Love and Lust for FANg Culture:
The Fandom behind the *Twilight* Phenomenon

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Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga *has become globally regarded as one of the greatest love stories of modern fiction. Beginning as novels with a community of loyal readership, the book series continues to be developed and produced into a blockbuster film saga, breaking box office records and becoming an even more outstanding cultural phenomenon. As the newest edition to vampire fandom, I seek to find out how fan culture derived from the* Twilight Saga *has spurred and reinvented an already existing culture. A textual analysis of ten Internet fan texts is conducted in order to address research questions about* Twilight*'s importance to its fans and the meaning making that occurs in engagement with the text. Using cultural studies theories from Henry Jenkins, Michel de Certeau, and John Fiske, as well as previous research and the creative/active audiences theory, content on the ten Internet fan sites undergoes analysis to find that identification with the norm within the culture allows for fan agency and creativity.*

Of modern day cultural phenomena, one that has spurred and reinvented an already existing culture into its most obsessive fandom is Stephenie Meyer's vampire saga, *The Twilight Series.* Consisting of four parts to the saga, including the self-titled *Twilight,* sequel, *New Moon,* the third part, *Eclipse*, and concluding with *Breaking Dawn*, this series created a readership community and soon expanded into a twenty-first century record-breaking cultural phenomenon. What began as a loyal readership to the vampire love story, the *Twilight* phenomenon developed into a common experience amongst a community who created a shared meaning, ultimately developing into another subset of fan culture. The newest edition to the vampire fandom is the *Twilight* phenomenon and it has taken the world by storm. Although vampire culture is not new, there is at present little scholarly research done about the fan culture that has developed from Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* and Summit Entertainment's *Twilight* movie franchise.

An unrequited, forbidden, and immortal love story exists as the central premise of the saga. Seventeen-year-old Isabella (Bella) Swan moves to dreary Forks, Washington to live with her father. Upon moving there, she meets new friends, one of whom is attracted by the scent of her blood and the pureness of her soul. Edward Cullen, a 100 year-old vampire, intrigued by Bella's arrival, falls in love with her, ignoring the danger of integrating the two completely different species. A tumultuous romance spurs as Edward fights to protect Bella's life from the dangers of his own kind. From an original print media birth, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* was adapted into a feature length film and released on November 21, 2008. Grossing theater box offices with more than 70 million dollars in its opening weekend (mtv.com) and more than three million DVDs sold in its first day of release, it is a wonder how such massive numbers could be generated. One major reason is the fan culture that supports this great media phenomenon. The fans of the books have contributed to the thriving book sales and box office success.

In order to understand how and why the "*Twilight* craze" began and continues to grow steadfastly, a textual analysis of the fan sites, blogs, and the representation of *Twilight* on social networking sites Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter will be conducted. The purpose of this study is to use these texts to provide an in-depth analysis of why this popular media form has become a cultural phenomenon and why it is so important to members of this culture. For the purpose of this study, the term "text" will adapt Jeff Lewis' (2008) definition of anything represented, symbolized, or mediated (p. 5). In this case, *Twilight* (the blockbuster movie and book), its fan sites, blogs, and social networking sites, as well as critical reviews, serve as media texts.

Though the topic of the *Twilight* phenomenon has not been recorded sufficiently in scholarly research because it has only erupted and grown in the past several years, previous studies of vampire and fan culture are available. These studies in vampire fetishes have thus far looked at the television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* as well as other science fiction applications and their representation as applied to youth culture, social construction, feminism, and adolescent agency. For example, book reviews such as one done by Richard Bailey in 2004 of Michael Adams' text of *"Slayer Slang: A 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' Lexicon"* reports on *Buffy* as a cult obsession that penetrates mainstream with its own linguistic slang. This is an innovation to energize its young audience. Buttsworth (2002) applies *Buffy* as a tool to re-invent women as warriors to negate a masculine social construct, and achieve agency. This resulted in leading women to embrace their femininity by

identifying with Buffy, the vampire slayer, as a warrior for empowerment. Also analyzing a book adaptation to film, Corbin and Campbell (1999) examined Coppola's 1992 film adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to discover the modern day reflection of feminine agency and social changes. Films are then believed to be visual markers of social change as they are adapted from the previous printed text. Based on these various studies, the *Twilight Saga* will fit well into cultural studies research, in which theories of uses and gratifications and the notion that active audiences create meaning from these texts provide understanding of a modern cultural phenomenon. Therefore, I propose to ask the following research questions:

1) Why is *Twilight* so important to its fans?
2) What meaning does *Twilight* bring to its fans, and how is this meaning represented to them?
3) Does *Twilight* fan culture differ from previous vampire fan culture, and if so, then what has this fandom led to?

Literature Review

Before examining the *Twilight* fandom that today is the apex and manifestation of vampire fan culture, looking at previous studies of *Buffy* and *Dracula* texts, as well as fan culture reports, draws insights that can be applied to the procedures and analysis of the current phenomenon.

