

Pace University

DigitalCommons@Pace

Honors College Theses

Pforzheimer Honors College

Spring 5-2009

Girl Empowerment and Unspoken Discourses on Girl Sexuality in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga

Caitlin Gulliford

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [American Popular Culture Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

GIRL EMPOWERMENT AND UNSPOKEN DISCOURSES ON GIRL SEXUALITY
IN STEPHANIE MEYER'S *TWILGHT* SAGA

CAITLIN GULLIFORD

(407).415.7740

11 MAIDEN LANE. #4A

NEW YORK, NY 10038

CAITLIN.GULLIFORD@GMAIL.COM

B.A. in SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY and WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES
MAY, 2009

ADVISOR: DR. TOM HENTHORNE
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
ENGLISH and WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

Précis

In this paper, I explore how Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga employs a form of girl sexual citizenship that recognizes girls as sexualized, but maintains unspoken structures of compulsory heterosexuality, regressive gender norms, and hyper-consumerism in order to police girls as a protection of patriarchy.

The *Twilight* Saga refers to four novels (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*) detailing the teen romance between normal girl Bella Swan and tortured vampire Edward Cullen. Recently, these novels and film adaptations have developed into a pop-culture phenomenon centered upon teenage girls. My research stemmed greatly from a curiosity to know why these particular novels have become so very popular, and I quickly discovered the alluring combination of love, fantasy, sex, and identity politics. The saga sexualizes girls in a way that legitimizes their sexual citizenship, or their belonging in society as sexual beings. However, my research problem focuses on the conflict between legitimizing girl sexuality as empowerment and the unspoken dialogues of patriarchy that wish to control this developing identity.

Our culture thrives upon identity politics, and the ability to grant rights and protections to those of certain identities while marginalizing others. Many feminists would agree that sexual empowerment for girls stems greatly from a healthy sexual development that promotes the girl as the center of control of sexuality. Products of pop-culture often reflect cultural changes of identity, and can often point out where our culture is going in the future. It is important as feminist scholars to analyze something such as *Twilight* to address the identities being created about girls, and also the discourses that may still exist to limit empowerment.

My method focused greatly on researching and using social theory about the development of sexuality, and the basic components of sexual citizenship. In Michel Foucault's work, I was able to use theories of legitimizing sexuality through dialogue and the power of unspoken discourses. In Brenda Cossman's work, I was able to outline a basic template for sexual citizenship focusing on the ability to self-regulate sexuality in terms of control and consumer citizenship, as well as keep it privatized within the family or private sphere. I analyzed the entire *Twilight* Saga in terms of these theories to highlight Bella's empowerment through her recognized sexuality, and also the implicit discourses that limit this sexuality as a way to protect patriarchy.

I found that Bella's identity as a sexually empowered girl, and also a sexually empowered citizen, was more of a guilty pleasure than an actual reality. This is because what was not said throughout the narrative was more controlling of her sexuality, and I found constant themes of compulsory heterosexuality (including anti-masturbatory themes), regressive gender norms that promote patriarchy instead of challenge it, and hyper-consumption to normalize girls as consumers and manipulate the consumption of sex. As a popular text, these discourses are not only limiting to the fictional world, but are enacted by the readers who wish to emulate the identities presented by them.

This paper is more of a theory based analysis of the *Twilight* Saga, and therefore makes theoretical conclusions about its role in the sexual politics of girls. Since the series is current, it is harder to analyze how it has changed girls. However, future research should utilize more quantitative analysis and data, especially interviews with girls, in addition to theoretical analysis of *Twilight* to research the affects on society in a larger picture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Advisory Approval.....	1
Précis.....	2
Introduction.....	5
Review of Literature.....	6
The <i>Twilight</i> Saga.....	9
I. Sexual Empowerment Through Sexual Citizenship.....	
Privatization of Sexuality.....	10
Self-Regulation of Sexuality.....	12
II. Unspoken Discourses of Control.....	
Compulsory Heterosexuality.....	13
Regressive Gender Norms.....	18
Hyper-Consumerism.....	21
Conclusion.....	23
Works Cited.....	25

