Preferring gender roles?

On women’s romantic preferences in relation to the cultural phenomenon of Twilight

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Abstract
The Twilight saga is one of the absolute biggest cross-cultural phenomena we have seen so far in the 21st century. The dramatic love story of the beautiful vampire and the ordinary teenage girl, written by Mormon housewife Stephenie Meyer, has made billions of dollars and engaged a huge predominately young, female audience from around the world. The Twilight phenomenon has also received a wide range of criticism, from misogynistic ridicule to legitimate commentary on the conservative and gendered elements of the narrative.

This thesis aims to examine why so many female fans idealize and prefer a relationship based on strong and dominant expressions of masculinity and a marginalized and self-sacrificing femininity. Tools used are combinations of concepts of adaptive preferences and symbolic violence, entailing the historical and social construct of inequity, making women embrace sex differences as natural. I highlight the potential emancipatory feature of Twilight that is the female libido, but maintain that the object of love and lust of Twilight fans remains the hypermasculine male.

Keywords: Adaptive preferences, symbolic violence, romance, Twilight, hypermasculinity, female libido.
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1. Introduction

Do you really have any idea how important you are to me? Any concept at all of how much I love you?” He pulled me tighter against his hard chest, tucking my head under his chin.

I pressed my lips against his snow-cold neck. “I know how much I love you,” I answered.

“You compare one small tree to the entire forest.”

I rolled my eyes, but he couldn’t see. “Impossible”

He kissed me on the top of my head and sighed.

“No werewolves.”

“I’m not going along with that. I have to see Jacob”

“Then I’ll have to stop you.”

He sounded utterly confident that this wouldn’t be a problem.

I was sure he was right.¹

1.1. An essential paragraph overlooked?

In the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), article 5, we read:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.”²

There is no excessive mentioning of this short paragraph in CEDAW. It is not subject to many reservations, although the Convention is known for being paralyzed by reservations made by skeptic State Parties. This is remarkable, since it may well be argued that a moderation “of social and cultural patterns” that serves sexism and gender roles is crucial, if not essential, when working toward eliminating discrimination against women and promoting equality between the sexes. Legislative measures on equality before the law; equal representation and political participation cannot replace feminist attitudes. Many states that are having problems with discrimination against women have gender neutral or even female friendly

² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 19 December, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13, para. 5 (a)
constitutions which, for instance, both India\textsuperscript{3} and the U.S. exemplify. Perhaps paragraph 5 (a) is too loosely worded to cause a more alert debate among State Parties, but that is a slightly different story. What this thesis aims to do is to give an example of how powerful cultural and social patterns of individually integrated sexism still prosper in Western society, even though Western states may appear relatively equal at first sight in comparison to development countries.

Even with the Obama administration claiming to be CEDAW friendly,\textsuperscript{4} the U.S. remains the only industrialized country in the world that has yet to ratify the Convention. It is also one of the absolute largest producers of pop culture in the world - a force to be reckoned with in the identification process for young consumers. This is too often a commercialized forum where “the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women” grow and flourish, and it is here young people face the demands and standard-setting of contemporary Western society.

This study uses the pop cross-cultural phenomenon of the Twilight saga as an example of how consuming gendered romance might stimulate an embrace of conservative gender roles that ultimately might pose a challenge to a progressive and equal society where women experience the same sense of entitlement to rights as men. The purpose is to show that Western academics need not to go to developing countries to find women who are comfortable in their gender roles. This thesis is guided by the question: Is Twilight counterproductive to female emancipation?

1.2. Introducing Twilight

The story begins with high school student Bella Swan moving out to the rainy small town of Forks, Washington, to live with her father. She is a clumsy, quiet thinker who always feels out of place, until the day she meets Edward Cullen – a reserved 17-year-old that turns out to be a vampire from the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. They are instantly drawn to each other; she because she is amazed by him and he because of her exceptionally irresistible blood scent.

Edward is not the only man in Bella’s life. The Native American Jacob Black soon

\textsuperscript{3} Nussbaum, Martha Craven, \textit{Kvinnors liv och social rättvisa: ett försvar för universella värden}, Daidalos, Göteborg, 2002, p. 45-52

\textsuperscript{4} Lowen, Linda, \textit{CEDAW - What is President Obama's Position on CEDAW?}, About.com Women’s Issues, 2010
becomes Bella’s best friend and as it turns out, he and the young men of his tribe (with the exception of one young woman) can turn into wolves in order to fight off vampires threatening humans in the area. Edward is part of a vampire family that only feeds on animal blood but suspicion and rivalry arises as Bella spends more time with Edward and the Cullens. Bella’s mind soon becomes set on an immortal life with Edward, for which she is prepared to give up her family, college and beating heart. Despite the danger Bella faces due to her involvement with vampires, her determination never changes.

Jacob, who thinks of himself as a better alternative for Bella than Edward, strongly resists the idea of Bella becoming a vampire. As does Edward, who is always very concerned with her safety and refuses to have sex with Bella or turn her into a vampire until she agrees to marry him after graduation. On their honeymoon, the newlyweds have sex for the first time in an act so pleasurable to Edward that he apparently bruises Bella, bites the pillows and breaks the bed. It should be added that Bella enjoyed the sexual encounter so much that she did not even notice the bruising.

Shortly after that, she discovers that she is pregnant and is almost killed by her fast growing vampire fetus, which she refuses to abort. Bella is turned into a vampire right after delivery and miraculously wakes up from the brink of death. The saga has a happy ending where Edward and Bella are the first vampire couple in the world to have a biological child, becoming a nuclear family where such families were seemingly impossible.

This skeptic summary renders Twilight a rather bleak story with strong conservative, heteronormative and gendered features. This is because the most important ingredient of Twilight has been left out: love. The love between the vampire man and the human woman has the power to dominate and marginalize all warning signs of female submission, abuse and violence. As exemplified in the opening quote, controlling behavior is wrapped up in almost fatherly love, disarming protest into slight irritation and occasional defiance.

It is hard to find a modern love story that compares to Twilight, yet it possesses all the goods of a classic fairytale. A forbidden, all consuming, can’t-live-without-each-other love is sexed up with supernatural characters, six-packs, fancy cars and golden eyes. The books Twilight (2005), New Moon (2006), Eclipse (2007), and Breaking Dawn (2008) are either made into screenplays or are in production. “Twilight” will here be used as an umbrella term for the series or phenomenon, while reference to
specific books or movies will be italicized.

Author Stephenie Meyer is a devoted Mormon housewife from Phoenix, Arizona, educated at openly Mormon Brigham Young University in Utah, whose religious beliefs shine through in her work, despite the fact that her characters are not religious. However, in an oversexed American youth culture, Meyer offers something else: old-fashioned romance and abstinence porn or “the erotics of abstinence” as Lev Grossman at Time Magazine puts it. "I get some pressure to put a big sex scene in," Meyer says. "But you can go anywhere for graphic sex. It's harder to find a romance where they dwell on the hand-holding. I was a late bloomer. When I was 16, holding hands was just - wow."  

Suffice to say, holding hands turned out to be an instant success. In 2008, Meyer sold more copies than any other author, 22 million books. 50 countries have bought translation rights and in 2010, the Twilight saga had been sold in 116 million copies. Meyer’s success is often compared to J. K. Rowling’s, and despite Meyer’s more simplistic literary constructions, Twilight has been known to top Harry Potter on booklists. Like the Harry Potter fans, Twilight fans dress up, write fan fiction, create Twilight inspired bands, make t-shirts and spend lots of money traveling long distances to various events.

Like the saga, the predominately female fan base is often critiqued in more or less legitimate manners. There is a strong anti-fandom containing several misogynistic expressions. The movie New Moon was promoted at the comics and popular arts show Comic-Con of 2009, and as it turned out, many people were less than welcoming towards the “hordes of screaming fan girls” and decided to demonstrate with signs saying: "Twilight ruined Comic-Con." Lisa Bode draws a decisive parallel between a negative review of the Twilight books and films to a negative review of the audience. Detached, rational and masculinist cultural critics have frequently dismissed Twilight as a commercialized “cash-machine” and the female audience as a “squeaky

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9 Grossman, 2008
voiced” swarming flock of mass-hysteria. The girls are used as examples of poor cultural capital in comparison to well-informed reviewers who know the difference between a great vampire movie and a pale copy.\textsuperscript{11}

An important challenge of this thesis is not falling into that cynic category of Twilight critique. Instead, this study aims to describe the complexity of the female reactions to Twilight, as well as it attempts to give possible explanations to mentioned reactions.

2. Methodology and procedure

The size of the Twilight community makes for an overwhelming amount of material. This increases the importance of a well-kept focus that will allow the researcher to find and keep a focus when choosing what material to work with and what to sort out.

