



PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

Episode 6: Love Stories

with Dr. Betty Barrett



University
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,
Resistance, and Support

Prevent Resist Support Podcast

Season 2 Episode 6: Love Stories with Dr. Betty Barrett

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and you're listening to Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: Okay, so today I have a really exciting episode for you, I get to chat with Dr. Betty Barrett. She works at the University of Windsor and has taught in the Women and Gender Studies Department as well as the social work department. And she is well known on our campus for being somebody who weaves pop culture into her lectures and talks about feminism, dating, relationships. And today we're going to focus on love stories, which is so exciting. So let's dive right into our episode today. But before we do that, I just want to remind you that there are accessible transcripts available of our episodes, and that if our hosts mentions anything that you might want to access, I will put the link to that in our episode description. And also, if you need support, you can reach out to us at the Office of Sexual Violence, you can reach out to us via email svsupport@uwindsor.ca, where you can find us on our website uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. And if you're not in our UWindsor campus community, you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca. So you can find some support in your city or in the city of Windsor. So there's

lots of options out there. So we're gonna dive right into our conversation with Betty and I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed chatting with her.

(Transition music)

Anne: All right. So welcome, Betty. We're so excited to have you today.

Dr. Betty Barrett: I'm so happy to be here. Thank you so much for the invitation.

Anne: So can we start by hearing a little bit about your background and how you got into the work that you're doing? You have a whole bunch of really interesting research. I feel like our listeners would love to hear about that.

Betty: Yeah, sure. I don't know how far back you want me to go. But I'm actually a social worker by training. And so before I came to academia, I was working in social work specifically in the field of family violence. So my master's degree was in child welfare. So a lot of my early social work was in the field of childhood sexual abuse. And when I came to academia, I was actually thinking my career was going to be studying child welfare, I wasn't really anticipating going the direction that I ended up going. So my dissertation was looking at childhood sexual abuse, and the way that it related to other kind of adulthood experiences, specifically violence across the life course. And one of the things that came out of that, that I found really, really fascinating for me was this connection between being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, and then being in an adulthood intimate partner relationship that was violent. And so obviously, other researchers had found this, my study wasn't the first to find this relationship. But it was something that I was really, really interested in and fascinated by both just for personal reasons in my own life, but also, just because childhood sexual abuse in general, was a very, very heavy field for me, it was, it's really hard to hear stories of sexual violence, as I'm sure you know, in the work that you do, over and over and over again. And so I had less familiarity with the world of domestic violence. And I kind of then moved into domestic violence work, doing more activism around violence against women,

hearing more stories, I was on the board of directors of violence against women organization that focused specifically on domestic violence. And so that's kind of where I landed in terms of moving out of child welfare moving a little bit more firmly into the intimate partner violence field. And then I came to the University of Windsor simply because the University of Windsor, I think it still has the only but at the time, it was definitely the only combined program in Social Work and Women's Studies. So it allowed me to combine my interest in you know, social work, as well as my interest in feminism, specifically in the classroom setting. And so I was really excited about that. And I've just been studying domestic violence ever since. So, yeah, that's kind of where I landed. And so most of my work in the field of domestic violence is around help seeking. So how do people seek help? How do they receive help? What kinds of things are helpful? What kinds of things aren't? Looking at bystander behaviour in response to domestic violence? And I look at that both in queer relationships as well as in heterosexual relationships, and most recently, I've landed looking at the ways in which intimate partner violence correlates or overlaps with animal abuse, and looking at women with pets in particular and how that is a barrier to help seeking and how we can help provide more holistic services to families including families that involve pets when domestic violence occurs.

Anne: That is amazing. And then if it's okay, I would love to just kind of note some of the other really like, interesting stuff that you're doing. You had mentioned that you do some research on wrestling.

Betty: Oh my gosh, I love professional wrestling more than a feminist social worker probably should. Um, yeah, it's really been great being an academic because there's an enormous amount of freedom really exploring what you're interested in. And I always tell people, when they're looking at, like, what should they study, specifically grad students, I'm always like, pick something that you are passionate about, or that you're interested in. Because it's the only thing that's really going to give you that motivation, that fire to keep going. And so I'm a really big wrestling fan, there was a lot of kind of research looking at professional wrestling and domestic violence. And so I was like, Oh, my gosh, this is a wonderful opportunity to kind of look at and do

something with something that I'm really passionate about. So yeah, I spent a few years studying professional wrestling, specifically looking at romance narratives in professional wrestling, and stories of fictional love as they were told, through that kind of context of the wrestling ring and the wrestling kind of story arcs. So yeah, super happy to talk about professional wrestling anytime you have any interest in that.

