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What is This?

# A Boyfriend to Die For: Edward Cullen as Compensated Psychopath in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*

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## Abstract

This article is an analysis of the teen-targeted vampire novel *Twilight*. The series and related merchandise have been a runaway financial success. Illustrative quotes from *Twilight* are presented according to Guggenbühl-Craig's concept of the "compensated psychopath" (CP)—an individual who approaches the psychological extreme of psychopathy but is able to pass for functional in society. The author argues the lead male character Edward Cullen is a CP and that the representation is problematic. The book's main female character, Bella Swan, becomes completely dependent on Edward, desires him in part because he seems unattainable, and is willing to die and live a life of predation in order to be with him. The largely uncriticized idealization of Edward as top boyfriend material flies under the radar of contemporary concern for girls' psychic and physical well-being.

## Keywords

adolescence, critical communication studies, psychology, symbolic power, women

There is a vampire "living" amongst us who is perennially young and "decidedly charming" (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 122). He drives a sporty Volvo, wears elegant clothing, and his father is a doctor. This seventeen-year-old, well-positioned vampire is the object of desire for a teen-age girl who has just moved from the warmth of urban

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Phoenix, Arizona to the pallor of Forks, Washington to live with her father, the town sheriff. The girl's only apparent talents are cooking and ironing. Otherwise she is uncoordinated, frequently falls down, often gets lost, is socially awkward, and needs regular rescuing. She is also completely fascinated (some might say obsessed) with the seemingly unattainable young vampire. Her name is Bella Swan. His name is Edward Cullen. This is their story.

*Twilight*, the first of four teen-targeted vampire novels by Stephanie Meyer, is a "best-selling pot-boiler about a principled vampire and the teenage girl who loves him" (Morgenstern, 2008, p. W1). Spawning merchandise and a movie, the Edward and Bella series has sold more than 85 million books worldwide (Alter, 2010, p. W10) and has grossed more than US$382 million (Schuker, 2009, p. W1). Three of the series' books, *Eclipse*, *New Moon*, and *Breaking Dawn*, held the number 1, 2, and 3 spots on the Barnes & Noble best seller list for the week of June 14, 2009 (Freierman, 2009). The films, though not garnering critical praise, earned more than US$77 million for their makers (Freierman, 2009; Germain, 2010). *New Moon* earned nearly US$141 million nationally and US$258 million globally during its first three days, making it the third highest opening weekend hits in Hollywood history (Germain, 2010). Teen (particularly teen girl) adoration of the books and movie suggests, on the one hand, a refreshing move in popular culture—a girl hero. On the other hand, however, *Twilight* has its shadow side.

In this article I briefly describe the romantic male vampire phenomenon in contemporary American culture. This is followed by a discussion of Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008, p. 94) concept of the "compensated psychopath" (CP)—an individual who approaches the psychological extreme of psychopathy and is not only able to pass for functional in society but, if anything, is an overachiever. The CP lacks Eros yet is aware something is missing. Guggenbühl-Craig uses the term *Eros* in a wide sense, not as a substitute for only the erotic or sex but as an approach to life. The CP characterization is then applied to the contemporary teen-targeted vampire Edward in the book *Twilight*. Discourse analysis is used to identify coded terms and phrases that have connotative meaning. This examination of "talk and texts" also includes a discussion of the implications of particular word choices (McKinlay & Potter, 1987, p. 443).

In this study, I focus on the first volume of *Twilight*, which set the stage for the other books and films that followed. I have not attempted an objective analysis but rather report from the perspective of my own reading of the material then viewed through the lens of Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008) concept of the compensated psychopath. Since this analysis is thereby subjective, being the result of a careful reading and textual analysis of the book, the findings are presented as illustrative quotes rather than as an attempt to quantify the number of times a character made a statement. Quotes from the 544-page *Twilight* are presented according to Guggenbühl-Craig's typology of primary and secondary symptoms of psychopathy. Although traditional literary and filmic vampires qualify as psychopaths, demonstrating this is beyond the scope of this article. I focus instead on the *compensated* psychopath variation embodied by the Edward

Cullen character. Briefly, a psychopathic personality is one characterized by manipulativeness, low frustration tolerance, lack of remorse or empathy, shallow emotions, egocentricity, episodic relationships, glibness, a parasitic lifestyle, persistent violation of social norms, and hyper need for stimulation. A *compensated* psychopath is a functional variation of this type, but who is, nevertheless, dangerous. The largely uncriticized idealization of Edward as top boyfriend material flies under the radar of contemporary concern for girls' psychic and physical well-being. In the book series and in the films, the main character, Bella, becomes completely dependent on Edward, desires him in part because he seems unattainable, and is willing to die and live a life of predation in order to be with him. For example, early in *Twilight* she says,

> About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was part of him—and I didn't know how potent that part might be —that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him. (Meyer, 2005, p. 195)

The popularity of the series among young people, girls in particular, raises questions about audience engagement with fantasy material and the pedagogical function of mass media such as books and films. A 13-year-old girl from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, Alicia Penner, said she has abandoned Harry Potter for Edward Cullen because "Nobody really believes you can have magic, but some people believe you can find the perfect guy" (Schuker, 2009, p. W12). Whether or not a vampire as ideal other is a "perfect guy" is one question this article posits. Despite, or because of, the popularity of this series I argue the characterization of Edward as a desirable male poses a danger to real girls-as-eventual-women's sense of self and development and the idea of the power dynamics in real relationships with boys-as-eventual-men.

