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**REPRESENTATIONS OF PARTNER VIOLENCE IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
DATING VIOLENCE IN STEPHENIE MEYER'S *TWILIGHT* SAGA**

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DISSERTATION

**PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

December 2013

Dedication

Dedicated to the amazing clients of SafePlace 1992 – 2012. I've learned more from you than school.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Mike, Lauren, Paula, Kelly, Julia, Meli, Karen, Noel and Dad.

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This dissertation is a qualitative study examining the behavior of the main characters in the novels in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga as those behaviors compare to behavior listed in warnings about partner violence. The study found specific behaviors of those fictional characters matching those recognized as behaviors of partner violence in all four novels in the series, including behaviors that are illegal. The commercial success and popularity of the novels, aimed at the young adult reader market, suggests broad social acceptance of the characters' behaviors in romantic pursuit. Despite over 30 years of anti-violence work, this research suggests that behaviors are socially well accepted as both indicators of romantic attachment and of partner violence, depending on context rather than behavior. The study demonstrates the fluidity of how behaviors are defined as partner violence, or not. These findings also suggest strategies for social work education, practice and research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

But if safety were all that people thought of
Then who would ever fall in love?

– Garrison Keillor
“The Front Seat”
O What a Luxury, 2013

Partner violence in popular culture

The present qualitative narrative research and analysis examined behavior portrayed by the protagonists in Stephanie Meyers’ *Twilight Saga*, a popular teen romance novel. Comparing indicators listed on websites educating about abuse to the story narrative, the data identified a story line that included behavior identical to behavior considered abusive, which in the context of the story is successfully conveyed as romantic. The successful acceptance of the novel as representing ideal romance in contemporary popular culture has raised significant questions about the remaining fluidity of meaning in violent behavior between intimates despite over thirty years of anti-violence advocacy and legislation. The findings of this research substantiate the important role of social work to examine the constructs of partner violence in the popular culture and imagination closely. This research found evidence of popular social norms that define men’s violent behaviors in intimacy as romantic when the woman wants the man, and abusive when she doesn’t want him. This subtle but effective victim blaming leaves the determination of what is or isn’t abuse mired in the perception of the woman’s reciprocation and dependent on her credibility. *Twilight* in many ways is an ongoing social excusing of men’s violence. By situating the partner violence in the form of an old-fashioned but perfect vampire, the story offers Edward’s beauty and protectiveness as a

justifiable reason for Bella to accept his violence in direct contradiction to the law. While the underlying ethics of the story may generate confusion about what is or is not abuse, it clearly resonates with the public and may be an accurate portrayal of contemporary social norms about romance. As such, the story also offers social work an insight into social norms that contribute to a social problem and suggests strategies for rethinking the social services approach to partner violence.

In contemporary societies there are two conflicting sets of cultural beliefs about family and intimacy. One set of beliefs holds families ought to be the safe harbor and generative force for member wellbeing and violence toward family or intimates is categorically harmful and bad for member wellbeing. While in a parallel set of beliefs, society understands violent behavior in families and between intimates is necessary and in fact beneficial (L. J. Miller, 1990). Current laws, scripture, and popular culture stories around the globe can be found to anchor both sets of beliefs (Goldwater, 2007; L. J. Miller, 1990). People sustain significant altruism and cooperation as well as violent behaviors in their closest relationships.

There is significant evidence that at least one in four women in the US, Canada and Great Britain will experience some form of physical violence (PV) at the hands of either their current or former partners (Dichter & Gelles, 2012), and analysts working within feminist frameworks suggest that PV is a systemic form of social control of women by men (R. E. Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Medina-Ariza, 2007; M. P. Johnson, 2011; Evan Stark, 2009). Victimization studies based on self-reports primarily using the Conflict Tactics Scale measure that women report being nearly equally likely to use violence in heterosexual relationships as men, although without taking sufficient

contextual information into account (Kimmel, 2002). It seems unlikely that women are as violent as men in intimacy and no one ever knew about it, nor is it likely that while men are more violent than women in every other sphere of life that violence is equal in intimacy. At present, the United States has the highest rate of intimate partner homicide of any industrialized nation (Kelley, 2011). In 2010 there were 1,335 murders of intimate partners in the US. Tellingly, 241 husbands or boyfriends were murdered; 1,094 wives and girlfriends were murdered (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Arguably victims of partner violence sustain the greatest tangible costs of violence in terms of physical, psychological, and economic damage, yet partner violence is also estimated to be costly to communities. Data considering the significantly increased healthcare costs of victims estimated that the annual cost to society from PV in terms of healthcare alone may be in the range of \$10 billion. That does not take into consideration mental health costs for children who witnessed PV (Tiefenthaler, Farmer, & Sambira, 2005).

Partner violence is generally recognized a social problem and a personal circumstance warranting social efforts to alleviate the suffering of victims (Bell & Naugle, 2008; Goodman & Smyth, 2011; M. P. Johnson, 2011; S. J. Kulkarni, Bell, & Rhodes, 2012; McHugh & Frieze, 2006; McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007; Roush, 2012). Incidents of partner violence are underreported, frequent in occurrence, and costly to well-being and lives (Chan, 2011; Daniel & Bowes, 2011; Ehrensaft, 2007). The Federal Department of Justice, the Center for Disease Control, the Federal Office for Violence Against Women, as well as state agencies, local governments and private charities provide extensive funds to programs for the victims of partner violence and their children.

However in the face of considerable evidence and spending to address PV, current public conceptualizations of domestic violence remain surprisingly variable (Poelmans, Elzinga, Viaene, & Dedene, 2011). Social norms and definitions of partner violence are transmitted through daily and simultaneous exposure to ideas about person-to-person violence embedded in families, communities, news and entertainment (Kivel & Johnson, 2009; Lang, Bradley, Chung, & Lee, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2009; Wheeler, 2009). Despite four decades of anti-violence effort, regular folk, social workers, police, and other officials have considerable discretion in defining specific behaviors as partner violence. That discretion results in continuing difficulty identifying partner violence, and sometimes-insurmountable challenges to helping or protecting people. The complex coexistence of love and violence results in ongoing confusion and damage.

***Twilight* in everyday discussions**

The young adult novels of the *Twilight* series has enjoyed prominence within contemporary culture, whether you love the story, hate the story, are disgusted or simply curious. Studying the story additionally garnered unexpected casual, while occasionally obsessive and insistent, assistance from students, friends and offspring. While this study was never intended to have auto-ethnographic elements, experience is a great humbler. People who learned about my study offered extensive unsolicited input. This was true across the spectrum from colleagues to students, PhD's to eleven year olds. For example, a colleague I worked with on another research project expressed extreme anguish when she learned about this study. We happened to be working in her office, while her eleven year old daughter was reading at an adjacent table, my colleague immediately turned to her daughter:

Mom (47): “But, no, *Twilight* is our mother-daughter thing. We read the books together. We see the movies. You don’t believe any of that story do you? You understand it’s just make believe don’t you?” Child: “Yeah, but I wish it was true.” – personal communication, June 2010

In addition to the narrative analysis, my findings were colored over time by conversations with students, colleagues, friends, waiters, strangers, and offspring who were unable to resist extensive unsolicited input. For example, at dinner one evening a member of my cohort commented on my research, sparking a response from another cohort member’s daughter. “I don’t understand. Like he’s an abuser or something? He’s a vampire. You can’t do that.” I asked if she recalled Bella waking from her honeymoon night covered in feathers and bruises. She answered that I couldn’t really call it abuse because she liked it. “So hurting your lover isn’t abusive if she likes it?” This time her answer was dismissive, “that’s not what I meant.” Although we left it there, her perspective wasn’t unusual and left me wondering if the victim’s consent to abuse changed it from abuse into something else. I was part of several conversations about consent, S & M, fantasy and romance without any of us being especially clear where the lines were drawn. It is impossible to imagine that this research was not affected by the unsolicited input.

Research rationale

Narrative fiction as evidence

In his comprehensive and compelling research in *The Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* Brian Boyd (2009) brings together considerable coherent and convincing evidence that our capacity to create stories, specifically fictional

stories, confers an evolutionary advantage on us. “Humans can fine-tune the emotional impact of shared attention on cooperation. We can draw on explicit shared models, exemplars, and admonitions, on myths, stories, and ritual reenactments.” (p. 107). In that sharing, people see and pass along future possibilities between each other. He goes on to say, “Stories not only make norms explicit, but also invite us to attend, rouse emotions amplified by our social attunement, and solve what economists call the problem of common knowledge ... by making us feel that we share these values and react in much the same way.” (p. 108). While we cannot ever be unacknowledged observers of a moment between lovers when it is decided, perhaps agreed upon, that this touch is pleasurable while this other is intolerable, we can and do create imaginary stand-ins to share the common knowledge of intimacy. A couple on a television daytime drama or in a novel shows us how it might look to fall in love, to mate.

The humanities and communication studies have a history of viewing popular culture as in relationship to social understanding. Scholars have investigated a variety of human behaviors through fiction; workplace envy in mainstream fiction (Patient, Lawrence, & Maitlis, 2003), nationalism in suspense novels (Schneider-Mayerson, 2011), the positive role of romance fiction for women (Ang, 1987), the impact of post-feminism in popular fiction (A. Taylor, 2012), and the romanticizing of psychopathological personality traits in men (Merskin, 2011). Literature has a supplementary role in offering shared simulations of behavior and emotions (Colm Hogan, 2010). Culture is created and norms are shared through the reciprocal producing, dissemination and consuming of meanings in recognizable ways (*The Johns Hopkins guide to literary theory & criticism*, 2005). Fiction is one of those recognizable ways.

There are clear limitations to the use of studying novels for evidence of violent behavior in relationships. Fiction is not, nor does it represent, actuality. Even very young readers and listeners understand that what happens in a fictional story is imaginary (Kokkola, 2011). Fiction is a mediated narrative and reality is a separate and distinct construction. What happens when readers encounter a fictional world is complex and sophisticated. Narrative operates within a complexity of levels, those of the author, the voice of the narrator, as well as those of the implied reader and the actual reader are in continual interaction (*The Johns Hopkins guide to literary theory & criticism*, 2005). Yet, a study of the norms, values and emotions surrounding partner violence via the public arena of fiction has distinct advantages: 1) avoiding the exploitation of victim's or perpetrator's perceptions when they vulnerable due to having been labeled as such; 2) avoiding the interference of social desirability conflicts in professional interview situations, 3) the presentation of the full range of human emotions, including the intensity of both positive and negative feelings and actions, and 4) extremely popular fiction has been carefully vetted by the culture. First by the person who writes into it an imaginary confection of the norms they know both consciously and unconsciously. Next by editors and publishers who work diligently to ensure that enough other people share the assumptions of this confection to make a profit. Finally by consumers, who give new life to one person's story by raising it up into the public awareness and then repeating it in other formats and tellings over and again. By the time an element of a story has become a cultural touchstone – think of “beam me up” – that story has become considerably more than what an author wrote (Frank, 2010). Such fictions provide ample stomping grounds for hunters of norms, values, emotional experiences and other intangible aspects of social

lives. As a complement to the empirical research in the field, the study of PV in fiction has the potential to provide additional insights to the harmful behavior and feelings behind the veil of romance.

For the purposes of this research the phrase partner violence is used in its broadest sense to include all the behaviors referred to by the following, sometimes interchangeable terms: intimate partner violence (IPV), intimate partner abuse (IPA), domestic violence (DV), domestic abuse, teen dating violence, dating violence, family violence, wife abuse, common couples violence, couples violence, etc. A single term is used for the sake of brevity in the face of this complex set of behaviors. No physical, emotional, economic, sexual, or other kinds of purposeful harm caused to anyone for any reason by a lover is intentionally excluded from the meaning of partner violence.

The study of partner violence rhetoric investigates how texts such as laws, policies, textbooks, journal articles, novels, movies, television, news, *et al* are used to organize and maintain social groups such as helpers and victims. Narrative rhetoric is an important element in constructing the meanings and identities of victims, survivors, abusers and loved ones. The stories people understand contribute to coordinating behavior in response to PV whether it is calling the police, fleeing home, seeking case management or counseling, or living with shelter rules and meetings. Narrative also has the capacity to mediate power inside a relationship, between the relationship and society, with interveners like police and shelter workers. Narrative and rhetoric also persuades: participants that they are victims and perpetrators; victims that they need help; funders to give money to programs. Campaigns, movements, and media, as well as fiction all reflect social concerns – they are rhetorical manifestations of culture.

Researchers find the evidence of what happens in partner violence by excavating memories of victims and perpetrators, third party reports by police and other interveners, and the visible effect of injuries, separation, and recrimination (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2008; Gelles, 2007; Song, 2012). Yet much, if not all, of what happens in intimate relationships – good and bad – and how the lovers interpret it remains opaque. One accessible arena in which people do dream about and create visible intimacy is in stories. Fiction allows people to safely explore topics otherwise considered private. Fiction that achieves popularity and endures over time also serves a crucial function in the dissemination of culture and the creation of potential futures. Popular communication is marked by being mass distributed, mass mediated, and struggled over in the public arena. Popular communication artifacts, such as best selling novels, work at the structural level as the building blocks of ideology including around issues of race, class, gender, identity, orientation, *etc* (Gunn & Brummett, 2004). Few things reveal social beliefs as effectively as the imaginary realms we choose to escape into *en mass*. As such, fiction is a rich resource for examining beliefs about partner violence.

The tendency of people to attend more closely to stories than to facts makes the ideas presented in all forms of fiction - novels, movies, sitcoms, dramas, plays - highly contagious (Boyd, 2009). The popularity of some fiction extends its reach considerably farther than that of policy, advocacy or even the law in its likelihood to influence social expectations, norms and values, and beliefs about what is or is not acceptable behavior. Campaigns, laws, policies, news, political movements, social media, as well as all the various forms of fiction, function as both reflections and powerful enforcers of social concerns. While their primary intentions may range from education and information

sharing to entertainment, they also serve as rhetorical manifestations of cultural norms and understanding (Black, 1978; Campbell & Burkholder, 1997; Hart & Daughton, 2005; Hughey, 2009). Popular culture is a rich, yet underutilized, resource for evidence about the place of partner violence in society.