Introduction

Identity and who we are have become essential in our contemporary society. We utilize identities to value, judge, and even control one another. The social creation of “identity” relies heavily on concepts of race, class, gender, sex, and age, amongst other social constructions. The development of the identity and the conditioning it brings about have often been linked to that of the adolescent, and teenage years of manipulation, rebellion, and self-discovery. All must deal with finding the right identity, which can prove difficult when deciding how we want society to view us - particularly as teens become sexual citizens. For girls, traditional sexualized identities center around a binary of the sexually repressed virgin or the sexually expressive whore – both of which police girls into submissive sexualized roles. Slowly with the development of feminist and girl theory, there has been a movement to discredit this binary with a focus on an “other” type of girl, who can be both sexual and in control without the extreme marginalization or submission. Manifestations include claiming girlhood through pop culture heroines such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer or the Spice Girls.

As with many changes and reactions of society, in popular culture this “other” type of girl often takes the form in narratives of the supernatural, and most recently that of vampires in the *Twilight* Saga. Popular myths and fairy tales have been historically used to critique the confinement of not only characters but also readers in current cultural environments and utilize the magic within the story to offer transformation in larger societal contexts (Wilson 161). The vampire has always been depicted as a creature of consumption – they must consume human blood and sometimes humanity in order to survive as a species. However, Meyer re-imagining of the vampire in the *Twilight* Saga

depicts a more civilized consumer and a more relatable one to girls in our society. In this way vampires signify not only the “other” but also the identity we can become. For girls, the vampires of the *Twilight* series (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*) present a distinct “other” that reflects a conscious sexual identity without repudiating the system and providing them navigation between the identities virgin or whore. This is done through the creation of a discourse that is new enough to satisfy and protect girls from marginalizing societal standards of sexual citizenship, but also from themselves and unacceptable border identities. Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* Saga provides an outlet for sexual development and exploration through the narratives of teenage vampires that normalizes the girl as sexual but also maintains patriarchy in the form of compulsory heterosexuality, the use of the supernatural to manipulate gender in terms of regressive western traditions, while overall presenting girl sexuality as a product for hyper-consumption.

Review of Literature

It is in girlhood, and in particular adolescence, that sexuality is developed into an experience and performance that is critical to the well being of the girl. Even though it is obvious that the social constructs of gender and sexuality affect girls and women at all stages in life, there is significance in centering on adolescent sexuality as the basis of defining “positive” or “healthy” sexuality maturity for girls and subsequently sexual citizenship. The basic standards for sexual citizenship to which both “good citizens” and deviant ones are held focus mainly on the privatization and self-discipline of sex and sexual relationships as, “...individuals are expected to promote their well-being by

managing and minimizing risks. Bad citizens, on the other hand, are those who fail to self-regulate in [the] domains of family, market, and sex” (Cossman 15). In order to become healthy and good sexual citizens, this is the type of sexuality that girls are supposed to develop. Not surprisingly, new discourses in pop culture are being utilized to regulate particular identities that are deemed ‘good’ sexual development that focuses on the girl as a sexual citizen who can be held responsible for her sexuality. This correlates with the fundamental structure of identity politics: by engaging it, these identities become legitimized in normalcy (Meeks 330).

Stephanie Meyer’s teen vampire romance novels are written from the perspective of Bella Swan, and it is through this that we experience her emotional and sexual maturation. By centering on Bella and her development, the *Twilight* Saga makes use of a very particular discourse on the development of girl sexual identity that actually functions as a model of girl sexuality as a whole. The first person narrative gives her, as a girl, a voice in her own sexual development. However, her voice also produces a discourse that is in many ways more controlling than empowering. This is not an uncommon practice in terms of defining identity and consequently using it for social control, as Michel Foucault demonstrates in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault points out that there was a great desire from the eighteenth century onwards to talk about sex, and thus dialogues on the subject multiplied. He explains how there was, “an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (18). By speaking about it, even in terms of repressing it, sex is legitimized and made the center of focus, even when it may seem

that the discussion is not directly doing so. To exemplify this, Foucault analyzes the institutionalized discourse on sex by Christianity's use of confession and the requirement to explain in detail all sexual encounters in order to transform it into a conversation that can better serve the control of religion over its members (23). However, this "installed an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex" allowing for various speech to reflect and even police sex from other institutions. Similarly, the *Twilight* Saga creates its own discourse of sex specifically in terms of the sexual practices of girls that may be influenced by other discourses, such as the Mormonism of its author Stephanie Meyer, but ultimately uses a specific narrative that is detailed through Bella's experience to shape a normalized girl sexuality. In this case, the discourse feels empowering because of Bella's ability to have a private and self-regulated sexuality and acceptable sexual citizenship.

