expected to cause social unrest (Wirasila and Dwipyana, 2020, p. 2).

Meanwhile, cohabitation as an act is still in the draft of the law, and the explanation about the criteria of cohabitation offenses and the elements within those offenses is still not detailed. From another perspective, what is more important about cohabitation is its impact on the individuals involved. It might be more objective to assess whether

cohabitation is good or bad. If the individuals involved in cohabitation gain positive benefits from the practice, why should they be condemned or eradicated? On the other hand, if they gain more negative impacts, then cohabitation should be discouraged (Rizal, 2020, p. 6).

Essentially, they understand the consequences of their actions (the couple), but they prioritize momentary desires over thinking about the consequences. There has been much discussion and thought about cohabitation. In positive law, the offense of cohabitation still lacks binding normative regulations, because in positive law it is not considered a violation and, of course, not punishable, as long as no one feels harmed. As a type of offense concerning morality, it is very difficult to prove the element of harm, especially when it is done with the consent of both parties (Rizal, 2020, p. 6). Many cohabiting couples believe that living together acts as a trial marriage that will ultimately strengthen their relationship. They argue that cohabitation helps them resolve tensions in their partnership. However, research indicates otherwise. In fact, couples who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce than those who do not cohabit prior to tying the knot. (Jeffrey S. Nevid, 2021).

Cohabitation is not inherently problematic; it is still possible for partners to have a commitment to each other before they marry. However, in Western society, the term "cohabitation" carries a deeper connotation, suggesting that marriage is no longer associated with the same level of commitment as it once was. Relationships are often based on two key elements: 1. individual preferences (whether one likes or dislikes something) and 2. consensus (an agreement to live together). If the lifestyle of cohabitation becomes ingrained in the process of individualization, then it's not surprising that divorce is viewed as normal, common, or even desirable. This perspective leads to the idea that marriage can

easily be "divorced" from its traditional significance. (Kurniawan, 2020, p. 60).

Psychoanalytic theory was the first of many psychodynamic theories to follow many within a direct line from Freudian thinking. Freud 'discovered' the unconscious which is the basis for all psychodynamic theories. Psychodynamic theories hold that human behavior is primarily the function of reactions to internal (thus mostly unconscious) stimuli: instincts, urges, thoughts. Behavioral theories on the other hand hold that behavior is in response to external stimuli; responses are learned and over time appear as automatic. Some would hold the possibility of internal stimuli; however, such cannot be seen and/or measured and thus are not a fit subject for science (Rabaté, 2018).

Phenomenological theories hold that the human is in process of becoming and just 'is'. Current psychodynamic theories are derived from Freud's original concepts with addition of new knowledge and information. More recent theorists are known as Neo-Freudians. Few, if any, practice as Freud once did. Psychoanalysis was not conceived as just a method of treatment, but also as a training method for new analysts. Basically, it was an attempt to surface and interpret all material located in the unconscious. This process was deemed to be curative for the patient (Rabaté, 2018).

For the trainee, the purpose was to develop an acute awareness of one's own psyche so as to prevent interference from one's own biases with the analysis of another. This is called counter transference. Freud named the level of consciousness unconscious, conscious and preconscious (not in much use now). Freud developed a topography of the self: id, ego and superego. Freud also posited that human behavior was built up over time through distinct stages. Freudian stages were oral, anal, oedipal, latency, genital. Observation of infant revealed to him the preoccupation with feeding and nurturance; excretion and toilet training, discovery of genitals

and sensation from erogenous zones. Following is a period of when the child is less preoccupied with their bodily functions and concerned about relations in the social world. When adolescence presents another radical physiological change, once more the person is preoccupied with the body and sexual feelings and activities now, they are living in an adult body (Rabaté, 2018).

In literary studies, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theories can be used with reference to the analysis of literary works. Reading novels, poems and other compositions through the lens of psychoanalysis gives the opportunity to analyse and evaluate the works of literature in their genesis and presentation. Freudian doctrine can be considered as a reading tool that allows the investigation of the enigmatic areas of human experience and, therefore, its main contribution to literature is related to the discovery of hidden aspects of the text, of the writer and of the reader as well (Giordano, 2020).

