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Aviva H. Jacobstein
Till (un)death do us part: Exploring
the romanticization of adolescent
dating violence in *The Twilight Saga*
and the romantic relationship beliefs
held by female fans of the series

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the romantic relationship beliefs held by female fans of *The Twilight Saga* and to explore influences of media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence. This study specifically examined 18 to 20-year-old female fans' varying degrees of *Twilight* exposure, narrative immersion into the series, and their beliefs regarding what constitutes a healthy romantic partnership. A total of 194 individuals who were exposed to the entirety of *Twilight* completed an anonymous online survey, which asked individuals to reflect on their reading/watching exposure to *Twilight* and immersion into the series. Participants also answered Likert-scale questions on the dating role attitudes health index, a metric created for this project to capture the overall healthiness of individuals' romantic relationship beliefs. Results indicated that participants with greater degrees of exposure to *Twilight* reported increased narrative immersion into the series. This study also found that participants who most identified with the Edward-Bella romantic pairing—considered to be the most abusive relationship in the series—reported overall less healthy views about romantic relationships and greater degrees of unrealistic relationship expectations. Additionally, this study found evidence that repeated exposure to *Twilight* through re-watching the films negatively impacted participants' relationship views. These findings offer suggestions for future media effects research related to adolescent dating violence and important implications for social work practice with adolescents, who continue to be the largest consumers of this type of media.

**TILL (UN)DEATH DO US PART: EXPLORING THE ROMANTICIZATION OF
ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE IN *THE TWILIGHT SAGA* AND THE
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS HELD BY FEMALE FANS OF THE SERIES**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2016

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Kann et al., 2014), approximately 1 in 10 high school students report having been the victim of dating violence—which encompasses physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and stalking. While teen dating violence has been found to involve both male and female victimization and perpetration, researchers have reported that on average females are more likely to be victims of male sexual violence, and to experience physical injuries from the abuse of male perpetrators (Manganello, 2008). Taking into consideration the high prevalence of teen dating violence among American adolescents and the significant negative physical and mental health outcomes for female victims, including post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (Manganello, 2008), it has become an increasing public health concern. Thus, social work research is needed to expand our knowledge about risk factors that contribute to adolescent dating violence and ways social workers can intervene at the prevention level.

Given the above, a study is indicated that explores what may contribute to adolescent females entering into potentially violent and abusive dating relationships, and the ways in which media may play a role in this social phenomenon. In the past several decades, media scholars have given increased attention to the ways in which media exposure can impact adolescent health outcomes, with particular attention to the ways exposure to violent media can result in increased desensitization towards real-world violence for viewers and an increased risk of viewers

becoming violent in their own lives (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002). These studies, though, largely examined the impacts and effects of media exposure for male viewers. With the help of critical feminist theorists, who have long been deconstructing and examining the ways in which gender is portrayed in modern media, more recent media effects scholarship has focused specifically on health outcomes for adolescent females in relation to their media exposure (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Orenstein, 2011). For example, at the same time that popular media is broadly normalizing violence for young female viewers, researchers have found that female adolescents who spend more time viewing romantic television shows are more likely to value traditional gender roles in dating relationships (Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008). Additional research has indicated that repeated exposure to this type of media poses long-term risk factors for sexual and physical victimization for female adolescent viewers (Foshee, Benefield, Ennett, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004).

In the normal course of growing up, as adolescents separate from their parents and develop their own values and beliefs about the world, they may be more likely to turn to media to inform their viewpoints. Of concern is that as children enter adolescence, they are often embarrassed or unable to discuss questions or concerns with their caregivers about sex and romantic relationships, making them more susceptible to media influences. While social science research is still debating the influences of media exposure on the young people consuming it, it is overwhelmingly evident from the results of countless media effects studies that some effects from media exposure are taking place (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002; Foshee et al., 2004; Manganello, 2008). Thus, the purpose of this research study is to better understand how exposure to media that glamorizes and romanticizes dating violence may pose a risk factor for adolescent girls' value formation around what constitutes a safe romantic relationship.

In order to explore the impacts of exposure to media that romanticizes dating violence, this project used an exploratory quantitative survey design to measure young adult women's current views about romantic relationships, after having read or watched *The Twilight Saga* when they were in middle or early high school. *The Twilight Saga*—a book series created by Stephanie Meyer and later adapted into a movie franchise—centers on the forbidden romantic relationship between human Bella Swan and vampire Edward Cullen and is marketed as an epic romantic saga, despite the fact that throughout the series Edward becomes increasingly aggressive and controlling towards Bella. Collins and Carmody (2011) conducted a content analysis of the counts of violent behaviors perpetrated by the books' male characters against its female protagonist Bella, and found over 221 accounts of physical or sexual violence, 164 accounts of controlling behaviors, stalking, or jealousy, 183 accounts of male aggressiveness, and 132 accounts of traditional gender roles. Because *Twilight* has become so popular among adolescent girls—becoming one of the all-time highest selling young adult novels since its release in 2005 and earning millions at the box office for its movie adaptations from 2008 to 2012 (Collins & Carmody, 2011)—this study recruited current 18 to 20-year-olds who identified they were *Twilight* fans while the books and movies were being released in real time.

The goal of the analysis was to assess if exposure to this violent media shows a correlation with female adolescents' views about romantic relationships, guided by the hypothesis that greater engagement with and exposure to *Twilight* may lead to less healthy overall views about what constitutes a safe and equal romantic partnership. While research examining the ways in which media help to create a social climate of acceptance of dating abuse for adolescent male perpetrators is also needed, this is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, this study focused on the ways in which young adult women interpret the negative media

portrayals they were constantly bombarded with through their *Twilight* consumption and how this then influences their own understanding of romantic relationships. Although a limitation of focusing on *Twilight* and the Edward-Bella relationship in the series is that this project may yield results that are not generalizable to non-heterosexual populations, this study may generate ideas for further research, and provide insight for social workers engaging in practice with female adolescents at risk of teen dating violence victimization.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the current romantic relationship beliefs held by young adult women who were exposed to and immersed in *The Twilight Saga* when they were in middle or early high school. Additionally, this study examined the relationship between young adult women's varying degrees of media exposure and immersion in *The Twilight Saga* and the extent of their beliefs regarding what constitutes a safe and healthy romantic relationship. The following literature review is divided into six sections, which focus on empirical studies and theoretical perspectives related to the research question. The first section provides an overview of the history of media effects research related to adolescent health outcomes within this field. The second section examines key theoretical contributions within the media effects literature. The third section focuses more specifically on media effects research related to adolescent females, including gender-based attitudes and the development of romantic relationship ideals. The fourth section addresses the social phenomenon of adolescent dating violence within the context of heterosexual relationships, and highlights empirical studies that examine media exposure as a risk factor. The fifth section narrows in on *The Twilight Saga* and its immense popularity among adolescent females, and discusses content analyses of the series that explore the romanticization of dating abuse in the series; as well as the few empirical studies that have

looked at beliefs of *Twilight* fans. Lastly, the literature review closes with a section on diverging perspectives in regards to media effects research and issues of diversity within *Twilight*.

Overview of Media Effects Research

The effects of mass media exposure on American youth have been heavily researched and analyzed over the past several decades, largely focusing on the negative behavioral health outcomes for youth with increased media exposure (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002; Ward, 2005). One of the most studied topic areas of media effects research concerns the extent to which violent television exposure increases and contributes to children and adolescents' increased violent behavior. Brown and Witherspoon (2002) note that,

More than 1000 studies using various scientific methods with a range of populations over 3 decades converge on the conclusion that viewing violence on television increases the probability that viewers will be fearful, desensitized to real-world violence, and violent themselves. (p. 156)

Additional meta-analyses examined the effects of violent video and computer games on children and adolescents, and showed that exposure to these violent games “amplif[ies] psychological arousal, aggression-related thoughts and feelings, and reduce[s] pro-social behavior” in participants (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005, p. 704). Across violent media effects studies, findings also indicate greater direct impacts of violent behavior on younger children and longitudinally a greater acceptance for violence; as well as an increased likelihood of violent and aggressive behavior in adolescents who were exposed more frequently to violent media as younger children (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002; Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005).

While the vast majority of violence media effects studies focus on males and their experiences with violent media, eating disorders media effects research has historically focused

on female experiences with media that promotes an idealized thin female body image (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002). Groesz, Levine and Murnen (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of experiments in which young women's body satisfaction was measured after exposure to either media images containing the thin ideal of female bodies or neutral images of objects or average and plus-sized female bodies. The authors found a significant effect size for participants' negative body satisfaction after exposure to images of female bodies containing the thin ideal, and found this effect size to be stronger for participants younger than age 19. Similar to violence effects research, an empirical review of eating disorder media research found that repeated exposure to fashion magazines, television, and commercials that highlight and idealize the thin beauty ideal for women increase female media consumers' likelihood of developing a negative body image, increased concerns about weight gain, and potentially eating disorder behaviors (Lopez-Guimera, Levine, Sanchez-Carracedo, & Fauquet, 2010). However, Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, and Zoino (2006) note that because not all women who are inundated with media images containing an idealized thin female body develop eating disorder behaviors, internalization of the thin beauty ideal instead moderates the relationship between media consumption and negative body image and disordered eating behaviors. Thus, eating disorder media effects research cumulatively shifts the focus of media effects research more towards individual meaning-making out of the media people are consuming, and the ways in which peoples' beliefs can then impact their behavior (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006; Ward, 2005).

Building on the media effects research of violence studies and eating disorder studies, adolescent sex and sexuality media effects research studies the extent of exposure to sexual media content and viewer involvement in media consumption, in relation to adolescents' sexual attitudes and behavior. Findings from key sexuality media effects research show that adolescent

viewer involvement, perceived realism of the sexual content, gendered dating norms, and sexual scripts within popular media were a greater predictor of adolescent sexual practices than simply increased media exposure (Ward & Friedman, 2006; Ward & Rivandenebra, 1999). Ward and Friedman (2006) also found that adolescent motives for viewing different types of sexualized media (such as watching prime time television dramas as a form of companionship) were strongly associated with adolescents' acceptance of sexist dominant sexual norms; and that more frequent media exposure to sexualized content likely reinforces adolescents' beliefs in gendered sexual stereotypes. Longitudinal media effects sexuality studies also report that children and adolescents who are exposed to sexual content in movies at younger ages (O'Hara, Gibbons, Gerrard, Li, & Sargent, 2011) and across media platforms—including television, music, and magazines, and movies (Brown et al., 2006)—are more likely to engage in early adolescent and risky sexual behavior as young adults.

Across media effects research, various scholars have disagreed about the exact effect media has on the lives of the young people who consume it and whether media has a greater impact on the actual behavior of adolescents, their thoughts and attitudes, or both. However, overwhelmingly this field of research points to the media being at least one of a number of influencing variables impacting the health outcomes of America's youth (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002; Browne & Hamilton-Giahrtsis, 2005; Ward, 2005; Ward & Friedman, 2006). Common Sense Media (2015) recently conducted a large-scale national survey of American teenagers' (ages 13-18) media use, and found that teenagers spent about nine hours each day consuming media, including: "watching TV, movies and online videos; playing video, computer, and mobile games; using social media; using the Internet; reading; and listening to music" (p. 15). As the ways in which American youth engage with modern media continue to expand and consume

their lives, they are increasingly immersing themselves into a false hegemonic version of reality, in which almost all characters are white, heterosexual, and wealthy, and rigid gender roles dictate the opportunities for male and female characters (Orenstein, 2011). Furthermore, research examining media consumers' immersion into narrative worlds has found that exposure to film versions of books people have already read increases their level of transportation into the narrative (Green et al., 2008). Given the findings from media effects research that adolescents—who are repeatedly exposed to negative media narratives *and* strongly identify with the media messages and characters they are consuming—are more likely to have adverse health outcomes, narrative transportation across media platforms may be enhancing media consumers' beliefs that the media they are consuming is accurately representing reality.

While it is impossible to directly tease out if media exposure has immediate impacts on behavioral changes for its viewers at the micro-level, taken together, numerous media effects empirical studies suggest that media exposure is more likely to change individuals' attitudes and behaviors over time. This can then change their behavior, and create environments in which collectively people are more likely to make similar behavioral outcomes at the macro-level. To better understand the ways in which media exposure alters viewers' belief systems and attitudes, it is important to understand the key influencing theories underlying media effects research, which contribute to media consumers internalization of mass media messaging.

Social and Psychological Theoretical Perspectives on Media Influences

Cultivation theory. George Gerbner developed cultivation theory in the 1960s in response to the boom in popularity of the television and the millions of American viewers and consumers of this new form of cultural media (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) hypothesized that through cultivation processes,

“those who spend more time ‘living’ in the world of television are more likely to see the ‘real world’ in terms of the images, values, portrayals, and ideologies that emerge through the lens of the television (p.47). Gerbner et al. (2002) postulated that cumulatively the television was producing a finite “set of images and messages produced for large and diverse populations” (p. 44). Thus as individuals spend more time consuming and watching television, over time the effects of television exposure at the individual level would be seen in large-scale societal shifts in beliefs and attitudes, stemming from newfound “shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics,” so that individuals’ beliefs become more in line with television’s version of reality (Gerbner et al., 2002, p. 44).

According to cultivation theory, the mass media’s influence on individual consumers should be examined at the macro level since the overall power of cultivation is focused on the media’s dominant messaging system and its power over time to shift peoples’ attitudes, beliefs, and values (Potter, 2014). By focusing on the media as a whole and not on specific genres, patterns of messages can be seen across different forms of media and as stemming from overarching societal institutions and their dominant ideologies. Hesse-Biber et al. (2006) offer an example of the way in which cultivation theory can be used to explain media influences on women’s level of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder behaviors. The authors argue that,

Through the lens of cultivation theory the problem becomes that the barrage of images of thinness may lead women to believe that the ideal body type is desirable *and realistic* (Holstrom, 2004, p. 197). In other words, the more one is exposed to the idealized image the more she will believe it is attainable. (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006, p. 216).

Because the idealized thin female body can be seen as a dominant media message across the media landscape, cultivation theory states that the more women are exposed to media in general, the more likely they are to have higher levels of body dissatisfaction.

That said, one critique of cultivation theory is that it focuses too heavily on total media exposure and does not pay attention to the ways in which individual media consumers make and generate meanings from the media they are consuming (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006). Since, for example, not all women who are heavy media users develop higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006), it is also important to examine individual interactions with media beyond total amount of media consumed, and the ways in which media exposure can exert a powerful influence in regards to individual's immersion and viewer involvement.