In consistency with the purpose of the study, selected examples will in one way or another visualize how traditional gender roles still are perceived as attractive and desirable by some people, even though they live in progressive Western societies where equality is said to be important and widely implemented. The concept of traditional gender roles refers here to socially constructed sets of behavioral duties that men and women are separately assigned by society.\textsuperscript{12}

The examples used in the Findings-section of this particular study are all internet-based sources and consist of blog posts, comment field discussions, forum discussions, pop articles and Youtube videos – all circulating the hot topic of the Twilight phenomenon. The statements are interpreted and analyzed through coding, a method extracted from grounded theory. Kathy Charmaz describes coding as a short and concrete way of defining action, detecting assumptions and revealing processes in data. What is being said and what does it indicate about social justice? Coding primarily done in the Findings-section lays the analytic foundation for further syntetisizing data, which is done in the Discussion-section.\textsuperscript{13} Further procedural information of particular parts of the thesis, including some methodological issues, is outlined in connection to section where that is needed rather than here, for the sake of


\textsuperscript{12} World Health Organization, What do we mean by ”sex” and ”gender”?, 2011

When searching for signs of embraced gender roles in the Twilight audience, purposeful sampling strategy of qualitative research is used. According to John W. Creswell, this means that the data collected serves the purpose of the study as it stimulates an understanding for the research problem or phenomenon. Since this research is highly theoretically based, the qualitative sampling form mostly used is theory based sampling, where examples of the theoretical construct are selected and examined.\textsuperscript{14}

In the case of Twilight, there is a wide range of both negative and positive opinions being expressed. Since the love for Twilight is examined here, these expressions are primarily chosen and presented over the ones that dislike Twilight, although some “haters” are quoted for the sake of a more nuanced and dynamic study in places where that is fitting. This will allow Twilight fans to state their positive opinions against the negative. Thus, theory based sampling is combined with a small amount of confirming and disconfirming sampling, where we occasionally elaborate on the initial analysis by inserting exceptions.\textsuperscript{15} The time and page limit prevents this to be done to a wider extent.

Still, partisan research can be done with a purpose, without excessive excuses. Critical research and theory, according to Joel L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren, acknowledges that hegemonic power relations in principle influence all forms of human interaction and that this must be taken into account when performing qualitative studies. A criticalist researcher bears this assumption in mind as she uses her work a form of cultural or social criticism.\textsuperscript{16} This approach is very much in line with the theoretic framework of this thesis, to which we now turn.

3. Literature review

This section is meant to provide a theoretical background to the thesis. The first subsection is devoted to academic work that deals with concepts of socially constructed inequity between men and women, primarily adaptive preferences and

\textsuperscript{15} Creswell, 2007, 125-129
symbolic violence. The concepts are selected because they offer models of explanation as to why inequality can be approved by both subordinator and subordinated.

As we narrow down the literature review from abstract theories to the specific example of Twilight, a section about female romance consumption will provide a better understanding for the case in question. Romance is selected because it is a genre within pop culture that has a relationship-based narrative with the power to create norms of the ideal relationship between man and woman for readers or viewers. These norms and ideals appeal to emotions, fortifying preferences that might be especially difficult to disrupt.

3.1. Symbolic violence, chain hugging and adaptive preferences

It cannot be considered especially bold to say that women (with a few exceptions) on a global level are, and have always been, subject to conscious or unconscious male domination. This subordination takes on more or less tangible proportions – some societies deny women equality under the law while others discriminate in a more structural manner. Gendered hegemony is more or less mentally integrated in a vast majority of both men and women, commonly allowing patriarchy to remain unchallenged, and even defended by both sexes.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the expression “symbolic violence” as a means of deconstructing the paradox as to why male dominance and female subordination is widely accepted. Bourdieu states that this is made possible because of a historic process of uninterrupted reproduction of gendered inequality, where multiple agents – both individuals and institutions – contribute. Over time, inequality is perceived as something natural to both men and women, and women may start belittling themselves systematically and feel inadequate in their own skin. Bourdieu links this feeling of inferiority to the tendency of women preferring male partners whose masculinity are in contrast to the female femininity - men that are taller and older, for example.

17 I would like to thank associate professor of philosophy and lector of human rights Lena Halldenius for advising this particular part of my thesis.


20 Bourdieu, 1999, p. 11-13

21 Bourdieu, 1999, p. 47-49
According to Bourdieu, an awakened will to disrupt symbolic violence may not be enough to cause actual change, because the powerful effects of it are deeply carved into our bodies and dispositions. In other words, sense may still be overrun by sensibility. He also warns us not to translate this sexist disposition of bodies into women actually choosing to be subordinated. Symbolic violence entails contribution by the ones who are subject to it, but Bourdieu maintains that the blame should be put on the patriarchal structures of society that make women take part in their own subordination.22

The historic importance for the construction of inequality that Bourdieu underlines was already acknowledged in the late 18th century by feminist thinker Mary Wollstonecraft: “Considering the length of time that women have been dependent, is it surprising that some of them hug their chains, and fawn like the spaniel?”23 In the eyes of Wollstonecraft, the female sexuality renders women either slaves or despots of men and claims that both positions work counterproductive to female mental emancipation. She regrets that women take on their assigned roles of hyperfeminine ornaments, enjoying and romanticizing the unnatural, hollow and fickle privileges of being desired by men instead of utilizing their minds for the rational thinking of which they are essentially capable.24

Contemporary philosopher Martha C Nussbaum expands on capabilities and argues that gendered unequal participation in political and social life has a negative impact on women’s so called human capabilities. Human capabilities, according to Nussbaum, refer to how well a person can live up to a decent life. In the liberal sense of the word, what political goals are humans actually capable of achieving without being influenced metaphysically? If we start with the universalistic rights principle of every human being and end in herself, the next thing we need to do is to look to every human’s capability to act on this – not as an instrument for others, but of for the end that lies within herself. 25 Nussbaum lists a few central human capabilities that she argues are universally important for well-being and for a decent life. Examples of Nussbaum’s normative central human capabilities are life and health, integrity of body and mind, reflective abilities and political participation.26

22 Bourdieu, 1999 p. 52-55
23 Wollstonecraft, Mary, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792, chapter V, para. 23,
24 Wollstonecraft, 1792, chapter IV
25 Nussbaum, 2002, p. 24-26
Too many women are not being regarded as ends in themselves, but providers for others ends and wellbeing in terms of care giving, reproduction, sex, and family stability. The female role of the nurturer is perceived exceptionally natural, although it is an artificial construction that is culturally and socially reproduced and projected onto the female sex from infancy.\textsuperscript{27} By starting off with a list of central human capabilities, the concept of adaptive preferences begins to explore the connection between women historically being refused certain capabilities or rights, and their conceptions of selves as right holders.\textsuperscript{28} Adaptive preferences are shaped unconsciously, beyond individual control\textsuperscript{29} and therefore will the preference theory allow us to second-guess women’s personal choices when these preferences show signs of being products of patriarchal influence and manipulation.

Sandrine Berges, leaning towards Nussbaum’s universalism, highlights the dividing line between educated decisions in life versus accepting a situation because you don’t know how things could be different, through using the example of taking a vow of silence in comparison to never being taught how to speak.\textsuperscript{30} Nussbaum would say that this is the relation between \textit{capability} and \textit{function}, where an educated choice to remain silent is a change in function rather than the political capability as a member of society.\textsuperscript{31}

The idea that adaptive preferences pose a threat to rights fulfillment is recognizable in \textit{Rights as Enforceable Claims} by Susan James. She argues that human rights only live up to their name when they are fully implemented and both provider and receiver play their part. In other words, James does not settle for passive institutions as rights providers, but extends their responsibility to reach out to those members of society that for some reason are unlikely to claim their rights, or even know their rights. She uses the example of a tight, patriarchal minority community as a platform from which young women would possibly have a hard time claiming rights from. “It would be extremely difficult to turn these young women into effective claimants, and to ensure that the obligations out of which their rights emerge were met”,\textsuperscript{32} she writes.

\textsuperscript{27} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 313-315
\textsuperscript{28} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 144-145
\textsuperscript{29} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 172
\textsuperscript{31} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 190
When dealing with the concept of adaptive preferences, there is always an element of risk, the risk of falling into the paternalistic trap that you aim to deconstruct. Feminists attacking contentedness with conservative gender roles often encounter accusations of being anti-democratic and totalitarian.\textsuperscript{33} How can this universalist approach legitimize interfering with women’s personal choices? Why should we not trust what women claim to be happy about? Do women need yet another voice telling them how to live their lives and what is best for them? These concerns might be even more justified when expanding adaptive preferences in an attempt to apply the concept to Western society and situations which are not necessarily a matter of the most basic principles of human rights, liberties and dignities. Then again, how can we blindly accept and rely on judgments or preferences that seem to be products of complex structural hierarchies? How can we ignore society’s norms, traditions, expectations and inequalities as factors in people’s processes of identification and decision-making? The initially Marxist idea, if not terminology, of a “false consciousness” has been used by Bourdieu\textsuperscript{34} and been reinvented in both feminist and liberal political theory,\textsuperscript{35} and must be considered well established.

The cultural or neocolonialist “outsider” critique that Nussbaum has faced\textsuperscript{36} may be avoided and taken into account if switching focus from one sexist society to another, from development countries to a similar complex of problems more close to home. What will prove useful to extract here from the concept of adaptive preferences is a tool, combined the concept of symbolic violence, with which we might critically examine how preferences are shaped in connection to the circumstantial power balance of the society in question. I argue that the concept would benefit from being applied to all kinds of socioeconomic contexts and not just third world societies.

\textbf{3.2. Preferring romance}

The experience of romance is not one-dimensional, but a highly subjective and complex one where writer and reader negotiate the implications of the female gender role of society. According to Janice A. Radway, the act of \textit{reading} romance can be considered oppositional towards patriarchy, since escapist romance reading symbolizes taking time for yourself and indulging in something for your own pleasure

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\textsuperscript{33} Berges, 2011, p. 74-76
\textsuperscript{34} Bourdieu, 1999, p. 54
\textsuperscript{35} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 147
\textsuperscript{36} Berges 2011, p. 74
\end{flushright}
and thereby momentarily refusing the feminine social role of caregiver for others. On the other hand, the act of writing romance can potentially be regarded as condoning or giving in to patriarchy, as the romance story dynamics between hero and heroine usually play into more or less stereotyped gender roles.  

Romance has its first cultural success at the end of the 18th century. Dry reason was to give way to a sensible and creative enlightenment through which real knowledge and truth could be reached. Although sentimentality was considered essentially female, the romance era had less to do with women and relationships and more to do with the ideal of the exceptional male protagonist adopting “female qualities” - keeping his masculine physique and rational intellect but combining it with an intuitional and emotional state of mind.