As principal as the direct discourse is, what is not being said is just as important to the realities of the discourse being used that what is being stated explicitly. Foucault explains:

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies (27).

In terms of *Twilight*, what is not being said explicitly within Bella's sexuality is actually creating and influencing the discourse that protects patriarchy and polices girl sexuality accordingly. Some issues that are present but not explicitly defined in the *Twilight* saga

include the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality, normalcy of regressive traditions, and promotion of hyper-consumerism for citizenship status. This demonstrates how, “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault 27).” Creating a new sexual citizenship for girls that is more ‘empowering’ in feeling requires these silent dialogues to police and contain what is necessary in order to protect patriarchy. As Cossman observes, “Subjects who are allowed to cross borders are reconstituted in this process of becoming; they are partially remade in the disciplinary and domesticity terms of membership” and borders “must be contained and controlled, lest the center does not hold, and sexual chaos results (25, 28).” To better understand how this plays out in the *Twilight* Saga, there is value in analyzing specifically how these narratives function through the series by looking specifically at the development of Bella as a private and self-regulated citizen. Also, the various dialogues that are not spoken must be taken into account including compulsory heterosexuality, regressive forms of traditional gender norms, and even hyper-consumption.

The *Twilight* Saga

Throughout the *Twilight* Saga there is an exploration of sexuality and conflict in the main character Bella, and her love for a vampire named Edward. In *Twilight*, Bella chooses to move to Forks, Washington where she eventually meets the Cullen family, a coven of ‘vegetarian’ vampires who feed on animals rather than humans. She and Edward Cullen eventually fall in love, but this is problematic due to her existence as a human and the constant need to protect her from him and other vampires. The second

book, *New Moon*, finds the Cullens *in absentia* so as to protect Bella from the vampire world. Bella goes through a period of extreme depression and thus begins a strong friendship with Jacob Black, a Quileute Native American who is part of a pack of shape-shifting werewolves sworn to protect their tribe from vampires. Here begins the love triangle between the three, as Bella and Edward are reunited towards the end of the book. However, they also receive an ultimatum from the Volturi, a coven of vampires who claim rule over the vampire world, that she either must be turned or killed because she knows their secret. *Eclipse*, the third in the series, explores the conflicts developed in the previous book: the struggle between the Quileute wolf pack and the now returned Cullens, the love triangle between Edward, Bella, and Jacob, and the turning of Bella into a vampire. Much is debated around ideas of morality and “souls”, with Bella agreeing to marry Edward before being turned into a vampire or having sex with him. The final novel, *Breaking Dawn*, begins with the wedding and subsequent honeymoon in which Bella becomes pregnant with a half-human and half-vampire baby. Edward turns her into a vampire during the birth, and their daughter, Renesmee, is discovered to be Jacob’s one true love. United, the Cullens, Quileutes and other vampire friends must protect Renesmee from the Volturi, who do not understand what she is and wishes to destroy her. The entire saga ends with the Volturi leaving without a fight largely, to Bella’s power of protection, and a promise of love forever between Bella and Edward.

