The Case of Charlie Swan: Fatherhood and Masculinity in *Twilight* (2008)

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ABSTRACT. The portrayal of fatherhood in Young Adult media often aligns with idealized masculine traits that limit the diversity, narrow the expectations, and diminish the evolving nature of fatherhood. Using gender and masculinity studies along with narratology theory, this study examines the portrayal of fatherhood in the film adaptation of *Twilight* (2008) by Catherine Hardwicke through the character of Charlie Swan as the father of Bella Swan. This study aims to analyze whether Charlie embodies or challenges traditional masculinity, and how he portrays fatherhood as a previous non-custodial father taking on a present role through his interactions with Bella. The findings reveal that Charlie represents a form of masculinity that departs from the idealized model by portraying a quieter, evolving form as he moves from an emotionally distant father to a subtly supportive one. Through the character's portrayal, the study argues that *Twilight* presents a complex model of fatherhood that moves beyond the stereotypical masculine ideal and differs from the common father archetypes in the YA genre despite the limited screentime and the overlooked nature of the character.
Keywords: Fatherhood, Masculinity, Non-Custodial Father, Charlie Swan, *Twilight,* Film

Kasus Charlie Swan: Peran Ayah dan Maskulinitas dalam *Twilight* (2008)

ABSTRAK. Penggambaran peran ayah dalam media untuk remaja (*Young Adult*) sering kali selaras dengan ciri-ciri maskulin yang diidealkan—hal yang justru membatasi keberagaman, mempersempit ekspektasi, serta mengabaikan sifat peran ayah yang dinamis dan terus berkembang. Dengan menggunakan studi gender dan maskulinitas serta teori naratologi, penelitian ini mengkaji penggambaran peran ayah dalam film adaptasi *Twilight* (2008) karya Catherine Hardwicke, melalui karakter Charlie Swan, ayah dari Bella Swan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis apakah Charlie mencerminkan atau justru menantang maskulinitas tradisional, serta bagaimana ia memerankan sosok ayah—yang sebelumnya tidak memiliki hak asuh—menjadi sosok yang hadir secara nyata melalui interaksinya dengan Bella. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Charlie merepresentasikan bentuk maskulinitas yang berbeda dari model ideal pada umumnya; ia menampilkan sosok yang lebih tenang dan terus berkembang, beralih dari seorang ayah yang berjarak secara emosional menjadi sosok yang memberikan dukungan secara halus. Melalui penggambaran karakter ini, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa *Twilight* menyajikan model peran ayah yang kompleks—melampaui stereotip maskulinitas ideal dan berbeda dari arketipe ayah yang lazim ditemukan dalam genre remaja—meskipun karakter ini memiliki durasi tampil yang terbatas dan sering kali kurang mendapat perhatian.
Kata-kata kunci: Peran Ayah, Maskulinitas, Ayah Tanpa Hak Asuh, Charlie Swan, *Twilight*, Film

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indonesian society, traditional conceptualizations of fatherhood have long been intertwined with patriarchal expectations of masculinity that emphasize authority, familial provision, and emotional restraint (Boestami et al., 2021). Within traditional domestic arrangements influenced by both indigenous societal norms and historical socio-cultural structures, Indonesian men are primarily cast as the *kepala keluarga* (head of the household) and main economic providers. In contrast, mothers are entrusted with primary caregiving and nurturing responsibilities, while children are socialized into hierarchical obedience toward both parental figures (Baried et al., 1983; Nilan, 2008).

Scholarly inquiries into the historical construction of fatherhood demonstrate that these rigid breadwinner-authority binaries are not immutable, but rather evolved alongside industrialization and changing domestic economies (LaRossa, 1997). As Lamb (2010) observes in historical and cross-cultural analyses of paternal involvement, cultural ideals have historically marginalized men's domestic participation, framing fatherhood largely through the narrow lens of financial support and distant authority rather than direct nurturing. Consequently, societal discourses have frequently relegated fatherhood to a secondary developmental role, assuming that paternal influence holds negligible impact on a child's socio-emotional growth compared to the maternal primary caregiver (Cabrera et al., 2000). However, as Cabrera et al. (2000) vigorously contend, this traditional assumption is fundamentally flawed; their foundational work challenges the "secondary parent" paradigm by demonstrating that fathers make unique, irreplaceable contributions to child development across cognitive, social, and emotional domains. This persistent tension between prescriptive traditional masculinity traits and evolving paternal practices underscores the need to examine diverse representations of fatherhood—particularly within rapidly shifting urban and regional contexts in Indonesia.