The first of several concepts to consider are the particular themes that emerge from previous literature that has been conducted on vampires in the media. Themes developed from these texts consist of good versus evil, feminist empowerment and agency, adolescent agency and self-identification, and social construction of identity, gender, sex, and power. From reading and engaging in what Adams (2003) considers "slayer slang," Bailey (2004) reports that the audience picks up the slang and uses this linguistic innovation as a way for the young people who watch *Buffy* to depart from the constraints of governed English language and step out of their silence to express creativeness. This provides an example of audiences as active and creative participants, as cultural producers rather than "passive receivers of messages that are highly vulnerable to meaning-making power of the mass media" (Lewis, 2008, p. 214).

Audiences create their own meaning of a text rather than have the dominant meaning imposed upon them. The vampire texts examined in previous research were considered agents that audiences used to create self-identities. In the instance of feminine gender identity, Beard (2003), Buttsworth (2002), Corbin and Campbell (1999), Owen (1999), and Milner (2005) address

the one-hour television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a text that enables the women audience to create their own agency and depart from patriarchal social constructs that confine them to subordination and submission. An example provided by Buttsworth (2003) is that females who watch this program will be agents of their own gender identity. These women undermine culturally constructed attributes of femininity, such as being "girly," and go against the misogynistic views that women cannot be considered good fighters (Buttsworth, 2003, p. 192). For Milner (2005), Buffy became a positive role model to represent powerful women in television in the United States. In a book review of Wilcox and Lavery's (2002) *Fighting the Forces: What's At Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* Heinecken (2003) reads the print text written about a media text as feminist representation of the anger women must control in a patriarchal society. Corbin and Campbell (1999) see how Coppola's adaptation of Stoker's *Dracula* is a reflection and contrast of historical time periods in which women have achieved agency. Coppola's film *Dracula* reflects a more modern time where women are active agents of their identity, whereas Stoker's *Dracula* disabled and did not entertain the idea of female agency. Stoker's characters were merely subordinates in the patriarchal hierarchy. Viewers of Coppola's film can make meaning such that modern day women have progressed and are creative and active agents of their own identities. This can lead to empowerment sexually and socially in correspondence with social changes that have occurred throughout history.

Sexuality and gender construction are also apparent in the *Buffy* studies. Braun (2000) and Richards (2004) suggest that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* represented sexual engagement issues that adolescents face in constructing their identities. This also reflected the binary opposition of good versus evil. Engaging in sexual intercourse as an adolescent drew the line between good and evil or human and vampire. Braun (2000) noted that the character Angel in *Buffy* transformed from good to evil because of sex. This teaches adolescents viewing the program to take the message of sex as malevolent when Angel turns into an evil vampire post-sexual intercourse. The coming of age as an adolescent became apparent as a theme that tied to Braun's (2000) and Richards' (2004) sex theme. Richards (2004) sees *Buffy* and its use of vampire mythology to teach adolescent issues of sex. The melodrama of high school teenagers and vampires serve as representations of "anxieties about intimacies of sex" and becoming an adult (p. 122). Sex in *Buffy* is represented to secure intimacy with others. Richards concluded with three concepts introduced to teenage viewers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: 1) being the slayer: participating in teenage life and

becoming sexual; 2) questions of risky intimacy in relation with Angel, which then applies to contracting venereal diseases of HIV and AIDS; and 3) identity and sex are explored by Buffy and her sister, representing an intimate non-sexual relationship. In addition, Wilcox (1999) touches upon the issue of viewers of *Buffy* learning how to grow up adolescent. The encoded message in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* represents the language and community bonding created within a cohort of people that watch the program. Especially affected are those adolescents who are watching a program about identifiable adolescents coming-of-age identity and emancipation from social pressures. In Wilcox's case, the vampire is the entity that represents sex to the young audience. The belief that a shift from adolescence to adulthood is expressed by means of sexuality is socially constructed. Their teenage identities are thus built by sexuality and exploration.

To consider another vampire media text, Ezra (2006) studied Louis Feuillade's *Les Vampires* as a text to represent urban crime during World War I. According to Ezra, the vampire's severed head represented the anxieties and traumas of the Great War. This may support the stereotypical image of a vampire as being a dark entity (Heldreth, 1999). Previous vampire cultural studies have illustrated the vampire as a representation of evil, immoral sexual promiscuity, or patriarchal control. However, by studying *Twilight*, one may see how this negative image of vampires is represented in a better light as the protector and cultural agent for empowerment for fans across the globe.