The *Twilight* Saga Synopsis

Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga is an unabashed love story originally told in four novels. The story is the fictional depiction of romance between a teen-aged human girl and a teen-aged, although 100 years old, vampire boy. Bella, the teen heroine of the story is also its primary voice. By her own account, Bella is clumsy and plain, shocked and awed by attention from the hero Edward. As her story unfolds she finds that Edward is not only attractive and mysterious; he is a vampire. The attraction between Bella and Edward, their struggle to find a way to have a romance and the results are the fuel of the story told in the original four novels.

Twilight Book 1

Bella, the heroine of the story, relocates to a small town in Washington to live with her father. On her first day at a new high school Edward Cullen, a classmate and the story's hero, captivates her attention. Unbeknownst to Bella, Edward is a vampire. He is part of a vampire family that refuses to consume human blood, instead feeding on the blood of large animals. The vampires in the story often have special powers in addition to their sparkling white skin, chiseled beauty and physical super strength. Edward hears other's thoughts. This is not a selective talent he controls, although he can focus it to listen to those he wants to, he cannot have silence. He learns of Bella's arrival through the thoughts of his fellow students. Yet to unsuspecting Edward, the scent of Bella's

blood is inexplicably irresistible. Adding intrigue to her scent, he cannot hear her thoughts. After an out of town hiatus to prevent killing her and consider his options, Edward returns to his vampire family and school determined to co-exist with Bella. Feeling as if he is physically unable to ignore her, he hovers around her, teases her, follows her, and sneaks into her bedroom at night to watch her sleep. He uses other people's thoughts to know what she is doing and where she is, and he able to eavesdrop on her conversations through other people as well. Essentially he stalks her. Despite fleeting recognition his behavior scares her, Bella is flattered by his attentions. She discovers he is a vampire through a friend and the danger of him combined with the beauty of him proves riveting. Bella assures Edward she doesn't care that he's a vampire, and the begin dating. Edward's attention is itself dangerous, and in addition he puts Bella in the path of other vampires much less restrained in their behavior towards humans than the Cullen family.

New Moon Book 2

The first novel ends after Edward has saved Bella from death at the hands of another vampire. In book two, immediately post this first encounter with vampires interested in killing Bella, Edward lies to her, ends the relationship summarily and abandons her in the woods. He then leaves the country with his family. In the wake of Edward's confounding departure, Bella's narration comes to a complete halt. The months immediately following Edward's departure are symbolized with pages on which nothing is communicated except the name of the month. For the intentions of the story, Bella ceases to exist. When she does communicate with readers again after four months, she describes emotional numbness of such profundity she is nearly catatonic. That is until she

realizes that when she is physically in danger she feels close to Edward and hears his voice. When she is in peril she internally hears his voice asking her to stop her risky behavior, the voice she misses desperately. When Bella jumps off a cliff into the ocean and is swept out by the undertow of a riptide Edward's sister, Alice who is able to see the future, sees Bella's future death in her mind's eye which is communicated to Edward via his ability to read Alice's mind. While the werewolves save Bella, Edward heads to the vampire coven in Italy he hopes will kill him. Bella and Alice arrive in Italy and save Edward, but as a group they incur the fury and suspicion of the vampire coven resulting a threat to hunt the entire Cullen family if Bella isn't made into a vampire.

Eclipse Book 3

In the third book, the Cullen clan has returned to Forks. Edward has conceded he has to be with Bella, and to ensure her moment to moment safety from both her own clumsiness and other vampires seeking to kill her he controls where she goes, what she does and who she sees. Vampire law prevents Bella from sharing information about vampires with humans, which separates her from her parents and other friends by intense secrecy. While visiting vampires hunt Bella, and Edward is forced into an uneasy truce with the werewolves, the couple plans their wedding.

Breaking Dawn Book 4

In the fourth and final book of the *Twilight* Saga, *Breaking Dawn*, Bella and Edward's love story teeters on the precipice of happily ever after. Bella and Edward get married, make love for the first time, get pregnant, have a daughter and rally to fight off the destructive vampire enforcers intent on killing their family.

Public reception of Twilight

There are several socially situated indicators of reader's enchantment with the story. Sheer book sales worldwide, while ever increasing, at this writing have exceeded 115,000 million (stephaniemeyer.com). The first novel of the series debuted at #5 on the NYTimes best sellers list in 2005 (New York Times). Subsequently the story has been adapted in five films with the film adaptation of the second half of the final book having arrived in theaters November 26th 2012, marking seven years of cultural fascination with the story. In addition to the books and films there are *Twilight* pages on Facebook and websites dedicated to the saga. There are also thousands of stories written by fans based on the novel's characters, setting, and other proprietary material in the form of fan fiction. From the fan fiction at least two stories have been plucked up by publishers, re-written to avoid plagiarism, and published, including E. L. James's best selling *Shades of Gray* trilogy. Readers' engagement with the story has also extended to lengthy on-line conversations on a variety of the websites devoted to the series, as well as in response to news coverage of the series. Meyer's official website lists and links to over 100 fan sites. The popular website Fanfiction.net hosts over 130,000 *Twilight* based stories written by and for fans. Twilighted.net has a category of fan created *Twilight* fiction wherein all the story's characters are presented as human with over 2,500 entries. *Twilight* readers not only buy and read the books, they go see the movies, they write their own versions, and they re-create the story for themselves over and over again. As fascinating as the phenomenon of the series' success is, that success has reached a level where close academic examination of the story content can be useful (Anatol & Kramar, 2011; *Bitten by Twilight*, 2010; Wilson, 2011).

The *Twilight* Saga is structured as a first person melodrama wherein one purpose of the story is to provide a reader direct and intense involvement in the narrator's emotional life (Kapurch, 2012). As such, the story includes recounted dreams as well as detailed descriptions of both pleasure and suffering experienced by the narrator. The story is also a coming of age tale, recounting the narrator's transition from adolescence to young adulthood, from high school to early marriage and parenthood. First and foremost though, the story is a romance, with the requisite architecture of 'boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl' plot milestones. Readers have expectations of specific narrative forms and melodrama promises participants physical engagement with the emotions of the tale, vampires, werewolves and dark passions are also staples of this form.

Despite its successes the story has received significant and serious criticism from the public – they are called Twi-haters – as well as from scholars. Topics that have engendered critiques include the absence of any kind of diversity in the story, which has been equated by critics to homophobia, sexism, racism, ageism, and classism. The story is exclusively heteronormative. All of the romantic relationships in the story are heterosexual, with no mention of any other sexual orientation in its two thousand plus pages (Ames, 2011). The women in the story are passive to a fault, they are the nurturers, the cooks, the frilly characters enjoying fashion and home comforts. The men in the story are protectors, drawn to fast cars, fighting and sports (Ames, 2011). The narrative is securely anchored in cultural whiteness, and Meyer's reverent descriptions of the beauty of extraordinary white skin are nearly cartoonish in their frequency. A characteristic of the desirable vampires is that their perfect, white skin literally sparkles (Wilson, 2011). The story is also decidedly embedded in luxury. The story is about upper class life that

aspires to extravagant riches (Goebel, 2011). Some scholars have attributed these shortcomings to the author's Mormonism (Tosano, 2010), and others have attributed it to the conservative economics of mass produced literature. Regardless, there is plenty about the story to critique in addition to its melodramatic flavor.

One cannot effectively think about the romance of Bella and Edward without deciding how to manage the genre bending presence of desirable vampires and werewolves. For the present investigation the infusion of vampires and werewolves into present day reality is a solemn metaphor for the epitome of positive personal attributes – such as beauty, immortality, youth, power, and strength, and is not understood as humor or parody in anyway. In the alternate present world of Twilight, individual vampire or werewolf characters may be either good or bad, but with the physical and psychic attributes they bear they are earnestly presented by the story as vastly superior to the humans they impersonate during their day-to-day lives.

Key terms

The World Health Organization defines intimate partner violence thus: “As well as acts of physical aggression such as hitting or kicking, violence by intimate partners includes forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion, psychological abuse such as intimidation and humiliation, and controlling behaviors such as isolating a person from family and friends or restricting access to information or assistance” (Kelley, 2011). Attempts to put limiting boundaries around the concept can also yield more awkward definitions like this one: “physical violence against a current or former intimate partner with whom the abuser shares or has shared a domicile” (Jouriles et al., 2008).

The number of phrases often used in place of partner violence include, but are not

limited to: partner abuse, family violence, intimate partner violence, intimate partner abuse, marital abuse, common couple's violence, teen dating violence, courtship violence, battering, relationship aggression, mutual combat. Survivors stress that abuse may not be violent, while violence is always abuse (Teitelman, Ratcliffe, McDonald, Brawner, & Sullivan, 2011). People in the GLBTQ community as well as people in the heterosexual community who are not married stress that violence is a feature of all types of romantic or partnered relationships (Richardson & May, 1999; Williams & Frieze, 2005).

The images conveyed by the terms used to describe partner violence are not synonymous, nor are they necessarily tightly related to what is happening in relationships when they include violent acts. Words are frequently used and misused to shape the way we think, act, solve problems and view what is in front of us (Standing, 2007). The terms used by researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and laypersons to discuss partner violence are also susceptible to euphemism for a variety of reasons, false modesty about sex and home certainly amongst them. Ordinary language gives the impression that words actually have the same meaning from person to person. It's easy to far overestimate any consistency and understanding in normal communications. Contributors to the dominant the public discourse on partner violence can and do assume far more consensus than exists (Ashcraft, 2000). The topic can be hard to write about without using too much jargon or getting too narrow.

It is not possible to examine fiction without honoring the traditions and structures of the format under consideration. These traditions and ways of talking are shared between storytellers and audiences; often without even thinking, and certainly without

naming them, we understand the agreements of the medium we are participating in. Those tacit agreements affect the story telling. For television it means a three-act format – the set-up, the crises, the resolution – as well as the inclusion of advertising, for movies there is the industry and audience imposed 2.75 hours time limit, and for novels it means literary conventions. There is no format in which a storyteller has an infinite amount of time or space to work with, therefore what is included in a story and what is left out has the weight of intentions. Audiences are distinctly disappointed by fiction that oversteps its structure, worse they can become confused and stop participating at all. While I have attempted to write about partner violence and the literary conventions clearly, I have also provided a glossary of terms for additional clarity (see Glossary).

Research questions

The following research questions were developed to guide the analysis of the novels as data:

- Does the romantic protagonist of Stephenie Meyer's novel *Twilight* exhibit stalking behaviors as measured against behaviors listed on the National Crime Victims Center (NCVC) website?
- Do the romantic leads in Stephanie Meyer's novels *New Moon* and *Eclipse* exhibit emotionally abusive behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the Love is Respect website?
- Does the male romantic protagonist of Stephanie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn* exhibit physically abusive behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the National Domestic Violence Hotline website?

- If yes, then does the heroine of the novel experience fear in response to the behaviors?
- What narrative strategies did the author use to construct the character's understanding of the behaviors?

Through answering these questions this analysis will also illuminate how violent behaviors between lovers, although deleterious and illegal, can be portrayed in literature, cinema and television as intimate, romantic or funny. Lovers characterized by the behaviors of partner violence in fiction are held up as idealized models of romance and commitment far more often than as cautionary tales. This research specifically contributes to an improved understanding of how violent behavior is culturally perceived, increases knowledge of the broad context within which partner violence happens, and suggests new additional strategies for addressing the problem. Additionally this research offers a clear example of popular culture as a location of social norms and belief systems pertinent to social work efforts.

Chapter Two: Theory and Literature

Theory

Three theories support the use of narrative fiction as evidence of social norms and cultural beliefs: constructionism, social learning and public arena theory. Constructionism provides a useful framework for exploring the processes by which people describe, explain and understand their world; it is concerned with words, political processes and the implications of definitions and explanations (Hacking, 2000; Heiner, 2009). Social learning theory outlines the ways people learn more, and more quickly, from what they watch than what they experience directly. Public arena theory recognizes the cultural use of public scrutiny as a practice of social control. Public scrutiny – that is, holding someone or some situation up for examination and comment – has the instructive capacity to teach about the boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable (Linklater, 2007).

Social Construction

Constructionism views reality as the ever-changing result of complex shared agreements within a society. The building processes of naming, describing, understanding, explaining and attributing meaning is seen as a collaborative framework by which a society, culture, or family communicate about what is tolerated or not tolerated by the group. Social constructionism also involves looking closely at who benefits and who loses because of how the world is defined or explained. From this vantage a single, shared, uncontested, or true definition of any concept does not exist (Hacking, 2000; Heiner, 2009; C. L. K. Muehlenhard, 1999).

Scholars studying social problems, including that of partner violence,

frequently turn to social construction explanations. Close examination of who decided there is a problem, what the problem is, how it was determined who has the problem, or how and who will respond is a useful strategy for researchers seeking evidence about the effects of problems or solutions on people. A social problem is not a fixed concept. The perception of behaviors or circumstances as problems is created within a complex grid of shared cultural understandings communicated through rituals, books, customs, institutional rules and policies, news media and entertainment (Heiner, 2009).

What is partner violence? Social norms and definitions of partner violence are created through daily simultaneous exposure to social practices at the individual, family, community and societal levels. When violence in homes comes to be foregrounded in public discourse as problematic for not just the participants but for the society as a whole, learning how partner violence came to be understood as a problem, by whom, to whom and for what purposes is an essential step in evolving effective strategies for remedying or eliminating the violence. It is equally important to seek and understand the forces that maintain partner violence in society.

Person to person violence is especially complex, because the act is often not as significant as the context when determining whether the violence is socially acceptable or unacceptable (Goldwater, 2007; Noh, Lee, & Feltey, 2010; Zizek, 2008). The complexity is magnified because people have an irresistible interest in defining violence in ways that excludes their own behavior (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Consequently how violence is perceived in specific contexts also has a lot to do with the interests of those who have power. An excellent example of the way context effects how violence is perceived was illustrated in a political cartoon in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal for killing

Trayvon Martin. Joe Morin, cartoonist for the Miami Herald protested assertions that the incident was not racially informed with a drawing showing a black George Zimmerman and a white Trayvon Martin in his hoodie under the caption “What if...” (see Figure 1). The visual impact of his cartoon evokes obvious disbelief that the case would have had the same result had the races been reversed. The cartoon also underscores the inherent power of being white.