Media texts serve as primary cultural sites for constructing and contesting public expectations of gender, positioning media representations of fatherhood and masculinity as central to contemporary cultural discourse (Hall, 1997). Rather than acting as static reflections of reality, screen media actively frame familial roles and paternal identities (Hamad, 2014). Within Young Adult (YA) narrative media specifically, parental presence—whether functional, absent, fractured, or substituted—frequently functions as a narrative anchor that shapes protagonist trajectories and models domestic dynamics for audiences (Giamalva, 2015). While mainstream YA media historically relied on rigid, conventional gender tropes (such as the nurturing mother paired with the authoritarian, emotionally detached father), contemporary media increasingly feature alternative or hybridized paternal narratives that complicate these tropes.

A prominent site of this discursive tension is Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga—adapted into the 2008 feature film directed by Catherine Hardwicke—which presents a nuanced portrayal of fatherhood through the character Charlie Swan. While much critical scholarship (e.g., Jarvis, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Durham, 2013) reads the franchise as fundamentally conservative, reinforcing traditional patriarchal structures and conventional gender norms, *Twilight* simultaneously offers alternative paternal counter-narratives. Charlie's depiction as a

quiet, emotionally supportive, and non-authoritarian single father disrupts traditional models of hyper-masculine paternal authority, inviting a critical re-evaluation of how screen texts negotiate between hegemonic gender expectations and shifting contemporary fatherhood ideals.

While traditional fatherhood has been defined by its financial contribution and authority rather than the nurturing and caregiving image, these expectations are challenged by the existence of single fathers who must fill in the shoes of both roles in the family in the absence of the mother (Risman, 1986). In *Twilight* (2008), Charlie Swan sheds his status as a non-custodial parent who had not been present physically for most of his daughter's life due to the limitations set by the mother, when Bella chooses to live with him in Forks. He is required to confront a more active parenting role, despite his unfamiliarity with it. Despite his attempts to reconnect with Bella, their relationship has been a broken one since the beginning, implying a sense that Charlie is actively fighting in a losing battle with his daughter (Giamalva, 2015). Through this context, *Twilight* offers a portrayal of fatherhood that diverges from traditional masculinity and paternal roles, despite his position as an authority figure, a role often associated with traditional masculine traits.

Introduced in 2005 by Stephenie Meyer and adapted into a film by Catherine Hardwicke in 2008, *The Twilight Saga* became a major pop culture phenomenon, initially drawing widespread academic and public attention to its central romantic triangle between Bella Swan, Edward Cullen, and Jacob Black. Over the years, critical scholarship has extensively examined the franchise through various lenses of gender studies, including feminist critiques (Jarvis, 2014), gendered violence (Durham, 2012; Taylor, 2014), Edward Cullen's contested masculinity (Bealer, 2011; Lindén, 2013), and the ideological framing of Bella's femininity (Snider, 2015).

While these foundational studies provide vital insights into the franchise's gender politics, they have remained predominantly tethered to the adolescent romance narrative, leaving the representation of adult domestic figures largely underexplored. This analytical focus reflects a broader historical tendency in Young Adult (YA) media scholarship to marginalize parental figures, despite the growing body of literature examining how contemporary screen media depicts parenting, alternative families, and evolving paternal roles during adolescence (Shary, 2014; Hamad, 2014; Marshall, 2017). Recent scholarship on contemporary fatherhood in film and television increasingly emphasizes the need to analyze how secondary characters negotiate domestic labor, emotional availability, and changing patriarchal expectations outside the nuclear family norm (O'Brien, 2019; Garey & Berkowitz, 2021). This study addresses the existing research gap by shifting the analytical lens away from the central romantic plot toward the portrayal of fatherhood and alternative masculinity embodied by the secondary paternal character, Charlie Swan.

This study aims to explore Charlie Swan's portrayal of fatherhood and masculinity in *Twilight* (2008). By analyzing his interactions with Bella, the study focuses on how Charlie navigates his new parental responsibility and the challenges of fatherhood as a formerly non-custodial parent through the framework of traditional and evolving masculinity. This study will contribute to a broader understanding of the

already existing gender discourse in *Twilight* by exploring the depiction of fatherhood in a Young Adult adaptation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual and narrative analysis of *Twilight* (2008), directed by Catherine Hardwicke. To systematically examine screen fatherhood, data collection was restricted to the 122-minute theatrical release of the film, which constitutes the primary text widely consumed by the global public and academic audiences. Blu-ray extended and deleted scenes (such as Charlie's dialogue regarding an all-girls school) are excluded from the primary evidentiary analysis as they represent discarded narrative material rather than officially released cinematic texts; however, where referenced, they are explicitly treated as paratextual commentary illustrating the production context of paternal characterization.

