Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

As a romance novel, much of the appeal of the *Twilight* series revolves around the enduring love relationship between Edward and Bella. As an illustration, note the positive reactions to the bond between the two main characters that many readers surveyed expressed: One 20-year-old reader noted, “I absolutely adore their relationship.” Another stated, “I am jealous, I would love to have what they have. It is a very strong bond between two people that are just drawn to one another.” Still another noted that Edward’s relationship with Bella is “… pure love. He just wants her to be happy.” And yet another remarked about Edward, “I like that he is completely committed to protecting those he loves.” As noted in an earlier chapter, such reactions are typical to female readers of romance novels who sometimes use these types of scripts to fulfill emotional needs as they identify with a female protagonist who is romantically pursued by the male main characters (Juhasz, 1988; Radway, 1991). Romance novels allow the reader to vicariously experience a love relationship that they covet, thus replacing one that might be less satisfactory or absent.

Alternately, a significant number of readers view the relationship between Bella and Edward as unhealthy. One 21-year-old female survey respondent describes Bella’s relationship with Edward as “…weird. I think it’s ridiculous how much she needs him.” Another 25-year-old woman describes it as “…screwed up. They are addicted to each other. Their relationship is too dependent upon each other.” And still another respondent described it as “unstable.” As noted in an earlier chapter, these less positive interpretations of the relationship between Edward and Bella are consistent with feminist perspectives on romance novels. Sterk (1986), for example, discusses the dysfunctional characteristics of relationships typically depicted in
romance novels as the characters progress through the stages of first meeting to their ultimate happily-ever-after commitment to each other. As an illustration, Sterk notes that romance novels portray storylines that suggest that traditional sex stereotypes, where the man is dominant and the woman ultimately submits to him, are common. They also tend to contribute to myths implying that there is one man who is the perfect soulmate for each woman, that love is necessary to complete or fulfill us, and that love is necessary to experience the greatest happiness available to us. Additionally, and more pertinent to this discussion, Clasen (2010) suggests that the *Twilight* novels, in particular, encourage four myths of romantic love including the notion that there is such a thing as love at first sight, that love lasts forever, that romantic love relationships are the most important of all relationships, and that if someone loves us s/he will be able to read our mind and know what we need-want-mean with little to no communication. These myths, like those noted by Sterk, depict love relationships in unrealistic ways, and although readers might understand that such relationships are fictitious, their depictions can still influence readers, creating dissatisfaction when their own relationships cannot measure up to these unreasonable and unreachable standards (Clasen, 2010).

As such, it is evident that there are again two divergent views, this time of Bella and Edward’s relationship, but as their relationship is discussed from a psychological perspective in this chapter, the view that emerges is more consistent with the latter, that is, it is unhealthy. In fact, Bella herself describes her initial attraction to Edward as “pathetic” and “unhealthy,” in *Twilight* (p. 74). As the relationship between the two *Twilight* lovers is examined, the work of Karen Horney, psychoanalyst and notable personality theorist, is used to understand this latter perspective. Karen Horney was one of the first to critique Freud’s psychoanalytic theory from a feminist perspective, and she is also known for developing her own theory of personality development, the psychoanalytic social theory, which emphasizes the influence of culture and the social world on mental health and illness, in contrast to Freud’s sexual emphasis (Horney, 1945). Additionally, later in the chapter, the behavior of Bella, especially, is further examined from a psychological perspective by discussing the symptoms of
both depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As will be demonstrated, Bella’s behavior can be described as maladjusted on occasion because she shows symptoms of each of these disorders, but it should also be noted that Edward too shows signs of maladjustment, that is, the characteristics he shares with domestic abusers discussed in the last chapter.