Anne: Okay, we're gonna like put a pin in that because I want to hear everything about that. But I want to talk about today's episode, which is about love stories more broadly. And I think, well, the way that I kind of thought of you as a podcast host was I just kept hearing about your twilight lecture, Dr. Barrett's Twilight lecture, like you have to see the Twilight lecture. And so what's really cool about your teaching method is that you weave these, like pop culture examples into your lessons in a really interesting way. And we're going to talk about some examples and how they relate to how we think about love and romance and violence. But before we get into that, I would love to know how you choose the examples that you include in your lessons because like Twilight, as like a millennial, I'm so into that.

Betty: Yeah, I mean, part of it is, again, is that I'm just a media junkie, you know, I watch probably more TV than is healthy for an adult person to watch. I'm always watching TV, I'm always watching movies, and I'm always looking at it just through the lens of curiosity. I'm just a really curious person. And so invariably, I'll be watching something for pleasure. And it'll just connect in my mind to something I'm teaching in class. So for example, I teach social policy as well, when I teach social work, and I have a whole lesson built around the cartoon DuckTales to teach capitalism, the concept of capitalism through this DuckTales story, where Scrooge McDuck goes to this island and he accidentally drops a bottle cap and the bottle cap becomes currency. I was just watching Parks and Rec actually, just before I got on, and there's this episode where Leslie Knope is trying to get a soda tax kind of passed. And so I was like filing that away for my policy class. So I, part of it is just what I watched, because I just watched an enormous amount of television. And a lot of the things that I teach about are just so prevalent in popular culture. And for me, personally, I've always really learned through stories, I'm much more interested in this story. So you can tell

me what the definition of capitalism is, for example, I'm not gonna remember that as well as hearing a story about Scrooge McDuck and how Scrooge McDuck kind of learned what capitalism was. So part of it is just what I watched personally, because I watched an enormous amount of television. But I also tried to really grounded in what my students are watching. Because I know there's a really big age gap now between me and my students. It wasn't such a problem when I first started, because we were a little bit closer in age, but it's become a little bit more of a problem now that I'm older. So when we teach in the classroom, the very first thing I have them do on the very first day, is I have them write down for me, the top five TV shows they're watching or that they love, the top five movies that they're watching or they love, the top five celebrities or social media influencers that they're interested in. And then I've had to start asking also about YouTube channels, because that's something that a lot of students are watching. So invariably, at the beginning of the semester, I'll just kind of go home. And I'll just kind of look through what young people are watching. And then I'll kind of try to see how much of that I can pull into my lessons. And so the whole thing about the timeliness of it is actually really interesting, because now so many young people are watching retro show streaming. So even things which I thought would be out of date, for example, like the television show Friends. Many of my students chose to write about Friends and their final papers for their class. The final paper for one of my classes is always on media analysis, so they can pick any TV show they want, they have to analyze, you know, gender representations, and that shows and so many of them were choosing things like Friends or Modern Family or the shows, I didn't assume that young people were watching but they just are because of the streaming. So I get a little bit here I get a little bit there. I just try to always teach through stories. I think that if I had to kind of define my, the way I teach people, I really think that just seeing a story, even if it's a story you're not familiar with can sometimes be really powerful. So sometimes I use media that I know they haven't seen. So for example, in one of my social work classes, I always use the film What's Eating Gilbert Grape? which no one has seen that movie. That's, that's a young person now. But you don't have to have seen the movie to really connect with the characters and to connect with the story. So so it's a little flexible in that way, I think because you know, if people know it, great, if they don't I think it there's

still that connection with another human being that can happen when you watch popular culture. So yeah.

Anne: Yeah. And I wonder if like, sometimes they also then go and watch the thing, because the example was discussed class. So I don't know, I would be compelled, I think to go and watch.

Betty: Yeah. Yeah. And, and I learned so much so. So for example, I just finished reading 100 papers that were pop culture analysis. And it really introduces me to new things that I should be watching. That would be good examples for next year. So for example, I haven't watched the show Euphoria. But apparently that's a really big one among the young folks these days, because lots of students chose to write about Euphoria. So that'll definitely be something I'll spend my summer doing. Because they've given me the example. So a lot of times I can build my lessons from the narratives of students and from kind of what they're teaching me about the culture that they're watching.