Social cognitive theory. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory states that individuals take an active role in analyzing and interpreting the meanings and messages they acquire from observations of other people's behavior within their social environments (Bandura, 2001; Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, & Berry, 2005). Through these observations individuals view certain behaviors as receiving either rewards or punishments, and behavior that is viewed and interpreted as being socially rewarded is more likely to be imitated by individuals than behavior that is viewed to have negative consequences (Bandura, 2001). Taking into consideration the rise and dominance of mass communication and mass media, Bandura (2001) postulated that as individuals' perceptions of reality become more and more filtered through a mass media lens, "the more people's images of reality depend upon the media's symbolic environment" (p. 271). Through the observational learning of people's behavior within the media and the ways in which it is positively and negatively reinforced, individuals will then begin to make inferences about observed behavior and imitate it in their own lives.

Social cognitive theory states that observational learning takes place because after individuals have made inferences about the consequence or reward of observed behavior they are then able to integrate and replicate the behavior, which happens through the following four processes: attentional processes, retention processes, production processes, and motivational processes (Bandura, 2001). Attentional processes involve individuals' cognitive abilities that allow them to self-select to which modeled observations they pay attention. Retention processes help individuals to determine which observations they remember and then transform into cognitive representations (Bandura, 2001). Through the behavioral production process, "symbolic conceptions are translated into appropriate courses of action" (Bandura, 2001, p. 272). Individuals can then practice the modeled behavior in an attempt to accurately match the observed behavior and it may take several attempts in order for their own behavior to match the behavior they observed (Bandura, 2001). Lastly, the motivational processes incentivize individuals to replicate modeled behavior that they perceive to be more rewarding and which they perceive to be modeled by individuals more like themselves (Bandura, 2001).

In his analysis of the ways social cognitive theory intersects with media influence, Bandura (2001) theorizes that, as individuals rely on mass media's version of reality, they begin to make inferences about the values and beliefs attached to observed behavior within the media. Through the processes of observational learning they then begin to replicate the behaviors viewed as more rewarding within the media's version of reality. For example, Martino et al. (2005) conducted a study examining the ways social cognitive processes mediate the relationship between adolescents' exposure to sexual content on television and their actual reported sexual behavior. The authors found that adolescents with greater exposure to sexual content on television "were more confident that they could enact safe sexual behaviors (e.g., obtaining

condoms, communicating with a potential partner) than were adolescents with less exposure to sexual content on TV” (p. 921), and that this internalization of safe-sex self-efficacy had a significant positive correlation with actual initiation of sexual behavior. Through the observational learning processes, adolescents observed the sexual behavior of characters in television shows largely showing no negative consequences, potentially influencing their decision to then engage in sexual behavior.

While total media exposure through cultivation processes, and individual meaning-making from exposure through social-cognitive processes, are both important in considering the influences and effects of mass media, it is likely a combination of both of these social psychological processes that allows the media to function as a powerful influencer in our society. In order to better understand how these two theories can be used to explain how media influences contribute to the shifting attitudes and behaviors of individuals to match dominant media messaging, the next section takes a closer look at the ways in which mass media exposure influences adolescent females’ gender-based attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in regards to the development of romantic relationship ideals.

Screen Media Exposure Influences Specific to Adolescent Females

Gender is one of the most powerful socially constructed mechanisms in which humans dichotomously categorize themselves in society, in which males and females are from birth assigned to a respective limited set of socially appropriate expectations and roles (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Orenstein, 2011). One of the core tasks of child and adolescent identity formation is the development of a specific gendered identity (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Children and adolescents are inundated daily with messages from everyone surrounding them, from parents to peers, teachers, and coaches, about socially appropriate ways to perform their

gender, and those around them often heavily police gendered performances that deviate from normative gender-expressions. These powerful messages from adults are heavily reinforced by the modern mass media, which rigidly shores up dichotomous views of gender and operates as a key socializing institution of gender in today's society (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Orenstein, 2011; Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Ward, 2005). Ward (2005) notes that,

Nearly every media portrayal, scene, and storyline conveys a message about 'normative' and expected behaviors of men and women. From these portrayals, much can be learned about what types of women are considered attractive, which male behaviors draw scorn, and which life choices are rewarded. (p. 65)

Critical girlhood media scholar Peggy Orenstein (2011) notes that every facet of the current media landscape geared towards female children and young adults—including books, magazines, movies, television shows, advertising, and social media—offers a limited set of stereotypical gendered options that emphasize the importance of body maintenance, heterosexuality, and upholding the impossible standard of being virginal and sexual at the same time.

In fact, within current tween television programming, Gerding and Signorielli (2014) conducted a content analysis of popular tween television shows across genres and found a 2:1 ratio of male to female characters, that female characters were primarily concerned with body maintenance and received more comments on their looks, and that female characters tended to be more physically attractive than their male counterparts. Additionally, Aubrey (2004) conducted a content analysis of popular teenage prime time television drama programming, and found that almost all of the episodes sampled contained adolescent sexual content, and about a third of the episodes that included sexual content showed characters receiving negative physical, social, and/or emotional sexual consequences. Of the characters that did receive negative consequences

for sexual behavior, the majority of the characters who received the negative consequence were female and overall negative consequences for either male or female characters were more likely to occur if a female character was the one who had initiated the sexual behavior (Aubrey, 2004). Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008) also conducted a content analysis of gender portrayals in the top 20 highest selling U.S. teen movies released between 1995 and 2005 and then conducted an empirical study examining the relationship between emerging adults' levels of teen movie exposure and gender-based attitudes towards friendships. The authors found "female characters are significantly more likely to engage in and be rewarded for socially aggressive behaviors than are male characters in teen movies" (p. 136). Furthermore, Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008) note that female young adults who watched more teen movies and identified strongly with the characters reported greater "negative perceptions of their friends' friendship behaviors" (p. 140).

Taken together, these content analyses highlight the impossible standards female characters are confined to in the media, in which they must be body-conscious and concerned with attracting male partners, but are punished for any sexual behavior they initiate, all while being socially rewarded for being mean towards their friends. As social cognitive theory predicts that humans learn about which behavior to emulate based on the observed rewards or punishments of the behavior (Bandura, 2001), adolescent females learn these contradictory messages through their media exposure about how to perform their gender and emulate behavior seen as rewarding (such as being a mean girl) and avoid behavior that is seen as punishing (such as not being concerned with one's physical appearance).

Romantic ideals and relationship values. While stereotypical and limiting representations of women can be found across all different media genres, romance and romantic novels, television shows, movies, and reality-based dating programs all tend to emphasize plots

and themes that highlight a socially constructed romantic ideal that leaves little opportunity for women to measure their fictional successes outside of finding a male partner (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippman, Ward, & Seabrook, 2014). “This construct of the romantic ideal is generally comprised of the following four themes: Love can overlook flaws; love can seek out that one perfect mate; love can happen instantaneously; and love can overcome all obstacles” (Hefner & Wilson, 2013, p. 152). Hefner and Wilson (2013) conducted a content analysis of the 52 most popular and highest grossing romantic comedies released from 1998 to 2008 to examine the prevalence of overarching themes of the romantic ideal within the films. The authors found that while almost all of the films did highlight at least one challenge to an aspect of the romantic ideal, this challenge tended to occur only at the expression level, whereas 82% of the films emphasized a “love conquers all” takeaway message (p. 158). Additionally, because many of these films center around the “falling in love phase” of a new relationship yet also feature grand romantic gestures, the films shore up a romanticism in which newer relationships are “containing all the sparks and passion of new love, but also all the devotion and sacrifice of longer-term relationships” (Lippman et al., 2014, p. 129).

In order to examine the relationship between individuals’ media exposure and their romantic ideal beliefs, Sergin and Nabi (2002) conducted an empirical study examining unmarried college students’ television viewing habits and their idealistic views about marriage. The authors found that college students who tended to hold more idealistic views about marriage reported a greater frequency of exposure to romantic-themed television programming, such as romantic comedies and soap operas. Similarly, Hefner and Wilson (2013) conducted an empirical study examining the relationship between college students’ romantic comedy film exposure and their romantic ideal beliefs. The authors found that greater romantic comedy

exposure was significantly related to the romantic belief of idealization of one's partner. However, because the study only looked at romantic comedies and not other forms of romantic media, the study was not able to produce a significant relationship between this form of media exposure and the other three domains of the romantic ideal. To account for this finding, Lippman et al. (2014) conducted a study examining college students' exposure to marriage-themed reality television, romantic-themed and sub-themed movies, and situation comedies. The authors found the viewers with greater romantic themed and sub-themed movie exposure endorsed stronger beliefs in the 'love conquers all' romantic ideal. However, exposure to romantic media had a stronger correlation with viewers' endorsement of romantic relationship ideals when viewers also tended to more strongly believe in the realism of the media.

Overall, these findings indicate that exposure to romantic media does potentially influence viewers' beliefs and idealization of socially constructed romantic ideals. Of note, all three of these studies relied on a mostly white and almost entirely heterosexual participant population (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014; Sergin & Nabi, 2002). The content analysis of modern popular romantic films conducted by Hefner and Wilson (2013) indicated that almost all of the major characters were also white and heterosexual. Considering the limits of diversity within mainstream media and media effects research, the findings from this field of research may only be explaining the media's influence on individuals whose lives are reflected and showcased within the media imagery itself. Also, Sergin and Nabi (2002) and Hefner and Wilson (2013) had a majority participant sample of female college students, while Lippman et al. (2014) had a more evenly distributed participant pool between men and women. That said, Lippman et al. (2014) reported that female college students were more likely than male students to consume romantic media overall. However, the authors did find that male participants

reported greater levels of mean romantic ideal beliefs than female participants. This finding is consistent with the popular romantic comedy film content analysis finding that male characters more often expressed romantic ideals within the films, while female characters more often expressed challenges to the relationship ideals (Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

Forming romantic relationships is a significant developmental milestone in the lives of American adolescents and emerging adults (Collins, 2003), and considering the normalization of dating in the media within the realm of romanticism (Hefner & Wilson, 2013) it follows that media exposure may play a significant role in actual adolescent dating behavior. Rivadeneyra and Lebo (2008) conducted a study examining the relationship between adolescent television exposure and adolescent gender-based dating attitudes and behavior. The authors found that female adolescents tended to watch more romantic programming, females who watched more romantic themed television shows reported more traditional gender role attitudes and beliefs, and specific soap opera genre television programming was more strongly correlated with a younger age of dating behavior initiation. Given that romantic television programming normalizes idealistic romantic ideals, and that individuals who more frequently view romantic programming may be more likely to initiate dating behavior at younger ages, it is important to understand the media's influence in the dating patterns of adolescents. Furthermore, because individuals who more strongly endorse romantic relationship ideals may be more at risk of staying in a relationship with an abusive partner for fear of leaving their one true love (Lippman et al., 2014), an examination of negative consequences for viewers who endorse a media ideology that normalizes romantic relationship ideals—even within the context of violence—is needed.

Adolescent Dating Violence, Risk Factors, and Media Exposure

Adolescent dating violence is broadly defined as any form of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or verbal abuse—including stalking behavior—occurring between current or former dating partners, ages 13 to 19-years old (Connolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2010; Manganello, 2008; Vagi et al., 2013). According to 2013 survey data collected from the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a national biennial school-based survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor high school students' health-risk behaviors, 10.3% of students reported experiencing dating violence (Kann et al., 2014). Students who experienced dating violence reported they “had been hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with one or more times during the 12 months before the survey” (Kann et al., 2014, p. 10). Additionally, 10.4% of students who had dated someone within the 12-month period before the survey reported they “had been kissed, touched, or physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to by someone they were dating or going out with one or more times” (Kann et al., 2014, p. 11). While both male and female students reported experiencing either physical and/or sexual dating violence, female students were approximately twice as likely to have reported experiencing both forms of abuse (Kann et al., 2014).

Vagi et al. (2013) conducted a review of 19 risk and protective factor research studies of adolescent dating violence perpetration that examined individual and relational factors occurring before adolescent dating violence perpetration was reported by research participants. The authors identified 53 key risk factors for dating violence perpetration that were grouped into individual risk factors (e.g., mental health issues, general aggression, and attitudes of accepting dating violence) and relational risk factors (e.g., engaging in peer violence, having friends who

perpetrate dating violence, and parent marital conflict). Vagi et al. (2013) also identified that cognitive dissonance after committing dating violence and having a positive relationship with one's mother were some of the key protective factors against dating violence perpetration. Additionally, Foshee et al. (2008) found that the significant relationship between minority status and adolescent dating violence perpetration noted by multiple previous research studies is actually mediated by "destructive communication skills, acceptance of dating abuse, gender stereotyping, and exposure to family violence" (p. 602). Interestingly, while mental health issues such as depression, attitudes that support acceptance of dating violence, and traditional gender roles were found to be risk factors for dating violence perpetration, longitudinal research examining adolescent risk factors for dating violence victimization also found these same risk factors to be implicated (Foshee et al., 2004). Furthermore, while greater acceptance of traditional gender roles has been linked with higher rates of sexual violence perpetration for boys, gender-stereotyping beliefs predicted higher rates of chronic sexual dating violence victimization for girls (Foshee et al., 2004). Thus, in considering the multiple trajectories that can lead to adolescent dating violence victimization and perpetration, it is important to understand how gender roles and aggression tolerant attitudes impact dating violence health outcomes for both boys and girls.

Gender and power risk factors. Feminist theory and research has over time conceptualized male-perpetrated intimate partner violence in adult heterosexual relationships as stemming from an abuse of male privilege, power, and control that is embedded within a hegemonic patriarchal society (Chung, 2005). This theoretical understanding of relationship violence as a part of larger societal systems of gender inequity can be used to explain the gendered relationship dynamics prevalent in adolescent heterosexual relationships that contribute

to adolescent dating violence (Chung, 2005). Chung (2005) conducted a series of qualitative interviews with 25 adolescent females and 15 adolescent males to explore how adolescent dating relationships may be impacted by hegemonic gendered systems of power and control. Chung (2005) found that both male and female participants felt compelled to perform their heterosexuality through forming intimate relationships with peers. However, for women the emphasis was greater in terms of forming a specific dating relationship and finding romantic love. Chung (2005) notes,

The idea that romantic love is characterized by individualism and freedom (Burns, 2000; Giddens, 1992) to choose a partner ignores the compulsoriness of heterosexuality (Rich, 1996) in which women's social identity is construed through being in a heterosexual relationship. It also ignores the gendered scripts within romantic love, which privilege male power. (p. 449)

Thus, because female participants placed strong importance on remaining in romantic relationships, they expressed sentiments of individualism through their decisions to remain with partners displaying signs or aspects of dating violence, without critically examining or reflecting on how their choices are actually constricted "within an individualistic discourse which further masks the effects of gender inequality" (Chung, 2005, p. 453).