According to Sigmund Freud's (1923) psychoanalysis, Freud introduced three other structural models, namely the id, ego, and superego. This concept, known as the psychoanalytic theory of personality, plays a role in modifying and enriching human behavior or attitudes (Syawal and Helaluddin, 2018, p. 3). Literary psychology is the analysis of texts by considering the relevance and role of psychological studies (Ratna, 2004, p. 350). This means that psychology plays an important role in analyzing a literary work by examining the psychological aspects of the work—whether from the perspective of the author, the characters, or the readers. Overall, it can be concluded that the relationship between literature and psychology is very close, giving rise to a new field of study known as "Literary Psychology."

The novel *The Silent Wife* was first published in 2013 in the United States. A.S.A. Harrison's skill in portraying the practice of cohabitation in America within her novel *The Silent Wife* tells the story of a

married couple who must face the harsh reality that their 20-year relationship ends tragically. Todd, who had been married to Jodi, initially decided not to have children. However, Todd eventually wanted to have children, a desire he felt could not be fulfilled with Jodi. He chose to cohabit with Natasha, Dean's daughter, his close friend. The consequences or impacts of the cohabitation practice in the novel form the unique background of the story. For this reason, the social issue of cohabitation in *The Silent Wife* by A.S.A. Harrison becomes an interesting research subject (Harrison, 2013).

A.S.A. Harrison, the author of *The Silent Wife*, was born in Toronto on March 7, 1948 (Harrison, 2013). She was a novelist known for her adult fiction. *The Silent Wife* was both her debut and final novel, as she passed away shortly after its publication on April 14, 2013. Harrison's keen observations of her surroundings suggest that *The Silent Wife* reflects the society she experienced, spanning from the 20th century into the 21st century.

Methods

To analyze the data, the author employs a descriptive analytical method aimed at investigating the state, condition, or other relevant matters outlined in the study. The results of this analysis are presented in the form of a report. The author incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic elements as additional supporting components. The intrinsic elements considered include characters and characterization, plot, conflict, and setting. These four elements are crucial to the focus of the research presented in this thesis. Additionally, the author utilizes literary psychology based on Sigmund Freud's developmental theory of psychoanalysis.

For data collection, the author employs a library research technique, which involves reviewing books, literature, notes, and reports related to the subject matter being addressed. In preparing this thesis, the

author focuses on the novel *The Silent Wife* by A.S.A. Harrison.

Findings and discussion

The beginning of Todd's meetings with Natasha marks the start of an affair and a pattern of cohabitation. Todd conceals his relationship with Natasha from his wife, Jodi, and his best friend, Dean. As Todd's relationship with Natasha deepens, he frequently drives her to and from campus, and they often rent hotel rooms to spend weekends together.

This cohabitation practice leads to Natasha's pregnancy, which shocks Todd to his core. While Todd does want to become a father, he never envisioned it happening this way. Additionally, Natasha's father discovers the news of her pregnancy, creating further tension.

When Dean learns that his daughter has been impregnated by his best friend, he becomes very angry with Todd. Overwhelmed by the situation, Natasha pressures Todd to finally confess to Jodi about his relationship with her daughter and the resulting pregnancy. This revelation inevitably leads to a confrontation between Todd and Jodi. However, by the end of their argument, Jodi comes to accept Todd's choice.

Ultimately, Todd's practice of cohabitation leads to the destruction of his relationship with Jodi. When it was revealed that Natasha was pregnant, Todd chose to leave the home he had shared with Jodi for a long time. Instead, he moved into an apartment with Natasha, who had already begun making plans for the baby and their future together. Unable to manage two residences, Todd decided to hire a lawyer to inform Jodi that she needed to vacate the condominium. Jodi was in disbelief that Todd would ask her to leave the home and life they had built together for so many years.

At the onset of the conflict, Todd's Id has a strong desire to have children. Eventually, Todd's Ego begins to fulfill this desire by engaging in cohabitation with Natasha. Initially, Natasha believes that her pregnancy news will make Todd happy, as she knows he desperately wants a child. However, this revelation triggers Todd's Superego, which tells him that this situation is wrong. Todd becomes angry upon learning that Natasha is pregnant without them having discussed it beforehand. While Todd's Id has always imagined the joy of having a child, his Superego morally informs him that this is not how he envisioned it, especially since he is still married to Jodi. Todd's anger leads him to react poorly when Natasha shares the news.

Furthermore, Todd suggests that Natasha should not tell her father yet; however, she has already informed him after their conversation. This raises many questions in Todd's mind. His Id is filled with curiosity, which pressures his Ego to seek answers to these questions. He starts asking Natasha about everything that is weighing on him. Instead of finding clarity, Natasha reveals that her father was unhappy upon learning the news and that he intends to speak with Jodi about what has happened. Natasha also pressures Todd by asking if he has contacted his lawyer. Todd's experience encompasses more than just the fear of Natasha's pregnancy; the panic he feels directly stems from the cohabitation practice in which he engaged.

