

EXPLORING ABANDONMENT AND ATTACHMENT IN TOY STORY 3**Hermia Setya Nabila¹, Asih Ernawati²**¹²Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia**DOI: 10.23917/humaniora.v26i2.10362**Received: May 10th, 2025. Revised: June 4th, 2019. Accepted: July 28th, 2019Available Online: August 27th, 2025. Published Regularly: August 2025

| Keywords | Abstract |
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| Psychological Approach Abandonment Attachment Toy Story 3 | <i>Psychology, as the study of human behavior, has core relevance to literary criticism in its engagement with such trauma as abandonment, a formidable influence on relationships and character. In utilizing the attachment theory as the analytical framework, the current research aims to examine how the abandonment trauma of Lotso led to his attachment style and what the ensuing psychological effects of such a style were on his relationships with the other characters of the film Toy Story 3. The study conducts a qualitative descriptive analysis of Lotso's dialogue, scenes, and plot elements in the film. The findings indicate that Lotso displays a disorganized attachment style, which entails inconsistency, mistrust, and emotional instability. His unresolved trauma is manifested through his manipulative and controlling behavior, which is indicative of extreme anger and feelings of worthlessness. The research concludes that Lotso's villainous behaviors are a result of his unhealed emotional wounds, offering a nuanced examination of his character beyond the actions of a villain. This study utilizes attachment theory to illustrate the psychological depth of fiction antagonists and the influence of early affective experiences on personality and social behavior.</i> |
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INTRODUCTION

Psychology is an important literary analysis component. It is enabling the examination of psychological aspects from the perspectives of authors, characters, and readers (Ningrum & Bahri, 2020). Literature uses fictional narratives to depict human behavior, while psychology attempts to understand individuals' underlying actions and motivations. Both serve as methods to explore the complexities of the human psyche. The study of literary works as psychological activities is known as literary psychology (Bagtayan & Lantowa, 2022). According to Dar (2022), through their narratives, writers express the inner experiences of many individuals, and the underlying inner conflict of characters in literary works can be effectively examined by analyzing character dynamics.

One of the inner conflicts that can be explored in literature is trauma experienced by characters, which is characterized as an emotional and psychological response to a painful or distressing event they have experienced (Watson, 2022). One of the many traumas that can be experienced, abandonment trauma can be said to be a complex emotional and behavioral response as it relates to the severing of emotional bonds with the primary caregiver (Marici et al., 2023). The trauma can impede a person's ability to trust in future relationships, and these changes can be recognized through attachment theory. Bowlby

(1988), stated that early experiences with primary caregivers significantly influence a person's ability to form relationships with others later in life.

Early Attachment to primary caregivers is primarily formed in childhood and strongly influences a person's development (Li, 2023). Furthermore, attachment theorists state that the Attachment experienced in childhood influences their attachment style in adulthood, reflecting strategies for emotional management, especially in reducing the negative effects during challenging circumstances (Beckes & Simpson, 2023). Therefore, a person's attachment style plays an important role in their future personality development and social behavior. By examining the trauma of abandonment and its impact on character development through attachment theory, we can gain a more fully aligned understanding of the characters in literary works, such as movies.

One of the films that portrays characters with abandonment trauma is the animated film *Toy Story 3*, released in 2010. The film is the third sequel to the *Toy Story* series, continuing the story of Woody, Buzz Lightyear, and their toy friends, as well as the appearance of a new character, Lots-o'-Hugging bear (Lotso), who is the main antagonist in this series. Lotso is first seen as a friendly and affectionate purple teddy bear with a strawberry scent. As the story unfolds, Lotso begins to show his true colors. Lotso was originally a doll who was loved by his owner, a girl named Daisy, but his life changed drastically when he was accidentally abandoned with Chuckles and Big Baby by their owner. Lotso and his friends attempt to return home to Daisy. When they return to Daisy's house, Lotso finds a new teddy bear that resembles him and replaces him, leading to deep feelings of disappointment and anger stemming from feelings of abandonment and worthlessness. This unresolved trauma underlies Lotso's manipulative and cruel behavior, which serves as a representation of how abandonment can shape an individual's behavior.