The ideal contemporary romance story orbits around the unfolding relationship between man and woman and consequently, the male still plays a vital part in romance stories even though romance of today is told from a female perspective. The description above is rather reminiscent of the ideal romantic hero, said to be an exceptionally fine specimen of the male sex, his very being humming with masculinity and virility, but with certain vital sensitive features. The women Radway studies want both: “strong but gentle”, masculine but caring”, “protective of her but tender”.  

The ideal heroine tends to have something very unique to her, a special ability or occupation that sets her apart from parents or other women. She has intelligence, alluring beauty that she is unaware of and a sense of autonomy, usually associated with masculinity. She also has an inexperienced innocence to her, defiant as the young woman of late teens or early twenties that she usually is. All of these qualities in combination with a caring side will make this “true woman” able to tame the hypermasculine man and bring out the sensitive, dependent and faithful man in him. Romance makes his transformation her responsibility and failure will be blamed on her as an imperfect woman or wife and not him and his inability to change.

39 Radway, 1991, p.122  
40 Radway, 1991, p. 128  
41 Radway, 1991, p. 130  
42 Radway, 1991, p. 123-128
Tracy Allen compares a “regular” romance story (roughly consisting of a hero and heroine meeting and falling in love, facing trials and tribulations, overcoming difficulties and uniting in the end) with a romantic suspense story. The romantic suspense is darker romance with elements of danger, where “the woman in jeopardy” needs to put her trust to that the potentially harmful man she is falling in love will refrain from hurting her. He might have been convicted in the past or accused of serious crime by people in their surroundings. In this sub-genre, the taming of the uncivilized, rough man becomes especially vital, the ultimate test the heroine is put to. Her life may even depend upon it.  

This type of romance resembles what Radway would call a “failed romance”, a romance that the women she studied found lacking. Radway points out that it is important for both heroine and readers to be rewarded for their emotional struggle with their relationship to the hero. Feelings of frustration and anger towards the male protagonist’s indifference or mistreatment of the heroine are neutralized when he finally comes around and it is explained why he acted like he did. This reinterpretation seems crucial in romance, since it allows the consumers to legitimize the male character’s emotional unavailability, dismissal or even cruelty. In failed romances, this process does not work as smoothly as in the ideal ones – the hero is more prone to independence and violence and shows little signs of transformation in the end. Still, this dangerous hypermasculinity creates sexual tension as it draws on the gendered differences between the sexes. Ultimately, despite alarming misogynistic behavior, masculinity is still perceived as something essentially good for women.

Even though these types of romantic stories are sold, they seem not to be preferred. The women explained to Radway that they prefer something “light and escapist” that would take their minds of their problems. Escapism is a central reason for consumption of romance literature. According to Radway’s studies, this escapism is experienced in two slightly different nuances. First, the literary escape that reading offers from the present, and second, the escape to another fictional “reality” where the reader gets to experience the exciting world of the female protagonist.

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44 Radway, 1991, p. 157-158
45 Radway, 1991, p. 168
46 Radway, 1991, p. 159
Radway’s informant Dot compares women’s romance reading to their husbands’ television watching and states that the romance reading allows the women to travel to another place, while television is more of a distraction for men. Dot thinks that this female immersion of romance reading is the primary reason of male aversion towards it, rather than the actual content of the stories. Most of the women interviewed say that their husbands hate or resent their wives’ intense readings, feeling shut out, threatened or jealous.\textsuperscript{47} Many women experience being ridiculed by both family and media over their romance consumption and start feeling guilty about having “bad taste” in books. Dot points out the double standard: men watching sports are not being blamed for spending their free time on low quality entertainment, while women reading romance seem to be an easy target.\textsuperscript{48}

Guilty pleasure or not, romance is pleasure, there is no question about it. But is it a truly emancipating pleasure? Radway points out that the romance narrative represents a utopia for female readers where female autonomy and independence can harmonize with care-giving and nurturance.\textsuperscript{49} Furthermore, the sexuality and desire of both heroine and female consumer is kept within heterosexual limits and preferably in connection with love. The ultimate goal is still marriage and monogamy, maintaining that female sexuality is socially constructed rather than an instinctive urge.\textsuperscript{50}

The romance genre and its publisher’s branding strategies tend to focus on “girls” and “women” as if they were a homogenous group, underlining that reading is a gendered medium. The fact is that Western women read more than Western men and they read more fiction than their male peers, which publishers pick up on and therefore market accordingly.\textsuperscript{51}

Still, romance remains a possibly progressive forum for women to negotiate sexuality with publishers, society and among themselves. Feminist input could contribute to a more updated genre, although to call for an academic or intellectual rewrite must be considered borderline elitist. We find ourselves balancing on the same fine line as we did with adaptive preferences: Who are privileged academics to say what is best for girls and women? The key to move forward seems to be not to

\textsuperscript{47} Radway, 1991, p. 90-91
\textsuperscript{48} Radway, 1991, p. 54
\textsuperscript{49} Radway, 1991, p. 55
\textsuperscript{50} Radway, 1991, p. 16-17
\textsuperscript{51} Steiner, Ann, ”Gendered Readings: Bella’s Books and Literary Consumer Culture”, in: Larsson, Mariah & Steiner, Ann (red.), Interdisciplinary approaches to Twilight studies in fiction, media and a contemporary cultural experience, Nordic Academic Press, Lund, 2011, p. 207-208
underestimate women’s reflective abilities and to have a dialogue about the personal relations that are idealized and reproduced through the romance genre. Let’s not forget that the romance narrative has the power to become a female channel for deconstructive criticism of patriarchy.\textsuperscript{52}

4. Findings

4.1. Reactions to Twilight: Love at first sight

The love story that is the cultural phenomenon of Twilight came to Meyer in a dream. In the dream, two people are having an intense discussion on a meadow in the woods regarding the implications of their love. Meyer writes: “One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire.”\textsuperscript{53} The fact that the lovers Bella and Edward are different species from different worlds, and that the vampire faces an insatiable thirst for the girl’s blood makes for a dangerous and dynamic infatuation.

Nevertheless, it is an absolute love, as Bella expresses in the first book \textit{Twilight}:

”About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was a part of him - and I didn't know how potent that part might be - that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him.”\textsuperscript{54}

This all-consuming love is also felt by the wide range of “fanpries” and “twihards” around the world, of different ages and backgrounds. According to blogger at Psychology Today and Psy.D Samantha Smithstein, it appears that Twilight has the power to create an obsession with some cases of middle-aged women up to the point of sleeplessness and dissolved relationships and marriages. She writes “women struggle with feeling out of control about the time and emotion related to the books, movies, and stars.”\textsuperscript{55}

Literature scholar Ann Steiner is one of the authors of the anthology \textit{Interdisciplinary approaches to Twilight}. She tells us about her constant reading around the clock and even locking herself in her workroom to cry over the pages -

\textsuperscript{52} Radway, 1991, p. 17-18
\textsuperscript{53} Meyer, Stephenie, \textit{The Story Behind} Twilight, The official website of Stephenie Meyer, 2005
\textsuperscript{55} Smithstein, Samantha, \textit{Craving a Twilight romance}, Psychology Today, 2010
even though she claims not to be an emotional person. Steiner instantly related to Bella’s experience of falling head over heels in love for the very first time. She also claims that disturbing elements in the Twilight saga, like Bella’s violent pregnancy in the last book *Breaking Dawn*, cannot be taken out of the context of the beautiful love story that is initiated in the first book *Twilight*.  

The editors of the anthology *Bitten by Twilight: youth culture, media & the vampire franchise* confess in the prologue how they officially went to the 2008 fan convention, or TwiCon, in Dallas as researchers and interviewers. “Unofficially” they write, “we went to TwiCon to participate in the Twilight fandom.” Continuing:

“Between December 2008 and February 2009, the three of us had all been surprised by how engrossed we became in the four Twilight books. We are three feminist thirty-something married mothers who happen to also be professors of communication – not exactly the target audience of Twilight. Nevertheless, we found ourselves swept away by the romance between a mortal teen girl and a sparkly vampire. All the while bemoaning the sappy writing style and too-traditional gender dynamics of the books, we were very much bitten by Twilight.”

Interestingly enough, these intellectual women have both a deep emotional bond to the phenomenon, as well as an analytic interest. Apparently, Twilight has the power to attract beyond puberty and hormones, as well as higher education and feminism, although it is indicated that the target audience not necessarily is old enough for academia, nor gender awakened. User mrsblack_1089 describes her first impression at fanpop.com:

”OK so I was at the library a few years ago and I picked up this big book and checked it out. It was called Twilight. I started reading it immediately when we were driving home. At first, the only thing that kept my interest was the preface; I wanted to know who the hunter was and who ‘I’ was. Then Bella got to her bedroom in Forks and I couldn't stop reading. And then when Edward was introduced, I flipped out!!!”

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56 Radioessä om vampyrserien Twilight, radio recording, Sveriges Radio, Lena Birgersdotter 2011  
57 Click, Melissa A., Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens & Behm-Morawitz, Elizabeth ”Prologue”, in Click, Melissa A., Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens & Behm-Morawitz, Elizabeth (red.), *Bitten by twilight: youth culture, media, & the vampire franchise*, Lang, New York, 2010, p. ix  
58 Twilight Guys, *your first impression of twilight was.....*, fanpop.com, 2008
When searching the internet for answers and explanations as to why people are drawn to Twilight, the immediate and overwhelming response is the written and spoken declaration of love or lust for Edward or Robert Pattinson and, slightly less often, Jacob or Taylor Lautner.