Anne: I love that. And so in preparation for episode you and I had a conversation about love stories, and what it means when you know we have a favourite love story and what that tells us about how we think about romance and relationships and sometimes like sex and sexuality. But what I would love to chat about is I put this poll up on my Instagram on my personal Instagram to ask my friends like what are your favorite love stories? So I have a list which I've sent to you. So I kind of grouped them into four categories. There were some folks that loved period pieces like Pride and Prejudice, Titanic, Jane Eyre, and Bridgerton was the most current one that came up. And then some folks had some just like classic movies like Edward Scissorhands, Moulin Rouge, When Harry Met Sally, and then like Gomez and Morticia, from the Addams Family. And then there was a little bit of pop culture, somebody did say Taylor Swift, which I loved. And then there were some like more recent faves. And I think all of them were cartoons. So She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, which is on Netflix, highly recommend such a cute show, Lore Olympus, which is a webcomic, about Hades, and Persephone and their love story. And then the Last Airbender and Legend of Korra, and some of the love stories and those shows. And then I guess this one isn't a cartoon, but New Girl was another one that

came up with, like, favorite love stories. And so that was kind of like what my friends put out there. So we'd love to hear from you like, what do these favorite love stories tell us about how we think about romance?

Betty: Yeah, and I think the really interesting thing about love stories is no matter whether you're talking about Edward Scissorhands, or the Titanic, they're these key kind of themes. And these key kind of like beats, I call them that come up time and time and time and time again, in love stories. And that even though they might be repackaged, or they might look slightly different. There are definitely these core aspects to romance stories that keep us coming back for more and for more and for more. And so what I think that love stories really tell us is not so much about what it says about us individually. And I do think that the love stories that we love, tell us something about us individually. But I think it tells us so much more about our culture and in terms of what's happening in our culture, and specifically in terms of what's happening in our culture around gender, because a lot of these love stories, as you pointed out are cisgender heterosexual, right that that's kind of the the well we keep going back to, so to speak, when it comes to these love stories. And I see that we're going to talk about queer love stories later on. And I'm so excited about that. Because I think that queer love stories are so important, not just for queer people, but also for heterosexual people as well. And so when I think about what love stories tell us today, and kind of why we're so drawn to them, because I think we all are everyone I know, loves the love story, even if it's not called a love story. So even when you look at media that's directed at men, for example, that you wouldn't necessarily call on the surface a love story. A lot of those stories have love as a very central component to them. And I think that part of what we love about love stories is connection. And I think that there's a lot of research now specifically about people of your generation in the generation below, and how lonely and disconnected people feel. And I think COVID has made that even more pronounced. And I think that part of what we love about a love story is we love that connection, that idea about connecting with another human being. But I think the other thing that we love about love stories or that I love about love stories, and I don't think I'm unique in this is, I do think that love tells us so much about our own value and

worth that we live in a society that's constantly telling us that you know, our hair is not good enough our body's not good enough. There's always someone prettier, smarter. You know, we're always in competition with one another. And there's social comparison that happens on social media. And I think that part of like the promise of love is that promise of value and worth that when someone chooses to love you, you are chosen, that they've seen you, that you kind of win, that you're valuable, you're worthy. So I definitely think there's also that need and desire in all of us to feel like we are loved, that we are worthy, that we have value, specifically given that we live in a culture right now, that is making a lot of money off of telling us that we don't. And I think that that's why, you know, we love the idea of, you know, I think it's Jack and Rose, for example, in the Titanic, you know, kind of coming together that idea of connection. And even though Jack is a poor boy, you know, or a poor man, so to speak. And even though he lives in a society where he's surrounded by affluence, and you know that you need to be a wealthy man, that even someone like that has worth, that he's seen, and that he's the target of love. And I think that just really speaks to all of us. And again, it doesn't have to be the specific stories, I think we see those themes being kind of rewritten over and over and over again, every packaged in really different ways.

Anne: I love that. And I love that you touched on self worth, and some of those other key pieces. And like as you were talking about it, it just made me think about like how centralized romance is in our culture. Like that is the most important thing, in terms of like how we think about, you know, different types of relationships. And I think even when we think about, like familial relationships, or friendships, like those are always seen in our culture as secondary to romance.

Betty: Mm hmm. Yeah. And I think that for a long time for myself, I, you know, it was almost like this hidden secret that I liked romance. You know, it was almost something that if you're a serious person, you don't talk about that, especially if you're a feminist, like the fact that you like the bachelor, you never admit that, right? The fact that you like rom coms, it's like you never admit that. So it's so interesting, because these romantic relationships are arguably the most important relationships in many people's lives. That when you ask people to talk about their lives, if

