Negotiating The Interconnections of Sociality, Identity, Fan Activism And Connectivity Within The Twilight Community

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NEGOTIATING THE INTERCONNECTIONS OF SOCIALITY, IDENTITY, FAN ACTIVISM AND CONNECTIVITY WITHIN THE *TWILIGHT* COMMUNITY

by

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For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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DEDICATION

My research is dedicated twofold: First, to the fans of the *Twilight* series who inspired me to see fandom as something *more.* I hope that this project helps people to see beyond common stereotypes of adult, female fans of the *Twilight* series. Second, to my loving parents, Michael and Carol O’Brien, who supported and encouraged me even when this process felt impossible. Thank you for enduring this with me and never losing faith in me. It means so much that you believed in me even when I had trouble believing in myself. I love you both dearly.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to the fans of the *Twilight* series and members of Esme’s Heart who took the time to share their experiences with me, the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina, and my committee of Drs. Kimberly Simmons, Kimberly Cavanagh, Jennifer Reynolds, and Sherina Feliciano-Santos. I would also like to thank Dr. Marc Moskowitz, Dr. Kate Adams, Cat Keegan, Dr. Susan Smith, Calli Ensor, Katie and Kira Saracen, and all my encouraging colleagues who supported me throughout this process. I am forever grateful for the support of my friends and family, all of whom helped me to reach the finish line through their support. To my nieces and nephew, Ashley, Vincent, Emily, Catherine and Madeline: thank you all for being my sunshine and bringing such love and joy into my life. I especially want to thank my sister, Sunny, for always welcoming me into her home and heart, listening to my stressed ramblings, and making me laugh with Latin jokes, *Joseph* songs, and memories of secret childhood messages. For all these things and more, thank you for being my sister and friend. In closing, I genuinely believe undertakings such as this are accomplished through a collective effort. Thank you to everyone who invested in me and helped me to accomplish this goal. It means more than you will ever know.
ABSTRACT

In my dissertation, “Negotiating the Interconnections of Sociality, Identity, Fan Activism and Connectivity within the Twilight Community”, I examine the ways in which women employed a shared interest in a cultural text to establish meaningful social relationships with other fans. Rather than focusing solely on consumptive pleasure, these fans of the Twilight series utilized the intense popularity of the franchise to engage in charitable activities. Through these common threads of identity, community, virtual technologies, and charity, I contend that the Twilight fandom represents a new form of fan community, which is trending upward and creating an impact beyond the traditional sphere of fandom. The internet and virtual technologies continue to increase the interconnectedness between people, and the ways in which experiences—online and offline—intermingle and flow back and forth to create vibrant fan communities that impact the world with both consumptive pleasure and altruistic intentions. As such, it becomes relevant to understand the ways in which fandom and the ensuing activities are enacted and experienced by people in a contemporary, technologically mediated community.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world. So this was really different. I was amazing now – to them and to myself. It was like I had been born to be a vampire. The idea made me want to laugh, but it also made me want to sing. I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined.

Bella Swan, *Breaking Dawn*¹

*Fans must actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by their borrowed materials; fans must confront media representations on an unequal terrain.*

Henry Jenkins²

1.1 The Research Question

My initial contact with the *Twilight* was a book store display case, which was prominently displayed at the entrance. I remember asking my friend what the “deal” was with these books. She rolled her eyes and commented that it was just the latest teenage vampire series, but it was no *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. Frustrated with the mainstreaming of “my” genre of fandom and a view that I was “too old” for it, I purposefully ignored the *Twilight* series until the film was released. After seeing the film, I became entranced with this depiction of a vampire who falls for an average girl and their journey together. I quickly purchased all of the books, and although feeling guilty for my consumption, I devoured all of them in only a week. I found myself continually

¹ Meyer 2008:523-524.
² Jenkins 1992:33.
confused as to why I enjoyed the series. As a feminist, I was frustrated by the female protagonist's willingness to change her life for the male character. As a scholar, I was baffled at the author's writing style and over use of descriptive adjectives. As an adult, I was worried that I was too old to be reading these books intended for teenagers. As a fan, I knew it wasn't the best series I had ever encountered, but there was just something about it that captured my attention. Apparently, I was not the only person to encounter this fascination as the Twilight series has spanned an impressively large fan community that consists not only of teenage girls, but adult women that interact with each other both through the internet and in person.

This dissertation centers around an ethnography of a southeastern U.S. based fan community devoted to the popular literary and cinematic series, Twilight (Meyer 2005), with a special focus on women's social interaction and cultural production through online and offline research methodologies. Just as the invention of the telephone did not indicate the end of face to face social interaction, the increasing popularity of computer-mediated communication does not indicate a decline in the importance of the “real” world (Boellstorff 2008). Rather these two realms are continually intersecting as the boundary between the online and the offline, which is imagined and created, breaks down. Researching the intersection of online and offline sociality is an expansive topic. Thus, analyzing the ways in which a fan community incorporates sociality through online and offline interactions will center the project around a cohesive element. Previous studies on fan communities have illustrated that these communities act as a place for people to gather who have similar preferences and views on cultural products (Bury 2005, Castranova 2005, Jenkins 1992, Sandvoss 2005), but little attention has been paid to the
ways in which online communities interact when meeting in “real life” and vice versa.

Online interactions between fans can often lead to more direct and personal communication, such as through private messages, phone calls, or face to face meetings at *Twilight* events. Members of the community sometimes gather in person for events, like conventions or group meetings, which present an opportunity for people to meet and socially interact with their online friends. In addition to these meetings devoted to *Twilight*, women will also organize events in their areas, such as social meetings, charitable activities, or movie premiere events, that provide additional opportunities for people to gather in person. Working with this community will provide an opportunity to better understand the ways in which women are living their lives in a fractured and disjunctive world that consists of constantly shifting boundaries. With the increasing prevalence of mobile technologies that bridge connections across physical geography, communication becomes a non-linear process of socialty that operates through a multitude of avenues.

As previous social networks based upon college or childhood connections weaken with the progression of time, women are replacing these relationships with new social ties with people who share a common interest, such as *Twilight*, via the internet. Adult women within the *Twilight* community gather together online and offline in an effort to communicate with other adults as the series is intended for a youth audience. As the community operates in a dual capacity, this allows women more freedom to facilitate friendships while still conducting their daily responsibilities. The *Twilight* franchise acts as an initial bonding factor that often gives way to more deep and personal relationships. In this capacity, many women are able to fulfill their daily lives as family caretakers
while simultaneously fulfilling their social needs by cultivating a new social circle online. This study is a unique opportunity because it provides a site to base a study that analyzes the influence and impact of computer-mediated social networks on the embodied and lived daily lives of women while acknowledging the interconnectedness of the online and offline spheres of sociality.

Using a fan community as the focus of my research represents an opportunity to analyze the ways in which connections between the online and offline are negotiated by participants. My research focused on adult women, some stay at home mothers and others employed, who create social networks through their interactions with the *Twilight* fan community. Through an analysis of their online interactions and in person participant observation, I explore the shifting aspects of sociality in the contemporary world in response to technological advancements. This poses a series of questions: In what ways are adult women utilizing the *Twilight* fandom to create social networks through the intersection of online and offline interactions that reflect the changing nature of sociality and communication in the contemporary U.S.? What role are these social interactions fulfilling for the women involved? Why is the *Twilight* series the cohesive element within this social network and what makes the series uniquely suited to facilitating a social bond between these women? In what ways do groups of this variety cause a reconceptualization of the term 'community' and the ways in which fandoms operate? Furthermore, how do these social interactions make us question the very nature of what is viewed as 'real' or 'virtual'?

1.2 Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*

The *Twilight* series began with a dream Stephenie Meyer had in 2003, which
prompted her to write a four book series that centers around a supernatural world of vampires, shapeshifters, and an average girl who becomes inextricably involved in this mythical milieu (Irwin 2009). This dream spawned a literary and film series that has captured the attention of millions. The first book, *Twilight*, was published in 2005 with an initial printing of 75,000 copies (Grossman 2009). *New Moon*, the second novel in the series, was released in 2006 with an increased original printing of 100,000 copies (Grossman 2009). By the release of the third book, *Eclipse*, interest in the series was apparent to the publishing company and resulted in an initial print of one million books in 2007 (Grossman 2009). Little, Brown, the publishing company, broke their record for the largest first printing with the release of the fourth novel, *Breaking Dawn*, at 3.2 million books in 2008 (Rosen 2008). Altogether the series has sold over 100 million copies (Sellers 2010) and been on the New York Times Best Sellers List for 235 weeks with 136 of those at number one (Grossman 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twilight</th>
<th>October 5, 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>New Moon</em></td>
<td>September 6, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eclipse</em></td>
<td>August 7, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Breaking Dawn</em></td>
<td>August 2, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.1 The Twilight Series Book Publication Dates*

However, the reach of *Twilight* has not been limited to the literary sphere. With the release of the first film in 2008, the *Twilight* series has become a formidable revenue
machine with a gross total of box office and video sales of $5.6 billion USD\textsuperscript{3}.

![Diagram showing release dates for Twilight series movies](image)

**Figure 1.2 The Twilight Series Movie Box Office Release Dates**

The first film earned $590,693,788\textsuperscript{4} at the worldwide box office and $266,552,965\textsuperscript{5} in video sales. *New Moon* nearly doubled the worldwide box office earnings with $1,006,447,268\textsuperscript{6} and $221,754,115\textsuperscript{7} in consumer spending on videos. A special screening of *Twilight* and *New Moon* the day before the release of *Eclipse* generated $4,770,474\textsuperscript{8} in worldwide box office sales. *Eclipse* earned less than its predecessor with $1,000,122,432\textsuperscript{9} in worldwide box office sales and video sales of $214,668,304\textsuperscript{10}. The worldwide box office revenue for *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* declined from the previous two films to

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\textsuperscript{3} While revenue is not a sole indicator of importance, the significance of *Twilight*'s popularity at both the domestic and international level is undeniable and this is limited to worldwide box office and video revenue, not the myriad of other *Twilight* commodities for sale.


$991,225,790\textsuperscript{11} and $142,583,449\textsuperscript{12} in video sales domestically. The release of *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* saw a rise to its highest amount of worldwide box office revenue at $1,124,984,774\textsuperscript{13} and domestic video sales of $100,988,046\textsuperscript{14}. The *Twilight* franchise generated $4.7 billion USD in revenue worldwide in box office sales and $946,546,879 USD in domestic video sales. The series has captured the attention of the masses as evidenced by the financial revenue of the films and the sustaining popularity of the books. I will now provide a brief synopsis of the books as a reference for those unfamiliar with the premise of the series.

In the first book, Isabella Swan moves to Forks, Washington to live with her father and encounters the mysterious Edward Cullen. When Bella discovers that Edward is a vampire, her life is endangered by a wandering vampire who attempts to kill Bella to upset Edward. The Cullen family strives to protect Bella and the threatening vampire is killed (Meyer 2005). *New Moon*, the second book, begins with Edward ending his relationship with Bella in an effort to protect her from supernatural harm. Falling into a deep depression, Bella is comforted by her friend, Jacob Black, who is a shapeshifting werewolf. When Edward's life is threatened in Italy by the royal family of vampires, Bella goes to save him and their relationship is restored at the expense of her friendship with Jacob as vampires and werewolves are mortal enemies (Meyer 2006). In *Eclipse*, mysterious killings in Seattle are the efforts of a plan for revenge by the mate of the vampire killed in the first book. With an army of newborn vampires to fight, the Cullen

family joins forces with the werewolf pack. These events are the background for the development of the love triangle between Bella, Edward, and Jacob. The book ends with Bella agreeing to marry Edward as he agrees to change her into a vampire (Meyer 2007). The last book, *Breaking Dawn*, begins with the wedding between Edward and Bella which results in her becoming pregnant during the honeymoon. In a gruesome scene, Bella gives birth to a daughter and is transformed into a vampire with special defensive powers. As changing children is forbidden, the Italian royal family travels to Forks for an epic battle, which is avoided due to Bella's defensive abilities. The happy ending is further wrapped up as the emotional loose end, Jacob, “imprints” on Bella's daughter and thus fits into the happy picture that is her life as an immortal vampire with a husband, daughter, extended family, and best friend (Meyer 2008).

Interest in the *Twilight* series, whether it is positive or negative, is an undeniable reality within the contemporary United States. Debates over its content, such as subtextual religious meanings and the portrayal of women, are widespread among both fans and dissenters alike. Literature discussing the series ranges from a discussion of morality (see Bruner 2009, Fosl and Fosl 2009, Kazez 2009, Silverman 2009) to the gendered implications of the characters decisions (see Housel 2009, McClimans and Wisnewski 2009, Myers 2009, Shaw 2009), but remains predominantly within the discipline of philosophy. The religious doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which is subtextually communicated through the series, highlights issues such as abstinence until marriage. The presence of these topics in the books are both criticized and lauded by readers as the erotics of abstinence are depicted until the characters marry (Shaw 2009). Readers do not always engage with material in the same
ways and often read actively, which results in an alternative message being received than the one intended by the author (Jenkins 1992). For this reason, the anthropological approach presents a useful perspective as it will allow for an interpretation that highlights the standpoint of the audience.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

I utilized both traditional anthropological methods, such as interviews and participant observation, and methodologies specifically designed for online research. As my goal is to explore the connections between online and offline interactions, I conducted my research both within the online context and the offline realm. To answer the proposed research question, I interacted with members of the community both online and offline to gain an understanding of the ways in which they negotiate the social aspects of the Twilight community. While studies of online communities are also occurring within the fields of cultural studies and communications, an anthropological focus will shed more light on these situations with a focus on the lived experiences of the participants.

I conducted preliminary research in person at a Creation Entertainment Twilight convention in Indianapolis in July of 2010. At this convention I employed traditional anthropological methods, such as participant observation and interviews. I attended a convention, DragonCon, with a young adult literature panel track in September of 2011. The bulk of the research for this project was conducted from July of 2012 to May of 2013 with subsequent follow up interviews in July and December of 2014. The online portion of the project occurred throughout the time period from July of 2012 to December of 2014, predominantly through Facebook. I reached out to a fan group located in the

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middle Georgia area, Esme’s Heart, in July of 2012 and it was with this group, or snowball sampling through its members, that the bulk of my research was conducted.

Members of the community frequently meet for events to see the Twilight movie premieres, have dinner, and socialize. To gain an understanding of these social events that are initiated by members of the community, I organized specific trips over the course of the research period to attend these events, such as monthly meetings for Esme’s Heart. In particular, the release date of the fourth film occurred during the research period, which provided an opportunity to attend the movie premiere event coordinated by Esme’s Heart. During these trips I engaged in participant observation and conducted interviews. Individual interviews helped me to gain a better understanding of personal experiences while a group interview comprised of friends and active Esme’s Heart members helped contextualize and illustrate the social relationships between women. Due to the geographic location of Esme’s Heart, the participants in my project lived in Georgia with the middle Georgia areas of Macon and Warner Robins being the most common cities of residence. As such, my site visits were to the Macon area as that was the central hub for the Esme’s Heart group.

While I do not want to oversimplify participants, the majority were white, heterosexual married women with children who practiced various denominations of Protestant Christianity. 25% of participants were between the ages of 21 and 29, 44% were between 30 and 39, and 20% were between 40 and 49. While themes of religion were often mentioned in passing, I did not experience pressure to adhere a Protestant

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16 While a small percentage of participants mentioned communicating with fans from other countries online, I did not identify any organized groups in other countries that were similar to Esme’s Heart. However, this does not mean they do not exist, just that I did not encounter any.

17 4% were under the age of 20 and 7% were between 50 and 59, with no participants over the age of 60.
religion myself and a small percent of people identified as agnostic. However, religious themes of charity and the redistribution of wealth through giving back was subtextually present. While politics were rarely mentioned, many appeared to align with the conservative Republican party. I will comment that the young man who attended events and was their Edward look-a-like was very well liked by the women of Esme’s Heart and he sometimes brought his boyfriend and mother to events. Thus, I did not witness any open dismissal of others with different lifestyles.

There was more diversity in terms of socioeconomic class with some participants more financially wealthy than others. As I will discuss later, participants communicated that one of the things they appreciated about Esme’s Heart was that the focus was one giving back within your own capabilities and the leadership of the group did not make smaller contributions feel less appreciated. Most participants lived in the central Georgia cities of Warner Robins, Forsyth, Gray, and Macon. Based on data from 2009 to 2013, the median household income for Warner Robins was $44,964\textsuperscript{18} while the income for the neighboring Macon was just $25,773\textsuperscript{19}. In 2013, 35% of the Macon population lived below the poverty line with an estimated population of 89,981. While for Warner Robins residents, 20.4% of the 72,531 persons living in the city in 2013 were economically below the poverty line. Lastly, according to 2010 census data, 28.6% of the Macon population were white alone and 53.2% of the Warner Robins residents were white alone. The Macon Metropolitan Area was frequently described by participants as a rural area that predominantly had activities and opportunities in the Macon area itself.

I did not disguise my status as a researcher to participants and most were willing to aid with the project. Olivia, a board member of Esme’s Heart, told me during an interview:

*I said *‘I’m going Saturday for an interview.’* He [her husband] said ‘An interview?’ I said ‘Yeah, there’s a girl writing her thesis on Twilight.’* 

He said ‘I thought you were done with all this stuff…when the movie ended!’* I said ‘Baby, we still do stuff. We still want to do stuff for the community.’* And I said, ‘And this girl’s writing her thesis, I have to help her!’*

While not all people I encountered wanted to speak with me, due to lack of time or hesitation to discuss their experiences, many were very willing to assist me with the project and wanted to ‘help’ me. I made an effort to reassure participants that I was not trying to write a sensationalist work about them as ‘crazy’ fans and my personal knowledge of *Twilight* seemed to provide them with a level of security of that fact. One participant, Chloe, jokingly turned the recorder on me during an interview after I asked her if she felt I had missed any important topics:

*No, cause I think you’re so involved in the fan world of it that you…you’re in the same boat we are. I mean you’re a member of our group...I mean at this point you could interview yourself and kind of answer your own questions and I don’t know if you’re trying to stay objective in it?*

While I endeavored to not guide or influence the project, ultimately my perspective and subjectivity as a fellow fan had both its benefits, such as in gaining participant
confidence, and limitations as my viewpoint is more so sympathetic as part of what lead me to this project was an attempt to better understand my own fascination and fan status. Throughout this project I learned more about myself as a fan and the ways in which I too was drawn to the *Twilight* series. In this way, I am unable to fully separate myself from the project and it becomes a form of native ethnography (Narayan 1993). By knowing the series and being a fan myself, I was able to better communicate with community participants and build a trust that my intentions were to understand and not sensationalize. As fan communities center around a common enjoyment of a cultural text, understanding that text as a fan and researcher positioned me as a native ethnographer and, thus, I want to articulate my positioning.

**Defining the Twilight Community**

While it is difficult to determine a cohesive *Twilight* community in its entirety, I focused on a subset population within the fandom. My project centers around adult women, many of whom are mothers, and their participation in the community. As the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the ways in which social networks are formed in a technologically mediated world through virtual and physical interactions, I initially constrained my project to the southeastern U.S. in an effort to increase the probability of teasing out the mapping of a loosely bounded community. The southeastern U.S. consists of ten states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. As community participation is often based on logistical and economic availability, I anticipated that members primarily participate in physical meetings that are in close proximity to their home location. As such, due to the group I worked with being located in Georgia, this
was where my participants resided. While not all participants were specific members of Esme’s Heart, I was able to reach them through snowball sampling through the group. Many of the people had previously attended Esme’s Heart events, such as movie premieres, but lived too far away to be an active member and kept up with them predominantly online through Facebook.

While most of my research participants are mothers, I did not control for this factor and some did not have children. I restricted my sample population to people over the age of eighteen in an effort to analyze the ways in which social networks form upon becoming an 'adult.' As a caveat, based on previous experience with the community, I did not anticipate a population of men who were active in the fan group, but if this expectation was false then I intended to include them as participants. While I heard the term ‘TwiDads’ mentioned in passing during my preliminary research, I did not encounter any men who fulfilled that category of being fans of the series and active in a group separate from a spouse during my research. Additionally, as this research was conducted toward the tail end of the Twilight phenomenon, many fans had been part of the community for years and some were displaying signs of ‘fandom fatigue’. As such, the narratives and stories that were recounted to me were more generalized in nature and an overview of their experiences, which may have spanned years. I would have enjoyed the opportunity to interact with more groups that are engaging fandom and charity similar to Esme’s Heart, be it within the Twilight franchise or other fandoms. The opportunity to travel to Forks, Washington, the setting for the Twilight series, with participants would have been an exciting experience and enlightening fan pilgrimage. Thus, I look forward to the future research of fan studies, which will continue to expand the theories of fandom
based charitable activities and the ways in which different communities come to be and interact.

**The Role of Online Methodologies**

The importance of exploring online research methods within anthropology is recognized by a range of scholars. However, the scholarship does not cohesively agree on the best approach as online methods are varied and dependent upon the specific research project. Previous scholarship on the intersection of online and offline communities predominantly focuses on epistemological issues of knowledge production and methodological challenges, such as the difficulties of building rapport with participants online (Orgad 2005, Ruhleder 2000, Wakeford 1999). In contrast, some scholars argue that online research methods are sufficient on their own for research projects and dismiss the use of offline methods (Boellstorff 2008). Tom Boellstorff questions why the “punchline” of online studies is so often to establish continuity with offline experiences (Boellstorff 2008:61). Centered around the virtual world within the game Second Life, Boellstorff’s study addresses the ways in which online participants construct a social world within the virtual space that is both real and significant (Boellstorff 2008). Boellstorff’s argument that online methods are sufficient for certain research projects is an important methodological point but I have utilized these theoretical models by incorporating a more traditional anthropological approach that includes participant observation and interviews. With a focus on the expansion of social interactions to incorporate new mediums, I analyzed these social networks as they occupy a space in which online and offline aspects of socialization are intersecting.

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Through participation in Facebook and individual discussions online, I interviewed people via the internet and observe the fan group’s Facebook activity. I conducted individual interviews online through various chat programs. While the initial website that grabbed my attention was TwilightMOMS.com due to its highly active nature, I ended up working with the smaller, more geographically bonded group of Esme’s Heart. The TwilightMOMS website was created in 2007 by Lisa Hansen in an effort to bring together adult fans to discuss the *Twilight* series. While the name would indicate that the website is restricted to mothers, the criteria for membership states only that the person be married, over the age of twenty-one, or have children.

TwilightMOMS.com, at the height of its popularity, had over 40,000 members and over two million total posts. This website was highly active with over 27,000 discussion board threads, which includes a wide array of topics, such as debates regarding the content of the series, a featured charity each month and a book club. The focus of the website was to network fans together and facilitate the establishment of social ties. This motive was exemplified by the propensity of gatherings established through the website. Within the discussion board there are threads for each state to facilitate communication between members who live close to each other. These geographically themed threads are used to organize meetings for midnight movie premieres, coffee and dinner events, and convention attendance. Between the preliminary research period and the close of this project, the TwilightMOMS.com website was closed and it was relocated to other social media outlets, such as Twitter and Facebook. As I was not involved with the owner of the

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22 Members of the *Twilight* community began an organization called “The Fandom Gives Back” that raises money for specific causes. In 2009, the community raised over $87,000 in one week for a children's cancer research foundation. In 2010, they raised over $147,000 for Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation.
website, I am unsure as to the core motivation to alter the website format, but during the research period Esme’s Heart also increased their presence on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Pinterest. Esme’s Heart has maintained their website for informational purposes, but it lacks the extensiveness that TwilightMOMS.com had with its discussion boards. As the majority of Esme’s Heart’s online activity occurred on Facebook, that is where I conducted the bulk of my online research.

To gain a larger sample size and find new research participants, I created an online survey. The survey was an effort to reach a wider audience and incorporate participants that I may not encounter in person. I set up an online survey of questions, both closed and open-ended, through SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). I distributed a link to this survey online and in person to work complimentarily with my qualitative methods. Additionally, the president of Esme’s Heart helped me to distribute the online survey by sending it out with an email update to members and posting the link on their website for several months. I analyzed these results in conjunction with interview and participant observation data as the community operates both online and offline.

**Participant Observation and Interviewing**

In addition to the online methods discussed above, my main sources of data collection included participant observation (Bernard 2000:318) and interviews (Bernard 2000:190). Through participation observation in the Facebook activity and physical gatherings, I was able to better learn what *Twilight* fandom means to its members and the ways in which their participation is enacted. As my primary interest is understanding what role *Twilight* fulfills for participants and the interconnectedness of online and offline

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23 The survey collected 29 online responses and 1 paper response.
interactions, I inquired about the ways that women use computers for these social moments. In what ways does the internet lend itself to socialization for these women? Are there underlying connecting factors that motivate participation? Online interactions have a context in which they are engaged which is important to understand (Mackay 2005:129).

I also conducted participant observation at organized community events, such as movie premieres and work days. These places serve a purpose for participants and Michel Foucault's concept of “heterotopias” (1984[1967]) is applicable to both the internet (Bury 2005) and fan conventions (O'Brien 2008). A heterotopia is a site where “other real sites...found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1984[1967]:239). Heterotopias are a tangible site, but also invert principles and behaviors of “normal” culture into counteractions which provide an inverted view of those “normal” practices. Foucault's heterotopias are constituted based on four predominant principles. A heterotopia is a site which embodies and intensifies meanings and beliefs that are circulating within a society but are not sufficiently embodied in other places. Heterotopias are also identifiable by their heterochronic status in that time is non-linear and measured differently than in “normal” life. Heterotopias also contain a juxtaposition of difference which refers to the containment of multiple incompatible sites within a single place. Lastly, heterotopias contain symbolic openings and closings which trigger a switch in practice and behavior (Foucault 1984[1967]:240-243). Group events and movie premieres serve as an intensification of the feelings generated by the Twilight community. Through participant observation at these events I will be able to further understand the ways in which these events are meaningful to participants.
I conducted interviews with participants which ranged from semistructured (Bernard 2000:191) to informal (Bernard 2000:190)\(^{24}\). I used the interviews to gather narratives of experiences within the community. With permission from the participants, I used a digital audio recorder during these interviews. Individual interviews were oriented to understanding the participant's personal motivations and experiences. How did she become involved in the \textit{Twilight} community and what drives her continued participation? I also inquired as to other online groups that people might be part of to see if virtual community membership was common for participants. One possibility is that the \textit{Twilight} community thrives as a social outlet due to the large amount of people it reaches whereas other websites may have limited visibility. In what ways do participants feel there is a cohesive group and what does this mean to them?

The \textit{Twilight saga} has generated a massive amount of attention in the media and, as with fans of other genres, \textit{Twilight} devotees are often portrayed as fanatical and obsessed. Henry Jenkins discusses the connotations of the word “fan” as it is derived from the Latin word fanaticus, which is related to temple rituals and deity worship (Jenkins 1992). The fan and fanatic connection is not discounted completely by Jenkins, but is emphasized in a more positive light through his theoretical developments. As there are extremists within most social groups, the actions of selective individuals are not necessarily reflective of the rest of the community. Thus, I argue for a more nuanced approach to fan studies, which allows for the ordinariness of participation rather than a sensationalized account.

\(^{24}\) Interviews ranged in length and style of structure with a sample size of 25 participants.
Ethics

The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics states that the primary responsibility is “to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work” (American Anthropological Association 1998). Understanding power dynamics and possible exploitation (Johnson 2004:239), researchers must be cognizant of these influences and reflexively engage with them (Lal 1996:124). Online methods must be held to the same ethical standard “of showing respect for people under study, of protecting their dignity and best interests, of protecting anonymity or giving proper credit, and of obtaining informed consent” as traditional methods (Wilson and Peterson 2002:461). As online methods are relatively new compared to traditional anthropological methods, they require reflexive engagement and should be held to the same standards of the researcher maintaining primary responsibility to the people involved regardless of the interfacing methods.

There are several ethical issues related to this project that must be addressed. First, eliciting a participant’s informed consent is challenging within the parameters of online and offline research. As the internet is viewed as a “kind of public space” there are ethical concerns of not alerting people to the presence of the researcher (Angrosino 2005:742). This “electronic eavesdropping” is a form of deception and “violates the speaker's expectation of privacy” (Wilson and Peterson 2002:461). While certain forms of internet research, such as the content analysis of a public website, may not ethically require informed consent, when engaging with a virtual community the same guidelines of informed consent apply as with conventional ethnography (Bird and Barber 2007). There may not be a fool proof way to handle informed consent in this context, but I
attempted to do so by alerting group members to my status as a researcher and include either information, which was collected during interviews or the online survey that communicated I would use their responses for this project. In regards to the Facebook and website activity, I use the concept of public space, in that if a specific login and password or moderator authorization is not required, then the information is intended for public consumption. Thus, I include some images or posts created by Esme’s Heart, but ensured to strip any identifying information that tied to private individuals. Another ethical concern within my project is maintaining the privacy of the participants. Additionally, to maintain confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms to participants; however, with group founders, I included their real names as the information is public information. Additionally, I kept the research data on a password protected computer.

Another ethical concern I encountered was the best way to demonstrate reciprocity for the time and compassion my participants displayed during my research. As I wrote this dissertation, I reflected on the theme of charitable giving that I continually heard from the group and remembered that Cindy commented: “Instead of getting presents…give back and give to somebody else. To me that’s more of a present, if somebody does something in my name for somebody else”. It is in this spirit that I made a donation to the Ronald McDonald House in Macon, Georgia in the name of Esme’s Heart as a thank you to the group for all their time and effort.

1.4 Theoretical Perspective

Defining ‘Community’

A central aspect of my project is the 'community' and in order to operationalize this term within a study that includes online communication, it becomes necessary to
problematize the meanings attached to this concept. With the shifting nature of social networks, additional questions arise about what constitutes a community and the ways that membership within these diffused communities is determined. Notions of a community are often constructed around geographical proximity and a common interest (Anderson 1991[1983]), but in what ways do these characteristics apply to a group that interacts primarily in a virtual space and also gathers in person? By whose standards is the validity of a community determined? Renato Rosaldo's argument for a bottom-up approach to social research is useful in studying subcultural and fan practices as it allows for the perspective of the people involved, not just the problem-oriented view of the dominant cultural group (Rosaldo 1999). Furthermore, Rosaldo's discussion regarding cultural citizenship may be utilized to analyze online communities and determine what constitutes “citizenship” within these communities. As visibility is predominantly limited to the internet through websites and message boards, how is this membership determined? Are people who only view these websites acknowledged as members or must people leave a textual mark in order to claim membership within the online community and through what methods are these distinctions policed and maintained?

Online groups face criticism that they are less authentic communities as they lack geographic boundaries and cultural homogeneity, but this argument is flawed as it is representative of a notion of community which early anthropological inquiries relied upon (Boellstorff 2008:180). Within the interconnectedness of the contemporary world (Appadurai 2006[1990]), this view of a community is increasingly difficult to sustain. However, “what makes virtual worlds 'worlds' is that they are places, what makes them sites of culture – and thus amenable to ethnographic investigation – is that people interact
in them” (Boellstorff 2008:180). It is the social aspects and the ability of the internet to connect people (Foster 1997:30) in a sustained and meaningful manner that creates its status as a community. Communities are centered around places, which are “concerned with identity” (Auge 1995:77). For participants within Tom Boellstorff’s study of Second Life, “the presence of other persons was key to a sense of place” (Boellstorff 2008:182). As identity construction within virtual worlds are often deliberate processes, the internet becomes a place and as such is a location of community building. In particular, it is this ‘feeling’ of a community and connection to other people who share similarities that is often cited by Twilight fans as a primary benefit of their membership.

**Defining ‘Identity’**

The construction of identity in association with online activities is a topic of interest (see Boellstorff 2008, Hine 2000, Ito 1997, Jenkins 2006, Orgad 2005, Taylor 2006, Wilbur 1997). Stuart Hall defines cultural identity as a positioning “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact...we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 2003:234). This framework for conceptualizing identity is beneficial to a project that incorporates online interactions as it readily acknowledges the production involved and the ways in which there is not a 'finished' outcome. Despite early acknowledgement of identity as a situationally shifting concept (Evans-Pritchard 2004[1940]), there remains doubt about the validity of “virtual selfhood” (Boellstorff 2008:119). Identity does not occur in isolation and more increasingly, this process is occurring in participation with online activities. These identities do not form individually; instead “the virtual is shaped in powerful ways by
referential and practical relationships to the actual world, but these relationships help constitute the virtual itself” (Boellstorff 2008:122). Virtual identities and physical world identities are developed in relation to each other, neither separate nor the same, but continually intersecting and reacting.

Identity categories are culturally loaded constructions that are often operationalized as “instruments of regulatory regimes” (Butler 2004[1991]:558). The gendered categories of 'mother' and 'wife' are experienced differently by women as ranging from “dominating” to “empowering” (Allen 1999:26). Janice Radway theorizes that the connection between reading romance novels and the social of 'mother' and 'wife' is that “on one level, then, the romance is an account of a woman's journey to female personhood as that particular psychic configuration is constructed and realized within patriarchal culture” [emphasis hers] (Radway 1991[1984]:138). Women within the Twilight community identify a need to fulfill a social role that exists separate from their domestic life. This desire is not influenced by a view of their domestic role as either dominating or empowering, but is fueled by a need for something that is uniquely theirs. This action to create an identity and social network that is disassociated from the domestic sphere highlights the intentionality of online personas that are still connected and reactive to the real world self.

**Popular Culture**

The theoretical underpinnings of popular culture have shifted since the scholarship that was developed within the Frankfurt School, which primarily viewed the audience as a passive group that were controlled through media (Adorno and Horkheimer 2000[1944]). In critique of this view, scholars of fan studies focused on the
disempowered consuming mass media as a way of evading mainstream ideologies. Thus, in this conceptualization, the audience is not a passive automaton, but active agents that express their resistance through their consumptive practices. However, this approach maintains the binary system of mainstream and “other” while attempting to differently value the experience of fan communities (Fiske 1989, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, Jenkins 1992, Said 1978). The next theme surrounding fan scholarship focused on the embedded nature of fan communities within larger social and cultural hierarchies, which emphasized capitalism and habitus (Bourdieu 1979). In this framework, fans are not free of the system within which they live. Rather, they exist within these social processes that they also maintain through their practices, which are often unconscious.

The third wave of fan studies focuses on addressing the integration of fandom as part of everyday modern life (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, McKee 2007, Scodari 2007). Scholars argue that the importance of researching fan studies is to cultivate a greater understanding of emotional bonds and their development within a mediated world (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007:10). Similarly, research on subcultures that initially cast participants in an essentializing light (see Hebdige 1979) gave way to more postmodern approaches that over emphasized the individualistic aspects (see Muggleton 2000). Some scholars seek to shift the narrative from a focus on ‘consumption’ in popular culture studies to recognize the nuances of desire and the production of human beings (Graeber 2011). My approach to researching fan communities, which often coincide with subcultural groups, advocates for a view of participation within these groups as a continuum, recognizing both the interconnected community aspects as well as the individual distinction that contributes to participation.
Fans, and as a result scholars of fan studies, often encounter the question of why does fandom matter? This question of determining the reasoning beneath recurrent participation in communities related to popular culture is continually addressed by scholars. The concept of resistance (see Fiske 1989, Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2000, Robertson 1998) is a common theme attached to the 'meaning' of popular culture. Dick Hebdige posits that subcultures resist the dominant ideology through style in a way that disrupts hegemonic practices (Hebdige 1979:17). Hegemony works in subtle ways that elicits the consent of the subjugated group to their disadvantageous subordination to a dominant group (Gramsci 2004[1929-1936]). Thus, I remain skeptical at the direct connection between popular culture and social reform as disrupting hegemony requires that the population be recognizable and mobilized by social and political institutions.

While popular culture does, at times, overlap with social agendas, the pleasure derived from fandom cannot be overlooked. The aesthetic value of popular culture is another theme that emerges within the literature (see Barthes 1972[1957], Hills 2007, McBride and Bird 2007, McRobbie 1994, Sandvoss 2007). Popular culture 'matters' as it is part of a person's social life in meaningful ways (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007). Pierre Bourdieu articulates that “the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, [however] scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education” (1979:1). Thus, these pleasures are often coded with socially constructed ideologies of 'good' taste and the fandom community can act as a counterweight to the mainstream views of 'bad' taste that is less socially legitimated. A heavy level of immersion within a popular culture community can trigger views of the participant as 'deviant' by mainstream cultural groups (Jenkins 1992).
In this aspect, the internet becomes a place of validation (Tushnet 2007) for a marginalized group who share a distinction for a cultural text. This shared interested extends to the amateur production of these texts themselves through fan fiction (see Bury 2005, Jenkins 2006, Jones 2005). These virtual places then act in cohesion with physical enactments of fan practices; “the internet has become a site of publication and distribution that both overlaps with and provides an alternative to fan conventions and fanzines” (Bury 2005:1). The valuation and meanings behind popular culture are not static or simple explanations. Rather, these meanings and the ensuing conceptions of validity are continually constructed and debated both within fandom and the mainstream audiences as the determination of legitimacy and authenticity of cultural tastes are perpetually differentiated.

**Gender**

The concept of gender as a set of socially agreed upon behaviors that are continually performed by participants is a theme within gender studies (see Butler 2004, de Beauvoir 1989[1952], Haraway 1988). Additionally, the view of a knowledge claim as something that is both situated and partial is also a recurring theme (see Bordo 1999[1992], Clifford 1986, Harding 1994, Haraway 1988, Hill Collins 2004[1990], Scott 1991). I reference this epistemological point as not all women within the *Twilight* fandom experience it in the same way. Thus, this project is not an effort to encapsule the singular *Twilight* fan experience, but to instead articulate the perspective of the women I encountered and better grasp the ways in which technology can impact sociality.

Literature that addresses the intersection of popular culture and gender thematically focuses on the potential of these cultural texts to act as a cohesive element
between women (see Baym 1998, Bury 2005, Jenkins 1992, McRobbie 1994, Wakeford 1999). The act of reading romance novels, which often include patriarchal themes – as *Twilight* is often deemed ‘anti-feminist’ itself – does not necessarily condone these themes. Women, as readers, engage with the material in different ways, one of which, Janice Radway argues is to mark the theme of female subordination as recognizable and witness the heroine overcome obstacles and achieve her ideal love (Radway 1991[1984]:71). Furthermore, through the tangible act of reading and temporarily abdicating from the role of caretaker, women are able to enjoy a break from their daily lives through a pleasurable act of reading (Radway 1991[1984]:88). This theme of needing an outlet from the daily role as caretaker and the emotional needs of mothers, often housewives, is a recurring theme (see de Beauvoir 1952, Friedan 1963, Kelsky 2001, Ochs and Taylor 1995). In what ways do these themes resonate within the *Twilight* fandom and drive women’s fascination with the series and participation in the community?