Beyond the creative agency that audiences develop from vampire texts and the representations that these texts portray lies the inquiry behind why these texts create fan communities. Davisson and Booth (2007), Scodari (2003), and Peirse (2007) have provided more recent accounts of vampire and science fiction fandom with the reason for such formation. In a review of the book *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy* written by Milly Williamson (2005), Peirse (2007) reveals the historical roots of the "sympathetic" vampire phenomenon found in contemporary film and television (p. 137). Williamson (2005) found that the sympathetic vampire is melodramatic. This important discovery may be applied to the vampire character of Edward Cullen in *Twilight.* Satisfying the description Williamson gives of the sympathetic vampire, Edward Cullen fulfills the role of rebellious, domesticated, and intimate throughout the book and film adaptation. To explain the fandom that results from this phenomenon, cultural theorists Henry Jenkins and John Fiske are drawn upon to explain that "the fans are the heroes of popular culture who poach the meaning of texts" (Peirse, 2007, p. 138). The

definition of poaching will later be addressed and applied to *Twilight.* Continuing to agree with the majority of *Buffy* studies in feminine and audience agency and creativity, Williamson (2005) notes that female fans of the sympathetic vampire character do not remain passive audiences who accept patriarchal ideology by identifying with the vampire's female victims, but instead empathize with the sympathetic vampire character (Peirse, 2007, p. 138). Later quoting Jenkins, the lure of the vampire in fiction leads to fandom such that fans are a community that is socially formulated by oppressed audiences resenting subordination in a social hierarchy (Peirse, 2007, p. 139). This idea of fandom empowering oppressed beings may align with the existing study of the *Twilight* sensation such that the re-creation of cultural texts creates a sense of authority in hierarchical society. Audience theories remain intact as uses and gratifications and screen theory consider fans as not just solely passive receivers of these media texts, but instead active agents who experience and create popular culture.

Supporting the concept of fandom as a form of audience agency, Scodari (2003) conducted a study to reveal that fandom creates a sense of bonding and community for emancipation from hegemony. Women authors of fan fiction that spurs from a popular media text belong to an active and creative audience that uses this appropriation of the text to emancipate themselves in a resistance to patriarchy. Pleasures come from fostering each other's pain as a fan community works together in micro-resistance of the dominant ideology, as cultural theorist Michel de Certeau points out. Scodari (2003) concluded that fan culture works to "oppose producer goals" as female fans recreate the text in their own fan fiction to emancipate the female character from male subordination. Scodari also critiqued the book *Fan Cultures* by Matt Hills (2002), answering the question about where a fan fits in the world. She suggests that a fan becomes a capitalist venture that the producers profit from. Audience devotion is the target from which capitalists earn revenue.

Lastly, Davisson and Booth (2007) conduct an examination of fan interaction and communication with characters of a popular media text. Fan devotion to an artifact of popular culture (i.e., a media text such as *Twilight)* develops a parasocial relationship, defined as a "connection between fictional characters and celebrities, and the fans that follow them" (p. 33). The relationship is considered a "projective identity" such that there is a "tension between the real-world person and the virtual identity" (p. 33). Using the projective identity method, Davisson and Booth could understand fan agency and activity with a new perspective. Also supporting Jenkins' adaptation of de Certeau's poaching

concept, fans strategically raid a mass produced media text and reproduce it in their own way to present to the fan culture. Audiences learn to control the text rather than passively view it. This, in turn, empowers the fan as they are stimulated to communicate with the fictional character for a real social relationship rather than parasocial. The fictitious character is recreated into a real person. In sum, Davisson and Booth found that the motivation of fan groups recreate fan fiction to explore their identities as the producer and the audience of a popular text. Interestingly, new media, such as networking sites MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, provide a novel place for fans to play with identity and communicate with fictional texts. This may later explain how *Twilight* fan activity has made the forbidden love story between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen attainable in their own lives.

Since the advent of *Twilight* fandom has only occurred in recent years, there is a significant lack of research done on this phenomenon with regards to fan culture. Why this new vampire love story is important enough to acquire multiple sheet spreads within magazines as well as magazine covers and lines of fans for the film's midnight screenings is a wonder. What does this text represent to its fans that makes it so meaningful to them? By conducting a textual analysis of *Twilight* fan sites, blogs, forums, and social networking websites, the question about why this popular text is so meaningful to fans can then be answered. Considering the creative and active audience perspectives of Michel de Certeau, Henry Jenkins, and John Fiske on fan culture, light will be shed upon an understanding of this new *Twilight* fandom. In addition, the path that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Dracula*, and other fan cultures have paved will be illuminated.