they're in a relationship, and you ask them what's important, they'll invariably talk about that other person. And when you talk about people who are single, who desire to be in a relationship, one of their primary goals is to find someone to love. And so we have this thing, which is so much the centre of our lives, but at the same time, it's culturally devalued to talk about or to care about it. Right? That, you know, we think about things like Chiclet, or the Bachelor or romantic comedies, in our society, those things are seen as being very frivolous, those things are seen as being not very important. And I think that that really speaks to you know, for me personally, why I've kind of come out of the closet, so to speak in recent years, about my love, for love, because I think that's a real feminist act. Because I think in our society, we've separated sex from love, we associate sex with men. So this normalization of pornography, sex, sell sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, you know, you know, sex is selling trucks, it's selling cars, it's selling everything. And then we have kind of love over here. But love is something that, you know, it's almost like, we're ashamed to admit that we care about it, or that we like about it. But if you're going to see a romantic comedy, that that's something that is, you know, almost something you want to hide from, you know, it's not something that that we're really open about. And I think it's because we've associated love with women. And in our society, we do tend to devalue things that we associate with the feminine, they tend to be things that we, you know, kind of ascribe less importance to. And so I do think that for me, as a women's studies scholar, it's been a really interesting and important journey, trying to be open and reclaim, like, No, I love love stories, love stories are really important. Because I do think that that's a feminist act, but saying that this thing that we associate with women, you know, it's not devalued, it's something that actually is very valuable to all of our lives. So I'm very open now about my love, for love. And I can talk about it all day.

Anne: I love that so much. And another thing that came up in my like little Instagram poll, which like, by no means scientific, but was really interesting to kind of get me thinking about what I wanted to ask from you and what we should talk about was the focus on queer love story. So in She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, there's two characters, I'm not going to spoil it by saying who they are, in case you haven't watched it yet. But they are both women. And they do get together at

the end of the show, which is really exciting. And then in Legend of Korra, there's also like a queer romance between two women. And so I think, you know, there haven't been as many pure love stories that have been, you know, this popular in the past, and I think folks are really excited about that. Um, but let's talk about that. What are some of the tropes in queer love stories?

Betty: Yeah, I mean, I think the thing about queer love stories that I think is so important, not just for queer people, because we know queer representation matters for queer people, but also for heterosexual people is so many of the tropes that we have in straight love stories are gendered. They're highly gendered. And I think we're going to talk about some of them today. And you finally have seen my twilight lectures so you know how I kind of play this with my students, so to speak, that so much of how we think about love is through a heteronormative and heterosexual lens and even today I know really strong empowered women who have PhDs who still will not ask a man out, there's still this idea that, you know, he needs to ask her out. And so I think so much of what we learn about love is through this heteronormative heterosexual lens. And so much of that is based in gender and gender roles, that I think queer love stories are so important for all of us because they just explode that they just explode this idea that there are preset rules for people based on their gender. And I think that that's really liberatory not just for queer people, but also for straight people to see how can love look when it's not being defined in these very prescriptive roles in ways that are clearly like set about based upon your gender. With that said, though, we are seeing more and more queer love stories, but the mainstream queer love stories that we're seeing are still very much through a heterosexual lens, you know, so even though we're seeing more and more queer love stories, the ones that make it onto Modern Family or even Schitts Creek, for example, which many of my students wrote about Schitts Creek, still have a lot of these common beats that you see in heterosexual relationships. So, Schitts Creek is actually one of my favourite love stories. So the love story of David and Patrick is one of my all time favourite love stories. It's so wonderful. But when you look at that love story, it follows a lot of the same beats of a straight love story, right? That they fall in love. They're in a monogamous relationship, there's a

proposal, there's a white wedding. So even though we're seeing more and more queer love in mainstream media, it still looks a lot like straight love. But even though you know, it's not as gendered in terms of the people who are involved, some of those larger things that we associate with heterosexuality like monogamy, and marriage, and those kinds of things are still very much there. And the queer love stories that I think are focus more toward queer audiences do a much better job of kind of exploding that and showing much more diversity, showing love that might not be monogamous, showing love that might not end in marriage, showing love that might involve more than two partners, you know, really just showing how love can really manifest in lots of different ways. But a lot of those really liberatory kind of, you know, messages that we're seeing in queer directed queer shows are not necessarily making their way to, you know, the TV shows that are still, you know, the primetime TV shows that your mom or your cousin or you know, or knowing about or talking about. So I really am just so excited about queer love stories. And I think that they just have so much potential to teach us all so much about what love can look like in a really healthy and a egalitarian way, and I just waiting for some of those queer love stories to make their way into more mainstream media.

Anne: That's amazing. I think you laid that out so well for us. And so one of the things that I really love from the Twilight lecture, which was I was so excited to listen to it. I like, had some snacks, I had notepad I was just pumped, it was great. And one of the things that I really loved was your discussion of dark romance and the dark romance trope. And I just thought that highlighted so well how unhealthy some of these stories are. So what is the dark romance trope and I gave some examples, we see it in 50 Shades and Twilight, which is what you lecture about. We see it a little bit in the Lore Olympus, you know, there's Hades was the god of the underworld. We also see it a little bit in Riverdale and shows like Scandal. What is the dark romance trope and why is it so unhealthy?