Several previous studies have explored topics related to this theme of Attachment. Manoranjani & Sripadmadevi (2024) conducted analyses of the characters in the novels *Gone Girl* and *The Silent Patient*, both of which are connected to attachment theory and its implications for insecure relationships. Similarly, Huda & Lestari (2024) explored the attachment styles of female characters in the works *Solomon & Gaenor* and the film *Cin(T)a*. Schwalbe (2017) emphasized themes of parental Attachment in films such as *Bambi* and *Finding Nemo*. Parlayandemir (2021) selected ten Turkish films spanning a broad temporal range from 1965 to 2020 and employed discourse analysis to examine various attachment patterns and gender conventions depicted within these films. Abbas & Mohammed (2024) investigated the intersection of attachment theory and toxic parental relationships in the film *Fences*. Furthermore, a study from Janah & Widyaningrum (2020) examined the character and behavior of Lotso through the lens of Marxist theory.

This study aims to analyze Lotso's character in *Toy Story 3* through the lens of attachment theory, focusing on the influence of his abandonment trauma on his attachment style. It seeks to answer the following questions: How does Lotso's traumatic experience shape his attachment style, and what psychological impacts does this style have on his relationships with other characters? By exploring these questions, the findings from this research can provide a deeper understanding of Lotso's complexities, portraying him not merely as a villain but as a product of unhealed emotional wounds. This analysis will also offer insights into the broader implications of attachment theory in literary works, guiding how we interpret character motivations and emotional struggles in narratives that reflect human experiences.

METHOD

This study examined the effects of abandonment trauma on Lotso's character in *Toy Story 3* (2010) using a qualitative descriptive method. This approach emphasized narrative components, dialogues, and character interactions, providing an in-depth understanding of how his traumatic experiences shape Lotso's identity and behavior. The primary data for this research is derived from the *Toy Story 3* movie, specifically focusing on Lotso's

character (Lots-o'-Huggin'). Secondary data includes relevant books, articles, and literary works that discuss Attachment theory and character analysis. Data collection involved several steps: first, watched the *Toy Story 3* movie to gather insights and collected data on Lotso's abandonment trauma; second, analyzed Lotso's dialogues and interactions with other characters to understand his psychological dynamics; and finally, organizing the collected data for clarity and ease of analysis. For data analysis, the researchers employed attachment theory as articulated by John Bowlby, which provides a framework for understanding the impact of early trauma on emotional development.

Additionally, Mary Ainsworth's concepts of attachment styles were utilized further to analyze Lotso's behavior and relationships with other characters. This theoretical lens was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of how Lotso's abandonment trauma influences his attachment style, ultimately shaping his interactions and identity within the narrative. By applying these theories, the study aims to deepen the understanding of Lotso's character and the broader implications of Attachment in literary contexts.

RESULT

This section presents and explains the information obtained from Lotso's character analysis, with a focus on the trauma of his abandonment. It related to the behaviors that identify Lotso's attachment style. The following subheadings examine Lotso's interactions with other characters.

Characteristics of the Attachment Style

Abandoned and betrayed

In *Toy Story 3*, Lotso's experiences of betrayal and abandonment had an awful effect on his behavior and character. Important details about Lotso's past are revealed in Chuckles' stories, highlighting the trauma of abandonment and the character transformation that followed. Chuckles describes the strong relationship between Lotso and Daisy in the scene from 00:49:31 to 00:52:00, saying, "*Daisy loved us all. But Lotso, Lotso was special. They did everything together. You've never seen a kid and a toy more in love.*" Lotso is a beloved toy in Daisy's life, as the dialogue shows their intense love and bond. Lotso values his love and affection, and so when he feels betrayed, it shocks him significantly.