During the rising action phase, Todd must explain to Jodi what has happened between him and Natasha. The situation becomes even more complicated when Dean, who already knows about Todd and Natasha's relationship and her pregnancy, informs Jodi about it. While Todd tries to resolve the situation with Natasha, whom he has gotten pregnant, he also seeks an escape, attempting to avoid feeling entirely guilty for his actions. Meanwhile, Jodi, who has spent twenty years with Todd, understandably awaits an explanation from him about what transpired.

Throughout their two decades together, Todd and Jodi have faced many minor issues, which they managed to resolve effectively. However, no one could have anticipated that their relationship was now on the brink of breaking up. This shift began when their problem extended beyond just Todd and Jodi, involving several other people. The conflict deepens when Todd finally tells Jodi everything he has done with Natasha.

Todd tries to apologize to Jodi, who is already aware of everything from Dean. However, she pretends to know nothing, which confuses Todd even more. He begins to see himself as a bad person. Todd attempts to explain to Jodi that the situation unfolded in a way he didn't intend. His superego condemns him for failing to inform Jodi about these issues from the start, while his id feels guilty. Todd's ego strives to accept Jodi's confusion regarding her misunderstanding of his behavior.

The conflict reaches its climax in an external analysis involving Dean and Todd. Dean is Todd's close friend, but he is also the father of Natasha, the girl Todd has gotten pregnant. Todd and Dean have been best friends since high school, and Todd considers Dean to be like family—specifically, as a brother.

When Dean learns that his daughter Natasha has been impregnated by his best friend, he cannot accept what Todd has done. Dean then informs Jodi about everything that has happened. However, Dean's quest for revenge doesn't stop there; he hires a hitman to kill Todd.

The extrinsic analysis at the resolution stage of the conflict reveals that Todd's Id desires to have a child with Natasha, but he still loves Jodi. His Ego manifests when Todd explains that he wants to leave Jodi and live with Natasha. Todd's Superego emerges when he reflects on his actions, realizing that he was wrong to pursue this relationship without first resolving his situation with Jodi. He

acknowledges that he should have informed Dean about his feelings for his daughter from the beginning.

The conflict between Dean and Todd, of course, continues. Dean, who is deeply angry with Todd, seems unwilling to accept his apology for what he has done to his daughter. Ultimately, the situation escalates to the point of murder.

From the author's perspective, Todd's Id expresses regret for what has happened. In this instance, Todd's Ego desperately yearns for just one more moment in his life. Meanwhile, his Superego comes into play as Todd accepts the possibility of his death, even though he profoundly wishes for more time.

Conclusion

The analysis of the impact of cohabitation on the character Todd in the novel **The Silent Wife** by A.S.A. Harrison, using both intrinsic and extrinsic elements of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach, reveals that cohabitation significantly affects Todd's psychological development. This behavior leads to a negative self-concept and influences his approach to resolving both internal and external conflicts.

In this psychoanalytical context, cohabitation is associated with failure. Todd struggles to fulfill his roles as a husband and father due to his inherent weaknesses, ultimately leading to his demise at the hands of a friend, a consequence of the cohabitation behavior he initiated. As a result, Todd experiences a constant sense of unrest throughout the story, reflecting the emotional turmoil typically associated with cohabitation. In reality, human life is often accompanied by failure, and Todd serves as an illustration of how these aspects of human nature manifest.

The impact of cohabitation on the psychological development of the character Todd Jeremy Gilbert is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

This can be observed in the following stages: The first one is *Conflict Initiation Stage (Generating Circumstances)*; Todd faces psychological challenges stemming from his conflict with Natasha. On one hand, he desires to have children; on the other hand, he perceives this desire as wrong since Natasha became pregnant outside of marriage. The second stage is *Conflict Escalation Stage (Rising Action)*; Todd encounters further psychological difficulties due to his relationship with Jodi. Although he still loves Jodi, he feels compelled to leave her in order to live with Natasha. The last one is *Climax Stage*; A significant conflict arises between Todd and Dean, Natasha's father. Dean cannot accept Todd's actions toward his daughter and feels betrayed by his best friend. This betrayal drives Dean to hire a hitman to take Todd's life.

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