

Exploring Emotional Intelligence Of The Lead Character In *To All Of The Boys I've Loved Before* Novel

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in understanding how individuals perceive, manage, and express emotions in various aspects of life. This study aimed to analyze the portrayal of emotional intelligence in the main character of the novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* novel by Jenny Han. Using a qualitative approach, the analysis examines the five core components of emotional intelligence as outlined by Daniel Goleman: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques, to identify narrative moments that reflect emotional responses and interpersonal dynamics. The study explores how these components are demonstrated through the actions, thoughts, and interactions of Lara Jean Covey. The findings show that Lara Jean exhibits all five components of emotional intelligence, with self-awareness and empathy appearing most prominently. Her emotional responses become more complex over time, highlighting how emotional intelligence shapes her decisions, relationships, and internal reflections throughout the novel.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, *To All of The Boys I've Loved Before*, Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills.

1. Introduction

Literature functions as a powerful medium that reflects the complexities of human emotions, thoughts, and social relationships. M.H. Abrams (1999, p.2) explains that literature uses imaginative language to engage readers by representing the varied experiences of human life, allowing us to better understand psychological and emotional realities through its characters.

Emotional intelligence, defined by Daniel Goleman (1995, p. 34) as the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage emotions effectively, offers a useful perspective for analyzing literary characters. Despite its importance in everyday social interactions, emotional

intelligence has received relatively limited attention in literary analysis, especially in the context of contemporary young adult novels.

This article addresses this gap by exploring the emotional intelligence of Lara Jean Covey, the protagonist in the novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2014) by Jenny Han. The analysis uses Goleman's five-component framework: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

The novel was chosen because it is one of the best-selling young adult novels, widely popular among teenagers and youth. Its relatable portrayal of emotions and experiences serves as a mirror for readers' own emotional intelligence development. The novel's accessibility and authentic depiction of teenage feelings make it a valuable subject for examining how emotional intelligence is represented and how it resonates closely with its audience. By analyzing Lara Jean's emotional traits and behaviors, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how emotional intelligence operates within fictional narratives and shapes character portrayal in young adult literature.

2. Methods

This study **employs** a qualitative research method to explore emotional intelligence as portrayed through the character of Lara Jean Covey in the selected novel. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth interpretation of emotional expressions, behaviors, and internal conflicts, which are central to understanding the character's emotional dynamics.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, which makes it suitable for literary analysis involving psychological and emotional dimensions.

The novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* by Jenny Han was selected as the primary data source because it reflects emotional experiences that are commonly faced by youth, such as insecurity, love, loss, and personal growth. These relatable themes make the novel a meaningful text for analyzing emotional intelligence and its relevance to the inner lives of adolescents.

For data collection, this study used documentation and note-taking techniques. The steps of data collection were as follows: (1) reading the novel thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline and character dynamics; (2) identifying and highlighting important dialogues, inner monologues, and narrative descriptions that reflect emotional behaviors; (3) applying the note-taking technique to record relevant quotations and actions that demonstrate the components of emotional intelligence; and (4) organizing the data based on the five components of emotional intelligence as defined by Daniel Goleman: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through the following steps: (1) classifying the selected data into the five components of emotional intelligence; (2) interpreting how Lara Jean's emotional expressions and reactions illustrate these components; and (3) describing the emotional intelligence traits based on Goleman's theory and supporting them with textual evidence from the novel. The analysis is presented descriptively using an informal method, focusing on narrative explanation supported by direct quotations from the text. Each finding is discussed with reference to the theoretical framework of emotional intelligence to provide a deeper insight into the character's emotional depth and psychological complexity.