## Lovers With a Bite

Once upon a time in media, vampires were presented as disgusting, gelatinous, primordial figures who reflected more about death and decay than romance and redemption. This was evident in the first full-length motion picture devoted to the telling of the vampire tale, *Nosfertu* (Murnau, 1922). In early versions, vampires smelled of rotting flesh and moldy soil, whose talon-like nails exuded from decaying fingertips. This portrayal remained intact as recently as Francis Ford Coppola's (1992) film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, which acknowledged the shape-shifting power of this monster as well as the underlying, invisible-to-mortal-eyes form of who the vampire really was. Although consistently popular in literature and film, vampires have gone through significant changes since the early days of rural European folk tales and early cinema. Even Coppola included a sexed-up version of the count with actor Gary Oldman. Anne Rice's novel *Interview With the Vampire* (1977), and the film (Jordon, 1994) that followed, deconstructed and reframed vampire mythology in a way that offered viewers, particularly female viewers, a Hollywood form of the romantic vampire bad boy with

actors Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. Rice's novels unpacked the garlic, mirror-phobic mystique of the vampire and constructed a redeemable, reachable male figure who was more misunderstood than monstrous. Angel, of the hit television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) is a key lineage holder to the present-day vampire-as-boyfriend model. A consistent tension in Charlaine Harris' Southern vampire books (which spawned the 2008 HBO series *True Blood*) is whether or not the main female character (Sookie) will or will not loose her virginity to a vampire (Bill) and whether or not she will become one. The same dynamic is present in *Twilight*—whether or not Bella will lose her virginity and become a vampire so that she and Edward can be together forever.

In "Vampires, Eroticism, and the Lure of the Unconscious," Dougherty argues that deep within our consciousness exists "predatory energy" (1998, p. 169) which may be constructive or destructive, and is metaphorically reproduced in vampires. Dougherty's thesis is that vampires draw from us eternal energies that "suck us dry of the will to essential to desire life" (p. 169). Furthermore, they challenge us to deal with our individual and collective dark sides. In recent years, after receding into the shadows of cinema, a virile handsome *youthful* stranger has emerged, one whose bad-boy nature appeals to women's desire to be desirable and young and girls' longings to be grown up and attractive to the best-looking boy in school. Stuart (1992, p. 85) writes, "At the heart of the vampire myth is a demon lover who is both elegant and deadly, a creature whose savagery is all the more shocking when taken with his seductive beauty and style." What is new in the re-visioning of vampireness is a form designed to appeal to teens—a sympathetic, narcissistic, compensated psychopathic vampire who symbolizes "the heavy, seductive lure of the unconscious itself, that force which works to keep consciousness captive in unconsciousness" (Dougherty, 1998, p. 171). This type of vampire, though fictional, has characteristics evident in real-life psychopathy, particularly compensated psychopathy. This personality type is discussed in the following section.

## The Nature of Psychopathy

Intended to generate a common definition of the symptomology of a psychopath, given the wide range of uses and misuses of the term in everyday and clinical life, psychologist Robert Hare and colleagues developed criteria to help clinicians diagnose the illness. What emerged from the work Hare began in the 1960s was a 40-point scale known as the Psychopathology Checklist (PCL-R) that was revised in 1991 to 22 items (Hare & Neumann, 2006). In addition to characteristics such as lack of remorse, callousness, pathological lying, charm, parasitic lifestyle, and other traits, the researchers discovered that "the popular image of the psychopath as a remorseless, smiling killer— Paul Bernardo, Clifford Olson, John Wayne Gacy—while not wrong, [was] incomplete" (Hercz, 2001, n.p.). Hare noted that the majority of psychopaths pass by us everyday, often unnoticed. These "'subclinical'" psychopaths" are "the charming predators who, unable to form real emotional bonds, find and use vulnerable women for sex and money (and inevitably abandon them)" (Hercz, 2001, n.p.). Thus, the one we should be most

concerned about is "the socially well adjusted psychopath" (Guggenbühl-Craig & Hillman, 1995). It is the criminal psychopath who makes headlines, but in reality there are few "pure psychopaths" (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 139).

To account for this variation, Jungian psychologist Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig (1980/2008, p. 95) introduced the term "compensated psychopath" (CP). The term modifies the concept and symptomatology of the psychopath to account for individuals who "approach the psychopathic extreme" but "are not totally wanting in morality" (p. 130). The CP is identifiable by five primary symptoms:

- An "inability to love" (p. 86)
- "A missing or deficient sense of morality" (p. 95)
- The "absence of any psychic development" (p. 105)
- A background of deep, nihilistic depression
- A "chronic background fear" (p. 114)

These (mostly) men[1] manage to fit in, and in fact, succeed in American society, particularly in the business and political worlds, in part because they "are graced with a kind of charisma" (Guggenbühl-Craig & Hillman, 1995). Cleckley (1941) wrote

> In these personalities . . . a very deep-seated disorder often exists. The true difference between them and the psychopaths who continually go to jails or to psychiatric hospitals is that they keep up a far better and more consistent outward appearance of being normal. The chief difference . . . lies perhaps in whether the mask or façade of psychobiologic health is extended into superficial material success. (pp. 198-199)

Furthermore, "Everything about him is likely to suggest desirable and superior human qualities, a robust mental health" (Cleckley, 1955, p. 332), and yet, to those who carefully observe him, it is clear something is not quite right. For example, CPs are logical to the point of rigidity, have extremely high personal standards to the level of narcissism, and are free from many of symptoms that might bring an individual to therapy such as low self-esteem or relationship problems. Since CPs rarely end up in a therapist's office their behavior goes virtually undetected until something significant, and usually tragic, happens. "Even under concrete circumstances that would for the ordinary person cause embarrassment, confusion, acute insecurity, or visible agitation, his relative serenity is likely to be noteworthy" (Cleckley, 1941; 1976, p. 340).

