

Romanticized Toxicity

JENNIFER PEREZ RAMOS

WR 122

¿De donde viene el término?

Where does the term come from?

“*Quiero una pareja tóxica*” is what the Hispanic young adults of today are saying. That sentence translates to “I want a toxic partner.” Being part of the Hispanic community I have curiosity as to why adults my age and younger are being attracted to toxicity or partners who are toxic. What is the appeal? How have we changed the meaning of a term used to describe a person as “anyone whose behavior adds negativity and upset to your life” to a person who people would want to be in a relationship with? In order to figure that out, I have to start with the origins of the word. Has it always been intended to be a derogatory term? Well, yes. The word *toxic* first appeared in the mid seventeenth century and came from the medieval latin word, *toxicus*, meaning poisonous (“Word of the Year 2018”). In fact, the word *toxicus* has its own origins from the Greek word *toxicon pharmakon* which was a type of lethal poison used by the ancient Greeks to kill people with their bows (smearred on the tip of an arrow). Crazy

right? Why would anyone want a poisonous partner? In order to answer that question, I need to go to the sources themselves.

¿Por qué nos interesa la toxicidad?

Why are we interested in toxicity?

When gathering information, I thought it would be fascinating to look at how people with these, I dare say, *fetishes* answer questions regarding their attraction to toxic relationships. So I interviewed my cousin. And before I start criticizing her relationship preferences, I want to disclaim that let her know beforehand that I would be giving my opinion on whom she is attracted to.

Celeste Barajas Ramos is a seventeen year old girl who is attracted to *tóxicos* or toxic men. When I asked, “What makes you want a *tóxico*?” She said, “What makes me want a *tóxico* is him being able to truly protect me and never let me go no matter what happens and doing everything he can to get me back.” From her answer, I think that what she is looking for in a relationship is someone who has an obsession. On the *Stylecraze* website, Sneha Tete writes about healthy and unhealthy relationships and what they look like. Tete says, “On the contrary [of love], obsession is an unhealthy sentiment where the obsessive partner does not allow the other person to grow and pursue their interests. They always feel insecure about their partner and experience jealousy and paranoia.” This information touches on some of the responses Celeste gave me in her answer to my questions, especially when she said “never let me go no matter what.” This article is credible for this topic because it was reviewed by Dr.

Waldron, a licensed clinical psychologist, certified couples counselor, licensed alcohol and drug counselor, and sex therapist with 16 years of experience. The credibility of this article is important for my research and analysis of Celeste's answers because it allows me to have a better judgment on these matters.

The next question I asked was "Do you have a current partner? If so, do you consider him toxic or a *tóxico*?" She answered with, "Yes, I do have a current partner, but I do not define him as toxic or a *tóxico* because he lets me be around anyone I know and never checks my phone. He just trusts me with everything and around everyone." I know I am not the only one who feels relief at the fact that Celeste was able to find a partner with whom she can have a healthy relationship, despite her preferences. Those questions did make me wonder where her fascination with toxicity came from, so I asked, "Are your parents toxic?" she answered "Yes, but mostly my mom." Bingo! Her fascination with toxicity comes from her family influences. Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and has studied and taught child development for several years. Stephens wrote "'Seeing is believing.' What kids see and believe, they become. Each and every day, parents build a legacy for kids to inherit. Choose to be a parent who role models family traits worth believing in and worth building upon." Kids respect adults especially if they have a relation to them, and they will also value the language and attitudes being exchanged between those important adults in their life. The relationship legacy her parents have left for Celeste to inherit is of toxic ideologies. I don't think her parents are aware of how their communications are affecting their daughter. And the trends in the media just continue to give her the green signal.

I think it is normal for Celeste to be so influenced by what she sees in the media or what she sees around her (in regards to her family), but I do not believe an obsession with toxicity is healthy. I think that we can all say we have been influenced by the things that surround us, because that is how we learn. As the old saying goes, “monkey see, monkey do.” That is exactly what she has done to learn her preferences with relationships.