3. Findings and Discussion

Emotional Intelligence of the Main Character in *To All of The Boys I've Loved Before* Novel

This section examines how emotional intelligence is reflected in the main character, Lara Jean, in *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*. Guided by Daniel Goleman's (1995) framework, the analysis examines five key components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

By analyzing selected passages and Lara Jean's responses to various situations, this section identifies how these emotional traits are demonstrated and developed throughout the narrative. The findings provide insights into her emotional growth and how it shapes her actions, decisions, and relationships. Each component is explored in detail to reveal the depth of her emotional intelligence across the novel.

a. Self-Awareness

In *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* novel, Lara Jean's emotional growth reflects Goleman's concept of self-awareness, which refers to the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions and their impact on thoughts and behavior. At the beginning of the novel, Lara Jean struggles to confront her true feelings, choosing instead to write letters she never intends to send. This avoidance highlights her initial lack of self-awareness, as she fails to acknowledge the depth of her emotions. However, as the story progresses, she is forced to face her feelings head-on, leading to a deeper understanding of herself and her emotional responses. In the following paragraph, each of the data is discussed in more detail.

Data [3-1]

I never meant for Peter to read that letter. I feel so exposed. But maybe, in a way, it's good that he knows. (page 67)

At this moment in the novel, Lara Jean realizes that one of her unsent love letters has reached Peter Kavinsky. She feels vulnerable and exposed because her private emotions are now

out in the open. However, despite her initial embarrassment, she acknowledges that his knowing might not be entirely bad, suggesting an internal conflict between fear and acceptance. This marks a crucial turning point in her emotional journey, as she is forced to confront feeling she once kept hidden.

Lara Jean recognizes her discomfort and embarrassment but also shows a deeper awareness of her emotions. She acknowledges that, despite her fear, the situation might have a positive outcome.

Data [3-2]

I never used to say what I really felt. I was always afraid of making things worse or making someone upset. But now, I think I need to be honest about my feelings, even if it's scary. (Page 102)

At this moment in the novel, Lara Jean reflects on her past behavior and recognizes a significant change in herself. She used to avoid expressing her true emotions out of fear of conflict or hurting others, but now she realizes the importance of honesty, even when it is difficult. This realization marks a key point in her emotional development, as she begins to embrace open communication and emotional authenticity.

A core component of emotional intelligence as defined by Goleman (1995). Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions and how they influence behavior. In this case, she acknowledges that she previously avoided expressing her true feelings out of fear of upsetting others. This recognition shows her growing ability to identify her emotional patterns and understand how they have shaped her interactions.

Her newfound awareness leads her to take action by choosing to be honest about her emotions despite the discomfort it may bring. This aligns with Goleman's idea that self-awareness enables individuals to make more intentional and constructive decisions regarding their emotional responses. By acknowledging her fear and deciding to confront it, Lara Jean demonstrates a shift toward greater emotional maturity, showing how self-awareness plays a crucial role in personal growth.

b. Self-Regulation

As defined by Goleman (1995), self-regulation is the ability to control emotions and respond to situations with thoughtfulness rather than impulsivity. Throughout the novel, Lara Jean struggles with managing her emotions, often resorting to avoidance when faced with difficult situations. Initially, she tends to withdraw or suppress her feelings, fearing confrontation and change. However, as she matures, she gradually learns to process her emotions in a healthier way, acknowledging that challenges and endings can lead to growth. Her journey in self-

regulation highlights her emotional development, as she shifts from avoiding discomfort to embracing change with resilience and self-awareness.

Data [3-3]

I write letters when I have feelings I need to get out. It's not because I want to send them. It's because I need to let them go. (Page 45)

In this moment in the novel, Lara Jean explains why she writes love letters but never sends them. She uses letter-writing as a private emotional outlet, a way to process her feelings without confrontation. This highlights her fear of emotional vulnerability and her reliance on solitude as a coping mechanism. The letters serve as a symbolic means for her to release emotions without engaging in direct communication. However, this avoidance of real interaction leads to future conflict when the letters are unexpectedly sent out.

Lara Jean's habit of writing letters instead of expressing her emotions directly demonstrates self-regulation, as defined by Goleman (1995). Rather than acting impulsively on her feelings, she channels them into writing, allowing her to process emotions privately and avoid overwhelming situations. This reflects emotional restraint and control. However, her avoidance of direct confrontation limits her ability to develop healthy communication skills. As the novel progresses, she learns to balance emotional control with openness, highlighting her growth in emotional intelligence.