Lacking a "divine spark" (Jung, 1966, p. 92), a self that individuates in a moral sense, the CP must, therefore, construct a persona. This persona, defined as "the character that we present to others, or the symbolic masks we wear" (Merlock Jackson, 2005, p. 217) only appears to be terribly concerned with the well-being and whereabouts of the target of interest. However, lacking an internal moral compass, he sees the world as a stage upon which a performance is needed (Goffman, 1959). If anything this personality type overcompensates, as do people who lack, for example, a good sense

of time and thus constantly look at their watches. "You can't appeal to his conscience. He just doesn't care. He takes what he needs and moves on to the next victim. . . . Like vampires, they exploit people to feed off the energy the game arouses" (Ramsland, 2002, p. 116).

When caught in lies, the CP, being free from feelings of guilt, is able to quickly recover and explain and/or rationalize away the situation providing seemingly reasonable explanations. These justifications mask an underlying lack of compassion and morality.

> If psychic health were defined as freedom from inhibitions, complications, or compulsions, and freedom from all scruples, psychopaths would be prime candidates. It is this freedom which makes psychopathic sexuality so attractive for others, particularly those acutely aware of the complications, inhibitions, and contradictory nature of their own sexuality. (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 116)

CPs tend to seek occupations "where those with whom they work will help maintain a moral rigidity, occupations where a strict morality is the order of the day" (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 130). They seem sincere, trustworthy, forthright, and of high moral standards but are "always distinguished by egocentricity" (Cleckley, 1955, p. 395). Ramsland (2002) notes, they are highly motivated and skilled at social climbing, "regardless of the cost to people or morals" (p. 127).

## The CP in Popular Culture

Several media portrayals glamorize the CP. In both literature and film, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* tells the story of a protagonist who never ages. He seduces women, betrays his friends, yet, in true CP form, "he does not know fear and sadness" (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 42). The 1987 (Stone, 1987) film *Wall Street* presented the unemotional, amoral Gordon Gekko (played by Michael Douglas) who was attractive in part because he was so unreachable. His good looks, compulsion to duty and order, exaggerated conscientiousness, aplomb, take-no-prisoners business savvy, and resultant financial success resulted in a sexy persona unfazed by an ethics of discovery. Gekko says to aspirant Bud Fox, "It's not a question of enough, pal. It's a zero sum game, somebody wins, somebody loses." Another illustration of the CP in popular culture is the 2000 film *American Psycho*, based upon the 1991 Bret Easton Ellis's book of the same name. The book's main character, Patrick Bateman (played by actor Christian Bale), is a Wall Street executive so taken by his own physical appearance and prowess that competition among peers for the best business card or most expensive suit elicits a murderous response. But it is Bateman's internal dialogue about himself that reveals his psychopathy:

> There wasn't a clear, identifiable emotion within me, except for greed and possibly, total disgust. I had all the characteristics of a human being—flesh, blood, skin, hair—but my depersonalization was so intense, had gone so deep, that the

normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow, purposeful erasure. I was simply imitating reality, a rough resemblance of a human being, with only a dim corner of my mind functioning. (Ellis, 1991, p. 282)

The CP's characteristics are not only rewarded in Hollywood fiction but also in everyday life. A *New York Times* article about financier Bernard Madoff, who operated a US$50 million Ponzi scheme, referred to him on the one hand as an "affable, charismatic man," "reclusive, at times standoffish and aloof," but also as "quiet, controlled, and closely attuned to his image, down to the most minute detail" (Cresswell & Thomas, 2009, p. BU1). Some journalists say he stole simply for the fun of it, "exploiting every relationship in his life for decades while studiously manipulating financial regulators" (p. BU1). In fact, an FBI agent referred to Madoff as a psychopath. Sensationalism? Perhaps, but the article nevertheless illustrates what is commonly rewarded in political and business culture—the ability to remain detached, hence unencumbered by emotions when making decisions, a powerful drive for self-preservation, and lack of remorse when making difficult decisions. As such, psychopaths usually believe they are beyond the law, beyond suspicion, and "tend to strongly believe that they're special" (p. BU1).

CPs are often envied for their ability to stand back and apart from emotional involvement. Many women, particularly emotionally vulnerable women, fall for the male psychopath because he appears to share their interests and passions:

He will talk to a woman who is interested in poetry about poetry. He doesn't care about poetry but he will quote poets! . . . and even sexually he will be better because his sexual life is absolutely healthy. Normal sexual life is so complicated, so full of strange ideas and obsessions and desires . . . it's one of the most complicated things in life and in many ways shows some of the most perverse things. The only sexually normal man or woman is a psychopath, sexuality just functions, and a man psychopath and a woman psychopath—they can make love to anybody, anytime, anyplace, doesn't matter, because it's just going, there is no inhibition of any kind. That's why they are so good at making money. (Guggenbühl-Craig & Hillman, 1995)

Popular culture portrayals tend to emphasize the CP's finesse and largess in business and political spheres. Their access to power and resources functions as an aphrodisiac. This allure is easily transferred metaphorically to other-than-human beings, including powerful fantasy figures such as the vampire.

## Twilight Time

The appeal of the forbidden, dangerous, and thus exciting, is a persona real CPs cultivate and are amplified characteristics in vampires, who are consistently appealing due to "their combination of deathless good looks and decadent sexuality" (La Ferla, 2009,

p. E1). Thus, for many of the same reasons, real girls and women are attracted to the vampire mystique. Therapist Linda Hilburn (2008, n.p.) wrote,

> Vampires are the quintessential bad boys of the preternatural universe. They don't follow any human rules or laws. Imagine James Dean with fangs. Or, Captain Jack Sparrow rising from his coffin. They're also examples of extraordinary men. Women in therapy often report disappointment with the "human" males they're in relationship with. Would a handsome vampire sit in front of the television, scratching his stomach and drinking beer? Are women lusting after the undead Homer Simpson? Probably not. Imagining a heart-stoppingly-gorgeous man hovering outside your window is much more fun. Most of my clients would open the window.