Empirical research examining how gender and power characteristics impact dating violence perpetration by male and female adolescents further supports Chung's (2005) formulation of adolescent dating violence. Giordano, Soto, Manning, and Longmore (2010) and Kaura and Allen (2004) examined how gendered relationship power differentials impacted adolescent and young adult participants. The studies revealed that for men and women, dissatisfaction with power dynamics in their relationships contributed to adolescent dating

violence perpetration overall. However, men were more likely to initiate violence towards a female partner if they perceived that they had less power in their relationship (Giordano et al., 2010; Kaura & Allen, 2004). Giordano et al. (2010) also found that adolescents who reported more jealousy, verbal conflict, and cheating within their dating relationships were more likely to have perpetrated dating violence against their partners. Jealousy and verbal conflict are often early warning signs for non-abusive partners of problematic relationship dynamics that can put them at risk for dating violence victimization (Murphy & Smith, 2010). Murphy and Smith (2010) conducted a study examining adolescent girls' responses to warning signs of abuse in their dating relationships, including jealousy/possessiveness and verbal aggression. The authors found that adolescent female participants perceived jealous and possessive behaviors of male partners, as well as verbal aggression, to be less serious, and that many participants were unaware that these behaviors could be warning signs of abuse. Given that the social construction of romanticism privileges being in a relationship as more important than the quality of the actual relationship (Chung, 2005), it is highly concerning that adolescent girls may not be aware of unhealthy relationship dynamics that can lead to violence victimization.

Media exposure risk factors. Not only is the media one of the key social institutions upholding hegemonic and limiting gendered representations of men and women in American society, but also where female adolescents spend their time learning about dating and romantic relationships. A content analysis of the 10 most popular television shows watched by adolescents from 2001 to 2002 revealed that about half of all relationships portrayed were free from conflict (Sherry & De Souza, 2005). When conflict was present, it was almost always portrayed as the female partner instigating the conflict towards the male partner for something the male partner did that was upsetting to the female partner, and in 83% of the conflicts everything was worked

out between the couple by the end of the episode. Thus, within the realm of romanticism in the media conflict is minimized or easily resolvable, “suggesting that relationships are easy to maintain. Romance is happy feelings and happy endings without the need to resolve conflict” (Sherry & De Souza, 2005, p. 17). For adolescents with limited personal dating experience these messages are highly concerning, as through cultivation and social learning practices, media influences may be contributing to adolescents’ understanding of conflict—and potentially violence—as a normative aspect of a dating relationship (Manganello, 2008).

Manganello (2008) created a conceptual model for researchers to examine how media influences may be an additional risk factor contributing to adolescent dating violence. The model suggested that adolescent dating violence is caused by interactions between overall exposure to violence, individual socio-demographic factors, relationship factors (such as relationship satisfaction and conflict), and network factors (such as societal norms and parent/peer influences). Manganello (2008) conceptualized that individual media use and selection of media containing messages about violence contribute to individual violence exposure and that the mass media’s overall messaging about violence contributes to network factors influencing the individual at the micro and macro levels. As these four spheres of influence interact with one another, adolescents make and extract meaning from the messages about dating violence and apply them to their understanding of their own dating relationships through social learning processes, putting them at risk for dating violence victimization and/or perpetration (Manganello, 2008). Building on Manganello’s (2008) conceptual model, Connolly et al. (2010) conducted a one-year longitudinal study of adolescents in dating relationships to examine how media use and influence fits into an ecological model of dating violence risk factors and impacts dating violence outcomes for individuals. The authors found that exposure to generally aggressive media did

contribute over time to dating aggression outcomes for adolescents. However, the authors noted that this relationship was significantly mediated by aggression-tolerant attitudes for both male and female participants. Taken together, if media messages portray traditional gender roles and romantic ideals that love lasts forever and can overcome all obstacles (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Sherry & De Souza, 2005), *and* media exposure influences traditional gender role attitudes (Rivadeneira & Lebo, 2008) and aggression-tolerant attitudes (Connolly et al., 2010), it follows that adolescent media exposure poses an important risk factor for adolescent dating violence.

Media influences on adolescent dating behavior. While media use and exposure has been implicated as a contributing risk factor in the etiology of adolescent dating violence (Connolly et al., 2010; Manganello, 2008), new research suggests genre-specific aggressive media use and exposure may influence actual dating aggression between adolescent romantic partners (Aubrey, Rhea, Olson, & Fine, 2013; Bonomi et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2011; Friedlander, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2013). Friedlander et al. (2013) conducted a three-year longitudinal study of adolescent dating partners, examining participant aggressive media use across multiple media platforms (e.g., television, movies, magazines, Internet), aggression-tolerant attitudes, and rates of dating violence perpetration and victimization. The authors found that, for boys and girls, both victimization and perpetration rates of dating violence behaviors were found to have a statistically significant relationship with media aggression use and exposure, specifically, when mediated by aggression-tolerant attitudes. Also, adolescents who used more forms of aggressive media across multiple media platforms showed a stronger predictive outcome of dating violence perpetration and victimization up to three years later; though the mediating factor of aggression-tolerant attitudes was stronger for perpetration than victimization (Friedlander et al., 2013).

Coyne et al. (2011) also found in their cross-sectional study of adolescent aggressive media use and reported perpetration of relationship aggression, that both male and female adolescents who reported using more aggressive media were more likely to have reported using aggressive behaviors in their dating relationships. Both male and female adolescents who reported media exposure to romantic relational aggression—“which involves using or manipulating the relationship to harm one’s romantic partner...[such as] threatening to break up with the partner as a way to control their actions” (Coyne et al., 2011, p. 57)—reported higher rates of romantic relational aggression in their dating relationships. However, the authors found that, for male adolescents, use and exposure to media depicting physical violence correlated with increased physical violence in their future dating relationships, whereas for female adolescents this correlation was not proven.

Since power and control are highly implicated in the development of dating and intimate partner violence, Aubrey et al. (2013) conducted a study specifically examining the relationship between adolescent use of television media portraying high rates of interpersonal conflict and adolescent-reported rates of controlling behaviors and romantic relational aggression in their relationships. The authors reported that adolescents who watched more television with frequent interpersonal conflict were more likely to report use of controlling behaviors in their dating relationships and this relationship was strongest for adolescents who had higher perception scores of television realism. Thus, while both male and female adolescents are implicated in the perpetration and victimization of emotional, verbal, and psychological adolescent dating violence (Aubrey et al., 2013), aggressive media influences for men may also predict greater acceptance and perpetration of potentially lethal forms of relationship abuse (Coyne et al., 2011).

What is further concerning though, is that adolescent females are some of the highest media consumers of popular romantic media that glamorizes and romanticizes dating violence. Bonomi et al. (2014) conducted one of the first studies examining health outcomes for young adult females, ages 18 to 24, who read fictionalized novels romanticizing dating violence. The authors specifically focused on the *Fifty Shades* book series, which content analyses reveal to be filled with male-perpetrated relational and physical violence against a female partner. Bonomi et al. (2014) note in their research,

Young women who read at least the first novel in the *Fifty Shades* series (but not all three novels) were at an increased risk of having, at some point during their lifetime, a partner who shouted, yelled, or swore at them and who delivered unwanted calls/text messages—behaviors that are consistent with definitions of verbal/emotional abuse and stalking, respectively. (p. 724)

Additionally, adolescents are at an increased risk of third-person perception in believing that those around them “are more influenced than they are by media messages” of dating violence, with greater amounts of third-person perception increasing perceived rates of dating violence among their fellow adolescents (Chapin, 2013, p. 393). Therefore, adolescent females who consume media that romanticizes dating violence have an increased chance of relational victimization, they are also at risk of believing dating violence to be a problem for those around them and but not for themselves.

Not only do fictionalized media representations of male-against-female dating violence skew the information in favor of victim-blaming instead of situating relationship violence within a hegemonic and patriarchal society, but media accounts of real-life relationship violence stories also rarely account for larger societal systems at play. Content analyses of teenage magazines,

largely targeted at a female audience, discuss real-life stories of relationship violence in ways that highlight individual characteristics of the female victim and male perpetrator and deemphasize a systems-perspective of this social problem (Kettrey & Emery, 2010). “As a consequence, teen readers may be left feeling that they must battle a large and pervasive cultural problem in isolation” (Kettrey & Emery, 2010, p. 1290). Thus, as cultivation (Gerbner et al., 2002) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) would suggest, adolescents are receiving the message on a large scale across media that relationship violence is an individual problem, they are invulnerable to it while their peers are not, and conflict is a normative part of relationships that does not lead to undesirable outcomes for the victim or the perpetrator. However, adolescent dating violence has been shown to have numerous adverse mental and physical health outcomes including: depression, anxiety, school disengagement, post-traumatic stress disorder, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, physical injuries, and, in some cases, death (Connolly et al., 2010; Manganello, 2008). Also, adolescents who are involved in an abusive relationship when they are younger are at an increased risk of being in additional abusive relationships as they mature, leading to further adverse health outcomes (Manganello, 2008). Adolescent dating violence is a serious national health problem and it appears that the media is partially implicated in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that increase risk of adolescent violence perpetration and victimization. The next section provides an in-depth critical examination of one of the most popular fictionalized media depictions of romanticized dating violence to date that has been consumed by millions of adolescent females nationwide: *The Twilight Saga*.

Exploring Gender, Violence, and Fan Responses to *The Twilight Saga*

The Twilight Saga is a multi-billion-dollar book and movie franchise targeted at adolescent female audiences that follows the epic romance between human teenage girl Bella

Swan and century-old vampire Edward Cullen. The series began as a young adult novel written by Stephanie Meyer, a Mormon housewife and first-time author who wanted to capture and expand upon a vivid dream she had of a “young woman and a vampire, talking, in a meadow” (Grossman & Alexander, 2009, p. 52). Meyer had not originally intended for the series to explode with popularity among global young adult audiences, and for the first few years after the series release, that was the case. The first installment, *Twilight*, was released in the fall of 2005 with only 75,000 print copies ordered (Grossman & Alexander, 2009). By the release of *Eclipse* in 2007 though, the third book in the series, over 1 million copies had been ordered and fans were lining up at book stores across the country to get their books and see what would happen next for the series’ protagonists (Grossman & Alexander, 2009). Due to the rising fandom and success of the young adult book series that spent over 235 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list, a movie adaptation was quickly ordered (Grossman & Alexander, 2009). However, due to the high popularity of the series amongst primarily adolescent girls, Hollywood was unsure how successful the film adaptation would be and only gave director Catherine Hardwicke \$37 million and a few months to make the first film (Bucciferro, 2014). The film adaptation of *Twilight* was released in 2008 and ended up making over \$70 million in the first weekend of box-office sales and is currently considered one of the highest grossing films by a female director ever made (Bucciferro, 2014). The next four film installments, with the fourth book *Breaking Dawn* divided into two films, were released between 2009 and 2012. These films were given much higher budgets and grossed over \$3 billion in film sales.

While Meyer may not have anticipated the lasting impact her novels would have on female youth culture, many feminist and media scholars agree that *The Twilight Saga* deserves cultural study considering that millions of adolescent girls engaged with this media during the

height of its popularity from 2007 to 2012 (Bucciferro, 2014; Parke & Wilson, 2011). During the height of the *Twilight* fandom, “Twi-hards” engaged with the series beyond reading the books and watching the films—through social media, fan-fiction, conferences, fan-created websites and message boards, and through the purchase of merchandise (Click, Aubrey, & Behm-Morawitz, 2010). *The Twilight Saga* rapidly became one of the most successful young adult novels and franchises in recent history, sparking the attention of feminist and girlhood studies scholars.

Click et al. (2010) notes,

The coming-of-age narrative that typifies YA [young adult] fiction is found in the transformation of characters from girlhood to womanhood through romance.

Traditionally, these books have reinforced dominant ideologies of femininity and masculinity through the archetype of the ‘good girl’ and the normalization of male control of romantic interactions. (p. 77)

Thus because of *Twilight*’s ubiquitous hold on adolescent popular culture marketed to girls and young women, feminist and media scholars have offered numerous textual and critical analyses of the messages and ideologies embedded within the series, with particular attention to the ways in which traditional gender roles and the romanticization of dating violence are portrayed.

Traditional gender roles and abstinence porn. In their critical analyses of the messages embedded within the *Twilight* series, numerous feminist and media scholars reveal a pattern of traditional gender roles and abstinence-only ideologies that underscores the entire series’ narrative (Click et al., 2010; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Seifert, 2008; Silver, 2010; Taylor, 2011). Meyer’s work has been likened to romances of generations past, from *Romeo and Juliet* to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. While these classic romantic stories represent traditional gender ideologies situated within their points in history, modern feminist scholarship has

critiqued *Twilight* for its packaging of a modern romance novel for young adult women within patriarchal, anti-feminist, and traditional gender role ideologies (Click et al., 2010; Parke & Wilson, 2011). As mentioned above, the series plot centers around 17-year-old human Bella Swan who moves to a new town to live with her father and is swept away into romance and fantasy as she encounters vampires and werewolves within her small town. Throughout the series narrative, Bella is portrayed as a passive, weak, and clumsy, childish protagonist who embodies traditional femininity and heroines of romance novels from a pre-feminist era (Parke & Wilson, 2011; Silver, 2010). The only activities Bella is shown to enjoy are cooking and cleaning for her father and spending all of her time with her vampire boyfriend Edward and his coven of vampire family. She is consistently in peril, sometimes putting herself there on purpose, and in need of rescue from male characters. Silver (2010) notes,

She embodies, in her physical klutziness the adolescent girl ill at ease in her new woman's body and with her first emotions of first love and lust. Nevertheless, in the context of Edward and Bella's relationship, her gracelessness provides numerous opportunities, particularly in *Twilight*, for Meyer to demonstrate the dynamic in their relationship of perpetual rescuer and rescued. (p. 125)

Additionally, Bella is shown to have very little self-esteem and is constantly commenting on how unattractive she is, so as to highlight the significance of being noticed and desired by Edward and to validate her decision to turn her life upside down and sacrifice her humanity to maintain the relationship (Parke & Wilson, 2011; Taylor, 2011). Moreover, feminist scholars are quick to point out Bella's complete isolation from friends and family in the series and how her relationship with Edward comes to define her existence, so much so that when they temporarily

break up in the second book her voice as narrator literally disappears, and readers are left with a handful of blank pages within the narrative (Click et al., 2010; Parke & Wilson, 2011).