Scene selection was guided by specific criteria:

1. Direct paternal engagement: Scenes featuring direct verbal or physical interaction between Charlie Swan and his daughter, Bella Swan.
2. Community and authority dynamics: Scenes establishing Charlie's standing in Forks as a representative figure of institutional authority (police chief) and community fatherhood.
3. Paternal contrasts: Key comparative scenes featuring alternative father figures—Carlisle Cullen and Billy Black—to contextualize Charlie's specific negotiation of masculinity against contrasting models of modern and traditional fatherhood.

In accordance with these criteria, a total of 14 primary scenes were selected for close audiovisual analysis. Dialogue and staging data were cross-referenced using an unofficial online PDF draft of the screenplay (dated May 2007). Following scholarly protocols for screenplay analysis, the screenplay's stage directions and parentheticals are treated strictly as paratextual artifacts rather than direct evidence of final on-screen action, recognizing that written stage directions may differ from Hardwicke's final directorial execution on the big screen.

To analyze the construction of paternal identity, this study draws upon theories of gender and film narratology to examine how Charlie Swan is visually and narratively articulated in *Twilight* (2008). The theoretical framework is grounded in Raewyn Connell's (2005) conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity—which examines how societal ideals enforce emotional restraint, stoicism, and patriarchal authority—alongside Joseph Pleck's (2010) framework on historical and contemporary fatherhood roles. To contextualize Charlie's position as a separated parent sharing custody or maintaining distance, empirical literature regarding non-custodial and divorced fatherhood (such as Kruk, 1989; Seagull & Seagull, 1977) is engaged as supporting background rather than theoretical constructs.

To examine how these ideological constructs are formally translated on screen, the study applies Peter Verstraten's (*Film Narratology*, 2009) framework for analyzing cinematic storytelling, complemented by Seymour Chatman's (1980) comparative work on the distinct semiotic properties of film versus written text. Rather than restricting narratological observation to isolated elements such as costume, this analysis systematically deploys Verstraten's formal parameters—specifically examining:

1. Framing and composition: How camera placement visually cages or liberates characters within domestic and institutional spaces.
2. Shot scale: How close-ups versus wide shots modulate emotional intimacy and paternal distance between Charlie and Bella.
3. *Mise-en-scène* and blocking: How physical staging and body positioning communicate authority, awkwardness, or protective care.
4. Lighting and color palette: How low-key lighting and muted PNW (Pacific Northwest) color grading reinforce the emotional tone of Charlie's domestic sphere.

Using the compiled visual and textual data of the film, the analysis was presented thematically. Focusing on scenes of Charlie and his interactions with Bella, the results of the analysis are presented through the frameworks that are used to identify Charlie's portrayal of fatherhood and masculinity. Alongside that, script passages that were adapted into visual narrative are presented as a point of comparison, since the former often becomes subtext when translated to the screen.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Masculinity of Charlie Swan

According to Connell (2005, p. 77), hegemonic masculinity is "currently accepted" as the prevailing model of manhood that culturally justifies male dominance over women. It establishes an idealized standard against which all men are measured, whereby even men who do not fully embody the archetype continue to accrue patriarchal dividends from its cultural hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Often associated with institutional authority and the legitimate exercise of power—such as within military force or state apparatuses—hegemonic masculinity naturalizes patriarchal dominance by framing this hierarchical order as immutable (Connell, 2005). Within this structural framework, occupational domains such as law enforcement are culturally constructed as "men's work," inherently tied to public authority, physical protection, and institutionalized power (McElhinny, 1994).