Figure 1: Joe Morin cartoon



(Morin, 2013)

Viewing a single illustrative activity or situation through a variety of lenses can further illuminate the complexity. In contemporary US norms slapping someone on the palm of the hand is a pleasurable greeting, slapping someone on the back of the hand is scolding. Smacking a person on the butt is potentially congratulatory, encouraging, punishment or sexually harassment. The social contracts, personal relationships and immediate circumstances between the people involved constructed the interpretations of the slapping, even though the hands and butts registered identical heat and sting from the contact. Popular culture rhetoric about relationship behavior is a rich resource for evidence about the construction of partner violence, social norms, values and

participation in partner violence.

Alternatively, constructing domestic violence as if it were an illness or a health threat as the Center for Disease Control does (www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/intimatepartnerviolence) produces a specific cascade of consequences, encouraging the use of a medical model to think about the problem. The medical model has many shortcomings as a way to address interpersonal concerns, not least of which is the conception of behaviors as sicknesses with unwarranted expectations for prevention or cure.

Each of the constructions above had implications for teaching social work practice. One strategy of social services has been to relieve society, or people, of problems at the individual level either by helping people seen as affected by social problems or changing those people viewed as creating social problems. As an alternative strategy a group could end a social problem by deciding and then convincing the general public that the behavior in question was not problematic and was in fact beneficial, as has happened with the issues of inter – racial and gay marriage.

Social construction informed this research by providing a theoretical framework describing the reciprocal relationship between the *Twilight* novels and their audience. *Twilight* is a contemporary reflection of social norms and expectations about romance conveyed in part by writers of 19th century melodramas that have continued to be part of classic literature. In its turn, *Twilight* conveys social norms about romance to a contemporary audience of readers. The development of an explicit understanding of pervasive social norms underpinning violent behavior in intimacy has the potential to support improved strategies for intervention and prevention of partner violence.

Social Learning

In his book *Social Learning Theory* (1977) Albert Bandura articulated a comprehensive theory that described how human behaviors are learned, influenced and regulated. He identified and organized the roles played in the human learning process by vicarious observation, symbolic thinking, and the capacity for self-regulation into a modeling theory of learning. The modeling theory defined human behavior as a constant reciprocal interaction between thinking, acting and the effect of the environment (Aronfreed, 1972; Bandura, 1972, 1977; Demirbaş & Yağbasan, 2006; Sunitiyoso & Matsumoto, 2009; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Social learning, later coined social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1989), assumed people do not come with many innate patterns of behavior. Rather, the theory articulated two ways people learn patterns of behavior; either through direct experience or vicariously by observation (Bandura, 1977). Once something is learned by experience or by observation a person thinks about it, and that cognition has significant influence on the learning process and on future behavior (Bandura, 1989). Complex and even novel behaviors can arise by someone integrating a variety of activities from differing observations (Bandura, 1977).

Social learning theory described the human learning process as mainly vicarious with the primary features of modeling, symbolic retention, rehearsal and performance (Bandura, 1972, 1989). In addition to the original elements of the learning theory, SCT distinguishes three modes of human agency: direct personal agency – one's own actions, proxy agency - relying on someone else to act at one's behest, and collective agency - organized social action (Bandura, 2001). Bandura extends this operationalizing to

specific examples of natural social learning from mass media (Bandura, 2001; 2009).

Social cognitive theory informed this study by providing a concrete explanation of the mechanisms involved in learning social constructs and norms vicariously through fictional stories that stir the imagination and are widely shared. Reading the *Twilight* saga is both a unique experience for each reader and an insidiously shared experience within the culture – including those who haven't physically read the story – that has influence well beyond the intentions of the story's author. As such, the story also has revelatory power for anyone concerned with reducing partner violence by offering a window into how people define or understand violent behavior in intimacy fluidly as sometimes good and sometimes bad.

Public Arena Model

The public arena model is a framework that allows scholarship to view specific locations, both real and implicit, as the site of key communication and public response. Examples of public arenas range from the international or global arena where there are conversations about water, slavery, and genocide to the US legislative arenas federal and state, from the arena of US national news media to the arena of celebrity, or from the public health arena to the arena of the Southern Baptist Church. Each arena has its own lingo, issues, and point of view (Wilkins & Christians, 2001).

Discourse and disclosure in the public arena has an important function: articulation of the social order (Giroux, 2011). The public learns about the wider world and how society values behaviors in part from what is available to them in the public arenas they have the most contact with.

The most common widely shared stories about partner violence involve

celebrities, homicides or are fiction – in a movie, book or television show. News stories about partner violence homicides, at the local and the national level, are extremely influential in shaping what the general public knows about partner violence (Nancy Berns, 2001; Bullock, 2007).

Figure 2: Famous couples that participated in partner violence



(From left to right: O.J. Simpson & Nicole Brown Simpson, Mike Tyson & Robin Givens Tyson, Chris Brown & Rhianna, Russell & Taylor Armstrong, Ike and Tina Turner, Sean Pean & Madonna, Charlie Sheen & Denise Richards)

These six high profile couples all participated in violence at a level that involved police intervention and eventually ended the relationships. Because of the celebrity involved there are thousands of pictures of these people in the public arena. By choosing these particular pictures to represent a ‘hall of fame’ of the ‘perfect battered woman’ I have constructed an instant visual rhetoric about my idea of society’s idea of the ‘perfect battered woman’: she is pretty, successful, smiling, she is also dependent on her man, she is captured by him. Public rhetoric, especially in the mass media as well as in public

policy, acts as both the reflection and promoter of social norms and understandings. What most people – including victims – know about partner violence is learned either directly from mass media outlets, via observed real behaviors in their immediate environs or observed imaginary behaviors in the media in their immediate environs.

The public arena model informs this research by illuminating and validating the societal ‘place’ where the fictional story of *Twilight* has influence. Where Social cognitive theory describes how individuals learn, the public arena theory provides an understanding of how group norms are communicated and enforced. How violence in relationships is portrayed in television shows, movies and in novels reflects public perception and influences public perception simultaneously. The public arena has grown in the past ten years with the expansion of the blogosphere through the inter-net where people can share their opinions and experiences, as well as create and directly share their fictions without the filter of an editor or accountant (Maratea, 2008).

Young adult fiction is an arena where high impact communication happens with millions of kids and adults of all ages. This arena, highly subject to word of mouth as well as marketing claims, has produced several of popular culture’s most engaging and well-known storylines. J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson and the Olympian series, Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games Trilogy, and Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* Saga are examples of popular artifacts that have touched millions of lives through books and cinema. While the stories are each good enough, what is most impressive is these narratives’ ability to sweep up the attention and imagination of large segments of the US population. People who have not read the books or seen the movies are familiar with the titles, characters and themes of these novels. The successes of these

stories are in part because they resonate with commonly held struggles of being a young adult. Beneath the magic, the gods, the dystopia and the monsters lay recognizable experiences and assumptions of being.

Literature

Partner violence

There is a significant body of literature describing, defining and examining the effects of partner violence (Busch & Valentine, 2000; Ken Corvo & Johnson, 2003; Heiner, 2009; M. Johnson, 2000; Kelley, 2011, 2011; S. J. Kulkarni et al., 2012; S. J. Kulkarni, Lewis, & Rhodes, 2011; Lackey, 2003; Libal & Parekh, 2009; Logan, Walker, & Hoyt, 2012; Loseke, 1992; Macy, Giattina, Parish, & Crosby, 2010; May, 1999; Maysel, 1991; McMullan, Carlan, & Nored, 2010; McPhail et al., 2007; J. Miller, 2006; C. L. Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999; Murray & Welch, 2010; Poelmans et al., 2011; Power, Bahnisch, & McCarthy, 2011; Pyles, 2004; Rothenberg, 2002, 2003; Rouseve, 2005; Saudino & Hines, 2007; Straus, 1980; Walker, 1999). Much research into causes of partner violence focuses in areas such as developmental and attachment theories about intergenerational learned violent behavior and expectations of hostility (Cui, Durtschi, Donnellan, Lorenz, & Conger, 2010; Ehrensaft, 2007; Lackey, 2003) and the possible behavioral evolutions from bullying to dating violence to partner violence (Corvo 2009). There is also a body of study that targets sexism as a cause (R. E. Dobash et al., 2007, 2007; R. P. Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Pyles, 2004). Within this literature there is a schism between the premise that partner violence of all kinds is rooted in men's violence against women, and the premise that partner violence is symmetrical with men and women equally likely to use violence in an intimate relationship (M. P. Johnson, 2011;

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2009; Straus, 2011). Scholars have also commented that until very recently co-occurrences of partner violence, child abuse and general violence have not been adequately recognized (Ehrensaft, 2007). As early as the 1980's a multifactorial model was put forward combining elements of individual, familial and societal structures putting family violence into the context of a high level of violence in our culture (Straus, 1980). There is considerable research on services for victims and perpetrators of partner violence as well, addressing wide ranging aspects of services from effectiveness of interventions, the effects of blame of services, how services are connected, service provider beliefs about partner violence, the locations of services, and how clients use services to provide a few examples of recent studies (Ken Corvo & Johnson, 2003; Goodman & Smyth, 2011; Haselschwerdt, Hardesty, & Hans, 2011; Kazdin, 2011; S. J. Kulkarni et al., 2012; Macy et al., 2010; Orpinas, Nahapetyan, Song, McNicholas, & Reeves, 2012; Power et al., 2011).

Other research has examined partner violence in adolescent relationships (Draucker, Martsof, & Stephenson, 2012; Teitelman et al., 2011). Studies have measured predictors of teen dating violence behavior (Casey, Beadnell, & Lindhorst, 2008; Foshee et al., 2009; Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999; Orpinas et al., 2012; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003), while other studies have examined teen attitudes towards violence in relationships (Draucker et al., 2012; Mueller, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2013). There have also been efforts at measuring the consequences of violence for adolescent mothers (S. J. Kulkarni, 2009), as well as the effectiveness of prevention interventions (Ball et al., 2012).

Of direct concern to the present study, researchers in the social sciences and communications studies have examined the significance and usage of language and rhetoric about partner violence. In studies of news reporting in print journalism reporters were found to have used both direct and indirect victim blaming tactics in their coverage (Anastasio & Costa, 2004; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Bullock, 2007; Richards, Kirkland Gillespie, & Dwayne Smith, 2011; R. Taylor, 2009), and a statewide intervention education efforts was discovered to change reporter coverage of partner violence (Ryan, Anastario, & DaCunha, 2006). Researchers also looked at how the O.J. Simpson trial effected reporting of partner violence (Maxwell & Huxford, 2000), finding the while reporting on non-Simpson related partner violence increased immediately post-trial the increase did not last, although reporting about help services for victims remained higher than pre-trial.

Research on public rhetoric about partner violence has also described the strategies of discourse used in magazines to resist relating partner violence to male privilege while placing of responsibility for partner violence on women (Nancy Berns, 2001; Nettleton, 2011). A study of teen magazines investigated the themes conveyed in teen magazines and identified both a cultural and an individual frame, and found that articles emphasized the situation of the victims, virginity, as well as minimized the dynamics of violence (Hensman Kettrey & Emery, 2010).

There is scant empirical research mention of the social construction of PV and the few empirical studies that do mention or address concepts of PV or definitions of PV do so tangential to their primary research topics, such as gender symmetry in perpetration where definitions make a huge difference in outcomes (Allen, Swan, & Raghavan, 2008;

Michalski, 2005), or the use of new technology to analyze police reports where lack of definitions confuse terms (Poelmans et al., 2011). These studies are mentioned here because they provide examples of the way the construction of PV arises during research, and they offer suggestive ideas about how to go about measuring constructs.

Michalski (2005) suggests that there is a conceptual debate about what should be included in the definitions of violence and in the definitions of partner violence in specific. He proposes at least four different types of violence in intimate relationships, and conducts a secondary analysis of data from the Canadian General Survey applying these typologies to (re)classify answers to questions about behavior with a spouse. The results confirmed different types of violence that characterize intimate partner conflicts (Michalski, 2005).

Coyne *et al* (2011) set out to measure the relationship between viewing media aggression in romantic relationships and actual aggressive behaviors in romantic relationships among young adults. Through the administration of a packet of self-reporting questionnaires to college students they investigated what television shows the students watched regularly, how much time they spent watching those shows as well as their reports of incidents of relationship aggression in the shows and in their dating/romantic relationship – either current or the most recent. The findings of significant correlation between viewing and enacting relational aggression are fascinating, but even more so are the assumptions about how broadly to define what the participants watched and what the participants did as relationship violence.

The application of the Formal Concept Analysis (FCA), a relatively new computer based data analysis tool used to examine police reports in Amsterdam were

challenged by the conceptual breadth of police officers' definitions of PV (Poelmans, *et al* 2011). The discrepancies in officers' reports about events created difficulties in the study when events that looked like PV to the FCA were not reported as such by the officers. There is no mention in their paper about the limitations of the FCA not being able to take context into account as an officer in the field might.

Empirical research on the public language of PV has largely been quantitative and mixed methods research based on content analysis of the language used in the news media and public policy. The content analyses in these studies included the features of examining word counts, phrase counts, counting the number of mentions of a particular topic, and looking at the context in which words were used (or not used) to convey information. These studies were explicitly rooted in social constructionism (Bullock, 2008; Nettleton, 2011; R. Taylor, 2009).

Researchers using qualitative methods of discourse and narrative analysis examining policy documents have additionally explored the ways victims and batterers are characterized in written policies, how those characterizations may re-victimize survivors or over-simplify policy. A notable subset of the content analyses tracing the elusive meaning of PV is the analysis of various data; interviews, focus groups, newspaper reports of PV, policies, television shows, magazines. Viewing the data as artifacts that either reflected or have created public perceptions and values, these studies attempted to raise biases and assumptions from tacit to explicit.

Fiction is written about a wide variety of subjects that include extra-legal or other behavior that deviates from broadly held social norms. The existence of the *Twilight* novels is not surprising as they are written in a time-honored genre; regency era romance

novels brought up to contemporary time. What makes the story notable for study is the overwhelming popularity of the story with women of all ages, and the movies, blogs, fan fiction and other instances of fascination with a fantasy rooted in a violent relationship being held up as perfect. The sheer popularity, and the ubiquitous presence, of this cultural artifact provided an opportunity to learn about how violence is culturally embedded in romance.