Seifert (2008) referred to the *Twilight* series in her analysis as “abstinence porn,” in which Bella’s constant desires for Edward to consummate their relationship are thwarted by Edward’s assertion that he is too dangerous to have sex with and that he would only take that risk if they were also married. While Bella asserts throughout the novel that she does not want to get married, once she is faced with the choice of being with Edward as his wife or never being with him intimately, she agrees to his proposal and they are married right out of high school (Taylor, 2011). However, after having sex for the first time on their wedding night, Bella is instantly pregnant with a half-human, half-vampire fetus that is literally killing her. “The *Twilight* books conflate Bella losing her virginity with the loss of other things, including her sense of self and her very life. Such a high-stakes treatment of abstinence reinforces the idea that Bella is powerless, an object” (Seifert, 2008, p.5). Click et al. (2010) highlight in their analysis that *Twilight* thus works to link adolescent female sexuality and desire with death and a loss of innocence. Furthermore, Bella immediately is portrayed as willing to sacrifice her life for her unborn child and the ability to live an immortal life as mother and wife in a heteronormative nuclear family with Edward (Silver, 2010; Taylor, 2011).

Therefore, feminist scholars critical analyses of *Twilight* showcase the contradictions of choice within a post-feminist narrative, where Bella’s choice to give up her life for her child is individualized and romanticized without any critical examination of the way in which her choices were limited in the first place by the patriarchy (Parke & Wilson, 2011; Silver, 2010; Taylor, 2011). Parke and Wilson (2011) also point out that the traditional gender roles, ideology, and patriarchal values romanticized in *Twilight* are further problematic because Bella serves as

the narrative voice and Meyer intentionally left out larger descriptions of her character so that readers could more easily project themselves onto her as they engage with the series. Without critical examination of the sexist and traditional gender role messages in *Twilight*, young female fans may be learning about what kind of romantic relationship values they seek in a partner based on Edward and Bella's relationship and the overarching message that giving up your identity is acceptable for the chance at eternal love.

Romanticization of adolescent dating violence. As a romance series, *The Twilight Saga* embodies a number of myths about romantic love including: love at first sight, love is forever, and romantic love is the most important relationship of one's life (Click et al., 2010). However, beyond hyperbolic representations of romantic love reinforcing false stereotypes about the amount of work and commitment needed to sustain a real romantic relationship, many feminist and media scholars have come to recognize that Bella and Edward's relationship in the series also parallels the characteristics of adolescent dating violence (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Franiuk & Scherr, 2013; Merskin, 2011; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Taylor, 2014). Collins and Carmody (2011) conducted a textual-analysis of the four novels examining the amounts of physical and sexual violence, and behaviors that have been shown to predict relationship violence, such as controlling behaviors (e.g., physically detaining, verbal demands, making threats, controlling information), stalking, jealousy, male aggressiveness, and traditional gender roles. The authors found 80 instances of directed physical violence, 16 of which result in Bella obtaining injuries, and 96 instances of secondary violence directed at Bella by other vampires and characters in the series—many of which necessitate her rescue by a male love interest. Edward also exhibits 31 verbal commands at Bella, 38 instances of emotional control, 11 instances of stalking, 17 acts of jealous behavior, 81 acts of male aggressiveness, and 89

instances of traditional gender roles (Collins & Carmody, 2011). The initial sex scene described in the narrative between Bella and Edward results in Bella obtaining significant bruising and a narrative description of the room in shambles after their violent sexual encounter.

Taylor (2014) notes in her analysis of *Twilight* that Edward is able to maintain control over Bella through “withholding information and making cryptic remarks for her to try to decipher, acting increasingly unpredictably and constantly reiterating how dangerous he is, which subtly implies that it would be best if she complied with his wishes” (p. 391). Throughout the series Edward is depicted as having erratic mood swings, which he attributes to not being able to read Bella’s mind, having to always control himself in her presence, and constantly having to rescue her from imminent peril (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Franiuk & Scherr, 2013; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Taylor, 2014). Bella works to regulate her own emotions and her behavior in Edwards’s presence and blames herself for any of his violent outbursts, which feminist scholars note are key dynamics in an abusive relationship. Edward uses surveillance, public possessiveness, and countless examples of stalking and controlling behavior in the series to control Bella without being able to read her mind. Examples of his behavior include: breaking into her bedroom without her consent to watch her sleep, eavesdropping on her conversations with other characters, following her to ensure she is not spending time with others he deems dangerous, monitoring her interactions with other male characters, and, in one instance, disassembling her car battery so that she could not leave his side and go to another character (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Franiuk & Scherr, 2013; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Taylor, 2014). Edward also uses physical force to control Bella, often under the guise of keeping her safe, including physically carrying her away from danger, pushing her out of the way, grabbing at her, and holding her against her will at his family’s home. This results in Bella isolating herself from

friends and family, since she cannot let others know Edward's true identity as a vampire, making her further reliant on their relationship. Parke and Wilson (2011) note,

Because the Bella/Edward relationship is presented as fated and Edward's actions are justified as being for the benefit of Bella's safety, we permit Bella to respond in ways that would concern us if we saw it manifested in others close to us. We condone her continued disregard for her own personal safety. We allow her to isolate herself from her family and friends. We accept her explanations for her repeated injuries. Bella literally gives up her life for "love." Edward's controlling behavior coupled with Bella's justification of it creates a situation in which the female's subordination becomes not only acceptable to readers, but rational as well. (p. 171)

Thus, as Bella's desire for Edward grows, in part because of his hyper-masculinity and devotion toward her despite the pain he acknowledges she causes him, her narration recodes Edwards controlling and aggressive behaviors as chivalrous and romantic and it becomes her responsibility to take care of him (Franiuk & Scherr, 2013).

Merskin (2011) goes beyond categorizing Bella and Edwards's relationship as abusive, to code Edward as a fictional representation of a compensated psychopath. A compensated psychopath is someone who "approaches the psychological extreme of psychopathy but is able to pass for functional in society" (Merskin, 2011, p. 157). Edward is narcissistic, displays a lack of morality and an ability to use rationalization to justify his actions, operates largely free from feelings of guilt in response to his actions, is able to control others around him with his charming personality, and is ultimately able to lure Bella in by making her feel special as the object of his desire, in spite of the danger he poses to her (Merskin, 2011). The more Edward tells Bella how dangerous he is, the more sexually desirable he becomes to her, which recodes his warnings

about his potential for violence as romantic and sexy and allows Bella to miss the real warning signs that this relationship could be dangerous. As Franiuk and Scherr (2013) note, in vampire fiction men's aggressiveness and violence is naturalized, which allows for Bella to accept Edward's mood swings and outbursts as just part of his nature and thus normalizes male violence against women as culturally acceptable and part of any romantic relationship. "It is Meyer's use of romance conventions that also transform the powerful, violent, and therefore potentially anxiety-inducing, males within the series into sites of pleasure and desire; these positive feelings then render them as reassuring" (Taylor, 2014, p. 394). Therefore, because the takeaway message from *Twilight* is that being in a relationship is more important than making sure that the relationship is safe, equitable, and healthy, Bella and Edward's relationship is romanticized throughout *Twilight* and readers are never once invited to critically think about the greater social constraints of the patriarchy and men's violence against women embedded within the series.

Current *Twilight* empirical research of fans' beliefs. While numerous feminist and media scholars have taken an interest in *Twilight*, offering critiques, critical readings, and textual analyses, few researchers have actually conducted large-scale empirical studies examining the thoughts and behaviors of actual *Twilight* fans. Bucciferro (2014) and Parke and Wilson (2011) offer small studies of mostly female *Twilight* fans based on qualitative data collected from focus groups and interviews respectively. Bucciferro (2014) found that fans showed high levels of engagement with the series, often reporting reading the novels dozens of times and consistently re-watching the films. Bucciferro (2014) also noted that many of the fans strongly identified with the series' male leads Edward and Jacob and that their reason for engaging with the series and considering themselves fans had more to do with their investment in gazing at and dreaming about the male heroes than it did with their investment in the series' protagonist Bella Swan.

Parke and Wilson (2011) also found that for the fans they interacted with, “Few readers mentioned gazing at the female characters in the same lingering way, even when they liked and identified with them. Gazing upon the men, however, whether in the words on the page or on the screen of the film, was a central feature of the pleasure all the respondents took in *Twilight*” (p. 76). Another theme found across fan responses was that part of fans’ desires for Edward, or a partner like Edward, was his protective nature over Bella and their desire for a partner to care for them as deeply as Edward is portrayed to care for Bella (Parke & Wilson, 2011). Fans from both studies also appear to be drawn to the sexually charged relationship between Edward and Bella and the contradiction of this arousal within the larger narrative of abstinence and waiting for sex until marriage. While these studies offer some initial ideas of what draws *Twilight* fans to engage with the series, their generalizability is restricted due to the limiting nature of qualitative research to describe larger populations.

In response to this gap in the *Twilight* fan research, Click et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative online survey of 3,624 adult and 627 teenage female *Twilight* fans to examine the ways female fans relate to and understand the romantic relationships in the series. The authors found that for both adult and teen fans, the series was a highly immersive experience, with fans scoring high on Green and Brock’s (2000) measure of immersion and transportation into a series’ narrative. For adults, an identification of a feminist identity impacted immersion level, creating lower levels of immersion for feminist-identified fans, but this was not true for teens. Additionally, both greater numbers of adult and teen fans reported that they identified with Bella and Edward’s romantic relationship. However, adult fans that identified more with Bella and Edward’s relationship were more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction in their own real-life relationships (Click et al., 2010). The authors also created a measure of *Twilight* (such as

jealousness and protectiveness like Edward) and anti-*Twilight* (such as partner equality) relationship characteristics and asked participants to rate which characteristics they most wanted in a partner. The authors found that participants who most desired the Edward and Bella relationship were more likely to desire the *Twilight* relationship characteristics in a prospective partner. Findings from this study continue to provide evidence of the highly immersive nature of *The Twilight Saga* and the power of transportation of fictional narratives for audiences (Green & Brock, 2000) as well as female fans' idealization of the Edward and Bella relationship above other romantic pairings in the series. However, further research is needed to continue to understand how *Twilight* may be influencing fans' beliefs about relationships, especially when considering the overall romanticization of dating violence in the series.

Biases and Limitations

In reviewing the literature above that examines the relationship between media use among adolescent and young adult populations and related health outcomes, one obvious limitation is that the majority of studies are correlational in design and thus cannot speak for known causal implications. Media effects research that has examined causal implications of media use and direct behavioral or attitudinal outcomes often shows stronger effects immediately after the media exposure and that follow-up studies indicate a lessening of the effects or do not account for individual characteristics of participants viewing the experimental media condition (Browne & Hamilton-Giahrtsis, 2005). Thus, the majority of media effects research has taken a correlational approach to examining the relationships between groups of people who consume specific types of media, either in format or genre, and their relationships with varying health outcomes, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. Considering that adolescents consume about nine hours of media a day (Common Sense Media, 2015), there is a need for more longitudinal

research examining the health outcomes of adolescents across a multitude of settings and the ways in which they engage with and experience the media they consume over time. While social science research may never be able to pinpoint a direct causal implication between individual media consumption and behavioral or attitudinal change, the existing correlational studies and meta-analyses do suggest that the media has the potential to reinforce attitudes and beliefs of individual consumers to reflect the media's version of a false hegemonic and patriarchal version of reality (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Ward & Friedman, 2006).

Additionally, because content analyses of romantic-themed media largely consumed by women almost exclusively portrays white and heterosexual couples, media effects research may only be explaining correlational links for individuals whose own identity categories are reflected in the media they consume (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014; Sergin & Nabi, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of studies listed above examining the relationship between media consumption and romantic relationship ideals (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014; Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Sergin & Nabi, 2002) or media consumption as a risk factor for adolescent dating violence (Aubrey et al., 2013; Connolly et al., 2010; Coyne et al. 2011; Friedlander et al., 2013) were using majority white and heterosexual pools of participants. Thus, any generalizations from this field of media effects research may actually be examining the relationship between media consumption of media portraying white and heterosexual couples, and any attitudes and beliefs about relationships held by white and heterosexual media consumers. Given that adolescent dating violence is, of course, also a health problem for non-white and non-heterosexual couples, additional research that explores the relationships between

popular media consumption and outcomes for diverse populations is needed to better understand how diverse groups engage with hegemonic media relationship portrayals.

Another limitation of the literature reviewed is that the majority of media effects research examining media as a risk factor for adolescent dating violence focuses on screen media. Bonomi et al. (2014) report that their study is the first of its kind to explore the relationship between adolescent and young adult female consumers of print media that romanticizes dating violence and negative health outcomes for media consumers. Given the authors' findings that readers of this media were more likely to have had a partner that exhibited dating violence behaviors, future studies are needed that continue to explore the relationship between print media and health outcomes. However, given that many modern novels geared towards teenagers and young adults are adapted into films—including *The Twilight Saga* series and the *50 Shades* series that Bonomi et al. (2014) discuss—it may be important to consider enhanced narrative transportation across forms of media, as Green et al. (2008) suggest that this may have a more powerful impact on media consumers. This would fit with social cognitive (Bandura, 2001) and cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002) perspectives that more media consumption can create a greater perception that the media is accurately representing reality and that consumers then have more opportunities to internalize media messaging in relation to their own behavior. That said, because this study was still correlational in nature, it did not account for other factors, such as parent and peer influences that could contribute to how people engage with this media.