**Horney’s Psychoanalytic Social Theory**

The strength of Horney’s theory can be found in her description of the neurotic personality. She suggested that neurotic conflict can be initiated at any age, but it is especially common for it to begin in childhood because children are not always given the warm, loving, disciplined environment they need in order to grow into well-adjusted adults (Horney, 1937, 1950). Parents, sometimes because of a lack of understanding about what appropriate parenting is, and sometimes because they have issues of their own, often raise their children in environments that are too lax in discipline or that seem hostile, and because of this, children sometimes grow up feeling insecure and unloved. Horney labeled these uncomfortable feelings basic anxiety. Basic anxiety can result in unhealthy modes of interacting with others and other maladjusted behaviors. Consider, for example, authoritarian parents, who are very strict and demanding (Baumrind, 1991). They expect to be obeyed without question. They are also very nonresponsive to their children, that is, they are not very emotionally supportive toward them and do not readily demonstrate affection. Children raised with this type of parenting tend to have lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression in comparison to children of other types of parents. They also tend to have poorer social skills. Conversely, indulgent parents (Baumrind, 1991) are very responsive (warm) toward their children but do not discipline them. Children raised with this type of parenting are more likely to be immature, demanding, and dependent. They are also more likely to display problematic behaviors such as underage drinking and drug use. Thus, in both cases, poor parenting is associated with maladjustment in later life, just as Horney suggested that basic anxiety results
from a lack of a warm, loving parental environment and results in neuroses later in life.

Bella’s experiences with her parents can certainly be qualified as less than ideal. In fact, she seems to be the parent in her relationships with both her mother and father, rather than the child. She describes her mother, Renée, as loving, erratic, and harebrained in *Twilight* and notes that she often took care of her mother instead of vice versa. For example, Bella thinks to herself, “I would have taken better care of her,” referring to her mother as she compares her ability to do so to her stepfather’s (*Eclipse*, p. 45). Likewise, she explains to Edward that “someone has to be the adult” (*Twilight*, p. 106) as she describes her relationship with Renée to him. As is noted in chapter 2 of *Twilight*, Bella also takes care of her father after she moves to Forks. She takes charge of the cooking and food shopping after she moves in with her father at the beginning of the series. She is also frequently described as cleaning the house and doing laundry. Charlie, her father, does take care of Bella in some ways: He provides for her as chief of police in Forks and he buys her a truck to get around in. In another scene he puts chains on her truck tires on an icy day to ensure her safety. But Bella is described as taking care of Charlie much more frequently than vice versa. Additionally, while these behaviors indicate that Charlie loves Bella, Charlie is also described as emotionally unavailable. In *Breaking Dawn*, after Bella and Edward are married and they are about to leave on their honeymoon, Bella approaches Charlie to say goodbye. “It was hard to talk about love with Charlie—we were so much alike, always reverting to trivial things to avoid embarrassing emotional displays” (p. 73). Ultimately they do tell each other that they love one another but readers can see how difficult it is for them and the implication is that such displays of affection have not been typical. In real life this difficulty in expressing love, this emotional distance, can be confusing to children, especially early on in childhood (Horney, 1937, 1950). This, combined with the fact that Bella seems to take care of both her parents, most likely led to feelings of insecurity and anxiety, according to Horney. And one can see Bella’s insecurities throughout the *Twilight* novels. For example, she thinks she is clumsy and unattractive, and she often worries that Edward will leave her. Because neurotics’ early (parental) relationships leave them feeling
insecure about being loved, they tend to overvalue love and employ mechanisms that protect them from feeling unloved, from basic anxiety (Horney, 1937). While there are a variety of mechanisms or coping strategies we can use to combat basic anxiety, the behavior of neurotics tends to be rigid; that is, they tend to use the same strategies over and over instead of using a variety of strategies (Horney, 1950). These repetitive strategies appear to fulfill specific needs, which Horney referred to as neurotic needs.

**Neurotic Needs**

Behaviors we use to fulfill neurotic needs can be thought of as strategies that maladjusted people use to deal with the feelings of being lonely and unloved. They develop and linger because of early childhood experiences, specifically relationships with parents. Horney suggested that there are ten neurotic needs, as listed in the following table. However, only the first two will be extensively discussed because they are most relevant to the discussion of Bella and Edward’s relationship.