Methods and Discussion

Revisiting the research questions asking why *Twilight* is so important to its fans, what meaning is invoked from this popular text to the fans, and whether or not this new vampire fan culture differs from previous vampire fan cultures, suggests a textual analysis for interpretation of popular media texts created by *Twilight* fans. The premise of this method is to seek the comments on fan blogs, fan sites, social networking websites, forums, and popular Internet media in order to deeply understand the meaning of the *Twilight* texts for the audience of these media texts. Main texts used in this study consisted of the fan sites *Lion and Lamb Love* and *His Golden Eyes*; the Stephenie Meyer Official Website; the official *Twilight Saga* Facebook page; the official *Twilight Saga* MySpace page; the number one and two ranked fan blogs, *New Moon The Movie* and *Twilight*

Guide; Twitter pages of two of the top searched *Twilight* fan sites on Google, *Twilighters* and *Twilight Lexicon*; and the film review website *Rotten Tomatoes*. Thus a total of ten Internet media texts were used to conduct a textual analysis. The websites were chosen randomly in an old-fashioned-names-from-a-hat system in which two texts from the top ten *Twilight* fan sites that appeared in a Google search were chosen. Twitter pages of those top ten Google searched fan sites were also determined in the same respect. The top two *Twilight* blogs listed on *toptwilightblogs.com* were chosen because of their ranking in the *Twilight* fan community. They must provide an excellent place for fans to visit, communicate, and categorize as top place for activity. *Rotten Tomatoes* serves as a well-known film review generator for critics as well as fans to leave meaningful comments. Official networking sites were also judged as a center for *Twilight* fan culture to (1) dwell and receive important information, and (2) provide new information by leaving comments. Finally, the fan culture that has developed would not be available without analysis of its creator, Stephenie Meyer. Her official website provides invaluable insight to the spurring of the popular media texts listed above.

The aspects noted upon analysis were the type of content that appeared on the pages in a given day, the comments left after posts and within forums, the type of news that was revealed on the official web pages, as well as the links that were provided as gateways to more media texts of that kind. Remembering that the type of content left on these mediums comes from the minds and agency of ordinary people, the popular cultural theories and theorists remain to interpret this popular cultural phenomenon.

Results

Based on support from previous studies, cultural studies theories, active audience theorists, and the textual analysis method, the research questions are closer to being answered. The first fan site visited was the author's official website. On Stepheniemeyer.com, I noticed updates of *Twilight* news or news of her other publications such as *The Host*. News consisted of postings dating back through 2009 before the release of the feature film adaptation of the second installment of the *Twilight Saga*, *New Moon.* Included in these sporadic updates were postings on the release and playlist of the *New Moon* soundtrack, promotion for the movie including sneak peak clips before its release in November 2009, television appearances that Stephenie Meyer would make at the time, pre-order releases of *The Twilight Saga* supplementary books, gear, and apparel. The promotion of links to buy the DVDs, soundtracks, books, and

apparel is a way for the corporations to capitalize off of the fandom. However, what will be seen later is that fan fiction writers poach the text as a way to go against copyrighted material to reproduce and share with their community as a subconscious way to disrupt capitalist ventures. I did not find a place where fans could leave comments or directly interact with Meyer. However, she provides a list of *Twilight* fan sites for the fans that visit her page. Meyer does not manage her official website herself, but rather has a web master mediate the content on the site.

The first fan site viewed was *Lion and Lamb Love*, its title note describing it as "a Twilight fan site to celebrate the love story between Edward and Bella." The postings on this site included whereabouts of the main and supporting cast members such as television appearances, fan spotting of the cast or production team, television and awards show appearances provided with supplementary pictures of these events, news about projects and other movies that cast members and the production team are working on while on hiatus from *The Twilight Saga*, pictures of magazine photo shoots, magazine spreads, candid spotting, as well as video clips of television appearances and interviews with video and transcription verbatim. Fans and visitors to the site are able to leave comments on the updated postings that appear various times each day. Comments included repetition of lines from the movie or book or quoting of the person (cast member or production crewmember) who initially said it. Most were statements of affection or excitement. For example, on pictures of an awards appearance by Kristen Stewart, who plays Bella Swan, one fan left the comment, "so sexy…I LOVE her" on the February 22, 2010 posting (lionandlamb.org). An interesting find, on the other hand, was the deletion of negative comments on the postings. On the same February 22 posting, another fan commented on the skimpy façade of the dress. Observing this comment disappear just a day later enabled me to see that the audiences of the popular text *Twilight* are active and become the producers of a new text to make Kristen Stewart appear in a better light. Fans then poach, as de Certeau would say, the original text, which was the picture of Kristen Stewart, and re-create it by re-posting it on their fan site and eliminating all negative commentary on it. Other fans that commented left remarks and statements as if they were talking to the actors themselves. One example is an interview with Chris Weitz, the director of *New Moon,* who remarks on a scene he regrets putting in the movie. Fans commented on this post as if answering him directly, saying whether or not they laughed during the scene and their opinion or advice to Weitz about what he should or should not have done. This behavior may be explained in the study

conducted by Davisson and Booth (2007) where a parasocial relationship between the real person and celebrity is created. *Lion and Lamb Love* seems to only want positive feedback and commentary on its website. This re-creation of the text in its ideal vision is a form of agency that is exercised by these fans to empower their control over their fan community. Positivity was preferably elicited, thus encouraged. The forum on this website only allowed registered users and members to view comments. This became a limitation for the research.