In the opening sequence of the film, Charlie is introduced not through objective omniscience, but through Bella's retrospective voice-over, establishing the narrative perspective strictly within her focalization. As Chatman (1980) and Verstraten (2009) note, narrative focalization dictates how character traits are filtered and perceived by the audience; by framing Charlie primarily through Bella's outsider gaze, the film visually and structurally sidelines him from the outset, laying the groundwork for his initial characterization as a distant, quiet paternal figure. Visually, Charlie is introduced wearing his official police uniform. Within Verstraten's framework of mise-en-scène, costume functions as a primary signifier of character identity; Charlie's uniform remains a constant anchor throughout his screen time, visually reinforcing his public role as Chief of Police and aligning his fatherhood with institutional authority. This professional status is continually re-inscribed by community members such as the diner waitress, Carlisle, and Edward, all of whom address him formally as "Chief Swan."

The convergence of his professional authority and paternal protectiveness is vividly displayed in the hospital scene following the van accident (01:45:10 – 01:48:30). Confronting Tyler—the driver responsible for the near-fatal collision—

Charlie immediately leverages his institutional power, warning him that he is going to "lose his license." While this moment asserts Charlie's dual role as protector and chief, his emotional reaction strictly adheres to the boundaries of restrictive masculinity. As Jansz (2000) outlines, restrictive masculinity comprises not only emotional stoicism—where men avoid grief, vulnerability, and open sadness—but also dimensions of aggression, defensive autonomy, and achievement orientation. Charlie channels his paternal terror and worry entirely into authoritative aggression directed outward at Tyler, while suppressing any internal vulnerability. Rather than comforting Bella with physical affection or emotional reassurance, he vents his anxiety through institutional threats and controlled stoicism, exemplifying how traditional masculine scripts constrain paternal expression even during moments of domestic crisis.



Fig. 1: Charlie (right) in his uniform with Tyler (middle) and Bella (left) in the hospital. (Source: Hardwicke, 2008)

Despite being a person of authority, Charlie rarely presented a direct, authoritative, and dominant action towards his daughter. Within his quiet demeanor, Charlie rarely expresses an outward opinion of his own. He often lets Bella do as she wants and reverts to subtle interactions. The only firm demand he makes of Bella in the film concerns carrying pepper spray for her safety. It was brought up for the first time after the death of Waylon Forge, which was believed to be an animal attack. Charlie had given her a can of pepper spray to ensure her safety and ease his own mind, and she complied.

Charlie's protective authority and patriarchal masculinity are further highlighted through his interactions with Edward Cullen, particularly in the domestic scene where Bella reveals her budding relationship (Scene 6, 00:38:15 – 00:40:05). Despite initially welcoming the local community, Charlie exhibits paternal anxiety regarding his daughter's romantic involvement. As Bella sheepishly admits to her date, Charlie methodically cleans his service weapon at the kitchen table, pausing to fix her with a stern glare before casually cocking the rifle right as Bella reveals that Edward is waiting outside.

Within the film's visual and narrative structure, however, this performance of hyper-masculine intimidation is treated with distinct cinematic irony rather than uncritical endorsement. Hardwicke's direction defuses absolute menace through comedic timing and domestic banality; Charlie's aggressive posturing with a firearm is immediately undercut by his clumsy parental awkwardness and inability to sustain a truly terrifying patriarchal stance. As Connell (2005) and Jansz (2000) suggest, such moments reveal the cracks within hegemonic masculinity, where traditional demands for authoritative control over female sexuality are performed half-ironically by fathers who recognize their own emotional displacement. Charlie's weapon-cleaning is less an execution of sovereign power than a performative ritual—a desperate, slightly comical attempt to assert traditional paternal authority over an inscrutable, superhuman suitor he cannot physically or socially control.

After Edward had stepped out of the house, Charlie would bring up the topic of the pepper spray that he had given her, once after he is formally introduced to Edward, and then before she went to prom at the end of the film where he informed her that he had put a new can of spray in her purse. In an extended scene, Edward told Bella that Charlie was thinking of putting her into an all-girls school, confirming yet another form of protectiveness that Charlie doesn't show outwardly. This aligns with the notion of stoicism, or the suppression of feelings that are common in Western masculine culture (Jansz, 2000).

It is not until the conflict arc of the film begins that Charlie finally expresses his vulnerability and raw emotion. The context of the scene was when Bella, who was hunted down by a rogue vampire named James, faked a breakup fight between her and Edward after the baseball date to get out of the house and seek safety for Charlie and her separately. Unaware of the supernatural nature of Bella's life, Charlie fell victim to the notion of the 'break up' that made her want to get away from Forks and everything that reminded her of Edward. During the sequence, Charlie firmly tells her that she shouldn't drive to Phoenix alone late at night and offers an alternative of him driving her to the airport by morning. Trying to assert authority over a daughter whose actions he rarely contradicts verbally, he follows her throughout the house, refusing to let her out of it.