**Table 2. Horney’s 10 Neurotic Needs.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horney’s 10 Neurotic Needs</th>
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<tr>
<td>The need for affection and approval</td>
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<td>The need for a partner</td>
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<td>The need for power</td>
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<td>The need to exploit others</td>
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<td>The need for social recognition</td>
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<td>The need for personal admiration</td>
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<td>The need for personal achievement</td>
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<td>The need for self-sufficiency and independence</td>
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<td>The need for perfection</td>
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<td>The need to restrict life practices to within narrow borders</td>
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The first neurotic need that can be discussed as relevant to understanding Edward and Bella’s relationship is the need for affection and approval. According to Horney (1950) neurotics who display this need attempt to please everyone because they, like other neurotics, overvalue love. They want everyone to like them and approve of them, regardless of their relationship to them. Thus, they try to gain others’ approval even if they have limited interactions with them. They also attempt to live up to other people’s expectations of them, even if those expectations do not match their own desires. As such, this type of person is not very assertive; they dread any hostility displayed toward them. Such a strategy is employed to combat basic anxiety because neurotics are trying to obtain the love and approval they feel they did not get as children from their parents. Certainly, there are numerous examples of Bella’s overemphasis on love throughout the Twilight series. For example, Bella notes, “Once you cared about a person, it was impossible to be logical about them anymore” (New Moon, p. 304). She further explains, “Love is irrational . . . The more you loved someone, the less sense anything made” (p. 340). Other evidence of Bella’s overemphasis on love can be found in New Moon as Charlie is talking to Alice about Bella’s (over) reaction to Edward leaving her. He tells her, “It’s not normal, Alice . . . Not normal at all. Not like someone . . . left her, but like someone died.” As Bella overhears this conversation she thinks to herself, “It was like someone had died—like I had died. Because it had been more than just losing the truest of true loves, as if that were not enough to kill anyone” (p. 398). Each of these thoughts suggests untrue and unhealthy assumptions about love relationships and illustrates that Bella places too much importance on love and her relationship with Edward. That is not to say that love is unimportant. It certainly is, and other personality theories have noted love as a basic human need (e.g., Maslow, 1970), but in this case, Bella’s overemphasis on the experience of a loving relationship eclipses (pun intended!) all other experiences to the point that nothing else matters. This exemplifies the prototypical neurotic need for affection and approval that Horney discussed. Thus, it is normal, healthy even, for someone to love another deeply and to miss them when they cannot see them or if the relationship ends, but it is completely different to become debilitated
Neurotics displaying this need for affection and approval also usually display the neurotic need for a partner. Those who display this need are the type of person who can never be without a partner. They move from one relationship to the next, looking for a long-term relationship with someone they can love and who will love them and solve all problems, because they see love as being the answer to all problems. Once they form a relationship they cling to it and are desperate to maintain it because they are afraid of being alone and are overly concerned about being abandoned. Unfortunately, this neediness often drives their partners away. Bella’s unhealthy obsession with and emotional dependence upon Edward is apparent throughout all the novels. She has trouble functioning when he is not around. In one scene, Bella experiences “desolation” when she finds out that Edward is not in the school cafeteria that day. She informs the reader,

> With dwindling hope, my eyes scoured the rest of the cafeteria, hoping to find him alone, waiting for me. The place was nearly filled . . . but there was no sign of Edward or any of his family. Desolation hit me with crippling strength. . . .The rest of the day passed slowly, dismally. *(Twilight, pp. 145–146)*

On another school day Bella seems choked up because she must leave Edward to attend gym class. She notes, “My goodbye stuck in my throat” *(Twilight, p. 220)*. She also later notes that since she had “come to Forks, it really seemed like my life was about him” *(Twilight, p. 251)*, referring to Edward. And after Edward leaves her in *New Moon* Jake finds Bella curled up in a ball on the beach because she’s been thinking about Edward. She couldn’t walk or breathe *(New Moon, p. 351)*. Clearly these scenes are indicative of a neurotic need for a partner and of its related maladjustment.

Bella’s desperation to continue her relationship with Edward, which exemplifies the clinginess that typifies the neurotic need for a partner, is also evident as she indicates that she would follow Edward around, no matter what his behavior toward her. To illustrate, after Edward abandons Bella in *New Moon*, she rushes to his rescue at the end of the novel. During this rescue she considers being changed into
a vampire and thinks, “...Edward could run after his distractions all he wanted, and I could follow’’ (New Moon, p. 437). It is unclear what these distractions are but one interpretation is that Bella is referring to other women. Bella further notes that “it did not matter if he did not want” her, referring to Edward’s perceived feelings toward herself. “I would never want anything but him, no matter how long I lived” (p. 451). Still later in the novel, Bella, unconvinced that Edward loves her, is happy on the way home from Volterra because she can have a few hours more with Edward even if he will leave her again as she thinks he will do. Bella describes the scene, “I wrapped my arms around his neck—what was the worst he could do? Just push me away—and hugged myself closer to him” (p. 488). In this last scene, her physical clinginess symbolizes her emotional clingingness, but even more illustrative of her neediness is the fact that after she “saves” Edward by making him aware that she is still alive, it is her turn to be in mortal danger from the Volturi—but Bella doesn’t mind. She feels “well” because she is with Edward again. She is happy to be with him despite the fact that he left her and despite the fact that she could be killed momentarily. She thinks, “... I knew we were both in mortal danger. Still, in that instant, I felt well. Whole’’” (p. 452). Such sentiments certainly demonstrate the overemphasis of a need for a partner, as Bella’s need to be with Edward takes precedence over the peril imposed by the Volturi.