If media influences do not necessarily lead to direct causal behavioral or attitudinal changes, does it matter then that women and young girls continue to choose to engage with media that reinforces limited and problematic idealized relationships such as *Twilight*? Throughout the literature review, ideas of post-feminist discourse have been talked about, as

regardless of the content analyses and feminist critiques suggesting the limited portrayals of relationships in popular media, women continue to report that they consume large quantities of romantic-themed media. Yet, not all women who engage with this media report experiencing negative health outcomes. Doyle (2009) writes in her article defending adolescent female consumers choice to engage with *Twilight* that, “not everything girls like is good art—or, for that matter, good feminism. Still, the *Twilight* backlash should matter to feminists, even if the series makes them shudder. If we admit that girls are powerful consumers, then we admit that they have the ability to shape the culture” (p. 31). While it is true that girls are powerful consumers and do have some level of choice in the media they engage with, it is impossible to ignore that *Twilight* is not a standalone example of a problematic adolescent relationship, but rather part of a larger cultural phenomenon that continues to offer reductive representations of girls and women in the media. Thus, when discussing *Twilight* from an academic perspective, while it is important to consider individual media consumer’s choice to engage with this media, it is also important to not lose sight of the fact that *Twilight* was not created in a cultural vacuum. The ideologies presented in *Twilight* are representative of larger heteronormative, sexist, and patriarchal values and individual consumer choice cannot be separated from our larger capitalist society. Therefore, even if social science research is not at a place where there is evidence of causal relationships between media consumptions and direct health outcomes, correlational research speaks volumes for the potentiality of impact these media messages can have for the young people consuming it.

Summary

Overall, content analyses of popular media consumed by adolescent females reveal that popular media showcase highly traditionally gendered and problematic representations of largely white and heterosexual couples across media genres and platforms. These media relationships

tend to romanticize false relationship ideals that love can overcome all obstacles and true love should be everlasting regardless of the quality of the relationship. Specifically within the romantic-themed genres, this media is also highly consumed by female viewers, such as the millions of adolescent girls nationwide who read and watched *The Twilight Saga* in real time as the books and movies were released. Within the realm of traditional gender role ideologies, feminist and media scholars suggest through their critical analyses that adolescent females may be at an increased risk of privileging being in a relationship over examining the quality of the relationship, and this messaging has been found to represent an overarching theme of *Twilight*.

Given that traditional gender role ideologies have been implicated in social science research as risk factors for adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization, it would follow that adolescents who spend more time engaging with media that romanticizes traditional gender roles within a relationship—especially a violent relationship like Bella and Edward’s in *Twilight*—could be at an increased risk for not recognizing the signs of unhealthy relationship dynamics. While media immersion and exposure to *The Twilight Saga* may only be able to explain white and heterosexual media consumers attitudinal shifts in relation to their *Twilight* consumption, there is nevertheless a need for an exploratory study examining young women’s exposure to *Twilight* when they were younger and ways this may have influenced their views about romantic relationships as emerging adults. Thus, given the breadth of content and critical analyses of *Twilight* and the limited empirical studies examining *Twilight* consumers’ engagement with the series, my study attempts to fill the gap in the literature in regards to highly popularized multi-media platform narratives that romanticize dating violence and female young adult consumers’ views about romantic relationships.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Formulation

In an effort to continue to fill the gaps in the media effects literature in regards to female adolescent exposure to popular media that romanticizes dating violence, this study offers an exploratory examination of current young adult women's views about romantic relationships who read and watched *The Twilight Saga* when they were in middle or early high school. The purpose of this study was to determine if the extent of an individual's immersion in and exposure to *The Twilight Saga* prior to age 17 shows a negative correlation with beliefs about romantic love, so that greater immersion and engagement with the series would indicate higher levels of unhealthy views about relationships.

This research project surveyed self-identified female *Twilight* fans between the ages of 18 and 20. To better understand how *Twilight* fans engaged with the series when they were younger, questions were created for this research project to help capture participant demographic information and self-reported fan-related activities. Questions from the Transportation Scale-Short Form (TS-SF) created by Appel, Gnambs, Richter, and Green (2015) were used to measure participants' level of immersion and transportation into the *Twilight* narrative. Additionally, a new measurement exploring individuals' responses to Likert-scale questions about romantic relationships was created to capture the degree to which *Twilight* fans' beliefs about love and relationships display unhealthy characteristics reflecting those embodied by Edward and Bella's

relationship in the series. What follows in this chapter is an examination of the design of this research, including a discussion of the participant sample, recruitment procedures, survey measurements, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

Research Design and Sampling

This study used a quantitative research design and nonprobability purposive sampling to identify eligible participants. After the Smith College School for Social Work's Human Subjects Review Committee approved data collection for this project (Appendix A), a public link to the survey was posted on SurveyMonkey.com. The link to the survey was made available online from November 29, 2015 to February 29, 2015. Participants who met all of the inclusion criteria were directed to the informed consent form and then the full online survey that should have taken participants approximately 10 minutes to complete. Snowball sampling was also used so that participants who completed the full online survey were also invited to forward the link to other individuals they knew who may have been interested in participating in the study.

Eligible participants were identified through the first page of the survey, which asked five initial pre-screening questions to ensure eligibility: currently at least 18 to 20-years-old, female gender identity, age of *Twilight* exposure no older than age 16, read all four *Twilight Saga* books and/or watched all five movie adaptations, and self-identify as current or former *Twilight* fans. (Appendix B). Participants needed to identify as having a female gender identity in order to participate in the study, as the aim of the study was to capture female experiences related to engaging with *The Twilight Saga*, as well as female beliefs and views of romantic relationships. Because a purpose of this study was to learn about the influences from the total immersion of *Twilight*, participants were only recruited if they were involved in the *Twilight* fandom in real time when the books and movies were being released, from 2005 to 2012. Therefore, in order to

be included in the study, participants must have been exposed to the entire *Twilight* series, including reading all four books and/or watching all five movie adaptations prior to age 17. For the purpose of this study, a fan identity was operationalized based on the pre-screening question: “Do you currently, or have you in the past, identified as being a fan of *The Twilight Saga*?”

Survey Measures

After participants passed through all five of the inclusion criteria screening questions and completed the informed consent to participate (discussed below), they were invited to complete the anonymous quantitative online survey through SurveyMonkey.com. Please see Appendix C for a complete copy of the online survey developed for this research study.

Demographics. The first section of the survey asked participants to complete demographic questions including: identifying what region of the United States (or other country) they spent the most time in during elementary, middle, and high school; identifying their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious preference, highest level of education or current grade enrolled, and age (between ages 18-20).

***Twilight* fan experiences and immersion.** Participants were then directed to answer 15 questions related to their past experiences with *The Twilight Saga*. The first five questions asked them to reflect on their level of exposure to the series, including: identifying their age when they first read or watched *The Twilight Saga*, how many times they had read the books and watched the films (ranging from never to more than four times), identifying if they had read any of the books before watching any of the movies, and checking off as many activities they engaged in related to the series (such as watching the films in theatres or purchasing *Twilight* merchandise). Participants were then asked to select their favorite romantic pairing from *The Twilight Saga* (Jacob-Bella; Jasper-Alice; Edward-Bella; Carlisle-Esme).

The next portion of the *Twilight* experience section asked participants to reflect on their reading and/or viewing experience when they previously actively engaged with the series narrative. Questions 13 to 19 are adapted from the 2015 Transportation Scale-Short Form (TS-SF) (Appel et al., 2015) that measures participants' level of immersion into the narrative worlds of the stories they are reading or watching. The TS-SF questions asked participants to reflect on their immersive experiences when engaging with *Twilight* and answer questions such as "I could picture myself in the scenes of the events described in *The Twilight Saga*" on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." Dr. Markus Appel, one of the researchers who developed the TS-SF, gave permission for his scale to be adapted for this research design (Appendix D). The final two questions of this section asked participants to reflect on the same 6-point Likert scale their beliefs of these statements: "I believed Edward Cullen is the perfect significant other for Bella Swan" and "*The Twilight Saga* was/is my favorite series of all time".

Romantic relationship beliefs. The final section of the survey asked participants to reflect on their views about romantic relationships by responding to 15 statements on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The statements were designed to measure the following domains of unsafe dating behavior that researchers have noted Edward exhibits in his romantic relationship with Bella throughout the series (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Parke & Wilson, 2011): jealousy, controlling behavior, quick involvement in a relationship, isolation, aggression acceptability, unrealistic relationship expectations, rigid sex roles, and blaming others for one's feelings.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were primarily recruited electronically so that interested individuals who met eligibility criteria and wished to participate in the survey could more easily access the online link

through SurveyMonkey.com. Permission request emails were first sent to various academic departments at Boston and western Massachusetts's undergraduate colleges to determine their feasibility of forwarding an email containing information about the survey and the direct survey link to their classes of undergraduate students (Appendix E). Colleges that chose to participate included Simmons College, Northeastern University, Boston College, Smith College, and UMass Amherst. The recruitment email that was forwarded to undergraduate students included a study description, direct SurveyMonkey.com survey link, and instructions regarding the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation (Appendix F).

Participants were recruited electronically through postings on public popular online websites and blog forums for *Twilight* fans, such as <http://www.twilightlexicon.com/>, <http://twifans.com/>, Tumblr.com, and Reddit.com. Facebook and Twitter accounts were also created for this study in order to recruit participants who already liked *Twilight*-related fan pages online. All postings on these public online sites contained a brief overview of the research study, eligibility requirements for participation, information about the anonymous and voluntary nature of participation, and a direct link to the online survey. Please see Appendix G for a copy of the recruitment postings used on online *Twilight* fan pages and social media.

In order to generate additional interest for participants to take the online survey, a flyer about the project was also posted throughout the greater Boston area at various undergraduate colleges. Permission to post the flyer was granted at the time of the request from all interested venues. Please see Appendix H for a copy of the recruitment flyer.

Data Collection

Throughout the three months that the survey was available online through SurveyMonkey.com, a total of **315** individuals attempted to take the survey, however only **194**

individuals met full eligibility criteria and were able to participate in the study and complete the full survey. Due to the nature of the recruitment methods outlined above and the exploratory nature of the research study, it was not possible to control for diversity of participants. There were no known risks to participation in this project, participants did not receive any gifts or benefits for their participation, and no federally defined vulnerable populations were solicited for participation. Additionally, the level of interest for participation in this project among individuals who did not meet full eligibility criteria was unanticipated, and will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

Retention of information collected. All completed survey responses submitted by eligible and consenting participants through SurveyMonkey.com were encrypted, password-protected, and firewalled per SurveyMonkey.com's security measures on their website to ensure participant anonymity. All electronic data on SurveyMonkey.com was kept password-protected and confidential. All research materials including survey responses from eligible consenting participants and subsequent analyses were stored in a secure location and will continue to remain as such for three years, according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data was password protected during the storage period.

Ethics and Safeguards

Informed consent. Participants were asked to read through a description of the study and the study procedures, including an estimated amount of time needed to complete the survey, risks and benefits of participation, their ensured anonymity in completing the survey through SurveyMonkey.com, and information about how to contact the researcher and the Smith College Human Subjects Review Committee if they had additional questions or concerns. The Informed

Consent page also explained to participants that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could discontinue the survey at any time while they were completing the survey. Please see Appendix I for a copy of the Informed Consent form that was embedded in the third page of the SurveyMonkey.com survey.

Confidentiality and anonymity. All completed survey responses that were submitted by eligible participants through SurveyMonkey.com were kept confidential, and only viewed by my researcher advisor, the Smith School for Social Work statistical consultant, and myself. There was no information collected from the survey that in any way could be used to identify specific participants and demographic questions were designed to be broad enough not to be used to identify participants. Participant name, email address, and/or IP address was not collected at any point throughout the survey to ensure participant anonymity.

Data Analysis

After data was collected from the online survey, information was uploaded to an Excel spreadsheet and forwarded to the Smith School for Social Work statistical consultant to assist with analyses. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for demographics and *Twilight* fan activities to determine frequencies of responses. A *Twilight* immersion index was created based on the Transportation Scale-Short Form (Appel et al., 2015) recommended analyses and a new *Twilight* fan index was created to group together participants based on their varying degrees of fandom. Additionally, the romantic relationship belief questions were grouped together to create a dating role attitudes health index for relationship views of participants. Parametric statistical tests were subsequently completed to determine the relationships between *Twilight* immersion, *Twilight* fan levels, and romantic relationship beliefs. All analyses are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study used an exploratory quantitative survey design to capture attitudes about romantic relationships held by female fans of *The Twilight Saga*. A further purpose of the study was to examine the degree to which these attitudes compare on the dating role attitudes health index score, a measure created for this study to explore how fans' views about relationships differed depending on their exposure and immersion into the series' narrative. A total of 315 individuals attempted to access the online survey through SurveyMonkey.com. However, only 194 individuals met full eligibility criteria and completed the informed consent form, yielding a sample size of 194 (N=194). Because the purpose of this study was to specifically understand the experiences of female identified individuals ages 18 to 20 that were exposed to the entire *Twilight Saga* narrative prior to age 17, this chapter begins with an expansion of the sample demographic information. Descriptive statistics of participants' *Twilight* exposure, fan experiences, immersion, and relationship beliefs are also addressed.

The chapter concludes with the results to parametric statistical tests conducted in order to better understand the following research questions: 1) Is there a difference in scores of participants on the dating role attitudes health index depending on if participants read/watched *Twilight* once versus more than once? 2) Do total dating role attitudes health index scores for participants, as well as the subscale of unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships, differ based on participants' identification with the Edward-Bella relationship over other

romantic pairings? 3) Is there a correlation between participants' total *Twilight* exposure and participants' total fan index scores, in relation to their immersion levels? 4) Does the degree to which a participant believes Edward is perfect for Bella correlate with a participant's dating role attitudes health index score?

Description of Participants

A total of 194 participants met eligibility criteria, completed the informed consent, and successfully accessed and completed the anonymous online survey. Participants were not required to complete every question, resulting in some answers marked as missing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants were eligible to participate in the study if they met the following eligibility criteria: currently at least 18 to 20-years-old, female gender identity, exposed to entire *Twilight* narrative (all four books and/or all five movies) at or before age 16, and self-identify as current or former fans of the series.

Demographics. The age distribution of participants between age 18 and 20 was approximately even, though the largest age grouping was age 20 (42% of the sample). The majority of the sample had attended some amount of college, with 32% of the sample attending less than one year of college and 43% of the sample attending one or more years of college. The largest racial or ethnic grouping was White/Caucasian (n=133, 70% of the sample) and the second largest grouping identified their racial or ethnic identity as Asian/Pacific Islander (n=31, 16% of the sample). The majority of participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual (n=121, 63% of the sample), followed by participants who identified as bisexual (n=30, 16% of the sample), and queer (n=20, 11% of the sample). Approximately half of participants (about 46% of the sample) identified their religious preference as Atheist/Agnostic (n=50) or none (n=38).