Betty: Yeah, so there are lots of different romance tropes in our culture. And some of them are more familiar to us than others, even if we don't recognize them as such. And so we can talk about some of those a little bit later, if you want, the Prince Charming being the really big one. But

the dark romance narrative is a narrative that you know, people associate with Twilight. But if we actually look at older movies like Grease, Grease is a really good example, the dark romance narrative. And that's that movie came out I believe in the 1970s, maybe the early 1980s. And what the dark romance narrative really does is it's this look at heterosexual love and passion through the lens of suffering essentially. So it's this idea in in very kind of watered down terms, it's the the bad boy good girl trope, right? So you have a bad boy, who is bad on the surface, right? So on the surface, he's a bad boy, but he's really got a heart of gold. Like he's really like Danny Zuko, you know, and in Grease, you know, on the surface, he's got that leather jacket, he's got his boys, but deep down, he just wants some summer lovin', right. He just, you know, he just wants and needs to be loved. So normally what the dark romance narrative starts with is, is a bad boy character, who is bad on the outside, good on the inside. And usually he's good on the inside because he's suffering in some way. And he's either suffering because of a past trauma, or he's suffering because, you know, in the case of Twilight, he's suffering because he's a vampire. You know, so he has these unmet needs. So you have a bad boy who's secretly kind of a good boy, we think maybe who's really kind of suffering on the inside. And he's very attracted to this good girl. And this idea is that she is the thing that can save him so she is the thing that through her love, the love of good woman, he can become a better man. So in addition to loving her and transforming himself, part of the romance narrative is also based on these tropes of chivalry, that it's also his job to protect her, usually from some kind of threat. And the threat is usually another man of some sort. So he's there to kind of protect her and in protecting her, that obviously involves a little bit of controlling her, surveilling her, doing those kinds of things. But because he knows he's a bad boy, or believes he's a bad boy, there's often this internal conflict regarding whether or not he should be with her. So part of this is he wants to be with her, but he also doesn't want to hurt her because he thinks he's a bad guy. So there's an enormous amount of inconsistency in his relationship with her. So going back to that Grease example, you know, you know, Danny is really nice to Sandy behind closed doors, but then in the hallways, he's acting like he doesn't know her at all right? Then then you kind of look at more current examples like Twilight. Edward is very back and forth with like, I love you come closer, as you go away, you

know, kind of like that back and forth, kind of come hither, no go away. So very much inconsistency in terms of this pairing of love and aggression, like, I love you, but I'm going to be aggressive towards you. And I'm being aggressive toward you, because I love you, and I'm doing that to protect you. And then ultimately, on the female side of the dark romance narrative, you have a woman who's usually quite innocent, you know, as in Sandy in Grease, or, you know, Bella in Twilight, you know, those kinds of things. She's very innocent, and she doesn't have a lot of experience with other men. And she kind of sees that she can be the one to save him. So she very much so starts to lose herself in terms of how can she save this man. He becomes much more a central part of her life. She's also very conflicted about her feelings between her head and her heart. Sometimes her friends will say he's a bad guy, you kind of got to get away from him. And ultimately, usually, we see the dark romance ending with personal transformation. So if you saw the movie Grease at the very end, you know, Danny doesn't become a good guy, Sandy comes out in the leather pants, like she has kind of entered his world. And with Twilight, we see Bella literally becoming a vampire. So basically, the dark romance narrative, if you had to kind of sum it up in like a very much more sustained way than I just did. It's a romance that pairs love and aggression. So it's basically romantic love stories where we see aggression happening in the name of love, and and oftentimes is very much marked also by instability, inconsistency, notions of suffering, that we know that we love someone because we're suffering, that that love hurts essentially, is how we know we love someone. And the darker romance narrative, I think, when you, when you talk about the way that a lot of people talk about their own love stories, a lot of people do kind of talk about love in this language of hurt. That like, yeah, even when you think about it, when you're a kid, they're like, I have a crush on someone. Right? So what is a crush? I mean, a crush is very, like, you know, a crush is something that hurts, right? So there's very much this pairing of romantic love hurts. You know, you love someone when they hurt you. Because if you weren't hurting, then you wouldn't love them, you wouldn't take the fact that you are hurting and the fact that they are able to hurt you is indicative of the fact that you must love them, right. And so that's kind of what we see in a very long version there of the dark romance narrative.