The second website visited, titled *His Golden Eyes*, gets its name from the color of the eyes Edward has when not hungry for living blood. Like most fan sites, including *Lion and Lamb Love*, the site's content includes exclusive sneak peeks, videos, trivia, games and quizzes, news about new releases pertaining to *The Twilight Saga*, links to a forum, a picture and video gallery, the books and movies, contests, and full character biographies. Most updates and daily postings on one website were duplicated on the various fan sites. Again, most comments were left on the daily postings and they expressed excitement, concern, adoration, opinions, and criticisms. One posting that acquired immense attention and comments involved a fan who made reaction videos to the release of *New Moon* on DVD and exclusive footage of the third movie to be released, *Eclipse*. Fans recorded their thrilled reactions upon watching the exclusive footage. The comments spurred by these videos included support of excitement from other fans along with criticism of the fans that made the videos. Some comments stated that these fans that created them were "too excited" or "made *Twilight* fans look crazy" or like "freaks." Others expressed disdain for people that act like that and have overexcited "freak outs" (hisgoldeneyes.com). The criticism that these fans tolerate may be a reaction to what previous fan culture studies would say is agency against the oppression that ideology places them in, to contain love for an entity. They stand up for what they love by freedom of expression. These fans step out of the expectations and norms set by "regular" society into this fan community where they believe they belong. In the forum of *His Golden Eyes* artwork, fan fiction, poems, and videos made in honor of the saga were collected. The forum is a place for the fans to re-create the text in their own vision, again exercising the act of poaching. Support from Jenkins provides that the art created by these fans is their way of liberating themselves from the ordinariness of their everyday lives (Lewis, 2008). In line with de Certeau, unconsciously these fans appropriate products of corporatist institutions, exercising activism by their fan expertise to reproduce art in order to negotiate their identity (Davisson & Booth, 2007; Lewis, 2008). Fan fiction

and fan art spurred the sense of a fan to see that regular, ordinary people can be involved and engaged with this culture. Female fan fiction writers provided readers with the means to feel like this love story could happen to them as well, since it is happening to regular girls that they re-write into the poached text.

The forum found on *His Golden Eyes* is nearly identical with forums found on other blogs and fan sites. Artwork contains re-creations of characters coupled with someone other than the initial person that follows the narrative of the original story. For example, Edward Cullen would be coupled in a fan rendition of a picture with Rosalie Hale, his vampire "sister" instead of Bella Swan. Fan fiction falls into the same respects. Based on titles of various short stories, novel length fiction, and poetry, it is suggested that the story follows something other than Edward and Bella's love story narrative in *Twilight*. These stories couple the characters in the original text to newly created characters or other characters in *The Twilight Saga*. The characters created by these fans might identify with the producer of the fiction themselves. Again, this signifies what Jenkins adapts from de Certeau, a textual poaching to transform mass culture into popular culture. The meaning that the fan takes from recreating a mass produced text into their own might be a way for them to "repair the inconsistent treatment of female characters" such as Bella Swan (Guinz & Cruz, 2005, p. 255). In addition, Jenkins has provided a reason as to why fans may engage in fan fiction writing. Since most people that belong to the fan group have been "ostracized by mass culture, they seek acceptance of those texts and of themselves from the fan group in which they participate" (Davisson and Booth, 2007, p. 36). Again, writing is done in order to belong and be accepted. In the texts, the fans write of characters they might identify with as the protagonists of the story. This is an example of turning a fictitious character into a real person, which transforms a parasocial relationship into a real social relationship. If the character the fan identifies with is the main love interest of Edward Cullen, for example, then they come to believe that it is their own vampire love story.

Blogs used in analysis include newmoonmovie.org and twilightguide.com. These were listed as the top two *Twilight* blogs. Similar to the fan sites, the content provided consisted of pictures, videos, television promo clips, interviews, and appearances made by the cast and production crew. Like hisgoldeneyes.com, fan reactions to videos were also posted. Behind the scenes sneak previews and footage were main coveted information. Press conferences about the release of several *Twilight Saga* copyrighted entities can also be found on blog sites and fan sites. The *New Moon Movie* blog was specifically