Sexual Empowerment Through Sexual Citizenship

In many ways, Bella is accepted as an empowered young woman by the focus of her sexuality as both privatized and self-regulated, these aspects being the standards of

good sexual citizenship. Because she accepts and owns her sexuality she is able to navigate challenges to it and avoid consequent marginalization by normalizing a sexualized but controlled identity. This identity is familialized and located not only within the private sphere of her family, but also within the more private sphere of the vampires - giving her seemingly more responsibility over herself in terms of social citizenship (Cossman 11). Additionally, Bella's sexual desires, wants, and fantasies are all private because her mind is absolutely sealed to everyone (except for the reader): thus she has a literal privatization of her sexuality. Many of the vampires, including the Cullens have special powers or talents. The Cullens consist of seven vampires: Carlisle and Esme, considered to be the coven's father and mother, Emmett and Rosalie (whose powers are strength and beauty), Alice and Jasper, (who can see people's futures and read and manipulate the feelings of people) and Edward (who can read people's minds). Bella is affected by all of these special powers, except for Edward's because her mind is shielded from any powers that might encroach upon it. When asked why he can't hear her thoughts he explains, "The only guess I have is maybe your mind doesn't work the same way the rest of theirs do. Like your thoughts are on AM frequency and I'm only getting FM' (Meyer, *Twilight* 181)." Later on in the series, once she is turned into a vampire, this trait becomes a powerful weapon in protecting her family against the threatening Volturi (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 690) as she learns not only to shield herself but also others around her and becomes the ultimate protector. This privacy of mind is essential to Bella's control of her sexuality. Although she may be influenced by the actions and reactions of others, including Edward, she is able to keep her thoughts and desires to herself, helping her master the self-regulation of her sexuality.

For Bella, self-regulation also means control, and it is this control that simulates her sexual empowerment. In the scene in which Bella, curious to know more about the Cullens, walks along the beach with Jacob Black asking him questions about Edward and his family, she recognizes that by flirting with him and using her sexuality she may be able to get more information. After she gets Jacob to slip and speak briefly about the Cullens, she pursues him in order to get the whole story about them:

“Oops. I’m not supposed to say anything about that.” “Oh, I won’t tell anyone, I’m just curious.” I tried to make my smile alluring, wondering if I was laying it on too thick. He smiled back, though, looking allured...“Do you like scary stories?” he asked ominously. “I *love* them,” I enthused, making an effort to smolder at him (Meyer, *Twilight* 123).

Similarly, when Edward and Bella’s relationship becomes increasingly physical, her desire to have sex becomes a topic of compromise as a result of her control of her sexuality and the privacy of her true wants. Edward wants to wait to have sex until she is a vampire, which has been compromised to take place after they are married (Meyer, *Eclipse* 450). However, Bella recognizes the importance of sex, and the fulfillment of her sexuality, in saying, “I’d had plenty of time...to figure out the things I was willing to lose with my humanity, and the part that I was not willing to give up. I knew which human experience I was going to insist on before I became inhuman (Meyer, *Eclipse* 436).” At the end of *Eclipse*, Bella wins the right to choose what she wants as Edward gives in and agrees to have sex with her before marriage and before transforming. But it is her decision to stop and wait until they are married, demonstrating that the act of

decision making is Bella's sign of her ability to be empowered through the self-regulation of her privatized sexuality.

Unspoken Discourses of Control

The direct discourse that highlights Bella's sexual citizenship is not the only discourse that contains it. As Cossman points out in cases of sexualized women's citizenship, "Women's sexual pleasure is incorporated into sexual citizenship, but in a way that ensures its containment (40)." In the *Twilight* series we see a similar occurrence as 'girl' (instead of 'woman') becomes a sexualized citizen in the narrative of Bella and her sexual pleasure. But, the surrounding unspoken discourses do in fact contain this citizenship, keeping it from becoming total social disarray. It conflicts with the idea that Bella's ability to choose signifies her sexual empowerment, as the selections of choice are limited by discourses of compulsory heterosexuality, regressive gender norms, and hyper-consumption as an indication of social citizenship.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Throughout the *Twilight* series a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality exists, normalizing and policing the boundaries of sexuality for the characters in the books, as well as for the readers. Heteronormative relationships are exclusively portrayed in the saga, with the possible exception of one group of vampires, but constitute the only possible choice Bella has in terms of her sexuality, thus containing it and protecting patriarchy. Before Bella meets Edward she is completely neutral in terms of sexuality. There was nobody who had sparked her interest or inspires her desire. When Edward questions her about her "lack of romantic history" she explains this to him, "So you never

met anyone you wanted?’ he asked in a serious tone that made me wonder what he was thinking about. I was grudgingly honest. ‘Not in Phoenix’ (Meyer, *Twilight* 242).” But as they fall in love and come to terms with being together, Bella explains the new “hungers” that she feels just the same as him. Their conversation goes as follows:

[Edward speaking] “But...” His fingers touched my lips lightly, making me shiver again. “There are other hungers. Hungers I don’t even understand, that are foreign to me.” “I may understand *that* better than you think” “I’m not used to feeling so human. Is it always like this?” “For me?” I paused. “No, never. Never before this (Meyer, *Twilight* 278).”

These feelings are only because of his presence now in her life, demonstrating that without a man to love her sexuality might never been established. Contrary to this, the dialogue used presents a different discourse, that does not particularly highlight this but from which an unspoken discourse on compulsory heterosexuality can be inferred. After being saved by Edward from James, another vampire who becomes obsessed with her, Bella addresses Edward in terms of the equality, and thus portraying a simplified and normalized and non-threatening feminist stance to mask a protection of patriarchy:

“I’ll be the first to admit that I have no experience with relationships,” I said. “But it just seems logical...a man and a woman have to be somewhat equal...as in one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other equally...” “I can’t always be Lois Lane,” I insisted. “I want to be Superman, too (Meyer, *Twilight* 473-74).”

What is problematic in this declaration that allows for a larger discourse to be at work in policing her independence is the phrase, “a man and a woman have to be somewhat

equal,” suggesting that absolute equality is not essential but more equality is beneficial. Consequently, the fact that she wants “to be Superman, too” also points out that the one who saves is always masculine, she just wants to mimic this masculine role. Her voice is utilized to express more ‘liberated’ ideas of who she wants to be in their relationship, but it does so without violating sexual citizenship standards or marginalizes her as being too feminist. The implicit discourse of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy contain and manage Bella’s sexuality and desires quite efficiently.

Since Bella’s sexuality is developed only in the presence of Edward, when he leaves her in *New Moon*, the obligation of heterosexuality is reaffirmed through a discourse that is anti-masturbatory and relies on the presence of another male to complete her. With the loss of Edward, she experiences a loss of sanity – which reinforces the sexualized discourse by exemplifying the importance of sex. However, the only acceptable way for her to regain sanity and wholeness is by building a relationship with Jacob, her Quileute friend. When Edward leaves her she explains how detrimental this is to her: “If I stopped looking for him, it was over. Love, life, meaning...over (Meyer, *New Moon* 73)” and the pain she feels is described as hole in her chest that feels as if her entire body is ripping apart, and her only defense is to “[curl] inward, hugging my ribs to hold myself together (Meyer, *New Moon* 118).” In losing his presence, she also loses the ability to self-regulate herself. Charlie, her father, points this out to her when he suggests she seek help, ““Honey, you’re not handling it. I waited, I hoped it would get better...I think we both know it’s not getting better (Meyer, *New Moon* 96).” Bella then attempts to find a way to make herself whole again.

She soon discovers that by placing herself in situations of danger she can hear his voice, an act that fills this void temporarily and is synonymous to self-gratification, or rather be able to please/find relief by herself. When she hears his voice she becomes lucid: “In the instant that I heard his voice, everything was very clear. Like my head had suddenly surfaced out of some dark pool. I was more aware of everything – sight, sound, the feel of the cold air...(Meyer, *New Moon* 111).” In order to have these moments of sanity and completeness, she must simulate his voice by herself through other dangerous acts, the most important being an attempt at cliff diving on the Quileute Reservation entirely by herself. Jacob saves her from drowning, but the fact that this almost kills her highlights a discourse against self-satisfaction of sexuality, or rather a variation on masturbation. The only way to be properly satisfied is through a direct relationship with a man – attempting to do so otherwise is highly dangerous. This reinforces compulsory heterosexuality by demanding that Bella seek out another man to fulfill her, which she begins to do with Jacob:

I remember wishing that Jacob were my brother. I realized now that all I really wanted was a claim on him. It didn't feel brotherly when he held me like this. It just felt nice – warm and comforting and familiar. Safe. Jacob was a safe harbor (Meyer, *New Moon* 375).