Ultimately, in this sequence, Bella resorted to bringing up the exact reason for her parents' divorce, something she had tried hard to avoid during the sequence, by saying,

> *"Like watch more baseball on the flat screen? Or go to the Coffee Shop? Same people, same steak, same berry cobbler every night? That's you, Dad. Not me."*
>
> *"And if I don't get out now, I'm going to get stuck here like mom did."*
> (Hardwicke, 2008)

By bringing up the root causes of her parents' divorce, Renee weaponizes Charlie's emotional vulnerability, successfully pushing him away in a painful rupture for both parties. Her parting words encode an explicit rejection of Charlie's rooted lifestyle—implying an aversion to becoming someone trapped in a mundane routine anchored to the same people and place day after day—and signal that, much like her mother, she is extracting herself from his domestic sphere. As Seagull and Seagull (1977) note in their empirical observations of non-custodial and divorced fathers, the emotional and psychological complexities of marital dissolution are frequently underestimated, leaving many men structurally and emotionally unequipped to process familial severance or articulate grief. Consequently, Charlie stands immobilized behind the screen door, watching Bella's truck drive away as he fails to bridge the emotional divide.

To interpret this domestic impasse as a failure of hegemonic masculinity, however, requires moving beyond the reductive assumption that hegemony is merely about exercising direct control over women or children within the private household. As Connell (2005) emphasizes, hegemonic masculinity is a structural, relational system operating across broader social and institutional fields. Charlie's inability to dictate his daughter's life choices does not automatically negate his participation in hegemony; rather, it exposes the inherent

friction between his *public* institutional authority (as a police chief embodying state-sanctioned power) and his *private* domestic displacement within an evolving, female-centric familial dynamic. His silent withdrawal highlights the limits of patriarchal dividends when confronted with emotional intimacy and relational autonomy, demonstrating how men positioned within hegemonic structures often falter when traditional dominance must translate into vulnerable emotional connection.

This emotionally complex narrative arc highlights Charlie's evolving articulation of masculinity and fatherhood. Early in the film, his characterization aligns with traditional markers of public patriarchy: he is visually introduced in his official police uniform, exercising institutional authority and protective posture—such as confronting Tyler at the hospital—while maintaining emotional stoicism. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes apparent that Charlie neither exercises absolute control over his daughter nor relies purely on authoritarian dominance. Instead of operating as a rigid patriarchal figure, Charlie gradually embodies a synthesis of public institutional authority and private emotional availability.

To characterize this dual positioning accurately, this study moves beyond Connell's (2005) concept of complicit masculinity—which merely describes men who accrue the "patriarchal dividend" without actively enacting hegemony—since Charlie's character actively subverts and renegotiates traditional norms rather than passively benefiting from them. Instead, Charlie's trajectory is better understood through the frameworks of hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) and caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016). By selectively borrowing elements from marginalized or egalitarian practices—such as open emotional vulnerability, domestic labor, and non-coercive support—while retaining aspects of his professional authority as police chief, Charlie illustrates a hybrid and caring masculinity. Ultimately, his portrayal demonstrates that screen fatherhood in contemporary Young Adult media can offer alternative models of manhood that reconcile public institutional strength with tender, non-dominant domestic care.



Fig. 2: Charlie's last scene with Bella in Twilight. (Source: Hardwicke, 2008)

Though the final act doesn't explicitly show how the father and daughter reconcile after her return, their last scene implies that a form of communication has occurred off the screen. Rather than confronting Bella with anger or control in the final scenes, Charlie maintains his usual calm posture. He allows Bella to attend prom with Edward, despite believing Edward had hurt her, and refrains from confronting or intimidating him. His quiet glare is the only indication of his disapproval, and even then, he prioritizes Bella's happiness over his own discomfort. His masculinity and growth aren't expressed through dramatic performances, but rather through the quiet, restrained, protective gestures he shows in the film.

Charlie Swan's Transition from a Non-Custodial Father to a Present Father

In the opening sequences of *Twilight*, other than the main character, Bella Swan, the

audience is introduced to her parents, Renée Dwyer and Charlie Swan, who were established to have been divorced for years before the events of the film. Within the first five minutes, Charlie appears on screen picking Bella up from the airport and driving her to Forks.