Moreover, in cultures such as the U.S. in which a premium is placed on youth, eternal life and fixed ethereal beauty is a hard-to-resist combination. The attraction is "all about the titillation of imagining the monsters we could be if we just let go," said a fashion designer, adding, "we're all fascinated with corruption, the more glamourous the better" and the idea of "devouring, consuming, possessing someone we desire" (as cited in La Ferla, 2009, p. E1). Male vampires presented in media as romantic partners are typically drawn to victims who are emotionally vulnerable. Teen and pre-teen girls who are wrestling with changing bodies, psyches, and sex-role identities are a vulnerable audience. Thus, the vampire story "resonates with girls because it perfectly encapsulates the giddiness and the rapture—and the menace—that inherently accompany romance and sex for them" (Flanagan, 2008, n.p.). In the following section, the connection between the CP and *Twilight* are brought to life through illustrative quotes from Edward and Bella, which are organized according to Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008) characteristics.

## A Thin Line Between Love and Hate

The first characteristic of the CP is an inability to love. Lacking a real ability to love, the CP performs the role of one who loves by way of persona, a mask, by putting on the appearance of someone with emotional depth and complexity. Whereas a pure psychopath is incapable of emotions in this regard, the CP is at least aware of the lacunae (i.e., missing parts). Not that he *feels* it, but notes the absence of what other people seem to experience. In *Twilight*, Edward admits to Bella, "I don't know how to be close to you. I don't know if I can" (Meyer, 2005, p. 278). Later he reflects on the something missing that only appeared to him when he noticed her, "For almost ninety years I've walked among my kind and yours . . . all the time thinking I was complete in myself, not realizing what I was seeking. And not finding anything, because you weren't alive yet" (p. 304). López-Pedraza (1991, p. 107) says, "The psychopath is the living expression of the phrase 'there's nothing inside them,'" which Edward is, but Bella refuses to believe. It is critical, according to Guggenbühl-Craig (1980/2008),

not to confuse feeling with love. Edward does feel, but "mistaking feeling for love is to overlook the fact that the relation is much more than emotion" (p. 68). CPs only appear to love. Edward says, "I have human instincts—they may be buried deep, but they're there" (Meyer, 2005, p. 278) and "I'm not used to feeling so human. Is it always like this?" (p. 278). Bella is puzzled by Edward's sexual restraint; something seems to be *missing* in him. Aware of his lack of Eros, Edward tries to compensate for it by forming a romantic relationship with Bella. Sex becomes a substitute for something more intimate. He and Bella literally throb with sexual tension, "They are compensated by the romantic fever that the sexual postponement generates. The book fairly heaves with desire" (Acocella, 2009, p. 101). Although throughout the book he appears to be intensely working on developing feelings, the lacuna of course is that Edward is a vampire and when Bella learns his secret she isn't sure what she feels "about this unnerving kink in his personality" (Rafferty, 2008, p. MT6). Later in the book he says, "You're resurrecting the human in me" (p. 304) and "I may not be a human, but I am a man" (p. 311).

*Twilight's* fate "hangs on fangs that aren't bared, and on a bloodlust that isn't indulged" (Morgenstern, 2008, p. W1). Whereas, according to Kantor (2006, p. 117), "The true psychopath fails to recognize the inescapable fact of life that instant gratification is rarely the straightest path to long-term satisfaction," Edward, as a CP, recognizes that if he were to give in to his urge to feed on Bella he would kill her. He says, "Wanting to be with me. That's really not in your best interest" (Meyer, 2005, p. 266).

## Missing Morality

Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008, p. 72) second characteristic of a CP is "a missing or deficient sense of morality." Although CPs "intellectually comprehend morality," and sometimes imitate it, for them "morality has no meaning" (p. 77). Edward remains eerily self-controlled and well behaved in his actions toward Bella, at least at first. Rigid, he pays "compulsive attention to duty and order," demonstrates a "pedantic adherence to any and all regulations," and exhibits "exaggerated consciousness," evident in his fastidious physical appearance, lifestyle, and behaviors (p. 133). Edward tries to offset this psychic defect by an overwhelming desire to protect Bella. For example, he says, "I've never tried to keep a specific persona alive before, and it's much more troublesome than I would have believed. But that's probably just because it's you" (p. 174). Edward declares that keeping Bella alive is "a full-time occupation that requires [his] constant presence" (p. 211) and that her "number was up before [he] met [her]" (p. 175). He also seems to thrive on either convincing Bella she needs rescuing or by rescuing her. For example, he tells her when she needs to rest, that he's anxious if away from her. But this appearance of morality and care is only a cover for the need to control. Therefore, when Eros is absent in the CP, "we frequently find manipulation" (p. 71). Edward says to Bella: "I'm the world's best predator, aren't I? Everything about me invites you in—my voice, my face, even my smell" (Meyer, 2005,

p. 263), but that "sometimes we make mistakes. Me, for example, allowing myself to be alone with you" (p. 187).

## *Forever Young*

The third primary symptom of psychopathy in Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008) typology is lack of psychic development. CPs appear timeless and never changing—they can be neighbors and always seem the same, coworkers who rarely vary in personality, or therapy clients who never seem to progress. Lack of psychic development is a consequence of the absence of Eros. Without the ability to love and to change there is no development.

Edward is more than 100 years old. Although physically he has a wide variety of cultural experiences, psychologically and psychically he is frozen in time. CPs fear change. Thus, for a variety of reasons Edward resists being sexual with Bella. Besides being afraid of hurting and even killing her, closeness would mean transcending his vampireness and entering a more mature relationship. In fact, Edward's attraction/repulsion is so strong when he first meets Bella that he must leave school for several days and feed on wild animals. "Love and hate, pleasure and pain are still energetically enmeshed. What is desired is merger, fusion, not union. What is desired incorporation, not insemination. What is desired by vampires is suck, not sex" (Dougherty, 1998, p. 173). Sex is something the CP uses as an avenue to power. It is "a prize not to be obtained in all the usual and acceptable ways but to be gotten by conning people out of it. They achieve this by lying about their true feelings ('I love you') and true intent ('I plan to marry you'), and by coming on as one thing ('your date') and turning out to be quite another ('your rapist')" (Kantor, 2006, p. 118). Intimacy is another animal altogether that would make Edward vulnerable.