The user KaterinoulaLove at fanpop.com writes before listing her top ten reasons for loving Twilight: “Well, I think that I have more than ten. It's practically an epidemic in the world! Yes. Twilight. I could talk about Twilight all day.” It is remarkable how the following “ten” reasons tend to overlap and circulate mostly around aesthetics – of the language, the book covers, the imagery and the characters. And of course, Edward, at the top of the list:

”1. Well, this is obvious. Edward Cullen. Need I say any more? He honestly has to be the most amazing fictional character ever created. Though he's not fictional in my mind. If only. Bella is so lucky lucky lucky. Am I jealous? God yes!”

And at the end of the list:

”10. I, like Bella, can honestly say that I am completely and irrevocably in love with the gorgeous, alluring, wonderful Edward Cullen. Though he will never be mine. Damn.”

These highly interesting male objects of affection will be examined more closely later on. What deserves attention here is the expression of love rather than the receiver of it, although this is a very good example of how easy it can be to yield to a discussion revolving exclusively around men when trying to address hopes and dreams of girls and women, especially regarding romance and love.

Ph.D. Gina Barreca, Professor of English and also a blogger at Psychology Today, decided to give the book Twilight a try since many of her best students and her very bright and perceptive 17-year-old friend Rebecca adored it. Barreca expresses her frustration having the complete opposite reaction of the other professors mentioned above: “What happened? I loathed TWILIGHT. I was surprised. What was I missing? I wanted to like it, I was willing to like it, I was waiting to like it.” She challenged

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59 Twilight Series, 10 REASONS I LOVE TWILIGHT, fanpop.com, 2009
60 Twilight Series, 2009
Rebecca to come up with five reasons to love the book, while she would “offer five reasons why I find it a crime against readers - especially girl readers.”

Since this section is about the love for Twilight, let’s give Rebecca the last word and begin with professor Barreca’s criticism. She starts off by simply stating: “The ONLY real reason young women like TWILIGHT is because of Edward. That is sad.” What also feels a bit sad is that she goes on claiming that it is unrealistic for girls to fantasize about a perfectly polished and behaved man that only wants to lay beside them, satisfied with neck kissing. “What they have met is their new best gay male friend.” Barreca then regrets how Bella’s knees get weak in a situation where she should have driven “away from the narcissistic bastard”:

"We should be appalled by Edward because Edward takes away Bella's keys to her very own car saying 'You're intoxicated by my very presence' whereupon she says - wait for it - 'There was no way around it; I couldn't resist him in anything'. Fifty years of the women's movement and that's what we get: 'I couldn't resist him in anything'?"  

To sum up, Barreca doesn’t see how anything good can come out of idealizing a relationship built on inequalities, not to mention using “fear of your love as an aphrodisiac. Ever.”

Rebecca, unlike Barreca, was reluctant towards Twilight before reading it:

"I never thought I’d be one of those obsessive, maniacal, “OME”-ers (“OME” stands for “Oh My Edward!”), especially since I mocked my sister endlessly when she first started reading the TWILIGHT series. I’d automatically lessened my opinion of people when I found out that they were followers (yes, followers)."

Again unlike Barreca, she fell in love after being talked into reading the first 100 pages by her sister, and ended up reading more than twice that amount the very first night. But being the reflective young woman that she is, Rebecca stopped to think

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62 Barreca, Gina, *Five Reasons A Smart Middle Aged Woman Loathes TWILIGHT*, Psychology Today, 2009  
63 Barreca, *Five Reasons A Smart Middle Aged Woman Loathes Twilight*, 2009  
64 Barreca, Gina, *Five Reasons A Smart Young Woman Adores TWILIGHT (Part 1 of 3)*, Psychology Today, 2009
about what she read and felt: ”[…] because I found myself so quickly sucked in, I couldn’t stop thinking about why - why these books? Why this fascination for ‘Edward’? […] I realized how difficult it was to explain exactly why these books are so beloved.” She lists the escapist quality as the first reason and adds that the fairytale element might allow the reader to embrace the story full on, without scrutiny:

“Sure, you can discover some pretty annoying messages without looking too hard - ahem, abstinence - but I found it quite easy not to think about messages at all. The books seem entirely detached from reality and are written, well, like drugstore novels, and thus seem separate from the world of political messages and life lessons.”

Moving on, Rebecca lists suspense; “Will he kill her?”, “Will he leave her?”, “Will she become a vampire?” and the open and broad possibility to relate to Bella; “in uniting myself with Bella in my mind, I became that much more invested in the story”. The reason of Edward, impossible to overlook, comes next:

“Why? Besides the danger aspect (bloodsucking, death, eternal condemnation, and so forth), the best reason I can come up with after many months of thinking about this is that he exists solely for the needs and desires of Bella (i.e. the reader).”

The last of Rebecca’s reasons for loving Twilight is the sense of community with other fans. What may appear to be an obsessive cult to the outside can contain friendship and belonging on the inside. “Ultimately, Twilight becomes more than a book - it is an experience.”

4.2. Teambuilding: Whose team are you on?

It should be underlined that the hundreds of thousands of Twilight-fans all over the world cannot possibly be regarded as a homogenous group with a singular, static relationship to Twilight. Globalization facilitates a hot-blooded debate online, where fans and non-fan discuss the endless subject that is the Twilight phenomenon.

In a community or sub-culture this big, with fans as devoted, it seems only natural for certain disagreements and alignments to appear, - or in this case, teams. It is safe

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65 Barreca, *Five Reasons A Smart Young Woman Adores TWILIGHT (Part 1 of 3)*, 2009
66 Barreca, *Five Reasons A Smart Young Woman Adores TWILIGHT (Part 1 of 3)*, 2009
to say that the two dominating teams are Team Edward and Team Jacob. Edward tends to triumph over Jacob – throughout the saga, it has essentially always been him for Bella, and it appears like a mere majority of the fans would agree, although one can never be sure. When this is written in late December 2011, the official Facebook group Team Edward has over 550 000 likes, while Team Jacob has over 725 000 likes. In two online polls, one made by Eonline.com from 2009 and one by HollywoodLife.com from 2010, Team Edward receives 64.3% and 76.09%. The latter poll has a header that reads: “Bella’s not the only one with a big decision to make. YOU need to choose too: Who do you love, Edward or Jacob?”

The two hypermasculine hunks are the hottest topics of the Twilight buzz, the center of both Bella’s and the fans’ attention. Both the female protagonist and the fans are constantly encouraged to take their pick in men. Bella is throughout the series forced to try to keep the two male protagonists from fighting each other in a violent tug-of-war over her and “who is best for her”. Multiple people are having their say in this matter, both characters and fans:

“Edward is hot I have to admit but he even admits he's a killer in New moon and he is TOO much of a gentleman! Bella need some one better than that who won’t be tempted to kill her whenever they touch. Jacob on the other hand can let loose and have fun, Bella has know him her WHOLE life, he’s just better for her, plus who doesn’t love a shirtless werewolf with a SIX pack? […] Bella always seems soo much more comfortable around Jacob, but with Edward she’s always so stiff and seems so nervous. I’ve read every book and seen every movie at least 5 times so far and I started out team Edward then I realized JACOB is SO much better for Bella.”

Since Team Jacob vs. Team Edward might be the most debated dividing factor of the Twilight community, there is a multitude of online posts and fan made videos arguing for what man to choose. This exposes different agendas and values regarding relationships and desirable assets to look for in a partner, beyond preferring vampire

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67 Facebook page, "Team Edward", Movie, facebook.com
68 Facebook page, "Team Jacob”, Movie, facebook.com
69 Eonline, R.Pattz vs. Taylor! Whose Beast Is the Best?, uk.eonline.com, 2009
70 Christina (no last name found), Photos! Team Edward Vs. Team Jacob — You’ve Made It Loud And Clear You’re Still Team Edward After ‘Eclipse’!, Hollywood Life, 2010
71 Twilight Series, Who’s Better for Bella?, fanpop.com, 2010
or werewolf. It should be highlighted that in some of these cases, the line between the character and the actor is blurred, which is something to be aware of.

In a Youtube video for Team Jacob called “20 Reasons to be on Team Jacob”, a picture is painted of a very masculine prince charming. According to this video, some of Jacob’s pros are “giving big bear hugs”, being muscular and mostly half-naked, caring for Bella, being “tall, dark and handsome”, his ability to fix cars and drive motorcycles and keeping you warm at night, and ultimately, his status of a non-sparkling alpha wolf that “can kick Edward’s butt any day” is underlined.

It is not uncommon for fans to pin the two suitors against each other, arguing over which one is the overall strongest competitor. This might be translated into a contest of preferred masculinities where it is fair to say that Edward is generally seen as sophisticated, self-sacrificing gentleman whereas Jacob is more youthful, spontaneous and rough around the edges. This tension is exemplified in the reoccurring debate on whether real men sparkle or not. In Meyer’s saga, vampire skin glitter when hit by the sunlight and this is something fans on Team Edward like to mention as a reason for preferring Edward: “Team Edward, because Jacob doesn’t sparkle”. This is countered by Team Jacob, claiming: “Team Jacob, because real men don’t sparkle”.

The idealization of Edward takes on another proportion in the two part Youtube series called “7 Lessons Guys Can Learn From Edward Cullen” made by Aileen Santos, M.A. counselor. In her opinion, “the more Edwards there are in the world, the better” and has therefore put together a guide for guys wanting the same kind of attention:

“What does your girlfriend spend more time with a fictional vampire than with you? Do you ever wonder what it is exactly about Edward Cullen that makes all kinds of girls giggle, sigh, and/or get that faraway look in their eyes at the mere mention of his name? Have you ever wished you got that kind of attention, too?”