Construction of partner violence

Although there is little empirical research explicitly seeking the cultural construction of PV, meaningful conversations are present in peer-reviewed essays and commentary written by leading thinkers and researchers in the field. Those observations and opinions, based on expertise, are published in peer-reviewed journals, and frequently serve to advance theory, knowledge and scholarship in the field. In these scholarly conversations influential ideas are shared about the underlying causes of partner violence (Buss & Duntley, 2011; E. Stark, 2009), the role of feminist theory in framing violence against women (R. P. Dobash & Dobash, 2004; M. P. Johnson, 2011; Straus, 2011), and the role of men in ending intimate violence (Kivel & Johnson, 2009). The discussion of how partner violence is socially constructed is also presented in the peer-reviewed commentary. A large part of the conversation about PV as a social construct has occurred in articles wherein scholars are putting forth their various opinions, thoughts and questions (Bettman, 2009; Ferraro, 1996; Flaherty, 2010; Haaken, 2008; Evan Stark, 2009). The scholars weighing in are from various disciplines, and they have participated in research evaluating various aspects of PV assessment, intervention, or prevention (Ken Corvo & Johnson, 2003; M. P. Johnson, 2011; Kivel & Johnson, 2009; Straus, 2011). In

the summer of 2011, the *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* devoted an issue to the gender issues connected to partner violence. That conversation is lively and promises to be on going.

Within the academy as well as the advocacy community the prevailing view is that PV is caused by a socially promoted domination of women by men (Bettman, 2009; Busch & Valentine, 2000; Kenneth Corvo & deLara, 2010; M. P. Johnson, 2011; S. J. Kulkarni et al., 2012; McPhail et al., 2007; E. Stark, 2009). This is a high level view that makes assumptions about social norms and cultural expectations that devalue women as individuals and in groups, extols male control of situations and people and bestows men the entitlement to use violence to maintain power, control and possession.

Accompanying that view are additional views that PV is transmitted from generation to generation, learned from a personal history of child abuse or witnessing parental abuse (Cui et al., 2010; DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011; Lackey, 2003) and views that PV is learned from socially sanctioned interpersonal violence of all kinds – especially in the media (Foshee et al., 1999; Kivel & Johnson, 2009; Nabi & Clark, 2008). These views tend to locate causes in local surroundings based on social learning from observed violence in the family, in the neighborhood, in school, at work, on television, at the movies, or in the news (Beeble, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2010). Claims makers who have adopted this view may or may not agree with blaming the violence on patriarchy because they tie the violence closely to individual choices to use violence in specific situations, linked to the consistent lack of serious consequences for the use of violence.

Psychological theories of PV perpetration look closely at neurological factors. Early trauma has a strong influence on future violence perpetration. Evolutionary preference including biology or human nature has been explored (Buss & Duntley, 2011). But, primarily the psychological research has focused on individuals including, insecure attachment, developmental disruptions, mental illness, cognitive distortions, or personality disorders (Mayseless, 1991; Roberts, McLaughlin, Conron, & Koenen, 2011).

Much of the above literature is exploratory, discursive and descriptive in nature, and as such the recommendations for future research are aimed at the micro level; recommendations about being responsible social scientists and being aware of the social sciences contributions to social constructs (C. L. Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999), the value of asking the right questions, and other loftier callings to either re-consider the role of gender or to discard it (Flaherty, 2010; Kelley, 2011; E. Stark, 2009). Common themes in recommendations also included concern about the impact of differing constructions of PV coexisting and often competing if not conflicting. What this summary indicates is nascent interest in the construction of partner violence and fledgling attempts to think about, write about, or capture it through reviewing the academic literature from new perspectives, articulating commentary, and most fruitfully through the content analysis of existing public documents, notably the news media, as well as state and local policy. None of the theories guiding current thought about PV are able to fully address the complexities of the violent dynamics (Ehrenschaft, 2008). It is very tough to understand all the kinds of partner violence we can see within any single one of the views in current thought. There is very little research into the impact of popular culture on teen behavior in intimate relationships.

Teen dating and abuse

Learning to navigate dating and nascent romantic attachments are no small issues for adolescents and young adults. 90% of people of high school age (14 – 19 years old) report they are in a dating relationship or have dated in the past (Teitelman, 2011). Research focused on teen romance has shown considerable evidence that teens are seriously romantically engaged with one another during this developmental phase of life and they tend to believe that romance is triggered by attraction and passionate desire (Connolly, 2009).

Children and teens have somewhat limited direct exposure to healthy successful adult dating behavior. The significant adults in their lives are past dating or are careful to mask dating behaviors from their kids to avoid the kids attaching to an adult who may not stay in their lives. In fact, due to the divorce rate, teens are equally likely to be observing a romance in decline or at termination, as they are to be witness to healthy thriving romance. American life is further segmented into developmental groups by schooling, meaning teens spend most of their quality time with other teens also inexperienced in romance. The initial exposure to intimacy in the forms of fiction and entertainment cannot be overlooked as important to teens' learning about romance and relationships. Fiction, whether cinema, television, or novels, provide people with the most in-depth detailed representations of new love. Despite the prevalence of relationship violence in the lives of teens, and the documented negative effect of this violence on their lives, classic and popular culture repeatedly offers teens romanticized positive images of courtship behaviors identical to the behaviors of violent relationships (Bode, 2010;

Collins & Carmody, 2011; S. Kulkarni, 2007). Fiction is significantly easier to access than parents, older sibling, or even friends, when it comes to intimacy. Given its popularity both as a novel and as cinema the *Twilight* Saga is positioned to be prominent among the fictional narratives of new love and intimacy for its adolescent audiences.

Physical abuse

The Center for Disease Control, which considers intimate partner violence to be a preventable health hazard defines physical violence neatly as “the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to, scratching; pushing; shoving; throwing; grabbing; biting; choking; shaking; slapping; punching; burning; use of a weapon; and use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person” (<http://www.cdc.gov>). Despite some variety in definitions it has been estimated that teen dating violence affects 25% of teens (Martsolf, 2012). The risk for experiencing teen dating violence is high; more than half (62%) of young teens (11 – 14 yrs) report knowing friends who have experienced some form of dating violence (Ball, 2012) and between 10 – 40% of teens reporting perpetrating some sort of violence towards a romantic partner (Muller, 2012; Drauker, 2012). A variety of factors have been identified as contributing to the occurrence of dating violence, including violence in families of origin, histories of abuse, bullying, and social norms around romance (Casey et al., 2008; Foshee et al., 1999; S. J. Kulkarni, 2009; O’Leary & Smith Slep, 2003).

Stalking

Recent research revealed the highest rate for being stalked occurs for teens, with the next highest rate being for people between the ages of 20 – 24, additionally people

who stalk are most often between the ages of 18 and 20 (Williams, 2005). Because stalking is a set of pursuit behaviors on the partner violence continuum rarely occurring in isolation from other forms of aggression or intimidation, those surveillance and pursuit behaviors may have a role in predicting further violence in romantic relationships (Evans, 2011). Stalking in the pre-dating behaviors of teens has not been adequately measured or studied. However, in most instances stalking behaviors are conceived as potentially dangerous forms of partner violence when the pursuit is unwanted and occurs post-relationship.

There is relatively little research focused on the stalking behavior of adolescents. Minor acts of violence and threats may be viewed as normal occurrences early in a relationship. These behaviors may not be considered harmful or threatening, but instead may bring a relationship to a higher level of intimacy (Evan, 2011). Partner violence takes various forms, although much of research has focused on physical violence during the relationship. Other forms of partner violence include courtship stalking, emotional abuse, isolation, control and stalking during the breakup of a relationship (Foshee et al., 2009; Martsof, Draucker, Stephenson, Cook, & Heckman, 2012; Tolman et al., 2003). Research on pre-stalking behaviors during the approach to courtship and their relation to future partner violence showed that among college aged young women and men pursuit or stalking type behaviors can occur prior to relationship development. In fact, initial courtship persistence or pre-stalking behaviors maybe relatively common occurrences behaviors used to attract the potential partner, and may include stalking related behaviors (Williams & Frieze, 2005).

Individuals on the receiving end of such romantic pursuit may not interpret persistence or pre- talking behaviors as inappropriate but may instead be flattered and in turn return the affection (Evans, 2011). Pursuit, persistence and mild intimidation may improve the success of romantic approaches, resulting in increased chances of intimacy. The behaviors of approach surveillance, intimidation, and mild aggression used by male and female college students served to both express initial romantic interest and foreshadow physical violence during intimate relationships (Evans, 2011). Surveillance and pursuit behaviors may be considered benign, indeed many activities in the repertoire of a stalker may be considered courtly or romantic in addition to being thought of as aggressive or threatening. No studies have yet explored what highly successful fiction reveals about the nature of stalking behavior in teen romance or applied this knowledge to current stalking prevention strategies. Yet the behaviors of stalking are often seen in literature, cinema and television as intimate, romantic or funny. In the popular film *Legally Blonde* the heroine follows her ex-boyfriend across the country to law school in order to “get him back.” On the CBS show *Two and Half Men* a lead character is stalked by a neighbor through the course of a 22-episode season as a comedic sub-plot. In the film, *The Amazing Spiderman*, Peter Parker falls for Gwen Stacy, puts her picture up as his screen saver, shows up at her work place, and repeatedly uses his ‘spidey powers’ to hang outside her bedroom window without her knowledge or permission. Stephenie Meyer’s novel *Twilight* also offers readers an intensely romantic and startlingly positive portrayal of pre-relationship pursuit behavior.

Emotional abuse and manipulation

Dating violence in the relationships of young adults comes in many forms. While physical violence is exceptionally dangerous, threats and verbal abuse may be used to intimidate and thus control dating partners without having to resort to physical violence (Stark, 2007). Emotional abuse can be subtle and therefore go unidentified as such by teens and their parents (Teitleman, 2011). Advocates and survivors of IPV report experiences of deception, betrayal, and emotional abuse as part of the violence in PV (Kullarni, 2012). Emotionally abusive tactics can include non-physical tactics such as verbal abuse – examples include demeaning and threatening – isolation and humiliation intended to force dependency (Postmus, 2011).

Threats have power to create fear, even when there is no intention of carrying through on the action threatened (Dutton, 2005). Witnessing PV in childhood or surviving child abuse are recognized as factors that contribute to teens' vulnerability to future relationship violence (O'Leary, Foshee). 20 – 40% of teens experience emotional abuse in a dating relationship (Foshee, 2009; Teitelman, 2011), with self-reports from girls and boys of both victimization and perpetration. Often, teens involved in emotional abusive behaviors are fighting with each other with no one partner exclusively being the victim or the perpetrator (Orpinas, 2012). Despite its frequency in their experience, romantic break ups can be traumatic for teens (Boelen, 2008).

Twilight

There is a growing body of academic literature focused on the *Twilight* saga. Physical abuse, sexual abuse and stalking are identified in the texts of the series (Collins, 2011) through counting episodes of abusive behaviors, though their study did not use an external measure of how abuse is defined. In another study the male romantic lead in the

series is identified as a compensated psychopath (Merskin, 2011). The plot of the novels is explored as reflecting masochistic love and a distinctly postfeminist influence (Taylor, 2011). The identification of the main female romantic lead as a battered woman and the positive depiction of self-harm behaviors in the series is examined (Kokkola, 2010, 2011). The success of the novels and the critical reviews are juxtaposed and examined (Bode, 2010). Researchers have also commented on the strength of readers' emotional response to the story, suggesting the significance of popular culture imagery in expressing fundamental dilemmas that cannot be resolved (Milone, 2011). The novels' presentation of young women, young men and families, as well as its pro-life position on abortion and motherhood are elucidated (Silver, 2010). A discussion thread on the official *Twilight* website examines how young women define their feminism on the World Wide Web (Summers, 2010). Common elements of all this literature include the identification of imbalances in the Edward and Bella's relationship, the post feminist values present in the stories, the popularity of the series, the enthusiasm of its fans.

The *Twilight* saga and its public embrace are under scrutiny from scholars from the fields of children's literature, women's studies, communications and psychology. Michel (2011) published a filed note that combined partner violence statistics, *Twilight* fan online commentary, and the *Twilight* saga story line to invite discourse about IPV and S & M back into the same arena. Physical and emotional self-harming was identified throughout the series of novels without either physical or emotional self-harming acknowledged as problematic in the storyline (Kokkola, 2010). Another study identifies the main male character in the series of novels as a compensated psychopath, and stresses the urgency of taking popular culture seriously (Merskin, 2011). Taylor (2012) provided

literary criticism that analyzed the novels portrayal of adolescent female desire, describing how the story linked eroticism and death. The criticism also explored how a masochistic relationship is seen as utopic in the novels (A. Taylor, 2012). Articles about *Twilight* have also been collected into books. *Bitten by Twilight: youth culture, media and the vampire franchise* and *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon* are collections of articles that investigated the popularity of the series and the story's themes (Anatol & Kramar, 2011; *Bitten by Twilight*, 2010). *Seduced by Twilight: the allure and contradictory messages of the popular saga*, Wilson's analysis of the story examined the appeal of the story's messages about true love, romance, and sex. The book also discussed how these charged themes interacted with current cultural issues regarding race, class, gender and sexuality (Wilson, 2011).

The current research is located in the intersection of literature and research about teen dating, violence in teen dating relationships and *Twilight* within a frame of social norms and the fluid nature of conceptualizing violence in intimacy. This research has importance for broadening how researchers understand the social context and expectations within which young adults manage intimacy, romance and violence by seriously viewing those norms through the lens of popular culture.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Methodology

Feminist analysis and use of self

This study was a feminist analysis that examined the presentation of the teen dating behaviors in the spectacularly popular young adult novels in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga. Like much feminist discourse analysis, the acknowledged intent of the research involved finding, listening to and privileging a story that has been silenced (Creswell, 2007; Lazar, 2007; Shumake, 2002). In this case, the analysis involved finding and giving voice to the story of stalking, manipulation and physical abuse as romantic gestures in a popular young adult novel. The methodology was chosen for this study to narrowly focus on a discourse that has mediated our collective experiences of reality while investigating the social structures surrounding partner violence in a narrative example of popular culture. Much narrative methodology and analysis is centered upon interviewing subjects about their life experiences (Denzin, 2008; *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, 2005). The novels at the center of this analysis are a first person narrative about a particularly formative time and set of events in a young woman's life.