Other examples of Edward's arrested development include obsession with winning and acting out if things don't go his way. He is an accomplished pianist, the most skilled driver, and fastest runner in his family. A "signpost" of this characteristic "is often a smooth lack of concern at being found out" (Hare & Neumann, 2006, p. 35). Edward drives at terrifyingly high speeds, yet without a sense of risk. When Bella expresses worry for their safety he says, "We've never been in an accident, Bella— I've never even gotten a ticket. Built-in radar detector" (Meyer, 2005, p. 182). Although Edward is the epitome of seductive energy, he is simultaneously a model of restraint, when moments of awareness break through. He says to Bella, "I don't want to be a monster," even though she seems more than willing to let him be that way with her, and there is no reason to think he might not become one at any moment. Recidivism among real psychopaths, for example, is much higher than among other criminals (Babiak & Hare, 2006).

## Background Depression

Despite what appears to be an inability to feel, Guggenbühl-Craig (1980/2008) argues that CPs do experience a kind of grief, often shown in feelings of mistrust. They suspect

they lack emotions that others have, "which accounts for their understandably chronic sadness as well as their chronic mistrustfulness" (p. 81). CPs commit suicide in response to these emotions in particularly inexplicable ways. In the vampire genre this is sometimes demonstrated by frustration with an inability to die and their ultimate wish to be put to rest (Overstreet, 2006; Rice, 1977; Twitchell, 1981). Social suicide is another death CPs also experience—through acts, attitudes, or isolation—they remove themselves from others. The Cullen family, for example, keeps their distance from the Forks townspeople. Although the father is a doctor, thus a prominent member of the community, the family remains hidden, living out of town. There is also the largely unarticulated but felt tension between the vampires and the indigenous community, who have an ancient agreement about where the vampires go and when.

Another depressive force is Edward's ability to hear human thoughts. This is not a characteristic of all of the *Twilight* vampires, but is Edward's "gift." This special strength can become overwhelming. Edward says, "Most of the time I tune it all out—it can be very distracting. And then it's easier to seem normal when I'm not accidentally answering someone's thoughts rather than their words" (p. 180). That he feels different is evident when he says to Bella, "I hear voices in my mind and you're worried that you're the freak?" (p. 181). Edward cannot, however, hear what's on Bella's mind.

## Chronic Background Fear

The fifth primary symptom of compensated psychopathy is a mistrust of the world. CPs are not afraid per se but believe others always have unrevealed motivations or are hiding something from them. They live with a constant ongoing mistrust and paranoia that is often articulated in abusive thinking, speaking, and rage. Edward's narcissism requires he control Bella by belittling her. He tells her that she is "emotionally unobservant" (Meyer, 2005, p. 81), "absurd" (p. 82), and "green" (p. 96). He patronizes Bella by saying, "You've got a bit of a temper, don't you?" (p. 90) and that she seems "to be one of those people who just attract accidents like a magnet" (p. 109) and only she "could get into trouble in a town this small" (p. 173) and that she's not only a "magnet for accidents—that's not a broad enough classification . . . [but] a magnet for trouble" (p. 174). He pathologizes Bella's accident-prone nature by comparing her with "ordinary people" who "seem to make it through the day without so many catastrophes" (p. 174).

Part of the CP's need to control his environment is expressed in his need to organize everything and everyone around him. Once they become a couple, Edward spends nearly every moment of every day with Bella, even watching her sleep. Although he warns her that being with him is not in her best interest, Edward nevertheless tells Bella what she most wants to hear: that he craves her company (and more). Bella can't believe someone as good looking and smart as Edward would be interested in someone like her. Early in the book Bella's self-deprecating view of herself is clear when she says, "I was in disbelief that I'd just explained my dreary life to this bizarre, beautiful boy who may or may not despise me" (Meyer, 2005, p. 50). Furthermore, she says, "I wasn't interesting. And he was. Interesting. . . . And brilliant . . . and mysterious . . .

and perfect . . . and beautiful . . . he must see how absorbed I was by him . . . because he wasn't interested in me at all" (p. 79).

Bella is more than a little dependent on Edward. She is drawn to his superhuman strength, his proven ability to save her in situations in which her life or her virtue are at risk, and the risk is high. There is much in her life that makes her feel awkward. She is an outsider to the tight-knit Forks community. For example, she says, "I'm absolutely ordinary—well, except for bad things like all the near-death experiences and being so clumsy that I'm almost disabled" (Meyer, 2005, p. 210).

## A Boyfriend to Die For

Whereas stories such as *American Psycho* are told from the perspective of the CP in "an interminable monologue of the non-self" (Murphet, 2002, p. 25), *Twilight* is narrated from the perspective of Bella, the girl who is attracted to the beautiful, seemingly unattainable boy, Edward. Bella, as a typical teen girl, wrestles with self-esteem issues and conceivably depression, having moved from sunny Arizona to perennially overcast Washington, as well as the stress of entering a new school. Edward asks her, "Are you so depressed by Forks that its made you suicidal?" (Meyer, 2005, p. 255). In a study of gender differences in symptoms of depression, Bennett, Ambrosini, Kudes, Metz, and Rabinovich (2005, p. 35) found, among 416 adolescents, "depressed girls had more guilt, body image dissatisfaction, self-blame, self-disappointment, feelings of failure, concentration problems, difficulty working, sadness/depressed mood, sleep problems, fatigue, and health worries" than did boys. Bella's limited self-view about how or why a boy like Edward would be interested in a girl like her is evident throughout the book. For example, she says,

> It was difficult to believe that I hadn't just imagined what Edward had said, and the way his eyes had looked. Maybe it was just a very convincing dream that I'd confused with reality. That seemed more probable than that I really appealed to him on any level. (Meyer, 2005, p. 86)

It would seem Bella has made a mature move by deciding to spend time with her father, but she may have in fact been looking for the kind of attention and nurturing she was no longer getting from her recently remarried mother. Edward, with his ancient knowledge, timeless experience, eternal youth, and dark psychic energies appeal to Bella as she emerges from the chrysalis of adolescence. His lack of Eros is reflected in the need to control, dominate, and take over every situation as well as Bella. "Conscious passivity about power feeds the evil of shadow" (Dougherty, 1998, p. 179), and Bella is more than willing to play this role.