Further evidence of Bella’s instability is also found after Edward leaves her in New Moon when Bella only shows an interest in living after she hears Edward’s hallucinatory voice, a voice that is heard when she engages in risky, potentially dangerous behaviors. Indeed, in order to hear his voice, Bella purposefully tries to trigger this hallucination by placing herself in danger. The voice seems to allow her some semblance of a continued relationship with Edward even though he is no longer present. Similarly, Bella’s use of fantasy as a coping mechanism to contend with her feelings of being unloved and rejected by Edward at the end of the novel is additional evidence of maladjustment. It allows her to ignore her fear of being abandoned by him again. As she considers how much she loves Edward and the misconception that he does not love her at the end of New Moon, Bella pretends that he does indeed feel the same way about her. She notes,
“... it was easy to pretend that he felt the same way. So that’s what I did. I pretended, to make the moment sweeter” (p. 489). She also explains,

...it was so easy to fantasize that he wanted me. . . . Maybe the time apart had been enough that I didn’t bore him for the moment. But it didn’t matter. I was so much happier pretending. (p. 490)

Clearly all these scenes illustrate Bella’s unhealthy need for affection and for a partner. Her desperation to maintain her relationship with Edward comes through as she indicates that she would do anything in order to do so. She utilizes maladjusted coping mechanisms, including fantasy and hallucinations, in order to alleviate her own feelings of being unloved, to alleviate her own feelings of insecurity. While everyone utilizes similar mechanisms (excluding hallucinations) to combat feelings of insecurity and anxiety, what distinguishes adjustment from maladjustment is the fact that neurotics use these strategies more frequently and more consistently than well-adjusted individuals. Neurotics attempt to fulfill very few needs, utilizing limited strategies to do so, to make themselves feel better, to make themselves feel loved, whereas people who are well adjusted use a variety of strategies (to fulfill a variety of needs) to make themselves feel secure. And as one can see, Bella continuously tries to fulfill just two needs—the need for affection and the need for a partner—but rarely feels the need to employ other mechanisms to combat basic anxiety.

**Neurotic Trends**

Horney suggested that these ten neurotic needs could be grouped together into three neurotic trends: the trends of moving against people, moving away from people, and moving toward people (Horney, 1945). The trend of moving against people includes the needs for power, social recognition, personal admiration, personal achievement, and to exploit others. The type of person who exhibits this trend is also referred to as the aggressive personality. They tend to treat others with anger and hostility. They want others to admire them and so tend to be achievement driven, often putting on a façade
of omnipotence. They also are quite selfish about meeting their own needs and desires, often at the expense of others, and would not hesitate to use others in order to get what they want. The trend of moving away from others includes the needs for self-sufficiency and perfection. The type of person who exhibits this trend is also referred to as the detached personality. They withdraw from others, preferring instead to be self-sufficient and independent as a way of protecting themselves from possibly being hurt by others. Consequently, they form a minimal number of relationships and are often solitary beings.

The last trend, which is the one most evident in the *Twilight* series, and which will be more extensively discussed here, is the trend of moving toward people. It includes the two needs described in detail earlier: the need for affection and approval and the need to be inconspicuous (that is, to restrict life practices to narrow borders). The type of person who exhibits this trend is also referred to as the compliant personality. S/he has a fear of abandonment and so repetitively seeks out new partners and desperately tries to hang on to these partners, often becoming very needy and clingy, as noted earlier about the neurotic need for a partner. S/he believes that love and a constant relationship are the answers to all life’s problems. Clearly, Bella falls into this category as indicated by numerous examples whereby she demonstrates the need for love and the need for a partner. Bella herself notes that she has an “addiction” to Edward (*Twilight*, p. 292), illustrating the clinginess that typifies the trend of moving toward people. Additionally, Bella’s fear of abandonment is also evident in *Twilight* where she has a dream in which Edward walks away from her and leaves her in “blackness.” She describes the dream,

That was the first night I dreamed of Edward Cullen . . . I couldn’t see his face, just his back as he walked away from me, leaving me in the blackness. No matter how fast I ran, I couldn’t catch up to him; no matter how loud I called, he never turned. (pp. 67–68).