Through the use of computer-mediated communication, women who are interested in romance narratives, such as novels and television programming, are able to forge connections with others female fans that share their similar tastes (Baym 1998, Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 2006). Through this distinction for a cultural text (Bourdieu 1979), women create an initial bond based on a shared interest – the cultural text – and this becomes the basis upon which a more meaningful and substantive relationship is formed. It is within this theory of distinction and shared taste, which I analyzed the meanings constructed around the negotiated relationships and the implications for gendered norms within the *Twilight* community.
Scholarship on the internet and its gendered aspects suggest that the public/private dichotomy (Ortner 2000[1974]) extends into the virtual space through women more so participating on private website message boards and men posting on boards of official websites (see Bury 2005, Wakeford 1999). As such, the internet is not an idealistic, gender free venue that will provide the opportunity to overthrow gendered categories, but it does present an opportunity to understand the ways in which people construct and negotiate their gender within a new context. In terms of understanding if this new context is 'real,' Vicki Kirby argues that the “complex ambiguity” of virtual interactions is simultaneously problematic within physical encounters as there is “something alien within all identity that fractures its unity” (Kirby 1997:140). The construction of self in cyberspace “describes the constitutive paradox of all subjectivity, where identity is made fragile in an immersive incorporation of otherness, a virtual technology of sorts” (Kirby 1997:140). Thus, it is within this conceptualization of identity and the virtual that I ground my project as the deliberate construction of self and its ensuing representation to others is not new to cyberspace, but is instead indicative of the mediated nature of subjectivity and identity in entirety.

1.5 Summary

Within the discipline, there is a call for the anthropology of popular culture and online communities (Bird and Barber 2007, Boellstorff 2008, Wilson and Peterson 2002). There remains, however, a lag between this request for anthropology to address these areas of research and the implementation of research projects to tackle these topics. Anthropology has a unique perspective that is well-suited to analyzing a research project containing these themes as the discipline is founded upon the impetus of understanding
culture and its numerous variations. Thus, a research project that addresses these contemporarily relevant topics is needed from within the field of anthropology in order to advance a more holistic and comprehensive view of modern cultures.

While a textual analysis of the *Twilight* series and its content is important, of equal interest are the ways in which women use this enthusiasm for the series to establish meaningful social networks. Through studying the ways that women are crafting social networks and negotiating identity within this community, broader issues arise surrounding the manner in which people are navigating social interaction in a modern, mediated world (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007). Additionally, the impact of technology on these interactions as they appropriate mass media cultural texts emerges as virtual worlds are utilized to bridge social relationships on the individual level. Social interactions with other fans act as sites of social rituals, as described by Emile Durkheim, which generate a sense of community through the effervescence the participants create and propagates continued interest in the series (Durkheim 2004[1912]). Thus, this research project analyzes a combination of two modern phenomena: a popular media text that has consumed the attention of the masses and a shift in the ways that people meaningfully socialize.

In chapter two, I contextualize the *Twilight* series and through a discussion of media representations of the character Bella and feminist theory, I situate the ways in which there is slippage in the themes and readings of the material, which challenges easy categorization. Chapter three contains an analysis of why women are drawn to the *Twilight* series and the ways in which its material directly connects to familiar identity categories. In chapter four, I reach the crux of what many participants identified as the
most significant aspect of their fandom: giving back. This chapter provides an overview of the charitable activities within the *Twilight* fandom and what these philanthropic goals mean to the members. In chapter five, I continue analyzing the theme of charity within the community and delve into the moral and gender aspects of these activities. Chapter six articulates the ways in which the *Twilight* community utilized the internet, with both positive and negative results. This chapter also includes an analysis of the ways in which ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ aspects of the community intersect and operate. The conclusion, chapter seven, serves as a discussion of the ways in which this project articulates the increasingly fluid and intersecting methods of sociality in the contemporary world. I also attempt to articulate the direction in which the community will go and potential reasons for its decline in membership after the movie releases ended.
CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PHENOMENON: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE TWILIGHT SERIES

I’ll be the first to admit that I have no experience with relationships…But it just seems logical…a man and 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.

Bella Swan, Twilight¹

Romance reading is a profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form.

Janice Radway²

2.1 Introduction

One evening, I was watching the news as I ate dinner and was surprised to hear the newscaster discuss the upcoming theatrical movie release of the first Hunger Games book (Collins 2008). Even more surprising was the cultural commentary the newscaster then added, in which the lead female character of the Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen, was contrasted to Bella Swan. The newscaster told the audience that Katniss was a direct contradiction to the familiar Bella as Katniss is a strong and independent female character. This was not the first time I had heard this type of comment, but what intrigued me was that this critique of Bella had moved from internet forums and personal conversations into the mainstream evening news. I find this particular critique troubling in that it communicates to a large, diverse audience an interpretation of two popular

² Radway 1984:5.
female characters that share the common banner of young adult literature, but not much else.

In this chapter, I will review feminist theories and utilize their discussions of feminism to analyze the character of Bella. While the group of Esme’s Heart utilized the name of the matriarch in their organization name, I will be predominantly addressing the character of Bella in this chapter. As women identify with multiple points in the story, Bella represents the memories or nostalgic desire to be a girl intensely in love. For some women, Esme becomes more of a reflection of the current identity and represents the thoughtful and deliberate ways in which Esme’s Heart portrays the group and its members as *Twilight* fans. As conversations surrounding *Twilight* tend to address Bella as she is the main character, I focus on the ways in which Bella is analyzed in this chapter. Through a more in depth look at the *Twilight* series, its plot, and the character of Bella, I intend to address popular critiques that suggest the *Twilight* series is the antithesis of feminism. *Twilight* (Meyer 2005) is frequently compared to other popular young adult series, such as *Harry Potter* (Rowling 1997) and the *Hunger Games* (Collins 2008). I argue that while these series share the commonalities of the young adult genre, extreme popularity, and movie franchises, this does not mean that the female leads are easily compared.

In casual conversations with people, many of whom do not know of my interest in *Twilight*, I hear comments about Bella and the ways in which she is a “terrible” character who never does anything. I attempt to use these encounters as teachable moments in which I can illustrate a different side to the debate. My goal in this chapter is not to argue that Bella is definitively feminist or not, but to articulate that she is not simply one or the
other. Bella is situated within a specific context, which varies depending on the perspective, and contains contradictions that cause slippage within her character that prevents easily categorizing her as either feminist or not. I suggest a more detailed reading of the *Twilight* series that allows for context and flexibility of meaning. My goal is to highlight the multiple, fluid themes of the *Twilight* series, one of which, perhaps surprisingly, is rooted in feminism.

### 2.2 Women and Popular Culture

I would like to briefly address the topic of women and popular culture studies as it is relevant to my project. My project predominantly focuses on adult fans of the *Twilight* series and, as I learned, many of them were either mothers or housewives and some were both. As such, I reference Betty Friedan’s argument that middleclass housewives often experience isolation and dissatisfaction (Friedan 1963). This sense of detachment is then combatted through various activities, such as reading. Janice Radway discusses the pleasurable activity of reading romance novels and the ways women will engage with these books as an “escape” from their daily lives (Radway 1984:88). These romance novels, which may include patriarchal themes, are read as a way to acknowledge the situation as recognizable, but not to necessarily condone it (Radway 1984:75). While the narratives within the romance novels contain patriarchal ideologies that imply a compliance with the message, women are also acting oppositionally as it “allows the women to refuse momentarily their self-abnegating social role” through deliberately engaging in an activity for their own pleasure and temporarily refusing the needs of their family (Radway 1984:210). Rather than a simple action, Radway suggests analyzing literary preferences and the action of reading through multiple lenses that each focus on a
different aspect in order to understand the complexity of the experience, such as defiance, complicity, and escapism (Radway 1984:210). Later, Radway expanded her perspective to include Angela McRobbie's argument that “representations are interpretations” (Radway 1984:5). Furthermore, literature on women and romance narratives in the form of novels and television programming recognize the importance of computer-mediated communication as a way for women to connect with other women who share similar tastes (Bury 2005, Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 2006).

Within subculture studies, women have had limited attention paid to them in the academic research. Women are either invisible within subculture studies, added as a “footnote,” or viewed in relation to their sexual attractiveness (McRobbie 2000:12-13). While McRobbie mentions the female punk subculture, which occupies the public domain, the main focus remains on girls within the roles of consumers or domestically bound. As traditional studies of subcultures focused on actions that took place in public rather than in the home, this focus excluded women. McRobbie critiques Dick Hebdige’s (1979) willingness to acknowledge the absence of race in subculture studies while completely missing the issues of gender and sexism (McRobbie 2000:32). McRobbie argues that all-girl subcultures may delay adolescent girls from being pushed into adulthood too fast. She states that an all-girl subculture “might forestall these processes and provide members with a collective confidence which could transcend the need for 'boys’” (McRobbie 2000:42). As such, all-girl subcultures may provide a space for females to grow and develop with limited influence of males, which can create the confidence to transcend the traditional domestic sphere with their activities.
Representations of gender also produce an oppositional relationship between subcultural and conventional practices. Gender may be used by subcultures to emphasize difference. In her study of Latina gang girls, Norma Mendoza-Denton argue that these women destabilize hegemonic ideas of gender through their willingness to fight, which is communicated visually through their demonstrative makeup and allows people to perceive them as different from conventional girls (Mendoza-Denton 1996:55). Judith Butler argues that all of gender is a performance and states,

*through performativity, dominant and non-dominant gender norms are equalized. But some of those performative accomplishments claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity, and they do this only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established.* (Butler 2004:209)

Butler’s theories of gender are used by subculture studies to explain the fluidity and change found within subcultures (Muggleton 2000:92). Furthermore, subcultures are often a way of escaping hegemonic representations of gender. For example, within the punk subculture, assuming the identity of punk allows women to discard the restrictions of “appropriate feminine behavior” (Muggleton 2000:103-106).

While this is a brief discussion of popular culture and women, there are numerous studies that articulate numerous perspectives on this area of research (cf. Bury 2005, Frederick 2005, Jenkins 1992, Jones 2005, McRobbie 1994, Miller 2005, Scodari 2007, Wakeford 1999). From youth to adulthood, women are engaging with popular culture for a plurality of reasons, which range from challenging gender norms (cf. Mendoza-Denton 1996) to taking a break from daily life (cf. Radway 1984). These actions and
engagements with popular culture do not occur solely in the home, but also occupy the public sphere. Thus, there is not “one way” that women interact with popular culture.

2.3 Twilight and Feminism

To people who are not familiar with the Twilight series, and perhaps even those that are, the idea of the series including themes that resonate with feminists may seem farfetched. I would first like to address this topic before proceeding. My intention is not to cast Twilight as a novel that is first and foremost a feminist book. Rather my goal is to create little cracks and fissures around what people believe Twilight to “be”. Opinions and beliefs are constructed as information from experiences are received and processed. These multiple pieces of information are then sedimented into a view of what something “is”. However, subjectivity and poststructuralist theory, would suggest that what something “is” shifts based upon the subject that has processed and formed the view. Gender and feminist theory emphasize the importance of fluidity and subjectivity. As such, Twilight is not simply feminist or not, it is a series composed of numerous themes and events, some of which, I argue, resonate with a feminist perspective.

Judith Butler argues that “gender is in no way a stable identity...rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1997:419). Furthermore, the identity constructed through gendered acts is not more “real” than other forms of identity as they are all acts of performativity. With this perspective, beliefs and stereotypes are continually repeated through small activities. Each time a statement is made that articulates what Twilight “is” or a disparaging comment is posted online, the sedimented view of Twilight is then reaffirmed. Thus, it is my intention to disrupt these sedimented views and deviate from the script. I do not argue
that one view is more accurate than the other, but instead I advocate for a willingness to deviate from sedimented views and stereotypes.

A common dispute is the challenge of determining the specific definition of feminism. bell hooks articulates that a problem with feminism is the lack of consensus on what feminism “is” (hooks 1984:51). Writing in the early 1980s, hooks highlights concerns that non-upper or middle class women had regarding feminism. Women in lower socioeconomic classes knew that they did not have equal social status, but neither did men in their class. As such, they were suspicious of early feminism because the movement might only focus on middle and upper class women, not lower class (hooks 1984:52). This struggle articulates that feminism is not an easily defined group or perspective. hooks argues that “feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression” (hooks 1984:52) and feminism needs to focus on both collective and individual experiences (hooks 1984:53).

When addressing the complexity of feminism, it becomes important to move beyond simplistic perspectives: “When we cease to focus on the simplistic stance 'men are the enemy,' we are compelled to examine systems of domination and our role in their maintenance and perpetuation” (hooks 1984:53). hooks argues for the phrasing that she advocates feminism instead of saying she “is” one to focus on the struggle and not the stereotypes as “a phrase like 'I advocate' does not imply the absolutism that is suggested by 'I am’” (hooks 1984:55-56). As such, I reference hooks’ argument to articulate the concept that feminism is not an easily defined perspective. It is important to not approach feminism from a blame framework, but to instead examine the complexity of the system and its power. This “advocacy” framework is useful in the context of analyzing the
Twilight series; instead of saying that Twilight “is” something, I argue that addressing the ways in which people advocate and interpret the series and its context is a more useful way to approach the topic. Thus, I cite Butler and hooks in an effort to highlight the complexity of feminist perspectives and the ways in which they are continually contested. Allowing for fluidity and contested meanings, I argue that Twilight has multiple meanings and, one of which, that resonates with feminism.

2.4 Beyond the Stereotypes: Analyzing Bella

Fans of the Twilight series have mixed views of Bella and her representation throughout the series. Granted, a positive view of Bella is not a requirement to be a fan. Henry Jenkins argues that fans are highly critical of the series they enjoy. The existence of fandom “represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture” as members are critical viewers and engage in cultural production (Jenkins 1992:283). Being a fan does not indicate blind agreement with all aspects of a series. However, even more than the other characters, Bella receives frequent negative attention. Based on the public commentary surrounding Bella, I find myself slightly confused. If Bella is so terrible then why have millions of people read the Twilight series? Thus, I endeavor to discuss the character of Bella and the ways in which she is interpreted by the media and by readers.

Returning to the evening news incident I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the newscaster articulated that Bella was not a strong or independent character and that viewers would have a stark contrast to her in the upcoming Hunger Games series with Katniss. Stripped of context and based solely on the first book of each series, Bella does appear to be more weak and dependent than Katniss. In the first Hunger Games novel, Katniss fights in the Hunger Games, steals in order to survive, and takes on the
caretaker role for her family. By contrast, Bella goes to high school, falls in love with a boy, and learns about the supernatural world of vampires. However, oversimplified descriptions such as these lack the nuances of each book.

Bella and Katniss both share similar traits. At the beginning of the novels, they are both caretakers who have primarily absent fathers, take care of their mothers, and are essentially the heads of household. Feeling isolated from others, both also have trouble relating to others and making emotional connections. However, once a bond is forged, both are intensely loyal and serious about relationships, be it familial, romantic, or friendship. Bella and Katniss both show strength when faced with dangerous situations. While Bella does need protecting through much of the *Twilight* series, her foes are preternatural creatures that she cannot physically fight. By contrast, Katniss' foes are humans with similar levels of physical strength to her. Thus, it is important to not rip these characters out of their respective contexts and simply compare them side by side.

Existing within a dystopic setting, Katniss, while strong and brave, is rarely alone. Prior to participating in the games she works with her best friend to hunt and provide for her family. During the games, she forges alliances with other participants, Rue and Peeta. While Katniss maintains emotional distance through her reserved demeanor, she places an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and refuses to turn on her allies. Katniss fights bravely, pitted against physically stronger foes that were trained their whole lives for the games.

By contrast, Bella does not live in a dystopic world, but in one that is similar to our own with one minor difference – it includes the existence of supernatural creatures that are unknown to the average person. *Twilight* begins with Bella making the self-
sacrificing move to live with her father so that her flighty and scatterbrained mother can travel with her new husband. The first half of the book is primarily devoted to Bella adjusting to her new life in rural Washington. Faced with a new school, an unfamiliar father, and being a teenager, Bella's journey is remarkably mundane and average, just as she describes herself to be. When she encounters the mysterious Cullen family and, eventually befriends Edward, Bella's life is drastically changed and she is thrown into a world of preternaturally strong creatures. When faced with a vampire that is hunting her, Bella first protects her father from harm and then flees with two of the Cullen's as a false trail is created by Edward and his siblings. However, the ruse is revealed and Bella is threatened by the adversarial vampire to either meet him alone or her mother will die. Then, through internal dialogue, she utters the words that ominously begin the book:

_I'd never given much thought to how I would die – though I'd had enough reason to in the last few months – even if I had, I would not have imagined it like this...Surely it was a good way to die, in the place of someone else, someone I loved. Noble, even. That ought to count for something. I knew that if I'd never gone to Forks, I wouldn't be facing death now. But, terrified as I was, I couldn't bring myself to regret the decision. When life offers you a dream far beyond any of your expectations, it's not reasonable to grieve when it comes to an end._

(Meyer 2005:1)

When interrogated by the hunter, Bella remains strong and refuses to betray Edward and the Cullen family, even when her leg is broken by the vampire. Thus, Bella displays some positive traits in the first book, such as bravery and loyalty. Not all readers view Bella as
a weak character, Savannah, a single woman in her late twenties, described Bella as “brave, loyal, determined, stubborn, [and] foolish”. Bella is not a perfect character, but she is also not simply a weak and dependent female. Savannah commented:

So I probably like Bella more than most people. I think for me I read the books very much in the context of how I think it was supposed to be taken. So I didn’t take them very seriously. And it was like one, it’s about kids in high school and that’s something to take into consideration. And it was about average kids in high school, and not New York City elitists, Upper East Side kids like you see in Gossip Girl. So it was more like high school kids that I knew and grew up with in the Midwest. And then also taking into consideration that there’s vampires and werewolves, so it is not real...So I liked Bella because for me she was very much like a lot of girls in high school who’s not sure of themselves yet and kind of figuring that out and maybe didn’t fit in perfectly with her mom in Arizona or people her own age. And then when her mom moved on, she wanted to give them space so she went with her dad. Again, not fitting in perfectly at school, being shy, being awkward, which are normal teenage things that happen to the vast majority of people in high school. So I found her relatable. And I did not, you know, go nuts about ‘Oh, but she’s following around this boy’ – lots of girls do that. Lots of girls get caught up in boys you always think you’re going to marry the first boy that you seriously date. Especially when you date him in high school and fall in love in high school. It is very serious and I think I was able to separate
the vampirism from it and not think about ‘Oh, she’s physically weak because she can’t fight vampires.’ Well, most of us don’t have to fight vampires...Cause I’m like you take Harry Potter. Ok, well Bella didn’t have a magical wand...and she was not magical, if we want to compare her with the mythical characters then let’s compare her once she is a vampire and she is very strong and powerful once she has those extra supernatural elements to her character. And with Katniss...it was a different time and you had to kill or be killed, so to say. And she was a trained hunter and, you know, she wasn’t just going to high school. She grew up in hardship...So I don’t think it’s fair to compare heroines so to say when the context is completely different.

In this description of Bella, she is a relatable and familiar character in the aspects of not belonging and having intense feelings about a boy in high school. The importance of contextualizing the characters is encouraged by fans when discussing comparisons between the female leads. The idea that Bella is a more ‘realistic’ female character and, thus, less comparable to heroines, such as Hermione, is also commented on by Violet:

If you look at the age of all the characters...like Hermione...they're all teenagers, but...most females...are not equipped to deal with that kind of [saving the world] stuff that faces them. Whereas, to me, I thought that the character Bella, I mean, she's not a fighter. She's kind of, you know, she's kind of gone through life just bee-bopping along, minding her own business, reading books, type thing...And to me females are more strong emotionally and mentally than they are physically on a day to day basis.
Now granted, you've got your cops, you've got your medical people, you know everything, and they're trained to do that...I hear it all the time:

‘Well she wasn't, she didn't fight, how can they put her in a fighter thing?’

And I'm like, ‘Well, she didn't fight physically but she sure did fight emotionally.’...And I don't know, I guess because I mean I have been a cop. I have been some of these things. So I know, kind of like, what I was like before I became a cop, and then of course now...I'm not going to put myself into situations where I'm going to physically get hurt, type of thing, or you know, but yet emotionally I can handle a heck of a lot more than some of my male counterparts can...So, and to me, I mean, there are women like, you know, like Hermione...but those are far and few between. Where I think there are more Bella’s than there are Hermione’s...I haven't changed, I still feel that way. That Bella is more of what I would call a day-to-day person, or day-to-day female.

In this discussion, Violet touched on the idea that fighting and strength are not always easily defined characteristics. Drawing on her own experiences before and after training to handle stressful and dangerous situations, Violet highlighted that not all people are automatically equipped to know how to react. Thus, she finds the characterization of Bella to be a more common representation of the day-to-day person.

Bella’s character is not stagnant throughout the series, but experiences a change and development throughout. While the journey is similar between the books and the movies, the description is more nuanced and fleshed out in the book series. Chloe described ‘Book’ Bella’s development in the series:
I think she went from reasonably unselfish, leaving so her mom could go with Phil...going to where she hated, doing something she didn’t want to do, you know cold and wet and all of that. Very unselfish with that. Took care of Charlie, made him supper every night, loved that. Would sit outside and read books. I mean, she was educated and introspective and giving and loving and put others above herself. Very Esme of her. And then by the end, she was more extroverted, she was not expecting Edward to be the world, but even though he really was, especially by the end...But she stopped being a brat about stuff and...just fought for what she wanted instead of laying in bed, or the woods, or sitting in the chair. Like she was powerful by the end. And that was part of the transformation from human to vampire, but she was getting that power before she became a vampire too. And so I really, really, liked her journey in the books...Movie Bella, still giving instance that she left so her mom could go with Phil, very self absorbed, no cares for education...they were never at school!!...I mean, she basically showed up for a couple of classes and went to prom...but by the end she was...very self possessed. She could walk into that meeting with J. Jenks and do what needed to be done. Because in the books she was actually the one who got the passports and stuff. She figured out what he [Jenks] was all about and figured that’s what she needed from him as opposed to the movie Jasper does. In the movie, she could walk in that meeting and be strong and do what needed to be done even when she saw it was just Veronica and Jacob Wolf that were going, that had passports
and stuff. She was like ‘Ok, thought we were travelling together. Ok.’

The scene Chloe referenced with J.Jenks was in the final book in which the Cullen family is faced with being eliminated by the ruling vampire coven. Bella discovers a clue that leads to J. Jenks and documentation for new identities to protect Jacob and Renesmee, her daughter. Thus, Bella accomplished what needed to be done and handled the meeting on her own, which Chloe identified as a sign of Bella’s character development. People who do not like the series may downplay the characters and their representations. As Kayla described:

*I think that they, well they want to downplay of course the whole series, but I think they feel like they have to say, ‘Oh she's weak she's not a strong character,’ compared to you know, other characters in other series.*

*But it makes them feel like they're downplaying the whole thing like, ‘Oh you're so stupid for liking that kind of thing. Like how can you think that this is a good series if it doesn't have a strong lead female character.’*

*They're, you know, they're saying the lead female character is weak and also it's like the same people who say it's not a real vampire. You know, it's not a real vampire story. It's like, what is a real vampire? How do you classify that?...But I have a friend who doesn't like Twilight. That's what she'll say, ‘Well that's not a real vampire or that's not a real werewolf’ and I'm like, ‘What?’ So, it's like they want to downplay [it]. It's not whatever, real? Well, obviously it's not real...You know, it's more fake than other vampire stories, or whatever...She was comparing that Twilight wasn't real, we're going to use that term, but that Buffy the*
Vampire Slayer was quote ‘real vampires.’ And I was like, ‘Seriously?’ I mean, they're both kind of on the made up side there. I'm not sure where she was trying to go with that, but that's what she kept telling me...It's all somebody's take on a fictional character. That is what she was saying, ‘Well, they're not real vampires.’ And that's when I finally asked her, ‘Well, so do you know some real vampires? Are you holding out on me here?’

Thus, people who are not fans of the series can find a variety of ways to downplay the franchise and articulate their views of it as fundamentally lacking. As Kayla mentioned, these comments can vary from downplaying Bella’s character to the lack of ‘authentically’ representing vampire mythology. While fans are critical of the series and may discuss their discontent of the variations between the books and the movies, the frustration of others judging their cultural text without approaching it with an open mind can trigger a defense of the series. As Chloe articulated:

'It's like if you don't watch it [Twilight], you can't do it. It's just like if you have siblings, I can talk crap about my sister all day long.

Somebody else does it, I will beat you down...If you don’t give it a decent chance, you can’t argue against it...It's kind of like atheists talking about the Bible...I mean it’s not a total parallel because Twilight and Bible. But, people are like ‘I’ve read it, I just don’t get all of that.’ But wait did you read it with an open mind? You didn’t read it wanting to learn Christianity. You read it with an atheist’s mind. As if you read or watched Twilight with a, you know, ‘No’ kind of mind. You’re going to get exactly
Thus, fans of the series may critique the content and character representations, but become protective when others who are dismissive of *Twilight* disparage the franchise. Drawing connections to religion, Chloe articulated that if people approach a topic with a closed mind then they experience the outcome they expected.

My intention is not to argue that one character, such as Bella or Katniss, is stronger than the other, but to simply illustrate that comparing the two is not a simplistic process. Comparing two characters without proper context renders them one dimensional caricatures of their representations within the novels. One of my goals is to challenge popular conceptions of fan communities and the series they support. As such, my intention is to challenge people to look beyond sound bites and clever internet images. Jenkins emphasizes the importance of being a critical and active consumer of media; “Fans must actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by their borrowed materials; fans must confront media representations on an unequal terrain” (Jenkins 1992:33). However, as the internet and media network people together into a “convergence culture” (Jenkins 2006), it becomes important for more than just fans to be critical consumers of media, but all those who participate, even casually.

While not all readers primarily identify with Bella, the series is narrated through her viewpoint and, as such, the reader spends a lot of time with Bella. It is a connection to Bella, her experiences, and her feelings that some readers identify with. Even adults who are no longer teenagers feel a connection to Bella. When asked why adult women are fans of the *Twilight* series, Linda, a middle-aged woman herself, commented:
I think older women, like women of all ages, are attracted to

Twilight because of Bella and Edward and their epic love story. The book series is very well written and I think everybody has at some point been through the same emotions as Bella. And Edward is, what can I say, Edward's the perfect guy. He loves Bella, he protects her, he takes care of her. I think that's something that all of us really and truly want. Is someone to just love us and take care of us and be there for us in tough times as well as the good times.

In Linda's discussion of Bella, the topic of Edward arises as the series is, at its root, the story of a girl falling in love. Linda's comment surrounding the benefit of Edward as a protector highlighted the desire for security. Thus, Linda was able to more fully enjoy the series because she derived pleasure from love stories. Bella is then the vessel for these desires to be fulfilled as the reader can identify with her.

Bella is not an infallible character, but in some ways it is Bella's flaws that draw readers in as much as her strengths. When asked to pick her favorite character, Savannah stated that it was Bella; “She's real. [She] displays both confidence and insecurity in her actions and thoughts. A real representation of a teenage girl living in a world amongst supernatural figures”. Bella displays traits that many teenagers can sympathize with feeling. Voicing feelings of isolation and being different, Bella is a character that many people can relate to. At the beginning of Twilight, Bella articulates her feelings of not belonging:

I didn't relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn't relate well to people, period. Even my mother, who I was closer to
than anyone else on the planet, was never in harmony with me, never on exactly the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain. (Meyer 2005:10-11)

Listening to Bella's internal thoughts throughout the series can be both endearing and frustrating. Much like a real teenager, Bella is not always fun to listen to, or to be around. However, I would argue that it is exactly this trait that, in part, captivates the reader and creates a connection with fans. For most of the series, Bella is an average girl living in an extraordinary story that is, in some ways, almost a fairytale. Many readers can relate to Bella's feelings of mediocrity and, as such, can more easily use her experiences with the supernatural to live out vicarious fantasy. Thus, not only is the reader able to read a fantasy novel about vampires and werewolves, but is also able to see it through a character's eyes that are not so different from their own.

2.5 The Internet Influence

Fans and critics alike comment on Bella, the Twilight series, and its content. The debate of whether or not Bella represents a feminist character is often publicly discussed via social media websites, such as Facebook. Clever internet images and memes\(^3\) perpetrate online that compare Bella to other popular culture female characters, such as Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series. These images insinuate that Bella is a one dimensional character that fails to embody the characteristics of a strong woman. These images are predominantly posted on internet blogs or social media sites, such as Facebook. They often contain clever retorts and comment on current events or popular

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\(^3\) An internet meme is an image or video that is electronically shared between users. These images are often posted and shared without the author/creator being identified.
culture. Pictured below is a meme that was shared on the internet. This image first crossed my path via Facebook when an acquaintance shared the image and it appeared in my newsfeed.

![Image of Bella and Hermione meme](image)

*Figure 2.1 Internet meme of Bella and Hermione*

The visual depiction of Bella in the above meme is an image – and plot occurrence – that is often selected to highlight her shortcomings as a strong female character. This image is from the second movie, *New Moon* (Meyer 2006), in which Bella has wandered into the forest in search of Edward after he has broken up with her. Distraught and lost, Bella curls up on the forest floor and falls asleep, unable to find her way out in the darkness. This visual is paired with an image of Hermione standing with a serene and contemplative look on her face. Thus, this image articulates the differences between the two characters and the ways in which they handled traumatic situations.

Pictured below is another meme that circulated around the internet. In this meme, Bella is compared to Hermione again and Eowyn from the *Lord of the Rings* series

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(Tolkien 1954). This image also depicts Bella in a passive, weak manner. By contrast, Eowyn stands with a sword in her hand and a stoney look on her face. Captured from the second movie in the trilogy, in this scene, Eowyn expresses her frustration at being unable to go to war despite her battle skills. Hermione again looks calm, as if keeping herself collected in a turbulent situation. However, Bella looks dazed with a confused look on her face. This image is captured from the first movie when Bella encounters an enemy vampire. The enemy vampire breaks Bella's leg in an effort to manipulate her and this image depicts her while she is in pain.

As I argued earlier in this chapter, comparing the different series and their characters is a complex process that requires more than a cursory glance. Without context, these characters – and images – are stripped bare of their developments throughout the series.

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and are instead frozen in time, unchanging and essentialized.

I highlight internet memes, in part, because I noticed that they appear in my social media newsfeed more frequently when the *Twilight* series has an upcoming event, such as a movie or DVD release. As the people who post the anti-*Twilight* memes are not participants in my research, I can provide only conjecture as to why they initially posted the image. However, I think when the *Twilight* series public relations juggernaut is in full force with movie promotions and news articles about the cast, it inundates people – fan or not – with *Twilight*. In frustration with the deluge of information, people communicate their dislike of the franchise via social media. For example, the image depicted below is intended to be amusing and is hosted on a blog for “funny pictures”. However, even humor has a pointed edge and is loaded with cultural meaning.

![Figure 2.3 Internet meme of Bella](http://funny-pictures-blog.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/bella-swan-funny-pictures.jpg)

**Figure 2.3 Internet meme of Bella**

The image above has a double meaning; while the message is obviously anti-Bella, it couches it in humor, which renders it less direct. However, the blatant message is

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also a subtle message to viewers that to enjoy Twilight is to participate in the setback of women's progress. While Twilight portrays characters with traditional, and frequently conservative, values, this does not indicate that all readers interpret the same message. Michel de Certeau argues that consumers are not passive receptacles of hegemonic messages. Rather, each reader brings a unique experience to the reading process that results in “an indefinite plurality of meanings” (de Certeau 1984:169). Building on this view, John Fiske states that popular culture, much like culture in general, is not a static or fixed system; popular culture is not merely about consumption, it is “an active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system” (Fiske 1989:23). Thus, Twilight and its thematic messages are contested and situated, ranging from a view of Twilight as a set back to feminism to conceptualizing Bella as a strong female character. As such, what becomes important about Twilight is the multiplicity of interpretations that readers create as they journey through the textual world of Twilight.

I became curious about the ways in which fans interpret images such as the ones pictured in this chapter. Savannah, a single woman in her late twenties, responded that Bella is described as “weak, needy, and dependent” when I asked her how the character was portrayed by the media. However, she believed this portrayal was inaccurate; “I think the first movie received more attention than expected and the media lost track of who the audience was intended to be...There were times when she [Bella] could have benefitted from sitting back and letting Edward do all the work, but she was a fighter. Breaking Dawn Part 2, hello!” Savannah ended her defense of Bella, who is consequently her favorite character, by highlighting the final movie in which Bella becomes a vampire and almost single-handedly prevents the destruction of the Cullen
vampire family and their allies. As such, not all internet depictions of Bella are negative.

![ Figure 2.4 Pro-Bella internet meme](http://blingee.com/blingee/view/118555924-Bella-Breaking-Dawn-part-2-)

Pictured above is an image that depicts Bella after she becomes a vampire. A popular phrase from the first book is “And so the lion fell in love with the lamb” (Meyer 2005:274). This image plays on that phrase and states, “Bella...From lamb to lioness...Breaking Dawn Part 2”. This meme communicates a positive message that focuses on Bella's journey throughout the series, from a lamb in need of protection to a lioness that is able to hunt and defend herself. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I did not come across this image organically through my social media newsfeed as with the other images. Rather, this image I sought out through an internet search for positive Bella memes.

While at an Esme's Heart meeting, Karen lamented that no one, except her, liked Kristen Stewart anymore after the scandal in which Kristen Stewart cheated on Robert Pattinson. Based on the frequency of internet memes and online comments, I also often get the sense that there is a general dislike of both Bella and Kristen Stewart although it is

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8 This social meeting was held at Mellow Mushroom in Macon, GA on February 7, 2013 and had approximately 15-20 attendees.
9 During the filming of the movies, the actress who played Bella Swan, Kristen Stewart, and the actor who portrayed Edward Cullen, Robert Pattinson, dated off and on according to the media. In July 2012, Kristen Stewart was caught cheating with another man just months before the November release of the final movie.
difficult to determine if the disdain began before or after her public indiscretion. While not all fans shared Karen’s view that Bella and Kristen Stewart are above reproach, some fans identified a different view of Bella than that which is commonly portrayed online or in the media. I posit that Bella's developmental arc takes her from an average girl that needs protection and feels isolated to an immortal vampire who saves her entire family and attains everything she desires. However, I doubt many internet memes will circulate that highlight this journey as many internet memes gain their popularity through their critique, not their praise of a subject. As I commented earlier, Jenkins (2006) describes the convergence culture in which we all live and the web of meanings this creates. Thus, I address these images and their content in an effort to advocate for a more thorough textual reading that does not rely solely on satirical material.

Internet memes are an increasingly frequent way for people to make statements online. Instead of writing out a few paragraphs that detail a topic, people will combine images and text into a brief statement that can then be quickly read by viewers. These images are then shared online, such as via Facebook, and become a quick way to share your opinion on a topic. Internet memes are not limited to a certain topic and I have seen a wide range traipse across my social media newsfeed. From sports to women’s bodies to politics, internet memes lampoon a myriad of topics, often in a humorous manner with a pointed edge. However, these images and snapshot reviews of a series become a method of perpetuating specific readings of a cultural text. Fans of the *Twilight* series frequently disagree with these stereotypical images of Bella and *Twilight*, citing specific examples from the series as to why they are false. I argue that, while these images lampoon *Twilight* and perpetuate a popular reading of *Twilight* and Bella as one dimensional and
superficial, the images also have a counter effect of making fans more adamant about their support of the series and strengthens the bond between friends over the *Twilight* series.

2.6 The Bella Puzzle: To Be Feminist or Not to Be

The debate surrounding the *Twilight* series and if Bella can be identified as a feminist character continues to persist both among authors, fans, and the general public. I now move from a textual analysis of the series and the inclusion of popular internet images to literature written about the *Twilight* series. Authors argue both for and against the feminist aspects of the *Twilight* series. Bella is a puzzle that seems to confound most writers and prevent them from conclusively arguing for either her status as a feminist character or not. There is a fluidity and slippage to Bella's character that causes her to be simultaneously viewed as a progressive woman and a pawn under male control. Most literature and textual analysis of the *Twilight* series resides within the discipline of philosophy. I utilize these critiques in an effort to articulate some of the academic conversations and themes surrounding *Twilight* and its content.

A common theme and critique of the *Twilight* series is the co-dependence and controlling aspects of Bella’s relationship with Edward. Parts of their relationship call upon a more old-fashioned view of romantic relationships between men and women. Bonnie Mann, a philosophy professor, critiques *Twilight* and the old-fashioned world it represents “where women were seen as empty conduits of masculine desire and valued for their propensity to self-sacrifice” (Mann 2009:134). Referencing Simone de Beauvoir and her text *The Second Sex*, Mann articulates the ways in which Bella and Edward's relationship directly represents de Beauvoir's argument that women give up themselves
and become relational beings (Mann 2009:134). As such, “When Bella falls in love, then, a girl in love is all she is” (Mann 2009:133). Throughout the series Bella is protected from danger by the vampires; “Her weakness contrasted with their strength is that of an infant, contrasted with an all-powerful adult” (Mann 2009:135). Young women today are confronted with contradictory messages: “A good woman is both pleasing in the traditional sense: passive, pleasant, childlike, and subordinate, bent on self-sacrifice; and together, meaning she knows who she is and what she wants sexually and professionally, and goes after it” (Mann 2009:138). Thus, the concept of womanhood and what it entails is a complicated web of contradictions, through which young women must navigate.

As women read the Twilight series, they are confronted with a complicated puzzle in the form of Bella. Just as young girls are navigating through their own lives and attempting to find a balance between the contradictory messages, Bella herself also seems to mirror this challenge. A freelance writer and teacher in New York City, Abigail Myers articulates the conundrum that Bella poses:

* Bella is a puzzle for feminists. On the one hand, we have a hero who is literate, is independent, and goes after what she wants...these seem like reasonable arguments for Bella being a fierce and fabulous feminist hero...but critics, bloggers, fans, and this author have a lot to say about Bella's suitability as a feminist role model for the millions of teenage girls (and...adult women) (Myers 2009:157).

Myers argues that Bella becomes a vampire for Edward, fails to pursue interests outside of their relationship, and accepts Edward's worst qualities, which negate her as a feminist role model. Myers closes her argument by encouraging readers to view Twilight for what
it is: a fairytale. Just as characters, such as Sleeping Beauty, are not feminist heroes, Myers argues that neither should Bella be treated as one (Myers 2009:160). Thus, as young women read the series and develop their opinions on its content, it is important for them to keep in mind the contextualization of the material as a fictional story.

Furthermore, Edward and Bella's relationship is far from picturesque by feminist standards. In an effort to protect Bella from supernatural creatures that are stronger than her, Edward attempts to control Bella's actions. Within the discipline of philosophy, Leah Mc Climans and J. Jeremy Wisnewski comment, “Controlling behavior may be the result of patriarchy, but it also reinforces it. The more Edward feels the need to protect Bella, the more he views her as weak and vulnerable. Moreover, his view of her is not simply in terms of her physical weakness, but it also applies to his assessment of her decision-making capacity” (Mc Climans and Wisnewski 2009:166-167). In particular, Edward disregards Bella's desire to become a vampire as “irrational, uninformed, and hasty” (Mc Climans and Wisnewski 2009:167). However, Edward's view seems to have a disconnect with Bella as a person; “Bella is an excellent decision-maker...She's incredibly mature...Could it be, just maybe – Edward thinks he knows better than Bella because he's a man?” (Mc Climans and Wisnewski 2009:167). Bella's response to Edward's controlling behavior includes two conflicting reactions: (1) resenting the control and resorting to clandestine behavior and (2) believing it to be a sign of care and commitment (Mc Climans and Wisnewski 2009:168). Thus, while Edward exerts control over Bella and attempts to make decisions for her, Bella often responds through subversive actions and is then made to feel guilty for worrying Edward.
The relationship between Edward and Bella proceeded as described above for the first two books. However, approximately halfway through the third book, a shift occurs in their dynamic. Citing hooks argument that “respect and trust are two dimensions of love”, love is truly achieved when partners break from patriarchy and regard each other as equals (McClimans and Wisnewski 2009:169). It is finally in the third book, Eclipse (Meyer 2007), that Edward begins to realize that his controlling behavior will only hurt his relationship with Bella. This does not mean that Edward will cease all controlling tendencies; after all, “structures of dominance are not thrown off in one day or by one decision” (McClimans and Wisnewski 2009:171). Yet Edward begins to realize that in attempting to control Bella and exclude her from decisions, she will continue to potentially subvert and resent him, which will drive a wedge between them. McClimans and Wisnewski end their analysis of Twilight on a hopeful chord: “Bella and Edward do not have a perfectly equal relationship – Edward can still be controlling and Bella really needs to see herself more clearly – but it's these imperfections that make this unbelievable story believable – and it's the sustained attempts to resolve these imperfections that give us hope for our own relationships” (McClimans and Wisnewski 2009:175). In some ways, the relationship between Bella and Edward becomes more relatable in the third book through this shift as it represents the changes in a romantic relationship.