I read the four novels that make up the *Twilight* saga in sequential order during the summer of 2008 for pleasure. I was aware of the series and the explosion of popularity, I had recently heard that there were to be movies made from the books. AT the time I was working in domestic violence agency. One day I spotted a paperback copy of the first novel *Twilight* on an upper shelf in the office of a co-worker. I asked if she had or was planning to read it. She said no, and when I asked if I might borrow the book she agreed. On my way down the hallway, a program director saw the book in my hand

and said, “I love that story. It’s so good. I read all four books in one weekend.” I also read the books in a single weekend; they are not hard to read. At the close of the story I was utterly taken aback by my ability to enjoy the love story when I clearly saw while reading that it was also about my professional nemesis, partner violence. I was stunned I’d found the first book and recommendations for it at work among other allies in the work against partner violence. The lack of any comment about the partner violence in the story was equally startling. My actual feeling was that the popularity of this story had singlehandedly undone twenty years of dating violence prevention work. As months passed I discussed the story with colleagues, and anyone else interested, during which time I began to wonder what *Twilight* had to tell me about what our culture doesn’t know about partner violence. That experience was three years behind me when I began the data collection and analysis for this dissertation, yet it is a contributor to the research perspective and process.

Content analysis process

Broadly, this research asked: Is there abusive behavior between the romantic couple in the *Twilight* Saga? If yes, how was that behavior presented and interpreted within the narrative? And lastly, what does the story offer to efforts to prevent dating and partner violence? Content analysis is a qualitative method of analyzing written materials with a long history in the fields of history, communications, sociology, and nursing (Elo, 2007). The method of the analysis was chosen for this study because it offered a systematic approach to describing the phenomenon of partner violence hiding in the plain sight of this popular fiction, allowing me to both confirm the presence of abusive behaviors in the story and enhance an understanding of the fluid meaning of violence in

intimacy. Scholars have investigated a variety of human behaviors through fiction; workplace envy in mainstream fiction (Patient et al., 2003), nationalism in suspense novels (Schneider-Mayerson, 2011), the positive role of romance fiction for women (Ang, 1987), the impact of post-feminism in popular fiction (A. Taylor, 2012), and the romanticizing of psychopathological personality traits in men (Merskin, 2011).

The study methodology was practiced in the tradition of ethnographic content analysis developed in Altheide's *Qualitative Media Analysis* (2012), which is a continual process of discovery aimed at establishing validity rather than reliability. As such, a priori categories were used to guide the analysis, while other categories were expected to and did arise as the researcher interacted with the novels repeatedly and over time (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Brummett, 2010; Gee, 2011). The analysis followed the story line of the four novels, and was thus narrative in nature. In its broadest sense the analysis also used the *Twilight* saga as a case study that is particularly revealing of the powerful contradictions in current popular constructions of partner violence that law enforcement, service providers, and individuals struggle to negotiate and navigate.

The four novel series that comprises the *Twilight* saga was chosen as the unit of analysis as a segment of material that is large enough to be considered complete, and yet small enough to keep in a single context. Ruled out of consideration for the unit of analysis was *Midnight Sun* a fifth half novel by the author that is a retelling of the first novel from the male protagonist's point of view, and the five *Twilight* films. Although as popular and influential as the novels chosen, the auxiliary data was excluded from the analysis because they were derivative of the original novels, and for the sake of defining a manageable body of data.

The analysis of the novels followed a ten step processes used in conventional inductive content analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Frank, 2010; Gee, 2011; Hsieh, 2005). These steps are outlined below:

Step 1. Formal research questions were drafted (See Table X). In drafting the research questions formally I engaged in iterative dialogue with partner violence professionals. This supported keeping the questions simple and useful.

Step 2. In order to identify a priori codes and definitions or descriptions of abusive behaviors for initial coding, I sought sources that were as easily accessed and as influential as the novels. I looked for widely disseminated static reliable sources young adults could locate easily for free. While there are hundreds of websites on the internet with descriptions of partner violence, including checklists, most of those are local community resources often hosted by nearby family violence centers. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, The National Crime Victims Center and Love Is Respect were the sites chosen for this study because they are sponsored by well-recognized nationally prominent anti-violence organizations, are frequently referenced by local service resources, can be accessed by phone and privately, and offer resources targeted towards young adults. Websites were chosen to identify the a priori codes because they are sources of information about PV with accessibility to teens that is similar in scope to the availability of the novels. Each of the websites also has high traffic and strong reputations in the social services community. Additionally, like the novels, each website has elements designed and marketed to a teen audience. It is notable in this context to remark that across a national platform the websites do not use common terms to label abusive behaviors. NCVC uses the term intimate partner violence, Love Is Respect uses

the term dating abuse, while NDVH uses the term domestic violence. While the four novels together tell a single story, each novel is about a particular stage in the protagonists' relationship. Accordingly this research focused on an analysis of stalking in the first novel, emotional abuse and manipulation in the second and third novels, and physical violence in the fourth novel.

Step 3. Codes were identified based on checklists on the websites (See Table X).

Step 4. Text was coded in two sequential close readings of the novels (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Brummett, 2010; Gee, 2011). The first reading was a reading of the physical books, during which I used Post-It flags to mark passages where the author described behaviors that matched behaviors on the coding lists.

Step 5. The second reading of the novels used a Kindle reader application on iPad in the Kindle application. Data was collected via the Kindle application for iPad by electronically highlighting passages of text.

Step 6. Kindle App for iPad allows for highlighted passages to be aggregated in a left hand column, from there passages can be cut and pasted with electronic markers of author, book title and page number. I cut and pasted data from the Kindle App and organized the data using a series of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

Step 7. Each of the book quotes was labeled on the Excel spreadsheet with a code from the list of a priori codes (See Appendix X for an example).

Step 8. Steps 3 – 6 above were accompanied by keeping memo style notes of impressions and thoughts through out the reading and coding process. The result of the labeling was more abusive behaviors than I expected, causing me to seek support for reliability by engaged in iterative dialogue with colleagues and peers.

Step 9. Although not an easily articulated step there was, after step 7, a distinct and significant period of organized thinking. This thinking period allowed for the development of insight and supported making inferences based on the data to facilitate understanding meaning, consequences and context.

Step 10. Having immersed myself in the data and making sense of it, I used the writing process to obtain a sense of the whole and begin abstracting concepts and conclusions providing knowledge as well as contextualized meaning of the presence of partner violence in the romantic story of the novels.

Step 11. Through out the data gathering and analysis process, but expressly during steps 7 through 10 I engaged in member checking and peer interchange with colleagues, and long time (20 year, plus) staff at the local partner violence agency through weekly meetings.

Table 1: Summary of questions, sources, codes, and findings

Research Question	Resource Website	<i>A priori</i> codes (✓ = found / ✗ = not found)
Does the romantic protagonist of Stephenie Meyer’s novel <i>Twilight</i> exhibit stalking behaviors as measured against behaviors listed on the NCVC website? If yes, then does the heroine of the novel experience fear in response to the stalking behaviors?	National Crime Victims Center, the Stalking Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follow you and show up wherever you are ✓ • send unwanted gifts ✗ • damage your home or property ✗ • monitor your phone or computer use ✗ • use technology to track where you go ✗ • drive by or hang out at your home or school ✓ • threaten to hurt you ✓ • find out about you by using public records or contacting friends ✓ • spreading rumors about you ✓ • and other actions that control, track or frighten you ✓

Table 1: Summary of questions, sources, codes, and findings, continued

<p>Do the romantic leads in Stephanie Meyer's novels <i>New Moon</i> and <i>Eclipse</i> exhibit emotionally abusive behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the Love is Respect website?</p>	<p>Love is Respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • calling you names and putting you down ✓ • yelling and screaming at you ✗ • intentionally embarrassing you in public ✗ • preventing you from seeing or talking with friends and family ✓ • telling you what to do and wear ✗ • <u>using online communities</u> or cell phones to control, intimidate or humiliate you ✗ • blaming your actions for their abusive or unhealthy behavior ✓ • stalking you ✓ • threatening to commit suicide to keep you from breaking up with them ✓ • threatening to harm you, your pet or people you care about ✓ • making you feel guilty or immature when you don't consent to sexual activity ✓ • threatening to expose your secrets such as your sexual orientation or immigration status ✓ • starting rumors about you ✗ • threatening to have your children taken away ✓
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Table 1: Summary of questions, sources, codes, and findings, continued

<p>Does the male romantic protagonist of Stephanie Meyer's <i>Breaking Dawn</i> exhibit physically abusive behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the NDVH website?</p>	<p>The National Domestic Violence Hotline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embarrass you with put-downs? ✗ • Look at you or act in ways that scare you ✓ • Control what you do, who you see or talk to or where you go? Stop you from seeing your friends or family members? ✓✓ • Take your money or Social Security check, make you ask for money or refuse to give you money ✗ • Make all of the decisions? ✓ • Tell you that you're a bad parent or threaten to take away or hurt your children? ✓ • Prevent you from working or attending school? ✗ • Act like the abuse is no big deal, it's your fault, or even deny doing it? ✓ • Destroy your property or threaten to kill your pets? ✗ • Intimidate you with guns, knives or other weapons? ✗ • Shove you, slap you, choke you, or hit you? ✓ • Force you to try and drop charges? ✗ • Threaten to commit suicide? ✓ • Threaten to kill you? ✓
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Chapter Four: Findings

Stalking in *Twilight* (Book 1)

The NCVV website includes a Stalking Resource Center and begins their description of stalking with the statement “While legal definitions of stalking vary from one jurisdiction to another, a good working definition of stalking is *a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.*”

(“Stalking Resource Center,” n.d.).

RQ1: Does the romantic protagonist of Stephenie Meyer’s novel *Twilight* exhibit stalking behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the NCVV website? The novel *Twilight* contains descriptions of behaviors commonly held to be stalking, and the narrator and victim of that stalking does express fear of some of those behaviors. The narrative analysis of the novel located fifty three instances in which the male protagonist, Edward, exhibits behaviors listed as things stalkers do on the National Victims of Crime website stalking page and yet, within the story these behaviors are characterized positively as deeply romantic. **RQ2: Does the heroine of the novel experience fear in response to stalking behaviors?** In addition the website clarifies that stalking is behavior that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear; the novel’s female protagonist, Bella, pauses in her thinking sixteen times to acknowledge fear based on something Edward has done or said.

Upon understanding he has been following her without her permission or knowledge, itself a stalking behavior, Bella expressed a conflicting experience ‘I wondered if it should bother me that he was following me; instead I felt a surge of pleasure’ (Pg174) wherein she acknowledges to herself it ought to bother her to be followed and expresses the upsurge of pleasure that accompanies a young woman’s

recognition that a potential romantic partner cares about her. Her pleasure instantly outweighs any fleeting recognition that Edward's behavior is bothersome.

As their relationship progresses and Bella gets to know Edward better, post her discovery that he is a vampire, Bella still has moments of fear when she is with him, 'I felt a spasm of fear at his words, and the abrupt memory of his violent black glare that first day' (pg. 175). Although Bella realizes that her life is at risk in her relationship with Edward, she cannot maintain fear 'I knew at any moment it could be too much, and my life could end - so quickly that I might not even notice. And I couldn't make myself be afraid.' (pg. 276).

The storyline, including the narrative reading of the character's points of view, squarely places stalking behaviors at the core of the romance. In this narrative, it is primarily with stalking behaviors that Edward shows Bella he is attracted to her. Once their mutual attraction is established, the relationship lapses into healthier less threatening behaviors. Edward drives Bella to school every day, they sit together in class and at lunch. Bella meets his family and he meets her father. They do homework together. During these interludes they exchange life histories, talk about how much they care for each other and show each other a great deal of affection such as kissing, caressing, and laughing together. Importantly, being with Edward makes Bella feel lucky, his attraction to her seems to her like a miracle.

In addition to Bella's love for Edward, she also falls in love with his family. Bella's parents were married and divorced young. In her relationship with her mother, she had a caretaking role. She moves in with her father when her mother remarries to provide her mom and stepfather some relationship privacy. Bella then becomes her

father's chief cook and bottle washer. Edward's family is actually a committed group of vampires who have chosen each other. Although Carlisle did make Edward a vampire, thereby fathering him in a manner of thinking, the family is comprised of three couples and Edward. Bella makes the family structure complete, by partnering Edward. Bella finds a feeling of belonging with Edward and with his family that she hasn't had while growing up.

Emotional abuse and manipulation in New Moon (Book 2) and Eclipse (Book 3)

In books two and three, Bella and Edward struggle to understand each other, the contradictory worlds they live in, and the risks to Bella of exposure with vampires outside the Cullen family. In the second and third novels of the series the courtship behaviors of both Bella and Edward are identical to the behaviors of emotional abuse. Edward confesses that when he thought there was any chance that Bella had been killed he had tried to imagine a way to kill himself.

“Well, I wasn't going to live without you.” He rolled his eyes as if that fact were childishly obvious. “But I wasn't sure how to do it—I knew Emmett and Jasper would never help...so I was thinking maybe I would go to Italy and do something to provoke the Volturi.” Pg 19

Edward is immortal and thus hard to kill, thus he imagines provoking other vampires to kill him by breaking vampire law. His declaration of unwillingness to live without Bella is at the same time an example of both melodramatic love commitment and the foundation for real emotional abuse. His statement to Bella launches the middle of Edward and Bella's story together. After declaring he can't live if Bella doesn't and

fearing their relationship keeps Bella in danger, she proceeds to seek out dangerous behavior, to get Edward's attention.