Table 1

Demographic Statistics of the Sample of Participants, (N=194)

Demographic	# of Participants	Percentage of Total
Age		
18	62	32
19	51	27
20	80	42
Race		
White/Caucasian	133	70
Asian/Pacific Islander	31	16
Other	29	15
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	121	63
Bisexual	30	16
Queer	20	11
Other	22	12
Religion		
Atheist/Agnostic	50	26
None	38	20
Protestant/ Christian	31	16
Catholic	33	17
Jewish	15	8
Other	27	14
Education Level		
1 or more years college	83	43
Some college < 1 year	61	32
Other	49	26

Twilight specific demographics of sample. In order to understand participants' exposure and engagement with *The Twilight Saga*, a series of *Twilight*-specific demographic questions were asked. The majority of participants (88% of the sample) reported that they were first exposed to *Twilight* between ages 11 and 14. Participants reported similar trends in their exposure to reading the *Twilight* books and watching the *Twilight* films, with 60% of participants (n=116) reporting having read the books once or twice and 64% of participants (n=122) reporting having watched the films once or twice. Participants were also asked to choose their favorite of the four most prominent romantic pairings in the *Twilight* series, replicating research

conducted by Click et al. (2010) to better understand how *Twilight* fans identify with different romantic pairings. Similar to their findings, participants in this study most strongly identified with the Edward-Bella romantic pairing (n=73, 38% of the sample). However, this was closely followed by identification with the Jasper-Alice relationship (n=62, 32% of the sample). Half of participants also felt that Edward was the perfect significant other for Bella. Additionally, more participants reported that *Twilight* was not their favorite series of all time than those who did report that *Twilight* was their favorite series.

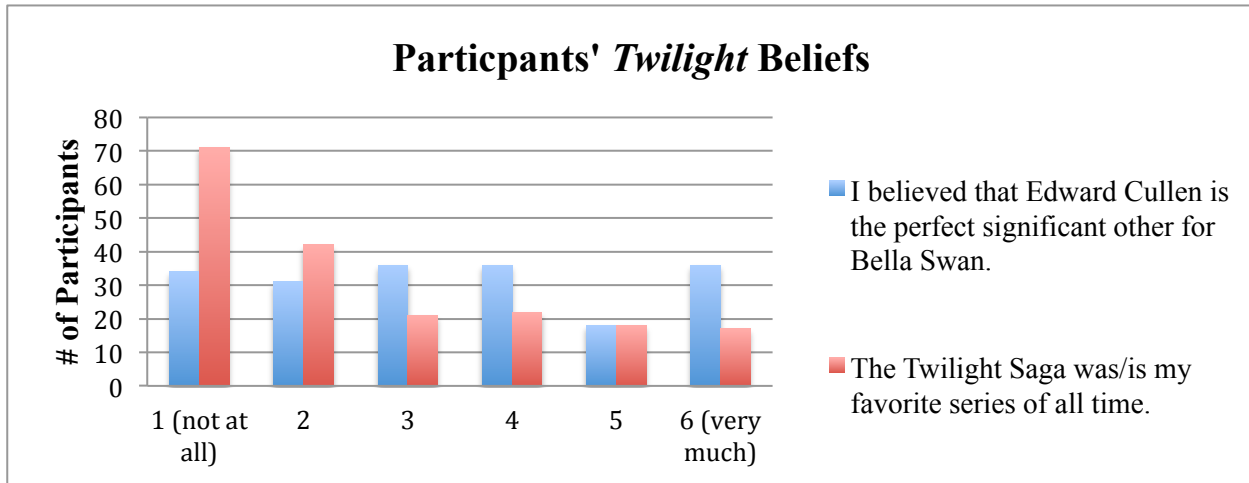
Table 2

Twilight Specific Descriptive Statistics, (N=194)

<i>Twilight</i> Demographic	# of Participants	Percentage of Total
<i>Age of Twilight exposure</i>		
Under 10	1	0.5
11-12	81	42
13-14	90	46
15-16	21	11
<i>Times read Twilight books</i>		
Never	10	5
Once	62	32
Twice	54	28
Three times	29	15
Four times	9	5
More than four times	29	15
<i>Times watched Twilight films</i>		
Never	5	3
Once	73	38
Twice	49	26
Three times	21	11
Four times	9	5
More than four times	36	19
<i>Favorite romantic pairing in the Twilight series</i>		
Jacob-Bella	36	19
Jasper-Alice	62	32
Edward-Bella	73	38
Carlisle-Esme	22	12

Figure 1

Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Twilight Beliefs, (N=191)



Fan activities and total fan index. Participants were asked to check all that apply in regards to a series of 11 questions asking about *Twilight* fan-related activities, such as owning *Twilight* DVDs, having attended *Twilight* conferences, purchased *Twilight* merchandise, etc. On average, participants selected three fan-related activities ($M=3.26$, $SD=1.68$) and approximately one-third of the sample (36%) selected between four and six fan-related activities. To capture participants' level of fandom, a total fan index was created by taking a mean score of participants' fan-related activities, reading and watching exposure to *Twilight*, and answer to if *Twilight* was/is their favorite series of all time. The average total fan index score of participants was ($M=4.16$, $SD=1.60$), with about a third of participants (35%) reporting fan index scores higher than the average (min=1.00, max=8.67).

Immersion. In order to understand participants' level of immersion when they were engaged with reading or watching *The Twilight Saga*, a series of seven questions were adapted from the Transportation Scale-Short Form (TS-SF) (Appel et al., 2015). The TS-SF measures

individuals' level of cognitive and emotional transportation into a story narrative, yielding a cumulative score of narrative immersion. On average, participants reported high levels of overall immersion ($M=30.00$, $SD=7.39$) into *The Twilight Saga's* series narrative.

Table 3

Twilight Total Immersion Scores, (N=194)

N	Valid	191
	Missing	3
Mean		30.00
Median		30.00
Std. Deviation		7.39
Minimum		7.00
Maximum		42.00

Note. The total immersion scores were created by taking a sum score of participants' answers to 7 immersion related questions (1=not at all, 6=very much), based on the TS-SF (Appel et al., 2015). (Cronbach's Alpha = .853, N=189, N of items = 7)

Dating role attitudes health index. Participants were asked a series of 15 questions on a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 6=strongly disagree) in regards to their romantic relationship beliefs and qualities that they desire in a potential significant other. A mean dating role attitudes health index was created to examine the healthiness of participants' relationship beliefs, with lower scores indicating less healthy views about relationships. Scores in the lowest quartile (less than 5.21) are of significant concern for unhealthy views about romantic relationships and scores in the highest quartile (higher than 8.73) indicate more equitable views of romantic partnerships and healthy dating role attitudes of potential significant others. On average, participants reported moderate dating role attitudes health index scores ($M=7.57$, $SD=1.12$). Slightly less than half of the sample of participants (43%) reported dating role attitudes health index scores that were lower than the average (min=2.75, max=9.78), indicating that a significant percentage of the sample had less healthy views about romantic relationships.

Within the dating role attitudes health index, subscales measuring participants' beliefs regarding jealousy and control and unrealistic relationship expectations within their ideal romantic partnerships were also addressed. On average, participants moderately did not value jealousy and control within their romantic partnerships ($M=13.17$, $SD=2.60$), though about 34% of the sample reported scores lower than the average, indicating that they more strongly agreed with jealous qualities in a romantic partner. In regards to unrealistic relationship expectations, about a third of the sample (36%) reported higher degrees of unrealistic relationship expectations than the average ($M=18.0$, $SD=3.83$).

Table 4

Total Dating Role Attitudes Health Index, (N=194)

N	Valid	189
	Missing	5
Mean		7.57
Median		7.67
Std. Deviation		1.12
Min		2.75
Max		9.78

Note. Mean health index score based on participant responses to 15 relationship-related questions (1=strongly agree, 6=strongly disagree). (Cronbach's Alpha = .728, N=184, N of items = 9)

Table 5

Subscales on Dating Role Attitudes Health Index, (N=189)

Jealousy and control

My ideal significant other should do whatever it takes to protect me.	Mean	13.17
	Std. Deviation	2.60
	Min	2.00
My ideal significant other becomes jealous when others show interest in me	Max	18.00
The person in a couple who makes more money should make more of the decisions.		

Unrealistic relationship expectations*		
I believe it is possible to fall in love at first sight.	Mean	18.0
I think there is only one person I am meant to be with.	Std. Deviation	3.83
	Min	2.00
Couples who are meant to be together never have major disagreements.	Max	24.00
Waiting until marriage to have sex makes a romantic relationship stronger.		

Note. Sum scores are based on participant responses to individual questions (1=strongly agree, 6=strongly disagree)

* Cronbach's Alpha = .616, N=184, N of items = 4

Results

Exploratory research question 1: Is there a difference in dating role attitudes health index scores of participants who read/watched *Twilight* once versus more than once?

In order to understand the differences in participants' relationship beliefs, as scored according to the dating role attitudes health index created for this study, based on their exposure to *The Twilight Saga* either through reading/watching once versus more than once, multiple t-tests were conducted. The first t-test revealed that there was no significant difference in dating role attitudes health index scores for those participants who read the *Twilight* series once versus those who read the series more than once. However, the second t-test revealed that there was a significant difference ($t(181)=3.22, p=.002$) in dating role attitudes health index scores between participants who watched the *Twilight* films once compared with those who watched the series more than once. Participants who watched the series once had a higher mean dating role attitudes health index score ($M=7.87$) than those who watched the series more than once ($M=7.34$), indicating that those participants with greater exposure to the *Twilight* films had less healthy views about romantic relationships.

Exploratory research question 2. Do total dating role attitudes health index scores for participants, as well as the subscale of unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships,

differ based on participants' identification with the Edward-Bella relationship over other romantic pairings?

A t-test was conducted to determine if there was a difference in total dating role attitudes health index scores for participants who more strongly identified with the Edward and Bella romantic relationship in the series over the other prominent romantic relationships. Results from the t-test revealed that there was a significant difference ($t(186)=3.48, p=.001$) in total dating role attitudes health index scores for participants who more strongly identified with the Edward-Bella romantic pairing in the series over other romantic relationships. Participants who chose the Edward-Bella relationship as their favorite had a lower mean dating role attitudes health index score ($M=64.07$) than those who chose other pairings ($M=69.77$), indicating that those who chose the Edward-Bella relationship had less healthy romantic relationship beliefs.

An additional t-test was conducted to determine if there was a difference in unrealistic relationship expectations (a subscale of the total dating role attitudes health index) scores for participants who chose the Edward-Bella relationship as their favorite pairing over other romantic relationships highlighted in the series. Results from the test revealed that there was a significant difference ($t(117.14)=2.90, p=.004$) in unrealistic relationship expectation scores for participants who chose the Edward-Bella relationship over others in the series. Those who chose Edward-Bella had a lower mean score of unrealistic relationship expectations ($M=16.81$) than those who chose other romantic pairings ($M=18.57$), highlighting that those who chose Edward-Bella had stronger unrealistic relationship beliefs.

Additional t-tests were also conducted to determine if there was a difference in total immersion scores for participants who identified their racial, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation as either dominant or non-dominant identity categories (white versus non-white,

heterosexual versus non-heterosexual, religious versus non-religious). However, no significant results for these t-tests were found. T-tests examining differences in immersion/dating role attitudes health index scores for participants based on participants differing ages of *Twilight* exposure (under 10-12 versus 13-16) were conducted, but did not yield significant results.

Exploratory research question 3. In order to assess if participants' overall immersion scores (as measured by their scores on the Transportation Scale-Short Form (Appel et al., 2015)) varied depending on participants' overall level of exposure to *Twilight*, as well as their overall total fan index scores, the following question was examined: Is there a correlation between participants' total *Twilight* exposure, as well as participants' total fan index scores, in relation to their immersion levels into the series' narrative?

To determine if there was a correlation between participants' total exposure to *Twilight* (reading and watching combined scores) and their levels of immersion into the series' narrative, a Pearson correlation was conducted. Results from the Pearson correlation revealed that there was a significant positive moderate correlation ($r = .397$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed) between participants' total exposure to *Twilight* and their level of immersion into the series narrative. A Pearson correlation was also run to examine if there was a correlation between participants' total fan index scores and their level of immersion, and a significant positive moderate correlation was found ($r = .380$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed).

Exploratory research question 4. Does the degree to which a participant believes Edward is perfect for Bella correlate with a participants' dating role attitudes health index score?

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine if there was a relationship between the degree to which participants believe that Edward Cullen is the perfect significant other for Bella Swan and participants' total dating role attitudes health index scores. Results from the Pearson

correlation test revealed that there was a significant negative moderate correlation ($r = -.386$, $p < 0.01$, 2-tailed). The more strongly participants believed that Edward was the perfect partner for Bella, the lower their dating role attitudes health index scores were, indicating less healthy relationship values and beliefs.

In order to explore potential correlations between participants' immersion scores and age of *Twilight* exposure, in relation to their total dating role attitudes health index scores, additional Pearson correlation tests were conducted. Significant negative results were found for both tests, however, due to the overall relatively small sample size of the study, the correlations were both found to be weak.

Summary of Findings

As evidenced by the results from the statistical tests discussed in this chapter, all four of the overarching research questions explored in this study were each found to be statistically significant. The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationships between the exposure, immersion, and romantic relationship beliefs of female fans of *The Twilight Saga*. Participants from the sample overall had high levels of exposure to *Twilight*, were highly immersed into the series' narrative, and engaged with a number of fan-related activities. The following chapter consists of a discussion of the findings outlined above, with particular attention to the ways in which participants' beliefs about Edward and Bella's romantic relationship intersects with the healthiness of their views about romantic relationships.

CHAPTER V

Discussion/Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to expand upon the media effects literature in regards to the ways in which female consumers of popular media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence engage with this form of media. Specifically, this study offered an exploration of female young adult fans of *The Twilight Saga*'s levels of exposure to and narrative immersion into the series, in relation to the current healthiness of their overall views about romantic relationships. Participants completed a series of questions through an anonymous online survey that asked them to reflect on their degrees of exposure to *Twilight*, engagement with and narrative immersion into the series, identification with romantic pairings in the series, and current views and beliefs about desired qualities in a potential romantic partnership. Participants' relationship views were analyzed based on their scores on my dating role attitudes health index and results from the scale were then interpreted in relation to participants' exposure to and immersion into *Twilight*. What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the findings related to the literature reviewed in Chapter II, concluding comments about study limits, and implications for future study and clinical social work practice with adolescents.