However, not all perspectives of the series view the relationship as potentially heading in a positive direction. Differing from the above perspectives, Rebecca Housel, a former philosophy professor and current freelance writer, argues that Twilight is far from a romantic novel. Housel states, “what in reality would be a horrific account of violence
against women, all too familiar in today's media, becomes a dangerously romanticized fantasy for a primarily young female audience” (Housel 2009:178). Edward, when differentiating fact from fiction, becomes a “possessive, dangerously violent stalker” (Housel 2009:178). Citing definitions from the U.S. Department of Justice, Housel articulates the ways in which Edward meets the criteria of stalking. While I was taken aback myself that Edward snuck into Bella’s room prior to their relationship and watched her sleep, we should keep in mind the context of the series and its roots in vampirism mythology. The theme of a vampire sneaking into a woman’s bedroom in the dark of the night often occurs, such as Angel in Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Thus, perhaps the trend of vampiric ‘stalking’ is symptomatic within the genre and not simply Twilight.

Additionally, suffering from low self-worth, Bella willingly seeks out her death, believing that it will be transformative (Housel 2009:179). Bella suffers from being a product of her generation, Generation Me, and “exhibits classic narcissism in her choices” (Housel 2009:182). Housel articulates the dangers of narcissism; “The excess of self-love and self-indulgence can lead to dangerous, even fatal, choices in pursuit of doing what one wants simply because one wants to” (Housel 2009:184). Rather, than stay in the abusive relationship with Edward, Housel argues that Jacob is the clear choice as he supports Bella and wants her to be herself (Housel 2009:188). In a positive relationship, Housel argues, “You want respect, support, friendship – all of which adds up to true love” (Housel 2009:188). Thus, according to some scholars, Bella is not a feminist character due to her narcissistic tendencies and the decision to remain in a controlling and potentially abusive relationship with Edward.
Another theme within the literature surrounding Bella is the way in which she contradicts the passivity expected of a submissive woman, such as by her role as the sexual aggressor in the relationship with Edward. While Bella may appear to be a more traditional, old-fashioned woman at times, she also departs from that stereotype in some situations.

*The most surprising thing about Bella's romance with Edward is not that Edward has to resist the urge to perforate her pulsing jugular vein, but that he, not she, puts the brakes on their erotic encounters...She [Bella] is regularly physically rebuffed by him as she longs to tear off his clothes. In the end, he is pushed into agreeing to sex while she is still human, only by forcing Bella to agree to marry him.* (Mann 2009:140)

Bella spends a majority of the books actively attempting to persuade Edward to engage in premarital sex. During the third novel, when a sexual situation begins to become intense, Edward says, “Would you please stop trying to take your clothes off?” (Meyer 2007:45). To which, Bella replies, “Do you want to do that part?” (Meyer 2007:45). Bella is continually the sexual aggressor in their relationship, which represents a contradiction to the idea of Bella as a passive character. However, after graduating high school, Bella's life changes rapidly: she marries Edward, has sex, and becomes life-threateningly pregnant. In some regards, Bella’s sexual desire is a cautionary tale to young girls as the end result of Bella’s want for intercourse is a very real threat to her own life. Like most women today, Bella lives in a complicated world in which what it means to be female is not clear. Bella is simultaneously as weak as an infant and a sexual woman with desires. Much like the world today, the *Twilight* series is filled with contradictory messages about
what constitutes as acceptable for women.

Fillled with depictions of women as passive or controlled beings and the negative consequences of sex, the Twilight series appears to be as far from feminist as possible. And yet, beneath the veneer is a “subtle feminist subtext” (Mann 2009:141). Bella's comments throughout the series carry undertones of strength and will power, from her opinions on classic literature to her desire to be the one doing the rescuing. Even Bella's hesitancy regarding marriage carries an undertone that she is not willing to be a passive female. As she is mortal and significantly weaker than vampires, Bella spends much of the series being protected and rescued. Mann argues that part of Bella's desire to become a vampire is wrapped up in her feminist roots:

_Bella wants to be a vampire, not only to avoid out-aging Edward and live with him in immortal bliss, but because in the vampire world, all bets are off when it comes to gender. Vampire women show no particular deference to men. They are endowed with superpowers just like the guys._

_Rosalie, Edward's, vampire sister, is the best mechanic in the family._ (Mann 2009:141)

Bella expresses her desire for equality at the end of the first book: “It just seems logical...a man and 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” (Meyer 2005:473-474). Despite popular representations, Bella is not content to sit on the sidelines and let Edward protect her. Rather, she desires to stand side-by-side with Edward and his family during battles. Furthermore, at the end of the series, when the Cullen family faces annihilation from an opposing vampire family, it is Bella – and Alice
Bella gains her strength and autonomy at a high price though. Citing de Beauvoir, Mann argues that Bella represents the concept of the “dream of annihilation” (Mann 2009:143). Bella so desires to be a player, not a pawn, in her own world that she wishes to become a subject through replicating her idol. While Mann discusses the subtle feminism of *Twilight*, she articulates a disappointment with the series; “What is disheartening about Meyer's books is her reinstatement of this old promise: assume your status as prey, as object, and you will gain your freedom as subject, as the center of action and meaning” (Mann 2009:143). Mann critiques the message that *Twilight* seems to encourage; the idea that a meaningful existence is achieved by sacrificing the self for others, which perpetuates the traditional female self-annihilation. Thus, while aspects of Bella’s character can be viewed as feminist, the route through which she gains her strength and independence runs counter to the end result. Through her role as an object and participating in self-sacrifice for others, Bella’s achieves her status as a subject with a strength and power capable of shaping the course of the story. It is in this crux of the problem that young girls must navigate and identify that not all feminine strength and power comes from a self-sacrifice.

Opinions about the feminist tones of the *Twilight* series range from hopeful (McClimans and Wisnewski 2009) to mixed (Mann 2009, Myers 2009) to negative (Housel 2009). The range of opinions about the *Twilight* series is similarly reflected in people's opinions of the franchise. Some people view Bella as a strong, female character and others see her as dependent and passive. There is not a “right” or “wrong” reading, but it is important to remember that each reading is situationally located and grounded in
a particular perspective. Critics and supporters alike can dig through the *Twilight* series and locate specific examples to construct their argument for whether or not Bella is a feminist character. Thus, my goal is to illustrate these varying arguments and articulate the postmodern position that each is a valid construction and perspective.

### 2.7 Summary

My goal in this chapter is not to convince you that Bella, and by connection the *Twilight* series, is a feminist narrative. Rather, my argument is that the character of Bella is not simply feminist or not. She is complicated, full of fluidity and contradictions, and ever changing based on the perspective. As such, the feminist undertones and themes within *Twilight* should not be dismissed. On the other hand, my argument does not suggest, due to these themes, that *Twilight* should be classified as a primarily feminist text. Rather, that multiple readings and a range of themes within the text should be recognized. Some readers may view Bella as a weak and dependent character, while others see Bella as a strong and opinionated. I illustrated the similarities and contrasts between Bella and the female lead of the popular *Hunger Games* series in an effort to disrupt commonly perpetuated conceptions that compare the two characters. This is not to say that one is stronger than the other or a more feminist character. Instead, my intention is to challenge simplistic comparisons that are perpetuated through social media sites.

I posit that feminism is not an easily defined concept, drawing on Butler and hooks, but at its core is the advocacy of women's equality in all aspects. As perceptions become sedimented due to repeated exposure, such as to media commentary, it remains important to remember that there is a context and flexibility to reading a series and its contents. I advocate for an active reading of the *Twilight* series and an openness to
interpretations that differ from popular representations portrayed within the media. There is not a unified consensus on if Bella is a feminist role model or not. Arguments for both sides to the debate will continue on, due, in part, to the individual experiences readers bring to the reading process, which triggers their own unique interpretation of the series. My goal in this chapter is not to convince readers that a particular perspective regarding Bella or the Twilight is correct or incorrect, but rather to encourage an openness and receptiveness that allows for a myriad of readings, some of which may contradict from their own.
CHAPTER 3
UNDERSTANDING THE FASCINATION: FINDING TWILIGHT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE FAN COMMUNITY

It seemed very natural to lean in and press my lips to her forehead...Renesmee was real and I knew her. She was the same one I'd fought for from the beginning. My little nudger, the one who loved me from the inside, too...I'd been right all along. She was worth the fight.

Bella Swan, Breaking Dawn

Woman is being identified with – or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of – something that every culture devalues, something every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that description, and that is 'nature' in the most generalized sense.

Sherry Ortner

3.1 Introduction

Adult women who enjoy the Twilight series are met with a certain level of stigma and skepticism from the general population. News articles about “crazed” women obsessing over a series intended for young adults communicate a view of adult Twilight fans as unstable and borderline inappropriate. Within most fan groups there are extreme members whom ‘cross the line’ of what is acceptable behavior within the community. In an attempt to distance themselves from these situations, which are often the ones cited in news articles, fans will qualify their status as a “hardcore fan” with a statement that they

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1 Meyer 2008:447.
are not extreme about it and do not cross the line of appropriate behavior. The ‘line’ is a subjective boundary, but the common themes center around the concept of balance, such as not losing yourself in the fantasy and maintaining connections to others.

The women I met would mention the stereotypes and perceptions people have of adult Twilight fans. Fans continually confront these stereotypes of extremism and being “too old” for the series. As a result of this trend, Esme’s Heart pre-emptively addressed the issue on the front page of their website:

And for those who think we are too old for the Twilight Series - we submit this statement: “We are fans of the series because we were the first to experience the world of loves, losses and friendships that others are just now discovering. We hope to inspire others (young and old) to recognize and embrace their passions - whether it be for love, family or charity and improve the world around them.” (Esme's Heart, Inc.)

The Twilight saga has generated a massive amount of attention in the media and, as with fans of other genres, Twilight devotees are often portrayed as fanatical and obsessed. Henry Jenkins (1992) discusses the connotations of the word “fan” as it is derived from the Latin word fanaticus, which is related to temple rituals and deity worship. The fan and fanatic connection is not discounted completely by Jenkins, but is emphasized in a more positive light through his theoretical developments. As there are extremists within most social groups, the actions of selective individuals are not necessarily reflective of the rest of the community. Thus, I argue for a more nuanced approach when analyzing fan

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5 As I will discuss in later chapters, Esme’s Heart was initially called TwilightMOMS of Middle Georgia. The name was changed in part as a way to distinguish themselves from TwilightMOMS.com and as a way to engage with people before they could make assumptions about the organization based on the stereotypes of adult, female Twilight fans.
activities; I posit one in which allows for the ordinariness of participation rather than a sensationalized account.

In this chapter, I will address the motivations women discussed for their enjoyment of the *Twilight* series and their participation in the fan community. I argue that the *Twilight* series and its online community are uniquely suited for cultivating adult female fans, in particular mothers or housewives. The series itself tells a story of a first love that is dramatic, dangerous, and eternal. Thus, it draws in adult readers who feel a sense of nostalgia for the emotional roller coaster of teenage love. Simultaneously, women who are primarily in the domestic sphere due to childrearing can connect with other fans via the internet. These activities, such as posting messages, can often be completed on their own schedule and, as such, do not disrupt their roles as primary caregivers.

My goal in this chapter is to briefly review theories of motherhood, identity, and gendered uses of the internet. Using these theories as a foundation, I articulate the ways in which women discuss and conceptualize their participation as fans. I begin with the narratives of the ways in which adult female fans “found” *Twilight* and became avid fans of the series. Building upon this initial experience, the social bonds women forged through their enjoyment of the series continually perpetuates participation in the fan community. Not all women engage with the *Twilight* series or online community for the specific purpose of establishing meaningful friendships, but the popularity of this trend as cited by my participants indicates that the interactions within the *Twilight* community are fulfilling a significant social role for members. While women often cite their participation in the fan community as an activity that is solely for them, I argue that it has the ability to
create a common, albeit unexpected, bond with others. The relationships formed with other *Twilight* fans become a motivator to continue participating in the fan community. However, as I will discuss later in the chapter, the enjoyment of *Twilight* can also create unexpected connections, such as with spouses or children. Thus, my intention in this chapter is to highlight narratives from women that detail their initial interest and continued participation with the *Twilight* series, and explore the relationships that have grown out of their involvement in this community.

### 3.2 Gender Theories, the Internet, and *Twilight*

Before discussing specific narratives from research participants, I first want to explore theories of gender, the internet, and establish the ways in which they connect to the *Twilight* community. The theory of gender as a performance and socially constituted set of behaviors is recognized by a range of scholars (cf. Butler 2004, de Beauvoir 1952, Haraway 1988). The view of knowledge claims as situated and partial (cf. Bordo 1992, Clifford 1986, Harding 1994, Haraway 1988, Hill Collins 1990, Scott 1991) is an important epistemological aspect of this project as the experiences and meanings discussed may not apply to the entirety of female fandom or all women within the *Twilight* community. Rather, I am attempting to illuminate a particular subset of the community in an effort to better understand the range of experiences within the *Twilight* community. Not all the women I met were housewives, but this was a common theme and several articulated feeling disconnected from the world. The topic of emotional satisfaction or lack thereof and isolation among middleclass housewives is a long running discussion (cf. de Beauvoir 1952, Friedan 1963, Kelsky 2001, Ochs and Taylor 1995). Has this sense of female isolation faded? Or perhaps women are developing new ways to
navigate this sense of dislocation through participation with online communities such as *Twilight*?

Literature on the intersection of gender and popular culture (cf. Baym 1998, Bury 2005, Jenkins 1992, McRobbie 1994, Wakeford 1999) focuses on the ability of these cultural texts to bring women together. In particular, Janice Radway (1984: 88) discusses the role of romance novels and the pleasurable act of reading which allow women a break from their daily life. While these narratives may include patriarchal themes, women engage with the texts not to condone the subordination of women, but to mark it as recognizable and witness the heroine achieve an ideal love despite obstacles (Radway 1984:71). In what ways, then, do the *Twilight* books establish similarly constructed connections for the women reading? Does this story of passionate first love create a sense of nostalgia for the readers? Does Bella's transformation into a supernatural being who saves her family represent a desire for the idealized self within the reader? Furthermore, literature on women and romance narratives in the form of novels and television programming recognize the importance of computer-mediated communication as a way for women to connect with other women who share similar tastes (Baym 1998, Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 2006). This distinction for a cultural text (Bourdieu 1979) creates an initial bond between women and establishes the foundation for a more substantive and personal relationship.

There is a discussion of the gendered aspects regarding internet use that suggest women are more likely to participate on the message boards of private websites while men engage on the boards of official websites (Bury 2005, Wakeford 1999). Does this represent an extension of the public/private dichotomy (cf. Bury 2005, Bordo 1992,
Gardner 1980, McRobbie 2000, Ortner 1974) that has been the topic of discussion for years within anthropology and women's studies? Or does the internet present an opportunity to create an identity that is less influenced by gendered categories? Rhiannon Bury (2005: 3) comments, “as a distinct subculture of a burgeoning online media fandom, women-only and women-centered fandoms are ripe for scholarly investigation. More importantly, it is a subculture that casts in relief three key issues at the heart of social uses of internet: identity, community and space”. As will be illustrated through narratives later in this chapter, these three elements are apparent within the Twilight community as women discuss needing activities separate from their roles as caregivers, the desire for a community of people to interact with, and the use of the internet as a space to fulfill these needs and desires. As women engage with the Twilight series online and make friends, they often find not only a group of people with whom they share a common interest in a popular franchise, but other women in similar situations that understand their perspective and needs.

3.3 Women and the Crafting of an Online Social Network

Creating a social network is neither a formulaic process, nor an easily accomplished goal. Some women find, as they enter new phases of their lives, that building a network of friendships is not as simple as it once was while attending school or working. Activities that bring people together and establish a common bond may become scarcer when women marry and begin having children. Stay at home mothers develop a variety of methods to fulfill their social needs, such as through book clubs, neighborhood friends, parenting blogs, meetup groups, or joining an online fan group. Cyber

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communities can act as a place for mothers to find others in similar situations for emotional support (Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005). Some women within the *Twilight* community articulated a sense of isolation at being home alone for most of the day. While their children do provide companionship, a recurring theme was that women needed an activity and social group that was separate from their roles as caretakers. This is not needed due to resenting their roles as mothers, as most of the women I spoke with indicated they loved being mothers and caring for their children. Rather, the need for friends and activities outside their domestic sphere is done so in an effort to maintain balance.

It is important to discuss the concept of motherhood and its challenges in the contemporary world from a framework of understanding the social expectations and demands placed on mothers. When a woman becomes a mother, the ideological expectation becomes to place herself second:

*Indeed, motherhood as ideology and institution presupposes women’s and children’s interests to be exactly the same: Children’s needs are mothers’ needs…”Good” mothers are supposed to “subsume their own personality to family,” which means “having no other real interests, but only substitute or contingent ones, depending on other family member’s desires.* (Dillaway and Pare 2008:442)

The social pressure and expectations of motherhood challenge women as they navigate the experience of raising children. This becomes increasingly apparent in a postmodern world where some families move away from their extended kin and women are needed to work outside the home to help provide for the family. Patricia Drentea and Jennifer L.  

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Moren-Cross highlight that…

.mothers are increasingly isolated in a postmodern society...Most

women no longer stay at home while childrearing...As such,

neighborhoods are not filled with women and young children interacting

throughout the day... An additional social movement has been the

medicalisation and production of ‘scientific mothering’...This

medicalization of what was once ‘women’s knowledge/takes mothering
even further away from women’s circles...Consequently, mothers are more

socially isolated...and can no longer depend on traditional circles of wise

‘other-mothers’ (Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005:921).

This lack of a local community is then coupled with the increasing medicalized world and

the scientific regulations on appropriate childrearing. To combat this isolation and the

science of mothering, women expand their network to the virtual world to connect with

other mothers, “which allows geographically heterogeneous women, who have no prior

acquaintance, to connect and create a community of caring and information-sharing”

(Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005:921). Through these communities of caring and

connection, women establish support network that bridges them together and enables the

sharing of information and experiences.

Women adopt so-called ‘feminine’ interaction that enhances

support and free exchange of advice. Women’s online behavior is, on

average, more emotionally-oriented than men’s...The online environment

of a mother’s group creates a female-dominated sphere of support. Women

use their own experiences of mothering to help themselves and one
another. As such, it brings motherhood away from the male-centred medical environment to a woman-centred environment...Women can explore their feminine sides and create their version of motherhood by writing of their experiences and consulting other mothers. (Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005:924)

Within these networks of mothers, Drentea and Moren-Cross argue that they are places in which women are able to build social capital through the exchange of information and experiences: “We believe the site became a place for enhancing mothers’ social capital. Lin (2001: 29) states ‘social capital is resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions’. In this case, these mothers received information from an online community creating informative resources and social support” (Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005:937).

Lori Kido Lopez analyzes the act of “mommy blogging” and argues that this act is one that deserves investigation and is often viewed as less substantive than other blogging activities. Drawing connections to the public/private dichotomy, Lopez articulates that women cross a ideologically constructed line by discussing private matters in a public arena:

*When women bloggers wanted a piece of the blogosphere, it seems that what they wanted was to participate in the public sphere as equals with their male-blogging counterparts. As motherhood is commonly viewed as belonging squarely within the private sphere and successful, strong men do not air their dirty laundry in public, so to speak, mommy bloggers did not fit into this equation and were thus criticized for their*
transgression. (Lopez 2009:731)

This builds into the idea that motherhood subsumes all other aspects of identity and, as it is an identity that is frequently associated with the private sphere, airing personal troubles is not as validated in blogging. Furthermore, “In the act of writing from one’s own subjectivity about one’s own life, one appears to be creating a bounded identity…The self that emerges from a blog is neither cohesive nor singular, but instead determined through an amalgamation of conflicting elements” (Lopez 2009:738). Thus, while mommy bloggers may appear to create a singular identity, the self that is created online is not simply that of a mother, but is a compilation of various fluidities.

Through blogging women are able to articulate their own experiences of motherhood and connect with others. “It is no wonder that women are afraid to embrace the identity of mother – the entire concept of being a mother is overwhelming and imbued with failure. Once women become mothers, their lives are taken over by society’s strict set of rules and expectations” (Lopez 2009:732). Thus, through mommy blogging, women are able to discuss their experiences as a mother and grapple with the societal expectations for this role. In communicating their challenges and needing to connect with others, women are not disavowing their enjoyment of motherhood: “Despite the fact that mommy bloggers struggle under the weight of an intensified, public version of the myth of motherhood and are criticized for their commercial endeavors, it is evident…that women enjoy validation and solidarity from their participation in mommy blogging” (Lopez 2009:742).

Motherhood and caretaking activities are fraught with complexities for women. While identity is fluid and constantly in production, women desire to connect with others
outside their current sphere due in part to an increasingly sense of isolation and the pressure of social expectations for motherhood. Thus, the internet becomes a site to connect women and allow them to engage with others for a multitude of reasons, be it to have interests outside their caretaking role or to discuss the challenges of motherhood with others in a non-judgmental venue.

Idealistically, the internet is a place in which social markers such as gender, race, and class were initially believed to be invisible. However, the internet is a large place with many varying landscapes. The private/public dichotomy that exists in the physical world may continue to permeate the online realm. In the early 1990s, public forums on the internet were disavowed by female fans in response to the “varying degrees of harassment and denigration on the male-dominated forums” and, as a result, “many female fans chose to stake out and colonize cyberspaces of their own in the form of private mailing lists” (Bury 2005:2). In this way, the private/public dichotomy persists with men occupying the public sphere and women in the private. The extension of this dichotomy into cyberspace is a troubling phenomena and one in which the Esme's Heart group contradicts. While the group operates through private mailing lists to organize events, a public website with information is maintained that contains event listings, pictures, and links. Thus, perhaps as the internet becomes more “colonized” the spaces of public/private as male/female are eroding.

Studies of female fans and their use of the internet provides a foundational base that emphasizes the establishment of a space that is uniquely theirs. Rhiannon Bury articulates that “in the case of female fans who were made to feel like outsiders in male-dominated forums, the dream of a community bringing together like-minded women had
a powerful resonance” (Bury 2005:15). Adult-centered Twilight websites, such as TwilightMOMS.com and Esme's Heart, are able to mobilize women from across the country, be it for discussions about the series or raising money for charities. However, even in purposively inclusionary groups, there remains a tendency to marginalize and exclude certain parties. Thus, Bury argues that it is important to analyze female fan communities through ethnography “to not only get at the specific communal practices that create an effect of substance but also at the ways in which those practices create insiders and outsiders, however unintentional” (Bury 2005:15).

While women may seek to establish a niche community to fulfill a social void, it is important to keep in mind that even in promoting the group, others may feel excluded. As such, it is important to not overly romanticize fan communities as completely inclusionary and ideal. Most stories of women that met online through the Twilight community were positive, but there are encounters that people find inappropriate and, consequently, triggers someone to disassociate with the other person. Melody, a mother in her early thirties, articulated an experience she had in which she became uncomfortable with another Twilight fan online:

*I met a girl [in her thirties] on the website that I don't want to mention...She was coming here [the convention] with her grandmother and she was wanting to meet up with some of the girls. So she started talking to me a couple of months ago and I was like 'Yeah, that's cool'...cause I can't imagine coming to a convention by yourself. So she got me on Facebook. Well, she takes tons and tons of snapshots of herself below the chin. [She's] sending me pictures of her in dresses wanting to*
know which one I thought Chaske [Spencer] would like best. This is just the beginning...she would see me online on Facebook [and ask]...'Do you think he realizes that I'm like his age and the only single person there?'...I finally got a snippet of her face because it was all like chin down so I'd know what she looked like. So I could avoid her all weekend because...she's like the kind of people that I feel bad for the celebrities. You know what I mean?...Like I'm a hardcore fan...but there's a line...You know what I mean? There's like a line and when I was talking to this girl online she just crossed that line multiple times to where I was just like 'That's too much'. I can't handle it.

As evident in the above story, not all fans are viewed as appropriate and certain behaviors may cause people to disassociate. Melody's main concern surrounding this interaction was the extreme focus the girl had on the actor, Chaske Spencer, to the point of attempting to dress to his liking. This seeming over attachment to the fantasy is a trait that many women I spoke with did not want associated with themselves. While avid fans, they occasionally made caveats that they were not overly obsessive fans that lost sight of reality due to their pleasure in the series and its fantasy. Cindy, a founding member of Esme's Heart and the organization president, commented that people often have negative reactions to adult *Twilight* fans based on stereotypes. Cindy stated, “Because they don't know, they love to just judge...and put something out there that is just so negative that it can be just so frustrating to us.” Thus, organizations such as Esme's Heart attempt to dispute these misinterpretations and demonstrate the positive endeavors organized by fans of the *Twilight* series.
As such, while I focus heavily on women who have formed social networks through *Twilight* online communities, it is important to remember that the internet is not a completely open and accepting space. As it is comprised of interactions between people, there remains situations of exclusion and marginalization. However, the internet is valuable in the development of fan groups in that it provides an opportunity to search for others with similar interests in relative ease from your own home.

### 3.4 *Twilight* Fan Groups

I would first like to briefly discuss the two main groups that I will refer to: TwilightMOMS and Esme's Heart. TwilightMOMS is a much larger website than Esme's Heart, but both organizations began due to similar themes and share commonalities. As a caveat, the term TwilightMOMS is widely adopted to address adult fans of the *Twilight* series and does not always specifically refer to the website or group itself. In an effort to minimize confusion, I will utilize the term TwilightMOMS when referring to adult female fans in general. When referring to the specific organizations, I will use TwilightMOMS.com and Esme’s Heart to distinguish between the groups.

While the group name TwilightMOMS.com may indicate that all members are mothers, this is not the case, and neither is it for the Esme's Heart group. Created in 2007 by Lisa Hansen, TwilightMOMS.com started as a way to connect adult fans of Stephenie Meyer and the *Twilight* series. Melody commented, “A lot of people think that to join TwilightMOMS[.com] that you have to be a mother and that's not the case.” Jennifer, a single woman in her early thirties, articulated the membership guidelines for the TwilightMOMS.com group:
So I'm actually a prime example...because I'm not a mother and I'm a Volturi moderator of the site. So you only have to meet one of three requirements. You either have to be married, you have to be 21, or you have to have children. So we even have TwilightDads on the site that talk to us and they're a real hoot. We...have a family friendly site. We don't let any foul language...or anything like that. Everything's so...if there are children running behind you, it would be ok for them to look at your site. And that's the job of the Volturi moms, to make sure that everything runs smoothly and everybody's on a very family friendly attitude.

A Volturi moderator was a member of the website who helps maintain and/or enforce the rules and regulations of the site, such as no profanity\textsuperscript{8}. Volturi moderators tend to be more active members in the community and, as such, membership is not dependent upon being a mother.

Esme's Heart was created in 2009 by Cindy Adrien and Bethany Rensberger when they wanted to watch the second movie, \textit{New Moon}, in theaters with a group of women their age. When more women showed an interest in participating, Cindy and Bethany decided to use the shared enjoyment of \textit{Twilight} as a way to give back to charities. The description of Esme's Heart was posted on their website front page:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Esme's Heart is 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to accomplish acts of love with a heart like Esme! We identify a need in our community and use themed events to help raise awareness and funds for various causes. Our group has not only helped about 25 organizations}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{8} Melody commented that she became a Volturi moderator at the request of TwilightMOMS.com. She indicated that it was in part due to her ability to be highly active on the website due to staying at home with her children.
with our events so far, but we have also been able to donate over $25,000 worth of funds and items to the chosen groups. Our name comes from the matriarch of the Cullen family who is Esme Cullen, in the Twilight Saga series created by Stephenie Meyer. We really like that she is accepting and loving of all and her kind and compassionate heart is one we try to emulate in trying to help others in need. (Esme's Heart, Inc.)

At the root of both groups is the idea of connecting with fellow fans of Stephenie Meyer. Both websites emphasize the concept of giving back through fandom, which I will discuss in more depth in later chapters. Despite the names, Twilight fan groups, such as TwilightMOMS.com, have a fairly open criteria for membership.

3.5 Finding Twilight

The story of how people “find” Twilight was one of my favorite questions to ask. The stories vary widely from an introduction by a friend or a random book selection. What strikes me as most interesting is the ways in which these stories of “finding Twilight” communicate the beginning of something significant. Important phases and events are marked by distinctive beginnings and endings. As many people remember their first date with a significant other, members of the Twilight community remember the events that brought them to Twilight.

For some fans, enjoying Twilight was not a surprise, but instead the social aspects were unexpectedly pleasant. It was finding other fans, often through websites, that became important. Regarding the TwilightMOMS.com website, Kelly commented:

TwilightMOMS[.com] just rekindled the passion and the enthusiasm through talents and interests that had gradually fallen into the
background as life’s responsibilities naturally became the central focus.

TwilightMOMS.com has grown into a place...to make friends, to go shopping, and even becoming involved in noble causes. This site was created by and is run by regular women from around the world and continues to be an uplifting, inspirational, and a fun place for women everywhere to visit. So what Lisa Hansen had once wanted, a place to simply chat with other women about her obsession for four little books, has become a booming site of over 38,000 members.

These websites, such as TwilightMOMS.com, become places for fans of the series to visit and find other people with similar interests. A mother of triplet boys, Melody, commented that she was not surprised that she enjoyed the Twilight series since she has read stories about vampires, werewolves, and monsters for years. What made Twilight unique for Melody was the community aspect; “For the first time I was able to talk and meet with other women and that's what started all this.” While Twilight as a series captivates readers and initially pulls in fans, I argue that it is the bond it creates between people that then becomes a motivator for continual participation in the community. Based on the narratives I heard, women are first drawn into the series through the characters and story and, in an effort to understand the fascination, they search online for others with similar experiences. What prevents the series from becoming a passing fascination for some is the emotional connection to other Twilight fans that extends beyond the confines of the books. As women become friends and share other aspects of lives, a deeper connection forms that then grows beyond but simultaneously cements Twilight as a significant aspect since it was the initial foundation of the relationship.
Cindy, a mother in her forties, first picked up the book to read on a family trip based on a recommendation from a friend.

I had a friend of mine...she read the series and we're in Junior League together which is another volunteer organization and she's like 'I really think you'll like this.' She says 'It's got something for everyone. It's got a love story, some action drama, but at the same time it's humorous. But it does have that bit of, you know, mystical in there with the vampires and stuff. So I was like 'Ok, ok, I'll try it.'...On a Thursday, I picked up the book, read the opening part of it and was just like, first page I was hooked. I was like 'Oh my gosh' and I read non-stop through. By the time we got home on Saturday I had already finished the book and I was going straight to the bookstore and bought all the other ones.

After reading the series herself and becoming “hooked,” Cindy then actively recommended the book to her friends, including fellow founding member of Esme's Heart, Bethany:

I gave Bethany the series and told her 'Look, you really should read this book.' Bethany never read...she's just not a reader. Oh my goodness, I gave her that and I mean...I did it with all my friends. I carried a copy of Twilight in my car at all times...'You've got to read this. It is the best book ever.' And I'd give it to them and then they're hooked. I don't know how many people I got hooked on it.

For Cindy, enjoying Twilight was not something she wanted to keep to herself. Rather, she wanted to share it with her friends as well so they could also enjoy the series.
Savannah, a single woman in her late twenties, was introduced to the *Twilight* series by a friend who read the series. Watching the movie and discussing the books quickly became a bond between the two which then had a ripple effect out to other friends. While the introduction by a friend made a difference, Savannah articulated that the series caught her attention due to her interest in the storyline, which included a “love triangle, vampires, and Native American characters.” However, what really makes *Twilight* special to Savannah was that this interest in a series has become a common bond with her friends. While other aspects of life may change, such as school or jobs, and trigger less commonalities with friends, *Twilight* becomes a potential common ground upon which people can socialize. As Savannah stated, *Twilight* “unites me with my best friends.”

Jennifer had a different experience when she discovered the *Twilight* series. Instead of a recommendation by a friend, Jennifer was simply looking for something to occupy her on a flight:

*I was actually going on an international flight and I needed a book. And I am not a reader, but I needed something with 18 hours on the flight...So I picked up the new vampire thing that was coming out on video or something...I ended up reading Twilight on my flight to Korea, picked up books there, read New Moon and Eclipse on the flight back and was running right out at midnight to Walmart to go get Breaking Dawn and that's how it started. And I started looking on the internet thinking 'Oh my goodness this is crazy! What am I doing liking Edward?'...But then I found TwilightMOMS. So I found out I'm not the only one.*
In this situation, Jennifer stumbled upon *Twilight* by herself and became entranced with the series. Then she sought out others online to make a connection with people about the series. People often express confusion initially over why they are so drawn to the series. In an effort to discover the “why” behind this attraction, people use the internet to research the series and discuss the interest with other people in a similar situation. Ellen, a woman in her twenties, had a similar experience:

> I don't even know why I picked up the book. I'll be honest. I think I heard the movie was coming out and my mom had made a comment 'Oh, that's about vampires. You'll like that'. And I had just seen the previews for the movie, but I was like 'Ok, why not?' and I read the first book in like two days. And then I think I read them all...it was probably like three weeks...I kind of messed around on the internet because I was like 'Man, I've got to be the only twenty five year old that's reading a young adult book for a teenager and is just completely infatuated with it!' And I got online and I think TwilightMOMS was the first website I actually clicked on...And I was like, 'Hey, this is pretty cool...I am not alone! I am not crazy. I am not, you know, a freak.' And just, I fell in love with the site and the books and the movies.

The widespread popularity of *Twilight* among people of various ages was a conundrum for many individuals. Cindy expressed her disbelief about the ways in which the *Twilight* series has drawn in so many people:

> What is it? What is it that drew us all in?...I don't know what it is or how it connected with so many people except for the fact that for us, me
and my age, that it allowed us to go back and live that time in our life and to feel that love. Even though many of us are married, and married for many years, but to feel that infatuation love...When she fainted after biology...and Edward swoops in and takes her off of Mike’s hands. How many times did you imagine in high school that this gorgeous guy, something would happen and the captain of the football team would be right there and pick you up or something? You know what I mean!...Of course we all have those thoughts. I don't know what it is. It just sucked us all in.

Many of the women I met expressed their initial confusion about understanding why they enjoyed the series so much. In an effort to better understand the pleasure derived from Twilight, they venture online to see if others are experiencing similar situations. It then becomes the connection to others that drives the continual enjoyment of the series and cyclically perpetuates the pleasure and participation circle.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, my own initial experience with Twilight was personally memorable. After months of resisting the displays at the bookstore and refusing to read the series because I perceived that it was not Buffy: The Vampire Slayer caliber, I broke down when the movie previews began to air on television and I became fascinated. I went to see the first Twilight movie with three friends and we were all entranced by it. While that was five years ago, I still share that bond with these friends. When the final movie was released, I initially became distressed because I had plans to view the movie with the Esme's Heart group, which meant I was not able to continue the tradition of seeing the movies with my own Twilight friend – only one of which still lived
in Atlanta at that time. After inviting my Twilight friend to the Esme's Heart event, she expressed her relief that we would still be able to go see the movie together on opening night. Thus, we were able to bring the shared experiences of the Twilight movies full circle by attending the movie premiere together.

Events, such as movie releases, come to mean more than simple popular culture entertainment screenings. These events become sites of social and emotional significance between people, which generate feelings of effervescence (Durkheim 1912). In later chapters, I will return, in more depth, to the ways in which the Twilight community generates effervescence through social rituals, such as meetings and movie screenings. My intention is to articulate the importance placed on the interest in the Twilight series and the way that interest was initially generated and is then perpetuated through participation in the Twilight community.

3.6 Bella: The Girl and the Mother

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bella endures a traumatic pregnancy and childbirth in the final book of the Twilight series. This pregnancy and her ensuing survival were deemed to be nearly miracles within the novel. Bella defies all odds and, in the span of a few minutes, shifts gears from a newlywed bride focusing on herself and her husband to a protective mother that will go to any lengths to save her child, even putting herself at odds with Edward and endangering her own life. Authors suggest that Meyer's religious undertones of Mormonism and prolife views saturate this particular plot line and influence the moral themes within the series (cf. Bruner 2009, Fosl and Fosl 2009, Kazez 2009, Silverman 2009). In the concluding volume of the series, it remains that Bella not only becomes a strong character that sways the tide of the final battle, but also becomes
the ultimate mother: protective, self-sacrificing, and, all the while, a 'natural' at it.

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter highlights, Bella becomes a mother in the final book and feels the “natural” pull toward maternal affection for her child. With relative ease, Bella shifts from being a young girl in love to a protective mother quickly in the final novel. I argue that part of the reason people, in particular adult women, are drawn to the Twilight series is because it tells a familiar story: that of a girl who falls in love, marries her boyfriend, and becomes a mother. While Bella is not necessarily the favorite character for all adult women within the Twilight community, reading the series through her eyes allows for the rekindling of adolescent feelings while simultaneously connecting with her future as a mother and wife.

Cindy commented that part of the reason she enjoyed the series was due to the nostalgic feelings that were conjured while she was reading. The intense emotions generated by the series caused her to fervently read the series:

*I have never in my entire life of reading, read a series that sucked me in [like Twilight]...I mean, I was staying up until 3 o'clock in the morning. What in the world? I mean, I never did that! And I devoured the whole series...In New Moon, it broke my heart when Edward left. But I knew he must be coming back because there's two more books, but it still broke my heart...I kept reading but I was so angry. I was mad all through that book. I was like 'How could he do that? How could he leave just like that?'...I was heart broken and I think it makes you feel that feeling...I felt like back in high school when it felt like that first love that you have. I could feel those emotions coming back and same thing about getting your
heart broken and so I knew what that felt like. And for me, I guess as an older reader, it was you know feeling these things that I felt once before and getting to relive it again sort of. And I know to a younger reader, for them...the love, it's something to look forward to that love can be like that...But then to show that there can be heartbreak.

These feelings make the series familiar to Cindy and trigger a strong emotional connection to the characters and story. As mentioned earlier, Cindy actively recommended the series to her friends. This was done, in part, because she wanted her friends to enjoy the same familiar, nostalgic emotions that she was able to while reading the series. Thus, while reading the *Twilight* series, Cindy (and others) can emotionally return to an earlier period in her life, before adulthood and motherhood, when first love feels as intense and unpredictable as life and death.