The turning point of abandonment comes when Daisy's parents accidentally leave Lotso, Chuckles, and Big Baby behind at a temporary stop. Lotso's resolve to be reunited with Daisy illustrates his unfaltering devotion and love, yet simultaneously forebodes the impending emotional disaster that will unfold. Upon his return to Daisy's home, Lotso discovers that a newer Lotso toy has replaced him. This is a deep act of betrayal that not only signifies the loss of his special bond with Daisy but also destabilizes his identity as a beloved toy. Chuckles' statement that Daisy has replaced Lotso emphasizes the depth of Lotso's emotional pain, and this statement heightens his feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

Chuckles went on with the backstory of Lotso, the line "*We were lost. Cast off. Unloved. Unwanted,*" Lotso and the toys feel rejected and useless, and this takes a great toll on Lotso's mind. The sentiments of being "lost" and "unwanted" lead to his character development of attempting to dominate the other toys while he is trying to cope with his trauma. His desire for power in Sunnyside stems from his unresolved emotional pain and the need to dominate others as a way of limiting his feelings of neglect. This transformation is an example of how traumatic events can lead to destructive behavior and a loss of empathy.

Contradictory Behavior

The character of Lotso in *Toy Story 3* displays contradictory behaviors that can be recognized under the framework of disorganized attachment style. This behavior is typified by the lack of coherent strategies in coping with stress and interpersonal relationships that frequently result from unresolved trauma. In the segment between 00:21:44 and 00:22:02, Lotso confirms, *"First thing you gotta know about me, I'm a hugger."* In this statement, Lotso is attempting to present himself as a welcoming and approachable individual, employing his propensity for physical contact and friendliness to induce a level of reassurance and security among the other toys. Additionally, between 00:23:50 and 00:23:53, Buzz Lightyear gives a positive remark by stating, *"What a nice bear,"* to which Rex adds, *"And he smells like strawberries."* The positive reactions from Buzz and Rex indicate that Lotso successfully created a positive impression on the new toy, which was charmed by its friendly attitude and the sweet scent it gave off.

However, the positive image of Lotso is contradicted by his later actions, particularly when Jessie and Barbie show his real character. Between 01:12:55 and 01:13:20, Jessie says, *"It's a prison! You're (Lotso) a liar and a bully!"* Then, Barbie repeats the train of thought that *"Authority should be derived from the consent of the governed, not from the threat of force."* Jessie's observation squarely puts Lotso's tyrannical behavior, one that runs counter to his original character description of being hospitable and warm. The word "prison" highlights the unpleasant atmosphere he has created. In the same vein, Barbie's words question Lotso's discriminatory approach to ruling. This interaction demonstrates the stark transition between Lotso's charming beginning and his later actions as a tyrant, emphasizing the contradictions that lie within his character.

Denial of love

Lotso's denial of love is a key element of his personality in *Toy Story 3*, illustrating his deep emotional scars and his inability to deal with his past. The rejection is a defense mechanism that enables him to shield himself from the pain associated with feelings of abandonment and betrayal. The clip between 01:14:05 and 01:14:33 powerfully illustrates this rejection. Here, Woody attempts to remind Lotso of his past relationship with Daisy by saying, *"She loved you, Lotso."* This is done to remind him of their relationship and the love that Daisy had for him. However, Lotso's first response is one of deflection and denial as he declares, *"She never loved me."* Not only does this reply deny Woody's statement, but it is also a complete rejection of his past and the emotional connection he once held so dear.

Lotso's denial of love is an illustration of how his emotional defense mechanisms are working. By believing that Daisy did not care for him, he does not have to face the hurtful truth about his replacement and abandonment. Woody's assertion that *"As much as any kid ever loved a toy"* is a critical reminder of the affection they shared. In the end, Lotso's denial results in isolation and self-destructive behavior. By erasing the hope that he was ever loved, he creates a sense of separation from the other toys and carries on a history of manipulation and control. The story of Lotso is a cautionary tale about the risk of rejecting love and the enduring impact such a rejection can have on an individual's sense of self and conduct.

Manipulative Behavior

Lotso's manipulative behavior is a key feature of his character in *Toy Story 3*, and it reflects his capability to control and manipulate others through psychological tactics and threats. In the scene between 00:43:18 and 00:43:36, Lotso employs physical manipulation to try to gain control over Buzz Lightyear. By making Sparks open Buzz's compartment, Lotso not only physically restrains Buzz but also deprives him of his

autonomy and individuality. He says, *“To reset your Buzz Lightyear action to its original factory settings.”* This act of resetting Buzz to his “original factory settings” is representative of Lotso’s need to dominate and redesign others in terms of what he wants. By deleting Buzz’s personality and experiences, Lotso is essentially taking away Buzz’s sense of identity, rendering him more susceptible to manipulation.