Although not ideal because Bella still loves Edward, the only safe way she can complete herself and satisfy her sexuality again is by transferring it to Jacob. Again, this demonstrates not only a warning against attempting to sexually satisfy oneself on your own, but also heterosexual relationships are the only acceptable form to do so.

The most obvious example of the implicit discourse of compulsory heterosexuality comes in *Breaking Dawn* with the arrival of possible lesbian vampires, who have come to witness for the defense of the Cullen family from the Volturi. Zafrina and Senna are described by Bella as wearing “eccentric clothes” made from wild animal skins and leather lace ties, but this isn’t just what makes them appear “wild” but, “everything about them, from their restless crimson eyes to their sudden, darting movements. I’d never met any vampires less civilized (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 613).”

The pair of them came to Forks together without their third member who is helping Alice in the Amazon, and Bella comments on their unusual closeness, “Senna was always near Zafrina, never speaking...Senna and Zafrina were more like two limbs of one organism – Zafrina just happened to be the mouthpiece (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 613). It is soon discovered that Zafrina’s special power is the ability to create illusions. This suggests also the ability to never show her true sexual identity. Her presence both physically and emotionally could be an illusion she is creating, and there is no way to prove whether or not what is perceived of Zafrina is her real identity. Not surprisingly, Bella, who is exclusively heterosexual, explains, “In truth, though I liked Zafrina very much and I knew she wouldn’t really hurt me, the wild woman scared me to death (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 617).”

What is not being said, but is still a present discourse of compulsory heterosexuality, is the fear and avoidance of any others who cannot confirm their heterosexuality. Because they are women in particular, it is imperative for Bella to fear the Amazons, as they are a true threat to her sexuality. In fearing them she confirms her heterosexuality and endorses a discourse that silently polices it as the only possible norm.

Regressive Gender Norms

The unspoken discourse on compulsory heterosexuality is not only used to contain sexuality, but is also used to protect and promote patriarchy. What results is another emerging dialogue around sex that focuses control through morality and regressive patriarchal gender norms. Bella's heterosexuality affords her the right to have sex, but when she chooses not to do so before getting married, a discourse of "sexual morality" is being presented as a means of control. Initially, Bella wants to have sex with Edward more so than anything else. Nevertheless, she agrees to marry him first as per his condition of protecting her virtue and ensuring her place in heaven, if such a place exists after a vampire dies (Meyer, *Eclipse* 453). Edward eventually gives in, though, and offers to have sex before getting married, but she says no explaining "I'm following all the rules, Edward. Your soul is far, far too important to me to take chances with (Meyer, *Eclipse* 620)." The "rules" of morality - no pre-marital sex - are more important than satisfying immediate lusts or wants. This presents a regressive model of the sexual responsibilities of girls that resembles abstinence only sex-education, and that girls should not practice sex at all until they are married. She even is forced to pronounce her purity to her father, designating his authority over her sexuality until marriage, in an awkward sex talk:

"Just tell me that you two are being responsible," Charlie pled..."Don't worry about it, Dad, it's not like that." "Not that I don't trust you, Bella, but I know you don't want to tell me anything about this, and you know I don't really want to hear it. I will try to be open-minded, though. I know the times have changed..."Ugh!" I groaned. "I really wish you were not forcing me to say this

out loud, Dad. *Really*. But...I am a...virgin, and I have no immediate plans to change that status (Meyer, *Eclipse* 59).”

Charlie specifically says “responsible,” which does not specify whether he is referring to abstaining or practicing safe sex. Furthermore, it is imperative and important to not only promise him that they are responsible, but that she is a virgin and will remain so. This conversation highlights a greater discourse on not only pro-abstinence only education, but also the encouragement of girls to remain virgins, as does Bella. Although it is a contemporary issue that continues to be debated, many recognize that it is pointless to enforce, and yet it is still an implicit discourse in this very popular romance series.