She starts off asserting that 98% of all the women she knows that have read Twilight are either “a) deeply in love with Edward Cullen; b) hoping they could find their own

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72 20 Reasons to be on Team Jacob, Youtube video, chrisbrownslilshorti, 2009
73 Team Edward VS. Team Jacob, Youtube video, MrsNickJonas4202, 2008
74 Team Edward vs Team Jacob, Youtube video, xxTemariRulzxx, 2008
75 7 Lesson Guys Can Learn From Edward Cullen (Part 1 of 2), Youtube video, aileensantos, 2008
Edward Cullen (or that they guy their with would turn into an Edward); c) lending their Twilight books to other women, so they’ll have someone to “O.M.E.!” with; or d) all of the above.” The other 2% are, according to Santos, either men or people who just find that Twilight is not for them. 76

The sum of the seven lessons is that “Edward isn’t afraid to be a man, in the real sense of the word”. So what makes a real man? A real man is not shallow: “instead of drooling over the usually yummy looking cheerleader or delicious busty blonde, […] he falls in love with a quiet girl, a girl who seems to be more concerned about other people’s feelings than her own” and he shows this love without expecting anything in return. This does not mean that the real man, represented by Edward, is afraid to take charge – far from it. “Be man enough to show her that you’ll protect her, and I mean, really protect her” and exercise self-control in a manner of putting her interests before your own. The next lesson reads, “Be MAN enough to take charge of your relationship. Including your sexual boundaries.” Nothing is mentioned about Bella’s interest in having sex, and Edward refusing her. Unfortunately, Santos claims not to have time to expand much further on what she means by this, but settles with stating: “for a lot of women it’s such a relief to have a male romantic character taking charge of every aspect of their romantic relationship.” 77

Curiously enough, another one of Santos’ lessons is being man enough to respect your partner as an equal, to “be the kind of man who knows how to make a woman his partner”. Besides it being quite questionable to say that Edward treats Bella like an equal, nothing is mentioned about how this lesson can harmonize with the lesson in full protection and taking overall romantic charge in real life.

Nearing the end, Santos reveals “the biggest secret of all when it comes to women” and “the secret behind the huge success of the Twilight saga” and why “almost every woman who reads about him falls in love with Edward Cullen”:

“The secret is, deep inside every woman, she dreams of being loved like Bella Swan. Deep inside, every woman wants to be the most important thing in a man’s eyes. To be so important in fact that she is his reason for living.” 78

This “secret of all women” is highly reminiscent of Rebecca’s reason for loving Twilight, namely the appeal of having someone who devotes himself completely to you and your needs. But if Bella is the center of Edward’s universe, why does she play such a small part in the Twilight fandom?

It is remarkable how little attention is paid to Bella in comparison to Edward and Jacob. Her team is secondary to their teams along with the neutral Team Switzerland and some other formations in favor of other characters. On Facebook, a group called Team "Guy Who Almost Hit Bella With A Car" is the first hit when typing in "Team Bella" in the search field. That group has over 142 00 likes in late December 2011 – a significantly bigger number than the few scattered Team Bella groups of a few thousand likes.

This finding seems to be very symptomatic of the Twilight fandom. Alyssa Best at the Huffington Post: “[…] besides an Entertainment Weekly cover of actress Kristen Stewart with the phrase, 'Team Bella’, I have yet to see or hear of this concept seeping into popular culture”. Carmen D. Siering at Ms. Magazine continues: “[…] few young readers ask, 'Why not Team Bella?’ Perhaps because the answer is quite clear: There can be no Team Bella. Even though Bella is ostensibly a hero, in truth she is merely an object in the Twilight world.” Team Bella does not appear to be much of a product of the Twilight fans, but rather a platform for various forms of critique. User Neither reacts to the dominant Team Edward or Team Jacob trend by refusing to pick:

"How about neither and Bella finds a healthy relationship. I mean, Edward stalks her and messes with her truck so she can’t go anywhere. And Jacob kisses her against her will (she even slaps him). I just don’t think either of them are healthy relationships. There are lots of great online discussions about this. But I guess most romantic classics are all about unhealthy relationships (hello Romeo and Juliet).”

Andy Swift at HollywoodLife.com states a similar view under the header “Team Edward? Team Jacob? You’re All Insane! I’m Team Bella & You Should Be, Too! She Deserves Better!”:

79 Facebook page, "Team 'Guy Who Almost Hit Bella With A Car’, Entertainment, facebook.com
80 Best, Alyssa, In Twilight: Eclipse, I’ll Vote for Team Bella, Huffington Post, 2010
81 Siering, Carmen D., Talking Back to Twilight, Ms. Magazine, 2009
82 Bierly, Mandy, Let’s have a 'Twilight’ debate: Team Edward or Team Jacob?, Popwatch Entertainment Weekly, 2008
"It’s a little ridiculous that this young, attractive girl has only two choices: a guy who has to constantly fight the urge to feast upon her blood, and another guy who occasionally becomes covered in gnarly hair and howls at the moon. That doesn’t sound like much of a choice to me. Where are all the nice, human boys? […] What do you all think? Are you on Team Edward or Team Jacob because you personally like Rob and Taylor, or do you ACTUALLY think that one of these monsters would be a good match for poor, innocent Bella?"83

Sadly, “poor, innocent Bella” is not the description we are looking for when trying to find an empowered heroine. We have now heard what a few skeptics have had to say about Bella’s character, let us now turn to how fans relate to her and the role that she plays in Twilight.

4.3. Being Bella: Fan identification and positioning

Again we recall what Rebecca said about Bella’s character being open interpretation, allowing the reader to identify with her. User Devymel12 at lion-lamb.livejournal.com says: “I relate to her probably more than I want to. There's a lot of similarities - hair, eyes, cop for a dad - but I feel that connect with her sense of self-worth. She's just an average girl swept up into someone much bigger than she imagined.”84 Caccasandra says: “I did identify with Bella… or at least I filled in the gaps of her personality with my own, making me the voice of the story.”85

Unfortunately, it seems like this openness of character can be translated into a vacant personality, especially in combination with her weakness for Edward as well as Jacob. User BellaHater at Entertainment Weekly’s Popwatch writes:

“Honestly, Edward AND Jacob should stop obsessing over a doormat like Bella and find awesome independent girls. […] I wouldn’t want my young girls (if I had children) reading a book that features such a weak female lead. She’s a loser, get over it!!”86

MN_Jen agrees:

83 Swift, Andy, Team Edward? Team Jacob? You’re All Insane! I’m Team Bella & You Should Be, Too! She Deserves Better! Hollywood Life, 2010
84 lion_lamb, Identifying with Bella, Livejournal, 2010
85 lion_lamb, 2010
86 Bierly, 2008
“I hate that I’m 28 years old and have an opinion in this (Team Jacob!) but I REALLY agree that Edward and Jacob could do better than doormat Bella. There are so many great heroines in literature – I find it depressing that so many young girls are loving books with such a bland and weak-willed female. If I ever have daughters I will try to push them towards books with characters like Jo March, Elizabeth Bennett, Anne Shirley, and even Hermione Granger and Sookie Stackhouse.”

User Team Jake is disturbed with Bella’s absolute dependence of Edward, which becomes the most visible in the second book and movie *New Moon*, where Edward leaves Bella for a long period of time to give her a chance of a normal life without a potentially dangerous boyfriend. As a mean of making him return to her, Bella deliberately puts herself in dangerous situations to force him to come and rescue her:

“I am also 28 and I also feel slightly retarded engaging in this but oh well. Team Jacob!! I couldn’t agree more with most of the comments about Bella being weak. I as I finished reading Twilight I just kept thinking her parents need to have a serious talk about what is healthy in a relationship. Then as I read New Moon and saw how depressed she was I was kind of aggravated by it. It’s one thing to be hurt it’s another to be delusional and psychotic because you have been ‘dumped.’ I mean Charlie just let her carry on for too long.”

Not everyone agrees about Bella being a pushover. EdwardandBellaLover responds to the previous critics:

"I read every single one of those books and ladies, you all seriously need to get a life! Just conquer the fact that Edward and Bella rock! In Breaking Dawn Bella becomes pregnant and almost DIES because of it. Edward wanted her to abort but she refused to. Bella is strong, smart, and stubborn; but she is a very good role model. I believe that all women have the right to be opinionated, but really and truly face the fact that all you Twilight Haters are just jealous of the characters in the movies AND books."

Obviously, being headstrong about keeping a baby that is breaking your body from the inside must be regarded as a rather questionable thing to mention in favor of

87 Bierly, 2008
88 Bierly, 2008
89 Bierly, 2008
Bella, especially in relation to being a good role model. The thing that appears hard to do is finding any healthy activities that Bella do only for herself and for her own well-being, except maybe reading romance novels. The statement above may well be connected to girl-empowerment blogger Rachel Simmons observations when watching New Moon: “I found myself praying quietly for a scene where Bella paints, or sits on a bus with the debate team, or does something unrelated to obsessive, self-destructive pining.”

Then what about jealousy, as user EdwardandBellaLover accuses Bella’s antagonists of? In a Facebook discussion regarding whether Bella deserves Edward or not, Claire Guyan writes:

"I understand why Bella can seem whiny or inadequate to us […] but that’s because we all want to be in her shoes and we compare her actions to what our own would be. They are perfect for each other, she was born with a "shield" and has a mature nature for her age which implies that fate had decided that her & Edward where made for each other, regardless of time or other trials and tribulations, they will always come together. She fit so easily into his world, both as a human and as a vampire. She is brave and selfless and he is perfection, he is romantic and a gentleman and his very words are poetry ‘Bella you are my life now’ who wouldn't want a man to say that to you?”