Data [3-4]

I thought pretending to date Peter would make everything easier. But now, I feel like I'm stuck in a lie. (Page 89)

At this point in the novel, Lara Jean reflects on the unintended consequences of her fake relationship with Peter. Initially, she believed this arrangement would protect her from embarrassment and unwanted attention. However, as emotions grow more complex, she realizes that maintaining the lie is emotionally exhausting and morally conflicting. Her internal struggle highlights her increasing discomfort with deception and foreshadows her need to confront the truth.

Lara Jean's decision to enter a fake relationship demonstrates impulse-driven emotional management, where she seeks short-term relief rather than addressing emotions directly. However, her growing discomfort shows an evolving ability to reflect on her choices and recognize her own emotions.

Data [3-5]

I wanted to disappear. I didn't know how to face him after everything. (Page 95)

At this moment in the novel, Lara Jean struggles with overwhelming emotions after an uncomfortable confrontation. She experiences embarrassment and anxiety, leading to an initial desire to escape rather than deal with the situation. Her instinct to withdraw highlights her discomfort with emotional confrontation and vulnerability.

Lara Jean's immediate reaction wanting to disappear suggests difficulty in managing emotional distress. Instead of addressing the situation calmly, she experiences emotional overwhelm, a common challenge in self-regulation. However, recognizing this urge and eventually facing the issue demonstrates growth in emotional control. Over time, she learns to regulate her emotions more effectively, shifting from avoidance to active resolution.

c. Motivation

As described by Goleman (1995), motivation is the internal drive to achieve personal goals despite obstacles. Lara Jean initially lacks confidence in her ability to handle challenges, often relying on others, like her sister Margot, for guidance. However, as the story progresses, she develops a stronger sense of determination, pushing herself to take risks and grow emotionally. She begins to understand that love, relationships, and personal ambitions require effort and commitment rather than passive acceptance. Her journey reflects an evolving intrinsic motivation, where she learns to take control of her own life and embrace challenges as opportunities for self-improvement.

Data [3-6]

Margot was always the strong one. I don't know if I can be like her, but I have to try. (Page 128)

At this point in the novel Lara Jean reflects on her sister Margot's strength and leadership within their family. With Margot away, she feels uncertain about her own ability to take on responsibility but recognizes the necessity of stepping up. This marks a shift in her mindset as she moves from self-doubt to determination, showing her internal drive to grow.

Lara Jean's statement reflects intrinsic motivation, as she pushes herself forward despite insecurity. Rather than relying on external encouragement, she finds the internal drive to improve and take responsibility. Her desire to emulate Margot's strength demonstrates goal-oriented behavior, a key aspect of emotional intelligence. Due to Lara Jean managing her emotional response to Margot's absence. Instead of letting fear or self-doubt control her actions, she chooses to channel those emotions into determination and proactive behavior. This regulation of uncertainty and transformation of fear into positive action exemplifies the balance between emotional control and personal growth.

Data [3-7]

I used to think love was something that just happened to you, but now I know it's something you have to work at. (Page 150)

At this point in the novel, Lara Jean undergoes a shift in her understanding of love. Initially, she viewed love as a passive experience, something beyond her control. However, through her experiences, she realizes that love requires effort, commitment, and emotional investment. This moment signifies her growing emotional maturity and her willingness to take an active role in her relationships rather than simply waiting for things to happen.

Lara Jean demonstrates self-driven growth, realizing that meaningful relationships require work. Instead of relying on fate, she acknowledges that love demands effort, communication, and resilience. This reflects intrinsic motivation, as she commits to understanding and improving her relationships rather than expecting them to develop effortlessly. Her shift in perspective marks a crucial step in her personal and emotional development.