Fig. 3: Charlie drives Bella from the airport to Forks. (Source: Hardwicke, 2008)

This first key scene between Charlie and Bella showcased his awkwardness and detachment towards a daughter he has rarely spent time with, let alone lived with, in recent years, as shown in the following exchange:

> *Charlie: "Your hair's longer."*
> *Bella: "I cut it since the last time I saw you."*
> *Charlie: "Guess it grows out again."*
> (Hardwicke, 2008)

Before this new living arrangement, Charlie maintained what Kruk (1989) termed a "visiting" relationship—a dynamic that empirical studies on non-custodial fatherhood associate with emotional distance, the erosion of day-to-day paternal intimacy, and acute relational awkwardness due to a lack of shared domestic routines. While research indicates that non-custodial visitation frequencies typically range from weekly contact to intervals of a few months (Mandel & Sharlin, 2006), Charlie's prior contact with Bella was far sparser, restricted to infrequent summer visits ("two weeks every summer," 00:03:15 – 00:03:40). Moreover, as Bella's unfamiliarity with Forks upon her arrival demonstrates, even this minimal visitation had lapsed in recent years, leaving their father-daughter relationship structurally severed and emotionally unpracticed prior to her permanent relocation.

Despite his initial awkwardness, Charlie attempts to establish domestic comfort by preparing for Bella's arrival through tangible acts of provision (Scene 2, 00:07:46 – 00:09:30). He purchases a used pickup truck from Billy Black as a functional welcome-home gift and sets up her childhood bedroom, painting the walls and outfitting the space to welcome her back to Forks. As Kruk (1989) notes in empirical studies of non-custodial fatherhood, fathers in post-divorce or separated arrangements frequently engage in compensatory caretaking behaviors—such as material provisioning and intense efforts to ensure comfort—driven by an underlying anxiety that their children harbor emotional distance or resentment. Rather than enforcing strict disciplinary boundaries, Charlie's initial paternal strategy relies on practical hospitality and gentle accommodation, striving to bridge years of physical separation through material gestures.

One trait that Bella highlights about Charlie is that he does not hover like stereotypical paternal figures, instead granting her ample personal space. By prioritizing Bella's immediate comfort over imposing rigid demands, Charlie initially hesitates to enforce strict discipline—a behavioral pattern that empirical research on non-custodial fatherhood attributes to the emotional distance and guilt accumulated during prolonged separation (Kruk, 1989). While he attempts to assert a protective stance by insisting she carry pepper spray

for self-defense, Charlie largely struggles with verbal emotional expression due to the same lack of shared domestic history.

This underlying relational awkwardness is visually externalized in the hospital scene (01:45:10 – 01:48:30). Although the unofficial screenplay draft (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 25) explicitly notes in its stage directions that "He'd hug her, if that was who he, or who she was. Instead, he glares at Tyler," these written descriptions must be treated strictly as paratextual artifacts rather than direct cinematic proof. Nevertheless, the final on-screen execution translates this psychological barrier into cinematic subtext. As Chatman (1980, p. 32) observes regarding the semiotics of adaptation, narrative translation across media shifts from the mode of verbal assertion in text to visual "naming" on screen, where fleeting gestural details and unspoken blocking convey complex emotional truths. Rather than exchanging physical affection, Charlie and Bella remain physically restrained, anchoring their evolving bond in unspoken protective acts rather than traditional displays of intimacy.



Fig. 4: Charlie is with Bella at the coffee shop. (Source: Hardwicke, 2008)

That said, the closest affectionate interactions between the two are presented through their coffee shop scenes. Briefly mentioned as a ritual the two shared during Bella's childhood visits to Fork, the two maintained the same ritual in the present timeline. The scenes served as a grounded interaction that built on the father-daughter relationship and a break from the supernatural plot surrounding Bella in the film. Mundane settings of an awkward father trying to reconnect with his daughter by starting with the classic talk about boys, asking about her day, and finally expressing his guilt of leaving her alone at home due to his work become evidence of the progress of the father-daughter relationship between the two as he became a more present father in her life.

The returning familiarity and the gradual progress of the relationship between the two are threatened by the rising action of Bella leaving the house after her separation from Edward. The sudden prospect of losing his child once again triggers the acute emotional trauma associated with non-custodial fatherhood; as Kruk (1989, pp. 87–89) notes, the absence of a child in these circumstances often induces an overwhelming sense of loss comparable to bereavement, frequently mapping onto the psychological stages of grief theorized by Kübler-Ross (1969).