3.7 Conceptualizing Motherhood and Identity

Women discuss the need for something that is ‘theirs’ and separate from their roles as caretakers. Participation in the *Twilight* community then fulfills this desire. I would like to first address theories of motherhood and identity construction before discussing the narratives I heard for why participation in the *Twilight* community is significant to the people involved. Constructing identity is a highly individualized process, but these categories are often collectively based on common social groupings. Some identity categories are assigned with socially constructed meanings that influence the ways in which people occupy these identity roles. Gendered identity is particularly susceptible to these influences. The category of mother is individually practiced by women in various ways, but the role itself holds many societal assumptions that are then
attached to the women who occupy the position. The notion of being an inherent caretaker is often associated with the role of motherhood, but this is not a biological basis and occurs through a sedimentation of practices that construct “mother” as a nurturing category.

These ties to the biology and nature are used as the explanation for the “pan-cultural fact” of female subordination within society (Ortner 1974:356). Through her physical being and the process of menstruation and reproduction, women are viewed as closer to nature than men (Ortner 1974:361). While biological facts are not irrelevant, “these facts and differences only take on significance or superior/inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems” (Ortner 1974:359). As men cannot create life within their physical bodies, they create outside of nature through technology and “relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings” (Ortner 1974:362). Women are not wholly relegated to the realm of nature as they are the primary caretakers of children and teach them “culture” (Ortner 1974:366). In order for this association of woman as “closer” to nature than man to change, there is a need for men and women to be equally involved in the creation of transcendent objects (Ortner 1974:367).

Similar to Ortner's exploration of the connection between women and nature, Gayle Rubin argues that culture produces gendered subjects through an idea that biology determines gender and thus, oppression. Rubin critiques a traditional anthropological focus on the deep structures, or universals, of anthropology. Histories should be reworked to take into consideration the often invisible labor of women (Rubin 1975:210). Rubin argues for an “elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles” (Rubin 1975:204).
Instead of a corrective approach that minimizes men's roles, Rubin suggests the disbandment of roles that are strictly tied to biological sex. Thus, the identity category of mother and its associated social meanings would not be a rigid structure, but a more fluid interpretation that lacks an obligatory aspect.

The idea that women are more “natural” caretakers is a challenging concept to destabilize. To address this concern, Amy Allen discusses feminist conceptions of power and different approaches to female empowerment. Allen critiques the view that “women are predisposed to being more concerned with care, nurturing, and relationships” (Allen 1999:23). Women are not more naturally inclined to caring work than men, but a sedimented link between woman's “nature” and the social construct of woman as caregiver naturalizes this connection. While many women construct their identities around caregiving roles, such as mother or wife, in empowering ways it may fail to account for the development of these practices through “a dialectical relationship with male domination” (Allen 1999:24). As mothers, women experience power within the domestic sphere through raising children, but these situations are not simplistic enough to qualify as either “dominating” or “empowering” (Allen 1999:26). Similarly, motherhood is not a totalizing identity category for many women. Conceptions of women as tied to nature and inherent caretakers are persistent ideas that still maintain a presence today. These views are not simple cultural constructs and require attention to multiple factors, such as domestic labor and empowerment through teaching children. How is it possible to determine what 'motherhood' means when there is such a plurality of constructions? Thus, it remains important to understand that motherhood is not a totality of identity and is conceptualized differently by women.
Dorinne Kondo discusses the formation of identity and the ways in which cultural factors impact the view of the self. Kondo argues that there are “fundamentally different cultural ideals about what it is to be human, a woman, and an adult” (Kondo 1990:33). Primarily referring to Japanese women and her research conducted in a factory, Kondo articulates the challenges of conceptualizing identity and the self. “Although Western feminists have undertaken the important work of deconstructing 'the whole subject' by pointing to differences within 'Western culture,' the relationally defined self of American women still remains solidly within a linguistic and historical legacy of individualism” (Kondo 1990:33). Through her research, Kondo discusses the ways in which people use language to “create contextually specific, nonessentialist identities” (Kondo 1990:33). This contradicts conventional views of identity that emphasize a fixed entity with boundaries that are distinct from an outside world (Kondo 1990:33-34). Kondo critiques the tendency to transpose the self/society binary through the “distinction between a 'person' – that is, human beings as bearers of social roles, on the one hand, and 'self' – a kind of inner, reflective psychological essence, on the other, recapitulating the binary between social and psychological, world and subject” (Kondo 1990:34). The self is continually produced in reference to the context and, as such, is not fixed or bounded. Thus, “the unitary subject is no longer unified” (Kondo 1990:34).

In many ways the above theories are validated through the narratives I heard within the Twilight community, which are included later in this chapter. As I heard stories from women, often these theories and arguments would resonate as I listened. In discussing the motivation for participating in the Twilight community, women articulated the desire for an identity and activity that was not reliant upon being a mother or wife.
This style of discussing identity reifies Kondo's discussion of the ways in which the self/society binary is perpetuated by viewing personal identity as something reflexive and psychological. The women I met did not explicitly express their discontent with being mothers. Rather, dissatisfaction was discussed in terms of feeling isolated in the home as a housewife or simply needing a break. One of the reasons cited for being a stay at home wife was the economic benefit due to the cost of childcare. However, it is the wife/mother who stays home with the children and not the husband/father. In this situation, the concept of woman as a natural caretaker, such as discussed by Ortner, Rubin, and Allen is perpetuated despite feelings of dissatisfaction by the housewife. While feminism and women's right have made significant strides to attain gender equality, there remains a disconnect in many women's lives. Thus, it is with these frameworks in mind that I discuss some of the ensuing narratives.

3.8 Isolation and Connection: The Bond of Twilight

As discussed above, motherhood is conceptualized differently based on the woman and there is not one way to be a maternal figure, just as being a mother is not a woman's sole potential identify category. Many, though not all, members of the Twilight community were mothers. This identity category was frequently discussed and referenced as they talked about their participation within the community. Many derived enjoyment from their roles as mothers, but articulated the sense that something was missing. The Twilight community thus fulfills variable roles within the lives of the women I met based upon their individual context. The underlying theme within the individual variations is the concept of developing connections outside of the domestic sphere or beyond the usual social circle. The connection that was first forged with the series becomes an initial bond
that is shared with others, which then reinforces an emotional link to the series.

On a cold, rainy February night, Esme's Heart had its monthly social meeting and, when attendance seemed low before the event began, I mentioned that the weather may prompt some people to stay home. Sitting across from me, Chloe burst out laughing. She commented that not even snow and ice could keep her from coming out to see her fellow TwilightMOMS. While Chloe frequently spoke lovingly about her husband and twin daughters, she explicitly stated that evening that her participation in the *Twilight* fan community was a way for her to take a break from her daily activities and enjoy spending time with friends about a series she loves. Thus, it is this idea of an “escape” from the daily domestic sphere that connects back to Friedan's argument from the 1960s that women can feel a sense of isolation within the domestic sphere. Simone de Beauvoir comments that “Those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness consists in being at rest” (de Beauvoir 1952:41). In this respect, are women able to expand beyond their roles as mothers and wives to fulfill their personal needs?

As a mother of triplets, Melody, desired a connection outside of the domestic sphere when she found the *Twilight* series:

*I became a member in 2008 and then that first year, it was kinda just nice getting on the threads because I'm a stay at home mom. It doesn't pay for me to go to work because of daycare so for that first, like, year or so it was a fog. But it was so nice to get on that board and talk to other women and stuff. It kinda got me away from the kids and then, after about a year, started having get togethers and stuff. And then I met Ellen about a year*
ago through there, had never met her before. Now we're, like, really close friends. And then we drug her sister into it.

Citing the economic benefits of being a stay at home mother, Melody acknowledged that it makes sense for her to be the primary caretaker, but described the isolation she felt at home with the children. While Melody enjoyed the Twilight series before becoming an active member of the online community, the website and the friends she made on it came to mean much more than fleeting online interactions. Furthermore, these interactions helped Melody during a difficult phase of her life:

I've always read. I've always loved monsters period. Always read that stuff and I've watched I don't know how many movies but I think it [Twilight] helped me in this point because...you kinda get to a point where you feel like you're trapped as a stay at home mom. So and, honest to God, I have some friends, but I've lost so many friends after I got married and had kids. So it's kinda like these are my new groups...my new group to hang out with...I don't know if this sounds cheesy, but it makes you feel not as alone. Because that first year I felt so alone because we were building a house, I was at home by myself with three babies and it was just so stressful. So when it started to gradually slow down and stuff...to me it was just like a breath of fresh air.

However, as the children grow Melody encountered new stresses and challenges as a stay at home mother. The Twilight community and the friendships she has formed through it then act as a support network for her to cope with these stressors:
So they're [the triplets] going to be three in August and I feel like the past six months they've really hit that terrible two stage. So it's nice to like get out with girls and stuff like that. Go to these things and have fun and have a group...that you share the same common interests. I love it. Never thought I'd be a moderator on there [TwilightMOMS.com]. They just kind of approached me you know, but being at home I'm able to get on there quite a bit...For me, being a stay at home mom, sometimes at the end of the day I feel like I don't do anything. I know that sounds ridiculous but it's like three o'clock and I'm still in lounge clothes, I feel like I haven't really...you know what I mean? So it's nice to kind of...I don't know. I need to get like an internet job or something because I've gotten to a point where I feel like I don't have a purpose or something...I know this sounds ridiculous...but I've thought about...Adam, my husband, has a job and he has two part time jobs. Because you know you have to and...I sometimes feel bad because I'm not bringing any income in so. It's hard to explain.

In the above story, Melody articulated her feelings of being a stay at home mother, which sometimes made her feel like she has not accomplished anything in a day because she has been at home and in lounge clothes. Simultaneously, she acknowledged that the feelings of inadequacy are ridiculous and yet continues to feel guilt about her husband having multiple jobs. Thus, in this situation, the Twilight community and Melody's work as a website moderator helped to mediate some of these feelings. It was not simply an interest in the Twilight series that caused Melody to continually participate in the community. Rather, the Twilight community and its members have come to maintain a much deeper
and more significant role in Melody's life.

Ellen, who picked the books up on a whim, became an active member of the online community, which led to her friendship with Melody. Ellen commented, “We had a get together in Greenwood and she [Melody] asked me to go to a convention…last year so. We had met once and we're like 'Ok, so we're going!'” Both women articulated that it was unusual for them to take an out-of-town trip with someone they barely knew and had only met once. However, this trip became a bond for the two women. Melody stated:

_I wanted to go to the convention so bad. And I'm like 'Who is going to go with me?' I'm like 'Ok, I just met this girl, but she seems cool. So I just called her and was like 'Do you want to go?' and she's like 'Yeah!'…After...we were just like...attached. And we've been to several of them since. So it's funny that I asked like a stranger to go to...with me._

While the two were essentially strangers when they drove to the convention, they returned as friends with an interesting story and a continued enthusiasm for the _Twilight_ series. Melody and Ellen also met Daphne through an interest in attending a convention. Daphne discussed why she selected the TwilightMOMS.com website and what led to her meeting Ellen in person:

_The thing is with me that was the whole reason I even got on the website [TwilightMOMS.com]. I wanted to come to a convention and up until that point I'd been on Twilighters Anonymous and they didn't have anything on there that narrowed it down to states or anything like that. So I finally found that and saw that it was narrowed down...And I just started going on there and was like 'Is anyone going to the convention? I don't_
want to go by myself. Is anybody going cause that would be great.' And before the convention I went to...two get togethers and I had just started talking to her [Ellen] and seen that she liked True Blood too and I had tickets to some True Blood thing and called her. I was like 'Hey, you want to go? Cause I got an extra one.'...I'm like I got tickets and nobody will go with me so...

Daphne selected the TwilightMOMS.com website specifically for its capability to bridge a connection with other fans in a geographic area. Once she met Ellen and Melody in person, the friendship that began online became more meaningful. Both Daphne and Melody were motivated to invite Ellen to an event due to an interest in vampires, but it was the friendship that developed as a result which kept them actively in communication. Through shared stories and experiences, such as at conventions, the three women – and occasionally Ellen's sister, Rachel – formed a social network. This in turn fulfills Melody's earlier comments about a missing element in her life regarding social relationships and a lack of female companionship.

Kelly, a mother in her late thirties, also established a substantially meaningful relationship through the Twilight community. This friendship differed from the one shared between Melody, Ellen, and Daphne because it was not a geographically ideal friendship, in that Kelly and Jennifer, her friend, lived in states that were far apart. Kelly described meeting Jennifer:

I met Jennifer who was from Texas and we started chatting...but we talked and that turned into a friendship of the past year and a half and a few weeks ago she drove up to my house [in Indiana] to come hang out
with me and my kids and my husband from Texas. And now we're here. And then we spend the next week together before we have to ...we're not talking about the saying goodbye part. So it's been pretty amazing.

In this situation, the internet was the primary vehicle for communication between Kelly and Jennifer and the sustainment of the friendship. These virtual interactions were not fleeting or frivolous as they provided the foundation and sustainment of a meaningful relationship. Kelly expressed genuine sadness at the prospect of Jennifer leaving, which indicated a deeper level of emotion. Furthermore, it was not just Kelly who developed a relationship with Jennifer, but also Kelly's children:

My kids, my youngest is eight and he loves Jennifer. Even though he just met her, but he's known of her in pictures and IM's [instant messages]. And on her drive...every hour, half hour, he would want to know where Jennifer was. 'Where's Jenn? What state is she in? Where's she at?' So I got to pull up Google Maps and show where she's at...And so, yeah, eighteen hours later when she pulled in the driveway he had just gone to bed, but that didn't last. So several late nights but it's pretty amazing...Nothing that I ever dreamed [that] I would, you know form a friendship halfway across the country. It's been amazing!

While not all friendships formed through the Twilight series are as substantial and meaningful as the ones described above, these types of stories are referenced by community members and viewed to be as common rather than an anomaly. Thus, active participants in the Twilight community continue to engage with the series in part due to the meaningful relationships formed through the series.
Women gravitate in particular towards adult fan sites, such as TwilightMOMS.com and Esme's Heart because of the possibility to converse with other adults. Lauren, a mother in her late thirties, commented:

*It [TwilightMOMS.com] was the first one I actually found....And then I found Lex [another popular Twilight website]. I really don't know the other sites out there. But I really enjoy the Moms. It's more my own age. I'm thirty-seven, I don't want to talk to fifteen year olds about Twilight. I'd like to talk to my Moms about Twilight!...So that's really why I chose TwilightMOMS[.com]. It's more adult conversation without being all the “OMG” on the fan site. I felt like it was more my speed and my temperament.*

This desire to experience the *Twilight* series with other women in their age group is a common theme. This inclination led Cindy Adrien and Bethany Rosenberger, the two women who began the Esme's Heart website, to organize a private screening at a local movie theater in 2009. Cindy describes the first movie event and the development of Esme's Heart:

*That November was when New Moon was coming out. And once Bethany had gotten addicted to it and we realized there were so many more people...She called the theater and asked about having a special screening just for our age. And that's where it all started. And we decided we're all going to come together, we might as well do it for something good. We thought, November food bank, we'll just collect canned goods*
and...we did Alex's Lemonade Stand\(^9\), which was kind of a national charity too at the same time. So we did a silent auction for them that night. And there were 250 ladies who came and we raised 1000 pounds of food and got 600 dollars for Alex's Lemonade Stand. And it just kind of snowballed from there. People wanted to do more...'Are you going to do more things? Are you going to get together?' And I was like 'I don't know'... We started it at a Panera Bread, just going and having coffee and talking with each other. About our love of Twilight and how they all could get it and enjoy and understand what we're talking about. You know, because there's so many people going 'Oh, that's just that vampire story' or something like that. They don't understand. They haven't read it. I even got my mother hooked on it... We had all ages there [the movie event]. We had mothers, grandmothers, I mean, it was unbelievable the number of people that we had there. We had some teens that came with their moms, but it was a fun night for that age group.

As articulated in the above story, women are not seeking out online websites to solely discuss the Twilight series and find out the latest news about the movie actors. In many cases, participation with the Twilight series is fulfilling a deeper need and providing women with a new social network. While Cindy actively recruited people to read the Twilight series, she was still initially surprised by the response to the first movie event, which would become the foundation for Esme's Heart. Thus, while women were initially drawn together by a common interest in Twilight, people found that it became about

\(^9\) Alex’s Lemonade Stand is a charity that raises money to fight childhood cancer. It was supported by a Twilight group called the Fandom Gives Back and was the ‘unofficial’ charity of Twilight for a time due to the success of the fundraising.
much more than simply being fans of the series.

Participation within the *Twilight* community can also provide women with an opportunity to step outside of their identity as a caretaker and explore new identity categories. Through participation in Esme's Heart, women are able to help organize events for the club and some are board members of the organization. These positions allow women to step into different roles than those of mother or wife. Before the final movie premiere event, I attended a monthly Esme's Heart meeting and sat in on part of the board meeting before the full club meeting\(^\text{10}\). Sitting around a table, Cindy ran the meeting from a set agenda and called on each board member to report the status of their responsibilities. The board, and subsequent full meeting, was run with a distinct purpose and lacked the feeling of a casual, haphazard social event. Rather, the board members ran the meeting with authority and gravitas, emphasizing the importance of the event running smoothly and collecting donations for the charity beneficiary.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Gayle Rubin calls for the disbandment of linking social roles to biological sex. I argue that some women within the *Twilight* community are using their involvement with the fan groups to attain different positions of power than they are usually able to experience within their gendered sex roles. According to Amy Allen, some women experience satisfaction as a stay at home mother because of the power experienced within the household in raising the children. This satisfaction may be the result sedimented gender inequality that people experience throughout their lives. The stereotype of women as “natural” caretakers and mothers is a heavy weight to bear. As Melody discussed, she bears the guilt of being unable to work and feels isolated at

\(^{10}\) This Esme’s Heart monthly meeting was held at Jocks and Jills in their *Twilight* room on October 4, 2012 with approximately 30-35 people in attendance at the full meeting.
home with the children, but knows the economic benefit of being a stay at home mother is greater than her employment. I do not argue that the *Twilight* fan community is an idealistic, Utopian group in which women are shedding stereotypes and reflexively cognizant of every action and desire they have. Rather, I posit that the *Twilight* community and its intense popularity with adult women is due in part because it resonated with women in several ways. It provided a new social network as previous friendships fade away due to time and distance. The community also allowed women to explore relationships that are formed through their interests and not their children or husbands. These bonds combat the feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction that some housewives experience and provided a group with which to discuss their lives, such as the challenges of being a mother.

These narratives articulate that identity categories are not inherent or bounded. Connecting to Ortner's argument about women as seen as closer to nature, some of the women I met discussed a dissonance with being “just” a mother and existing within the domestic realm. Thus, it is through the internet and the *Twilight* community that women can branch out into the public realm and create connections that exist outside of their roles as mothers. As Allen argues, women are not “natural” caretakers and, as such, there are many ways to “be” a mother. Some women enjoy the role as a housewife while others, such as Melody, struggle with the experience. Furthermore, comments that articulate a need for something that exists outside being a mother or wife connect to Kondo's discussion of identity in that the self/society binary is perpetuated in these narratives. As women discuss a need for something that is “theirs” and separate from their social role, the self/society binary is continually reinforced. Thus, while identity is
not fixed or bounded, in this situation it is also likely to never be satisfied. Caught between social roles and internal psychological desires, the self exists in the slippage amidst these spheres. This desire prompts some women to participate in activities, such as the *Twilight* fan community, and develop substantive connections with others in an effort to better understand their own pleasure in a cultural text and form a social network.

People are continually experiencing the expectations and structures of ideology, which subconsciously influence their actions and self-representations. While my intention is not to undermine the narratives shared and the views of participants that women are more “natural” caretakers, I want to address the theoretical concept employed by Anne Allison of Louis Althusser’s ideological state apparatus. Through analyzing school lunch practices in Japan and the expectations placed on mothers, Allison argued that the food is embedded with social expectations and gendered practices (Allison 1996). Through structured processes, the social order and expectations are communicated to mothers about what their primary role should be. Through these daily practices and social indoctrination from a young age, a perspective of what a woman “is” begins to form in people’s minds from a young age.

Studying psychology and child development, Valerie Walkerdine analyzed the early education and the production of children:

*This is the development of the idea of ‘the child’ as an object both of science in its own right and of apparatuses of normalization. These provided the possibility for a science and a pedagogy based on a model of naturally occurring development which could be observed, normalized and regulated. Thus, as it were, they permitted the idea that degeneracy*
could be nipped in the bud, by regulating the development of children in order to ensure their fitness as adults. (Walkerdine 1984:170)

In this framework, the formation of the child and adult as subject is continually in production. However, these processes are often regulated and trigger a normalization of behavior and expectations as a child, which then carries into adulthood. Walkerdine furthers the study of children thorough analyzing young girls and popular culture (Walkerdine 1997). Walkerdine attempts “to try to understand the conditions of their subjectification, how they become subjects and live, their subjectivity at both a social and psychic level” (Walkerdine 1997:23). Through the depiction of working class and middle class girls in media, Walkerdine highlights the manipulation of girls as children, which contributes to the production of femininity and influences the ways in which girls are taught to think of themselves from a young age.

Thus, I incorporate these frameworks to highlight that participants described their viewpoints as they were individually experienced, but they are situated within larger structures of gender normalization, which are not easily visibly or identifiable. Concepts such as women as “natural caretakers” become embedded and naturalized at an early age through multiple avenues of society, media, and religion. Once adults, these productions of identity that occurred earlier in life trigger concepts to be viewed as normalized and “natural”. I want to preserve the intent and experiences of the participants in this project and their discussions surrounding gender, but to caveat that it exists within a larger structural framework of gender normalization.
3.9 For the Self or a Bridge to Others?

As mentioned earlier, a theme among adult female *Twilight* fandom members is the need for something that is uniquely theirs and separate from their roles as mothers, wives, and caretakers. Socializing with other women and having fun for themselves is the emphasis for why their participation in the fan community is important. While this may then appear to be a self-centered focus for participation, I believe it is less about the self and more so about building connections with others. When asked to reference significant impacts their participation in the *Twilight* fan community has yielded, a frequent response is to detail a story of a friendship that has developed into a deep relationship through the *Twilight* fandom. However, while many women cited the need to have an activity or social group that is separate from their husbands and children, I argue that participation in the *Twilight* community can also facilitate a bond, albeit different, with spouses or children.

In her discussion of why the *Twilight* community is special to her, Kelly described the reasons she enjoys participating in the group:

*You sort of need that breakaway. I don't know. So* 

*TwilightMOMS[.com]* when I found that was a place that I didn't have to share with my daughter and it could be just me. I play taxi, I have teenagers, I have an eight year old. I do all the running and like...a stay at home mom does. And I just needed that piece of me. And when I found *TwilightMOMS[.com]* and other ladies who were not crazy because I really thought I was sort of crazy. Um, yeah, it gave me that part of me that had nothing to do with my kids, my husband, and all those kind of
responsibilities. And then it turned into friendships and group chats, and

obviously I shared my Jennifer story and it's just been pretty amazing.

While this story initially focuses on the ways in which Kelly needs to get “away” from the activities and roles of her daily life, the end to the tale emphasized a connection with others. Furthermore, while Kelly discussed Twilight as a “breakaway,” she also recognized its potential as a common interest with one of her children:

I'm a stay at home mom and I have three kids and I have a
daughter in the middle who is fourteen and also very much into Twilight.

So it's good that it's something for us to do together. We go to the midnight
movies. We do that kind of thing.

While Kelly did not want all of her social interactions with the Twilight series to include her daughter, the series acted as common ground between the two. Thus, Twilight has a
dual benefit for Kelly as it allowed her to share the movies with her daughter, while forming a social network online with other adults and attending conventions.

Members of Esme's Heart often bring their children to events, such as movie
premieres. Cindy discussed a conversation she recently had with another Esme’s Heart member, Olivia, about her son, Ryan. Olivia, a mother in her thirties, believed that these experiences with Esme's Heart has a positive effect on her son. Furthermore, the Twilight series provided opportunities for teachable moments and reinforcing positive moral traits:

Last night, Olivia...she calls me on the phone...they [Olivia and Ryan] went and stopped at Walmart to get the movie. She stayed in the car and Ryan went in to get it. And he was getting two copies and the lady in line saw what he had and she says 'Aw, is that the new movie?' And he
says 'Yes, ma'am.' And she says, 'Aw, I really want that but I can't afford it
right now'. Ryan bought it, went out to the car, and told his mom...and
said 'Mom, that lady said she couldn't afford to buy it right now.' Olivia
says, 'Well you should have bought it and given it to her' And he says, 'I
didn't know if it was going to be ok with you.' She said, 'Son, if...that's
what you're feeling...you go back in there, take one of those, and give it to
her.' And so he ran back into the store and handed it to the lady. And the
lady just hugged him...That she [Olivia] feels is in part because he comes
to all our events. Now this is a high school boy, big tough guy. He plays
football and all this other kind of stuff. He comes to all of our events and
he helps set up. He does all of this stuff and I mean, he...is just so sweet.

In this situation, the Twilight series and the Esme's Heart events provided an opportunity
for Olivia and Ryan to share a parent/child moment about taking action and being a
caring, thoughtful person. Twilight is something that the two can share and, through club
events, Olivia is able to demonstrate the importance of charitable acts and responsibility.

During the Esme's Heart final movie premiere event11, I worked at the Silent
Auction booth with other volunteers. The energy level of the crowd was high as people
milled around and looked at the auction and raffle items. Several repeat visitors to the
Silent Auction booth caught my eye. In particular, a young boy, about twelve years old
kept running up to the booth, looking quickly at an item, and then darting away. After the
fourth or fifth visit, I made my way over to the auction item that he kept looking at,
which was a signed photograph by an actor, Daniel Cudmore, and a red Volturi robe.

11 The Esme’s Heart Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie premiere was held at the AmStar 16 on November 15,
2012 in Macon, Georgia.
When he approached the next time, I inquired if he was winning the auction and, smiling bashfully, he said yes. Later, when he discovered he was outbid, he quickly brought his mother over to the table and asked if they could raise their bid on the item. When she acquiesced, he bounced up and down happily as he wrote down the new bid. As the auction drew to a close, his excitement was palpable and, I must admit, I was rooting for him to win the item – which consequently, he did. However, what struck me about this particular experience was the relationship between the mother and son, who attended the movie premiere together and shared the event. It was through the Esme's Heart organization that the event occurred and was able to provide a shared moment for the mother and son. While I only encountered the mother and son briefly, I was struck by the ability of the series to bridge a connection between parents and children during an often difficult time for adolescents and adults to bond. While this is a subset of the adult *Twilight* fan population, the series provided an opportunity for parents and children to share a common interest and build rapport with each other.

Among the women I met, there is a range of experiences surrounding the topic of support from their husbands. Some find their wives interest in *Twilight* odd, others are supportive but uninvolved, while some even become actively involved. Melody's husband is uninvolved, but supportive of her participation in the *Twilight* community; “My husband's supportive because he knows if I didn't get out of the house with three three-year olds, I would probably lose my mind.” As discussed earlier, Melody stays at home with the children in part because of the economic benefit. While she worries about not financially contributing to the household, her husband is less concerned:
My husband, he was like 'You worry too much.' He doesn't worry about it...That's where [home] he wants me to be if I'm ok with it. If I'm not like losing my mind...So he's happy that I'm at home with them [the children]. And I think that's why he's so understanding to this. Because it kind of gives me my time.

In Melody's situation, her husband supported her taking the time to engage in activities for herself, but does not become actively involved himself. Linda, a middle-aged woman, experienced a different situation with her husband:

I have to say with my husband has been absolutely wonderful because he takes an interest. The story I want to share is the first year the movies came out, I wanted Esme's bracelet for Christmas and he said 'Well I'll buy that for you but you've got to buy Carlisle's ring for me.' I thought he was kidding! Until he kept shaking packages under the tree and I finally had to say to him 'Were you serious or were you kidding?' He goes 'No, I was serious. I'm going to be disappointed if it's not under there.' So I had to go around and call all these places to find one and have it shipped to me and he wore it when we went down to see his family in Mississippi for Christmas. He wore his ring and I wore my bracelet so I have to say he's very supportive. He doesn't say I'm crazy. And he's absolutely wonderful.

In this context, Linda's husband actively engaged in the *Twilight* series and became invested in a commodity that linked two of the characters. The rings which are significant to the *Twilight* characters – Esme and Carlisle, a married couple – then become
meaningful to Linda and her husband as a symbol of their relationship. Thus, there are
instances in which the Twilight series can act as a bond between a romantic couple.

Stacey, a middle-aged woman, does not have quite the same experience with her
husband and, while it is not necessarily a negative interaction, it lacks the active support
cited in the above stories:

Warhammer is this game that boys play and there are little men
that they have to paint and they play war. My husband does that and
whenever he's like 'You're going to Indiana?' I pick up a Warhammer guy
and go 'What did you say?' And he goes, 'Oh, ok'...So we balance our
obsessions. He's got his, I've got mine.

While Stacey's husband was not as supportive as the other narratives shared, based on her
story, he was still accepting of her participation as he has his own “obsessions.” I have
shared mainly stories of supportive spouses and situations in which Twilight acted as a
bond between wives and husbands, but I want to caveat these narratives by stating that
not all women experience support, or even indifference, from their spouse regarding their
Twilight interest. Daphne, for example, briefly mentioned that her now ex initially
prevented her from meeting Melody and Ellen by refusing to let her go and taking her car
keys. The TwilightMOMS.com website forum even has a thread dedicated to discussing
the ways in which their husbands think they are “crazy” for their interest in Twilight.
Thus, not all women shared the same experiences as the women referenced. While these
experiences are not universal, it struck me as important that women discussed supportive
spouses.
While many women articulated a need for something uniquely theirs and separate from their family, I detected a common theme of women sharing, albeit in a limited capacity, their interest in *Twilight* with their children or spouses. The primary relationships established and maintained through the *Twilight* series remain the friendships formed with other women. However, the *Twilight* series provides a secondary level of attachment through these peripheral connections that are strengthened through the interest in *Twilight*.

### 3.10 Summary

The *Twilight* franchise acts as an initial bonding factor that often gives way to deep and personal relationships. In this capacity, women are able to conduct their daily lives as family caretakers while simultaneously fulfilling their social needs by cultivating a new social circle online. Women are seeking out the formation of meaningful social groups through a common interest, which is a relatively normative practice. As these women are primary caregivers, the internet becomes a functional and logical method to foster social networks as it lends more flexibility to the user, which is often appreciated and necessary in the case of mothers. While engaging with others through discussion boards and online messages may appear superficial to some, the friendships that are established become significant to the participants, as cited in the narratives included in this chapter.

As I mentioned earlier, I posit that adult female fans of the *Twilight* series become attached to the franchise, in part, because the story is familiar. Reading the *Twilight* series allows women to nostalgically travel back to a time of first love and all the emotional excitement attached to it. Bella progresses through the teenage angst, falls in love,
marries, has a child, and becomes a protective caretaker. While not all women I met in the
*Twilight* fan community were mothers or caretakers, this is a prominent theme that is
frequently mentioned by members. Bella’s journey from a teenage girl to a married
mother is one which many women can identify with. As such, this draws the reader in
even more and causes a bond with the series.

The sense of isolation women experience within the domestic sphere as primary
caregivers is then alleviated through their social interactions with other members of the
*Twilight* community. The *Twilight* series and participation within the fan community
simultaneously empower women through pursuing their own personal interests, while
also reifying concepts of women as natural caretakers through the themes within the
novel. Connecting back to Radway's argument, I posit that women are drawn to the
*Twilight* series because of recognizable narratives within the novels. The initial curiosity
over why they are interested in the series then prompts women to explore the internet and
search for others in an effort to fulfill a personal need. Thus, I argue that participation in
the community, while initially driven by a preference for the cultural text, is maintained
and nurtured due to the relationships established through discussion of the series, which
then further drives the effervescent effect of the community.

Many active participants in the *Twilight* community did not anticipate that they
would become so heavily involved or that the series would become so important to them.
I argue that the series in turn becomes more significant to the women as they develop
meaningful relationships with others through the *Twilight* series. Thus, in closing, I defer
to Cindy and her articulation of the significance of the *Twilight* series:
I've gotten to meet so many amazing people. To me, I think that's one of the best things that has come out of Twilight for me is that I have gotten to met, and I'm not meaning the stars, I'm meaning people. People as in I have found people in the community that have either had a need and we have been able to help out or just strangers who came to an event and were willing to give. And that has just been truly an eye opening thing for me.
CHAPTER 4

GIVING BACK: MOBILIZING CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE TWILIGHT FANDOM

You are bizarrely moral for a vampire.

Bella Swan, Eclipse¹

A striking feature of postmillenial politics is the ways that pop culture references are shaping political rhetoric and movement practices, while at the same time...the characteristics of social and political movements are ‘perpetual’ and ‘ubiquitous’ features of everyday lives. Accordingly, fan activism has moved from a crisis response to, for example, program cancellations into a consistent, ongoing engagement with real-world concerns.

Henry Jenkins²

4.1 Introduction

The concept of change is a fundamental theme within the Twilight series as well as its fan community. In the series, Bella completes a transformation from an average human, teenage girl to a vampire, mother, and wife. Bella is not a passive subject in her transformative process, but instead fights for her desired life outcomes. Similarly, Twilight fans are not passive consumers of media (see Adorno and Horkheimer 2000[1944], Benjamin 1999[1936]). Members of the Twilight community are active participants in popular culture (see de Certeau 1984, Fiske 1989, Jenkins 1992) and many endeavor to make a positive change in the world through the Twilight franchise.

Furthermore, new discussions surrounding the topic of consumption articulate a different

¹ Meyer 2007:536.
² Jenkins 2012:1.7.
framework from previous popular culture theorists. Addressing the themes of pleasure and desire, David Graeber proposes a new way to frame consumptive practices:

*It might be more enlightening to start looking at what we have been calling the ‘consumption’ sphere rather as the sphere of the production of human beings, not just as labor power but as persons, internalized nexes of meaningful social relations, because after all, this is what social life is actually about, the production of people (of which the production of things is simply a subordinate moment), and it is only the very unusual organization of capitalism that makes it even possible for us to imagine otherwise.* (Graeber 2011:502)

In this framework, the focus shifts from the act of consuming something to the ways in which social relations are produced through this action or practice. With this perspective the production of consumption includes the ways in which human beings and social relations are produced through these practices that are deemed ‘consumptive’. This focuses on the construction of human beings and their practices and activities instead of just the material commodities and cultural texts that they consume and pleasurably enjoy. Thus, the attention moves from the cultural text itself to the ways in which people form communities around that text and the ensuing production of community practices.

Most stereotypes of adult female *Twilight* fans focus on their fanaticism; the women I met both reinforced and challenged this concept. As I discussed in the previous chapter, *Twilight* fans often qualify their status as an avid fan with a disclaimer that they are aware it is a fictional series. Thus, women are continually combatting the common notion of *Twilight* fans as “crazy” and out of touch with reality. The women I met derived
personal pleasure through the *Twilight* series and several even took vacations to Forks, Washington where the series takes place. In this way, the women I met did display a certain level of fanaticism; however, they then mobilize this interest in the *Twilight* franchise to give back to the community through charity, which indicates a level of personal and social awareness.

While the *Twilight* series initially captivated me on an individual level, it was when I noticed the charitable activities of the fandom that the community more deeply intrigued me. I first noticed a fundraising campaign for Alex’s Lemonade Stand, a foundation for childhood cancer, on a popular *Twilight* fanfiction website. Upon further exploration, I learned that this was not an isolated fundraiser; rather, an array of *Twilight* fan groups mobilized charitable activities through the fandom. Due in large part to the widespread popularity of the franchise, *Twilight* fan groups harnessed this interest to simultaneously enjoy the series and enact change in their communities through giving back.

I want to articulate that not all *Twilight* fan groups engage in charitable activities. Additionally, not all members place the same level of significance on philanthropy. In this chapter, I will explore the charitable themes within the *Twilight* community with a focus on the Esme’s Heart group in the Macon area of Georgia. The organization of Esme’s Heart instilled philanthropy as a foundational aspect of its formation. As such, members heavily emphasized the charitable aspects of the group. Again, I want to caveat that not all *Twilight* fan groups place the same level of importance on giving back. Many *Twilight* groups focus primarily on the enjoyment of the series as fans and consumers. However, I posit that groups, such as Esme’s Heart, which focus on charity, will continue to be active
longer than other groups due to their diversified interests. Esme’s Heart continues to be active in the Macon area community several years after the final *Twilight* movie was released. Esme’s Heart often organized events in conjunction with film premieres, but the group also branched out and engaged with other local charities. As such, the philanthropic roots that Esme’s Heart developed in the community will help the group to continue beyond the end of the film releases; albeit, attendance has diminished to a smaller number than it was at the height of *Twilight’s* popularity. The goal of the group remains intact as members make an effort to help others in their community.

The *Twilight* community was my initial introduction to a new form of fan activism, however, I want to note that *Twilight* fans are not the sole purveyors of using fandom as a vehicle for philanthropy. Fan activism previously focused on issues directly related to the cultural text, such as a letter campaign to prevent the cancellation of a series. However, a new trend of fan activism indicates a link between fandom and social awareness (see Bennett 2012, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Earl and Kimport 2009, Jenkins 2012, Jenkins and Shresthova 2012, Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012, Scardaville 2005). Thus, the *Twilight* groups I discuss operate within this new paradigm.

Furthermore, I argue that this shift in fan activism reflects the increasingly interconnectedness of the world. Arjun Appadurai theorized global cultural processes as disjunctive flows between various spheres and “-scapes” (Appadurai 2006[1990]). Appadurai proposes an elementary framework for exploring these disjunctures by looking at five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes (people), mediascapes (print media), technoscapes (technology), financescapes (global capital), and ideoscapes
(ideologies). The suffix -scape allows for a more fluid, irregular analysis of global cultural flows. Thus, fan activism no longer remains relegated to the consumption of a cultural text, but extends into other spheres. In the context of Twilight, the cultural text originates within a mediascape and the reader then consumes the series. Through the use of technoscapes, Twilight fans utilize interest in the series to enact change in the world based on their own ideoscapes. Appadurai believed that due to the fetishization of consumer, the consumer is not a social agent and lacks agency. However, I would argue that current happenings within fan communities dispute this viewpoint as a trend of fan activism suggests that it is through their consumptive practices that agency can occur. In this context, fans are not merely consumers of commodities and cultural texts, but operate within the paradigm of pleasurable individual consumption of mass products and then utilize the popularity of these franchises to turn the paradigm inverted and use consumptive practices as a way to be socially aware of charities and provide aid and awareness to the needs of the community.

In this chapter, I will address the ways in which women in the Twilight community conceptualize and enact the fan groups’ charitable activities. In an effort to better understand the motivations to develop charitable Twilight fan groups, I discuss the initial formation of Esme’s Heart. I will also review a selection of their group events, which members frequently referenced during my research. Furthermore, the philanthropic activities trigger a sense of satisfaction within members. As such, I posit that the enjoyment of the Twilight series coupled with the pleasure of philanthropy sustains the repeated charitable activities and continued interest in the franchise. It is unrealistic that the Twilight fan community will always exist; however, I argue that groups, such as
Esme’s Heart, will have a longer lifespan due to their diversification of interests through the incorporation of charitable activities, which enables non-Twilight specific roots and connections with other philanthropic organizations.