How and why darkness and danger are erotic is beyond the scope of this article. However, as Dougherty points out, self-destructiveness can be erotic in the same way a substance abuser finds the need for a drug, or a self-mutilator lives for the next moment of flesh piercing or cutting—this separation from and attraction to the erotic release

engaging in forbidden acts offers. The victim's psychological enslavement to the vampire is itself a form of addiction. Sometimes it is the psychological power the vampire holds over his victim that is addictive (Kane, 2006). Edward describes his desire to feed on Bella as a "hunger—the thirst—that, deplorable creature that I am . . ." (p. 278). He tries to relate this impulse to her as a drug addiction, referring to her as his "brand of heroin" (p. 268). He reminds her of her vulnerability, describing her as "breakable" and that he can "never afford to lose any kind of control" when he is with her (p. 310). Both he and she are hooked. In vampire lore, the intended victim must invite the vampire in, thus allowing, even initiating, the feeding. Whereas a "healthy instinctual response" would be to resist Edward, and Bella knows and says this, she nevertheless allows him into her psyche, which "enables [her] to remain passive and compliant in situations that require ethical mobilization" (Dougherty, 1998, p. 172). However, rather than "depriving herself of this really, *really* good-looking guy's company" (Rafferty, 2008, p. MT6; italics in original), Bella is willing to risk her life and that of her family to be with him.

According to Guggenbühl-Craig (1980/2008), a secondary symptom of compensated psychopathy is the ability to be simultaneously charming and evoke pity. Bella is drawn to the unattainable Edward, who shares outsider status. Low self-esteem makes her vulnerable to him, something vampire lore tells us increases likelihood of vampires having power over their victims, for "being chosen and being the victim are the same (López-Pedraza, 1991, p. 51). As her name portends, Bella Swan is the fair virgin. She and Edward do a dance of predator and prey and victim and violator. In fact, the movie version of *Twilight* ends with Edward and Bella doing just that—dancing—under a gazebo at the high school prom, unknowingly observed by a dangerous, female renegade vampire. The two even refer to one another as the lion (Edward) and the lamb (Bella). Edward says, "And so, the lion fell in love with the lamb . . . what a sick, masochistic lion" (p. 274). Bella remarks how she feels herded by Edward, that he spies on her, and refers to herself as a "stupid lamb" (p. 274).

Dougherty (1998) notes how abuse figures in the vampire/victim relationship: "the strong over the weak, the jaded over the innocent, the adult over the child" (p. 170). In fact, Bella's simultaneous attraction and repulsion at the idea of him as a vampire suggests her own ambivalence about growing up. The vampire is "enabled by his victim's passive submission" (p. 172), and Bella more than fulfills that role. She lives and breathes the idea of him—he is distant and too perfect. His need for control by rescuing and protecting her results in his being with her at every moment, even when she's asleep. Bella says, "I was consumed by the mystery Edward presented. And more than a little obsessed by Edward himself" (Meyer, 2005, p. 67). Furthermore, she realizes, "I couldn't allow him to have this level of influence over me. It was pathetic. More than pathetic, it was unhealthy" (p. 74). But he does and she does.

Despite the fact that he could easily kill her, Bella often talks about how she is not afraid of Edward and how she refused "to be convinced to fear him, no matter how real the danger might be" (Meyer, 2005, p. 243). Moreover, Bella states she "would rather die than stay away" from Edward and knew, "at any moment it could be too much, and

my life could end—so quickly that I might not even notice. I couldn't make myself be afraid. I couldn't think of anything, except that he was touching me" (p. 273). Bella is so completely under the spell of this very dangerous man, that she looses any sense of self-preservation.

Edward, always a loner before, spends a significant amount of time brooding about and warning Bella about his nature and the fact that he might, at any time, lose control, resulting in deadly outcome for her. He tells her to stay away from him, asks her to consider, "What if I'm not a superhero? What if I'm the bad guy?"(p. 92). Being with Edward means Bella's life is always at risk. He warns her that she should stay away from him because he's "fighting fate" (p. 191) to keep her alive, that being with him is not in her best interest, and, importantly, he points out that she should never forget "I am more dangerous to you than I am to anyone else" (p. 266). And yet, rather than reject him, Bella elevates Edward to status beyond her boyfriend to that of "not human. He is something more" (p. 138), as an "angel" (p. 241) and "perpetual savior" (p. 188). She describes him as "beautiful" (Meyer, 2005, p. 79), with a voice "like melting honey" (p. 102). Bella claims, "There was nothing about him that could be improved" (p. 241). Such an obsession is exactly what the CP wants from his victim.

Literature about psychopaths frequently references the power of their gaze. Hare (1993) describes intense eye contact while others note psychopath's empty, expressionless eyes or an intense, fixed cold stare. Many times in *Twilight* Bella describes Edward's eyes—either their color (gold or black) or the energy they emit. She says she is "afraid of the persuasive power of his eyes" (p. 243), that they are "overwhelming" (p. 102) and "hypnotic" (p. 139), and that she feels "his black eyes full of revulsion" and, particularly disturbing, she notes, "The phrase 'if looks could kill' suddenly ran through my mind" (p. 24). At one point she remarks that Edward "unleashed the full, devastating power of his eyes on me" (p. 58).