Anne: I think like one of the things that just strikes me so much about this is that it like totally excuses the man's violence because he has a reason for being violent, like he's suffering, he has his own trauma. And like, that's really valid, you know, we should we should think about people's traumas as like maybe the root cause of why they're acting a certain way. But that doesn't excuse that kind of behaviour towards somebody else. So I think that that's like a really interesting piece of thought is the way that the the behaviour is just kind of like romanticized and excused and explained away. I think it's, it's easy to see kind of like the direct correlation between that and like normalizing unhealthy relationships.

Betty: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that that's one of the reasons why, even though it seems kind of silly to call it the Twilight lecture, of all the classes I teach, if I could only expose my students to one lesson ever, that would be the one. And the reason why is that I think we've done a really good job in the Violence Against Women field of really educating the public around physical abuse is bad. So when we see somebody hit their partner or push their partner, we automatically know whoa, red flag, this is dangerous, walk away. We've done a less good job educating the public on those other forms of abuse, the coercive control, the gaslighting, those kinds of things, which are so hard to identify and which the really good abusers use because they know they're hard to identify. They know that they're things that we don't readily identify as abusive, so it's so much easier to get away with it. And so I always use a quote when I'm teaching from one of my professors when I was in grad school named Nancy Worchester. And she said this thing that I just say over and over again, which is the best batterers actually never have to lay a hand. That you get so good at exerting power and control in these other ways that you never have to actually raise your fist to someone. And so I think that this gets back to why I really like using popular culture to illustrate some of these things. Because even though we're now educating the public around emotional abuse, gaslighting, love bombing, all those kinds of things, it's really hard to see what they actually look like, right, it's really hard to see how they actually manifest. And I think Twilight, in particular, is a textbook example of, you know, predatory behaviour, coercive control, gaslighting, and at the same time, it was one of the most popular love stories of the last 20 years. And when you talk to young people, they all know Twilight, I have yet to

meet a young person in any of my classes, who hasn't seen Twilight or who doesn't know Twilight. And so I think that, you know, it's very interesting and telling that these are the love stories that we're growing up with. These are the love stories that were being told. And then, you know, we find ourselves in these romantic relationships not being able to name or to know whether they're problematic. You know, one of my favorite problematic tropes in any kind of love story is the very kind of cliché running to the airport, right? You've seen that, like Ross runs of the year, you run to the airport, and now they're in security. So you have to spend money to buy a plane ticket, and then you go in. And we say that's so romantic, that act. But that act is only romantic, if you believe you love the person doing it. If it was someone who you didn't love, it would be really creepy. And so you know, imagine if you didn't love someone or you weren't attracted to them, and they followed you to the airport and they ran for they physically ran down the thing, you would literally be like scared. And so in Twilight, there's this really interesting scene where, you know, Edward watches Bella asleep, and he'd later tells her that he does this. And she finds this so romantic. But imagine if in Twilight, it had been Mike, for example, if Bella had woken up, and Mike was in her bedroom, it would be really super creepy. So these acts, you know, these things that are very clearly problematic in certain contexts become completely excusable, when they're done in the name of love.

Anne: That is so important. I'm so glad that you went through that for us. And I'm just really excited that, you know, this is kind of the piece that you're like, if I can only have one lesson because I, when I listened to the lesson, I was like, this is what I need the listeners to know about. I also think there's like this aspect of like, you know, maybe we know the romance is bad, maybe we know that this isn't the healthiest love story, but it's like really sexy. And so, you know, there's this desire, there's a taboo nature. And I think that kind of ties into our next question, which is, you know, the ways that, you know, now with 50 Shades of Grey, it's portraying out in relation directly to like, BDSM culture. And I know that that's something that I've seen in my work is, you know, people saying that it's BDSM, but it's really just like, non consensual grossness. And so I'm curious to know about what you think about these tropes and how

they relate to like kink culture, and what we think is normal sexual activity, and what we think is like consensual and non consensual.