4.2 The Beginning of Esme’s Heart

Esme’s Heart initially began in 2009 at the New Moon movie premiere in Macon, Georgia. Cindy Adrien, the President of Esme’s Heart, contacted the local movie theater and inquired about reserving an auditorium for the New Moon midnight showing specifically for adults. Cindy and Bethany, Cindy’s family member, knew that the New Moon film would draw a large teenage audience. As such, Cindy and Bethany made the effort to rent the separate auditorium to watch the film with other people their age and, as word spread about the event, the 250 tickets were quickly sold out.

Viewing this as an opportunity, Cindy and Bethany partnered with the local movie theater to collect canned items for the November food drive. At the event, 250 attendees donated 1,000 pounds of provisions for the November food drive and raised $600 USD for Alex’s Lemonade Stand. Following the positive response at the New Moon event, Cindy, Bethany, and a few other women decided to find a way to continue doing good work and “take it to another level” while enjoying the Twilight series. Cindy commented:

_I come from a charity background...of being in Junior League for ten years and being a big sister for...Big Brothers, Big Sisters
and...president of that board...I really hadn't been involved with anything...at the time and so I was like 'I don't know. Maybe we could turn this into something?_”
As such, while not all *Twilight* fans and groups emphasize the importance of charitable giving, I found it to be both an inspiring and interesting way to couple individualistic pleasurable consumption with philanthropic goals.

To illustrate the ways in which giving permeates the Esme's Heart group, I would like to briefly include an interaction I had with a club member in which she bestowed an act of kindness upon me. I met Olivia on a Saturday morning at a Panera Bread Company in Macon, Georgia. On the drive down from Atlanta, I hit traffic and had to call Olivia to let her know I’d be late. I was embarrassed about my tardiness since she was doing me a favor. I thankfully arrived a few minutes before her and when Olivia arrived, we got in line to order coffee. I pulled out my wallet and tried to purchase both of our coffees. To which she quickly shot me a look and told me to put my wallet away because this was on her. Flustered, I thanked her. Olivia emphasized that she wanted to do something nice for me and she was excited to talk to me about Esme’s Heart. I was impressed and touched by this small act of generosity when Olivia was already helping me simply through giving her time.

This is just one example of the acts of kindness I witnessed during my time with the women of Esme’s Heart. It is in these small moments that the root of the group and their motivations becomes evident. I experienced a similar situation when interviewing Cindy as well. This mindset of helping others permeated the group and contributed to the events organized by the group. Thus, before exploring the ways in which the women of Esme's Heart give through the organization, I want to emphasize that the philanthropic work conducted through the group is not the sole aspect of their lives in which charity, and furthermore kindness, is important.
4.3 The Twilight Phenomenon and Philanthropy

During my research, I focus primarily on the organization of Esme’s Heart and the events they organized. Their philanthropic actions and motivations are the primary focus of this chapter, but I will also briefly address other *Twilight* fan groups that organize charitable events to illustrate the variety of charitable organizations within the fandom. Many of these groups operate under a similar premise and, at times, there was overlap and communication about best practices and recommendations for fundraising and charitable work between the groups. I first became aware of the *Twilight* fandom raising money for charity in the summer and fall of 2009. During this time, a *Twilight* website I visited had a donations ticker on the side of the front page that highlighted their goal and the amount of money received to date for the Fandom Gives Back. I was impressed to see that they raised over $80,000 USD in just seven days through donations and auctioning items for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation\(^3\). This occurrence was a surprise to me as I have attended fan conventions and participated in online fan activities since I was a teenager, yet I personally have not seen such a large scale and focused drive to raise money through a fandom.

The Fandom Gives Back donation drive originated from the friendship of three women who met online through their shared interest in *Twilight* and lived in geographically dispersed areas: in the northeast, was Nina Politani from Pennsylvania and in the west, Christina Daniel was from Utah and Lauren Harp from California\(^4\). When the three women met in person at a convention they discussed the ways in which


their fandom could potentially give back. In a news article on the Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation website, Politani states: “We're predominately a group of women - all ages, all backgrounds, all walks of life - and yet we found something that we're so passionate about that we used it to help a charity...There are a tremendous amount of talented people out there. We just managed to commandeer them together for a fundraiser”\(^5\). Thus, in 2009, the Fandom Gives Back began raising money for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation through online auctions with a goal of collecting $10,000 to donate. Seven days later the goal was met and greatly exceeded with a total of $87,640.00 raised\(^6\). In 2010, the Fandom Gives Back raised $147,537.00 for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation\(^7\). The Fandom Gives Back collected donations of goods and services from fans all over the world as well as from some of the \textit{Twilight} actors themselves. These items were then auctioned off over a week and, at the end, sold to the highest bidder. The auctioned items ranged from \textit{Twilight} memorabilia to hotel and airline credits to a meet and greet with Jackson Rathbone, who played the character of Jasper in the movies, and his band\(^8\). This group and fundraiser is an example of a small handful of women who collaborated with \textit{Twilight} fans globally and organized a charitable event via the internet.

Another example of a woman who wanted to use the \textit{Twilight} fandom to give back was Andrea Hayes, who read the series and became captivated by the story. Hayes was a stay-at-home mother, who chose to leave a successful business development career to care for her two young children. Hayes began keeping a journal about her fascination

with the *Twilight* series in an effort to better understand what was happening to her
(Hayes 2009:116). After reading through her previous journal entries, she decided to
there were other Moms out there who would identify with my crazy experiences and get a
good laugh...I was determined to publish this book so that many of the moms out there
would know that they are not alone” (Hayes 2009:116). Hayes donates a portion of the
book sale profits to the Foundation for America's Blood Centers. This charity was
selected because her daughter received three separate blood transfusions at six months
old and there were challenges finding a match. Hayes comments, “Giving back to my
community is very important to me...I would love to make a difference through the sale
of this book” (Hayes 2009:116-117). Hayes also maintains a website titled “Confessions
of a TwilightMom: United and Giving Back!” On the website front page, Hayes
articulated the motivation for using *Twilight* to give back and the successes thus far:

*This site was the dream of two moms who adore Stephenie Meyer’s
Twilight Saga as well as the movies that brought her stories to life. They
were both so inspired by the compassionate Doctor Cullen and his
family’s desire to do good that they decided to turn their passion for
Twilight into a way to unite like-minded Twilight Fans in their community
for the purpose of giving back! Together, Andrea and Gigi raise money for
the Foundation for America’s Blood Centers (FABC) through hosting
Twilight inspired charity events, the sale of Andrea’s book, Addicted to
Twilight: Confessions of a Twilight Mom and Gigi’s sophisticated
Twilight inspired Boutique. Gigi and Andrea have successfully hosted*
several Twilight inspired charity events in their community and have
raised over $5000 for the FABC. Andrea is focusing her time on
developing other fun ways to raise money and awareness for the FABC.
There will definitely be exciting events to come in the future from Gigi and
Andrea's United and Giving back cause. They were awarded the Volunteer
of the Year award by the Foundation for America's Blood Centers (FABC)
this year for their service and dedication to raising awareness about
blood donation and education for a safe blood supply.9

When Cindy read Andrea's book she was amused by the ways in which she could
identify with the content of the book. Cindy and Andrea began communicating online and
learned that both women were organizing charitable events through the Twilight series.

Cindy stated:

I read Andrea's book and...I just laughed and laughed. So we had
been communicating online and found out that she did the same kind of
thing, but hers was focused more on food banks and also the Foundation
for America's Blood Centers because her daughter had a life threatening
illness when she was like two and had to have a blood
transfusion...Thankfully it was taken care of and it was not anything really
bad, but it always made an impression on Andrea...She wanted to be able
to give back and the whole vampire blood thing just worked out.

In communicating with Andrea, Cindy found someone with similar goals to identify the
ways in which to harness the interest in the Twilight series to give back. Olivia later told

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me that Andrea and several friends travelled up to Macon, Georgia for an Esme's Heart bunko\textsuperscript{10} event, which was a lot of fun for attendees and raised money for the Crisis Line and Safe House, a local Macon organization that helps battered women. This is just a brief example of two other \textit{Twilight} organizations that use the interest in the franchise as a way to raise money and awareness for charities and, on occasion, even interact with each other to exchange ideas or support each other’s events. I highlight these groups to illustrate that was it not just Esme’s Heart that was using \textit{Twilight} to give back.

Furthermore, these groups work together and exchange information and ideas regarding their charitable causes. Cindy and Andrea became friends, exchanged ideas, and even attended events organized by each other’s groups, such as the bunko night. Thus, Esme’s Heart did not originate in a vacuum as the sole \textit{Twilight} fan group that engages in philanthropy, but as a part of a larger trend within the community.

4.4 Media Attention and Esme’s Heart’s Charitable Activities

While not actively seeking recognition, Esme's Heart cultivated a fair amount of media attention since its inception in 2009 under the initial name of “\textit{Twilight} Moms of Middle Georgia”. Through supporting local charities and gathering groups of \textit{Twilight} fans, the women of Esme's Heart garnered local attention for their activities. While these events are on a smaller scale than some non-profit organizations, Esme's Heart was a completely volunteer organization without paid employees. In fact, most of the women who participate and volunteer have full-time jobs and families. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that these activities are fit into an already busy schedule out of love of the \textit{Twilight} series and a desire to help others. I would like to highlight a few of the events

\textsuperscript{10} Bunko is a social dice game that is predominantly luck based and is popular with families and used for fundraisers.
held by Esme's Heart that generated media attention. While these are not the only events that have been cited in news article, I selected the activities that were also discussed on occasion by group members.

At the *Eclipse* movie premiere in 2010, Esme's Heart arranged for the truck Bella drove in the first movie to be shipped to Macon for the event. The truck was purchased after the first movie ended by a fan in Texas. Cindy then borrowed the truck, pictured below, for the event and used it as a way to raise money.

![Figure 4.1 Image of Bella's truck](image)

The event was featured in the local news: “*Twilight* fans were even able to sit inside Bella's original Chevy truck for five dollars and for a good cause. All the money raised from the photo frenzy is being donated to the American Red Cross to Jay's Hope. It's an extra kick for fans, but the real excitement is on the big screen”\(^\text{12}\). During my time with Esme's Heart, the truck was frequently mentioned with nostalgia and excitement. This event drew a lot of attention due to the vehicles on display, which included the make and

models of other cars pictured in the films, such as a yellow Porsche driven by the character of Alice. While I joined the group almost two years after this event, it was still mentioned with regular frequency even then. Allen, the “Edward-Lookalike” that frequented Esme’s Heart events, dressed as Edward and, upon request, sat in the truck for pictures during the fundraiser. Even years later, at the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 DVD release party, Cindy jokingly asked Allen if he remembered sitting in the truck for hours and having lots of pictures taken with people. Events such as this one were popular in part due to their physical incorporation of commodities from the series, such as the truck.

In April 2011, Esme's Heart helped a young girl with lung cancer, Abby, to meet one of her favorite actors from the Twilight series, Booboo Stewart. Esme's Heart sponsored and hosted the…

…first Annual Abby’s Dream Walk to help Abby Wilson, a 13-year-old who has been battling Stage 4 Lung Cancer for 4 years realize her dream to educate others on lung cancer awareness and that anyone can get lung cancer – even children and non-smokers. The event was attended by about 250 people along with a Twilight Star – Booboo Stewart – who plays “Seth” in the Twilight Saga Movies who came to help us get the word out about Abby’s Dream. About $3,500 was raised for Abby’s Medical Fund from the event.

This event generated attention from the media due, in part, to the attendance of an actor from the Twilight series. While not a celebrity at the level of Kristen Stewart or Robert

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Pattinson, Booboo Stewart played a recurring role in the movies. His character, Seth, is a kind-hearted, young werewolf who likes the Cullen family despite the conflict between the wolves and vampires as natural enemies. In an article titled “‘Twilight’ actor coming to Macon for benefit for teen,” the Telegraph, a Middle Georgia news source, reported:

*A Saturday event at Tattnall Square Academy to benefit 13-year-old Abby Wilson of Macon is scheduled to include an appearance by actor Booboo Stewart of the “Twilight Saga” movie series. The Twilight Moms of Middle Georgia, a group of avid fans of the movies, helped arrange Stewart’s visit to Macon. Abby is a big fan of the “Twilight” series, both the books and the movies. Stewart, who plays the role of Seth, a werewolf in the films, says he wanted to attend Abby’s Dream Walk because Abby is “such a brave girl.”*

On an Esme's Heart work day, members of the group spent the evening helping Cindy organize her basement, also known affectionately as the “Twilight Room”. While the activities and benefits for Abby were held before I joined the group, I was able to spend a portion of the evening helping fix some of the picture frames and shadow boxes that commemorated various events, one of which was an event for Abby. Esme's Heart took pride in helping people through a love of *Twilight*. Thus, the organization was happy to help make it possible for Abby to meet Booboo Stewart and raise donations for lung cancer awareness.

Since its inception, Esme's Heart has organized several events to benefit Wesley Glen Ministries and also volunteered repeatedly at their location. Wesley Glen was

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established in 1984 and helps adults with “developmental disabilities by providing a home environment and continuum of programs to allow each individual to develop skills and greater confidence, living happy, full lives as contributing members of their Wesley Glen family and the surrounding community”\textsuperscript{16}. In March 2013, Esme's Heart helped sponsor and organize the road race at the Cherry Blossom Festival, which benefited Wesley Glen Ministries. Prior to the festival, Esme's Heart “had a Mardi-Gras themed birthday bash (at an earlier time) with the residents of Wesley Glen and we created the awards for the race with the residents”\textsuperscript{17}. The Telegraph, a Middle Georgia news source, referenced Esme's Heart specifically when covering the 2013 Cherry Blossom Festival:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Esme’s Heart, formerly Twilight Moms, is in its third year of organizing the race and helping the Wesley Glen residents make awards for division winners. Last month, with big smiles on their faces, the men and women who live in Wesley Glen housing pressed down on ceramic tiles with hands covered in brown paint. Their handprints became trunks and branches for blooming cherry trees the winners take home as unique prizes.}\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The picture below from the article depicts a member of Esme's Heart helping a Wesley Glen resident to make the ceramic tile awards for the division prizes.

Cindy commented to me once in passing that of all the events and organizations they had worked with, Wesley Glen was one of the most rewarding and enjoyable for the volunteers.

Despite the news articles devoted to the organization and its events, Esme's Heart maintains that the goal of the activities is not to draw attention to themselves, but to raise donations and awareness for the causes they support. Olivia described:

> What drew me in was a group of women who wanted to get together and do stuff for the community. You know, take it one step above because you may have one organization that says 'Oh, I'm all about the community' but they're constantly highlighting the things that they've done personally. And we've never been one to call, we do not call the media and say 'Oh, we're doing this and this. Y'all need to send somebody out.' It has always happened because somebody else contacted the media...We've never, I don't

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want to say toot our horn, but we've never been one to do that. There are other organizations and groups that do that.

As I will discuss later, Olivia was a devout Christian and the above statement reflected her view that the goal of charity was not to be personally recognized for it, but to instead help others quietly and with a purpose. I address the media attention Esme's Heart has garnered through their charitable activities by highlighting events that were referenced by members in my conversations with them. While the organization does not actively seek recognition for their activities, they do hope that awareness of Esme’s Heart will help generate interest and participation in their philanthropic events.

4.5 Forming a Fan Charity: Donating Blood Instead of Drinking It

Esme's Heart is a relatively small organization, but the events they organized and the funds and donations they raised are impressive and directed at a more local level than the fundraisers organized by The Fandom Gives Back. I would like to discuss the formation of Esme's Heart and the ways in which it and other similar Twilight fan groups are unique in their organization. For some, it was this aspect of doing good work through Twilight which seemed to draw many people in to the group. I discussed in previous chapters Olivia's introduction to the Twilight series through word of mouth and a persistent friend. Though captivated by the series, Olivia was not motivated to join a fan group for the primary reason of finding other fans. Rather, Olivia decided to become a member of Esme's Heart after attending an event and seeing the ways in which Cindy used an intensely popular series to help generate philanthropic interest.

Olivia discussed her initial experience with Esme's Heart, then called TwilightMoms of Middle Georgia, at the New Moon movie premiere:
We were celebrating October birthdays for my girlfriends and I had not talked to them about reading Twilight or anything...Another girl sat down and she said 'Oh my gosh, I'm going to see New Moon!' and I was like 'Gasp, you are?! When?!' She said 'There's a friend of mine who's got this group and they're calling themselves Twilight Moms of Middle GA and they're going to show the movie [and] they're selling tickets'...I was like 'Oh my gosh, I have to have it!'...She was like 'It's for the midnight showing [and] I said 'I don't care.'

Olivia did not intentionally seek out a fan group related to Twilight. Instead she happened upon it while engaging with her friends. Upon realizing that there was a movie event in the area, Olivia eagerly wanted to attend because of her fascination with the series. However, Olivia was pleasantly surprised by the movie premiere event and found herself motivated to participate in the group as a result:

So we met [at the movie premiere] and I saw Cindy walk in. And she's carrying all this stuff and my friend reminded me she was like 'You know, you'll want to bid on stuff because everything is for charity.' And I was like 'Ok' and so we walk into the theater and there's all this stuff and it's all lit up and everything...I left there thinking 'Whatever it is she [Cindy] does I want to do it.' So I came home that night and I Facebook messaged her and said 'I know you don't know me from tonight, but I'm friends with Dena, she knows you. I'm so captivated by the series, but what you're doing is what I want to be a part of. How can I be a part of that?'...She messaged me back and said 'I'm going to have a meeting in
January. More details to come.' So I got an email sometime in December that said we were going to meet. There were four of us that met: Cindy and Bethany, and Bethany's friend...and myself. And we met, we ordered food, and Cindy basically just launched into 'Bethany and I read the series. We wanted to figure out how we could take this to another level because it is such a phenomenon. It's not just a phenomenon among teenagers, but it's a phenomenon among people our age. So how can we take it to the community? How can we give back? How can we use this for a purpose?'

So I was like 'Oh yeah, I'm so on board.'

Olivia was the treasurer for Esme's Heart and she bore a large part of the financial stress of the organization in regards to budgeting and ensuring the events planned were not too expensive. However, during my time at events, meetings, and casual get togethers, she never commented resentfully of this responsibility. Despite her busy schedule with her job, college classes, and caring for her family, Olivia seemed to enjoy taking on responsibilities for the group to help facilitate the success of the organization and its events. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, many women became interested in joining a *Twilight* fan group through a desire to seek out others with similar interests. It strikes me as interesting and important that many women I encountered placed such an emphasis on the charitable actions of the fan group.

When I interviewed Olivia she heavily emphasized the charitable aspects of Esme's Heart and gave me a detailed description of the organization and its development. What began as a small group of women meeting at Panera Bread Company, continued to grow from the *New Moon* movie premiere in 2009 to the *Breaking Dawn: Part 2*
screening party in 2012. Olivia described the planning and development of Esme's Heart in early 2010:

*The next meeting we had, which welcomed about three or four more people, was actually here at Panera... We would meet here and it started out as, I want to say there were six or eight of us. And it was just very casual and we would just get together and try to figure out you know. Because at that point we knew that New Moon had just come out [in theaters] and we knew that it would be coming out on dvd. Ok, so what can we do to draw people in? What charities can we be a part of?*

Part of the initial planning of Esme's Heart surrounded determining the best ways to aid local charities and organizations. At this point, Esme's Heart was not a 501c non-profit organization, it was simply a group of women who wanted to help use a wildly popular series to benefit others. The group then reached out to others who could help them. Olivia described their meetings with leaders of other charitable organizations and the ways in which the group developed ideas for helping local charities:

*Some of the first meetings we met Cindy Gaskins... she's the head of Jay's Hope. She lost her son to cancer and... she's formed an organization. So she came and talked to us about what her organization does and how as a group of us, because at that point we weren't really technically an organization we were just a group of people. But how we could help them. We also met the guy from the American Red Cross because we said 'If you like vampires and it's blood, might as well have blood drives.' [Pictured below is Cindy at one of Esme’s Heart’s blood*
So we met with him and at that point it was just about organizing and figuring out what charities we could help, who we could help. You know, we immediately named like there's a place in town for battered women, there is the Ronald McDonald house, we knew we wanted to do something for that.

Figure 4.3 Cindy donating blood

After meeting with other organizations and forming the initial core group, which included Cindy, Bethany, and Olivia, Esme's Heart continued hosting events after the New Moon movie premiere. Eventually the organization moved away from the initial name of “TwilightMOMS of Middle Georgia” and adopted the name it is currently known by, Esme's Heart. The group also applied for and gained their status as a 501c non-profit organization. Olivia discussed some of the motivations behind the name change for the group:

We changed to Esme's Heart because we wanted to get away from the comments of 'crazy, middle-aged women'...I didn't want to hang my

head in shame and say 'Yeah, I'm part of that group' You know? Because
of the judgments that may come from others...And I found myself
sometimes launching into 'This is what we do and blah blah blah. Oh
yeah, and we call ourselves...' So to transfer into Esme's Heart, that is
something people go 'Who? What? What is that?' And then, just to tell
people with a little flyer or note and say 'Just go check us out on the
website. See what we do. Do you want to be a part of it? Do you want to
help us with local charities and that kind of thing?' And that's just where
our draw was. That's why people, when they would see the internet, they
would see the Facebook page, people started responding, 'Ok, I know y'all
are going to have something coming up...Where is it going to be and can I
be a part of it?' And so that's kind of how it all transitioned from just a
group of four people at a small restaurant to having to meet at a bigger
restaurant with a private room to the owner realizing 'Hey, this is
something big. We need to change the whole layout of the room'...It's so
surreal to look back on it and to think, while I wasn't a part of it for the
New Moon event, that really launched it for me and I became one of the
originals, you know? I just, I knew that this was something I wanted to be
a part of and so, that's just where we are now.

The negative stereotype of all adult female Twilight fans as “crazy” caused many women
to be cautious about admitting their participation in the fan community. Some women I
met relished the opportunity to change someone's opinion about Twilight fans and
confront the stereotypes. Olivia's concern stems more so from wanting to ensure that
Esme's Heart was taken seriously as an organization and that negative stereotypes did not adversely impact their ability to do good work for the community.

For Olivia, it will be the knowledge that Esme's Heart worked to help the community that would remain with her even after *Twilight* and the organization itself, while still active currently, eventually ends. While Olivia loves the *Twilight* series and enjoyed the books and movies, to her the pleasure from consuming these cultural texts does not compare the knowledge that Esme's Heart took it to the next level. Olivia stated:

> When I look back on everything that we've done...twenty years from now, that will be the memory of this. Yes, *Twilight* is a wonderful book. There have been other wonderful books. You know? Gone with the Wind was a wonderful book, it was turned into a movie. Nobody created an organization from it and when you look at Facebook and you look at Twitter and there are all of these groups that have formed, and I don't know what these groups do, a lot of them do trivia and fun stuff like that on Facebook and that kind of thing. I don't know what they do, if they do anything to give back to the community, but I know that I can stand behind and be proud of the fact that that's what we did with it. We didn't just get together and giggle over it and get excited and reminisce about it. Now when we have our, make our baskets and that kind of thing? Sure, we watch a movie or you know whatever. But it's moved beyond the giddiness of it and it's moved more into how can we give back and what can we do and what can we do to make this the best that it can be for our community?
Olivia identified the organization's giving back to the community as the most significant past of the group. Instead of just getting together and discussing their enjoyment of the series, Olivia took pride in the knowledge that the women of Esme's Heart took their love of the series and used it to help others and share that positive emotion.

Similarly, other fans of the *Twilight* series join groups, such as Esme's Heart, and many identified that the most important aspect of the organization was their charitable actions to help others. Elaine, a housewife in her thirties, thought that the group was unique due to this aspect. Elaine commented: “Esme's Heart is different from any other I have heard of because the goal is to help others (charity) with a *Twilight* theme, where other groups just share in their love of the series”. The philanthropic actions of *Twilight* fan group was a point of pride for many fans. Rather than being idle consumers, they actively took their enjoyment of the series and wielded it as a way to do good works. A retired teacher, Alice believed that groups, such as Esme's Heart, are different because “it is an altruistic group, not just a group of people who like the *Twilight* series”. This was a recurring theme throughout my research and people found satisfaction, perhaps even pleasure, through the charitable activities.

The ways in which Esme's Heart and similar *Twilight* fan groups give back was a unique and defining factor to many members. Teri, a recent high school graduate and housewife, commented: “Esme's Heart has taken something so popular in today's youth and turned it into a way to give back. They have made charity and goodness into something appealing for children and teens and it has really helped our young people get involved”. Thus, the actions of Esme's Heart not only beneficially impacts the organizations for which they raise money and goods, but also becomes an interesting way
to draw a younger population into charity work through a popular franchise\textsuperscript{21}.

Many members feel that these charitable activities were the most important aspect of \textit{Twilight} fan groups. Lori, an employed mother in her twenties, stated: “The most important aspect of a \textit{Twilight} fan group is being able to help others and bring light to organizations that need help or support. It is nice to be able to help out an organization and have events for those organizations to raise funds and awareness”. The concept of giving back for some members was rooted in the desire to share the love they experienced with the series. Colleen, a teacher in her thirties, commented: “I love it and not all do it but many realize let's use this love and connection of people to do good for others”. The women in the \textit{Twilight} fan groups sought to expand the feelings evoked by the series by helping others. A meaningful theme in the books that fans cite was the emphasis the Cullen family places on loving people, helping others, and doing the right thing even when it is not convenient or easy. I argue that fans draw on this positive theme and use the constructive feelings as a motivator to engage with charity. Cindy, the founder of Esme's Heart expressed a similar sentiment: “Maybe it's the love that you feel in that \textit{Twilight} that you want to spread to other things”. Thus, women in the \textit{Twilight} community were attempting to use the positive emotions they experienced while reading the series as a way to help others and enact productive change.

While for some a main goal or enjoyment for participating in the \textit{Twilight} fandom may be the relationships with other women, for others the primary motivation was a sense of satisfaction in helping others. Jules, a housewife and homeschooler in her thirties, stated: “I have met friends, but I just participated in an auction/charity

\textsuperscript{21} In following chapters, I will discuss the ways in which women use the \textit{Twilight} fan group and its charitable activities as a way to set an example for their children.
fundraiser…Twi-nerds do great things”. In the use of the term “Twi-nerds” Jules recognizes the underlying cultural view of fan activities as “nerdy” and “uncool” and yet, she co-opted the term and used it as a way to describe that fans can actually do impressive things through these “nerdy” pursuits.

Many members of Twilight fan groups, such as Esme's Heart, identified that the charitable activities were mostly unique to this particular fandom, albeit some expressed confusion as to why that was. Teri, a recent high school graduate and housewife, commented: “I think it is unique and definitely notable, but I'm not sure why it has been Twilight. I think Harry Potter could have done the same thing, even the upcoming Vampire Academy series”. Teri did not identify a particular reason why the Twilight series generated the interest among fans to give back to others while different fandoms did not cultivate the same enthusiasm. In the following chapter, I will explore theories of why the Twilight fandom cultivated this tendency to give back.

Members of the Twilight fan community do see their organizations as unique from other fan groups. Cindy commented: “I certainly don't see it [charitable activities] in the Star Wars or Lord of the Rings. I don't see them collecting food for the hungry or, you know, anything...I mean, maybe they do and I'm not knocking them or anything they do”. Similarly, Jules, a housewife and homeschooling mom in her thirties, stated: “I don't know much about Harry Potter, but I have been to Star Trek conventions. Trekkies are cool, but Twilight has inspired many fans to do great things for others as a charitable thing”. Some of the women had not previously participated in fan groups, while others had experience with fandoms and conventions. Casey, a married student in her twenties, had previous experience with fan conventions and groups. She commented: “It seems
unique to *Twilight*. I have been to anime fan cons, DragonCon, and other groups don't do as much charity work as *Twilight* groups. I think women are more charitable in general”\(^{22}\). Some members of *Twilight* groups that emphasize charity view their actions as unique among other fan organizations. As Olivia commented, many members of *Twilight* fan groups wanted to take their love of the series and the shared enthusiasm to the “next level” by using it as a platform to help others.

Olivia had also attended fan events for other series and genres aside from *Twilight*. Based on her experiences, Olivia found that the philanthropic undercurrent that runs throughout many *Twilight* groups did not seem to occur at these events. Olivia commented:

> You just think, I mean I know my son likes to go to DragonCon, ComicCon, there are those followers, but...you do not hear about Trekkies all getting together to raise money...You don't hear about DC Comic people all getting together to raise money. I mean, I've been to all of them with him and more recently all this anime that he's into...But there's nobody that's like saying 'Hey, we want to take our love of this and turn it into this.' Nobody has really done that, that I know of, but if you look across the Twilight fandom...they're all doing it and they all take off of each other.

Olivia identified that what was unique about the *Twilight* fandom was that the groups fed off each other in their charitable goals. While attending conventions with her son, Olivia has not seen groups band together as a fandom and organize events to give back to the community, which is a trend across the *Twilight* groups. Esme's Heart and other *Twilight*

\(^{22}\) I will return to this concept that women are more charitable later in the following chapter.
fan groups were not the sole proprietors of charity through fandom. There are definitely other fan groups that contribute to charities and making a difference, which I will briefly address later in this chapter. What I do argue and want to illustrate is the voracity and emotion members of *Twilight* groups, such as Esme's Heart, have regarding the importance and significance of helping others – it is often viewed as their primary objective above other goals. Personally, what I found unique was the strength of conviction about giving back to the community by Esme's Heart and its members coupled with the prevalence of this theme within the *Twilight* community.

4.6 Fan Activism: Theories of Giving Back and Non-*Twilight* Groups

As mentioned above, non-*Twilight* fan groups also engage in philanthropic activities. While many Esme’s Heart members identified the *Twilight* fandom as unique in their contribution to charities, not all group participants agreed with this opinion. Janet, a recent college graduate and mother in her forties, commented: “I think many fan groups do what they can to help those in need. I think the *Twilight* fan group has just gotten more publicity because of it”. My intention is not to argue that the *Twilight* groups and its members are the sole purveyors of philanthropy and fandom. Thus, it is important to remember that these comments by members of *Twilight* groups are based on their personal experiences and exposures. As such, I would now like to briefly discuss other fan groups that engage in philanthropy. I have attended DragonCon numerous times over the past ten years and the convention holds a blood drive during the convention.

Another example can be seen with a *Star Wars* fan group, the 501st Legion also engages in charitable activities. The mission statement for the 501st Legion states:

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23 In the Macon area of Georgia, Esme’s Heart was featured in the local news on occasion.
The Legion is an all-volunteer organization formed for the express purpose of bringing together costume enthusiasts under a collective identity within which to operate. The Legion seeks to promote interest in Star Wars through the building and wearing of quality costumes, and to facilitate the use of these costumes for Star Wars-related events as well as contributions to the local community through costumed charity and volunteer work (501st Legion Charter, emphasis in original).

Thus, it is not only Twilight fan groups that are concerned with giving back. In speaking with associates that are heavily involved in the Star Wars fandom, the 501st Legion is not necessarily a “typical” Star Wars fan group as they are highly visible publicly as the preferred Imperial costuming group of Lucasfilms and seek to maintain a positive image. This beneficial image is cultivated and maintained in part through these charitable actions. However, the theme of activism is still an increasing topic of discussion within fan studies (see Bennett 2012, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Earl and Kimport 2009, Jenkins and Shresthova 2012, Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012, Scardaville 2005).

Similarly, there is a Harry Potter fan group, the Harry Potter Alliance, which is a 501c non-profit organization: “The Harry Potter Alliance turns fans into heroes. We’re changing the world by making activism accessible through the power of story. Since 2005, we’ve engaged millions of fans through our work for equality, human rights, and literacy”25. Using the Harry Potter Alliance as a case study, Jenkins defines fan activism as “forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans, often conducted through

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the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through
metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture” (Jenkins 2012:1.8). Fan
activism often manifests in the form of exerting their power as a media audience through
attempting to save shows from cancellation. Jenkins argues that while efforts to save
public broadcasting from budget cuts is seen as activism, many fan groups are not
recognized as such. In refutation, Jenkins states: “Functionally, fans attempts to protect
texts they see as meaningful represent similar efforts to shape the cultural environment,
though they rarely get taken seriously in literature about activism, suggesting a residual
distinction between high and low culture” (Jenkins 2012:2.3). Connecting with
Bourdieu’s argument about the distinction of taste, fan activism is recognized as more or
less socially legitimate based upon the cultural text through which they organize.

The Harry Potter Alliance has over 100,000 members and more than 70 active
chapters across the Unites States. The Harry Potter Alliance is a much larger organization
than Esme’s Heart and operates more within a framework of youth culture. A staff of 40
people runs the organization; some positions are paid and others are volunteers (Jenkins
2012:3.2). The median age of members is 21 years old and high schools or colleges and
universities host a majority of the active chapters (Jenkins 2012:6.1). The group engages
in a range of charitable activities, but one example is the response to the earthquake in
Haiti and the collection of $123,000 USD to fund five cargo planes to transport medical
supplies (Jenkins 2012:3.2).

While the groups are different, the ways in which they operate are similar in that
they deploy fan specific methods. Jenkins comments:
Fan activism works because of its fannishness. This fannishness extends beyond specific ways of reading texts to specific forms of fan participation...some of which may look strange outside the community. But each contributes to fandom's ability to organize and mobilize quickly, to frame issues and educate supporters, to get the word out through every new media platform and channel. This is what ultimately distinguishes fan activism from more casual deployment of pop culture references. (Jenkins 2012:7.6)

Jenkins argues that fan activism works in large part due to the ways in which the groups utilize the “fannish” aspects to mobilize people. Thus, Esme’s Heart and the Twilight fandom are not the first, and nor will they be the last, to organize through a cultural text with the purpose of helping others. An interesting development within fan culture is the way the activism is shifting from fighting for a pleasurable consumption of the cultural text, such as with fighting a series cancellation, to a more socially aware perspective of using fandom to harness large groups of people to help those in need, such as after the earthquake in Haiti. It is within the latter group that Esme’s Heart situates their goals.

4.7 Pleasurable Consumption and Charitable Activities

I joined Esme’s Heart during the months leading up to the theatrical release of the final movie, Breaking Dawn: Part 2. As I attended the monthly club meetings, most of the discussion revolved around planning the event. These events were a combination of business and fun that appeared to trigger excitement, pleasure, and the stress that often accompanies coordinating large events. Volunteers were needed for the “Breaking Dawn: Part 2 Private Screening Party”, the official event name. The event had an Edward look-
a-like and a celebrity guest, Daniel Cudmore, who portrayed one of the evil Volturi vampires in the films. Additionally, there was a raffle, silent auction, and a collection of items for Toys for Tots and the Food Bank. I signed up to work the silent auction booth with two other women. Chloe, one of the event organizers, assured me that silent auction would be the best place for me considering my “newbie” status. Amusingly, the silent auction booth ended up being a site of contention later in the evening as a woman protected her bid on an item by standing in front of the item's bidding sheet. Despite that particular instance of demonstrative possessiveness, the majority of the premiere attendees were pleasant and excited to see the movie while raising money and collecting donations.

I was impressed by the scale of the event and the planning that went into it. The large white tent in the parking lot of the movie theater contained heaters and created a warm, inviting atmosphere for people to peruse the silent auction and raffles. Pictured below is the inside of the event tent that was set up in the parking lot of the theater.

*Figure 4.4 Image of Breaking Dawn: Part 2 Movie Event*[^26]

[^26]: Photo by author.
As I worked the silent auction booth with Danielle, she consistently reminded people that the proceeds went to charity, which seemed both new to some and familiar to others. Below is an image of one of the silent auction items, which was a large tote bag filled with both *Twilight* memorabilia and other items, such as bath and beauty products or wine\textsuperscript{27}.

![Figure 4.5 Image of a silent auction item\textsuperscript{28}](image)

This event was essentially the pinnacle thus far of the organization in terms of attendance. Esme's Heart collected items for charity at the event: “We helped the theater collect canned goods for the Georgia food bank as well as toy for the Marine's toys for tots

\textsuperscript{27} Some of the items for the baskets and totes were donated and some were purchased by Esme’s Heart to use as incentives for people to donate items and attend events to raise funds for the selected cause.

\textsuperscript{28} Photo by author.
program. 558 toys were collected!!”

29 Previous group events were often mentioned during the course of my research and the organization keeps detailed records on their charitable activities.

I discussed earlier that Esme's Heart initially began at the midnight showing of *New Moon*. This was Olivia's initial interaction with the group and essentially kicked off the organization. At the *New Moon* event, the group raised money for Alex's Lemonade Stand, which was, at that time, the unofficial charity of the *Twilight* fandom. Cindy commented: “We did do Alex's Lemonade Stand. It was at our very first event though...that was at the *New Moon* event that Bethany and I did”. In November 2009, at the *New Moon* Movie Premiere, the group “raised over 1,000 pounds of food for the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank and $600 for Alex's Lemonade Stand and $200 for the Foundation for America's Blood Centers from the sale of Andrea Hayes book - *Confessions of a Twilight Mom*”. Following up on this event, Cindy organized the initial meeting at Panera Bread between the core group members. After meeting with other organizations and developing an idea of which local charities the group wanted to target, the women of Esme's Heart discussed the need to pull in women from the community to attend events and help raise donations for the identified charities. Olivia described:

*Then just as a group of us who had been a part of other things, we all just started brainstorming about how we could draw women in the*.


31 For the first event, Esme’s Heart supported Alex’s Lemonade Stand since it was a popular charity within the *Twilight* community at that time. They later transitioned to focusing more so on local charities.

community to not see it as this crazy vampire thing, but 'Yeah, we all like
Twilight, but how can we branch out and do stuff for the community?'

The group knew they needed to draw people in by generating interest first through the
Twilight series. Following on the heels of the success of the New Moon movie premiere
events, Esme's Heart opted to coordinate the next large event with the DVD release of
New Moon. Olivia detailed the New Moon DVD release party, which also included a
movie screening and the collection of donations. The group was shocked at the generous
response of the event attendees:

We had our DVD release and we did that at the Museum of Arts
and Sciences. And that was a huge success. I mean, I remember setting up
and doing everything and I looked outside of the museum and there was a
line of people. I mean, and it was just so surreal...There was just a line of
people and they came in and I think my first thought when I was checking
people in was 'Look at everything they're bringing!' because this was not
someone who brought a Kroger bag full of stuff. These were people that
were bringing bags upon bags upon bags of stuff. And was it because of
the raffle tickets and the possibility of winning things? I don't know. Was it
because they were just so giving? I would like to believe that. I mean
everything that we have done people have showed up with massive
amounts of items. And I mean that's just what's overwhelming. That they
can take it and say 'Oh yeah, I want to go to this fun cool event, but I'm
also going to donate.' And they donate most of them without saying 'What
am I going to get for it? I need a ticket.' I mean they just bring it.
Occurring in early 2010, the New Moon DVD release event was a huge success and the women of Esme's Heart were astounded by the generous response of the people who attended the event. I would like to caveat this story with the warning that not all people who donate at events do so entirely altruistically. While a majority of attendees genuinely donate goods and money out of a desire to help others, some do so in order to gain raffle tickets and increase their odds of winning prizes. Olivia stated that on rare occasion she has dealt with people of this attitude; “I've never really dealt with anybody, I mean we've had a few that have said 'I brought more and I want more tickets.’” When these situations arise, Olivia told me that she would usually just give the person another ticket and move on because that instance was the outlier and not the norm. Thus, while not all attendees were entirely altruistic, the majority of people that Olivia has encountered donated without demanding something in return.