This scene, which clearly suggests that Bella is concerned that Edward will leave her, takes place just after Edward saves Bella from being crushed by a vehicle in the school parking lot and even before a romantic relationship between the two starts. Fear of abandonment is
further exemplified as Bella begins to hyperventilate when Edward is indifferent to her after Jasper attacks her at her birthday party at the Cullens in New Moon. She imagines running away with Edward and panics again when she sees him. She is described as anxious when she receives the silent treatment from him. When Edward does ultimately leave Bella in New Moon, she begs him not to go and, similar to her dream, walks after him as he walks away from her. She gets lost in the woods and falls into a stupor saying over and over again, “He’s gone” (pp. 74–76). Bella doesn’t even respond to others afterward, even when she is found and carried back home by a member of a search party. She is described as “lifeless” for four months. Even Charlie, her father, is aware that her behavior is not normal and suggests that she see a therapist and move back in with her mother (and away from Forks, where everything reminds her of Edward). Still later when Bella saves Edward from the Volturi and she is pretending that he loves her, even though she truly does not believe it, she describes being with Edward as “heaven—right smack in the middle of hell” (p. 491) because of her fear that Edward will abandon her again.

This trend of moving toward people is further demonstrated by the fact that after Edward breaks up with Bella in New Moon, she begins another relationship with Jacob even though she is still in love with Edward and has not recovered from their breakup. This is typical of the compliant personality because such a trend includes the neurotic need for a partner and so, often, this type of person moves on to new relationships after another has just recently ended. Similar to her behavior with Edward, Bella becomes excessively dependent on Jake. After Jake (as a werewolf) rescues Bella from Laurent, a vampire who was about to feed on (and kill) Bella, Jacob ends contact with her but she does not know the reason why. She misses Jake terribly. She keeps on calling him even though it is evident that he does not want contact with her.

I’d half expected him to call on Monday. ... I called him Tuesday, but no one answered. ... On Wednesday I called every half hour until after eleven at night, desperate to hear the warmth of Jacob’s voice. (New Moon, p. 253)
Weeks later, Bella goes to La Push and waits in front of Jake’s house for him. Bella herself notes her desperation to talk to Jake and to continue her relationship with him. In fact at one point, Bella herself notes that she “wasn’t handling alone well” (p. 228) after this extended period of time with no contact from him. Such desperation exemplifies the neurotic need for a partner, the neurotic need for affection and the compliant personality. Additionally, and similar to the discussion about neurotic needs, we again see that Bella’s behavior is rigid in the sense that she employs only one trend to alleviate her basic anxiety. She initiates another relationship (with Jacob) after the one with Edward ended, and then she becomes overly dependent on him, just as she did with Edward. While Bella utilizes just this one trend of moving toward people, well-adjusted people tend to employ all three trends and are, therefore, more flexible in the ways they alleviate their basic anxiety.

Depression

Other evidence of dysfunction in Edward and Bella’s relationship, and in Bella’s behavior in particular, comes from the fact that Bella also shows signs of clinical depression in the series, especially in New Moon after Edward leaves her. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2010) clinical depression is a mood disorder that goes beyond the occasional feelings of sadness that we all experience. In contrast to everyday types of depression, clinical depression is much more severe and lasts for an extensive period of time. Clinical depression has a number of symptoms that go beyond feelings of intense sadness. Certainly there are emotional symptoms that include feelings of sadness, but additionally, someone with clinical depression can feel anxious, empty, hopeless, or pessimistic. Sometimes they feel worthless or helpless. Other symptoms are more behavioral in nature. For example, some victims of depression are irritable and restless while others experience fatigue and less energy that can include a loss of interest in activities that used to be viewed as pleasurable. This can result in insomnia or excessive sleeping, respectively. Still other symptoms are cognitive in nature. People who are depressed often have difficulty with concentration, remembering, and making deci-
sions. They sometimes have thoughts of suicide and can make suicide attempts. Finally, some depressive symptoms are physical and can include body aches, headaches, and digestive difficulties. Changed eating habits are also typical in depression resulting in either overeating or loss of appetite and subsequent weight gain or weight loss.