Other secondary symptoms of psychopathy, according to Guggenbühl-Craig, include lack of feelings of guilt, of any "real understanding or insight" (p. 118). Remarkably capable of evoking pity while remaining charming, CPs seem, in many ways, bored with the world as they lack the emotional depth with which to consider experience. The appeal to teen and preteen girls (besides that fact that, in most homes anyway, having one's daughter date a vampire would be forbidden) is the deliciously romantic angst of watching a seemingly unattainable "gorgeous vampire . . . fight his own biological destiny to fall in love with . . . a human girl" (Schuker, 2009, p. W12). Furthermore, because "love and morality do not get in their way, [CPs] often succeed in bewitching those around them" (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1980/2008, p. 122). Bella says,

> I didn't know if there ever was a choice, really. I was already in too deep. Now that I knew—if I knew—I could do nothing about my frightening secret. Because when I thought of him, of his voice, his hypnotic eyes, the magnetic force of his personality, I wanted nothing more than to be with him right now. (Meyer, 2005, p. 139)

Bella first sees Edward in the school cafeteria at Forks High School. She is intrigued by his appearance and that of his siblings whom she describes as "devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful" (Meyer, 2005, p. 19). Edward and his family are markedly different from the rest of the Forks community in terms of social class and physical appearance— they look and act different than anyone else and stick to themselves. The family simultaneously provokes awe and pity because of their necessary physical and social isolation. This appeals to Bella who, as a newcomer to Forks, also feels like an outsider. She says, "I felt a surge of pity and relief. Pity because, as beautiful as they were, they were outsiders, clearly not accepted. Relief that I wasn't the only newcomer here, and certainly not the most interesting by any standard" (p. 22).

## A Stake in the Culture

The goal of this article is to examine the discourse of *Twilight* in terms of the likelihood that Bella's love interest (Edward) fulfills Guggenbühl-Craig's (1980/2008) definition of the compensated psychopath. Drawing on Bakhtin, language is never neutral. The section of particular words and phrases functions to articulate beliefs as a form of disclosure. For Bakhtin, language is ideological and dialogic—we speak out of bounded systems of constructed knowing, and every utterance is a "two-sided act" (1973, p. 9). This means a word is chosen specifically due to its shared territory between sender and receiver—it is both ideological and social. As a manner of questioning words and the power structures behind them, discourse analysis provides a mechanism through which message and motivation are revealed. From the verbal exchanges between Edward and Bella I argue that this fantasy character/teen heartthrob has entered the lives of real girls in ways that are not positive. This dynamic has at least two implications.

First, the vampire as sympathetic tragic figure and object of a young girl's desire in *Twilight* is an example of the culture ignoring the gender specificity of serial killing. Cameron and Frazer (1987) ask

> Why . . . is it usually men who are driven to kill women, and only very rarely that women kill men? Why are there no female sadistic sex-killers and why are there so many men of this type? What is the connection between murder and the erotic? What is the difference between 'normal' men and killers? To ask these questions . . . is to ask something about men—or more precisely, about the construction of masculine sexuality in our culture. (pp. 30-31)

Although Edward Cullen feeds on animals other than humans he is always only a bite away from a change in the menu, which is part of his appeal to Bella. She says, "Common sense told me I should be terrified. Instead, I was relieved to finally understand. And I was filled with compassion for his suffering, even now, as he confessed his craving to take my life" (p. 273). Even more frightening is once Bella realizes this,

she says of her choice to be with him, that the "decision was ridiculously easy to live with. Dangerously easy" (p. 140). A film reviewer wrote, "*Twilight* has targeted the collective soul of teenage America, and will surely have its way" (Morgenstern, 2008, p. W1). This soul, personified in Bella is in flux in teen girls, toggling between girl-hood and womanhood. Having the boyfriend or girlfriend of one's dreams can seem like life or death to an adolescent. However, in the case of this story's heroine, the consequences are literal. A 2006 survey by Teen Research Unlimited (Picard, 2007), for example, revealed that teens are experiencing more physical and psychological abuse than in previous years and that girls in particular had been "hit, punched, slapped, or kicked while in a relationship" (p. 12). Furthermore, parents did not know about the abuse in many cases because their teen either didn't tell them about it or minimized the seriousness of the violent behavior (68%; p. 14).

Despite applause for the book series' and films' emphasis on self-control and girl power, I argue those messages are lost by rewarding Bella not for confronting her shadow, not for being strong and seeing that this guy is dangerous, but rather for her dependence on a monster who can only offer her death or eternal life like his feeding on others. Stephanie Meyer describes on her website (www.stephaniemeyer.com) where the idea for the book came from—a dream:

> In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.

The second implication is the importance of taking popular culture portrayals seriously. It would be easy to dismiss *Twilight* as only harmless entertainment. Although Edward Cullen may be purely fictional, the power of story, of mass media, to influence viewers and readers, is well established in academic literature. Scholars such as Stuart Hall describe the importance of media texts in the formation of social subjectivity. Literary analyses thereby direct attention to the connection between discursive practices and identity formation. Scholars suggest that adolescence is the time when the social world of young people provides information on heteronormative expectations for romance and relationships (Walton, Weatherall, & Jackson, 2002). This is a particularly vulnerable time for girls who are "just beginning to take up (and to resist) cultural coherence systems that construct gender and sexuality" (p. 673). Furthermore, "The notion of threat or vulnerability relates to the positioning of females as submissive, passive, and dependent within dominant cultural dis-courses of both heterosexuality and romance" (p. 674). Although "every decade offers an iconic bad boy who gets the girl," such as James Dean, Elvis, 50 Cent, (Pelusi, 2009, n. p.), according to Strasburger (p. 276), "Hollywood producers and directors would have us believe that their products are harmless fantasy, but the communication literature indicates

otherwise." To ignore that power puts our culture under Edward's spell. A substantial body of research demonstrates the power of media to influence girls' and women's body image, self-esteem, and sexual identity (Carpenter, 1998; Currie, 1997; Durham, 2002; Kearney, 2006; Merskin, 2004; Strasburger, 2005). Furthermore, girls have a special relationship with books (Blackford, 2004; Cherland, 1994). Cherland argues that girls read within a culture that is socially constructed around gender roles. Girls interact with texts such as books in multiple ways that ultimately reflect expectations of their place in the social order. Thus reading is both a social and a psychological process. Flanagan (2008, n.p.) says,