Many who practice charity do so out of love for God (Jackson 2003) and as a way to uphold the teachings of their faith and several Christian religions teach the social justice of charitable giving to foster solidarity and maintain economic order (O’Boyle 1991). As most women in Esme’s Heart were of the Christian faith, the significance placed on charity and humility becomes understandable and consistent with their religious tenants. These women deliberately represent themselves in a particular manner, which focuses on giving back and not placing consumptive pleasure at the forefront. Through Twilight and Esme’s Heart, they are not only feeding their social needs, but also doing so as a function and responsibility of their respective religious faiths.

Most people attend events with a positive attitude to have fun and raise money or donations for a good cause. I repeatedly heard that, in particular, the bunko events were
very popular and enjoyable. Olivia described the first bunko event held by Esme's Heart in 2011:

_We did a Bunko event, which was a huge draw. I mean, everyone and their mama showed up for that! And [it was] a lot of fun because you know we decorated. We even had the ladies from, for that first bunko event, we had that lady that wrote Confessions of a TwilightMOM. She actually came up for that event...What we did was we brought in people and said 'Do you want to sell your stuff? You know, just a percentage of whatever you make or a set fee, you just donate back to our organization. We had an open bar, which is always a hit for people that like to drink and spend money. And so that was just a fun night._

At this event “Go Red' for Bunko for the Heart Association” in February 2011, Esme's Heart had 108 players and “raised about $2,500 for the Heart Association!”[^33]. Subsequent bunko events have also been popular. Later in 2011, Esme's Heart held another bunko event for the Foundation for America's Blood Centers and raised $500. In February 2012, Esme's Heart held another “Go Red for Bunko” event: “We had a fantastic night spreading awareness that Heart Disease is the No. 1 Killer of women and playing Bunko for the American Heart Association. Our group raised $500 for the American Heart Association that night”[^34]. Thus, while many events organized by Esme's Heart centered around specific events that tied in with the *Twilight* franchise, such as movie premieres and DVD releases, the group also held separate gatherings that were intended to

continually use the popularity of the series to give back to the community.

Esme's Heart also raised donations for the Crisis Line and Safe House on several occasions. Olivia described an event when the group collected so many items for the battered women shelter that it was not possible to see out the back window of her vehicle. Olivia stated:

*When we did an event for the battered women, my Explorer I had to lay my seats down. We collected so much that when I got there, the ladies that came down like brought a basket thinking that's what we were bringing in and I opened up the window to my Explorer and I was like 'No, no, no, no'...because from behind my seat all the way back, all the way up. I could not see out. In fact, my husband got upset at me because it was quote unquote unsafe for me to drive because there were paper towels, rolls of paper towels stacked up.*

In this interaction, the people working at the shelter expected a small donation that could easily fit in a basket. However, Esme's Heart collected far more than one basket full of items with a grand total of about 500 items donated to the Safe House. Esme’s Heart has helped numerous groups since their inception. Cindy, the group president, described the motivations behind how Esme’s Heart identified those to help:

*Word of mouth is usually how needs are presented to our group and we try to decide if our volunteers and funds can be best used for the event or if they have a big base of volunteers and funding sources already. We try to help those smaller groups who might not get as much help. We also try to focus on helping groups instead of individuals as we feel our efforts*
can be spread out and be of more use.

The specific events mentioned here are only a small sample of the “acts of love” completed by Esme's Heart. I reference these events as group members discussed these events during my research and are reflections of the types of gatherings and charitable acts that Esme's Heart completed.

Women in the group speak of the events and the donations they raised with a sense of pride and fulfillment from their participation. Cora, a working mother in her thirties, commented that gathering donations has been a huge success for the group. She commented, “That's been the biggest hit for us, collecting items...I mean, people feel like they're giving back when they bring the items”. By bringing items, event attendees feel a sense of satisfaction that they have helped the group with the charity they are supporting at that particular event. Similarly, Cindy noted:

They [event attendees] feel like they bring something that they're actually doing...they're participating in what we're trying to accomplish...I think that's why we've been so successful with the collection of items is that they may not have the five hours or...two hours to go and help clean up our Adopt a Spot or to actually give of hours, but they can show up and bring stuff and feel like they're helping with whatever charity we're helping at the time by doing that.

By bringing donations to the events, people gain a sense of satisfaction and feel as if they have helped the organization for which Esme's Heart is supporting. Many of the group members lead busy lives with jobs and families, which may cause time constraints in terms of helping organize and set up for events. Thus, women are able to tangibly feel
that they are part of something that is trying to make a difference without neglecting their other responsibilities, such as work or family. The people attending the events are from a range of socioeconomic classes and not all have the capacity to make large donations. Esme’s Heart focused on the intent to contribute and made a point to be appreciative of all levels of donation. As such, it made people feel valued and appreciated, which would prompt further participation.

When considering why people so generously donate at these events, Cindy thought it stemmed in part from the tone of the *Twilight* series. Cindy articulated that she believes the characters in the books and their generosity inspire people. Cindy stated:

*I personally think it has to do with some of Stephenie's writing. To me, it has to do something about her writing about the characters and the personality of the characters, some that I relate to, which would be Carlisle or Esme, and just their generosity or how they look at others or how they would do. So to me that's...I think that may be part of why this Twilight fandom feels like it wants to give back. Maybe they've picked up some of Stephenie's kind of morality that she's written into the books.*

I will address the morality and religious aspects of the series in the following chapter, but for now I want to mainly address Cindy's connection between the generosity of the characters and the ways in which this motivates people to bring donations to Esme's Heart, and other *Twilight* groups, at the charity events. Cindy identified this as part of the reason why giving back to the community is such a trend within the *Twilight* community. Thus, *Twilight* itself was unique in that it not only draws in a multitude of fans, but also helps those readers to recognize a subtextual theme within the series and then to act upon
this theme to help others and collect charitable donations through a shared interest in the series.

Similar to Cindy's assessment, Jules, a housewife and homeschooling mother in her thirties, also thought that the generosity of the fans stems from reading about positive and loving characters, which makes people want to emulate them and help others. Jules stated:

*The characters in Twilight are so giving and caring. Esme especially, then Carlisle, both are so charitable with their personalities.*

They love each other, their family, they loved Bella from the beginning. The whole Cullen family cherish human life. It just evokes wonderful feelings in people and makes them want to do for others.

Jules identified the base emotion of love as significant in the series, in particular stemming from the matriarch and patriarch of the series, Esme and Carlisle. Thus, after reading about this loving and compassionate family that is genuinely concerned about helping people, Jules thought it had motivated readers to then want to help people in their own lives. This willingness to help others and give back then becomes viewed as a significant part of some Twilight fan groups. Similarly, Elaine, a housewife in her thirties, also identified positive traits in the Twilight series characters. Elaine commented:

*Maybe because Carlisle and Esme are so giving and caring and easily lend to helping others. Especially Carlisle, he serves humanity as a doctor simply for the joy of caring for people. I do not know if this is unique to Twilight, although I have not heard of any Harry Potter, Hunger Games, or Hobbit groups that promote charities.*
The Cullen family does not have to work to survive and Carlisle chooses to practice as a medical doctor because he wants to help people. Again, Elaine identified that this seems to be largely unique to the Twilight community based on her experience. The characteristic of volunteering to help others, which readers identify in characters such as Carlisle, are then visible in the fan community as well. Violet, a divorced engineer in her fifties, viewed the volunteering aspect of Esme's Heart to be the most important and ties its roots to the character of Esme. She commented: “The volunteering aspect – Esme was always able to see things differently and was able to give love in the simplest ways”. Esme's vision and the ways in which she was able to see beyond barriers, such as vampire and werewolf, to help and care for anyone is discussed as her significant trait and utilized by groups, such as Esme's Heart, to ground the basis for their organization.

The women of Esme's Heart truly believe that there is no act of kindness or love that is too small to make a difference. While planning events can be stressful and the group hopes for the best in terms of donations, the heart of the organization remains the focus on making a difference no matter the size. Olivia stated:

*Everything that we've done, you know, you pour blood, sweat, and tears into it to get it ready and going and you hope for the best as far as turn out. But really and truly we never said, I mean...there are stresses with being an organization of not going in the hole, you know you don't want to go in the hole for an event. But really and truly we have stayed true to that's not what it's been about. Because if only ten people showed up, but they brought a hundred items, that was the silver lining. Ok, maybe only ten people showed up, but look at everything now that we're going to be able to...*
I heard Olivia's comments echoed in other conversations with members. The goal of the group is to help others with a compassionate heart, regardless of the size of the act. While ten people gathering may seem inconsequential, those hundred items collected then go to local organizations that use the goods to help those in need. To the charities and people in need, even a small act of kindness can make a difference. Furthermore, the events held by the group become important because they give people an opportunity to not only socialize and have fun, but to also tangibly experience the act of giving which makes it more pleasurable and thus, more likely to repeat through the positive reinforcement. As someone who personally showed up to their first Esme's Heart event without a donation for the Ronald McDonald House, I must admit that I felt quite guilty at the self-perceived mistake that I have not since repeated. As such, I posit that the events held by Esme's Heart play a key role in socially reinforcing giving back through making it pleasurable and seeing others also donating items, which then aids in the momentum of the group and its charitable goals.

These events are sites of excitement and attended by groups of people. In the case of the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie premiere, this event was attended by a large crowd and not everyone knew each other. Emile Durkheim theorized that when people engage in social rituals with other group members they experience a sense of effervescence. As such, through the energy and enthusiasm experienced at the event, it becomes, for many participants, a successful social ritual through the generation of effervescence. Durkheim

35 While Durkheim published his theories of social rituals and collective effervescence in 1912, these concepts are utilized and discussed by anthropologists to discuss contemporary influence (de Coppel, ed. 1992), theories of consciousness (Throop and Laughlin 2002), political mobilization (Verkaaik 2003), and in other disciplines, such as biology, to quantify effervescence in rituals (Xygalatas, Konvalinka, et al. 2011).
We have seen, in fact, that if collective life awakens religious thought when it rises to a certain intensity, that is so because it brings about a state of effervescence that alters the condition of psychic activity. The vital energies become hyper-excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful; there are indeed some that are produced only at this moment. (Durkheim 1995[1912]:424)

When these social rituals are successful, they create a continued or renewed interest not only in Twilight, but in Esme’s Heart as well. During the ending credits of Breaking Dawn: Part 2, the film recognizes all the actors and actresses from the movies, including those only in the first movie. Set in sepia tones with a melancholic love song, the montage triggered a sense of finality and remembrance. I watched this scene for the first time at the Esme’s Heart movie premiere and found myself unexpectedly fighting tears. Leaning over to my friend, I commented that it felt like a memorial service for the characters, to which she responded in agreement. When speaking with others who attended the final movie premiere, they also echoed similar sentiments. Thus, while this particular instance does not depict enthusiasm in the sense of a cheering crowd, the experience generated deep emotions within attendees that enabled them to feel more connected to others, which allows for a successful social ritual. Once the ritual ends and people return to their separate normal lives, there is a sense of longing for the shared sense of community that was enjoyed during the ritual (Durkheim 2004[1912]:92-93). Thus, when the events end people long for the sense of camaraderie shared in the moment. These events in which Esme’s Heart collects goods and donations for charity
groups generate effervescence, which then triggers a sense of longing after the social ritual ends and results in further philanthropic activities.

4.8 Summary

While I was captivated by the Twilight series itself as a fan, I was drawn into the community when I noticed the trend of giving back through the fandom. Culture is not a stagnant or fixed entity and, as such, neither are fan communities. Early popular culture theories articulated the ways in which media texts could influence viewers (see Adorno and Horkheimer 2000[1944], Benjamin 1999[1936]). This view gave way to a perspective of popular culture that allowed for an active reading of texts and a theme of resistance within the subculture of the fan (see de Certeau 1984, Fiske 1989, Hebdige 1979, Jenkins 1992). Another theme within popular culture was the emphasis on the aesthetic value and the ways in which the “low popular culture” should be valued (see Bourdieu 1979, Hills 2007, McBride and Bird 2007, McRobbie 1994, Miller 2006). Furthermore, recent studies depict a trend of fan activism, which is gaining popularity in numerous fandoms (see Bennett 2012, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Earl and Kimport 2009, Jenkins 2012, Jenkins and Shresthova 2012, Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012, Scardaville 2005). Through the framework of the production of social relations and human beings through consumptive practices (Graeber 2011), fan communities are producing new ways of being a ‘fan’ through their consumption and are molding new social relations and practices.

While some fan communities focus on primarily on aspects of individual pleasure and consumption of a cultural text, this was not the story I found within the Twilight community. This is not to say that Twilight fans who engage in charitable activities are
not also deriving personal pleasure from their participation or that all Twilight fans are altruistic people with a primary goal to help others. My intention is not to idealize Twilight fans, or fans in general, but to instead articulate a group of people within a particular fandom, both of which have a trend of giving back to the community. By illustrating the activities of Esme’s Heart, my goal is to add to the growing research and awareness in fan groups that utilize a collective interest in a cultural text to philanthropically give back and help others. As previously explored, the women of Esme’s Heart had varying levels of socioeconomic statuses and the group emphasized the value of all donations regardless of monetary value. Participation in a fan group and pleasurable activities indicates certain level of economic stability and, while those who may struggle to pay bills would be welcome at all events, the attendance and even a small donation would potentially be cost prohibitive.

I argue that it is a continuous cycle that perpetuates the charitable actions of the Twilight community. The Twilight series drew in adult female fans that enjoyed the sense of nostalgia for the feeling of first love created by the series. Simultaneously, many women then identified with characters, such as Esme, due to their roles as mothers. Acknowledging Esme’s compassion and recognizing the large popularity of the series, the following question was to learn in what ways this popularity could be utilized to help others? Drawing in other fans, the act of giving back becomes a focal point of many organizations in an effort to help others through a love of Twilight.

The act of giving back then elicits a sense of satisfaction and pleasure for participants. For example, Nicole, a housewife in her thirties, finds meaning in her participation with Esme's Heart because it gives her a sense of belonging while making a
difference. Nicole commented:

* My favorite part I mean is of course the people, but I've always
  wanted to feel like I was a part of something and this group is the first
  thing that I've joined where I feel like I'm actually a part of something...I
  feel like I play a role in helping different people out. I feel like I mean
  [something], and too the friendships we've made, but I think my personal
  favorite part is just being a part of something that's changing people's
  lives.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, women become members of *Twilight* fan groups for a multitude of reasons. The charitable activities of the fan organizations are not the sole driver for people to continually participate, but for some it does become the primary motivation. Furthermore, what I find interesting about the *Twilight* fan community is the way in which multiple groups were able to harness the power of the *Twilight* fandom to give back and donate to charity. While many fans are primarily consumers, in this context, the fans are not only consuming cultural texts and products for personal pleasure, but also giving instead to others. Thus, based on my interactions with *Twilight* fans, they represent a particular form of a fandom community through their attention to giving back instead of a sole focus on personal, individualistic consumption. It is my hope, albeit idealistically, that it is in this direction of harnessing the power of fandom for charity that fan communities will continue to travel.
CHAPTER 5

MORAL CARETAKERS: THE RELIGIOUS AND GENDERED THEMES WITHIN THE TWILIGHT COMMUNITY’S CHARITABLE ACTIONS

I didn’t agree with my father’s particular brand of faith. But never, in the nearly four hundred years...have I ever seen anything to make me doubt whether God exists in some form or the other. Not even the reflection in the mirror.

Carlisle Cullen, New Moon[^1]

Alms are the fruits of a moral notion of the gift and of fortune on the one hand, and a notion of sacrifice, on the other.

Marcel Mauss[^2]

5.1 Introduction

As I described in the previous chapter, many women that participate within the Twilight fan community feel a sense of satisfaction surrounding their charitable activities. In this chapter, I delve deeper into the themes of morality and gender that are undercurrents within the charitable aspects of the Twilight community. While I previously discussed the charitable activities of Esme’s Heart and the ways in which this impacts participants’ enjoyment of the group, I now discuss the moral and gendered themes within the philanthropic activities. While there is a better understanding of the ways in which Esme’s Heart and other Twilight organizations engage in charitable giving, I want to identify themes within the series that resonated with fans and, for some members, became part of the reason they wanted to engage in charity.

[^1]: Meyer 2006:36.
Beyond religious and moral themes, women identify that it is in part their roles as caretakers that makes them willing to take action to help others as it is a familiar endeavor. As the role of motherhood is not something that women leave behind when away from their children, does this familiarity with caregiving contribute to the desire to help others after reading the *Twilight* series? I also return to the concept of fan activism and address its connections to social movements. I intend to explore these themes in this chapter in order to gain a better understanding of the motivations to engage in charity through *Twilight* and to attain a clearer picture of why the *Twilight* fandom that has generated such philanthropic intentions amongst fans.

5.2 Morality and Morsels: The Religious Themes in *Twilight*

I would be remiss if I did not address the religious themes within the *Twilight* series. Stephenie Meyer is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and its subtextual doctrine is apparent in the series through the characters' actions and beliefs. As addressed in previous chapters during the discussion of gender roles and sexuality, Bella spends a portion of the series attempting to sway Edward to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage. After much negotiation, Bella agrees to marry Edward before having sex. This is just one situation in which the religious and moral aspects of Stephenie Meyer's beliefs become apparent. This tendency to include religious themes is both praised and criticized depending on the reader. Many women I met were pleased to have a widely popular book advocate for more conservative values in terms of marriage and sexual intimacy. However, the religious and moral themes of the series did not end merely at “waiting until marriage” for the women I met.
Beyond the religious views on sex, Cindy appreciated other aspects in the series that communicated a more moral and thoughtful way to conduct your life. In earlier years, Cindy would carry a paperback copy of *Twilight* with her and give it to friends who had not read the series yet. She was motivated to do this because she wanted people to potentially benefit in the ways in which she had from the book's message. Cindy described:

*I wanted them to experience that same thing I had experienced with the book. And there was so much that I had gotten out of it that it wasn't just the love story, the drama, the whatever. I really appreciated Stephenie's moral values that she put into the book. I mean, it wasn't just about not having sex until you're married or being respectful of others. To me it was things like Carlisle and how he became this person...we all are dealt something in life and it's how you deal with what you have and take that. You have the choice to make what you want out of your life. No matter what you're given and so you have that power within yourself to do that.*

To Cindy, the religious and moral themes within the *Twilight* series were not limited to telling people what not to do. Rather, the main message Cindy received from the book was learning to cope with adversity and rise above your situation by refusing to be limited by what you are or stereotypes of who you should be. Cindy identified the most with Carlisle and Esme because of their compassion and acceptance of others. At the end of the first book, Bella is bitten by a vampire and the venom begins to trigger her to change into a vampire herself. In an effort to save her, Edward then sucks the venom out
to cease the change. Caught in the bloodlust, Edward begins to take too much of Bella's blood and loses himself in the taste. Carlisle reminds Edward that he can rise above his basic instincts of hunger. Cindy referenced this scene as an example of the ways in which Carlisle guides the characters in the book to live based on their own beliefs instead of being limited by their situation:

And he [Carlisle] says that 'Remember who you are' and how he [Edward] had always wanted to do good and never wanted to harm people, even though he had become this supposed monster or whatever.

And so, it was just, I was touched by all of that. I thought that was a very fascinating way to look at that. You don't have to be something horrible.

The notion of not being limited by your situation was a theme that Cindy heavily identified with and wanted others to also experience. While most vampires subsist off human blood, the Cullen family refrains from killing people and instead feed off of animals, ironically referring to themselves as “vegetarian” vampires. Thus, the Cullen family does not take the easy path, but instead chooses the one they believe to be morally right. In this context, the Twilight series becomes an entertaining way for people to read situations in which characters overcome obstacles, such as being predators of humans, and make a decision and concerted effort to take a different path. Consistent with Christianity, the correct path is often challenging and filled with obstacles, such as in Edward's situation. Another common theme in Christianity is the act of forgiveness. Cindy articulated that this was another facet of the series that she enjoyed:

Also the forgiveness family gave...and that's way family should be.

That you know when Edward went off and he had to kind of find himself at
one point and he may have done things that were not right by humanity...Even though he tried to just prey on predators and people who were going to hurt somebody, but still it was taking a life...At the same time when he came back to the family they accepted him in...It was how family should be. It's an unconditional love that you have...I just enjoyed all of that. I absorbed every bit of that, but I think that also came from reading it several times.

The concept of family and forgiveness in the Twilight series was emphasized by Cindy as part of the morals that Stephenie Meyer wove into the story. For Cindy, the books were about more than just supernatural creatures and a love story, it was about a family with conflicts that struggled to overcome their obstacles while accepting and forgiving each other.

Some readers recognize that the Twilight series contains religious themes, but this does not necessarily impact their enjoyment of the series. Casey, a student in her twenties, identified the aspects of waiting until marriage and anti-abortion as religious themes in the series. She commented: “Meyer touched upon vampires and souls, but she didn't go into much detail. I, personally, would enjoy the series either way, however, the religious themes make me more likely to share the book with any future daughter that I have. I would want her to know it's ok to wait for the right guy and that life is sacred”. Elaine, a housewife in her thirties, also enjoyed that the Twilight series contains “somewhat” religious themes: “Edward and Carlisle clearly believe in God and heaven and hell. I like that they acknowledge that some people believe, strongly, in God”. Thus, while the series did not contain overt messages or advocate for a specific religion, Elaine
enjoyed that some characters in the books believed in God. Similarly, Helen, a teacher in her forties, commented: “It [Twilight] has brief references to religion throughout the story. These references have only added to my love of the story”. For some readers, the inclusion of religious and moral themes added to the enjoyment of the series.

Kayla, a woman in her thirties, also recognized the moral messages in the series, but this did not specifically impact her enjoyment of the books. Kayla commented: “There is definitely morality in the books. I would say based on Carlisle's background and the discussion on Souls in the books that there is a Christian perspective. It only impacted my enjoyment as far as it was woven into the books which I love!” Thus, the moral undertones of the books were not a primary draw for all readers that recognized the religious themes. The morality in the books did not deter some readers though, such as Kayla. Rather, an overall enjoyment of the series was the primary factor and the moral themes of the book were simply one facet of a series she loves.

I want to clarify that not all readers of the Twilight series and members of Esme's Heart identify with the religious and moral themes described thus far. When asked if the Twilight series had religious themes, many people stated no. The books did not overtly argue for a specific religious doctrine and, aside from Carlisle's father being a Protestant preacher in the 1800s, no explicit mention is made of Christianity itself. Others responded more vaguely or viewed the moral themes in the series as less religiously based. Renee, a housewife in her early thirties, commented: “It [Twilight] has some religious themes, but they seem caught up with societal expectations rather than actual religious rituals and faith based actions. The death and rebirth of Bella is pretty obvious though”. Similarly, Alice, a woman in her fifties, also did not really view the themes in
Twilight as specifically religious: “Somewhat, Bella sacrifices herself for the baby”. The main religious aspect that Alice identified in the series was Bella's refusal to terminate her life-threatening pregnancy, which is a common religious topic as the debate between prolife and prochoice camps often makes contemporary news headlines.

However, despite the moral themes readers identify in the series, some religious organizations do not wish to be affiliated with Twilight and opt instead to distance themselves from the franchise. Teri, a recent high school graduate and housewife, wanted to collaborate with her church and Esme's Heart after she joined the group, which did not go as initially planned. Teri described:

When I got involved with Esme's Heart I had a fundraiser under their name for my church. It was for our food pantry and Jesus Kitchen.

Right before I went to do this my church decided they did not want to be affiliated with Twilight in any way and I had to take their name out of it.

Personally I believe that fiction can be separated easily from religion and it doesn't have to relate.

In this situation, the help of Esme’s Heart was rejected by the religious organization due to a desire to maintain distance from a supernatural series. However, not all members of a religious organization feel that need to distance themselves from Twilight due to the content and message of the series. Jules, a housewife in her thirties, is a Southern Baptist and also thought that the fiction of the series did not interfere with her enjoyment of the series:

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I think the argument about Edward's soul could be construed as a religious aspect, but for me it was just a conversation between Edward/Bella. I know some that didn't agree with the books/movies just because of the whole vampire thing (possibly being against religion) but the same people had a problem with Harry Potter. Nothing has ruined my enjoyment of the series, including repeatedly reading them.

While many people identify religious and moral themes in the *Twilight* series, this does not indicate that churches wish to be affiliated with a franchise that includes supernatural creatures, such as vampires. As in Teri's situation, some churches opt to not interact with *Twilight* or groups associated with the series. In this respect, even the charitable actions of groups, such as Esme's Heart, are not seen as trumping the franchise with which they are affiliated.

Olivia, while a consummate fan of the *Twilight* series, did struggle a little with the supernatural aspects of books as a Christian. However, she identified a line between fantasy and reality in terms of supernatural forces. Olivia stated:

*It's almost two-faced to say that it's ok to read about vampires, but when it comes to witchcraft I draw a line. Only because I believe in demonic power, I believe that there are people that practice witchcraft, that's real. I do not believe in vampires. If you want to drink blood, that's your own personal forte, but we all know that nobody grows fangs, or in Stephenie Meyer's world, nobody sparkles without fangs and razor sharp teeth and actually drinks from a human wrist or neck. That's where I was able to say fantasy and reality, but there are practicing witches and there*
is practicing witchcraft and as a Christian that opens up the world of
demons and Satan, who is very real. So that's where I do conflict a little bit...I know that sounds very like 'Ok, she doesn't know what she's talking about if she says it's ok to read about vampires but not ok to read about witches.'

Olivia was very open about being a Christian and viewed it as the foundation for wanting to help others and give back to the community. This desire to help others was a recurring theme as I got to know Olivia. Thus, while she identified the positive aspects of the series, such as Esme's compassion, Olivia also acknowledged that some aspects of supernatural novels conflicted with her views as a Christian. However, she made decisions based upon her religious views on what was potentially real and established the line there. I posit that the charitable work that is common within the Twilight community, which resonates with Christian views, also contributed to Olivia's comfort with the series.

The Twilight series was not the first franchise to attract a religious audience in part through its subtextual content. Nor is it surprising that the series contains Christian themes based upon Stephenie Meyer’s background. One of the unique aspects of the Twilight fandom is the tendency for groups to utilize their shared interest in the series for charitable benefits. I posit that this occurs in part because the series may attract a type of fan that identifies with these subtextual religious and moral themes. Many religious organizations, such as the Catholic church⁴, advocate for people to donate to those in less fortunate situations through either giving of time, goods, or money.

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Bourdieu’s theory of habitus describes the ways in which it is constituted through practices (Bourdieu 2004[1974]). Habitus is a product of history and produces practices on both the individual and collective level. These practices are done in accordance with the ‘schemes’ of history. The past then perpetuates itself in the future through these structured practices. These practices are internalized and enable external forces to be exerted. The habitus that is internalized is a product of history although this history is not always recognized. Habitus is then the ‘active presence’ of its past, which it is a product of, and is spontaneous, without consciousness or will. Bourdieu articulates: “The habitus, an objective relationship between two objectivities, enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition” (Bourdieu 1979:101).

In this framework of habitus, members of the Twilight community, such as Cindy, were already familiar with the practice of charity. When embracing a new activity, such as the Twilight fandom, the habitus of charity carries over and is then enacted by the participant in this new context. Thus, if the Twilight series attracts readers who are familiar and may participate in organized religions, then it becomes more likely for the fan groups of Twilight to embrace charitable events based on their past experiences. When paired with an organizational leader, such as Cindy, whom has experience with volunteering in Junior League and other groups, it then becomes more understandable as to the reason why Twilight fan groups mobilize philanthropically.

The habitus deployed by the women of Esme’s Heart is then brought into a new sphere that may not be as familiar with the same practices. As fan activism with a
focusing on giving back to communities is an increasing trend, these new habitual practices are crossing into new terrains. Furthermore, these practices of charity and philanthropy, which are often associated with religion and high cultural capital, are then brought into a context of a cultural text that is associated with low cultural capital. The distinction and taste for *Twilight*, which is associated with a more ‘lowbrow’ literary genre, then becomes boosted in terms of capital by the association with philanthropy.

Bourdieu argues that “the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, [however] scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education...[thus] cultural practices...and preferences...are closely linked to educational level...and secondarily to social origin” (Bourdieu 1979:1). Bourdieu's theory of taste utilizes four forms of capital which people access to gain legitimacy: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. The four forms of capital may exist in an ethereal state, such as through a person's confidence, or a solid state in terms of tangible products. Additionally, these forms of capital can often be institutionalized in forms that add to their legitimacy within the social context. Children are socialized into these forms of capital at an early age which grants them a sense of confidence and aligns them neatly within the category of cultural legitimacy. People who are socialized into these forms of capital are granted access to a skill set which predisposes them to succeed in a society which recognizes and legitimizes the capital they have accrued (Bourdieu 1979:66). Thus, when you have a preference for a text or commodity that is viewed as ‘low’ in terms of capital, such as *Twilight*, assumptions are made about you based on that association. As previously discussed, the internet has the capacity to bring people together with common tastes, but it also creates opportunities for non-fans to identify and
openly critique fans of a cultural text that is viewed as ‘low’ capital. The assumption is made that because the person has a preference for a certain text, they then embody the host of qualities and stereotypes associated with that commodity.

Thus, the insidious downside to the assumption of inborn tastes is that it naturalizes and legitimizes social differences. While people can attempt to acquire capital through different methods, the end product is not on level ground and maintains distinctions between social classes. A person who receives a great deal of cultural capital from their parents is given “a sort of advance which...enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture...in the most unconscious and impalpable way – and to dispense with the labour of deculturation, correction and retraining that is needed to undo the effects of inappropriate learning” (Bourdieu 1979:70-71). Therefore, while a person may attempt to learn the skill set of the legitimate culture, they are at a disadvantage because the behaviors and actions are studied and calculated instead of “authentic” and “effortless” as they are to the person who has inherited capital since childhood. So the person who inherits cultural legitimacy from the previous generation is doubly benefited because not only are they equipped with legitimate forms of capital, but the resulting aptitude is misrecognized as being natural and individual to them instead of the result of benefiting from systematic power structures which legitimate social differences. Thus, women who associate with the Twilight series are associated with lower forms of capital due to the concept that this preference indicates their taste is ‘lesser’. However, through the engagement with charity, when confronted with openly verbal dissenters and non-fans of Twilight, women within the community deploy their participation in philanthropy as a form of acquired capital.
When under attack for their association with a ‘low’ capital cultural text, women of Esme’s Heart wield and leverage the philanthropy of the community as a form of legitimized capital to counter these charges. This rebuttal then triggers dissenters to potentially rethink the context and back down from their assumption of innate characteristics assigned to people who enjoy certain cultural texts.

Distinctions between socioeconomic classes are further stratified based on the forms capital that those of a higher socioeconomic class are able to benefit from more easily. The concept of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture are often assigned to socioeconomic classes and the preference or taste for each is viewed as inherent to the person based on the capital they deploy. The women of Esme’s Heart displayed a range of socioeconomic statuses, but were bonded together through their enjoyment of the *Twilight* series, which represents a mass cultural text and is, therefore, within the ‘low’ culture category. However, their deployment of philanthropy represented an association with a higher cultural capital. In this turn, mass cultural texts begin to take on new forms of capital and the participants are able to acquire and deploy different forms of capital as well. As the cost of participation is relatively reasonable for those who are meeting their needs financially yet are not ‘wealthy’, participation in charity through *Twilight* becomes a fiscally feasible way to intersect the higher cultural capital of philanthropy with the lower cultural capital distinction for the *Twilight* franchise and its literary genre.

5.3 The Motherhood Aspect: Women as “Natural” Caretakers

In previous chapters, I discussed theoretical arguments surrounding the formation of a female identity and the view that women are often deemed “natural” caretakers (see Allen 1999, Ortner 1974, Rubin 1975). While women are often conceptualized as being
“good” caretakers and many are mothers, these identity categories are not the sole aspects of their lives. As I addressed in previous chapters, many women derive pleasure from their participation in fan events in part because it allows them an activity and avenue that is separate from their caregiver role. While there may be a physical perforation at these events, I found that the role of motherhood still heavily influenced the activities of Esme's Heart. Thus, while the participation in Esme's Heart allows for a break in their duties as a mother, identity is not a fixed aspect and one piece does not cease to exist simply because the children are not present. Rather, I learned that while the group provided respite for women, the identity category of mother remained present. Cindy was, at times, referred to affectionately by group members as the ‘Head Mom’ of Esme’s Heart, which indicates their foundation as a collection of women who are also mothers.

At this point, I again quote the front page on the Esme's Heart website to discuss more in depth the ways in which the primary identification with the character of Esme becomes a building block for charitable activities. The Esme's Heart website stated the following message:

*Esme's Heart is 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to accomplish acts of love with a heart like Esme! We identify a need in our community and use themed events to help raise awareness and funds for various causes. Our group has not only helped about 25 organizations with our events so far, but we have also been able to donate over $25,000 worth of funds and items to the chosen groups. Our name comes from the matriarch of the Cullen family who is Esme Cullen, in the Twilight Saga series created by Stephenie Meyer. We really like that she is accepting and*
loving of all and her kind and compassionate heart is one we try to emulate in trying to help others in need. (Esme's Heart, Inc.)

Rooted in the name of group, changed from Twilight MOMS of Middle Georgia to Esme's Heart, the organization explicitly tied itself to the Twilight matriarch, Esme. As the predominant motherly character in the series, Esme makes it a point to look after the other family members. However, Esme's compassion is not limited to those who bear commonalities with her. During the final book, Breaking Dawn, the werewolves split into two different factions: those that wish to destroy Bella and her unborn baby for fear of the unknown and those that want to protect Bella and the child. Despite wanting to protect Bella, whom was still human at the time, not all the werewolves were fond or appreciative of the Cullen family due to the historic conflict between wolves and vampires. Leah, a female werewolf, was frequently rude to the Cullens and begrudgingly helped protect the Cullen territory and Bella. During this time, the werewolves were protecting the land surrounding the Cullen's house and were cut off from their homes. In an effort to look out for the werewolves, Esme would prepare food and make sure the wolves were taken care of in terms of sustenance and general necessities. Leah was continually rude and dismissive of Esme's attempts and yet Esme was not deterred and continued to look out for the werewolves.

It is this type of compassion that the members of Esme's Heart aim to emulate at events and with their fundraising for charities by accomplishing “acts of love with a heart like Esme.” The Esme's Heart website stated:

‘Accomplishing 'acts of love' with a heart like Esme!’ - Why is this our slogan? Esme Cullen is the “mother” figure in the Cullen Clan. It is
her love and caring that holds the Cullens together to form a family. We, as women and/or mothers, tend to be natural caregivers and Esme is to whom we can relate. It is her examples of love and acceptance that encourages us to do “acts of love” for our community with our passion for Twilight. (Esme's Heart, Inc.)

Esme's Heart identified with the motherly aspects of the character of Esme. Violet, a mother in her fifties, believed that it was due to the female characters in the series and their compassion that motivated fans to then accomplish acts of kindness. Violet commented, “I think that because there was such a dominate female thing…throughout all four movies. I mean…every time you ever saw Esme…she was always showing kindness”. Furthermore, the group mission comment that as “women and/or mothers, tend to be natural caregivers” connects to previous chapters and the discussion of women viewed as closer to nature and the perspective that woman are inherently more caring through their roles as mothers. This topic of women/mothers as natural caregivers is a contentious topic; however, I think it is important to articulate that this is the foundation from which the organization operates. As discussed in previous chapters, there are many theories surrounding the identity categories of “woman” and “mother” and their ties to caregiving. Thus, the theory from which the Esme's Heart organization is built works upon the concept that women/mothers are natural caregivers. This causes them to primarily identify with Esme and want to then share this “love and acceptance” with the community through charitable work.

I want to discuss the ways in which identity categories can be operationalized by larger structural forces and thereby influence the formation of individual perceptions.
Anne Allison discusses the ways in which both mothers and children are indoctrinated into the Japanese school system through the ritual of the obento. Utilizing Louis Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus, Allison argues that food is coded with social expectations through the ways in which it is used by the educational system. Mothers must pack lunches for their nursery school children that are appealing, quickly eaten, and aesthetically pleasing. The student is then expected to eat the obento in a timely fashion. Allison comments that culture is “doubly constructive” in that it creates a world for people and people for worlds (Allison 1996:82). The obento is imbued with more cultural meaning than just a nutritional function. The significance of the obento for the child is to begin instilling a sense of obedience and a desire to work hard, which are qualities encouraged by the state (Allison 1996:88). While the eating of the obento is meant to teach children discipline, it also represents an element of home life during the transitional period of nursery school, which is often difficult for children (Allison 1996:89). Just as the child is taught to eat the entire obento, mothers are taught to be creative and work hard on the obentos for their children to make the “chore” easier for the child (Allison 1996:93). This also represents the beginning of the kyoiku mama (education mother) role, as success in school for a student is often a joint effort between parent and child (Allison 1996:95). Through this process the social order is continually reconstituted, often through gendered roles (Allison 1996:103).

Using this theoretical concept that people are taught their roles within the social order through seemingly benign practices, such as a school lunch, I will make an argument that women within the Twilight community tend to engage in charity in part due to their experiences as mothers. Allison’s argument about motherhood and obentos
highlights the ways in which roles are often gendered, such as motherhood, and are imbued with certain expectations. Allison pays particular attention to the nuance and culturally constructed roles that have multiple meanings and layers. Beyond the individual layer of a mother aiding her child is the way in which these small, daily actions support a larger social order, and vice versa as the social order influences the ways in which the role of “mother” is enacted. Thus, if the women in the Twilight community have been indoctrinated to the socially appropriate way to be a mother, which is to say a caretaker, then it becomes reasonable to understand why this caregiving is then extended to others. As women experience continual influence from the social order on the best way to be a caretaker, this is then internalized as part of their “natural” motherhood identity. Therefore, even when engaging in an activity in part to break away from their responsibilities as a mother and wife, the tendency arises to engage in caring labor for others through their activities in the Twilight fandom.

5.4 Why Twilight?: Motherhood as a Charitable Motivator

When asked why Twilight appears for the most part unique in its attraction of fans that want to raise money and goods for charity, some women identified being mothers as a potential reason. Alexis, a housewife in her thirties, commented: “A good amount of us are mothers, and as mothers, we enjoy caring for others”. In this way, the women in Esme's Heart and similar groups are using their experiences as mothers and caregivers as a basis for helping others outside their family or social sphere. It is not only mothers themselves that identify this as a theme. Daisy, a teenage girl, commented regarding the Esme's Heart organization: “I feel like they take the lessons of Twilight and project that into the universe. Esme's Heart uses Esme's motherly way and nice nature to go out there
and help”. In Daisy's opinion, Esme's Heart takes the lessons of kindness from *Twilight* and bring it into the world around them through their charitable works.