In a different scene, from 00:47:35 to 00:47:42, Lotso depicts psychological manipulation as he addresses Buzz with the statement, *“At ease, soldier. They’re neutralized. But remember, they’ll tell you anything to make you doubt yourself.”* This sentence illustrates classic psychological manipulation; by characterizing the situation in militaristic terms and referring to the other toys as “soldiers,” Lotso is reasserting his dominance and power. By implying that others will attempt to get Buzz to doubt himself, he becomes the only source of truth and authority. This is so Buzz will doubt himself and become paranoid, so that he will be easier to control by Lotso. His manipulation of others not only cements his dominance but also highlights the darker side of his nature, showing how trauma and betrayal can become toxic qualities to manipulate.

Mistrust of Others

Lotso’s experiences of loss and betrayal have led him to develop a deep distrust of others, shaping his view of reality to believe that relationships are temporary and that forming attachments will only lead to pain. This perspective is particularly evident in the scene from 00:22:27 to 00:22:59, where Lotso states, *“No owners means no heartbreak.”* This line succinctly captures his belief that avoiding emotional connections is the best way to guarantee emotional security. By equating a lack of ownership with a paucity of heartbreak, Lotso promotes a mindset that downplays the importance of emotional Attachment. As a coping mechanism, this rationale allows him to justify his feelings of abandonment and protect himself from the pain of potential losses. Lotso becomes even more cynical when he tells Woody, *“So, this Andy abandoned you, huh? Well, that’s his loss, Sheriff. He can’t hurt you anymore.”* In this statement, Lotso diminishes Woody’s loyalty to Andy, framing it as a flaw rather than a virtue. By belittling the significance of Woody’s bond with his owner, Lotso seeks to invalidate the value of loyalty and emotional connections. His words reveal a deep bitterness and hatred towards the concepts of love and affection, as he projects his feelings of betrayal onto Woody. This manipulative behavior not only highlights Lotso’s emotional scars but also illustrates how his past experiences have distorted his understanding of relationships and trust.

Influence of Lotso’s Attachment Style on Relationships with Other Toys *Tyrant leader*

Lotso’s tyrannical leadership is also manipulative because he claims dominance as the leader of Sunnyside. His leadership establishes an oppressive atmosphere where fear and domination replace trust and cooperation. The following is an analysis of the key points in the dialogue that indicate the tyrannical leadership of Lotso.

- Ken : *“Everyone, listen! Sunnyside could be cool and groovy if we treated each other fairly. It’s Lotso. He’s made us into a pyramid, and he put himself on top!”*
- Lotso : *“Anyone concur with Ken?”*
(*Toy Story 3*, Scene 01:13:43 to 01:13:54)

In this statement, Ken is pointing to the pyramidal structure Lotso has established at Sunnyside. Positioning himself at the apex of the pyramid, Lotso establishes his dominance and control over the other toys. It is indicative of his autocratic style of leadership, where power is vested in one’s hands, thus resulting in oppression and disparity among the toys. Lotso’s reaction to Ken’s demand for justice is a display of his contempt for dissent. By questioning whether anyone else is on Ken’s side, he disregards

Ken's issue and affirms his control. This is used to frighten the other toys and discourage them from voicing opposition to his leadership.

Control of fear

Lotso uses fear as a key strategy to control the other toys in *Toy Story 3*. His manipulative tactics create an atmosphere of intimidation and submission, forcing the toys to follow his rules and expectations. In the scene from 00:47:07 to 00:48:10, Lotso instructs Buzz Lightyear to outline the regulations of their new environment in a militaristic manner that emphasizes punishment and control. By comparing their living conditions to a prison, Lotso establishes a clear hierarchy and instills fear among the other toys. Buzz Lightyear's statement, *"Prisoners sleep in their cells. Anyone caught outside their cell spends the night in the box,"* serves as a direct threat, reinforcing the consequences of disobedience. This strategy is designed to create fear among the toys, making them acutely aware of the repercussions they might face for defying Lotso's orders.