This statement confirms both Rebecca’s and Santo’s claims mentioned earlier about the wish of being loved and adored by a man. Still, as we have seen, Edward’s overpowering love for Bella is constantly overpowering her. Emily LeDuc rationalizes Edward knowing better than Bella, since he is more emotionally complex and experienced than a girl her age:

"Some of Bella's actions were both frustrating and annoying within the novels, but you have to take a step back and consider Bella as an 17-19 year old American teenage girl - we aren't equipped to handle falling head over heels in love with someone as both mythically and emotionally complex as Edward. Which brings me to my second point, Edward came from a different time originally and has had years
of world experience so it is natural that he would be much more decided in his love
for Bella than she initially would for him.”

Although Bella is said to play in lower division than Edward, she is still deserving of
him according to Kelsey Long, for a specific reason:

"Of course she deserves Edward. Edward has never fallen in love with anyone before,
no one had even caught his eye, and she did. Anyone who can turn the head of a
ridiculously gorgeous vampire, and have him love her, definately deserves him.”

Edward's extreme love and devotion makes him want to protect Bella, stretching
the limits of what you can do in the name of love. When asked if they think Edward is
too possessive and controlling, many fans lean towards yes. But some fans disagree or
find ways to rationalize this control. Kirsty Davison says: “I dont think its control, I
think the character is meant to be so in love with her that he cant deal with it and if
you remember from the first book he has a overwhelming urge to protect her.” Some
girls claim they would find that attractive in a real boyfriend. "Yeah he might be too
controlling, but the reason for it beats that. He just loves Bella so much that he wants
to protect her from everything ♥ Where are the real life Edward Cullens?” Leah
Maker shares a similar opinion: "I don't think Edward is too controlling. I agree with
Kirsty. Personally, I would love an Edward Cullen protecting me!”

Another discussed topic of Bella and Edward’s relationship is the abstinence issue.
Some people say that the chemistry between them is more due to suspended lust than
love. Laura at popwatch.com:

"My biggest problem with Twilight has always been the very unrealistic “true” love
between Edward and Bella. They have very little in common, do not have a
particularly great repartee, and frankly don’t even have chemistry. Honestly, the
reason they are so hot for each other is because they are so hot for each other. It’s
called lust, people. Unfulfilled lust. And since the Twilight series is supposed to be a
giant metaphor for abstinence, it’s very clear that Edward’s powerful attraction to

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92 Is Bella worthy enough to deserve Edward?, 2009
93 Is Bella worthy enough to deserve Edward?, 2009
94 Facebook page, "Because of Edward Cullen, human boys have lost their charm", Discussion Board,
Bella’s blood is really meant to be his strong desire to have sex with her. Well, that is not true love.\(^{95}\)

Throughout the series, virgin Bella is honest and open about wanting to have sex, which must be considered refreshing in a pop culture world where female desire or flat out horniness is severely marginalized and taboo. Still, Bella is repeatedly refused by Edward for reasons that apparently have to do with him being afraid of both hurting her and compromising her virtue.\(^{96}\) It is important to emphasize that even though Edward shows a restrained sexuality, this is not transposed onto Bella – it is just something she is forced to accept.\(^{97}\)

Most definitely, Twilight strikes a very sexual note with the fans as well. Among the many declarations of love, there are examples of declarations of lust. When watching the vampires running in Eclipse, a Swedish 17-year-old girl says to her friend: “I love it when they run, it’s like Baywatch to me!”\(^{98}\) At several online web stores, you can purchase t-shirts with this very sexual, although rather alarming message: “Edward can bust my headboard, bite my pillows and bruise my body anyday!”\(^{99}\) There is also a Facebook group with the same name.\(^{100}\) A reason for being on Team Edward is said to be “because piano players are good with their fingers.”\(^{101}\)

Although some fans are eager to get it on, some prefer the “erotics of abstinence”. Another one who was forced to accept the same kind of “bitter-sweet” sexual tension of chastity as Bella is Cole Benjamin, who shares his story under the header “Twilight Almost Cost Me My Wife (and My Life)”.\(^{102}\) He gave his wife the Twilight book, or weapon of destruction as he calls it, and she soon became obsessed, despite not being much of a reader. It first, giving his wife the book paid off in the bedroom, but that came to an abrupt end as she decided that it would be sexier not have sex: “I don’t want to have sex until Bella does.” Benjamin was shocked by this notification, and

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\(^{95}\) Bierly, Mandy, ‘Twilight’: Why are Bella and Edward really attracted to one another?, Popwatch Entertainment Weekly, 2009
\(^{96}\) ZD’s blog, Twilight & teen sexuality: Bella wants to have sex, Edward doesn’t. Now what?, teensource.org. 2010
\(^{97}\) Cousins, Johannah, Sex in ‘Twilight’: An Argument for Bella, Pop Psychology, Psych Central, 2010
\(^{98}\) Jennie (no last name found), Killarnas våta dröm blir blodigt allvar för tjejer, tjuvlyssnat.se, 2010 (English translation by author)
\(^{99}\) “Edward Can Bust My Headboard...” Black Fitted Shirt, dazzledbytwilight.com
\(^{100}\) Facebook page, “Edward can bust my headboard, bite my pillow, and bruise my body anyday”, Actor/Director, facebook.com
\(^{101}\) Teame Edward VS. Team Jacob, 2008
\(^{102}\) Benjamin, Cole, Twilight Almost Cost Me My Wife (and My Life), itthing.com, 2011
soon discovered that he would have to wait for three whole books before Edward agrees to sex.

Benjamin didn’t understand how his wife could translate romance into abstinence:

"The ironic thing, though, was that she would get really turned on by these books. It was my understanding all along, and still is, that this was a romance. Call me a caveman, but I thought romance was supposed to lead to sex… isn’t that the point?"103

After a long period of intense foreplay spiced up with broken glass and real blood, Benjamin’s wife founds out on TV that Edward and Bella are getting married. She is furious for being subject to this spoiler. She decides to lift her vow of chastity, but as it turns out, Benjamin and his girlfriend’s Twilight-inspired experience seems far from the fictional thing:

"Six nights later, my wife lifted her ban of chastity. No glass was broken. I was grateful. What I didn’t appreciate (and still don’t) was that, whether out of spite or out of fantasy, my wife didn’t thank me during grateful time. Oh no, she called out to Edward. Still does."104

5. Discussion
In the discussion, theoretical framework and literature review will be applied to the findings as we try to understand the love and sex appeal of Twilight. To what extent is Twilight the story of a bad romance? If it is, what does that say about its audience?

5.1. Twilight: an independent choice?
As we have seen, it is not just hormonal, “impressionable” teenage girls that are moved by Twilight. We have Twilight Moms, Twilight Grandmas and even well educated women from academia. They all enjoy the ageless, experience of falling in love over and over again. The very diverse group that the Twilight fan base is makes it almost impossible to determine to what extent Nussbaumian adaptive preferences are implemented. What Nussbaum sets out to defend is the basic human capability to

103 Benjamin, 2011
104 Benjamin, 2011
make an independent choice. It is a lot more difficult to legitimize attacking the way a woman chooses to function if it could be determined that she has fully exercised her human capability to chose conservatively.\textsuperscript{105} It would be one thing to sit down with a twelve-year-old Twilight fan and talk about healthy relationships and gender roles, but quite another to do the same with a professor in her thirties or forties. The academic Twilight fans in this study are all very aware of the problematic sides of Twilight, but are still drawn in.

Before discussing this further, let us look into what a “healthy relationship” can be said to entail. According to Kansas State University counseling services, a healthy relationship does not involve trying to change one another, but being communicative, mutually caring and reliable, but also staying true to yourself and your own independency. A healthy relationship does not involve frequent blaming or critique. Acknowledge that a good relationship is a process but not some hopeful distant goal for future development. Do not let loyalty to your partner keep you in a destructive situation.\textsuperscript{106}

Nothing is mentioned about separate gendered duties, which makes for an interesting contrast to counselor Aileen Santos’ Edward Cullen-based relationship advice directed to men. The fact is that although Bella and Edward love each other unconditionally, it is the very “unconditional” part that becomes problematic. Bella’s loyalty to Edward frequently causes her to disregard several signs of his abusiveness, and even reinterpret them as reasonable signs of love. In the Findings-section, we see that many fans tend to do the same. We recall that Radway deems this process of female reinterpretation of male misbehavior as essential to the romance genre.\textsuperscript{107}

In real life, many of Edward’s actions would be considered unacceptable, probably even by many fans. Graeme McMillan at io9.com checks off 15 out of 15 of National Domestic Violence hotline’s warning signs of emotional or physical abuse, including threatening, jealous, controlling and scary behavior, isolating you from family and friends, threatening to kill you or commit suicide, physically hurting you and giving you the blame for it and of course, believing in rigid gender roles.\textsuperscript{108} Despite these very disturbing elements, fans seem able to either sort them out as parts of a purely

\textsuperscript{105} Nussbaum, 2002, p. 190
\textsuperscript{106} Kansas State University Counseling Services, Healthy Relationships, k-state.edu, 2000
\textsuperscript{107} Radway, 1991, p. 157-158
\textsuperscript{108} McMillan, Graeme, Official: Twilight’s Bella & Edward Are In An Abusive Relationship, io9.com, 2009
fictional fairytale as Rebecca did, or more alarmingly, reconcile them with the dominating love theme of the narrative as Kirsty Davison and Leah Maker did.

This study cannot possibly tell whether Twilight fans would be more accepting towards dominating or abusive partners in real life than non-fans. However, what can be stated is that all of them are deeply touched by the story of a fictional relationship that would appear extremely unhealthy if taken out of the context of a supernatural saga. The unavoidable question is: How can this be?