Depressive symptoms in Bella are evident as Charlie explains to Alice what Bella was like after Edward left her in New Moon. He describes her as “catatonic” for the first week. “I thought I was going to have to hospitalize her. She wouldn’t eat or drink, she wouldn’t move” (p. 396). He further describes Bella’s behavior after she started functioning again,

“She went back to school and work, she ate and slept and did her homework. ... But she was ... empty. Her eyes were blank ... she wouldn’t listen to music anymore; ... She didn’t read; ... She was alone all the time. ... It was night of the living dead around here. I still hear her screaming in her sleep.” (pp. 396–397)

In this description there are examples of a wide variety of depressive symptoms: Describing Bella as catatonic, empty, blank, and as the living dead are all examples of emotional symptoms of the disease. The fact that Bella would not eat is an example of a physical symptom. Bella’s inability to move is indicative of reduced energy typical of behavioral symptoms of depression. Other behavioral symptoms include the fact that she lost interest in activities that she once enjoyed, such as music and reading. And certainly Bella shows suicidal indications even though those are not described here by Charlie. They are, however, found later in New Moon as Bella begins to engage in escalating risky behavior once she starts interacting with Jacob: She approaches men she hopes are dangerous. She learns to ride a motorcycle and goes too fast, crashing the bike and hurting herself in the process. And ultimately she tries to cliff dive and almost drowns. In contradiction, some readers view Bella’s risky behavior as adventurous and evidence of Bella’s feminist nature. For example, one survey respondent who agreed that Bella is a feminist explained why. “She’s strong in the movie. Feminism is the power of women and she shows it, especially in the bike scene,” referring to when she learns to ride a motorcycle in the New Moon movie. But if one looks deeper at her
adventurous behaviors to deconstruct them from a psychological perspective, they are not adventurous. They are self-destructive and can even be viewed as suicidal, as further explained in the next section.

Self-Destructive Behavior

Further maladjustment in the Twilight characters can be found in their self-destructive behaviors, of which there are numerous instances, some indicating suicidal tendencies. As discussed, the first of Bella’s self-destructive behaviors is found after Edward has left her in New Moon. When Bella begins to function again months after being abandoned, she goes to Port Angeles with Jessica, a girl in her class. As they are walking through town, Bella approaches strange men at a bar even though Jessica is resistant and discourages her, the implication being that these men might be dangerous, similar to those from which Edward rescued Bella in the previous novel. At this point she hears Edward’s voice in her head admonishing her, “Bella stop this right now!” (p. 111). In fact, Bella is disappointed that these men were not the same as those who attacked her the year before. She notes, “They were probably nice guys. Safe. I lost interest” (p. 114). As an aside, it should be noted that psychologists usually interpret hearing voices as a sign of a mental disorder, for example, schizophrenia or delusional depression, which is more likely in this case. Such experiences as hearing voices are labeled as hallucinations, that is, bodily sensations that are also not real. Hallucinations can include hearing voices as noted but can also include seeing, smelling, or feelings things that are also not real (National Institute of Health, 2011). Nevertheless, what is most relevant to this discussion is that Bella wants to place herself in danger and is disappointed when she is unsuccessful in doing so. In fact, Jessica asks Bella if she is suicidal, “‘Are you crazy?’ she whispered. ‘Are you suicidal?’” (p. 110). Bella says she is not but this is not necessarily true. As we all know, just because someone says something does not mean that what they say is true, and actions speak louder than words.