These regressive gender norms also develop a discussion of the constitution of marriage and call for a movement back to traditional “forever” relationships instead of more contemporary serial monogamous ones. It has been noted by many sociologists that the patterns of marriage have changed over time from more life-long partnerships, to being “characterized by the pursuit of individual fulfillment” that is more voluntary (Cossman 71). In the *Twilight* Saga, there is a discourse supporting traditional structures of relationships and marriage by romanticizing concepts of being “soul mates.” This greatly takes place within Bella and Edward’s relationship, but also with the subsequent pairing of all the other vampires as “mates.” When thinking about marrying Edward, she contemplates the conflict that contemporary society places on their love by envisioning “A World where it would surprise no one if I wore his ring on my finger. A simpler place, where love was defined in simpler ways. One plus one equals two...(Meyer, *Eclipse* 325). Bella and Edward’s love become ideal, and the structure of their

relationship reflects more traditional marriages than contemporary ones. This is reinforced when while on their honeymoon Bella gets pregnant from the first time they have sex (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 124). Consummation sex also becomes procreation sex, thus representing a very conservative discourse that the pivotal role of sex is procreation.

This nostalgia for a simpler time of love does not apply exclusively to the vampires, but is also featured in the Quileute wolf pack through the practice of “imprinting.” Jacob explains to Bella that this is more powerful than just love-at-first-sight, but a more absolute way of finding one’s soul mate (Meyer, *Eclipse* 123). It is so powerful and binding, that when Jacob imprints on Renesmee, Edward and Bella’s daughter, in *Breaking Dawn*, the rest of the wolf pack swears protection over her as she must now be protected for Jacob’s sake (Meyer, *Eclipse* 456). The most startling issue about this is the ability of grown men to imprint on infant girls. When Jacob’s friend and pack member imprints on a two-year old he doesn’t view this as bad as contemporary norms would make it seem and explains to Bella that by imprinting he will be whatever she needs at all times of her life (Meyer, *Eclipse* 176). When Bella questions whether or not the girl gets a say Jacob answers her by explaining, “Of course. But why wouldn’t she choose him, in the end? He’ll be her perfect match. Like he was designed for her alone (Meyer, *Eclipse* 176).” The dialogue of imprinting on girls at a young age validates the idea that the best match for any girl is a patriarch, a man who can protect and love you. All of this demonstrates a retreat of normalized marriage and relationships to non-voluntary, forever partnerships typical of historical patriarchal marriage patterns. This works well within a discourse of regressive gender norms as it works hand in hand with abstinence, as not

only are girls' sexuality maintained by abstaining from sex until marriage but also until you find the one person you should marry. Patriarchal practices are being glorified through without the explicit discussion of this implicit discourse.

Hyper-Consumerism

In addition to compulsory heterosexuality and regressive gender norms, a concealed discourse of hyper-consumerism as a standard for sexual citizenship is also utilized to regulate girls' sexuality. Throughout the entire series, there is a constant focus on consumerism by building images of characters through the products they own. This is best exemplified by Edward's shiny silver Volvo, or the Porsche that Edward buys Alice as a bribe to keep Bella safe while he goes away to hunt (Meyer, *Eclipse* 146). What is important about this is how the Cullens have figured out how to appear human – by consuming human things in the form of products like clothes or cars. This is translated onto Bella by Edward's preference for her to wear certain clothes and desire to buy her gifts, and she even admits to the importance of distinction and taste in consumerism when she loves her old red truck Charlie buys for her (Meyer, *Twilight* 8). Although she refuses most gifts because she does not want to be doted on, it doesn't change the fact that consumerism is essential in building their identities as civilized. Those who are not as civilized, either nomadic human hunting vampires or more explicitly the Amazon vampires, have fewer products. It is a dialogue that is unnoticed within the texts.