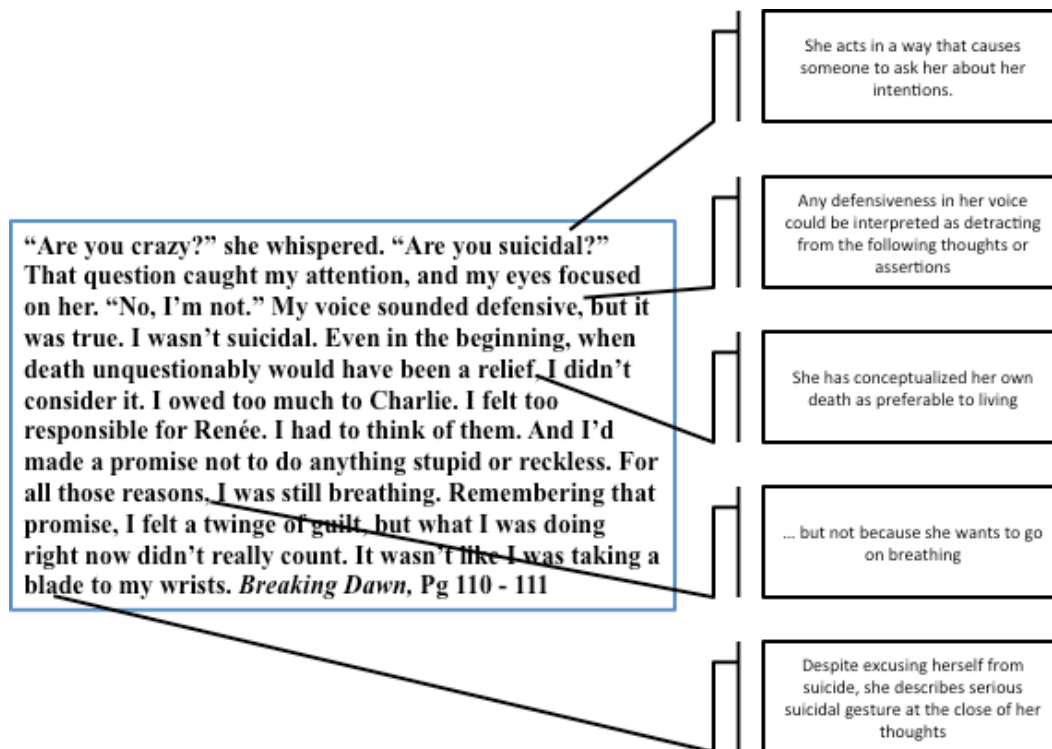
I didn't understand why, but the nebulous threat the men presented drew me toward them. It was a senseless impulse, but I hadn't felt any kind of impulse in so long.... I followed it. Pg. 109-110

As if any feelings were better than no feelings, Bella embraces the rush of adrenalin that stems from risky behaviors. When she does, she hears Edwards voice. It is unclear whether or not she actually hears his voice or imagines it. Compelled by the gratification of hearing Edward's voice, and suspecting she can hurt him by hurting herself, she decides to seek out risky situations. Reckless driving on a motorcycle and deepening her relationship with werewolves, also a danger to humans, Bella begins to restart her life by taking risks she wouldn't ordinarily take.

In the second novel of the *Twilight* Saga, *New Moon*, there are 52 instances of narrative suggesting physical abuse, emotional abuse, manipulating feelings to get one's way, or threats. In a change from the narrative of the first novel in the series, where Edward stalks Bella and is the perpetrator of abusive behaviors towards her, in this novel their relationship has progressed and both characters engage in the emotionally abusive or coercive behaviors towards the other. The narrative arc of this part of the story is focused on presenting Edward and Bella's love as so profound that they are each unable to perceive living without the other. The plot tests and proves up this theory when Edward leaves Bella to keep her safe from other vampires sending her into despair. When she is drawn towards life threatening behaviors – engaging with male strangers at night (Book 2 page 110), reckless motorcycle driving (Book 2 page 126), cliff diving into the ocean

(Book 2 page 357) – she hears Edward’s voice in her head warning her to stop, yet the sound of his voice is so powerful that she continues to put herself in harms way to hear it. Although not explicit in her written intentions, she seemingly puts herself in danger to get his attention and to show him that she is in just as much danger – or more – without him than with him.

Figure 3: Confusing narrative about Bella’s feeling suicidal



I was going to be as reckless as I could possibly manage in Forks. I would not be the only keeper of an empty contract. Pg 147

When Bella ultimately jumps off a cliff into the ocean, Edward learns via other’s thoughts what has happened and he, like Romeo, assumes she has died. He then sets out to be killed by the Volturi. His sister Alice sees this possible future and takes Bella to Edward to save him. Reunited then by Bella’s extreme behavior, their suicidal gestures

have successfully brought Bella and Edward back together. It is never entirely clear whether Bella was actively suicidal without Edward or manipulating her world to force Edward's return, but it hardly matters. Proving that romantic love is more important than survival, the couple's unwillingness to be separated is portrayed in this part of their story as hopelessly romantic in a literal sense.

When leaving her in Book Two to keep her safe proves untenable, in Book Three Edward resorts to isolation and monitoring as ways to control Bella's safety, and therefore Bella. There are 15 instances in the third novel that depict controlling or manipulative behavior between Bella and Edward. Edward reverses course utterly and is unwilling to have Bella away from him at all, and when he must leave her even for a few hours, he demands complete control over her whereabouts. When Bella balks at this and suggests some places she thinks she might safely go, he disables her car.

He spoke as if he were talking to himself now, still looking at the piece of my truck's engine as he twirled it in his hands (Book 3 Pg 63).

In order to partake in a weekends 'hunting' with his brothers he coerces his sister into watching Bella. The gift he gives his sister is a car she coveted.

I grumbled, incredulous. "He gave you that just for two days of holding me hostage?" Alice made a face. A second later, comprehension came and I gasped in horror. "It's for every time he's gone, isn't it?" She nodded. I slammed my door and stomped toward the house. She danced along next to me, still unrepentant. "Alice, don't you think this is just a little bit controlling? Just a tiny bit psychotic, maybe?" (Book 3, Pg 146)

Bella is reluctantly compliant with Edward's demands. She turns down an offer to visit a friend, "I wish. I'm not at Charlie's," I said sourly. "I'm kind of being held prisoner." (Book 3 Pg 148 – 149). And while Bella and his family accepts Edward's control as protective, if confining, other characters offer her a straightforward assessment of Edward's behavior asking, "Is he your warden, now, too? You know, I saw this story on the news last week about controlling, abusive teenage relationships and —" (Book 3, Pg 223 – 224). Bella dodges that line of thought without acknowledging it as either valid or false. Although having acknowledged the questionable nature of Edward's behavior in this aside to the audience, the plot continues holding Bella hostage from her friends and family and Bella makes excuses for her compliance despite seeing that her behavior confuses and hurts her father and her friends.

Despite his isolating her and controlling her whereabouts, Edward finds many of Bella's behaviors so endearing he is unable to resist giving her what she wants. In books 1 and 2 Bella is oblivious to the effect she has on him and is horrified by his generosity. She deflects and refuses many of Edward's gifts, feeling that she cannot hope to reciprocate. In book 3 she begins to recognize her ability to coax him to do what she wants and she conceives of this as a weapon she can wield in the relationship.

I asked quietly, experimenting with my newly discovered weapon. I touched his face lightly with the tips of my fingers. "Please can I see it?" His eyes narrowed. "You are the most dangerous creature I've ever met," he muttered. (Book 3, Pg 457)

Alongside Bella and Edward's manipulative behaviors towards each other, the third book introduces two additional premises linked to abuse other than partner violence.

The first occurs when Bella's friend Jacob asserts himself as a rival for Bella's affection and insisting that does love him he kisses her fiercely quite against her will. Bella's reaction is to feel she is a horrible person to hurt him by not loving him as much as she loves Edward. The second is when the concept of werewolves helplessly imprinting on their future mates is extended to a teen-age boy (wolf) imprinting on a two year old girl. Both of these story elements come uncomfortably close to accepting and justifying sexual assault.

Identifying the elements of emotional abuse in the middle installments of Bella and Edward's love story, where the behaviors are offered as natural and understandable, is significant in light of research that has indicated the seriousness of the pain inflicted by emotional or verbal abuse (Sears, Sandra Byers, & Lisa Price, 2007). The books' fans have communicated the strength of their emotional attachment to the story in a variety of ways, none more telling than how some readers felt while reading *New Moon*. A thread on thewilightsaga.com labeled "your reaction when Edward left" finds two comments that speak eloquently to how young readers experience stories they love:

I cannot believe it!!

When he left her.. alone in the forest.. I feel the NEED to give a break to my reading and Cry.. after 30 minutes of crying-all-the-time. I re-started the book.

And when I re-read the END, I keep reading with my eyes full with tears, I almost wet all the book! – Gabz, female 17 yrs old (<http://thewilightsaga.com/forum/>)

That's something that u can't describe with words...

I felt hurt, lifeless, in pain, crying...alone.

But also i couldn't stop reading, i had to call my sister...

To tell her that i was in pain cuz' Edward left her, and when i was talking to her i didn't noticed that it was being 4 months...i then meanwhile we talked... and read that, that was all. i really felt that my life was over as Bella's...

Valiumgirl, female age 20 (<http://thewilightsaga.com/forum/>)

The power of a fictional story to spark visceral real-time emotions so strong that one needs to reach out for help, as Valiumgirl comments above, underscores the compelling nature of popular stories. Crying, unable to continue reading, calling a sister for support – though these were the reactions to the story plot, they sound achingly similar to the reactions one might have to a relationship breakup of one's own. Reader's ability, and tendency, to physically absorb a story raises the question: is that vicarious experience retained for use in real-life relationships?

Physical abuse in *Breaking Dawn* (Book 4)

RQ1: Does the male romantic protagonist of Stephenie Meyer's novel *Breaking Dawn* exhibit physically abusive behavior as measured against behaviors listed on the NDVH website?

In *Breaking Dawn*, book 4 of the series, Bella and Edward get married, finally reconciling their strained romance. Amidst the lavish wedding provided by Edward's wealthy family, and exotic honeymoon on a private tropical island Bella looks forward to consummating her relationship with Edward. At the same time the unacknowledged undertow of abusive behavior in their relationship escalates to physical abuse and death. Within the 'happily ever after' nature of their story's end lies a compelling description of

physical abuse and Bella's death. Both instances are viewed through the narrative lens that the behavior is necessarily tied to the love story.

The narrative analysis of book 4 made the presence of physical abuse in the story very clear. Of the 15 codes developed from the NDVH website that indicate abuse, 11 were present in the story's narrative.

Still swept up in the cascade of pleasure of the previous night's lovemaking, Bella sees herself in the mirror:

I stared at my naked body in the full-length mirror behind the door. I'd definitely had worse. There was a faint shadow across one of my cheekbones, and my lips were a little swollen, but other than that, my face was fine. The rest of me was decorated with patches of blue and purple. I concentrated on the bruises that would be the hardest to hide—my arms and my shoulders. They weren't so bad. My skin marked up easily. By the time a bruise showed I'd usually forgotten how I'd come by it. Of course, these were just developing. I'd look even worse tomorrow. – Breaking Dawn, Pg 95

Although he had attempted to be a gentle with her as possible, Edward had injured her while making love. Edward is unhappy and remorseful in the face of her injuries. Bella, it turns out, has become pregnant. Yet, another circumstance that puts her life in danger.

Book four allows for an additional narrative viewpoint. In a departure from Bella's voice, ten chapters of book four are told from Jacob's point of view. It is through this narration that he describes Bella's death. After a difficult and physically demanding pregnancy, Bella is unable to give birth. The strength of the ½ vampire infant is superior

to Bella's fully human body. Edward, afraid to change Bella into a vampire before the baby's birth, tears her womb open with his teeth, effectively saving the baby and killing Bella. The infant safely delivered, Edward and Jacob attempt to save Bella.

But there was nothing there, just me, just him. Working over a corpse. Because that's all that was left of the girl we both loved. This broken, bled-out, mangled corpse. We couldn't put Bella together again. *Breaking Dawn*, Pg. 355

By biting Bella repeatedly, Edward is finally able to infuse enough venom she is re-animated as a vampire.

Bella's death and re-animation is not by any means the end of the story. As a vampire, Bella is transformed into a creature that is gorgeous, graceful and has tremendous powers to protect herself and others. She is able to protect herself and everyone else from other vampires wishing to hurt them. After a dramatic battle, and with the Cullen family secure, Bella and Edward are given a small cottage by his parents and there they settle to live happily ever after.

The power of Bella's voice

The close first person point of view is very different from an observer's perspective. In the first person a reader has the obligation and the luxury of deferring the meaning of an action to the narrator, where as in the third person judgment remains with the reader. When Bella's first person narration tells the reader she is enjoying herself, it is difficult for a reader to set aside Bella's value judgment of the action and inject her own – thereby making it less likely the reader will recognize the abuse. *Twilight* and the ensuing phenomenon highlight the significance of the very human condition that violence in intimacy can be easily identifiable when it happens to 'someone else' – and near invisible

when it happens to ‘me’. *Twilight*’s first person narrative is also distinctly melodramatic in tone. When Bella suffers, her prose is thick with images of fear, desolation, water, darkness and pain. Death is a constant companion in her dreams. The story is told in a way that invites readers to experience Bella’s feelings along with her.

These findings illuminated the instances of stalking, emotional abuse, manipulation and physically violent behaviors as intended to signal romantic interest and commitment on the part of the male protagonist. In addition, the findings identified the feelings of fear on the part of the female protagonist. It is important to understand that Bella is fearful of Edward’s violent behavior, but she is more afraid of losing him. Her desire to be intimate with him, and her love for him, consistently supplant her momentary fear of his violence and control, completely obliterating her concern for safety. Another significant finding was the effectiveness of the melodramatic first person voice in releasing the reader from making her own assessment of abusive behaviors that are tolerated by or even pleasing to the victim. These behaviors are surrounded by healthy and benign dating behaviors that may serve to further obscure a perception of the violence as abusive.

The content analysis of the four novels of the *Twilight* saga revealed repeated examples of character behavior that matches behaviors listed as abusive. In the context of the story, these behaviors are seldom referred to in a negative light, and most often are part of the characters’ attempts at showing how their deep attraction for one another is the most important motivation in their lives. The story is revealed as one example of many means by which violent behaviors in intimate relationships are constructed, in this case constructed as tangible signs of love. Held up against matching behaviors constructed as

PV, such as on the websites, provides an illustrative juxtaposition of the fluidity of concepts of violent behavior in romance. A single story cannot itself be representative of cultural norms, but the embrace of a large and diverse audience signals resonance. That resonance suggests reciprocal complex meaning between story and audience.