> The salient fact of an adolescent girl's existence is her need for a secret emotional life—one that she slips into during her sulks and silences, during her endless hours alone in her room, or even just when she's gazing out the classroom window while all of Modern European History, or the niceties of the passé composé, sluice past her. This means that she is a creature designed for reading in a way no boy or man, or even grown woman, could ever be so exactly designed, because she is a creature whose most elemental psychological needs—to be undisturbed while she works out the big questions of her life, to be hidden from view while still in plain sight, to enter profoundly into the emotional lives of others—are met precisely by the act of reading.

According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, 13-year-old Haami Nyangibo said teen girls are switching from *Potter* to *Twilight* finding, "the *Twilight* books 'far more relatable. They just engage in a more realistic way. A lot of my friends have gone off *Harry Potter* and are onto *Twilight*" (Schuker, 2009, p. W12). A vampire-human romance—more realistic? When mostly unknown British actor, Robert Pattinson appeared at the King of Prussia, Pennsylvania mall, to promote the then-forthcoming *Twilight* movie, a reporter described the sound coming from the more than 1,000 "mostly teenage girls" as follows:

> In collective pitch, frequency and volume the sound would make a shuttle launching seem demure, a Jack White guitar solo retiring, a jackhammer somehow soothing. To reach into history, it may have approached Beatles-at-Shea-Stadium loud, replete with the weeping, swooning and self-hugging. (Carr, 2008, p. C1)

Beyond sheer star power madness, something troubling was happening. When the actor appeared "the crowd didn't see an actor. They saw Edward Cullen, the perfect boyfriend who just happens to live on blood" (Carr, 2008, p. C1). Parasocial interaction, the nonreciprocal one-sided relationship in which one party knows a great deal about another party (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), can be particularly profound among vulnerable individuals who are lonely or shy, characteristics often found among adolescent girls who are developing their sense of self in relation to themselves and others. Parasocial relationships with celebrities have become

ever more common in the latter 20th century onward with the ubiquity of television, film, magazines, and other media and particularly since their convergence (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Potter, 1988; Rubin et al., 1985). The combination of media-generated and media-sustained gossip, paparazzi, and celebrity self-promotion collaborate in a public image of an actor whose roles appear real and accessible. For some fans, the line between fantasy and reality grows quite thin (Lewis, 1992; Mazzarella, 2005). Potter (1988, p. 28) noted that, within these relationships viewers create "a strong sense of realness about [the] character." Furthermore, the processing of information about characters is active, hence becoming even more real. In the case of Edward, for example, "When Mr. Pattinson appeared at the Apple store in SoHo the week before one young fan asked him to bite her." Pattinson said, "'The connection that I am an actor playing this character is sort of skipped. . . . They are in denial. They think I am Edward Cullen" (Carr, 2008, p. C1).

Just as psychopathy, particularly CP, is difficult to identify in real life, the romanticization of it in fiction, fiction that targets girls via stories about vampires, is also potentially dangerous. This study primarily examines the character Edward Cullen. Future work could examine the books and film from the perspective of other characters as well as an analysis of Bella. Future research could also examine more of the books in the *Twilight* series as well as the continuing flow of movies and merchandise. In addition, as in the case of many vampire movies, the casts of these films are generally white. However, Native Americans figure in both *Twilight* and *New Moon*, the second book and movie, in the series, as does a black vampire, Laurent. Both racial and gender differences in audience views of the books and movies would be compelling investigations.

As a source of learning, the media play an important pedagogical role in the socialization of young people. If the information coming to girls is that a dangerous, psychopathic boy is good boyfriend material, I argue they are psychically and physically in danger. *Twilight* and the other three books in the series are "contenders for the most popular teen-girl novels of all time" (Flanagan, 2008, n. p.). Yet as parents and educators we should critically evaluate the message the books deliver. The director of the film *Twilight*, Catherine Hardwicke, said, "You have the story of a young woman falling so deeply in love that she doesn't care if she dies or becomes a vampire" (Carr, 2008, p. C1). I believe this is something to be concerned about. By dismissing the Edward Cullen character as merely entertainment further contributes to what Schoene (2008, p. 395) describes as masculinity's "exemption from its highly anxiety-inducing task of asserting and identifying itself over and against the feminine."

The appeal of *Twilight* to girls may in fact be a backlash to the progress girls and women have and are making toward equity and equality consistent with what Currie (1997, p. 455) identified as the power of social texts to operate as the "new site[s] of women's oppression/liberation." Although the abstinence-only message of *Twilight* appeals to girls (and women) in ways that speaks to love beyond the physical, Bella wants sex and violence done to her. The allure of this idealized, perfect guy with so much apparent self-control hides a problematic message about relationships: that true

love is only possible with a hyper protective, controlling, *dangerous* guy who is validated through rescuing the distressed damsel—at least for the moment.

## Note

1. Psychopathy primarily affects men and figures range from about 1% to 4% of the U.S. population (Seabrook, 2008; Stout, 2005).

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## Bio

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