The last question I asked her was “How do you define toxic or toxicity?” I asked her this because I wanted to know if her definition would come close to the one given by the Oxford Languages Dictionary. To the question, she answered, “I define toxic or toxicity as breaking up but him still doing everything for you to only be with him, also him protecting you from all men, also them showing up at your house after every argument.” After hearing her response, I think it is clear people are romanticizing words like toxicity; but the media is also romanticizing terms like *obsesión* (obsession), *aislamiento forzado* (forced isolation), and *acoso* (stalking). All of these words have association and are part of the lexis of the trending Hispanic and Latinx relationships. *Lexis* is defined as “all the words and phrases of a particular language [within a community]” (“Lexis”). The best way I can define this term through simple examples is by looking at the word *perro* or *perra* and the word *dog* in English. Both share the definition of the furry creatures we have as pets, but they both have a different meaning within the Spanish speaking communities and the English speaking communities. In Spanish, the word *perro* takes the role of being, well, the obvious furry creature, but it also takes the roles of cheering a friend like in its use in the phrase “*ah perro*,” saying something is cool like in the phrase “*perrón*,” and as an insult like when you hear “*maldito perro*.” There are also

different roles to the word *perra*, like when someone wants to indicate it is a female dog, they say “*perrita*,” and as a derogatory term (the “B” word), they just say “*perra*.”

Whereas in English, there is only the mutual furry creature (seen in both languages) and in the form of greeting a friend informally (this is often written differently though).

Hopefully I have provided an easier to understand definition with my example. Now back to the research. The terms *obsession*, *isolation*, *stalking* and *toxicity* all surround the trending relationships we see in media like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Netflix, etc. and it is causing these terms to become the definition of relationships or what we perceive to be. Those words are becoming the language around relationships within those Hispanic and Latinx communities.

La toxicidad que nos rodea

The toxicity that surrounds us

Toxicity is seen all over Hispanic entertainment, for instance in songs like “*El Tóxico*,” by Grupo Firme and Carin Leon, both very large figures in Latin American music and in *La Musica Regional y Corridos* genre. They both have over 2 million followers on Instagram and over 7 million subscribers on YouTube. The song has reached over 300 million streams on Spotify and over 400 million views on the official video. The song is based on a guy who is still extremely obsessed with his ex-girlfriend and is going out of his way to make her life a nightmare. The song goes:

El Tóxico - Grupo Firme ft. Carin Leon



[Grupo Firme - Carin Leon - El Toxico - \(Video Oficial\)](#)

Te daba mi vida

I gave you my life

Y te valió madre

and it was worth nothing to you

Cuando más te amaba

When I loved you the most,

Te fuiste sin darme explicaciones

you left me without an explanation

Fui el mejor de tus amores

I was the best out of your lovers,

Hoy el peor de tus errores

today, your worst mistake

Me vas a aborrecer porque te juro que

Unbound 2023-2024

You're going to abhor me because I swear

Voy a aferrarme

I'm going to hold on

Voy a ser tu ex, el tóxico

I'm going to be your ex, the toxic one,

El innombrable

the unnameable

Una pesadilla

A nightmare,

Un dolor de muelas

a toothache

Que cada que me nombres sea pa recordarme a mi mamá y mi abuela

*That each time you name me it is to remind me of my mother and
my grandma*

Y me vas a pagar hasta los suspiros

And you're going to pay even for the sighs

Que me arrebataste

you snatched from me

Y tu corazoncito y, de paso, hasta el perro voy a envenenarte

And your little heart, even the dog I'm going to poison

Y no te imaginas

And you can't imagine

Qué alacrán te echaste

what a scorpion you've made for yourself

En tu perra vida vas a hallar la calma hasta que te mueras

In your fucking life will you find your peace until you die

O hasta que me mates

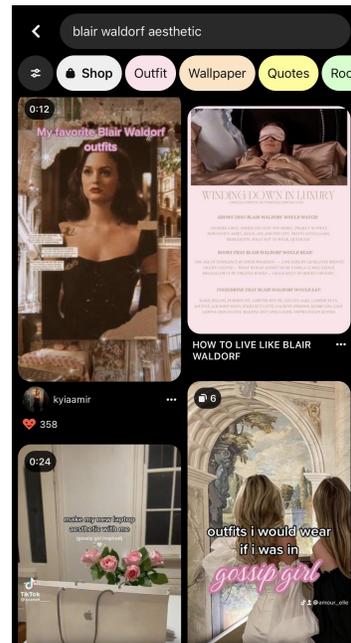
Or until you kill me

In the song, singers Eduin Caz and Carin León take turns singing the lines “*Voy a ser tu ex, el tóxico,*” “*Una pesadilla, Un dolor de muelas,*” “*hasta el perro voy a envenenarte y no te imaginas que alacrán te echaste,*” and “*vas a hallar la calma hasta que te mueras o hasta que me mates*” in the lyrics above. Caz and León are naming some of the most fearful and painful things. Comparing their toxicity to a nightmare, molar pain, a poisoned dog (causing them to poison their dog), a scorpion, and having to end the suffering with death or murder. The threats in this song are terrifyingly evil. But if the things in the song are so extreme and threatening, then why do people continue to listen to them? The answer is simple. It's a catchy song sung by good artists. And I can't lie, even I have fallen for the catchy song.