While Charlie had previously adapted to the long-term emotional distance imposed by their sparse visitation schedule ("two weeks every summer," 00:03:15 – 00:03:40)—which had even lapsed entirely in the years preceding her relocation—this established psychological equilibrium is destabilized by Bella's arrival and sudden departure. Rebuilding day-to-day paternal familiarity over the course of her stay makes the impending threat of her departure intensely felt, reactivating the emotional vulnerability of separation rather than representing a permanently resolved grief process.

However, with Bella leaving the house, the sense of loss over his child

returns in an instant and hits him so hard that his emotional barrier comes down as he expresses his guilt over the fact that in his view, he had not been the father Bella needed, and he is willing to change it by doing more things together. Charlie felt that despite everything that he had done during this transition of his fatherhood role, it hadn't been enough to keep Bella satisfied with him as a paternal figure. The fear of being a bad parent affects the emotional and physical actions of a father, especially the non-custodial father (Seagull & Seagull, 1977). The "Santa Claus" role in ensuring the happiness of the children, which non-custodial parents assume, became more apparent due to the fear of rejection (Kruk, 1989).

Within Young Adult (YA) media, parental figures—particularly fathers—are frequently depicted either as entirely absent or as rigidly authoritarian, reflecting historical representational patterns in adolescent literature and media (Cart, 2016). While Raewyn Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity primarily sociological framework addressing real-world gender hierarchies, scholars frequently apply its tenets to cultural artifacts and fictional archetypes (such as cinematic heroes and patriarchal figures) to examine how popular media normalizes dominant masculine ideals (Connell, 2005, p. 184). Consequently, within traditional YA narratives, fathers are rarely framed as nurturing or domestically engaged; instead, when they do appear—particularly in narratives centered on male protagonists—they typically function as agents of rigid discipline and traditional masculine socialization.

Within Young Adult (YA) film adaptations, paternal figures frequently function as distant or authoritarian narrative catalysts. For example, in the film adaptation *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), Poseidon exemplifies the archetype of the physically absent divine father, yet his paternal lineage remains central to Percy's heroic arc, operating as a double-edged inheritance that grants protective status while drawing him into mortal peril. Similarly, in the cinematic adaptation of *Divergent* (2014), Marcus Eaton is depicted as a rigidly authoritarian and psychologically abusive father, driving his son, Tobias, to rebel against his birth faction and defect to Dauntless.

While these father-son dynamics illustrate how paternal absence or hyper-authority drives adolescent rebellion, they represent a specific gendered subset of YA storytelling. In contrast, screen narratives centered on female protagonists—such as *The Twilight Saga* (2008)—often position fathers within the domestic sphere rather than the epic or dystopian arena, exploring the subtle tensions of co-habitation, protective anxiety, and evolving emotional intimacy between fathers and adolescent daughters.

Charlie Swan, who embodies a complicit masculinity, stands out among the typical representations of fathers in the genre. He is not absent as he maintains contact with Bella even before the events of the film, with the arrangement of his "visiting" relationship, nor is he authoritative as he rarely enacts control over Bella's decision and puts her comfort above his own. Although Bella leaves him by exploiting his vulnerabilities, Charlie remains steadfast when she returns to his custody in Forks, as their relationship stayed the same, and his approach to parenting remained subtle and introspective.

Charlie's portrayal of the present, non-authoritarian father also differs from other

paternal figures within the film corpus of *Twilight* (2008), such as Billy Black. In his limited screen appearances (e.g., Scene 5, 00:29:40 – 00:32:10; Scene 7), Billy functions as an indigenous working-class father and close confidant to Charlie. Unlike the distant or overbearing paternal tropes common in YA media, Billy maintains an emotionally open, communicative rapport with his son, Jacob, and displays a warm, welcoming familiarity toward Bella. However, Billy's paternal role in the 2008 film remains anchored in community tradition, protective local knowledge, and grounded paternal advice regarding local dynamics—such as warning Charlie about the Cullens. By restricting the comparison strictly to the cinematic text of *Twilight* (2008), Billy's portrayal provides a localized, working-class counterpoint to Charlie, highlighting how different fathers within the same remote Pacific Northwest setting negotiate single parenthood and community protection outside of hegemonic rigidity.