Additional evidence of self-destructive behavior can be found as Bella considers breaking her promise to Edward to stay safe in
response to Edward being unable to keep his promise to her, that when he left her, it would be as though he had never existed. She looks for ways to purposefully be “reckless” (New Moon, p. 125). She thinks, “I wanted to be stupid and reckless, and I wanted to break promises” (p. 127). As also noted, her next potentially dangerous action is acquiring two motorcycles and using her college fund to restore them to working order. She approaches Jacob to help her repair them and they both hide the new acquisitions from their fathers. Later, after the bikes are in working order, Bella is terrified about riding one but is still determined to do so. When she does, she hears Edward’s voice in her mind again telling her that she is being “reckless and childish and idiotic” (p. 184). Startled by the voice she stalls the bike, which falls on top of her. In response Bella attempts to ride the motorcycle again, at which point Edward’s voice asks Bella whether she really does want to kill herself, just as Jessica did when Bella approached the strange men outside a bar. Bella, who ultimately hits a tree and injures herself, reacts with a smile to the voice’s question about her suicidal tendencies. Whether this smile is an affirmation or not, Bella does note after her crash, “I’d take whatever pain … without complaint” (p. 193) as long as she could continue to hear Edward’s voice.

In an ultimate example of self-destructive behavior Bella agrees to go cliff diving with Jacob in order to hallucinate Edward’s voice again. Clearly she understands that her behavior is not healthy and admits that she is “addicted to the sound of [her] delusions ” (New Moon, p. 352). Even earlier than this admission, Bella admits to Jacob that she is maladjusted, using the word “pathetic” and “messed up” to describe herself, as well as Jacob (p. 349). Her cliff diving behavior further confirms her dysfunction: Rather than waiting for Jacob, Bella dives off the highest cliff even though lower ones are available and she has never dived before. She knows that this is dangerous. “I knew that this was the stupidest, most reckless thing I had done yet. The thought made me smile. The pain was already easing, as if my body knew that Edward’s voice was just seconds away” (pp. 357–358). Bella jumps, hits the water, and almost drowns. In fact, she would have drowned if Jake had not saved her at the last minute. Potentially drowning, however, did not disturb Bella. She notes that she did not
mind dying because her last image was of Edward. She describes herself as “content” and doesn’t even try to save herself. She thinks, “Why would I fight [to live] when I was so happy where I was? ... Happiness. It made the whole dying thing pretty bearable” (p. 361). Consequently we find a third character, this time Charlie, wondering whether Bella is suicidal. He asks Bella, if she was trying to kill herself when he later discusses this incident with her in New Moon (p. 544).

Bella again denies it but there can be no doubt as to her intention. Even outside these dramatic self-destructive episodes, there are other examples of suicidal tendencies in both Bella and Edward. Bella says to Edward, “I’d rather die than be with anyone but you” (New Moon, p. 45), and although Edward tells Bella that she is being melodramatic, Edward is also suicidal on occasion. For example, in Twilight Edward tells Bella that he would have killed himself if James had killed her. Similarly, at the end of New Moon, Edward is about to expose himself as a vampire in order to be punished by the Volturi because he believes that Bella is dead. He assumes his punishment will be his destruction. And in Breaking Dawn he discusses the possibility of Jake killing him if Bella dies during her pregnancy with Renesmee. Edward tells Jacob, “The moment Bella’s heart stops beating, I will be begging for you to kill me.” Jacob replies, “You won’t have to beg long,” to which Edward responds, “I’m very much counting on that” (pp. 183–184). Such scenes are disturbing because they romanticize suicide. They imply that it is acceptable to consider suicide if one’s heart is broken, and this is troubling considering that these novels are primarily marketed toward young adults.

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

Finally, evidence of other types of dysfunction in the Twilight saga can also be found again in Bella’s reaction to Edward leaving her at the beginning of New Moon. Her behavior is reminiscent of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a type of anxiety disorder that occurs after the experience of a particularly traumatic event. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2009) the symptoms of PTSD can fall into three categories: symptoms in which reexperiencing takes place, avoidance symptoms, and symptoms of
hyperarousal. Symptoms of reexperiencing involve the reliving of the traumatic event. They include such experiences as flashbacks and nightmares. Often the nightmares can change in nature, initially starting out as a reliving of the event, then progressing toward a mastery of the event, and then an emotional coping with the event. For example, a soldier injured in battle who lost a number of friends in the fight might initially dream of the battle again and again. Then as healing begins s/he might dream about winning the battle and escaping unharmed and about her/his fellow soldiers surviving. Finally, as the coping progresses, her/his nightmares might be about emotional reactions to the battle experience. The second set of symptoms, avoidance symptoms, involves behaviors that help the victim avoid thinking about the traumatic experience. They include behaviors that help the victim to feel safe, such as avoiding anything that might trigger remembering the event. A rape victim, for example, might avoid crowds if she were gang raped. Emotional reactions to the traumatic event, such as feeling emotionally numb or depressed are also typical of these types of symptoms. Finally, symptoms of hyperarousal are those that indicate a heightened state of tension and agitation. People with PTSD often feel jumpy, on edge. They are often easily startled and sometimes have trouble sleeping.