Betty: Yeah, and I think 50 Shades of Grey is so interesting when we look at that, because so much of the controversy around 50 Shades of Grey was the BDSM part of it was the fact that he wanted to get her in a kink relationship. And I always say with that movie, even if you took that entirely out, even if you took BDSM completely out of that scenario, that is still one of the most problematic movies as far as the love story, the coercive control, the gaslighting, the love bombing, which had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that he wanted her to be in a BDSM relationship, right? So in that movie, it was the BDSM that became problematized, not the other stuff, which was actually problematic. And so I think in our society, there is a tendency, you know, for people who don't understand BDSM, to automatically try to pathologize it in some way. Whereas I think what's really important to recognize is, is that it wasn't that he was wanting a kink relationship with her. It was a very clearly he was wanting a non consensual kink relationship with her. Because consistently throughout that film, she's very clear, she never falters on the fact that she does not want or desire a kink relationship, she does not want a BDSM relationship. And if you read the books, and if you look at the the films, I mean, she's pretty consistent from the right out of the gate, right, that she does not want this. And so it's not necessarily that it was the BDSM that was the problem. It was the fact that he was trying to get her into a BDSM relationship through love bombing, through gaslighting, through these very abusive tactics. And so I think that, that 50 Shades of Grey, you know, is an important film in so many ways, but it's also such a problematic film, because I think it has led to the further marginalization of BDSM because it kind of lumped all BDSM into this kind of non consensual, coercive kind of kind of thing, when really my understanding of BDSM and I'm not a member of that community, and I don't want to speak for that community. But I do do sexual education, sexual health, is that when that is entered into consensually and when that is entered into freely, that that can actually be a very satisfying relationship for people. And so what we see though, with 50 Shades of Grey is how he was enticing her the love bombing. And I think love bombing is one of those really important concepts, that again, it's so

normalized that a lot of people don't realize how problematic it is, you know, when he's buying her computer, he's buying her car. Yeah, he's completely, you know, overwhelming her with these declarations of love. And we're taught to believe, like, oh, wow, that's so romantic, when it was clearly so manipulative, and it was clearly being used to, to kind of get her to do something that she didn't want to do. And so I'm not sure if I answered your question properly there. But I do think that, you know, when we think about 50 Shades of Grey, it's, it's really important to recognize that even if it was not a story about him trying to get her into BD, even if the whole love story was about him trying to get her to move to Cleveland, for example, you could take the BDSM out, and all the other stuff that's still left is what's really problematic.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. And I think it's also just and you highlighted this, I think really well in your answer is that, like, it's not an accurate portrayal of BDSM culture, and that real BDSM culture is so consent based. So I think the takeaway is, you know, do your research, read about those things, and then like, if consent isn't, you know, a central part of that activity, then it's probably not, you know, coming from that really thoughtful and researched place that a lot of folks engage with those activities from so I think that that's, you know, really good to think about and how some of these like other relationship tropes, and like harmful behaviors are showing up in that in that story. So, sorry, did you have something you wanted to add?

Betty: No.

Anne: Okay. So then this is like a piece that I just wanted to add, because I think that, you know, we have the like, bad boy trope, but then in our culture right now, I always see memes about like, the sad boy, who's just like, really sad and depressed. And then there's like, the Manic pixie dream girl, she's so like, whimsical and wonderful. She comes into his life and is just like, magical and like, makes them feel better, like Scott Pilgrim and Ramona Flowers, or, I mean, there's so many examples of that. But, um, I want to know what you think about the sad boy trope?

Betty: Yeah, I mean, it's, it's one of those things where it's like, I love it but I know it's problematic, right? And I think that that's, you know, so much

about all these things. I love the Bachelor, know it's problematic, right. And so the manic pixie dream girl or the messy bun, girl, I think they're calling it now, and the sad boy trip, I think they again, they really show us so much about gender, because part of what those tropes are showing us is that people are entering into relationships, unequal. That people are entering into relationships where one person is to save the other, one person is supposed to be the caregiver of the other person. And normally that's gendered where we see the person doing that is the girl. But normally, it's the female who's there, to kind of save the boy. So even things like the sadboy trope, it contains a lot of the same elements is the dark romance narrative, this idea that you have someone who is broken, but secretly has a heart of gold, he just needs to be watered with a little bit of love. And then he's going to grow into his fully actualized and realized self. And I think that part of the issue with with all of these love stories that are grounded in inequality is exactly that, that they're grounded in inequality, that we see very few representations of people coming to love as fully formed human beings, right? We see very few representations of people coming to love as equal partners, right? This the idea that one person needs to sacrifice something for the other. That's another common thing that we see in romance narratives. This idea that he's really just a sad guy, and he really needs your love, you know, like, all of those things are really talking about how inequality is built into relationships, right? Like, there's always this expectation, that to be in a love relationship, you know, you have to give something up, there has to be some kind of barrier or some kind of sacrifice. And being around the sadboy. I mean, normally, the sad boy is really, really cute. He's really hot. But if you've spent a lot of time around people who are experiencing mental health issues, who don't have proper emotional support from trained professionals, you know, sometimes real damage can happen in that, you know, if you're someone who is trying to be the sole support person for someone who has very serious mental health issues, and you yourself are not a social worker, you yourself are not trained to do this. And even if you were you're not in a professional helping relationship with this partner, you know, it's a very problematic thing for both parties involved because one, the person who is the sad boy is not getting the kind of real professional help that he needs. Or the Manic pixie dream girl you know, whoever it happens to be male or female that relationship,