Discussion

Overall, results from my analyses were found to be significant and reveal important ways this study can add to the intersection of media effects literature and its implications in understanding the etiology of adolescent dating violence. This study confirms previous literature

findings that suggest greater degrees of exposure to *Twilight* and fan engagement correlate with increased narrative immersion and transportation into the series. This study also confirms that individuals who more identified with the Edward-Bella relationship, which is considered to be the most abusive relationship in the series (Parke & Wilson, 2011; Silver, 2010; Taylor, 2011), reported less healthy views about romantic relationships, including greater degrees of unrealistic relationship expectations. Additionally, this study found evidence that individuals who watched the *Twilight* films more than once had less healthy views about relationships than individuals who only watched the films one time. An interpretation of these key findings from the study and how they compare to existing media effects literature is discussed below.

Key Findings and Their Connection to Previous Literature

Exposure and immersion. There is no question that, overwhelmingly, the sample of participants was highly engaged with *Twilight* and immersed into the series' narrative. The majority of the sample reported watching all five of the films and reading all four of the books one or two times and selected, on average, a minimum of three fan-related activities, such as owning *Twilight* merchandise or seeing the films in theaters. In Bucciferro's (2014) qualitative research with self-identified *Twilight* fans, she also found that her participants reported re-reading the books and watching the movies multiple times. Click et al. (2010) conducted quantitative research to examine similarly self-identified *Twilight* fans' levels of immersion and transportation into the series' narrative and found that participants had high levels of narrative immersion while they were engaged with *Twilight*. In my study, participants also had very high levels of immersion ($M=30.00$, $SD=7.39$) into *The Twilight Saga*'s series narrative. Considering that more participants reported that *Twilight* was not their favorite series of all time than those who reported that it was their favorite series, it is interesting that the overall majority of

participants still reflected on their narrative engagement with the series as a highly immersive experience. This emphasizes the immersive power of *Twilight* for its fans and consumers, and speaks volumes to the results that a statistically significant positive correlation was found between participants' total *Twilight* exposure, as well as participants' fan index scores, and their narrative immersion into the series.

Examining an individual's level of immersion into the narrative world of a piece of media is extremely important because it can help determine how realistic they perceive the media to be and then in turn how strongly they are able to identify with its characters. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 2002) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) together offer a theoretical understanding for how individuals can begin to shift their larger understanding of the world, in relation to the homogenized version of the world portrayed in the media. Because higher levels of perceived media realism coupled with increased media exposure have been found to have a greater impact on people's shifting viewpoints (Aubrey et al., 2013; Lippman et al., 2014), media exposure and immersion need to be examined together in order to better understand the media as an influencing agent in people's lives. Thus, when considering participants' romantic relationship views, their degrees of exposure to and immersion into *Twilight* likely intersect to enhance *Twilight*'s overall influence, in connection with their pre-existing values and beliefs.

Reading versus watching the narrative. An interesting finding from the study that adds to the media effects literature is that watching the *Twilight* films more than once appeared to have a greater impact on the healthiness of individuals' views about romantic relationships than simply watching the films one time. However, results from the study did not reveal differences in dating role attitudes health index scores for participants who read the *Twilight* novels once versus more than once. Together, these findings suggest that *Twilight* exposure was more influential for

participants who repeatedly watched the films, indicating the power of visual media. That said, approximately 90% of participants from this study (n=175) reported reading the novels before watching the films. Green et al. (2008) suggest that narrative transportation for individuals may increase when they are exposed to the same fictional narrative across multiple media platforms. “Prior reading may allow individuals to form a stronger connection with the characters or a fuller understanding of the narrative world, and this depth of experience carries over into the viewing experience” (p. 522). Perhaps *Twilight* operated as such a powerful narrative for individual immersion and transportation because it was highly popularized across both print and film media and consumed equally in the two mediums by fans of the series. As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants of this study reported approximately equal degrees of reading and watching exposure. Nevertheless, repeated film exposure appears to play a stronger role in the development of relationship viewpoints of participants than repeated print exposure.

Identification with the Edward-Bella relationship. As discussed at length in Chapter II, numerous feminist and media scholars have found the romantic relationship between Edward and Bella portrayed throughout the *Twilight* series to mirror characteristics of adolescent dating violence (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Franiuk & Scherr, 2013; Merskin, 2011; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Taylor, 2014). In my study, participants were asked to reflect on the degree they felt Edward was the perfect partner for Bella, and approximately half of participants reported that they felt more strongly that Edward was perfect for Bella than that he was not the perfect partner. Additionally, participants were asked to select their favorite romantic pairing from the series, replicating research conducted by Click et al. (2010) in their study of *Twilight* fans’ views and beliefs about romantic relationships. The largest grouping of participants from my study, analogous to the Click et al. (2010) study, selected the Edward-Bella relationship as their favorite

romantic pairing in *Twilight*. Click et al. (2010) then found that participants who more identified with the Edward-Bella relationship in the series were more likely to value similar relationship characteristics, as displayed by the dynamic between Edward and Bella, in their own potential future relationships. Results from my study confirm this finding and add to the literature, as individuals in my study who reported that the Edward-Bella relationship was their favorite romantic pairing had overall more unhealthy views about what constitutes a safe and equal romantic partnership. Also, individuals who more strongly believed that Edward was the perfect partner for Bella were more likely to indicate less healthy relationship beliefs.

Because one of the overarching goals of this project was to better understand how female-identified individuals interacted with media romanticizing dating violence, it is important to remember that all participants discussed in this project reported a female gender identity. In Rivadeneyra and Lebo's (2008) study of adolescent romantic television exposure and adolescent gender-based dating attitudes, they found female adolescents with greater romantic television exposure indicated more traditional gender role attitudes. Feminist media scholars have found *Twilight* to highly romanticize traditional gender role ideologies (Collins & Carmody, 2011; Parke & Wilson, 2011; Silver, 2010; Taylor, 2011), which is concerning when considering how participants' identified with the Edward-Bella relationship in this study and that previous literature has indicated acceptance for traditional gender roles as a risk factor for adolescent dating violence (Foshee et al., 2004). Under the guise of traditional gender role ideologies, unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships repeatedly portrayed in popular media, such as "love conquers all" (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014; Sergin & Nabi, 2002), overshadow any of the dangerous behaviors displayed by abusive characters like Edward as less important than the message that being in a relationship is more important than the quality of the

relationship. Results from my study found that, overall, participants had high degrees of unrealistic expectations about relationships and, specifically, these unrealistic relationship expectations were higher for participants who more strongly identified with the Edward-Bella romantic pairing. Thus, *Twilight*'s potential as a media influencer moves beyond mere degrees of exposure and becomes amplified when thinking about the ways in which individuals who engaged with the series identified with different characters and relationships.

Conclusion

Strengths of the Study

One of the core strengths of this research project is that it adds to the very small selection of empirical research that directly examines media consumers' views about romantic relationships post-exposure to media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence. Click et al. (2010) conducted one of the first large-scale quantitative studies of this kind specifically examining *Twilight*. However, their project was conducted during the height of *Twilight* media frenzy and popularity. This study is unique in that it offers a cross-sectional examination of media consumers' views and beliefs about romantic relationships years after known exposure to *Twilight*. Also, as an exploratory project using an anonymous online survey to collect data, likely more participants were able to find and participate in this project, adding greater voice to this population of media consumers. Given that adolescents consume approximately nine hours of media every day (Common Sense Media, 2015), it is imperative that more studies are conducted to continue to understand how this exposure may be impacting adolescents' global development.

Limitations of the Study

That said there were a number of limitations of this project that may impact the generalizability of findings. The sample of participants in this project lacked diversity in regards

to age of *Twilight* exposure, racial/ethnic identity categories, and sexual identity categories. The majority of participants in this project reported first exposure to *Twilight* between ages 11 and 14, with virtually no participants reporting *Twilight* exposure age 10 or younger. Previous media effects literature indicated that younger exposure to media may have greater impacts for health outcomes of adolescents and young adults (Brown et al., 2006; O'Hara et al., 2011) and it would have been interesting to be able to compare differences in romantic relationship beliefs of participants' with varying ages of *Twilight* exposure. It was also disappointing that this study continued to lack racial/ethnic diversity of participants, with the majority of participants identifying a white racial/ethnic identity. Media effects research as a whole has relied heavily on white participants in empirical research in this field and unfortunately this project was unable to fill this gap in the literature. Additionally, while there was a greater variance in sexual identity categories of participants, the majority of participants of this project reported a heterosexual sexuality identity. Thus, this project may continue to add to the media effects literature in terms of understanding how dominant media imagery impacts white and heterosexual individuals. However, it was beyond the scope of this project to explore how non-white and non-heterosexual individuals interpret this type of popular media, given the limited diversity of participants.

Another limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. While the sample size was large enough to conduct the proposed statistical tests in order to answer the key research questions, a number of statistical tests that yielded significant results found weak relationships between variables, limiting the ability to make inferences about the findings. For example, a significant negative correlation between age of *Twilight* exposure for participants and participants' dating role attitudes health index scores was found, suggesting that the younger participants were exposed to *Twilight*, the less healthy their views about romantic relationships

were. Although this correction was found to be weak, additional studies with larger sample sizes may be able to build on this research. However, inferences about this specific finding cannot be made at this time due to the relatively small sample size.

The survey design had a number of limitations that impact the generalizability of findings as well. As mentioned in the previous chapter, 315 individuals attempted to access the online survey, but only 194 people met eligibility criteria for participation and were able to complete the survey. Perhaps the inclusion criteria for this project were too specific and should have been left broader to allow more interested individuals to access the project. It is also important to note that, because participants were answering the questions about their previous *Twilight* engagement, exposure, and immersion, a level of hindsight bias is inherent in this type of survey design, and thus participants may not have accurately reported their responses. Lastly, as a cross-sectional project, there was not comparison data of individuals' relationship beliefs during or immediately after their *Twilight* exposure. Additional longitudinal research is needed in order to continue to build on the media effects literature and the ways media exposure contributes to individuals' shifting views and beliefs over time.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Adolescent dating violence is a very serious and widespread social problem, impacting approximately 1 in 10 high school students nationwide (Kann et al., 2014). For social workers who work with adolescent clients, having an understanding of how adolescent dating violence can impact youth health outcomes, as well as ways in which prevention and intervention can occur, is essential. Given that youth spend more hours per day interacting with different forms of media than they do sleeping (Common Sense Media, 2015), understanding the media youth are consuming—especially media that romanticizes dating violence and unhealthy relationship

characteristics—can offer social workers ways to help their young clients use familiar media to understand their own lives. Media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence can be used as an example to teach young men and women about warning signs of relationship violence. Social workers could use these media examples to help empower young people to diligently analyze and understand the media they consume, and social workers should be cognizant of the media literacy efforts currently taking place and find ways they can educate their clients about smart media consumption. Social workers should also have a voice in movements to offer more feminist role models for adolescents in the current media landscape. Mass media is not going away any time soon and it is only going to continue to entrench itself as a pervasive aspect of youth culture. Understanding the media consumed by our young clients may be a key to our work with them and it would be unwise to not take an interest in some of the popular books and films that resonate with millions of adolescents across the country, such as *Twilight*.

Of course, media scholars would not suggest that simply reading a novel romanticizing dating violence would immediately enhance the likelihood of engaging in a violent romantic relationship. Instead, they would conceptualize this type of media exposure as enhancing a patriarchal worldview that normalizes and individualizes dating violence for media consumers. As Park and Wilson (2011) note in their analysis of *Twilight*,

Since patriarchy does not necessarily operate as an explicit, perceivable reality (meaning, we don't always recognize it when we see it), we must review the aspects of our culture—pop culture included—that perpetuate patriarchal ideology and cause it be normalized. What are, in fact, dangerous ideas that devalue the female in society are too frequently seen as legitimate choices in the *Twilight* saga—choices made in the name of 'true love' or in the face of supernatural forces. When presented through these lenses,

Bella and Edward's relationship is seen as romantic and desirable, when in any other world it would be destructive. (p. 175)

Twilight may be fiction and supernatural, but the series' embedded messages are dangerous. In order to move beyond Bella and her vampire boyfriend as the answer to society's definition of successful adolescent femininity, social workers need to pay attention to the messages broadcast to our young clients, especially our young female-identified clients. Hopefully, this project continues efforts put forth in previous social work literature (Collins & Carmody, 2011) to understand this popular media and the role it may play in the massive causal web of adolescent dating violence.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Research

In reflecting on this entire project, I want to make it very clear that by focusing on women's experiences with media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence I am in no way implying that it is the responsibility of female-identified individuals to not become involved with abusive partners. Rather, in our patriarchal society in which male-identified individuals commit the majority of the violence against women, I am continually fascinated by the ways women make sense of media narratives romanticizing this type of relational abuse. *Twilight* was a ubiquitous part of popular adolescent culture during its reign of popularity, and it was predominantly consumed by female-identified adolescents. As there is limited empirical research examining the relationship beliefs of female young adult consumers of popular media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence, the main goal of this exploratory research project was simply to continue to understand this population. Future longitudinal studies that track how adolescents' views and beliefs about relationships change over time in relation to media consumption are needed to continue to understand the media's role in the lives of our adolescent

clients. Studies that examine the media's role in adolescent dating violence etiology, specifically how male-identified individuals make sense of popular media that romanticizes adolescent dating violence, will be an important next step in continuing to fill this gap in the media effects literature. Additionally, future studies that examine differences in popular media consumption by non-white and non-heterosexual adolescents are needed if we are to fully understand how this type of media impacts all adolescents, as adolescent dating violence impacts everyone, not just those in dominant societal identity categories. If nothing else, my hope for this project is that, moving forward, social workers—particularly social workers who work with adolescents—will begin to show a greater interest in media studies and will continue to find ways to use the media that shapes our clients' lives as tools to help our clients understand their own lives.

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Appendix A

HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

November 25, 2015

Aviva Jacobstein

Dear Aviva,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett'.

Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee
CC: Elaine Kersten, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Participant Pre-screening Questions

[Horizontal lines signal a different page in the questionnaire.]

Thank you for your interest in participation!

Please review the following questions to see if you are eligible to participate in the study.

1. Are you between the ages of 18 and 20-years-old?

Yes No

2. Do you identify as female?

Yes No

3. Were you younger than 17-years-old when you first read or watched *The Twilight Saga*?

Yes No

4. Have you been exposed to the entire *Twilight Saga* series (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, *Breaking Dawn*), either through reading the books, watching the movies, or a combination of the two?

Yes No

5. Do you currently, or have you in the past, identified as being a fan of *The Twilight Saga*?

Yes No

SUBMIT YOUR ANSWERS

Option for Inclusion Page:

Congratulations! You meet the eligibility criteria for participation in this study. If you would like to move on to participate in the study, please click ‘Continue’ below, and you will be taken to the informed consent.

CONTINUE

Option for Exclusion Page:

Thank you for your time and your interest in participation. Unfortunately you are unable to complete the survey at this time. Please click ‘Exit’ below to leave this page.

EXIT

Appendix C

Online Survey for Participants

This is a brief demographic section. Please mark the boxes that are the most true for you.

1. Did you attend elementary, middle and high school in the United States?

Yes No

1a) If yes, please mark which region of the country you spent the *most* time in during your schooling.

- Midwest
- Northeast
- Southeast
- Southwest
- West

1b) If no, please fill in which country you spent the most time in during elementary, middle and high school. _____

2. How would you best classify your race or ethnicity?

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African American
- Caucasian/White
- Latino/Hispanic
- Multiracial/Biracial
- Would rather not say
- Other (please specific) _____

3. How would you best classify your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual
- Gay/Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Would rather not say
- Other (please specify) _____

4. What is your religious preference?

- Protestant/Other Christian
- Catholic
- Mormon
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Atheist or Agnostic
- None
- Would rather not say
- Other (please specify) _____

5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, please mark the current grade you are in.

- 12th grade, no diploma
- High school graduate – high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, but less than 1 year
- 1 or more years of college, no degree
- Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
- Other (please specify) _____

6. What is your age?

- 18 years old
- 19 years old
- 20 years old

This section asks questions about your experiences with The Twilight Saga series. Please answer the following questions that are most true for you.

7. How old were you when you first read and/or watched *The Twilight Saga*?

- under 10 years old
- 11-12 years old
- 13-14 years old
- 15-16 years old

8. How many times have you read some or all four of *The Twilight Saga* books?

Never Once Twice Three times Four times More than four times

9. How many times have you watched some or all five of *The Twilight Saga* movies?

Never Once Twice Three times Four times More than four times

10. Did you read any of *The Twilight Saga* books before watching *The Twilight Saga* movie adaptations?

- Yes
- No
- I have not read the books; I have only seen the movies

11. Please check all that are true for you (either currently or in the past):

- I watched all five of *The Twilight Saga* movies in theatres
- I only watched some of *The Twilight Saga* movies in theatres
- I own all of *The Twilight Saga* books and DVDs
- I own at least one book or one DVD of *The Twilight Saga*
- I have visited social media and websites dedicated to *The Twilight Saga* fandom
- I have read Fanfiction related to *The Twilight Saga*
- I have written Fanfiction related to *The Twilight Saga*
- I have created multi-media related to *The Twilight Saga* (such as Fanart, YouTube videos, or memes)
- I have purchased merchandise related to *The Twilight Saga* (such as T-shirts, notebooks, jewelry, backpacks, posters, or the movie soundtracks)
- Stephanie Meyer, author of *The Twilight Saga*, was/is my favorite author
- I have attended in-person conferences or events (such as TwiCon or Comic-Con) where I discussed the series, met other fans, and/or met actors from the movies

12. Throughout *The Twilight Saga* there were many different romantic relationships. Of the four most prominent relationships, please select your favorite romantic pairing.

- Jacob and Bella
- Jasper and Alice
- Edward and Bella
- Carlisle and Esme

Thinking back to when you experienced The Twilight Saga series, please check the number under each question that best represents your opinion about the narrative.

13. I could picture myself in the scenes of the events described in *The Twilight Saga*.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

14. I was mentally involved in *The Twilight Saga* while reading and/or watching it.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

15. I wanted to learn how *The Twilight Saga* ended.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

16. *The Twilight Saga* affected me emotionally.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

17. I had a vivid mental image of Edward Cullen.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

18. I had a vivid mental image of Jacob Black.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

19. I had a vivid mental image of Bella Swan.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

20. I believed that Edward Cullen is the perfect significant other for Bella Swan.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

21. *The Twilight Saga* was/is my favorite series of all time.
1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all very much

This section asks you to reflect on your views about romantic relationships. Please mark the boxes that are the most true for you.

22. I believe it is possible to fall in love at first sight.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

23. My ideal significant other should do whatever it takes to protect me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

24. My ideal significant other should be so attracted to me that they cannot control their emotions in my presence.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

25. I think there is only one person I am truly meant to be with.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

26. Romantic love should be the most important relationship in someone's life above all else.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

27. When someone has found their true love, it does not matter how long they are together before getting married.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

28. Couples do not need to take equal responsibility for cooking and cleaning the home.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

29. The person in a couple who makes more money should make more of the decisions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

30. My ideal significant other respects my opinions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

31. Couples do not need to take turns paying for dinner when they go out to eat.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------	------------------	----------	-------------------

32. Couples who are meant to be together never have major disagreements.
 Strongly Agree Agree Tend to Agree Tend to Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
33. My ideal significant other becomes jealous when others show interest in me.
 Strongly Agree Agree Tend to Agree Tend to Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
34. People should not spend all of their free time with their significant other.
 Strongly Agree Agree Tend to Agree Tend to Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
35. All relationships have conflict. Sometimes conflict means hurting your significant other.
 Strongly Agree Agree Tend to Agree Tend to Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
36. Waiting until marriage to have sex makes a romantic relationship stronger.
 Strongly Agree Agree Tend to Agree Tend to Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

SUBMIT SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you for your participation in this survey!

If this study was interesting to you, please feel free to copy and paste the survey web link and send the recruitment information you received to anyone you know who may be interested.

Appendix D

Permission for Transportation Scale-Short Form

Markus Appel <appelm@uni-landau.de>

Fri, Oct 30, 2015 at 2:59 AM

To: ajacobst@smith.edu

Dear Aviva, Please feel free to use the scale as you like.
Good luck with your research!
Markus

~~~~~  
Prof. Dr. Markus Appel  
Institut für Kommunikationspsychologie und Medienpädagogik  
Universität Koblenz-Landau  
Fortstraße 7  
D-76829 Landau  
Tel: 06341-28036714

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**Aviva Jacobstein** <ajacobst@smith.edu>

Thu, Oct 29, 2015 at 1:43 PM

To: appelm@uni-landau.de

Dear Mr. Appel,

My name is Aviva Jacobstein and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am currently working on my Master's of Social Work thesis, and am writing to request your permission to use the Transportation Scale-Short Form recently published in *Media Psychology*.

The purpose of my research study is to better understand how exposure to media that romanticizes dating violence may pose a risk factor for adolescent girls' value formation around what constitutes a safe and healthy romantic relationship. My research study will examine how the extent of participants' media immersion into *The Twilight Saga*, a wildly popular young adult narrative, when they were younger can negatively influence their views about relationships as young adult women.

I am currently in the process of designing my research survey, and have found that Green and Brock's (2000) original Transportation Scale has more questions than I would like. Based on your research into the importance of standardizing shortened versions of this scale to ensure measurement validity, I would love to use your developed 6-question short-form of this scale in my research project.

Thanks so much for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
**Aviva Jacobstein**  
MSW Candidate  
Smith School for Social Work '16  
[ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu)

## Appendix E

### Feasibility for Email Recruitment at Colleges

Hello,

My name is Aviva Jacobstein and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am currently working on my Master's of Social Work thesis, and I wanted to reach out to you and see if you would be willing to forward information to undergraduate students in \_\_\_\_\_'s \_\_\_\_\_ department about participation in my graduate research project.

The purpose of my research study is to better understand how exposure to media that glamorizes and romanticizes dating violence may pose a risk factor for adolescent girls' value formation around what constitutes a safe and healthy romantic relationship. I am going to be specifically recruiting 18 to 20-year-old students who were exposed to and engaged in the *Twilight Saga* fandom when they were in middle and early high school, and asking if they would fill out my anonymous online survey.

I'm not sure what \_\_\_\_\_'s policy is regarding forwarding emails to your department's listserv of undergraduate students, but if possible I would love to make my study available to \_\_\_\_\_'s \_\_\_\_\_ students. Any students who participated in the study would do some on a completely voluntary basis, and would be instructed in the email not to inform whoever forwards the email to them if they participated in the study so as to maintain anonymity. I likely won't begin recruitment for my study until January or early February 2016, but for my school's Human Subjects Review Board I am currently trying to get confirmations from various colleges that they would be willing to pass along an email containing information about my study when the survey is released online in the next couple of months.

Please let me know if you have any questions and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Aviva

---

**Aviva Jacobstein**  
MSW Candidate  
Smith School for Social Work '16  
[ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu)

## Appendix F

### Recruitment Email for College Student Listservs

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

If it is still possible, would you please forward the following information about participation in my graduate social work research study to your \_\_\_\_\_ department's students.

Thanks so much!

Aviva

-----

**Are you a current or former fan of *The Twilight Saga*?**

**Are you a female young adult between the ages of 18 and 20?**

**Did you read and/or watch the entire *Twilight Saga* series before you were 17-years-old?**

If you meet the above criteria, you are eligible to participate in a new exploratory study examining female young adults' beliefs regarding romantic relationships!

The following survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and all your responses are completely anonymous. On the survey you will be asked about your past experiences with *The Twilight Saga* and about your current beliefs regarding romantic relationships; in addition to some general questions about your background. Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and you should not inform whoever forwarded this recruitment email to you if you choose to participate in the study so as to maintain your anonymity.

So whether you were Team Edward, Team Jacob, or both, now's your chance to make your voice heard, and take a moment to reflect back on your experiences with *The Twilight Saga* phenomenon when you were younger, and your current beliefs about romantic relationships.

**The survey and more information can be found by clicking the following link:**

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/twilightinlove>**

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding the study, please contact me at [ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu).

Thanks for your consideration!

Aviva Jacobstein  
MSW Candidate  
Smith College School for Social Work  
[ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu)

*This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my Master's in Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work. This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).*



## Appendix G

### Recruitment for Public Social Media Sites

Are you a current or former fan of *The Twilight Saga*?

Are you a female young adult between the ages of 18 and 20?

Did you read and/or watch the entire *Twilight Saga* series before you were 17-years-old?

If you meet the above criteria, you are eligible to participate in a new exploratory study examining female young adults' beliefs regarding romantic relationships!

The following survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and all your responses are completely anonymous. On the survey you will be asked about your past experiences with *The Twilight Saga* and about your current beliefs regarding romantic relationships; in addition to some general questions about your background.

So whether you were Team Edward, Team Jacob, or both, now's your chance to make your voice heard, and take a moment to reflect back on your experiences with *The Twilight Saga* phenomenon when you were younger and your current beliefs about romantic relationships.

**The survey and more information can be found by clicking the following link:**

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/twilightinlove>**

*This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).*

Appendix H

Recruitment Flyer for Distribution on Public Bulletin Boards at Boston-area Colleges

Calling all  
**Twilight**  
fans past and present!

- ♥ Are you between the ages of 18 and 20 and female?
- ♥ Did you read and/or watch the entire *Twilight Saga* series before you were 17 years old?

If you answered "yes" to the questions above, you may be eligible to participate in an exciting new study examining female *Twilight* fans' beliefs on romantic relationships!

The survey and more information can be found at: [www.surveymonkey.com/link](http://www.surveymonkey.com/link)

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC)

www.surveymonkey.com/link  
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## Appendix I

### Online Informed Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

### Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA

.....  
Examining the romantic relationship beliefs of female fans of *The Twilight Saga*

**Investigator:**

Aviva Jacobstein

Email: [ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu)

Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee: (413) 585-7974.  
.....

#### Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study examining female young adults' beliefs regarding romantic relationships, who identify as current or former fans of *The Twilight Saga* series.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as a female young adult, ages 18 to 20-years-old. You were also selected as a possible participant because you identify as a current or former fan of *The Twilight Saga* series, which you were first exposed to when you were younger than age 16. Additionally, you have either read all of *The Twilight Saga* books and/or watched all of *The Twilight Saga* movies, so that you have been exposed to the entire series.
- We ask that you read this form in its entirety and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be a participant in the study (see contact information below).

#### Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to better understand female young adults' views about relationships, who had either read and/or watched the entire *Twilight Saga* series when they were younger than age 16.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my Master's in Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences, and may be used in secondary analyses in future research.

#### Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete the following online SurveyMonkey.com survey for one time only.
- The survey will ask questions about you, about your experiences with *The Twilight Saga*, and about your beliefs about romantic relationships. Some questions will ask you to select an option from a list that best applies to you, and some questions will ask you to rate the degree you feel a statement applies to you.
- It will take approximately 10 minutes of your time to complete the survey.

### **Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- There are no reasonable foreseeable or expected risks associated with your participation in this research study. If you are unable or would like to stop completing the survey at any time, you will be able to close the browser window. As incomplete surveys will be eliminated during the analysis process, no data or information will be used if you choose for whatever reason not to complete the survey results.

### **Benefits of Being in the Study**

- The benefits of participation are having an opportunity to reflect on your experience with *The Twilight Saga* when you were younger, as well as possibly gaining insights into your current views and beliefs about romantic relationships. You will be able to provide information that could be helpful for future research and better understanding of the experiences and beliefs associated with female young adult *Twilight* fans.
- The benefits to social work/society are to provide information for future research around female young adult popular media usage and consumption, as well as how they themselves are able to reflect and understand their developing views about romantic relationships.

### **Confidentiality**

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity.

### **Payments/gift**

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time up to March 15, 2016 by not submitting your survey results without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You also have the right not to answer any single question while you are taking the survey and still submit your results for inclusion in the study.
- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Aviva Jacobstein at [ajacobst@smith.edu](mailto:ajacobst@smith.edu). If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

### **Consent**

- **By checking the box below that says “I agree,” you are indicating that you have read and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, your participation, and your rights, and that you agree to participate in the study.**
- Please print a copy of this page for your records.

I agree

I disagree