Being part of Esme's Heart and giving back can also provide an avenue for teaching children and leading by example for their families. Lori, an employed mother in her twenties, stated:

> *Motherhood has influenced some. I like my kids to see that you can help others who need help and it is nice to be able to tell them that mommy volunteers or is going to an event to donate items or raise awareness for organizations. It is also nice when I tell my kids to go through their toys and find ones that they do not play with so we can donate them or have them go through their clothes so we can donate them as well. It can make a huge impact in a child's life.*

Lori uses her participation with Esme's Heart as a way to show her children that she values giving to others. Thus, when she asks them to select toys or clothes to give to charity, the children have a better understanding of why they are being asked to relinquish the items by seeing their mother's example.

I mentioned in previous chapters that the *Twilight* series is, sometimes unexpectedly, an opportunity for women to engage with their husbands and children. I had previously heard about an occurrence between Olivia and her teenage son, Ryan, from Cindy in which he wanted to give a copy of the *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* DVD to a woman. I later asked Olivia if she would tell me more about the story:

> *The night of the DVD release, we left and Cindy had given Ryan her credit card for him to take April and Ben [children of Cindy and*
Bethany] to a movie...I was exhausted, I had been up since 5am and...we
got home and Ryan went 'Gasp! Momma I have Ms. Cindy's credit card!'
And I said 'Well, let's turn around and go back right now and you go find
her.' So he goes in and he takes her her credit card. Well, at that point it
was almost midnight and I said to him, 'If I gave you my card, would you
go in and get me the movie?' And he said, 'Yes, ma'am.' So I dropped him
off and I waited and he comes out and he had this look on his face, I knew
that something wasn't quite settling with him. And we turned around and
we drove out of the parking lot and all of the sudden he says to me
'Momma, there was...a lady in front of me and she turned around and said
'Oh is that the newest movie?' And I said 'Yes, ma'am it is.' And...she said
'Oh' and she turned around.' And he said, 'Momma she turned around and
I heard her say 'Oh well, I can't afford that right now'...And he said to
me,...'Momma if I could, I would go back and buy her the movie.' As
exhausted as I was and as much as I wanted to get home, I knew that that
was a point in his life where he was wanting to do something good for
somebody. So I said to him 'Is that what you want to do?...As Christians, I
said is that what the Lord is leading you to do?' And he said 'Yes ma'am it
is.' So I said 'Ok. Let's go. Do you remember what she looks like?' He
said, 'Oh yes, ma'am' So I spun around, got back up there, dropped him
off...He runs in and I said 'Just pick me up another one'. Well, then that
sweet baby comes back out and he said 'Momma, the first movie rang up
for $14.96, he said but this one rang up for $17.96. I said it's ok...But
anyway, I said 'What happened?' And he said 'I just walked up to her and I handed her the bag and I said 'Here ma'am, I want you to have this.' And he said she looked at him and said 'What?' And he said 'It's ok. I'm going to get another one.' And he said that she grabbed him and hugged him and he said 'Momma...I could just tell she just didn't have a lot.' And I said, 'Well, you probably made her night.' You know, so with all the things that our teenagers now are known for, I'm glad that that is something that he did on his own without me coaxing him into it or anything...Then I called Cindy and I said 'Not only have we always done this since he was little, but I think him being a part of everything that we have done and seeing everything and all of the stuff that is brought in for charity'...I mean he helped me organize that trunkload of stuff...Cindy likes for everything to be counted. So I had to, in my driveway, lay out all the shampoos, lay out all the soaps...and count everything. He helped me organize that and he knew where it was going. So I just think that the fact that between the way that we've raised him and witnessing what we've done as an organization, he just knew that that's what he wanted to do. And I wasn't going to, if he was lead to do that...I wasn't going to let a little bit of tiredness stand in my way or a little bit of cheapness either because I'm the one that paid for it. But anyway, so that's what he did...He's a good kid.

This story is significant in several aspects regarding the ways in which it relates to my discussion of Twilight and charitable actions. Ryan, a teenage boy who played football,
exhibited a high level of awareness in this situation and displayed a desire to want to help another person, even in a small way. Olivia, familiar with giving back, was extremely tired both from staying up for the DVD release party and from helping to prepare for it earlier in the week. However, while some people may take a path of least resistance and continue driving home or assume the woman had left the store, Olivia recognized an opportunity to encourage her son to want to help others. Olivia provided Ryan with the opportunity and means for this particular interaction, but the onus was on Ryan to convey the situation in the first place, tell his mother what he wanted, and then act upon the decision to go find the woman and give her the movie. Crediting part of the influence to Esme's Heart and a participation in their events, Olivia believed that witnessing and helping with the organization's activities beneficially influenced Ryan. Thus, in this situation, the *Twilight* fandom and its charitable activities both help those they raise money and goods for, but also act as a bond between a mother and son and create opportunities for a teenager to learn ways in which to give back.

Olivia and her husband raised Ryan to be a conscientious person. Ryan participated in Esme's Heart charity events over the last few years, but he was also exposed to giving back from a young age by his mother. Olivia credited a combination of this childhood influence and experiencing the Esme's Heart charity events as a teenager as the reason why Ryan was more attuned to feeling fortunate and wanting to help others. Olivia explained:

> Ryan has a very sweet heart and we have from very early on, because my mother works at a children's home, we have from very early on taught him about giving back. I remember when he was little,...we
would go into his room and I would say 'Ryan, now we need to go through your toys and we need to give some toys away to some children who don't have any.' And it was not always about giving away the stuff we didn't play with. Because I can disregard any old thing if I don't have an attachment to it then I'm not really doing anything, I'm not really sacrificing anything... There was a time where, I remember coming home and I got a phone call from my mom that... the agency had just dropped off three kids on Christmas Eve and they had nothing. Nothing. So we ran to Walmart and we got gifts and I let Ryan pick everything. And for him that was so much fun. Another time we got a phone call where some kids had been dropped off, they again had nothing, and the stock room at the children's home was low... Ryan went into his room and we got up two tubs full of stuff and... the thing that stood out in his mind was when we walked in and gave the tubs of stuff, and we turned around and walked out, the kids were playing board games. And for him that sat with him because he had the Xbox or the Playstations or the whatever. We didn't sit around and play board games. He thought for them that was the most excitement that they had. So it was a way for him to kind of go 'Hmm. I do have things ok.' I think the latest saying right now for teenagers is 'I hate my life.' I don't know what that whole thing is about, it's just supposed to be something funny, but I don't find it comical at all. Because most of them have it so much better. I don't believe Ryan would ever post anything like that because that's just not how we raised him... The organization [Esme's
Heart] has helped him to get a lot of his community service hours in that have to be met for school. And now that he's driving he can do it in other avenues, but when he wasn't driving I had to find ways that around my work schedule and my husband's work schedule that we could get him to these things. So for the last couple of years he's just done everything with me whether it was picking up trash on Peake Road or helping with a blood drive.

In this narrative, Olivia identified that charity and giving back was not new to her family in general. Her mother worked for a children's home and Olivia frequently helped the home when they were in need. From early on, Olivia encouraged Ryan to help give back as well. What is striking is the comment Olivia makes about sacrifice and understanding that for an item to truly be meaningful and be missed, it must first mean something to you. Instead of simply encouraging Ryan to give away old toys, Olivia taught him that sometimes it is the things you like the most that need to be donated to others. The night of the DVD release party when Ryan wanted to give the movie to the woman at the store was a turning point in Olivia's opinion for him because it signified a step he wanted to take on his own to do something nice for a stranger. Olivia's identity as a mother is inextricably connected to all parts of her life and, as such, she used the Esme's Heart events as a convenient way to continue to teach her son about giving back. Olivia believed that it was not only the way Ryan was raised as a child, but specifically attending Esme's Heart events as a teenager, participating in the work, and seeing the donations that has solidified the awareness to help others. Esme's Heart members often say that no act of kindness is too small and while giving a DVD to a stranger may not be
the most expensive or time consuming act of charity, it was a teenage boy recognizing a situation and wanting to help someone else. If it is in the daily routines and small acts that we find the disruptions to gender stereotypes (see Butler 2004), then it is moments like this one created by Ryan that help create positive change.

I want to clarify that not all the women who participate heavily in the charitable activities of Esme's Heart are stay-at-home mothers. Many have regular, full-time jobs and families that take up a majority of their time. Thus, I want to emphasize that it is not out of boredom that motivates many of these women to participate in the organization's philanthropic events, but a desire to give back and help others through their love of *Twilight*. Just as identity categories are not fractured and separate, women in Esme's Heart and other *Twilight* groups do not keep their personal identification with the role of motherhood distinct from their activities within the organization. While some may participate in the fan group as a way to take a break from their children – a theme I heard jokingly stated numerous times – there is not a true divide from this aspect of their lives. If it is the tendency for adult female fans of *Twilight* to be mothers and caretakers that influences them to want to give back to the community when gathering as a group and this is the root of understanding the charitable actions of the organizations, then the *Twilight* series becomes unique in the way that it draws in adult female fans due to their nostalgia for first love, but then mobilizes them as mothers with the goal of giving back to the community. In this way, the series mobilizes and draws in fans through multiple ways as it forges connections with identity categories and notions of what these identities mean to the people involved.
5.5 Social Movements and Fan Activism

The increasing attention to social movements and the ways in which people are mobilizing to enact change in the world articulates the need for research to understand these trends. I will address the concept of social movements in its more traditional sense and identify the increasing trend of fan-generated activism. I articulate these concepts as a way to situate Esme’s Heart and the philanthropic actions of the *Twilight* community within a larger context of social change. While members of Esme’s Heart did not identify their actions as specific activism, the traditional definition of activism is taking “intentional action to challenge existing hegemonies and provoke political and/or social change” (Brough and Shresthova 2012:2.2), which describes the group’s goal to raise awareness and help causes in their local community in an effort to positively impact people.

Activist culture is often viewed as problematic due to the issue of white privilege and some groups dissolve due to the tensions over race and class (Graeber 2009:241). When attempting to challenge social inequality, the people with the capacity to get involved are often the ones who are not in the most need for the change. Graeber comments, “Those on the bottom, who have the most reason to want to challenge such inequalities, will also tend to have the most restricted range of weapons at their disposal with which to do so. Inevitably, this causes endless moral dilemmas for those whose privilege actually allows them to rebel” (Graeber 2009:245). In this regard, Esme’s Heart does operate from a privileged standpoint in an effort to help others in their community. While not activists or revolutionaries in comparison to other groups, Esme’s Heart strives to make a difference and encourage awareness, such as through their work with Wesley
Glen, a community for people with disabilities. While most of the women I encountered were white, there was a range of class backgrounds amongst them and the opinion of Esme’s Heart that no act or donation was too small made women with lesser financial means still feel valued and included. In this way, the group of Esme’s Heart is able to bridge class divides in a small way and bring together people of varying socioeconomic classes for the enjoyment of *Twilight* and giving back in an amount that the giver is able. However, I want to articulate that being a member of the fandom indicates some level of economic stability and, while they would be welcomed, the cost associated with the group may be prohibitive to those living near or below the poverty level. The capacity to go out to dinner, attend movies, purchase books, and have internet access are simply a portion of the activities engaged in by group members. While not all events must be attended, the ability to frequently participate in events would indicate a level of economic stability. Thus, while there were varying levels of socioeconomic status among the women of Esme’s Heart, I do want to articulate that those of lower economic means in the group were still able to spend money on pleasurable activities.

While Esme’s Heart is not specifically a faith-based organization, the group emphasizes the moral message in the *Twilight* series as part of their foundation. The ability of faith-based organizations to benefit communities is recognized and “some commentators have gone even further, suggesting that the future of civil society in America will depend on the role of faith-based organizations” (Kemper 2006:143). While right-wing and conservative movements to change the social order are less frequently addressed (Edelman 2001), Faye Ginsburg (1998[1989]) articulates that to be right-wing is to support the state in its endeavor to maintain social order, but to oppose the state in
the role of redistributing wealth and power amongst society in a more equitable fashion. In this perspective, it is the role of the community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide assistance to people in need, not the state. Many women in Esme’s Heart expressed conservative views and the importance of ‘doing good’ and giving back to your local community. NGOs are often seen as groups that can help local communities because they are unburdened by politics or the market, but this is an idealized perspective of ‘doing good’ (Fisher 1997). While NGOs have the capacity to help, their use can also contribute to continued larger issues as the NGOs combat localized problems often without addressing the structural or political solution (Fisher 1997). These organizations are still susceptible to government regulation though as many are registered as non-profits and are encased within a certain model of society (Graeber 2009:284). However, despite regulations, through micropractices and the restructuring of the social order beneath the state and market, NGOs and their endeavors can trigger change and undermine traditional foundations (Fisher 1997:457). Esme’s Heart members promote random acts of kindness as a way to encourage people to help others, even in small ways. Thus, these acts of kindness can be viewed as a form of micropractices within the local community in an effort to enact change.

The internet becomes a form of connectivity that enables both fans and activists to interact and mobilize around movements (see Bennett 2012, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Zhang 2014). While some celebrities utilize the internet and their fans to encourage people to support their preferred cause (Bennett 2012), many fan communities engage in activism through more grassroots methods. Additionally, the use of social media helps pull in a younger generation (Brough and Shresthova 2012) and, for some youths, this is
their first engagement with civic participation (Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012). With the convergence of imagination, cultural consumption, and social engagement, the use of social media for fan activism is increasingly frequent as fandom intersects with civic action (Bennett 2012). Thus, “fan groups may organize around real-world issues through extended engagement with and appropriation of popular culture content. Fan activism can thus also be understood as fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content” (Brough and Shresthova 2012:2.3). Through these activities, fans become engaged in social movements that intersect with and utilize the popularity of popular cultural texts.

While fans and consumers are sometimes viewed as passive receivers of media messages, there is not a predetermined definition that designates fans as passive or resistive. Rather, it is negotiated both on an individual and community level, which can result in networked individualism and collective action (Brough and Shresthova 2012). How then do these fan activist communities arise? Using the Harry Potter Alliance as a case study, three common themes were identified that “may be common to many manifestations of fan activism: shared media experiences, a sense of community, and a wish to help” (Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012:1.5). Identifying the themes within fan activism is important as it allows for a better mapping of the trend and understanding of the ways in which these practices can be situated within other social movement patterns. In understanding why some fan communities begin engaging in social actions, it becomes apparent that their success in part draws on an already existing network of people with a common interest:
The HPA... builds on an existing fandom, one that already thrives on media experiences and a sense of community that its members share around a common text. The organization channels these powerful experiences in inspiring its members to social action around a variety of different causes. Members’ wish to help may come from different sources, but it may also be created through their involvement with the organization.

(Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012:6.5)

The passion and enthusiasm for a cultural text is then mobilized into social action by community members. Esme’s Heart developed initially as a group of adult women who desired to see the theatrical release of a movie with fellow fans their own age. Upon seeing the interest level and enthusiasm of the participants, the founding members identified this as an opportunity to operationalize a large group with a common interest with positive outcomes for others through charity.

I want to articulate that while fan activists endeavor to ‘do good’ works, not all members identify their actions in terms of the ‘activist’ verbiage. The women of Esme’s Heart did not use the term ‘activism’ in relation to their charitable goals. While attempts to enact change in terms of politics, environmental protection, or oppression are more commonly viewed as activism, the goal to make a difference or to participate in civic engagement with the intention to positively improve people’s lives is also a form of social change that can be understood under the traditional definition of activism. However, the term activism is ideologically loaded with politics that some fans wish to distance themselves from: “Many fans have resisted efforts to bring politics into fandom, seeing their fan activities as a release form the pressures of everyday life, or preferring the term
charity rather than the more overtly political term activism to describe their pro-social efforts” (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012:1.9, emphasis in original). I address this to underscore the importance of the perspective of the people involved in the fan communities and their interpretation of their actions. However, as the trend of fan activism increases and the research surrounding social movements continues, there is an opportunity for a better understanding of the relationship between communities and the catalyst for civic engagement. This is not to say that all fan communities will engage in charitable activities, but in understanding the ones that successfully mobilize a community to ‘do good’, it can provide an additional layer to the research surrounding social movements.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I illustrated some of the key themes that contribute to the charitable actions of the Twilight community. Two themes that arose concerning the ways in which Twilight fan groups lean toward a propensity for charitable activities were the topics of morality and gender. Research participants identified the moral themes within the Twilight series as a reason why they both enjoyed the story and then wanted to help others through the franchise. Furthermore, participants articulated that they were “natural caretakers” through their roles as women and mothers, which increases the propensity for helping others through fandom philanthropy. These are also two themes, which were cited as reasons for the increased enjoyment of the Twilight series and triggered women to become such avid fans.

Thus, I argue that the Twilight fan community has a theme for conducting charity through interest in the franchise due, in large part, to the profile of the fan the series
draws in and the ensuing habitus they deploy. If fans are heavily identifying with the moral and motherly themes in the series, then the type of individual that becomes captivated by the story and joins a fan group is predisposed to wanting to enact habitus and contribute to charity and, as such, the community is in many ways self-selecting participants that will feel a desire to help others through their moral and caretaking experiences. As Esme’s Heart and the *Twilight* fandom are situated within a larger trend of fan activism and social movements, understanding the themes and underpinnings of why these women engaged in charity through fandom will help further articulate the overall leaning toward activism through cultural texts.
CHAPTER 6

TWILIGHT AND THE INTERNET: THE USE OF VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGIES

If only I could be struck by lightning and be split in two. Preferably painfully. For the first time, giving up being human felt like a true sacrifice. Like it might be too much to lose.

Bella Swan, Eclipse1

The relationship between the virtual and the human is not a ‘post’ relationship where one term displaces another; it is a relationship of coconstitution. Far from it being the case that virtual worlds herald the emergence of the posthuman…I argue that it is in being virtual that we are human. Virtual worlds reconfigure selfhood and sociality, but this is only possible because they rework the virtuality that characterizes human being in the actual world.

Tom Boellstorff2

6.1 Introduction

As I write this dissertation, I often reflect back on my own early years as a ‘fan’ and the ways in which I grappled with methods to satisfy my seemingly insatiable hunger for more of a cultural text and a desire to feel a connection. In the late 1990s, I was a teenager with a fascination for Buffy: The Vampire Slayer. I simultaneously sought to hide this while desiring to find others who felt similarly. I vividly remember the painful wait as the computer would connect to the internet through the dial-up connection and the distinct sound of the modem as it forged the connection. Our sole computer was located in the very public family room and I recall spending hours on it, much to my parents chagrin, taking up the phone line and hoping I wouldn’t get disconnected. I would search

for *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* forums and fanfiction. Many of these websites were privately hosted via Tripod or other similar website builders. I would stay up late typing up my plot theories for the show, posting them online, and saving fanfiction in Word documents so I could read them while ‘offline’ from the internet. For a long time these websites were my private sanctuary where I felt safe and accepted. A majority of the websites are no longer active and I experienced a feeling of unexpected sadness when I realized this years ago. While many things have changed in the last fifteen to twenty years with the internet and technology, a common theme remains in that the internet remains a powerful tool for people to locate other fans.

As mentioned during the narratives of the ways in which participants located a *Twilight* fan group, many people cited the internet as the way they located other fans. Many women formed relationships with others online that resulted in meaningful, substantive friendships. Some of these friendships were followed up with in person meetings, either organized on the individual level or through attendance at fan group events, such as those held by Esme’s Heart. People have varying experiences with the internet and the *Twilight* fandom, but most cited it as a useful and convenient way to connect with other fans. The literature and breadth of research studies3 surrounding online activities and groups is growing as the connection between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ continues to become more intertwined and pervasive.

The goal of this chapter is to articulate the ways in which members of the *Twilight* community are utilizing technology and how these experiences are conceptualized. Are

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online interactions as equally valid as in person communication to participants and do these formats intersect for members? In what ways has the internet created both positive and negative aspects for the Twilight fan community? Furthermore, as the hype of the franchise ends, what role will the internet play as a form of socialty for the remaining fans?

6.2 Internet Usage: How Esme’s Heart Communicates Online

Before articulating in more depth about the experiences participants have online and their positive or negative aspects, I want to first provide an overview of the ways in which Esme’s Heart and members of the Twilight fandom communicate online. While I am unable to cover the entire range of online communication methods, my intention is to highlight a sample in an effort to express the variety of ways the internet is utilized. As mentioned previously, during my research period I witnessed a shift from traditional, private websites to a more social media-centered focus. For example, I previously commented that TwilightMOMS.com closed their website and relocated it to social media avenues, such as Facebook and Twitter. Esme’s Heart still maintains their private website4 as a way to host information, but a majority of their online activity occurs through social media, which their private website displays links to at the bottom of the page. This online migration is increasingly commonplace as even businesses are now utilizing social media as a way to reach people. While more traditional websites require users to make the effort to visit them, once a user ‘likes’ or ‘follows’ a business or organization through Facebook or Twitter, the information then flows to the user more organically in their daily life through a newsfeed or aggregated homepage without the necessitation of an extra step or website visit.

The internet is a powerful communication tool for fan communities and enables people to quickly bridge geographic differences. I previously mentioned the truck Bella uses in the first *Twilight* movie was used for the *Eclipse* movie premiere event. As Cindy researched other *Twilight* groups online, she found a woman from Texas who was also doing charity work through the *Twilight* fandom:

_She was doing the same kind of charity events and had gotten early screenings. So I was emailing back and forth, I’ve yet to meet her, but I was asking her like ‘How did you do this? How did you do that?’ She’s the one that made it able for us...[to get] the truck that was in Twilight. We had the truck at our Eclipse event. We had it trailered in from Texas and brought here for our screening and it was just the most awesome thing._

In this situation, basic internet use via emailing enabled Cindy to communicate with a fellow fan in Texas and organize the transportation of Bella’s truck to Georgia for an Esme’s Heart event, which generated a lot of excitement among members and raised funds for charity. Emails blasts are a way that Esme’s Heart frequently communicates with its members. Utilizing Constant Contact⁵, the board will send out information to people about upcoming group events and general organization updates, such as new board members. In this way, *Twilight* fans use the internet to communicate with each other, generate ideas for events, and strive to do a good job with their fundraisers and group events. Olivia commented that the author of *Confessions of a TwilightMOM* would post pictures online that inspired and challenged Esme’s Heart:

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⁵ Constant Contact is an email, social, and event marketing solution service, which is available at http://www.constantcontact.com/.
[The woman] who wrote Confessions of a TwilightMOM, would post these pictures of the fun stuff that they were having. Their fun events and their little appetizers and how they spun off of every little, you know, and everybody wanted to be Alice Perfect. You know, everything had to have the twinkling lights and the pinks and the champagnes.

In this situation, visual depictions of events and the level of effort from other fan groups motivated members of Esme’s Heart to strive for ‘Alice Perfect’ status, which is a reference to the Twilight character, Alice, who was a detailed perfectionist throughout the series. The connectivity of the internet allows Twilight fans of different groups to easily communicate with each other, share ideas and images, and even facilitate the acquisition of items, such as the truck, that may have previously been unavailable.

Esme’s Heart maintains an active online presence with their private website and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Pinterest. The private website was updated periodically, but it remained primarily the same and was a hub of information about the group and contained links to Esme’s Heart on social media. While a lot of the information hosted on the private website, Facebook page, and Pinterest site are similar, it is often grouped in different ways to help the user navigate based on the platform.
Due to the various formats of the social media platforms, Esme’s Heart uses them in different ways. The Pinterest page, primarily visual, is grouped by ‘boards’ that state the type of event or topic so that visitors can more easily navigate the information and, if desired, pin it to their own board.

It is on the Facebook page for Esme’s Heart that posts and communication become even more interactive. Esme’s Heart uses Facebook for a variety of reasons, such as communicating with members, posting images of events, asking questions, and playing games. While many of these activities are *Twilight* related, their online posts are not always related to the franchise. However, as most are mothers, a focused effort is made to keep all posts ‘kid friendly’.

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The image above is an example of the non-
Twilight posts that Esme’s Heart will share. As
most members of the group are mothers and their participation is, in part, an effort to
have time separate from their role as a caretaker, this image correlates to this idea as it
depicts the lack of privacy and personal time caretakers of children experience. Thus,
images such as these communicate to women that others share similar experiences.

Esme’s Heart also posted interactive topics, such as ‘online trivia’ and asking
questions. These activities were done as a way to draw people in and keep them
interested in the Esme’s Heart Facebook page. Often these contests include prizes and
require the winner to be the first to respond correctly. In this regard, the contest favors the
person who was attentive to the group’s Facebook activity as notifications about the game
and when it will be played are communicated in advance through Facebook.

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The above game required participants to visually recognize a character from the *Twilight* series and respond quickly to the post with their answer. As seen above, three people responded at the same minute with the correct answer, Aro. However, only one prize is awarded and Esme’s Heart selected the response that was posted first. These contests are not limited to active members of Esme’s Heart and are geared toward cultivating an online presence. Another online activity the group frequently played was a trivia game in which a topic is picked and then several questions are asked. The player with the most correct responses then wins that night’s trivia game and is awarded a prize. The trivia topics are frequently connected to the *Twilight* series, but other topics are also chosen, such as the 1980s was the theme for one trivia game.

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The questions sometimes require a very detailed knowledge of the series, such as with the above question. The goal was to make the game a slight challenge and not simply ask easy questions. While this may limit the number of respondents, it makes the game more interesting for those involved because they must respond quickly to answer before others and be first, which may lead to errors. Just as the trivia game was played publically on the Esme’s Heart Facebook page, they also announced the winner on the page with a reminder of future games.

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While trivia was fun for those participating, the multiple posts and comments did cause a lot of activity in the newsfeed for people who had ‘liked’ Esme’s Heart on Facebook. After several trivia nights when the group lost ‘likes’\(^{11}\), the Esme’s Heart board considered ending the trivia games, which they eventually did cease later. Thus, not all online activity was continued and Esme’s Heart continued to learn and adapt as needed.

While many of these online games and questions involve prizes, some questions are asked for fun and to poll people to find out their opinions. For example, the below question was posed in between the release of *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2*:

![Figure 6.6 Esme's Heart Facebook poll\(^{12}\)](image)

At the end of *Breaking Dawn: Part 1*, Bella is transformed into a vampire. Before her transformation, Edward gifted her with a car that was extraordinarily safe in an effort to protect her. Upon her transformation Bella was practically indestructible and, as such, she then drove a more fun, less ‘safe’ car. Thus, these interactive posts are often timely and connected in an effort to keep people interested.


\(^{11}\) At the time in May of 2013, Nicole was one of the board members running trivia and she told me they were down to 677 Facebook page likes. She commented that the Facebook page had lost ‘likes’ the day after trivia occurred several times. In December of 2014, the likes have risen to 759, which is still lower than the group’s all time high of 1500 when the movies were still being released.

The goals of fun and maintaining interest were not the only online activities Esme’s Heart engages in. The group also uses the internet as a way to foster and grow their charitable work. Esme’s Heart set up an iGive\textsuperscript{13} account as a way to easily encourage people to support the organization. Users must set up an account on iGive and select Esme’s Heart or their preferred charity. Then when you shop online and navigate to a website, iGive will pop up and ask you to confirm if you would like to enable the donation of a portion of the purchase amount, in this case 1.6%.

![Figure 6.7 iGive pop-up window](image.png)

Users can then view their activity on the iGive website, which tracks the purchases and amount donated. This is a relatively easy way to contribute to a charitable organization of your choice while completing a purchase that people would likely make regardless and does not cost an extra amount. For example, I purchased a gift on Kohl’s website for $19.99 and, from that order, $0.32 was donated to Esme’s Heart.

![Figure 6.8 iGive donation information\textsuperscript{14}](image.png)

Esme’s Heart posted on Facebook on a frequent basis about the iGive donation option to remind members of an easy way to support the organization and their charitable work. In this context, Esme’s Heart was utilizing the internet as a way to help fund their charitable work.

\textsuperscript{13} iGive is a website that coordinates with online sellers, such as Amazon or Kohl’s, to have a percentage of the purchase donated to a charity of the buyer’s choice if the charity has an iGive account.

activities through receiving donations that do not cost people extra money. Rather, through a donation of time and remembering to enable the donation button, people were able to electronically support Esme’s Heart.

Esme’s Heart also used websites to raise money for specific events, such as a raffle held at the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie premiere. The group sold raffle tickets online\textsuperscript{15} for a chance to win a trip to Forks, Washington, which is where the Twilight series takes place. By selling the raffle tickets online, Esme’s Heart was able to open it up to a wide range of people. The proceeds of the raffle were divided equally between a young Forks resident with lymphoma and the Foundation for America’s Blood Centers. This attempt to reach people outside the usual boundaries of their group was a goal of the Esme’s Heart board, which was successful as a woman from Kentucky won the prize.

Olivia described the raffle drawing the night of the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie event:

\begin{quote}
Having the contest for the Win a Trip to Forks, I mean, a girl from Kentucky won that…I had so many people say to me 'How disappointing was that?...We were all standing there under the tent waiting for one of our names to be announced and it was a lady from Kentucky?' But that's how we had to do it in order to go national.
\end{quote}

Olivia’s reference to ‘go national’ means to expand Esme’s Heart beyond the middle Georgia area and their current members. In an effort to raise more money for the beneficiaries, the Esme’s Heart board wanted to reach this national level and encourage everyone interested to purchase raffle tickets regardless of geographic location.

\textsuperscript{15} For this raffle, Esme’s Heart utilized the eventbrite website: http://www.eventbrite.com/e/esmes-heart-charity-raffle-win-a-trip-to-forks-wa-home-of-twilight-tickets-3714993646.
While this was a small sampling of the online activities in which Esme’s Heart engages, my goal is to articulate that the organization employed a variety of methods in an effort to reach its members and beyond. Beyond the scope of their members, Esme’s Heart communicated online in the hope to update people and reach new people that may not be located within their geographic proximity. Some events, such as the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie premiere, are physical events that are easier for local people to attend, while the online activities have an opportunity to reach a wider audience.

6.3 The Good and the Bad: Experiences with the Internet and Twilight

While many participants commented on the positive aspects, to state that the internet is universally beneficial to the Twilight community is a false statement as not all online experiences are pleasant. The internet is not an idealistic space in which people are able to interact without the restrictions of in person stereotypes and preconceived notions. While some use it as a way to find others with similar tastes, the pathways work for non-fans as well and enable anti-Twilight people to hone in on fans online. However, despite some of these negative encounters, which I will discuss further, many people still viewed the internet as having helped the Twilight community more so than it has hurt.

The internet provides a place for fans to locate each other and share their own cultural productions, such as fanfiction. The mention of fanfiction was commonplace as I spoke with participants and many of them exchanged story recommendations. People enjoy fanfiction for a variety of reasons and the internet helps fans to locate stories for their preferred fandom. For example, Cora, a mother in her thirties, commented: “Look at fanfiction.net and there’s so many stories on there and…I’ll read them…I like seeing people’s different takes and what they would do with the characters…[but] I don’t
envision Edward and Bella per se from the movies when I read them”. For Cora, Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson are not the visualizations she pictures when reading. Instead, she borrowed the depiction from the graphic novels that she feels is a more accurate portrayal of Stephenie Meyer’s characters; the image of which she pulled up on her iPad to show me:

![Figure 6.9 Graphic novel depiction of Edward and Bella](image)

Fanfiction is a way for fans to experience a different perspective with the characters and series. Sometimes, such as in Cora’s situation, the mental visualization while reading fanfiction is not linked to the movie franchise, but instead to a different image of the characters. When I finished reading the series, I was also drawn to the expansive and prolific fanfiction created by the fans. Some of these stories became so popular that it motivated the authors to attempt to publish them, which for *50 Shades of Grey* (James 2011), originally a *Twilight* fanfiction, was successful. Cindy was appreciative of the plethora of fanfiction because she had trouble letting go of the series once she finished

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the books. The list of new books to read piled up on her ebook reader, but Cindy found herself unable to let go of *Twilight* just yet. Esme’s Heart shared an amusing image about having a ‘book hangover’ on their Facebook page that describes the trouble Cindy experienced when trying to read other books after finishing the *Twilight* series.

Based on the recommendation from a friend, Cindy started reading fanfiction in an effort to combat the ‘book hangover’ she was experiencing since she was unable to feign interest in other books at the time. Cindy described,

> I was so depressed after the books were done...I mean I needed something to read and...nothing was good. I mean everything I picked up I’d go ‘Ugh, that’s not Twilight. Ugh, that’s not...keeping my attention. I don’t like this.’ And so I turned to fanfiction because somebody else had mentioned a story and I read it and I was like ‘[gasp] I’m back in my world again!’...I was happy again, you know? I was not depressed. I had more of my addiction I could read, you know! And so I would keep trying to find more and more fanfiction. And some that I’d read I’d go ‘Ugh, ok

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that was just a waste.’ But at least I was in my little world of Edward and Bella.

For Cindy, fanfiction became a way for her to remain in ‘her’ world of Twilight, even if some of the stories were not the best quality. This cultural production and sharing amongst fans was a positive aspect for many as it allows them to easily seek out new stories about their favorite characters and remain captivated even when the book series is completed. The fantasy aspect of the series is then extended, almost indefinitely, as readers can continue to navigate new storylines at their convenience.

The positive aspects of the internet for the Twilight community are not limited to personal, individual pleasures. The internet has made organizing group events vastly easier, which Esme’s Heart takes full advantage of. Once the board of Esme’s Heart determines the activities calendar for the group, Cindy and the social media team – Cora and Nicole – make sure the events are created and distributed to members. These invites included the information of when and where the event would be held and notify members as to what donations were being collected. For example, in the invite below, members are able to quickly see that the event is at the AmStar movie theater and donations will be collected for the Ronald McDonald House.

![Figure 6.11 Esme’s Heart Facebook event](19 Esme’s Heart’s Facebook page, accessed December 10, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/EsmesHeart.)
While this may seem logical, the importance of maintaining a schedule and sending people concrete information is important. For Chloe, a mother of twins in her thirties, having events on the calendar is a must and it’s a practice of Esme’s Heart which she appreciated:

To have these meetings where it’s…a very scheduled thing, and it’s just like ‘We can do that.’ I mean…if it can be put on a calendar, I can do that. And that’s why I love that Cindy is mostly organized. You know, she’s…very organized and she’s big about getting things on a calendar. Create a Facebook event, do something…And I live by that kind of stuff…if it’s not on a calendar or schedule, it doesn’t exist in my world…So being able to schedule girltime…it’s…only once a month. Is that so much to ask of yourself? To give up a couple of hours once a month?

For Chloe, these events are necessary ‘girltime’ moments that she enjoys. Without the structure of a scheduled event, Chloe finds it a challenge to fit this personal time in for herself between working and caring for her family. In this way, the internet and its use by Esme’s Heart was important to members as it allows them to know when events are occurring and communicates specific information that can be documented on a calendar to ensure it is fit into their schedule.

Often fans were able to see both the positive and negative aspects of the internet due to their lived experiences as fans online. For Casey, a married woman in her twenties, she saw the benefit of the internet as it connects people and enabled her to be able to distinguish who was truly interested in the series:
I joined a Goodreads group too. It's fairly active... It's easier to tell who really likes it [Twilight] and is still interested... To me if someone is still blogging about Twilight, it means something important to them, cause they take time out of their day even if the movies are over and even if there's never another book. And I still care cause I look at them, so we're connected by our long-lasting Twilightness... It wasn't just a fad for them.

Through Goodreads and Facebook, Casey met several online Twilight friends that were located in California and Asia, which she enjoyed because it gave her an opportunity to converse with people from different geographic areas: “I love meeting Twilight people from other countries they’re usually very sweet and I learn stuff about their area... What people do for fun is not much different than me”. However, just as Casey is able to locate Twilight fans online, people who dislike the series were able to identify fans as well.

Casey commented, “As with all fandoms, it leads to trolls\(^{20}\) and haters visiting the sites”. In this case, the internet has helped Casey meet other fans and build friendships, but also enabled ‘trolls’ to locate and make comments directed toward Twilight fans.

Similar to Casey, Elaine, a woman in her thirties, saw both positive and frustrating aspects when using the internet as a Twilight fan. Elaine utilized a variety of methods to interact with other members of Esme’s Heart, such as via Facebook, email, phone calls or texts, and in person events. Elaine identified the theme of forging connections as the main way the internet has helped the Twilight fan community: “I think it has helped tremendously with connectivity... It makes connecting with people much easier and more widespread”. However, Elaine also had negative experiences online in relation to her

\(^{20}\) Internet trolls are commonly defined as people who post inflammatory, often absurd or even untrue, statements online with the intent of creating disharmony and upsetting people.
enthusiasm for *Twilight*. What frustrated Elaine is the lack of regard shown by those that do not care for *Twilight* and the way in which they seem unwillingly to let it go.

*A lot of times it doesn’t bother me…but sometimes it really gets under my skin just because they’re comparing apples and oranges really. You know they’re totally different. So many people point out how Katniss Everdeen and Hermione and Eowyn and other such characters are so much better characters…It’s not the same thing. You know what I mean? They’re not in the same circumstances and…I don’t know that they’re stronger characters…I think that’s very apples and oranges. They’re just, they’re different. And I really dislike when people say ‘Oh, those [books] shouldn’t even be literature…’ And I’m just like ‘I’m pretty sure that everybody has their own, everybody should be allowed to have their own taste and I don’t knock someone who likes to read Stephen King who I cannot stand. You know?…I don’t like that dark stuff…but I don’t tell them they’re ignorant and that their books are stupid and I don’t like belittle them for their [taste] …It gets old. Especially on Pinterest…because I follow a lot of the book pins and I get so tired of seeing those…Actually I have stopped following certain people because they post so much of that…I’m like ‘Ok, I get it if you make a funny every now and then, but let’s move on’.*

The people Elaine encountered online are not specifically taunting *her* for her enjoyment of *Twilight*. Rather, they were simply posting pictures and items for general consumption of those that follow them on Pinterest. After enough anti-*Twilight* posts, some fans, such
as Elaine, would become frustrated with the perceived lack of respect and cease following the person online. Just as some fans are not yet ‘done’ with the *Twilight* series, neither are some dissenters. Similarly to Elaine’s discussion, I saw this post in my Facebook newsfeed in December of 2014, which was slightly confounding to me as the *Twilight* franchise ended in 2012 with the final movie release.

![Figure 6.12 Anti-*Twilight* meme](image)

Occurrences such as these articulate that the series still generates a depth of feeling, amongst fans and dissenters alike, in that a seemingly random anti-*Twilight* post was made two years after the final movie release. While the picture depicts a photoshopped image from the *Star Wars* franchise, the words are predominantly geared toward displaying a disregard for the *Twilight* series and end with a reminder that *Star Wars* is better than *Twilight*. While I did not unfriend and continued to follow my old college friend, I find it interesting that the valuation of a texts’ cultural capital is frequently

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debated in opposition to another in an effort to place a higher value on one of the commodities.