Lotso's approval of Buzz's explanation further solidifies his authority based on fear, as he promotes the enforcement of these rules. By insisting that the toys adhere to these guidelines, he helps them understand the severity of their situation and the consequences of disobedience. This atmosphere prioritizes fear over trust and friendship. Lotso's declaration, *"If you start at the bottom, pay your dues, life here can be a dream come true! But if you break our rules, step outta line, or try to check out early, well, you're just hurting yourselves,"* juxtaposes the promise of an ideal life with the threat of punishment. This coercive environment creates a psychological trap for the toys, where compliance with Lotso's demands is necessary to avoid repercussions. Overall, Lotso's approach fosters a culture of compliance among the toys, where the fear of punishment becomes the primary motivator for their behavior, leaving them feeling vulnerable and helpless within a system designed to control them through intimidation.

Physical Violence

Lotso uses physical violence as a central element of his oppressive leadership, showing his willingness to hurt and dominate the other toys. Through his actions, he creates an atmosphere of coercion and fear that reinforces his dominance and deters opposition. In the scene from 00:46:35 to 00:46:43, Lotso disciplines Mr. Potato Head by incarcerating him in "the box," a form of punishment that represents isolation and fear. He states, *"Not him. I believe that the potato needs to learn some manners. Put him in the box."* The box is a symbol of control and discipline, and it invokes fear in the rest of the toys, commanding respect for Lotso's rules. By punishing Mr. Potato Head publicly, Lotso conveys the message that disobedience will not be tolerated and there are dire consequences in store for those who go against his wishes.

In another scene between 01:12:13 and 01:12:28, Lotso's violent behavior is also demonstrated when he destroys Chatter's Telephone to achieve his goals. This is marked by Chatter's regretful tone as he says, *"I'm sorry, cowboy. They broke me."* This moment underscores the physical violence that Lotso inflicts upon Chatter; by making him broken, Lotso not only shows his willingness to hurt others but also demonstrates his utilization of violence as a means of manipulation and coercion. These incidents point to Lotso's dependence on physical force as a tool of asserting control over the toys, building a situation where fear reigns supreme and opposition is suppressed. His behavior illustrates the dynamics by which authoritarian leadership can be established both through psychological manipulation and physical terror, ultimately giving rise to a culture of obedience based on intimidation.

Betrayal

Lotso's betrayal is the defining moment that encapsulates the transformation of his character in *Toy Story 3*. Not only does it reveal Lotso's true identity, but it is also the breaking point for Woody, Buzz, and the other toys. Between 01:20:32 and 01:21:02, Lotso, Woody, Buzz, and the other toys are confronted with a life-threatening situation when they encounter the immediate peril of being dropped down into the garbage incinerator. While noticing the button meant to halt the machine from operating, Woody and Buzz, despite their recent confrontation with him, immediately move to rescue Lotso when he seems to be in danger. This scene showcases their natural trust and inclination to assist, reflecting the principles of friendship and loyalty that characterize Woody and Buzz's characters. However, Lotso's abrupt betrayal comes as a shock and is deeply disappointing.

Instead of reciprocating their trust and helping them, he takes advantage of it to his benefit, abandoning them to face their fate. His taunt, "*Where's your kid now, sheriff?!*" serves as a bitter reminder of Woody's earlier fears of abandonment, thus adding to the emotional weight of his betrayal. This scene gives a stark contrast between the innocent trust and loyalty exemplified by Woody and Buzz and the treacherous nature of Lotso. His vicious taunt not only emphasizes the emotional significance of his betrayal but also strengthens the film's themes of trust, friendship, and the serious consequences that come from betrayal.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest the complex relationship between the abandonment trauma and the development of Lotso's disorganized attachment style in *Toy Story 3*, thus providing an exhaustive account of his villainous personality. This evaluation is aligned with attachment theory, which holds that initial experiences of disruption in the caregiver-child bond can cause a disorganized attachment style, exerting a profound influence on a person's emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships across the lifespan (Bowlby, 1988). Lotso's prior experience of being abandoned and replaced by Daisy not only shattered his sense of security, but he also showed avoidance by keeping emotional distance through intimidation and power. Yet, anxiety and restlessness were caused by a craving for incomplete acceptance and affection. These trends are consistent with earlier reports that indicated individuals with disorganized attachments also showed confused and unpredictable behavior and lacked autonomy and intimacy (Main & Solomon, 1990).