tailored to honor the second book and movie in the saga. Its more recent posted news specifically announced news about the *New Moon* DVD release. The *Twilight Guide* provided more general *Twilight* information than *New Moon Movie*. This included contests, countdown widgets for the third movie *Eclipse* and *New Moon* DVD release, quizzes, fan reaction videos such as those found on the fan sites, daily quotes taken from the book or movie, and a forum as well. A fascinating find on the blogs was the greater amount of comments left by people. This may be due to the exclusiveness of some fan sites that require membership registration and information to leave comments. Blogs seem to be slightly more open to the public, reaching out to non-fans as well. In addition, the *Twilight Guide* celebrates fan art by posting it as updates more so than fan sites that only post official news. For example, one post included *Twilight* inspired cakes. One cake recreated Bella's birthday cake in the movie *New Moon*. Another took the covers of the books and layered them. Comments made were of encouragement and accolade. Others made judgments on the cake of their preference. For instance, one comment left stated "Cool! Those look awesome! The first one is really pretty, so is the second one, the color and flowers are pretty, I love the third one, I always like cakes that look like the third one" (twilightguide.com). Fan art and creativity is more celebrated on the blogs. It is a way for fans to express themselves differently. This re-creation is once again a way to be accepted in a shared community. In addition, *Twilight Guide* also represents other vampire texts such as the television programs "Vampire Diaries" and "True Blood." Polls are also offered for everyone to participate in. Establishing a more open simulation of closer communication and interaction with the text, the *Twilight* community entertains the idea of feeling a sense of belonging. Here, *Twilight* fans find a harbor to express fandom, but other fans of vampire culture are also welcome. Blog analysis easily transitions into the representation of *Twilight* in the social networking world.

In just its first year and a half, Twitter has attacked the world and become one of the key modes of mediated communication. Its main idea is "a real-time information network powered by people all around the world that lets you share and discover what's happening now. Twitter asks 'what's happening' and makes the answer spread across the globe to millions, immediately" (www.twitter.com). Embracing this immediacy of information, two *Twilight* fan sites uphold Twitter pages that constantly update throughout the day. *Twilight Lexicon* and *Twilighters* are two of the top searched fan sites on Google. For the purpose of this study, I followed these pages to receive their updates. Considering that they are both fan sites, both *Lexicon* and *Twilighters* kept

followers up to date with almost minute-by-minute information. In the case of events where these fanatics intended to catch the chance to be in the presence of the cast members, whether it is on television or public appearances, the webmasters of these sites would tweet every detail and a play-by-play account of what the celebrity said or what they did. Also, cast and crewmembers of *The Twilight Saga* have their own official Twitter pages. Fans, fan sites, and fan blogs would re-tweet what the celebrity was saying onto their page or Twitter. Re-tweeting is copying and pasting or copying and disseminating the original post, for instance from a fan site, to one's own twitter page so that their followers may see a message from a person they may otherwise not be following. This served as a way to feel closer to the cast or crewmembers that were tweeting in real time as if they are experiencing it with the poster of the original tweet. Again, as Davisson and Booth (2007) have reported, this is the act of closing the parasocial gap and establishing what feels like a social and communicative relationship with them and making them a real person. Surprisingly, the principal members of the cast do not have Twitter accounts. The impact of them creating Twitter accounts would change the fandom dynamic and support the method coined by Davisson and Booth (2007) called "projected interactivity," defined as "Fans, Fanatics, and Groupies: Loving something until it Hurts" (33). Closing the distance between real life and fiction would be highly exercised. By re-tweeting an update left by the cast or production crew of *Twilight,* a fan gains a sense of involvement with the other person.

Two of the mogul networking sites that have increased in popularity in the twenty-first century are Facebook and MySpace. As venues for individuals to express themselves and keep in touch with a greater network of friends, they provide a haven for fans to also keep in touch via communal ties. Unsurprisingly, content of this nature was found on the official *Twilight Saga* Facebook page. The main focus of the news posts were on the upcoming DVD release of *New Moon.* Appearances, awards, interviews, magazine photo shoots, press candids, and polls were also provided on this page. In the comments, interestingly, I found the same type of ridicule about a picture of Kristen Stewart that I found on the *Lion and Lamb Love* fan site. Although fans would critique Stewart in a negative way, pictures of Taylor Lautner, who plays Bella's best friend Jacob Black, were accepted. This may be explained by the fact that *Twilight* has mainly attracted a female fan base. For one thing, Meyer is a female writer. According to Jenkins, Meyer, as well as the female fan fiction writers, is reclaiming "feminine interests from the margins of 'masculine' texts" (Guinz and Cruz, 2005, p. 253). The critique of Stewart with a minimum amount of coverage as opposed

to the acceptance to revel in a picture of Lautner half nude is seen as a sign of empowerment for women from patriarchal subordination, as it is now the male as the object of the female gaze. The woman should control her body rather than be the object of the male gaze. The action of these fans on gawking at Lautner's body and rejecting that Stewart should parade around in a skimpy outfit aligns itself with previous studies about feminist empowerment. Women should be active agents of their femininity rather than succumbing to patriarchal social constructs to parade in showy clothing for male attention.