they're not getting the help that they need, which is really problematic. And you might be doing things which could maybe exacerbate someone or be highly unhelpful, you know, not realizing it, but coming from a place of good intention. But it also creates the scenario where you're, you're now entering into a relationship. That is, you know, you're someone's professional, you know, someone's professional helper. I remember seeing, I think it was in the show *Shrill*, I don't know if you've seen this show *Shrill*, but there's this episode where Annie is breaking up with her boyfriend, Ryan, and she's telling him, you know, he's, he's basically saying, you know, tell me what to do and I'll do what you, whatever you tell me to do, whatever you tell me to do, like, I will do it, just tell me what you want. And she says, I don't want to tell you what to do, you know, I don't want to be your mother. Because if I'm your mother, I don't want to be having sex with and sleeping with my son. You know, like, that's not a relationship, right. And it's kind of the same thing when you think about somebody being in an over helper role with someone who really needs professional help. And not only does that create complications for the person who needs professional help, but he isn't getting it. But it also centres them in that relationship, they become the centre of that relationship. And the person who's doing the caregiving, their emotions take second place, like their needs take second space. And so it really again reinforces a hierarchy or an inequality in a relationship, that potentially is very problematic.

Anne: I just love all of that. None of you can see my facial expressions, because this is a podcast, but I was just like, hyping it up on the camera while I was muted. I just like all of that is so important. I just like want people listening to know that, like, you don't have to give free therapy to people you're dating. Like, that's not anything they have to do.

Betty: Yeah, there's a reason why therapists aren't supposed to sleep with their clients, right? You know, I like to think about it like that. And so if you are being someone's therapist, you know, that's not an equitable, romantic love relationship. And I want to be really clear, because I think mental health is such an important issue that I'm in no way trying to stigmatize you know, sad boys, or *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* anyway, and I hope that's really, really clear. Part of the concern is, is that when people

are experiencing really serious mental health issues they need and they deserve proper, professional help.

Anne: Yeah.

Betty: And trying to get that help from someone who is not properly trained to do it, and who is not in a professional role with you, is potentially very problematic for all the reasons, you know, for all the reasons we just talked about.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. And you know, if that's something that you're thinking about, like, we have so much content on our social media about providing support to people that we love and care about from like, a really like thoughtful support role, like not a not a therapy role, not a counseling role, but like, I'm a person who cares about you, and I'm supporting the role. So if that's something you want to know about, like we are, so here for the support, and you can find all of that info on our channel.

Betty: Yeah, and it's really important, I think, you know, I also don't want to say that if your partner is sad, or expect that you need to, like walk away from, I want to be really clear about that, too.

Anne: Yeah.

Betty: But but what we're talking about here, and we talk about the manic pixie dream girl, or the sadboy trope is very much something that extends beyond what we're talking about, about being a supportive person in a relationship, that if someone is wanting and expecting you to be their mental health professional, you know, that is a very different kind of relationship than an equitable, mutual, romantic love relationship. And romantic love relationships should be equitable, and they should be mutual. And when you see these relationships becoming unidirectional, just consistently over time, you that's something where maybe we need to kind of think about what's going on here. And you know, is there a real need for someone in this relationship to maybe get some help outside of this relationship?

Anne: I love that. And we're kind of at the end of our time, and I think that's a really lovely place to kind of bring our conversation to a close. Are there any, like last thoughts that you would like to leave us with?

Betty: Oh, gosh, that went really, really fast. Um, not that I can think of, I mean, I love the rest of the questions you had here. I'm sad we didn't get to them. I had so much to say about them about the love triangles.

Anne: Um, you know, I think we're maybe gonna have to do a part two.

Betty: Yeah, yeah. Um, no, just thank you for letting me talk. Like I said, I can talk about love all day and the time to go super fast. So no, just thank you for having me on and for the opportunity to speak to you today and to be on your podcast. It's been really great.

Anne: Yes, we've loved having you. We're so excited about this episode. Like everyone in my office is just so pumped. So yeah, thank you for your time and your thoughts. I'm so excited to like, chat some more.

Betty: Yeah, no, definitely for sure, anytime.

(Transition music)

Anne: So that is our chat with Dr. Betty Barrett. I hope you enjoyed our episode today. As a reminder, you can find the episode transcripts on our website uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. And you can reach out to us if you need any support or you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Their website again, is sexualassaultsupport.ca. And so, if you liked this episode, if you're enjoying the podcast, please like and subscribe. I love seeing all the feedback that we get on this on this podcast and love being able to connect with you on this way. So thank you so much for listening and have a wonderful day.