Chapter Five: Endings and Conclusions

Is there behavior between the romantic couple in the *Twilight* saga matching abuse warnings?

By comparing behavior in the novels with behaviors listed on respected websites as abusive the research project identified evidence of distinct overlapping between the behaviors of courtship and commitment and that of stalking, emotional and physical abuse and loss of life presented in a fictional romance. The storyline of *Twilight* (Book 1), including the narrative reading of the character's points of view, squarely places stalking behaviors at the core of the romance. It is primarily with stalking behaviors that Edward shows Bella he is attracted to her. Further, the research found evidence of emotional abuse in the middle installments of Bella and Edward's love story, *New Moon and Eclipse* (Books 2 & 3), where the behaviors were offered as natural and understandable, holding up manipulative, emotional abusive, controlling and suicidal behaviors as emblematic of true love, deep commitment and passionate dependence. The story framed these behaviors as allowable elements of a desirable pursuit of love. In *Breaking Dawn* (Book 4), the conclusion of Bella and Edward's love story, the narrative offers a description of Edward injuring and killing Bella within the context of destiny, irrepressible passions and happily ever after. The *Twilight* saga can be measured as a portrayal of successful pursuit and relationship behavior up to and including intrusion, persistence, surveillance, control, manipulation, shoving, biting, bruising and killing one's partner in fiction as romantic. As such, the story serves as important evidence of the ongoing socio-cultural dilemma around the distinction between desired and reviled romantic behavior

What makes the story of *Twilight* 'work'?

The success of the story in engaging the hearts and imagination of millions of readers seems to indicate a resonance between the story and cultural expectations. This especially clear and popular depiction of the cultural assumption that a true love is a love worth dying for has explanatory and theoretical implications. The expectations based in understanding horror, melodrama and romance for struggle, passion, separation and reunification are met in the story.

The close first person point of view is very different from an observer's perspective. In the first person a reader has the obligation and the luxury of deferring the meaning of an action or an event to the fictional narrator, where as in the third person those judgments remain with the reader. By offering the story through Bella's voice, the author and readers were able to describe and experience deeply passionate romance despite, and indeed because of the risks to Bella. From the opening lines of *Twilight* - "I'd never given much thought to how I would die - " (Pg 2) to the end of *Breaking Dawn*, the story valorized the ability of romantic love to survive any kind of danger. Most unsettlingly, the story insisted it was better for Bella's love of Edward to survive than it was for Bella herself to survive. Readers were drawn to the melodrama of the story and writing that stirred suspense, high-stakes urgency, and a powerfully felt voice as an antidote to the portrayal of romance's uncertainty and risk.

The success of the story has potential to explain the invisibility of partner violence. Despite three decades of advocacy work, public education and services to survivors partner violence still rears up in relationships unexpected and unwieldy. Easy to spot from the distance of a friendship, the signals of impending violence slide undetectable beneath the fog of attraction, desire, awkwardness, insecurity and illusions

of romance and intimacy. Apparently, violence in intimacy can be easily identifiable when it happens to ‘someone else’ – and near invisible when it happens to ‘me’. The boundaries of acceptable or unacceptable behavior become increasingly mobile and blurred the closer one is to the relationship.

The novel’s success also explains the insidious continuation of victim blaming in partner violence. This research suggests that popular social norms continue to define men’s violent behaviors in intimacy as romantic when the woman wants the man, and only as abusive when she doesn’t want him. This subtle but effective assignment of the determination of what is or isn’t abuse to the perception of the victim, leaves the responsibility for abuse mired in the woman’s reciprocation of affection and dependent on her credibility. It also explains the dilemma of law enforcement officers, advocates and court staff trying to abdicate the determination of abuse to the victims without much success.

Feminist theory about partner violence has suggested, among other thoughts, that victims are the experts on their situations, perpetrators are solely responsible for their violence towards loved ones, victims are responsible for recovery from violence, any and all violence in intimacy is wrong and bad, and that much of men’s violence and women’s victimization can be laid at the doorstep of patriarchal power. As much as I prefer those views, this research implies we may need to ask some additional, sometimes contradictory, questions. Prevention efforts aimed at young daters are up against an undertow of acceptable relationship violence romanticized in the popular culture. Neilson BookScan’s US Consumer Market Panel reports on book sales by major retailers, covering approximately 75% of the book sales. BookScan reports that since 2008 over 22

million books in the *Twilight* Saga were purchased (The Neilson Company, 2013). The occurrences of millions of people, who are not by and large fans of partner violence, completely missing its presence in the story upon first reading is stunning. This examination of popular culture revealed that victims and perpetrators of partner violence may not see their relationship as it unfolds.

A critical examination of popular texts can reveal much about the contexts in which people manage their intimacy, as well as provide insights into the place of violence in romance and intimacy. This research also suggested that there is a responsibility for partner violence within the larger frame of community and the public sphere. Within the confines of this story, the violence between Edward and Bella is not wrong or bad rather it is protective. Much like contemporary ‘stand your ground’ laws, like it or not, social norms have reserved a place for good lethal violence causing no end of confusion about when behavior can be declared abusive. Additionally, it seems that market forces honed and promoted by capitalism have influence on social norms and practices surrounding intimacy that equal or rival those of patriarchy. The commercial success of this one story against all of its competitors exposed far more teens to partner violence than were exposed to dating violence prevention education during the past decade. If the behavior of courtship and romance intersects with the behavior of partner violence, there is considerably more work to be done.

Discussion

Reducing the incidence of PV and ameliorating its deleterious effects on generation after generation of men and women is complicated and messy. There is no right answer or action. The call to do something in response to this messy problem is

insistent. Social services, in all its forms, are part of the response. At a time when services for victims of partner violence are well established, there is also an opportunity to do something else. Seeking evidence capable of shedding additional insight into dynamics that foreshadow and encourage violent behavior between lovers has the potential to reveal additional areas for pro-social change including in the popular culture.

In the close of the *Twilight* story, much more than at the beginning of the saga, the questions of passion, love, life and immortality have become dangerously tangled with story elements of control, injury and death. Close examination of this contemporary pervasive story in the culture found evidence that society has romanticized violent behavior into cultural signs of attraction and commitment, and that once romanticized in this way partner violence can become invisible to the participants. We are a culture that cherishes clashing aspects of intimacy. While the imperatives of patriarchal and heterosexual privileges are enforced by impulses towards individuality, secrecy, and violence, people are also highly desirous of conjoining, commitment, and caretaking. We romanticize bad boys and beauties, while craving tenderness and trust in our most intimate relationships. The resultant confounding social expectations severely complicate the role of social services aimed at remediating and reducing partner violence.

One public arena in which people have consistently practiced, shared and dreamt about intimacy is in popular stories. A criticism of early Victorian domestic novels was that readers experienced physical excitement while reading, those novels popularity was attributed to this affect (Cvetkovich, 1992). Contemporary studies of philosophy, psychology, as well as neuroscience have provided increased empirical evidence that imaginary stories evoke real emotions (Todd, 2013). The popularity of some fiction

extends its reach considerably farther than that of policy, advocacy or even the law in its likelihood to both reflect and influence social expectations, norms and values, and beliefs about what is or is not acceptable violence between intimates. Fictional stories serve a crucial function in the dissemination of culture and the creation of potential futures thus fiction is a rich resource for locating the role of partner violence in society in ways that are beneficial to the practice and study of social work. The study of fiction can generate new knowledge of how and why people accept, tolerate or expect violence in intimacy. Those understandings can potentially open new doors to solutions.

"But, he's a vampire." During discussions about the presence of stalking and partner violence in the novels, somewhere in the ensuing conversation comes the protest, "but, he's a vampire - he's supposed to act like that" (personal communication - September, 2012). This first - in often a volley of protests - is reminiscent of assumptions made by observers of non-fictitious partner violence. A recent example; when a pro-football player killed his girlfriend, sports commentators raised serious questions about whether or not Mr. Belcher killed Ms. Perkins because he'd sustained head injuries, or because he owned a gun (Bruni, 2012; Mick, 2012; Peters, 2012). In that construct, the person who hurt their lover is deemed not abusive because there is something explanatory about him, his nature, his job, his stress, his education, his family, his drinking, his possessions, made him do it. Often that something is connected to a popular societal role - a pro athlete, a redneck, a rapper, a thug - cherished by pop culture to the extent that the violence the person uses is considered an explicable tolerable side effect of their role. This study suggests vampire status explains away abusive behaviors with a cloak of acceptability in much the same way social status masks abusive behaviors in reality.

Stories that succeed with teens have a lot to tell researchers, educators, and practitioners about how teens understand abusive behavior, how they perceive intimacy and what kinds of relationships resonate with them as passionate and relevant. In the case of *Twilight*, the tolerance of Edward's stalking behaviors by Bella and thus by the story's readers is an important source of information about the conflicting norms of romance and respect in intimacy amongst the youngest individuals as they begin having intimate relationships. It shows us, in fact, how when adolescents are attracted to the person threatening, the threatening behavior can cause pleasure despite recognition of the inappropriateness of the behavior.

Implications for social work research

A variety of factors have been identified as contributing to the occurrence of teen dating violence, including violence in families of origin, histories of abuse, bullying, and social norms around romance (Ball et al., 2012; Draucker et al., 2012; Foshee et al., 2009, 1999; Martsolf et al., 2012; Mueller et al., 2013; Orpinas et al., 2012). Despite the prevalence of relationship violence in the lives of teens, and the documented negative effect of this violence on their lives, classic and popular culture repeatedly offers teens romanticized positive images of courtship behaviors identical to the behaviors of violent relationships (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Merskin, 2011; Michel, 2011; Silver, 2010). Future social work research about the *Twilight* Saga needs to examine the extensive data specific to reader response to the series, which is available in the forms of on line discussions (<http://twilightfan27.proboards.com>), on line question/answer boards (<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081208053100AAIFwqJ>), and in the fan fiction (<http://www.fanfiction.net/book>). A lively on-line presence is a revealing

element of *Twilight* fandom. In online discussions readers have shared their experience of the story with each other, the author, and the public. The strength of fan passion for Edward can be extraordinary. In 2009 a *Twilight* reader participating in a Yahoo Answers debate posted:

please explain twilight haters, how can the most amazing man in the world be abusive. I`m crying as I write. litterlly I am clutching twilight between my legs and crying, my eyes are so swollen because of the vampire stinging tears...I have tried several times to try and turn my self into a vampire, I have looked on every website and done every ritual, and still am not reunited with edward, SO EXPLAIN OK CUZ MY BODY TINGLES EVER TIME I TALK ABOUT THIS AMAZING MAN , YOU IDIOTS..

- T_bombbbb

(<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090819211309AAkwb6l>)

In addition, future research needs to examine the presentation of violent relationship behaviors as acceptable expressions of love in other popular fiction, television, and cinema. Future research about the problem of partner violence needs to focus on better understanding cultural acceptance of violence in melodramatic romance.

Social work research is well positioned to examine the social norms and expectations in popular culture surrounding partner abuse in the venues of television, music, film and the visual arts. In addition, the study of social norms and values in the identification and resolution of social problems has great potential to inform social service interventions and solutions.

Implications for social work education

Given the prevalence and influence of fiction of all kinds on people's expectations for life, and their expectations for their own behaviors, social work education need to include an elucidation of social norms present in popular culture. Much of what people understand about social problems and who has them is informed by entertainment and other commercial enterprise such as advertising. Rhetoric about social problems can easily be found in novels, television shows, movies, sports and the news. Examples of the consequences, both negative and positive, of those same social problems can be experienced and examined through familiar media. Like science, business and public affairs, the study of social work is first and foremost about the future. Inclusion of a deep understanding of the present is an essential tool for social workers.

Social work educators can take care to communicate with students about the entertainment they cherish and develop teaching tools to support student examination of social norms and values present in beloved entertainment that is counter to the values in the social work profession. In addition, educators can use current entertainment and events as case examples for practice, and to measure student ability to apply social work concepts and values to familiar scenarios. Examples of assignments that support students in critical thinking about the social values in popular culture include blogging assignments related to social problems in network television programming, watching and writing assignments where students watch a movie to identify the ways solutions to social problems are portrayed, case studies where students design treatment and advocacy plans for characters in popular novels.

As framed within the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational and Policy Accreditation Standards (EPAS) Core Competencies section nine, social

workers must learn strategies to stay informed and respond to the evolving societal contexts in which they practice. Students are inundated with conflicting messages about social norms, social justice and responsibility for change through exposure to school, news and entertainment. Social work educators have a unique responsibility to create environments where students can learn to navigate the resulting confusion with perceptiveness and understanding.

Implications for social work practice

Studying *Twilight* called into question the pivotal social services demand that victims self-identify as being abused in order to access and qualify for help – a norm rooted in individualism and advocated in the name of empowering victims may be keeping victims at risk: perhaps the victim and perpetrator are not the experts in their relationship (N. Berns & Schweingruber, 2007; Goodman & Smyth, 2011). The success of the story has created an opportunity for social workers to consider strengthening the arguments for the development of bystander intervention, family based intervention and services for bystanders/relatives/ and others who may be in the best position to ‘see’ and to ‘help’ in situations of partner violence.

Organizations with dating violence prevention programs in place are beginning to bring popular culture, including discussions about *Twilight* into their programming. One example is the Start Strong Idaho, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, initiative addressing the 3rd novel *Eclipse* and encouraging fans to eschew “Team Jacob” or “Team Edward” and illuminating the need for recognizing Bella’s freedom to choose. It seems essential to engage teens in developing prevention efforts that speak directly to their interests and concerns. Bringing popular culture representations of romance into the

prevention discussion might alternatively include movies or television in addition to fiction.

This study identified distinct overlapping between the behaviors of courtship and commitment and that of stalking, emotional and physical abuse and loss of life presented in a fictional romance. The popularity and success of the story indicated its power as a depiction of social norms. Stalking laws and victim advocates have long underscored the elements of behavior that is unwanted or cause fear as keys to understanding the difference between romance and abuse. However, the portrayal of successful pursuit and relationship behavior up to and including intrusion, persistence, surveillance, control, manipulation, shoving, biting, bruising and killing one's partner in fiction as romantic serves as an important reminder of the ongoing socio-cultural dilemma around the distinction between desired and reviled romantic behavior. Additional research is needed to determine whether a subjective lack of desire for a particular kind of attention can be an effective measure of the legality of someone else's behavior.