Like the blogs, Facebook is open for the public to comment. That is, those that own Facebook accounts may post a comment on another's Facebook page. *Twilight* fans worldwide were able to comment on news as it was posted. All comments came in various languages, indicating that this cultural phenomenon has acquired an international fan base. Though mass culture shuns these fans, the large community of fan sites, blogs, and social networking sites rejoices in its own culture representing and sharing identities throughout the globe.

Lastly, MySpace positions itself as a disseminator of important *Twilight* news, like the various venues listed above. MySpace's *Twilight Saga* page offered personality tests, which aligns fans with the *Twilight* character they are most like. No fan site links showed up unless fans themselves posted them. Instead, links to official store merchandise, or sites that provide a place to purchase the music, or official websites pertaining to the movie, were found. Most comments found on MySpace were from fans excited for upcoming releases or upcoming appearances. The meaning made from this is to stay professional and official as a social networking site. MySpace harbored carefully constructed constraints such as lack of fan site posting and current official information. It is a place for fans to express themselves through comments and personality quizzes. However, it is not a way for fans to express themselves through agency. This serves as an example of being ostracized by mass culture, as Jenkins has remarked. Fans were only limited to posting comments and creating a forum aside from the official merchandising this social networking site exercised. Although fan expression was not openly supported on MySpace, fans could still take away from this Internet text and create their own. For example, although created and provided only by the webmasters behind the *Twilight* MySpace page, a fan could personalize their own computer screen with the *New Moon* skins available for download. The personality test could also serve as an agent to close the gap between the fan and the celebrity, enabling a closer identification with them.

Rotten Tomatoes provided insight about how the film ranked among a community of movie watchers. A diverse opinion was expressed about the movie. Receiving a 54 percent rating on its "tomato meter," *Rotten Tomatoes* served only as a source for movie critics, fans, and non-fans of the saga to express their true opinion of the film adaptation of the book. Comments were split between celebrating the movie and its premise and thinking it was a complete fail or that there was no need for celebration. Many comments also projected the movie adaptation's failure to capture the original book. Instead of supplying a haven for fans to express themselves I interpreted *Rotten Tomatoes* as anti-fan. It represented the way that mass culture shuns and ostracizes fan activity to become agents and recreate their culture to belong to and rejoice in. The critics that leave comments are exercising patriarchal ideologies of what a "good" film should entail. This venue does not allow for creativity and agency, but instead what de Certeau calls "the socially strong." The critics are not the strong ones; rather, they are the socially weak since poaching, recreation, and re-production of the *Twilight* text among the fan sites and blogs take originally copyrighted material to spread farther and wider than the critics and corporate institutions could imagine. The critics on *Rotten Tomatoes* are trying to instill a dominant ideology, but fans are not discouraged nor halted from expressing their agency and identities elsewhere.

Twilight fan culture extracts meaning from the text to empower itself and fans' self-identity. Rather than being subordinates in love and lust, fans identify with Bella as a fighter for the love and life that she desires, vampire or human. According to Davisson and Booth (2007), *Twilight* fans speak as if they know the characters in real life. Fans would criticize other fans to make them look greater. This is an example of identity negotiation; as Davisson and Booth put it, "fan communities are shaped and structured by a tension between the communal expectations and individual desires, manifested in an individual's socialization" (p. 37). This shows that there is a growth of cultural norms within a fan community.

By supporting this study with the active and creative audiences theory and cultural theorists such as de Certeau, Jenkins, and Fiske, it is clear how fans of *The Twilight Saga* are not just passive dupes of capitalism and dominant ideology. According to de Certeau, fans are poachers who recreate texts as their own. The fan fiction writers are an example. Not only are they poachers but they become the socially strong as they subconsciously liberate themselves from capitalism. This is done by recreating and disseminating those new forms of the original copyrighted texts. The fans not only receive Meyer's *Twilight,* but

they also are given the chance to indulge in the variations of the love story that their own peers create. Following de Certeau's three characteristics of resistance, the fans do this unconsciously, in the midst of everyday life, and practice to maximize their pleasures and satisfactions by poaching the narrative and disseminating it for consumption by others for no profit (Lewis, 2008).

In line with Fiske, the pleasure that the fans receive from re-creating texts to satisfy their own cravings for the vampire love story are being freed from what Fiske calls "the instrumental rationalities and order of patriarchal capitalism" (Lewis, 2008, p. 227). By creating meaning out of *Twilight* beyond the original idea presented by the author, fans are creating their own culture, one not consistent with what dominant culture expects. These people are freeing themselves from high culture, or what is considered high art. Art in a museum will not stop these fans from creating paintings, stories, or poetry about *Twilight*. They are creating popular culture and engaging in discrimination about which mass produced products to consume. In this case they choose *Twilight* over others. To make meaning out of the text and create their own culture represents agency of the fans who step up beyond dominant cultural ideology. Art is meant to be shared on an everyday level.