Although, this discourse appears to be less obvious as a means of controlling sexual citizenship than the others, but is just as relevant and probably most successful. In our larger contemporary capitalistic society, market-self reliance and consumption have become key factors of good citizenship “by virtue of the norms of market consumption”

and market self-reliance (Cossman 40). Not only is this thinly structured within the *Twilight* series, but it also constitutes the saga as a whole. Our culture is one of hyper-consumption, where we consume products in mass amounts in order to satisfy our wants and desires. Consequently, the *Twilight* Saga redirects the budding sexuality of many girls into the experience of consuming the books, movies, clothing, jewelry, and other various *Twilight* themed products. This correlates with maintaining the norm of girl sexuality as explored through Bella in the books by protecting girls from going out and experiencing sex for themselves: if they are too busy reading *Twilight*, watching the movie, or blogging on fansites, they are safe from becoming sexually deviant at least physically. This is not to say that all of the fans are teenage girls; however, since the books are narrated from the perspective of one, they entail social commentary about girls as social citizens. With over 10.7 million copies of the four books in print, and being sold in thirty-seven different countries, it is impossible to ignore the significance of its consumption (Valby, "Vampire Empire" 24-25). Additionally, the first film adaptation, *Twilight*, has grossed over \$350 million worldwide, with more films on the way (Valby, "Shooting Twilight" 28). Through mass consumption across various mediums, characters become products for consumption, especially Edward amongst girl consumers who see him as the "perfect boyfriend" and seek out a relationship with a fictional character by buying products featuring him. Even the soundtrack for the film, available to be purchased, feature songs such as "Bella's Lullaby" – a present Edward writes for Bella in the first book (Burwell 2008). Keeping the focus on how the series can be consumed allows the unspoken discourses that are present throughout the books to have

practical application by maintaining girls' sexuality through the various products that are imbued with the qualities of the discourses.

Conclusion

In Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga, various discourses on sexuality are explored through the first-person narrative of average girl, Bella, as she falls in love with a vampire, Edward Cullen. Bella is presented as a smart young woman, who is aware of her own sexuality and as a result uses it to her advantage in terms of her sexual citizenship. Not only is her sexuality private, but also self-regulated by Bella in terms of her family in both the human world and vampire world. However, the sexualization of Bella does not imply absolute sexual empowerment and there remain important unspoken discourses that police the boundaries to Bella's sexuality. These include compulsory heterosexuality, morality and gender norms, and hyper-consumerism. Although, Bella uses her power to decide her future, the unspoken discourses limit her choices. Bella only knows sex through male characters, cannot personally satisfy herself sexually, fears others who cannot prove their own heterosexuality, follows moral rules and supports patriarchy, and pursues a conservative marriage and family life demonstrating how much more control these social structures play in her life than her decisions. As a result, the *Twilight* saga is more regressive, hetero-normative, and controlling of girls' sexuality than the empowerment of Bella implies. Accordingly, these controlling discourses extend beyond the pages of the novels as they become products for use by the many girls consume them in the books, movies, and other various *Twilight* themed paraphernalia. By engaging girls as sexualized citizens, the *Twilight* saga as a pop-culture phenomenon

sustains the ability to legitimize these controlling discourses in mass contemporary girl culture. The current popularity of the *Twilight* franchise is so new that there is little academic research on the immediate reaction of girls from girls themselves. However, it will be interesting to see if the concept of the sexualized girl will develop into more creative and popular examples, or will the silent discourses that maintain control of patriarchy regress the empowerment of girls.

Works Cited

- Burwell, Carter. Bella's Lullaby. Twilight (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack). Chop Shop/Atlantic, 2008.
- Cosman, Brenda. Sexual Citizens: The Legal and Cultural Regulation of Sex and Belonging. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction. New York: Random House, Inc, 1978.
- Meeks, Chet. "Civil Society and the Sexual Politics of Difference." Sociological Theory 19.3 (2001): 326-43. JSTOR. The Henry Birnbaum Library, Pace University. 28 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3108599>>.
- Meyer, Stephanie. Breaking Dawn. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008.
- . Eclipse. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2007.
- . New Moon. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006.
- . Twilight. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005.
- Wilson, Sharon R. Myths and Fairy Tales in Contemporary Women's Fiction. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
- Valby, Karen. "Shooting Twilight." Entertainment Weekly 18 Feb. 2009: 27-33.
- Valby, Karen. "The Vampire Empire." Entertainment Weekly 18 July 2008: 23-27.