On the other hand, Carlisle Cullen, head of the Cullen vampire coven, exemplifies a contrasting model of immortal paternal stewardship. While Joseph Pleck (2010, pp. 27–57) critically evaluates the "essential father hypothesis"—ultimately concluding that empirical evidence does not support the claim that fathers are biologically or socially *essential* in a way that renders them irreplaceable—the cinematic text of *Twilight* (2008) romanticizes Carlisle's role as a singular, foundational anchor for his adoptive children. Although Carlisle enters his children's lives at the point of their conversion rather than through biological infancy or childhood, his centuries-long mentorship provides a philosophical and ethical framework that shapes the coven, particularly Edward. Paired with Esme's maternal warmth, Carlisle functions as an aristocratic patriarch whose calm authority and moral restraint offer a polished, benevolent counter-model to Charlie's mundane, working-class human fatherhood.

Charlie, by comparison, is presented as unsure of how to be a present father and assert himself back in Bella's life in a more present way, and yet, he was consistently willing to try and change for the better. His caring efforts, such as incorporating Bella's favorite color to ensure her comfort while staying in her new room in Forks or changing her car's tires, contrast with the dramatized forms of paternal guidance found elsewhere in YA fiction. Unlike Carlisle and Billy, whose presence often could influence their sons, Charlie never takes over Bella's main narrative. Her independence, though quietly painful for him, was something that he rarely outwardly challenged or frowned upon. Instead, he orbits quietly around the world that she built for herself, offering support without intervening.

By portraying fatherhood outside the paternal archetypes found in YA media of absent fathers and controlling paternal figures, Charlie Swan offers a model of fatherhood that is complicit in a way that he is present and quietly nurturing in his subtle ways. He does not embody the essential father hypothesis, where he had the utmost influence over Bella's life. His transition from a non-custodial parent who only got to see his daughter for two weeks per year to a present father figure in Bella's life reflects the complexity of fatherhood within the circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored how *Twilight* (2008) represents fatherhood and masculinity

through the character of Charlie Swan, a portrayal frequently overlooked due to the scholarly tendency to privilege the franchise's central romantic plot. As examined through the film's key narrative scenes, Charlie's gradual attempts to reconnect with Bella unsettle and complicate rigid traditional models of hegemonic masculinity. Initially, Charlie appears to align with conventional patriarchal markers: he is an emotionally reserved law enforcement officer occupying a position of public institutional authority. However, as his relationship with Bella evolves throughout the narrative, these monolithic expectations give way to moments of emotional growth, caretaking, and vulnerability. Rather than functioning as a static archetype, Charlie demonstrates how cinematic screen fatherhood can bridge institutional authority with compassionate domestic care.

The findings of this study reveal that the character of Charlie Swan challenges the traditional hegemonic norms by blurring the rigid lines between protective and authoritative with emotional development. Charlie's awkward attempts to reconnect with his daughter, concern for her well-being, and quiet support for her independence reveal a more diverse form of masculinity. Instead of fitting into the idealized model, Charlie possessed the traits of complicit masculinity, where he did not fully embody the traits of hegemonic masculinity but still gained advantage from it due to being a male and an authoritative figure in Forks.

While father figures in Young Adult media are often portrayed to be absent or overly rigid with a dominant narrative influence over their children, Charlie offers a model of fatherhood where he is present in Bella's life in the film and quietly nurturing in his subtle ways without interfering with her dominant narrative in the storyline regarding the supernatural. Rather than asserting dominance or imposing authority, Charlie learns to trust Bella's decisions even when they diverge from his own understanding or comfort zone and ensures her safety in the ways he knows. His portrayal of fatherhood went from the "visiting" relationship that most non-custodial fathers possessed to the present fatherhood as presented in the film after Bella moved to Forks to live with him.

In comparison to the other paternal characters of the film, Charlie occupies the middle ground. He isn't as involved and wise as Carlisle to the Cullens, nor is he authoritative and traditionally bound as Billy to Jacob. Instead, he portrays an evolving model of fatherhood through his emotional awkwardness, quiet affection, and non-authoritarian parenting.

By representing a fatherhood model that isn't determined by his masculinity and the idealized traits surrounding it, *Twilight* offers a broader understanding of paternal representation in Young Adult media regarding the complexity and diversity of fatherhood, especially single fathers. By spotlighting Charlie, a background character often overlooked in literary analysis because of his minimal narrative dominance, the study also suggests that secondary characters such as him could offer nuanced portrayals within their limited screen time.

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