Certainly Bella has numerous traumatic experiences throughout the Twilight saga. She is almost accidentally killed by a vehicle, accosted by would-be rapists, and hunted by a myriad of vampires. Interestingly, it isn’t these experiences that seem to result in extensive trauma. Rather, it is her break up with Edward. As noted earlier in this chapter, this is typical of the trend of moving toward others (the compliant personality), which includes the need for affection and the need for a partner, according to Horney (1945). But her reaction to this breakup can also be explained through an examination of the symptoms of PTSD. While Bella does not exhibit all categories of symptoms typical of PTSD, she does show some in response to Edward ending their relationship. Her depressive symptoms and her inability to function after their breakup have already been discussed. Charlie describes her going through the motions of life—eating, going to school, and so forth—without any affect, which is typical of the emotional numbness that is representative of the avoidance symp-
toms of PTSD. Another symptom that Bella displays that is characteristic of PTSD is a repetitive nightmare, which is typical of the reexperiencing category of symptoms of this disorder. For example, in *New Moon*, after Edward leaves her, Bella tells the reader that she has recurring nightmares from which she awakes screaming. Relatedly, the nature of Bella’s nightmares change after Bella begins to spend time with Jacob, a sign that she is healing. “I lay still in bed, and tried to shake off the dream. There had been a small difference last night, and I concentrated on that” (p. 151). The nature of the dream itself might not seem like progress toward getting past the trauma of Edward leaving her but the fact that the dream changed at all is evidence of healing.

**Summary**

Fans of the romance genre often admire the relationships depicted in such stories, and especially the relationship between Edward and Bella in the *Twilight* novels. But while there are certainly agreeable qualities to Edward and Bella’s relationship, there are also dysfunctional characteristics to it. Consequently, it is important to recognize that behavior that is often perceived as normal or even admirable by some can actually be dysfunctional when examined from a psychological perspective. The romance genre often provides unrealistic and unhealthy depictions of love relationships, and reading such novels—or seeing such movies—can contribute to distorted opinions about love relationships. As has been repeatedly noted, we learn through social learning, that is, the observation of behavior in real-life experiences and also by scenarios depicted in novels, movies, and television programs (Behm-Morawitz, et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is extensive research evidence that the media influences adolescent perceptions of heterosexual romantic interactions (Brown, et al., 2006; Galician, 2004; L’Engle, et al., 2006). Although some readers, and author Stephenie Meyer herself, dismiss the possibility that reading novels such as *Twilight* can influence the thinking processes of readers (Meyer, n.d.a), in this case about the characteristics of the ideal romantic heterosexual relationship, Behm-Morawitz, et al. (2010) indicate that there is evidence to suggest that the saga is doing just
that. They note a variety of popular merchandise slogans that represent views of fans, each of which imply that Edward (and sometimes Jacob) is the ideal mate. For example, note the slogans, “Edward ruined it for mortal men” and “Forget a prince on a horse. I want a vampire in a Volvo” (Click, et al., 2010, p. 138). Unfortunately, the *Twilight* novels depict Bella’s obsession with Edward merely as a sign of the depth of her love for him. They imply that her depression is evidence of her heartbreak, and they misrepresent her self-destructive behaviors as indications of her sense of adventure. But as one looks past the surface of these behaviors, from a psychological perspective it is evident that none of these behaviors are examples of adjustment. Instead, they illustrate dysfunctional behavior. Accordingly, because tweens and teens are forming ideas about what behaviors are appropriate for romantic relationships through the use of symbolic models such as the characters in *Twilight*, and because adults can also come away from romance novels with inaccurate perceptions of healthy love relationships, it is important to separate the normal and healthy aspects of the relationship between Bella and Edward (and Jacob) from the dysfunctional aspects, that is, it is beneficial to distinguish between these features so as to eliminate confusion about the attributes of a healthy love relationship, and that is what is discussed in the next chapter.