Other forms of media that share the message of toxicity are television shows like *Gossip Girl*, *YOU*, *The Vampire Diaries*, etc.; novelas like *Teresa*, *Dame Chocolate*, *Rebelde*, etc.; and movies like *Twilight*, *The Invitation*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, etc. all romanticize the toxic protagonist to their target audience consisting primarily of younger adults. Those who have seen *Gossip Girl* were witness to the unstable relationship Chuck Bass and Blair Waldorf shared. In the show *YOU*, Joe Goldberg is a controlling, conniving, and obsessive individual who “murders out of love.” In *The Vampire Diaries*

there are multiple representations of toxic relationships, from the protagonist, Elena, leading on both of the vampire Salvatore brothers, to Caroline being in love with a murder machine, also known as Klaus. *Teresa* is a *novela* where the protagonist picks her next partner based on their wealth and status. In *Dame Chocolate*, Rosita is head-over-heels for Bruce who is just using her to get the secret ingredient to make the family's famous chocolate recipe. In *Rebelde*, we can see some of the most manipulative and abusive relationships between the main characters: Roberta, Diego, Mia, and Miguel. *Twilight* and *The Invitation* are both movies about vampires where the female protagonist is lied to countless times, manipulated, and/or used to keep the family traditions. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a movie where Christian Grey, the protagonist, is obsessed with controlling, abusing, and dominating his female partner(s) for his personal pleasure.

Some of the shows I have mentioned are in my top ten favorites because of the celebrities playing the characters, the glamorous style, and the drama. Blair Waldorf from *Gossip Girl* is one of the most beloved toxic characters. People often post on Pinterest tutorials on “How to become Blair Waldorf” or “What I would wear if I were in *Gossip Girl*” (Screenshot from my Pinterest). She is known as one of the most iconic female characters in my book, and I know I am not alone.



Gossip Girl has recently had a reboot. Though many people loved the show back in 2007, there are some people against the reboot because of the choke-hold the original still has on fans. Elish Kathleen, co-founder of *Culture Sifts*, an online platform

that talks about all things pop culture and the arts, writes, “While *Gossip Girl* has reached icon status since its run from 2007-2012, it has also had its fair share of bad press for its ludicrous storylines and for being a ‘bad influence’ on teens at the time.” The article continues talking about the releases from *Teen Vogue*, an online publication covering all the latest news targeted to teens, on the matter saying that we should not be excited about the reboot because of the messages represented in the first seasons (Kathleen). I think this is important to clear up because in Mexico, there has already been a Spanish reboot of *Gossip Girl* called *Gossip Girl Acapulco*. In the Mexican version, the storylines aren’t necessarily the same as the original because one is obviously set in New York and the other in Acapulco, but they both share the theme of toxic relationships between characters and friends (Nagi). The only difference with the Spanish version is that there was not nearly as much hate regarding the bad influences the show conveyed. I found that the bad ratings were mostly directed towards the cringeness of the show.

After having done the research of the books and movies, I don’t think the Hispanic and Latinx communities are the only ones changing their views on *toxicidad*. There are lots of people from other communities who desire toxic relationships like the ones seen on *The Vampire Diaries*, *Gossip Girl*, and *YOU*. Of course, the other people don’t go around saying they want a *tóxico* or *tóxica*, but just because they don’t address their toxic attractions by name, doesn’t mean they don’t exist.

I am still a little inconclusive over my thoughts on this matter. Should toxicity be removed from everything and everywhere for the sake of not influencing young adults that those ideologies are correct, and risk losing a large part of our entertainment? Or

should we just hope those people are able to tell toxic relationships apart from healthy relationships and find someone that shows them honesty, respect and open communication. Now that I have shared what I think, what do you think of the etymology of the word and how it is being used today in the media?

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