Current intervention and prevention efforts aimed at partner violence do not take contemporary cultural desires for intense feelings of attraction into consideration, nor does they consider how awkward and undesirable most of us feel during our mating and dating years. Also missing from partner violence intervention strategy is any recognition of people's yearning to be loved or the thrill of being caught in the obsessive gaze of another however momentary or fleeting. It is an incalculable error to ignore the cultural understanding that true love is worth dying for. Bella isn't real and all the information we have about her is in her story. Even so, her narration makes it clear she does not enjoy being hurt or Edward's controlling her, yet she tolerates it as a small thing when the

reward is framed as his love. She never risks questioning out loud if he can love her without controlling her. Social work would do well to take the resonances in popular culture seriously. While no single story is itself representative of cultural norms, the popularity and eventual subsuming of a story into the canon of broadly shared cultural touchstones has deep significance. Stories that reach the pinnacles of social approval through awards, adaptation or sheer sales provide practitioners with valuable access to reservoirs of the social conscience. Such stories are capable of revealing broad social understandings at the root of social problems, as well as suggesting avenues for pro-social change.

The findings of this research suggested that prevention efforts aimed at young daters are up against an undertow of acceptable relationship violence romanticized in the popular culture. Addressing the intensity and awkwardness of young love, the structure of young adult attraction and yearning, and the comforting assurance of stories may be essential elements in efforts to effectively reach young daters. Compelling examples of peaceful intimacy filled with urgency and passion are required to displace violent models of desire. The new prevention story may be effective in more useful ways if it includes tangible thrill equivalent to the perils of actual teen attraction.

Summary

A critical examination of popular texts such as this study can reveal much about the contexts in which people manage their intimacy, as well as provide insights into the place of violence in romance and intimacy (Wilson, 2011). A single text has a multitude of meanings. Readers construct varied meanings from texts, and are capable of multiple simultaneous readings of a single text. When a culture is swept up by a story that begins

to permeate the social awareness of readers and non-readers alike, that story can give us answers to the basic concerns of the culture.

Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga is such a story. Considerable attention is being paid to the story by women's studies scholars, much of it focused on what the story can tell us about the current state of feminism (Ames, 2010; Bode, 2010; Silver, 2010). It has been established that the male protagonist in the romance exerts insistent dominance – including violence – on the female protagonist (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Kokkola, 2011; Michel, 2011), thus *Twilight* Saga also has important messages for domestic violence advocates and services providers about the role of violence in intimacy. Horror stories and melodrama, both of which *Twilight* are in addition to romance, can be viewed as functioning as fairy tales for grown-ups, teaching people what is or is not permissible in sexual relationships. Since the debut of the first novel in the four book series, *Twilight* has been a prolific and profitable purveyor of instructions about romance to young women and men. Bella's attraction to abusive men encourages readers to translate male violence into gestures of love. The *Twilight* popular fandom has produced girls wearing t-shirts that say "Edward can bust my headboard, bite my pillows and bruise my body any day" which certainly offers a dangerous message to the real life young men trying to woo them.

Figure 4: Photo of T-shirt

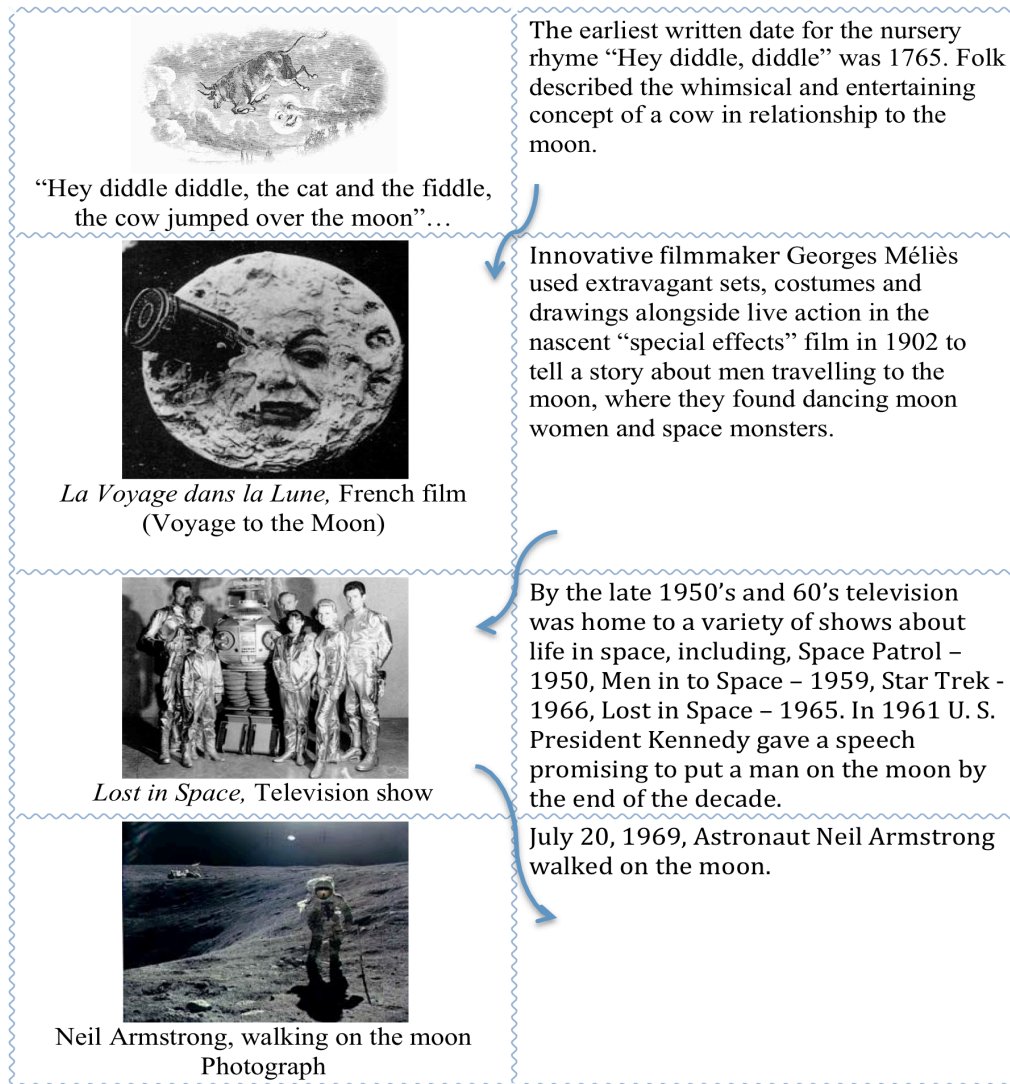


Bella, as the story's narrator and heroine, views abusive behaviors by men as desirable. She likes Edward's behavior toward her. Yet, in addition to stalking her throughout the story, Edward scares her by driving too fast, orders her into confinement, dictates who she can see, physically controls her by carrying or restraining her, calls her "silly" and a "coward," and refers to her as "mine." He also throws her through a glass table, repeatedly exposes her to other vampires intent on killing her, abandons her in a forest, and badly bruises her during sex. At one point in the narrative he marks her with his scent to deter Jacob as a suitor. Bella responds with utter dependence on him for her happiness, safety and future. Without exception, from Bella's point of view the narrative presents dangerous abusive behaviors as sexy. Readers are encouraged to translate Edward's behaviors as desirable, protective and romantic. Genre and voice work to support readers' resistance to a sub-plot of violent behaviors as a reflection of abuse.

Social workers are positioned to tell compellingly urgent stories of how social justice, equality, peace or simply contentment look and feel. Without the addition of those stories social work is missing a powerful tool to change society in the future. A powerful

example of the relationships between imagination and future is the story of being on the moon unfolding from wistful thinking in 1765 to reality in 1969 through fiction (see Figure 5). Social work aimed at influencing social problems like PV, that remain deeply rooted in social norms and the culture, must attend to the reciprocal relationships between the cultural imagination and individual as well as group behavior. This research has helped illuminate the significance of transforming the social norms evident in popular culture from implicit to explicit. This work has also suggested while implicit social norms can undermine social work efforts, social work may also be able to find new strategies through recognizing information circulating in the popular imagination. It took 200 year to get to the moon, yet anti-smoking campaigns changed smoking from cool to uncool in just 20 years.

Figure 5: Reciprocity between imagination, ideas and actions in the world: visually tracing a familiar concept through the popular culture



The only other stories, works of fiction, referred to in the *Twilight* Saga, are *Wuthering Heights* and *Romeo and Juliet*, both examples of troubling romantic behavior shared in wrought language. Catherine and Heathcliff treat each other badly in the name of love throughout their story, never to be a couple. And while *Romeo and Juliet* both die

for love, the turn of those events is narrated as extraordinarily sad – a cautionary commentary on the cost to powerful men of their foolish egos. In *Twilight*, our lovers go on together happily dead. Fantasy in all its iterations is critical to all of us at any age, dreaming of magical even unattainable success and pleasure is not inherently bad; to the contrary it is very human behavior. Thus it is especially revealing of contemporary norms when a story comes along wherein death is offered as a desirable way, actually as the only way, to achieve the dream of true love and is accorded social acclaim. The narrative rewards for Bella's acquiescence are romantic pleasure, secure marriage, fulfilling motherhood, monetary riches, physical beauty, entry as a valued member into her ideal family, and a fairytale cottage for home. Yet, by the end of her own story she was also neatly contained in the permanent perfect stasis only achievable through death.

The research of the present study found the extraordinarily popular young adult story told in the novels of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga to be a clear and compelling example of the fluidity of meaning in violent behavior between intimates. The comparison of the protagonist's romantic behaviors with descriptions of abusive behaviors listed on the websites of national anti-abuse organizations found identical behavior largely understood in the first instance as romantic and thus socially tolerated and acceptable, and in the second instance as abuse and thus socially intolerable and punishable under criminal law. The commercial success of the *Twilight* Saga and the story's resonance with readers is evidenced by books sales, the popularity of the film versions and annual fan conferences, and fan participation in the creation of fan fiction as well as in online discussion groups. This research argues that the success of the story is revelatory of contemporary conflict within constructs of partner violence in the popular

culture and imagination. This research found evidence of broadly agreed upon social norms that define men's violent behaviors in intimacy as passionate and excusable when the partners are romantically in love. The same behaviors are only considered abuse when the element of desire or romance is not present for both participants.

Twilight in many ways is an example of the prevalence and effectiveness of ongoing social excusing of men's violence. By situating the violent behavior in the form of an old-fashioned but perfect vampire, the story offers Edward's beauty and protectiveness as justifiable reasons for Bella to accept his violence in direct contradiction to the law. The story exemplifies remaining confusion in the culture about what is or is not partner abuse and can function as an accurate portrayal of contemporary social norms about romance. As such, the story offers critical insight into social norms that contribute to a social problem and suggests strategies for rethinking the social services approach to partner violence.

Appendix A.

Examples of Edward's stalking behaviors according to NCVC

What is stalking? (NCVC)	
Some things stalkers do:	Does Edward do stalker things?
1. Follow you and show up wherever you are.	
	"I followed you to Port Angeles," he admitted, speaking in a rush. "I've never tried to keep a specific person alive before and it's much more troublesome that I would have believed. But that's probably because it's you. Ordinary people seem to make it through the day without so many catastrophes."174
3. Damage your home, car, or other property.	
	He reached up with one hand and, with a deafening crack, effortlessly ripped a two-foot-thick branch from the trunk of the spruce. "As if you could fight me off," he said gently. Pg 264
5. Drive by or hang out at your home, school, or work.	
	"How often did you come here?" "I come here almost every night." I whirled, stunned. "Why?" "You're interesting when you sleep." He spoke matter-of-factly. "You talk." Pg 293
6. Threaten to hurt you, your family, friends, or pets.	
	"It's not only your company I crave! Never forget <i>that</i> . Never forget I am more dangerous to you than I am to anyone else." Pg 266
7. Posting information or spreading rumors about you on the Internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.	
	I panicked. I had no interest in being soothed. My mom was here and I was recovering from a vampire attack. "Why did you tell her I'm here?" "You fell down two flights of stairs and through a window." He paused. "You have to admit, it could happen." pg 458
8. Other actions that control, track, or frighten you.	
	"That suits me," he replied, his face relaxing into a gentle smile. "Bring on the shackles - I'm your prisoner." But his long hands formed manacles around my wrists as he spoke. Pg 302

Appendix B

Table 3: Examples of partner violence in the *Twilight* saga

Indicators of abuse on the National Domestic Violence Hotline Website	Narrative examples
Embarrass you with put-downs?	Yes; Edward is repeatedly dismissive of Bella because she human and thus fragile. When in front of his family, whom she wants to view her positively, she is embarrassed.
Look at you or act in ways that scare you?	Yes
Control what you do, who you see or talk to or where you go?	Yes; this is done in the name of her or other's safety.
Stop you from seeing your friends or family members?	Yes; he disables her truck to ensure she doesn't leave.
Take your money or Social Security check, make you ask for money or refuse to give you money?	No; Money isn't an issue; he is rich and extravagant in wanting to gift her
Make all of the decisions?	Yes;
Tell you that you're a bad parent or threaten to take away or hurt your children?	Yes; a) he wants to get the monster out of her when she gets pregnant – for her own safety. b) takes the baby away from here again for safety reasons because supposedly a 'new' vampire is too dangerous to avoid endangering the child. C) her contact with her child is carefully monitored by either him or his family.
Prevent you from working or attending school?	No; Edward wants Bella to go to school.
Act like the abuse is no big deal, it's your fault, or even deny doing it?	Yes;
Destroy your property or threaten to kill your pets?	No;
Intimidate you with guns, knives or other weapons?	Yes – if other vampires count.
Shove you, slap you, choke you, or hit you?	Yes – though again in the name of her safety.
Force you to try and drop charges?	No; there is no recognition of any abuse in the story – thus no charges.
Threaten to commit suicide?	Yes; he makes it clear to her that he will kill himself if they cannot be together. She also engages in suicidal behaviors in his absence.
Threaten to kill you?	He actually does kill her, again he does this to make her a vampire, basically saves her from dying in childbirth by killing her and resurrecting her as a vampire.

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