When attempting to give possible explanations to this question, it must be underlined that every individual has her very own sets of reasons for falling for Twilight, due to her unique mind. Still, the theoretic framework invites us to look to how individual preferences are shaped by cultural and social contexts. Clare Chambers argues that a liberalistic focus on the individual risks coming at the expense of not taking the social context into account and claims that an individual choice never can be isolated from the sociocultural landscape of (in)equality that the individual is a part of. 109 As a mean of taking both individual and context into account, we make room for personal statements in the Findings-section before analyzing these individual expressions against a background of hierarchal power structures of our society.

The endorphins released when reading an engaging love story makes the reader feel good, like falling in love herself. According to Smithstein, an addiction to this sensation can be a possible reason for cases of Twilight obsession, especially with older married women who might experience this “utopic” love as more intense and passionate than in their own marriages. 110 But since we cannot disregard the sexist elements of the Twilight love story, we also search for explanations as to why these are accepted or even embraced by fans.

In line with Nussbaum’s version of adaptive preferences, the human capabilities of Twilight fans may differ in development depending on age and socioeconomic context. Young girls may grow skeptic of Twilight as they mature and develop, 111 while some might keep their appreciation as they age. Others fall in love with the story as adult members of democratic society, which would indicate that their interest

109 Chambers, Clare, Sex, culture, and justice: the limits of choice, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pa., 2008, p. 43-44
110 Smithstein, 2010
111 Wilson, Natalie, Seduced by Twilight: the allure and contradictory messages of the popular saga, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, NC, 2011, p. 5-6
in Twilight has to do with their way of functioning. However, we might still suspect that this choice of function is a preference that cannot be entirely separated from patriarchal influence. There seems to be a slight difference between making an active choice of being a housewife for instance, and feeling an instinctive and irrevocable attraction towards a fictional love story with an essentially abusively hypermasculine protagonist. The emotional appeal, as we have seen in the Findings-section, is often described as the opposite of a rational choice – some fans even described their obsession with reluctance.

We recall how deep Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence and masculine domination is said to dig into our beings. Clare Chambers draws on Bourdieu and claims that patriarchy’s naturalization of gender hierarchy has the power to create an integrated conviction that sex differences are crucial for the reproduction of the human species. This may explain why some women feel the need to feminize themselves with makeup, uncomfortable shoes and clothes, and even plastic surgery, or prefer men that embody masculinity ideals like length, muscles and wealth. This would permit gender roles to function both as an aphrodisiac and a sedative opium for women living under patriarchy, since the gendered polarization is translated into “natural” sexual dynamics and equality is perceived as a turn-off.

Chamber’s theory would explain why Edward’s masculinity is so attractive, but what about Bella’s feminine attributes being attractive to Edward? We recall Aileen Santos praising Edward for falling in love with the quiet Bella “who seems to be more concerned about other people’s feelings than her own”, and not the hyperfeminine, outgoing cheerleader. Still, Bella is said to deserve the gorgeous Edward, since she is able to pull him in and tame him with her uniqueness and unselfishness. Between the lines, fans can read that they do not need to wear high heels and makeup to attract a hypermasculine prince charming, but that self-sacrificing and goodness is rewarded as well.

In Twilight, gendered polarization is facilitated, as Bella and Edward are not just only differentiated by sex, but also by species with extreme biological differences. Danielle N. Borgia claims that these “racialized gender roles” are accepted because of

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112 Chambers, 2008, p. 46-50
113 7 Lesson Guys Can Learn From Edward Cullen (Part 2 of 2), 2008
the supernatural elements of the story,\textsuperscript{114} which explain why Bella is weaker, why Edward needs to protect her. They both feel deeply fascinated with one another since they literally are from different worlds. However, it is clearly conveyed to the fans as well as by the fans that Edward’s world and persona is much more sparkly and fascinating than Bella’s. Let us now look further into to the alluring masculine world of Twilight.

\textbf{5.2. Desired masculinities}

What is it about this hypermasculine man that is pictured as the norm and ideal in both Radway’s studies and in Twilight? We cannot possibly ignore that the men of Twilight, Edward and Jacob, arguably are the real stars of the story, as they are the most important people to both Bella and fans. Let us briefly expand on how ideal masculinities are created before returning to these to male objects of desire.

Gender is a fluid social construction that cannot be taken out of the sociocultural context. Still, as the masculine gender is the norm, along with being white and heterosexual, it appears harder to change in comparison the feminine gender. Masculinity is safeguarded by patriarchal power structures and the image of the capable, rational, strong and successful man is perpetuated through media, cultural expressions, and everyday interaction between people. Men are often actually thought to be generically more aggressive and less care giving than women.\textsuperscript{115} As focus often is put to “the other” rather than to the dominant group, men’s masculinities are not as frequently studied as women’s processes of gender. By looking into masculine construction in Twilight, we examine how men are allowed to be the center of the attention of this “female narrative” as well as of the largely female fan base.\textsuperscript{116}

The concept of hegemonic masculinity can roughly be said to describe the construction of a complex hierarchy where the masculinity norm or ideal of contemporary society triumphs over marginalized masculinities and women. Since the hegemonic masculinity is based on cultural ideal and institutional power, it is not very threatened by feminists or oppositional men - although it may well be challenged. Most men fail to live up to the high standard of the hegemonic masculinity, but still

\textsuperscript{115} Connell, Raewyn, \textit{Maskuliniteter}, Daidalos, Göteborg, 1996, p. 69
enjoy the privileges patriarchy generally distribute to men as part of the subordination of women.\textsuperscript{117}

At the very extreme end of this hierarchy of masculinities, is the hypermasculinity, entailing a very physical or extrovert expression of being a man, using your male body as a tool or a weapon for different reasons.\textsuperscript{118} It is an image that is difficult to upkeep and may be embodied by society’s idealized famous men like muscular athletes and handsome actors,\textsuperscript{119} but is also a strategy used by boys and men who feel the need to project a more extreme masculinity onto their surroundings, usually towards other men. Michael Kimmel’s “Guyland” is an example of a social context between boyhood and manhood where “guys gather to be guys with each other” without having to show consideration to parents, girlfriends, wives or kids. It is a place where adult life is put on hold. However, the guys are not completely allowed to be themselves, since Guyland also is a forum where adolescent boys struggle to prove to each other that they are “real men”, and challenge each other’s masculinities.\textsuperscript{120} Guyland is described as a hostile place for women to be in, where the only girls that are said to be allowed are those in pornography and those who accept that bro’s go before ho’s.\textsuperscript{121}

Through the Twilight saga, Jacob is transformed from a friendly and almost shy boy in his early teens to an unusually tall and muscular werewolf. At first, he kept his love for Bella to himself and did not want to be part of the tight group of guys that was taking shape in his community. After being reluctantly initiated into the Twilight version of Guyland that is the werewolf pack consisting of only shirtless guys and one barely accepted girl, Jacob becomes an aggressive and persistent suitor (who loves blonde jokes\textsuperscript{122}), determined to pursue Bella until she yields. On occasion, he even forces her to stand still while he kisses her against her will. Bella punches him in the face afterwards and fractures her hand against his rock hard body, but without Jacob regretting forcing himself on her – quite the opposite. When Bella’s father finds out

\textsuperscript{117} Connell, 1996, p. 101-103
\textsuperscript{118} Connell, 1996, p. 85
\textsuperscript{119} Connell, 1996, p. 101
\textsuperscript{121} Kimmel, 2008, p. 13-14
\textsuperscript{122} Jacob’s blonde jokes in Breaking Dawn, Youtube video, dianediane78, 2008
what happened, he congratulates his favorite suitor for his conquest, saying: “Good for you, kid.”123

Up until the end of the saga, Bella is the only girl who can tame this Guyland werewolf-masculinity and turn it into something that occasionally resembles the female friendly affection124 that the Team Jacob fans prefer. They see the soft and warm side of Jacob who refuses to see the girl he loves give up her life, literally, for Edward. As we have seen, fans on Team Jacob enjoy Jacob’s blatant masculinity, temperament and impulsiveness associated with lively teenage boys. We remember Radway stating that romance generally tend to make even questionable forms of masculinity appear as something essentially positive for women.125

In comparison to Jacob, Edward is called “too much of a gentleman” by a fan in the Findings-section, and his sparkle is said to be unmanly. Curiously enough, Jacob’s hypermasculinity is still deemed insufficient next to Edward’s. His juvenile competitiveness with Edward, violence and difficulty to control his temperament places him in the “failed romance” category and his rank as secondary suitor to Bella prevents him from actually threatening the ultimate hero: Edward, who triumphs over Jacob in the hegemonic masculinity hierarchy of Twilight.126

While Edward can project his masculinity through money, power, decades of education, white appearance as well as a marble-hard body, Jacob only has his bare, animalistic Native American physique, making him into a racialized savage next to the refined Edward who is a perfect intersection of normative and dominant social categories. Exposing your body in a hypermasculine act does not only mean using it as a weapon for projection of power - it simultaneously entails extreme vulnerability, especially when it is done by someone who has few other means with which to project manhood.127

The male body of both Edward and Jacob is still widely appreciated by Bella and female (and surely male) fans, and sometimes it is hard to determine whether the love for Twilight is about the messages of the story and the characters or about the eye candy. Although Bella appreciates Edward’s piano playing, caring and listening, she spends more time praising his perfect body and how it makes her feel. She is aware of

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123 Meyer, 2007, p. 336
124 Wilson, 2011, p. 85-86, 90
125 Radway, 1991, p. 168
126 Wilson, 2011, p. 89-90
127 Wilson, 2011, p. 91-93
Jacob’s impressing body even though Bella never really considers choosing Jacob over Edward. Fan-made tributes to the two men always contain more or less outspoken signs of desire and we remember one girl comparing Twilight to Baywatch.