Jenkins serves as the forerunner of this study with his accounts of fandom. Connecting through *The Twilight Saga*, fans find it as a "central symbol, a way of bringing order, meaning and community to his or her everyday experiences" (Lewis, 2008, p. 233). By building a culture that brought a sense of community to these fans, they were able to feel as if they belonged somewhere and understand their actions as a *Twilight* fan, giving them personal pleasure and satisfaction that comes with identification with others. Fans found acceptance with the *Twilight* fan sites, blogs, and social networking sites' pages. These places were a safe refuge from the ostracism of mass culture. Popular expression and fandom are accepted in the *Twilight* fan community. Fans also attempted to close the distance between themselves and the fictitious character by having their own rendition of the love story in a fan fiction, or a designed banner stating "I love Edward Cullen" as a representation of their own being. One level of fandom that Jenkins talked about was that a fan should learn the fan community's expectations. This was demonstrated by fans who abided by the fan fiction post rules. These rules stated that only stories pertaining to *Twilight* were allowed. Nothing on the fan sites went outside of the *Twilight* or vampire community. These fans were also activists, such as site editors of *Lion and Lamb Love* who ridded the blog's content of negative comments to uphold a friendly and positive fan community. The appropriation of Meyer's original

text was seen as a way to challenge corporate powers of copyright control, which drew these fans from mainstream cultural capitalism (Lewis, 2008). Recreation through fan fiction, fan art, and fan expression via commentary brought the meaning of *Twilight* to fans in forms of empowerment, agency, community, belonging, and relationship construction. The fan culture sprouting from *The Twilight Saga* does not reside far from the fan culture of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dracula.* Issues of agency, empowerment, and self-identity continue to embed themselves within these texts. The greater difference is that analysis of *Twilight* has not been as exhaustive as vampire texts that have been around for a greater amount of time.

Conclusion

The research questions of this study asked why *Twilight* is so important to its fans, what meaning is represented to its fans, and if it differs from previous vampire culture. By studying the content and comments on fan sites, fan blogs, social networking websites, the author's official page, and film review website, these questions were readily answered. This study does not differ greatly from previous examinations of vampire culture. The importance of *Twilight* to its fans would be due to its utilization as a tool for agency and freedom of expression to a community that does not conform to ideological norms of mass culture. The fandom of this text is a form of popular culture. It enables regular people to belong to a subset of a larger culture in order to feel accepted by people that share the same ideas. By breaking from their everyday, mundane lives, fans are able to live every day more meaningfully.

The Twilight Saga has taken vampire culture to another level in the twenty-first century. How its fans make sense of it may differ from other groups, especially those groups whom the fans break away from, dominant culture and their ideology. Cultural studies research has paved a path to understand fan cultures and the meanings behind popular texts. The commentary by main cast and director, Catherine Hardwick, of *Twilight* may make meaning of the text in different ways than its fans. Even film critics found a different meaning of *Twilight*. They viewed it through the lens of what Fiske called "popular discrimination" (Guinz and Cruz, 2005, p. 215) rather than through the lens of a fan. These critics engage in popular discrimination such that they choose which movie (the text) to view to seek pleasure. They are discriminating among texts, which are artifacts of popular culture.

Limitations of this study were the time constraints and amount of texts that could be utilized. The amount of fan sites and blogs multiply day by day, as each

book of the saga gets adapted to the big screen. Technical problems encountered included the amount of bandwidth that a website would occupy. Excessive amounts of content are uploaded onto the examined sites daily, making it harder to access previous information conveniently. What was viewed on one day was not easily obtained the next day because of the ongoing flow of massive amounts of information. Also, a random sampling of all Internet text should have been used not only for fan sites. The texts studied lack an ability to generalize to the greater population of *Twilight* fans or *Twilight* texts. Other subsets of this fan culture should also have been examined. Those include "Twilight moms," "Twilight teens," "Twilighters anonymous," or the all-male population of *Twilight* fans, in addition to the majority female populace. The inability to sign onto particular forums due to need of fan site membership and registration was also a constraint. Not all aspects of fan art and fiction were allowable for viewing aside from the comments. Becoming a member of these sites in a further study and following pages on Twitter would provide for a more enhanced research experience.

Limitations cannot constrain the need for more research. This study may be the first of its kind and will hopefully lead to greater cultural studies of the *Twilight* text as succeeding and concluding installments of *The Twilight Saga* films continue to be released. Expanding from textual analysis must be considered. Ethnographic research may be considered to gain first-hand experience to better understand the meaning of actual fans to discover reasons as to why and how they make sense of the phenomenon by attending *Twilight* events. Interviews may also be conducted with fans for the opportunity to gather information as fans directly express themselves, for the sake of research. The meaning interpreted by the researcher may prove to be different from the meaning acquired from real fans. This is only the beginning of an explanation to a cultural phenomenon. Culture happens every day and everywhere. Popular culture even resides within the vampire world that fans continue to bite into.

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