Data [3-8]

It used to terrify me to think about the future. But now, I think I'm ready to face it, no matter what it brings. (Page 275)

At this moment in the novel, Lara Jean reflects on her fears about the future. Earlier, she was hesitant to embrace change, fearing uncertainty and loss. However, after experiencing emotional growth, she shifts her mindset from fear to acceptance, demonstrating a newfound confidence and resilience. This realization represents her willingness to embrace life's uncertainties rather than avoid them.

Lara Jean exhibits intrinsic motivation by choosing to face the future with courage rather than fear. Her change in perspective highlights her ability to set personal goals and move forward despite uncertainties. Instead of being paralyzed by doubt, she embraces challenges with a proactive mindset, showing her growth in emotional resilience and perseverance.

d. Empathy

As defined by Goleman (1995), empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, fostering deeper relationships. Throughout the novel, Lara Jean grows in her ability to see beyond her own emotions and recognize the perspectives of those around her. Initially, she views love in an idealized way, but over time, she learns to appreciate the imperfections in relationships and the emotions of those she cares about. Her empathy allows her to strengthen her connections, especially as she begins to listen more actively and acknowledge the feelings of others. This emotional growth helps her build more meaningful and authentic relationships.

Data [3-9]

I don't need a perfect love story. I just need something real. (Page 230)

At this moment, Lara Jean reflects on her understanding of love and relationships. She realizes that love is not about perfection but about genuine connection and emotional honesty. Her earlier idealized notions of romance, influenced by books and movies, shift as she recognizes the depth of real relationships, ones that come with flaws, challenges, and growth.

Lara Jean's statement showcases her ability to understand and accept the emotions of both herself and others. She moves away from an idealized, unrealistic view of love and acknowledges the importance of authenticity in relationships. By doing so, she demonstrates emotional maturity and a deeper awareness of others' feelings, needs, and imperfections, which strengthens her ability to build meaningful connections.

e. Social Skills

As defined by Goleman (1995), social skills refers to the ability to manage relationships effectively through clear communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. In the novel, Lara Jean gradually improves in her ability to express her emotions and engage in honest conversations. She learns to stop avoiding emotional discussions and begins to communicate more openly with those around her. This growth helps her address misunderstandings and build stronger, healthier relationships. Her development in social skills is evident as she becomes more confident in expressing her feelings and resolving interpersonal challenges.

Data [3-10]

I used to think love was something that just happened to you, but now I know it's something you have to work at. (Page 150)

At this point in the novel, Lara Jean undergoes a shift in her understanding of love. Initially, she viewed love as a passive experience, something beyond her control. However, through her experiences, she realizes that love requires effort, commitment, and emotional investment. This moment signifies her growing emotional maturity and her willingness to take an active role in her relationships rather than simply waiting for things to happen.

Lara Jean shows improvement in communication. She understands that love involves openly discussing feelings and working through issues, instead of suppressing emotions or avoiding difficult conversations. This marks her progress in developing stronger social skills, as she learns how to handle relationship dynamics in a more emotionally intelligent way.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the portrayal of emotional intelligence in the character of Lara Jean Covey in *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* by Jenny Han through the framework proposed by Daniel Goleman. The analysis demonstrates that all five components of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, are present in Lara Jean's character and are reflected through her thoughts, actions, and interpersonal relationships.

The findings indicate that self-awareness and empathy are the most dominant aspects of her emotional intelligence. Lara Jean shows a strong ability to recognize her own feelings and understand the emotions of others, which plays an important role in shaping her relationships. At the same time, her development in self-regulation and social skills becomes more evident as the narrative progresses, particularly as she learns to communicate more openly and להתמודד emotional challenges more directly.

Furthermore, the study reveals that Lara Jean's emotional responses become more complex over time. This development reflects her growth from a passive and avoidant individual into someone who is more emotionally aware, expressive, and capable of managing relationships. Her journey highlights how emotional intelligence influences decision-making, personal growth, and social interaction.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single character and a single literary work, which may not represent broader patterns across different texts or genres. Future research may explore emotional intelligence in other literary works or compare multiple characters to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

5. References

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