It seems highly unlikely that Twilight would arouse this many women if bodybuilder Jacob Black or marble-bodied Edward Cullen were replaced by Average Joe, or Bella’s other marginalized suitor and classmate Mike, who is nervous, goofy and throws up when watching horror movies. This would strongly imply that hypermasculinities with a few alterations are almost automatically preferred over simple men with regular appearances who show signs of weakness – or just being imperfectly human. Bella has many admirers at her high school, but dismisses them all as she is drawn to Edward, who looks at her with a hostile stare: “He was glaring down at me again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase if looks could kill suddenly ran through my mind.”128 At first, it is the unfriendliness of Edward’s strong silent type that Bella finds attractive, even though it hurts her feelings. Instead of walking away from Edward and his aggressive glares, Bella is emotionally preoccupied with his behavior, determined to confront him in the search for vindication and explanation.129

Despite the problematic elements of the masculinities of Twilight, they seem to have stimulated the libidos of hundreds of thousands of predominately female fans in a Western pop culture that is generally dedicated to female objectification and male sexuality. Could it be that female sexuality is the mere reason for the focus on men in Twilight? On top of this, Twilight is said to carry a message of abstinence. We will now examine this sexual contradiction further as we attempt to understand to what extent Twilight is emancipatory for female sexuality.

5.3. Declarations of lust

Sex, or sexualized abstinence, is the undercurrent that flows through the pages and the screen, keeping the fans wanting more. In Twilight, it can be hard to tell what declarations of love, actually are declarations of lust of female sexuality. We recall the many “O.M.E.”’s, the “I love Edward”’s or “I love Jacob”’s with multiple exclamation points that we had to search beyond for more eloquent reasons for loving

129 Borgia, 2011, p. 4
Twilight in the Findings-section. Can it be that we fail to see the forest for all the trees? Are girls just hot for hot actors and “abstinence porn”?

With a Twilight saga filled with conservative, old-fashioned and flat out sexist features, the depiction of female sexuality might be the healthiest thing Twilight has to offer young readers. As Fleur Diamond underlines, despite conservative elements, the missing discourse of female sexuality is very much addressed in the Twilight saga.\textsuperscript{130} Still, Bella’s sexuality is by no means allowed to run free, but kept on a tight leash by chaste boyfriend Edward who argues that courtship and marriage comes before sex, like it did back in the day when he was a young man at the turn of the last century. Before he gives his body to her, Edward establishes that Bella is socially bound to him through the institutional rite of marriage. Another reason for Edward’s chastity is also the constant risk of him breaking her fragile human body if letting go of self-control. As Carrie Anne Platt puts it, “sexual abstinence is literally constructed as a matter of life and death.”\textsuperscript{131}

According to Wilson, this negotiation between Bella and Edward permits fans to choose whether they identify with Bella’s sexual forwardness or Edward’s more traditional take on young, unmarried sex.\textsuperscript{132} Studies show that female fans frequently discuss the complex issue of abstinence and that many of them can relate to it since it is conveyed to them through a medium they appreciate, rather than by conservative sex education and parents. Edward offers “safe” sex in a world where young girls learn to be wary of teenage boys’ careless or even predatory sexuality. Bella can push for sex and be absolutely certain that Edward will not try to take sexual advantage of her (although he ends up unwillingly bruising her). For once, the girl is the one banging on the gatekeepers door, trying to get into the boy’s pants instead of having to play gatekeeper of sex herself.\textsuperscript{133}

Since Twilight is a perfect example of a romance story, the female sexuality is also kept within one given limit, namely the limit of love. Female sex and sex drive is ultimately stimulated by the love for the hero.\textsuperscript{134} Bella’s sexual attraction to Edward is

\textsuperscript{130} Diamond, Fleur, “Beauty and the Beautiful Beast”, \textit{Australian Feminist Studies}, 26:67, 41-55, 2011
\textsuperscript{131} Platt, Carrie Anne, “Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Twilight Series”, in: Click, Melissa A., Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens & Behm-Morawitz, Elizabeth (red.), \textit{Bitten by twilight: youth culture, media, & the vampire franchise}, Lang, New York, 2010, p. 77
\textsuperscript{132} Wilson, 2011, p. 57
\textsuperscript{133} Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Melissa A. Click ”The romanticization of abstinence: Fan response to sexual restraint in the Twilight series”, \textit{Transformative Works and Cultures}, no. 5., journal.transformativeworks.org, 2010
\textsuperscript{134} Radway, 1991, p. 16
a seemingly natural result of their alliance of love, and even if Bella occasionally thinks about what a life with Jacob would be like if she had never met Edward, she never considers having casual sex with Jacob when Edward abandons her in *New Moon*. In the Twilight saga, as in any other typical romance, Edward represents to Bella the ultimate sexual partner as well as the perfect husband, since he is a sexy “real man” but sprinkled with softness, allowing the masculine stallion to become husband-material.

This “perfect man” who is “just right” seems hard to come by in real life. According to Kimmel, many young men struggle with this balance and feel like they receive contradictory messages of “what women want”. A young man called Tom asked Kimmel about his experience with girls saying that they claim to want a nice guy who listens, but still secretly prefers “the strong silent type”. Kimmel decided to test the Anna Quindlen’s Boyfriend vs. Husband problem on the female students in his class. The problem addresses the dilemma many young women faces: feeling that the sensible thing to do is to look for a man who is dependable, honest and show promising signs of being a good father and husband – but, still feeling attracted towards the “boyfriend” type that is exciting, unpredictable and entertaining.

Kimmel gave the girls two options in men: 1. A short, thin, strawberry blond guy who loves you completely and will always be honest and faithful to you, great father and loyal friend. 2. A tall, dark and extremely handsome man with a cold side and record of dishonesty and cheating on women. The class was divided into 50/50, even though everyone seemed unhappy with their choice. One woman, Jeanine refused to choose. “How about I have sex with #2 and marry #1?”

Kimmel explains that the two men are modeled after Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*, where Scarlet O’Hara chooses Rhett, who actually rapes her, even though she wakes up happy the day after as if she actually enjoyed it. Jeanine again: “Okay. I get it. But look, the problem is that Rhett Butler as never been loved by me. When I love him, he’ll change.” Ironically or not, Jeanine expresses how a woman’s love is thought to have transformative powers, as it often has in romantic fantasies like Twilight. It is supposed to turn Rhettas into Ashleys and vampires and werewolves into loving partners. She also states that she does not want

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135 Kimmel, 2008, p. 255-256
136 Kimmel, 2008, p. 257
to choose between a good husband and a passionate lover – but indicate that she could get both with different men.

As Kimmel acknowledges, there is no way of knowing why women chooses Rhett over Ashleys, it might be because of unwillingness to commit or sexual adventure. What also needs to be acknowledged is that girls and young women are sexual creatures just like men, and cannot be expected to always think of sex in connection to love and relationships. Like Bella, many Twilight fans find themselves in the middle of a negotiation with patriarchal forces that want to keep their sexuality on a lockdown. Even if the final message of Twilight is that female desire needs to be kept within the wedlock, the narrative cannot put a lid on the debate on sex that is a huge part of the active fandom.

Bourdieu argues that the symbolic violence of masculine dominance has made women feel uncomfortable with their bodies. Since the male body and sexuality is the norm, women may look upon their sex with a sense of inadequacy, disdain or even disgust. This process is facilitated by a sexist mass media and pop culture, telling girls to discipline their bodies rather than get in touch with them. If we acknowledge this, we can begin to understand the barriers young women need to overcome to fully reclaim their sexuality. As we have seen, female sexuality is frequently harnessed and tied down by patriarchy camouflaged as romantic love. Thus, we might also suspect that some Twilight-related expressions of love are expressions of lust in a more accepted disguise. Bella does not once apologize for her sexuality, inviting the female fans to follow her example. Whenever they choose to have sex, let it be their decision and let us applaud them taking active part in addressing the patriarchal structures that want to influence their choice.

6. Conclusions

Let us recall the research question: Is Twilight counterproductive to female emancipation? As we have seen, the answer is both yes and no. Twilight has a very conservative and problematic narrative on multiple intersecting levels, involving gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Knowing that, the high number of Twilight fans

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137 Kimmel, 2008, p. 258
138 Wilson, 2011, p. 108
139 Bourdieu, 1999, p. 48
140 Cousins, 2010
is alarming and we might share professor Barreca’s frustration and ask where 50 years of women’s movement actually has taken us.

Still, describing Twilight as the place where feminism comes to die would not be accurate. On the other side of the coin, we find a female protagonist with a strong libido and a fan base eager to discuss relationships, sex and even patriarchy. The fandom is not characterized by an audience that is passively buying into every single part of Twilight, but rather actively participating in commenting on the story through different venues. Then again, the Twilight movement is hardly a feminist one. This thesis maintains that the phenomena is full of evidence that points to deeply integrated sexism, since the audience manage to marginalize or even embrace the distinctive “racialized” gender roles that the love story is built on. The point is that the fandom shows critical potential, but also romantic preferences historically influenced by the gendered inequality of Western society.

As we have seen, the Nussbaumian terms of capability and function proved insufficient to fully explain this type of adaptive preferences, since many Twilight fans can be said to have well-developed basic capabilities to base their way of functioning on. To understand why seemingly liberated women prefer Twilight, we need to complete these concepts with Bourdieuan critical theories of symbolic violence, which takes historically constructed hegemonic power relations into account as we try to make sense of how gender roles can be perceived a both natural and sexy.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that this thesis does not argue that love or romance necessarily entails sexism and inequity – quite the contrary. It is alarming how many famous love stories seem to include these features as if they were natural, when they should be the “deal-breakers”. It is clear that love between two people, or between a cultural phenomenon and a fandom, does not automatically equal a healthy relationship. If love is blind, it needs an eye opener ever now and then.

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