This study offers a significant theoretical contribution by applying attachment theory—traditionally used to analyze human relationships—to the character of Lotso in *Toy Story 3*. In contrast to prior studies from Janah & Widyaningrum (2020) that examined Lotso's character from a Marxist perspective, focusing on his character as an oppressor of his subordinated toys in a capitalist world, this research is more psychological in scope by analyzing Lotso's villainy, which is the result of abandonment trauma that he experienced. While Marxist critiques attribute Lotso's violent behavior to class conflict and structural power relations, this research demonstrates that animated antagonists can exhibit complex psychological profiles, not merely serving as narrative villains but as representations of unresolved emotional wounds. This approach enriches the discourse on literary psychology, showing that even characters in children's animation can reflect the profound impact of early relational trauma on personality development, social behavior, and leadership style.

Lotso's portrayal in *Toy Story 3* presents an interesting perspective on his actions, highlighting the fine line between "villain" and "victim." His abusive behavior can also be seen to represent unresolved emotional wounds based on abandonment. This interpretation transcends stereotypes of villains as simply being one-dimensional evil characters and invites other "criminals" within fiction and reality to reassess violent crimes. It suggests that such actions are most commonly an expression of deep inner trauma. Defense mechanisms are the survival mechanisms of trauma victims (Van Der

Kolk, 2014). These survival mechanisms can lead to devastating controlling behaviour, which is a survival response to unbearable emotional pain.

Lamothe (2023) argues that in films, trauma establishes a framework that allows viewers to identify the villains and comprehend their motivations swiftly. Consequently, the journey of processing this trauma and finding healing transforms into a narrative of its own. Thus, even when trauma is central to a character's identity, it remains just one element within a broader story. Lotso's portrayal leads audiences to rethink the stereotypical understanding of malevolence by revealing the underlying psychological traumas leading to such behaviour. His narrative requires a deeper exploration of how trauma can form identity and behaviour, instilling critical understanding and compassion toward antagonistic characters. This reading not only deepens our understanding of *Toy Story 3* but also facilitates a more analytical evaluation of the actions of human beings, both on and off screen.

CONCLUSION

This research illustrates that Lotso's villainous personality in *Toy Story 3* can be best understood through the lens of attachment theory and the psychological impact of abandonment trauma. Rather than oversimplifying Lotso as a one-dimensional villain, it is illustrated here that his disorganized attachment style and abusive behaviour are the consequence of deep emotional wounds and disrupted relationships within his early experience. Through the use of psychological theory applied to an animated character, this research adds to the Body of work in literary psychology, illustrating that even children's films can demonstrate the profound impact of childhood trauma in early relationships on personality and interpersonal relationships. Lotso's narrative blurs the distinction between villain and victim, highlighting how unresolved trauma can manifest as destructive and controlling actions that serve as survival mechanisms for emotional pain. This is a more nuanced and empathetic approach to villains, real and fictional, and an examination of the role that psychological scars play in behavior. Ultimately, the research increases our enjoyment of *Toy Story 3* and encourages a heightened focus on human behavior nuances, the origins of malevolence, and the value of understanding others' behavior through empathy.

Through this research, it is discovered that the abandonment trauma of Lotso was a central element in the formation of his attachment style and caused some remarkable transformation in his behavior and personality. Through these research findings, future researchers are advised to explore further the psychological processes of traumatized characters, analyzing how such traumatic events shape emotional development and interpersonal relationships. In addition, because the present research involved the psychological examination of Lotso's attachment style, future research can further expand the methodology by including semiotic or cinematographic analysis. In this way, an in-depth examination of the construction of Lotso's character portrayal in the movie can be realized, for instance, through the symbolism, visual storytelling, and artistic rendition influencing the audience's perception of his character.

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