Danielle, a woman in her forties, has also encountered negative experiences online in regards to the *Twilight* series. Unlike Elaine and myself, Danielle was directly confronted online by someone she had known for a long time about her status as a *Twilight* fan. Danielle commented,

*I put something on Facebook, ‘Oh, you know, the second movie came out. It was so great...’ And somebody was really rude, one of my friends who I’ve known for a long time...[He wrote] ‘Don’t tell me you’re one of those middle-aged child molesters.’ I mean it was very detrimental and I blasted him... ‘Oh, let me tell you about my group! We have raised over $25,000, we have a hundred members,’ and I just wrote this big old long thing and it was pretty cool...I was like ‘Yeah! We’ve done all that!’ And I had a picture of the toys for Toys for Tots and the marines with all the stuff there...It was really cool. I was like ‘Yeah!’*

As I heard throughout the project, women did need to assert themselves at times and stand up for their status as a *Twilight* fan. Despite the charitable work done by Esme’s Heart, some people think all adult female *Twilight* fans are ‘cougars’ and, as Cora told me, “Every now and then you have to put somebody in their place”. Danielle’s enthusiasm as she told this story of how she stood for herself was palpable. However, this wasn’t simply a story of a fight in which both sides walked away angry. Danielle commented, “It’s funny and then somebody else posted on that...then the other guy [the man from the earlier story] went and said ‘No, don’t even go there with her. I already
found out all about it. It’s not what you think”. In this situation, not only was Danielle able to stand up for herself, but she was also able to help someone understand that not all adult female fans of the *Twilight* series are the exact representation of the popular ‘cougar’ stereotype.

There are many ways that the internet was both positive and negative for *Twilight* fans. My goal was to illustrate a selection of these experiences. A theme regarding the positivity of the internet for the *Twilight* fandom is its ability to connect fans and then enable them to organize events, make donations, and continue to experience the series through fanfiction. While the negative online experiences with ‘trolls’ or other anti-*Twilight* people do occur, people take precautions to either limit these interactions, confront the instigator, or just ignore them. Based on the friendships, charitable giving, and individual pleasurable consumption of online texts, many *Twilight* fans believe the internet has done more good than harm. Additionally, in some ways, the internet and its ability to forge connections with other fans can help people combat feelings of frustration when dealing with anti-*Twilight* comments.

**6.4 Fan ‘Pilgrimages’ and Connectivity**

Fans often feel a deep sense of connection to their preferred series, such as *Twilight*, and some have the desire to venture out and see the filming locations or other key events that are significant to their fandom. These ‘pilgrimages’ become topics that members discuss, even if they did not go themselves. Not all fans can afford to visit Forks, Washington and tour the setting of the *Twilight* series or travel to the filming locations of the movies in Vancouver, Canada. The internet and technology then becomes a way for them to share in the experience through pictures and other virtual platforms.
Cindy became friends online with the author of *Confessions of a TwilightMOM*, Andrea Hayes, after reading the book and reaching out via the internet. The two had only communicated online when they decided to visit Forks, Washington and Vancouver, Canada with two others: Bethany, Cindy’s friend, and Regina, Andrea’s friend. Cindy described,

Bethany and I ended up going to Forks for the first time Mother’s Day weekend...[in] 2010 with Andrea and Regina. Never met them. They're flying from Florida, we're flying from Atlanta and we're going to meet in the airport at Seattle...and I'm like going 'What if these are crazy Twilight people?'...Cause by this time we had seen some...and we're going like 'Well, they're probably thinking the same thing about us right now.' And our husbands were all thinking the same thing. It was so funny because they're like 'What if you get out there and these people are like nuts or whatever?'...We met them in the airport and it was just like kindred spirits. We all just had the best time. I mean we did Forks, we went to Vancouver and did the behind the scenes tour of all the locations they filmed...I mean we just had the best time and just became such great friends. Just meeting through our love of Twilight and being online.

It was through communicating online and forming a friendship that Cindy and Andrea decided to take the trip to visit the *Twilight* locations and experience it together. In this regard, the four women travelled to these locations on the other side of the United States as a form of fan tourism. Marc Auge distinguishes that “a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity” (Auge 1995:77). In opposition, he
describes that “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” which is a result of supermodernity and the lack of integration of earlier places (Auge 1995:77-78). The role of the tourist or traveller is described as “the archetype of non-place” (Auge 1995:86, emphasis in original). Through the focus on the destination and not the journey or history, Auge argues that most tourists occupy a non-place even when in the location because the history and context is stripped away from the site.

In some aspects, these fan ‘pilgrimages’ to locations, such as Forks, represent this concept of the non-place as the history that is being visited is a ‘new’ history as a result of the Twilight series. Furthermore, visiting filming locations can be considered as public expressions of identity (Couldry 2005:5). Through bridging the private experience of engaging a cultural text and the public place were it was filmed, fans experience connections that are “neither neutral nor trivial” (Couldry 2005:19). Cindy and her companions were passing through the space, which is characteristic of a non-place, in an effort to see the different locations of relevance to the series. Cindy described,

*I could show you spots where we were that were in [the movies],
like the breakup log. We were there, had our pictures taken and
then...where Victoria runs through the woods, that path. We found out
where Bella jumps off the cliff is actually in this park at a bridge. And it
just happens to have a rock cliff right over on the side and it was a perfect
shot...for them to shoot the rock cliff and then paint in...to make it look
like it went flat out in front of her...We went by the studios and went to the
high school that they used, not like the one they used in Twilight because
that was in...Oregon, Portland. But they were able to recreate almost that same look at a high school in Vancouver. So she took us by there and it was so fascinating.

In addition to visiting the locations, a key element is taking a picture as a form of a keepsake or verification that the experience occurred. These pictures can then be shared with fellow fans to share in the experience. The definition of a non-place is contentious and Auge even articulates that “places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of a non-place is never absent from any place” (Auge 1995:107). Thus, Auge argues that a shift needs to occur in which a tourist or passenger, who is defined by the destination, becomes a traveller that ‘strolls’ along the route. In this aspect, Cindy and her companions were travellers who sought out the locations and viewed the sites as places with history and meaning in relation to a topic that held intense emotional meaning to them. Nick Couldry refers to the occurrence of fans travelling to filming locations as media pilgrimages:

*Media pilgrimages are specifically journeys to points with significance in media narratives. Through media pilgrimages, not only is the abstract nature of the media production system ‘reembedded’ in an encounter, for example, with a site of filming or a celebrity, but the significance of places ‘in’ the media is more generally confirmed. The media pilgrimage is both a real journey across space, and an acting out in space of the constructed ‘distance’ between ‘ordinary world’ and ‘media world’. (Couldry 2005:23)
While these pilgrimages may be an imperfect occurrence as the previous history of the locations were not the focus, I argue that the experience, which was then shared, still crafts this situation as that of a traveller that is not relegated to the non-place while visiting filming locations or other sites of significance to series.

Another situation in which fans travelled to a location dedicated to the *Twilight* series was when Cindy and three other women from Esme’s Heart (Bethany, Karen, and Elaine) went to the red carpet event for *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* and camped out in ‘tent city’ with other *Twilight* fans in Los Angeles, California. Pictured below is an image of Cindy that was shared by the event attendees on the Esme’s Heart Facebook page:

![Cindy at tent city](image)

The experience was simultaneously enjoyable and disappointing for the members of Esme’s Heart due to the other people they encountered at the event. Elaine described her opinion of the experience:

*It was just the four of us in our group and so we were there with...hundreds of other fans...I had a really, really great time. I would never ever do it again because I get where people think that Twilight*

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people are crazy. They were, so many of those people, women and men, not just women...were beyond unbelievable. So rude and so just out there.

This lack of common courtesy frustrated the members of Esme’s Heart in that it was an alternative perspective of Twilight fans that they had not previously encountered. In this context, the focus was not on helping people or forging a community, but instead many people were out for their own benefit to collect autographs or free items that were being thrown into the crowd. As Cindy described parts of the experience, it almost sounded as if a mob mentality took place in the tent city and people were willing to knock others down for swag. At one point during the event, Cindy was nearly knocked to the ground because she was inadvertently between a woman and a commodity that the woman was trying to reach. From the perspective of the Esme’s Heart members, it was not worth altering their usual behavior to obtain material goods. Cindy commented,

I’m not going to change who I am...to get an autograph or to get something that’s so materialistic...I may like the series and I might like a lot of the morals and things that can be learned from the series, and to me, that’s what Esme would do. How would she act in this?...It’s also [how] we look at it...from our group ‘What would Esme do?’ Would she turn around and help this person...or would she act this way?

This perspective and goal of emulating Esme and acting with compassion remained with Cindy even when confronted with crowds of people that were caught up in the moment. Even in contexts such as these where many fans adopt a new frame of mind and actively seek to gain commodities for themselves, even at the risk of accidental physical harm to others, I want to articulate the thoughtful composure and self-representation that the
women of Esme’s Heart attempt to put forth. The statement of ‘What Would Esme Do?’ draws a clear line to the Christian saying of ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ and the message to actively deter yourself from selfish acts and to instead think of others. Thus, the women of Esme’s Heart have deliberately chosen to represent themselves as a different type of *Twilight* fan that is motivated by more than a desire for commodities. They combat the stereotypes of self-indulgent *Twilight* fans and position themselves in a way that instead focuses on their desire to give back. As most of the women of Esme’s Heart choose to represent themselves in this way, when faced with other fans who do not subscribe to those same self-positionings, a friction occurs between the different ways of ‘being’ a fan. While Cindy did not express regret at attending the event, she did communicate that the types of fans at those events are not necessarily the ones she prefers to interact with and are not representative of a majority of the Esme’s Heart members. This deliberate line is drawn between Esme’s Heart and fans that do not subscribe to their views of appropriate behavior. While all fans are welcome at Esme’s Heart events, the active members do attempt to balance their enthusiasm for the series with an understanding that they are a distinct type of fan that has chosen to represent themselves as focused on giving back through *Twilight*. Despite the negative aspects of the experience and sleeping outside during November, the final red carpet movie event was an exciting opportunity for the four women and, since space was limited, they had entered an online raffle to have the chance to attend.

Other members of Esme’s Heart who were not able to attend were excited to have the group represented. Board members who remained at home posted online to communicate that four women from Esme’s Heart were at tent city.
Figure 6.14 Esme’s Heart tent city post

As seen in the above conversation, members of the group were excited for pictures and updates from the event. These pieces of information are then a way for the members who were ‘left behind’ to feel a connection with the event and vicariously see it through another’s attendance. Luckily, the next day, the attendees of the event were able to post pictures and share the visuals with others.

Figure 6.15 Picture of Twilight actors from tent city

The above image depicts two actors, Jackson Rathbone and Nikki Reed, who portray members of the Cullen family. In addition to sharing the image with the entire Esme’s

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Heart group, the attendees were even able to snag pictures of people’s favorite celebrities and dedicate the reason for the picture to them, as seen in the above comment to Jessica. In this way, the internet enables a more meaningful form of connectedness. While the non-attendees could simply view pictures online from various sources, such as a Google image search, this format of viewing pictures shared from people that are known adds an extra layer as pictures can be taken for specific members that may not otherwise make it online. Furthermore, once the four members return home, those not in attendance will have the chance to hear the contextualization of the image and learn more about the events that took place. In this aspect, the image is not a solitary picture without context or meaning as those viewed online from other unknown sources often are.

Another highlight of the event was the red carpet portion in which attendees could get autographs and pictures of the actors and actresses from the *Twilight* movies. Attendees were assigned to specific sections based on their wristband numbers and were given instructions on when to line up, which was several hours before the celebrities began walking the red carpet. Despite the waiting and crowds, fans were excited to have the opportunity to see the people who portray the characters in the franchise. Cindy described,

*So they had people seven rows deep...you had to stand the whole time and...they lined us up at like 2:00....and then they weren’t coming through until like 6:00. It was crazy...Then you knew when the big three*\(^{25}\) *came in that was about the end and so we had all been waiting and they brought all three of them at the same time so we saw three cars come in*

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\(^{25}\) The ‘big three’ refers to the three main actors of the series: Kristen Stewart, Rob Pattinson, and Taylor Lautner.
and we knew. And we were like going ‘Ohh! This is it! This is it!’

Everybody’s getting excited and we’re on about the third row from the front. Third or fourth row, but it didn’t matter because people just swarmed down from behind us to go up front and stick their stuff out to be autographed...I did not care to get an autograph...I was just enjoying the moment and all. So I was actually Facetiming with Alexis and with Nicole back and forth and was like going ‘Ok, do y’all see what I’m seeing? Do you see this? Look, I’m letting y’all look at everything that’s going on.’ So they’re getting to, you know, I had my phone turned around so they could see everything...Every one of them Taylor, Rob, and Kristen started on our side and went...down as far as they could until their handlers...made them go down the middle section. But Rob was like from here to that wall right there. That was it. It was fascinating.

In this interaction, the technological utilization went beyond taking a picture and uploading it to Facebook for the consumption of others. Rather, in this instance, Cindy used the ability to Facetime as a way to bring people who could not attend into the experience. Cindy’s comment about the importance of enjoying the moment illustrates an emphasis on the lived experience as the focus and indicates a perspective of the event as traveller relishing in the journey rather than simply viewing it as a destination. This aspect of ‘enjoying the moment’ represents a type of embodied practice (Crouch 2004) as the space was experienced through the physical body as well as the imagination.

Furthermore, she drew in additional virtual travellers to share in the experience with them. While the Facetiming video may not have been the highest quality for Alexis and

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Footnote:

26 Facetime is a videotelephony software application for mobile devices.
Nicole, it allowed them a sense of the experience and the enthusiasm. Virtual technologies are able to create bridges between people through these shared experiences over a beloved cultural text.

In these situations, those that have the capability to travel to these meaningful *Twilight* events and locations can also bring with them the other members of the group through technology. Some methods are more historically common, such as photographs, which are used as documentation or ‘proof’ of the trip upon return. However, new online platforms, such as Facebook, allow the real time sharing of images and, for those that wish to take the virtual journey, people are able to witness the events through these images while the journey is occurring. At the red carpet event, Cindy and her friends in Georgia pushed this electronic sharing one step further through the real time Facetiming in which Cindy turned the lens so the recipient was electronically next to her witnessing the event. Beyond the capability of technology to link people, the sharing becomes meaningful as a social interaction when the topic or context of the picture or video is of significance to both parties. Thus, the shared love of *Twilight*, the friendship, and the message received from the series is what crafts these online interactions as meaningful experiences and travels to the women, be it in person or virtually.

6.5 The End of the Phenomenon: The Post-Movie State of Esme’s Heart

With the release of the final *Twilight* movie, *Breaking Dawn: Part 2*, the popularity and intensified interest in the series did begin to wane in the wake of fans realizing the franchise did not have any new cultural texts to be released. Esme’s Heart and its membership did bear witness to this dwindling attention in the months following the last movie premiere. In this section, I will address the ways in which Esme’s Heart
has adapted to this decline in interest, what challenges member’s foresee, and their goals as they continue to operate as an organization.

Esme’s Heart continues to maintain an active presence on Facebook and updates their private website. As mentioned earlier, members discussed the ability and intention to extend their reach on a more national level with some activities, such as the Win a Trip to Forks raffle. With a declining interest in *Twilight*, members acknowledge that their reach will not be as far now. Olivia commented: “Whether or not we'll be able to continue with that [national level], I don't know. I think the phenomenon that is *Twilight* has died down. And it will be replaced with something else...whether it's the *Host* or now there's a new series out that has drawn teenagers in...*City of Bones*...And that's kind of what they're calling the next big thing”. Identifying the next ‘big thing’ is a challenge and while a new popular series may draw people in, it may not pull in the same individuals that *Twilight* did. While other popular series, such as the *Hunger Games*, are releasing movies, Esme’s Heart has not ‘latched’ onto these franchises and planned events as they did with *Twilight*. Rather, the group appeared to be moving away from having a connection with a book or movie franchise. Cora articulated, “It’s a progression of the group. I mean you’re going from the original hype and it’s slowly transitioning into something more, I guess you could say, apart from *Twilight*”. Instead of attempting to ride the popularity of a series that does not mean the same thing as *Twilight* to members, the

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27 *The Host*, published May 6, 2008, was a novel written by Stephenie Meyer that was released several months prior to the final *Twilight* book.

28 *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* movie was released on August 21, 2013 and only generated roughly $31 million despite a production budget of $60 million. The planned sequel was placed on hold and has not yet begun production. Talk around the series has indicated it may become a television series instead. Suffice to say, this particular young adult series did not receive the same theatrical reception as the *Twilight* series.
organization recognizes that it will need to evolve into something that does not solely rely on the popularity of *Twilight* to exist.

A woman in her thirties, Kayla became a member of the Esme’s Heart board after the final movie premiere. She was active in the group prior to the *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* movie premiere and also views that the group is changing to adapt to a post-*Twilight* space. Kayla described the shift in the group,

> We...obviously are continuing on. My mom actually asked me after the last movie premiere...cause kind of things were winding down with *Twilight*, she was like ‘Are you all gonna keep going? Do you think?’...We don't have as many numbers as we had...leading up to the last couple of movie premieres or before. Between the wedding event I think and the final movie premiere was...the biggest fan-base because everybody was excited and there was a *Twilight* theme...Well now it's more ‘Yes we all came together through our love of *Twilight*, but now it's...let's all work together to make...our community better’...But everything's not *Twilight* oriented. Every raffle isn't, you know, ‘Here's your pocket Edward and your *Twilight* whatever.’ It's more oriented around ‘Let's help people. This is what brought us together: but let's see what we can do to help people.’ So I don't think we have as large a membership as we once did, but I think the ones that are still...together, and members and working toward and planning things and doing the various projects, I think it will continue on.

Kayla’s view of the post-movie status of the group resonated with other member’s opinions that the trajectory is shifting away from a national, *Twilight*-themed focus to a
local organization that helps the community. The organization recognized that its roots stem from the *Twilight* series and they do not disavow their previous connection with the franchise. However, the goal was to become a self-sufficient organization in its own right that does not solely exist as a peripheral piece of the *Twilight* series.

This goal to branch out and continue on without the *Twilight* series as its primary focus does not indicate that the organization or its members have forgotten about the franchise. In advance of the holiday season in 2014, Esme’s Heart shared the below post, which articulated that the series is not forgotten by members.

![Figure 6.16 Twilight Christmas ornament](image)

Even two years after the final movie release, Esme’s Heart has not forgotten about the *Twilight* series and, while it was no longer the driving force behind the organization, it remains a piece of their past and a cohesive element. While the group still referenced the *Twilight* series, they can no longer rely on the franchise as the foundation to organize events and engage in charitable activities.

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As the president of the organization, Cindy recognized the shift in the fan community and endeavored to find a way to keep Esme’s Heart up and running. Recognizing that their ability to draw in large crowds through movie premieres and other \textit{Twilight}-related events has now passed, Cindy still maintains a vision for Esme’s Heart for the future. Cindy described,

\textit{Now I can see where it's starting to dwindle. The craze has kind of gone by. So that's why we wanted to kind of change and just kind of keep our group small and together and online and try and encourage other people to, no matter what you're doing, where you are, I mean it can be a bunko group, it can be a book club...I mean you can do...anything but you can always give back.}

With the decreased interest in \textit{Twilight} as the hype fades, Cindy recognized that the intensified interest has past and that the organization does not have the same capability to organize large events as it once did and draw in large crowds that bring donations. Thus, Esme’s Heart primarily exists in a smaller capacity and online now, but they maintain their initial goal to do good work with a heart like Esme. It was with this goal still in mind that Cindy hoped their online activities would inspire other people. Cindy commented,

\textit{Hopefully they'll be inspired to do something...that's what we want to do...I mean I really see this going more of online and people just being inspired to do something because they see that we've, as a small group,...did it. I mean that to me is what I hope, [what] I want others to do. Does that make sense? Because they can. I mean it doesn't matter}
where you are, you can get a group of people together and you can collect some canned goods...I mean no deed is too small. I mean you just don’t know where and how that can affect somebody. I mean I think about that sometimes when you know you may not have had a good showing or something like that, but at the same time I see like these boxes of...things overflowing and there may just be two boxes full, but still. There’s probably, in that Ronald McDonald stuff in there, there’s probably twenty...aluminum foils and...it’s enough to last them you know three or four months. So that’s an expense the house doesn’t have to incur. That’s something that those families have that they can just, they don’t have to worry about, they don’t think about it, you know. I don’t know, it’s just...I would hope that more people are like that...You already read so many bad things in the news...and you know bad things happen. I wish there was just one channel that just did all good news, you know?...I read People magazine. I love People magazine. But I love it to read the back with the heroes among us, like the real heroes.

Cindy’s goal for Esme’s Heart was to help inspire people to take action and remind them that acts of kindness of all sizes are necessary. In this goal, the internet was a useful way to show others what Esme’s Heart is accomplishing. Furthermore, instead of focusing solely on the negative actions that occur, Cindy advocated for a perspective that saw the good as well and recognized the efforts of people to help others. Through Esme’s Heart and their online activity, Cindy hoped others are inspired by their actions and endeavor to complete their own random acts of kindness.
This focus was evidenced through Esme’s Heart’s Facebook page and their posts, which frequently cite ways to help other people. While some posts, such as the tree ornament picture, do incorporate *Twilight*, others are stripped completely of *Twilight* and primarily address the theme of giving back.

![Random acts of kindess post](image)

*Figure 6.17 Random acts of kindess post*  

The above image is an example of the type of posts Esme’s Heart released, which incorporate ways for people to ‘give back’ in their daily lives. The examples range from purchasing gifts for children to donating your time or completing acts of service. This provides a range of ideas for people depending on their capacity to donate of time or money. The final item on the list simply reminds people to be kind to everyone as a random act of kindness.

In addition to posting suggestions of ways people can help others, Esme’s Heart continues to engage in their own charitable activities within the local community. These events are focused primarily on the theme of giving back and do not include *Twilight* specific activities or goods.

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Above is an image of items the organization collected to benefit the Salvation Army for the purpose of helping children in need receive supplies and materials. While this donation was not of the same volume as some previous events, such as the Toys for Tots donations at movie premieres, this act represents the small acts of kindness for which Cindy advocated and wanted to inspire others to engage in.

Esme’s Heart also continues some of their previous endeavors that were popular when the *Twilight* movies were released. As the films were often released in November, Esme’s Heart would partner with the local movie theater for a food drive to benefit the food bank. While the films are no longer being released, Esme’s Heart has continued with their annual tradition of working to raise food donations in November. In 2013, Esme’s Heart partnered with other organizations, such as AmStar Cinemas and a local radio station, to coordinate the food drive and collected over 2,500 items. Esme’s Heart continued to coordinate the food drive in 2014 as well.

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In this way, the legacy of *Twilight* remained within Esme’s Heart and their charitable activities as many of the relationships they currently worked with, such as with AmStar Cinemas, were initially cultivated during the time period in which *Twilight* was intensely popular. During the 2014 food drive, over 10,000 pounds of food was collected between Esme’s Heart and the other food drive partners. Cindy represented Esme’s Heart on a local radio station, WDEN, to help promote the food drive.

Through activities such as these, Esme’s Heart continues to try and help their local community. These events, online and in person, keep the current, smaller membership engaged with the group and the needs of their local community.

Many members of Esme’s Heart agree with the organization description listed on the Facebook group: “A group of volunteers who came together over a book and who chose to stay together because of their common love of helping others in need”. However, some people saw the move away from Twilight as a sign that the group was not as devout in their status as fans. For Casey, a woman in her twenties, signs she witnessed online indicated that Esme’s Heart was not as interested in Twilight anymore, which disappointed her.

Yeah, I was looking for more serious fans…or at least people who were excited about it…Well at the time a lot of people seemed to be selling their Twilight stuff on Facebook and changing the name’s of their Twilight blogs and even Esme’s Heart became Esme’s Heart instead of Twilight Moms of Middle GA, it was like…people were no longer interested after the last movie…Like it was time to give up…They had no more imagination for it…I mean Star Wars was over for a long time before the new movies…I’m happy to say that there are some blogs that still blog just about Twilight and I just learned that there is a kind of #Keep[in]TheSparkleAlive movement on social networks.

While Esme’s Heart has made efforts to keep people engaged and have not completely disavowed their enjoyment of Twilight, some fans see the shift away from the series as a sign that the group lacks a commitment to the series. Casey instead sought out other

‘genuine’ fans online via social media. The #KeepinTheSparkleAlive hashtag enables posts devoted to *Twilight* to aggregate on social media feeds and #AlwaysTwilight is another popular tag for posts.

![Figure 6.21 Tumblr for #KeepinTheSparkleAlive](image)

These online posts and hashtags indicated that some fans are still invested in the series. Perhaps it was this continued interest that caused Lionsgate and Stephenie Meyer to decide to make five new *Twilight* mini-movies. Announced in late September of 2014, five aspiring female directors would be chosen to direct the short films. Meyer commented that the female voice has become important to her through her experiences in the film industry. Furthermore, these mini-movies would be launched on Facebook. Michael Burns, Vice Chairman of Lionsgate, stated: “We think Facebook is a great way for us to introduce the world of ‘*Twilight*’ to a whole new audience while re-energizing existing fans.” Thus, not only were fans embracing Facebook and social media as a form of communication, but so is the film industry.

While members of Esme’s Heart still enjoy the franchise, a decision was made in an effort to sustain the group by focusing on local charitable activities and connections.

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instead of continuing to primarily center around *Twilight*. Members of Esme’s Heart recognize that maintaining interest is a challenge. Cindy commented, “We’re trying to find ways. It’s…hit and miss. I mean, we’re still trying to find the best…way to get a hold of people. I mean we’re a non-profit so we don’t have…a lot of funds to put toward [events]”. The group was previously able to organize larger events due to their ability to draw on key *Twilight* events that would attract large crowds and would be enticing enough to have people pay admission to the event to cover the overhead. Nicole also wondered about the ways in which they can draw people back in:

> Our big thing is trying to figure out what can pull people back in. That’s what we need to figure out now. Since we’ve lost a good chunk…I mean should…we change the name? Do we try to do something different with the name? I mean, I personally like it, but a lot of people are like ‘Well, what’s Esme’s Heart’ you know?...We try to post on the page, our website,...our pinterest page...There’s all that stuff out there.

However, as Danielle commented at one point, she attended a seminar for real estate brokers that went over how to utilize social media for the housing market. To her perspective, almost everyone is using these avenues to reach people, which might be part of the challenge. Nicole articulated that people may have been overwhelmed by posts and decided to ‘hide’ Esme’s Heart in their newsfeed, such as with the trivia game that resulted in a reduction of ‘likes’ the following day. Nicole commented, “There’s an option now to where you can take people out of your newsfeed…so I mean people may have been tired of seeing stuff at one point and took it off”. Similarly, Cindy mused, “We don’t know if people are just tired of *Twilight* or…[if] they want to do good work”. The
members of Esme’s Heart are faced with these challenges as they navigate the intricacies of attracting people via social media and generating a local interest in philanthropy. However, while Esme’s Heart expressed the challenge of drawing people in, I want to comment that the ‘likes’ to their Facebook page increased by eighty-two in between May of 2013 and December of 201439. This may seem like a minor number, but it indicates that the group was slowly growing through their social media methods in the last year and a half.

With the ending of the *Twilight* movies, Esme’s Heart made the decision to focus on local charitable activities through online methods and hoped to inspire others to give back as well. While this less intense focus on *Twilight* may have alienated some people, the increase in Facebook page ‘likes’ over the past year indicates that Esme’s Heart continues to reach people online. Rather than scaling back and only working in person with local charities, Esme’s Heart maintains their online presence with the goal to draw people in and motivate them to give back. Cora commented, “As far as the internet goes, I mean, this day and time you can’t do anything without it…I mean without the internet, there’s no way we would be where we are”. Thus, Esme’s Heart endeavored to harness the internet and, in particular social media, as a way to reach people and continue their goal of helping the community even with decreased numbers and a waning public interest in *Twilight*.

6.6 The ‘Real’ and the ‘Virtual’: The Mediation of Communication

Not all participants within the *Twilight* online community meet in person, but for a time many Esme’s Heart members did interact in ‘real’ life as well as through ‘virtual’

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39 In May of 2013, the page has 677 likes and the last trivia game was played in August of 2013. In early September of 2013, the Facebook page had 699 likes. By mid-December of 2013, the number had increased to 780. It has now settled at 759 in December of 2014.
methods. In this section, I will discuss the concept of community and the ways in which this term can be applied to *Twilight* fans. Furthermore, the ways in which fans engaged with the series, and each other, through multiple avenues helps maintain an interest in the series and feelings of nostalgia for past events. The importance of the internet is its ability to facilitate “social inertia” and the ways in which people use this medium within their daily lives (Hine 2000:4). Through this view of the ways people utilize the internet, the focus shifts from the piece of technology (e.g. the computer) to the uses and meanings that are attached to it (Hine 2000:4). Thus, the focus is not simply on the internet, but in the ways that it enables connections and meaning between people.

I want to discuss the concept of the term ‘community’ and the problematic aspects of its definition. Benedict Anderson theorizes that the anomaly of nationalism is a result of imagined communities (1991[1983]). These imagined communities are filled with people who will never meet each other and yet share in the bond of national structures and ideologies that can cause inequality and yet the concept of the nation is one of “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1991[1983]:7). Often constructed around geographic proximity and a shared interest, the term ‘community’ in its more traditional context is problematic when analyzing it in conjunction with the internet. Howard Rheingold defined a virtual community as a “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold 1993:1). This also poses the question of what defines ‘sufficient’ human feeling? Does the ability of the internet to connect people with similar interests create a sense of community? Derek

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Foster suggests that “our social cyberspatial selves are far more likely an extension of our conscious selves than a representation of self-conscious being” (Foster 1997:32). Thus, it is through “selective exposure” that people locate others online that have a similar shared world view (Foster 1997:33). Not all online interactions automatically constitute a community and for some certain parameters distinguish virtual sites. In his study of Second Life, a multi-user online game, Tom Boellstorff articulates that social media sites, such as Facebook, are networks and not places; “one connects relationships ‘through’ networks, but lives relationships ‘in’ places” (Boellstorff 2008:247). However, based on the concept of imagined communities, a place is not necessarily the binding factor of a community.

While the online interactions of Twilight fans may not utilize a virtual ‘world’ in the perspective of Boellstorff, I posit that it does constitute a virtual community through a sense of shared interest and camaraderie. A majority of the participants viewed Twilight fans as a form of a community. While some interacted in person through Esme’s Heart, others only interacted with fellow fans online. Facebook is a frequently cited online method that people utilized to communicate with others. In 2008, at the time of Boellstorff’s book, Facebook was quite different than it is today. Anyone over the age of thirteen was allowed to join Facebook beginning in September of 2006 and the newsfeed function was launched, which aggregated friends’ activity. In November of 2007, Facebook added the functionality for businesses and organizations to create pages as a way to connect with their audiences, display useful ads, and gather insights into

41 Second Life is a multi-user online virtual world that allows people to create avatars, buildings, and other virtual representations and interact with fellow users.
consumer preferences\textsuperscript{43}. Additionally, the now frequently used ‘like’ button was introduced in February of 2009\textsuperscript{44}. The internet and its content are continually morphing and adapting, which makes it increasingly a challenge to articulate what sites, such as Facebook, ‘are’. Thus, while Facebook was simply a ‘social network’ at its inception, it has morphed into a much different site now that is compiled of networking, advertising, and communities.

As expressed by Esme’s Heart members, the group would have been a challenge to organize and start up without the use of Facebook. Through the perspective of Renato Rosaldo (1999) of bottom-up viewpoints, I argue that a \textit{Twilight} community exists because fans of the series believe that there is a community through their shared interest in the series. Helen, a mother in her forties, commented, “I believe it is a community. People all over the world come together over a common bond, their love of \textit{Twilight}”. In this sense, \textit{Twilight} is an imagined community of fans that will likely never meet, but are bonded through a common interest. Donna, also a mother in her forties, articulated her view of why \textit{Twilight} fans are a community: “When I talk to someone who likes \textit{Twilight} we just seem to have a lot in common. We have an easy time talking and becoming friends”. As discussed in earlier chapters, a shared interest in \textit{Twilight} provides an initial bond between people to build upon. I also posit that people view \textit{Twilight} fans as a community in part due to the hostility they experience. Part of the reason fans ventured online initially was to find others, preferably adults, who also enjoyed the \textit{Twilight} series so their own individual behavior would feel less isolating. Janet, a mother in her forties,

commented that it is unpleasant to handle the “constant bashing from non-
Twilight
readers about Twilight enthusiasts”. Thus, due in part to the negativity from non-fans,
when Twilight fans locate others, be it online or in person, with similar tastes for the
series it then generates a common bond and the emotion of not being alone in your
preferences. While ‘sufficient feeling’ is a challenge to define, I argue that this sense of
individual satisfaction, camaraderie, and the common bond of Twilight are the factors
which enables a view of Twilight fans as a virtual, imagined community.

The ways in which fans interact with Twilight also contributes to a level of
fascination and enchantment. Fans are exposed to the series through multiple ways,
which helps maintain interest and forms a bond. Chloe, a mother of twins in her thirties,
conveyed to me that she usually has a deeper connection with television series:

I think for me with [movies] ...I read it somewhere about...movies
you have to go see and so you don’t have...quite the same

feeling...But...you go to like Eyecon\textsuperscript{45} and stuff and you meet The Vampire
Diaries and you think about it, they’re in your home every week. And so
you already kind of feel like you have this connection with them. They
don’t have it with you, but you have it with them. But you know with the
Twilight people, as much as you love the movies and all of that, you go see
it every year. You might watch it on DVD a couple of times a year maybe,
if that. You just don’t have that, you know, you see them every
week...they’re your Thursday night date.

\textsuperscript{45}Eyecon is a fan convention in Atlanta, Georgia for the popular CW television series, The Vampire Diaries.
In this context, emotional attachment forms through repeated interaction with a series, often in your own sphere. While it is not a television series, the *Twilight* books and movies did form a connection with many of its fans that extends beyond casual viewings at the theater. Many participants read the books a handful of times, but others re-read the texts with frequency, some up to twenty times. These activities help reinforce the bond between the reader and the series. For Elaine, a mother in her thirties, revisiting movies and books she enjoys was a regular occurrence:

*I do tend to re-read and watch the movies. And as a matter of fact, my kids and I the other night had a Harry Potter movie marathon and my daughter for her last birthday decided she wanted a Twilight birthday party. So we had the whole movie marathon and the theme and everything. So yeah, I definitely will [re-read Twilight]. That’s just kind of who I am...Like old friends. Go visit old friends, you know?*

In this description, the *Twilight* books were not just a hobby or passing interest. Rather, the books become a type of nostalgic emotional connection, like an old friend, which was revisited on occasion to reaffirm the feelings. Thus, while the *Twilight* movies may not air weekly like a television series, fans forge connections with the series through multiple platforms and, for some, re-reading or re-watching *Twilight* is a familiar and comforting experience.

Many fans keep their views of the actors portraying the *Twilight* characters separate from their enjoyment of the series, such as by not letting the personal relationship and ensuing drama between Kristen Stewart and Rob Pattinson impact their view of Bella and Edward. However, not all fans keep the line between the characters and
the actors completely separate. Leslie, a mother in her twenties, commented: “The Kristen Stewart cheating story did make me like Bella a little less. Every time I see a Robert Pattinson article it makes me want to rewatch”. Exposure to news articles about the actors triggers a desire to watch the movies and enjoy *Twilight* again. Furthermore, many fans enjoyed the film soundtracks as well and were exposed to new music, which becomes embedded with *Twilight* meanings. Cora commented, “I can’t listen to Christina Perri’s song now without thinking about the movie”. These multiple avenues through which fans interact with the *Twilight* series represent the concept of polymorphous perversity, which is a “pleasure that...extends over multiple territories, can be triggered by any number of stimuli, is ongoing rather than linear, and invites a mapping of gendered identity that is more queer than clear” (Allison 2006:10).

Building upon Appadurai’s approach to globalization, Anne Allison illustrates this framework of polymorphous perversity through an analysis of the Japanese toy, *tamagotchi*. In her book, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, Allison argues that Appadurai’s disjunctive and fluid approach to global flows is evident through the popularity of *tamagotchi* toys. These toys play with the “boundaries of the imaginary” and are “symptomatic of the social reality we inhabit: one in which virtuality is becoming increasingly intergrated into everyday life and movement, of both people and things, is rapid and intense” (Allison 2006:177). Thus, Appadurai’s argument that deterritorialization and media proliferation have influenced and changed the ways in which the imagination works today.

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46 Christina Perri’s song, *A Thousand Years*, was featured in both *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2.*
47 *Tamagotchi* is a portable game that hangs on a key holder and the purpose of the game is to raise a virtual pet.
Place and imagination are directly connected and the deterritorialization of the world has created a “diffusion of the imagination into everyday life” within the past two decades (Allison 2006:179). Additionally, the imagination is what creates a sense of sociality in today's disjunctive and dispersed world. Allison argues, “sociality – our sense of connectedness to people, communities, humanness, and life – is what centers subjectivity” (Allison 2006:179). In the contemporary context, sociality is in a continual state of flux as people move from place to place. Thus, creating uprooted bonds from 'home' and places of belonging while offering alternative ways to forge new connections with distinct sets of pleasures (Allison 2006:179). These two ways to forge connections, old and new, trigger what Appadurai calls a “schizophrenia” of sociality.

Appadurai's theory of the imagination connects to a deterritorialized world in which images proliferate. In this schizophrenic world, tamagotchi bridge the gap between a state of continual flux and a rootedness in physical upkeep, as the virtual pets travel anywhere and require corporeal management (Allison 2006:180). As people travel throughout their day, continually in flux and dislocated, tamagotchi create a feeling of an interpersonal relationship that can keep people company as they experience feelings of alienation during their dislocation (Allison 2006:183). Tamagotchi are able to provide companionship in a disjunctive and dislocated world. They keep people “distracted and plugged into something meaningful...even when no one else was around” (Allison 2006:183).

Through the internet, which is now accessible via mobile technologies, members of Esme’s Heart are able to maintain a connection with others even when in the public sphere and posted pictures become a way to mark a memory for the people who attended
or trigger a desire to attend for those who did not.

In the above image, members of Esme’s Heart were completing the clean up on their adopted mile. These pictures are a way for members who attended to have a visual image as a memory of the activity. Posting these pictures also helped promote the visibility of the group and can trigger a sense of wanting to attend to others, such as Jennifer and Bethany illustrate in the photo comments. Memorable photos become discussion points and nostalgic memories of enjoyable events. One such image was shown to me by Nicole and it depicts the women from Esme’s Heart holding an actor from the *Twilight* series, Michael Welch, up horizontally.

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Michael Welch, who portrayed Mike Newton, one of Bella’s human friends, attended one of Esme’s Heart’s gala events and it was an exciting event for many of the members. Images such as these are reminders of the pleasurable experiences for group members. In this way, Durkheim’s theory of social rituals and the ensuing effervescence (1995[1912] is useful as it may be applied in new ways. Active engagement online and depictions of communal events also generate a form of effervescence which helps maintain and propel the community forward. Victor Turner discusses communities and moments of liminality, such as at group events, where other statuses do not matter because the members are going through the experience together. Turner argues that these liminal moments reinforce community identity at times, but the sense of camaraderie may not always be maintained (Turner 1977[1969]). Thus, not all members may remain active within the community, but these images can act as a nostalgic reminder of the past for those who leave as well as generate a pleasure which motivates continued membership. The internet and in person events intersect at these points and simultaneously become ways to remember past events and propel continual interest through multiple avenues.

It is within this view of schizophrenic sociality that I argue that the *Twilight* fan community exists. Social networks do not operate in a linear manner, especially within the contemporary and technologically connected world. Just as people move between identities and social networks in their physical world, the same processes occur within the virtual realm. As such, these networks and places overlap and intersect creating a web of social processes that is neither linear nor unified. The activities of *Twilight* fans are not a linear progression, but a complicated web without a defined path. As fans travel throughout their days, they engage with the series in various ways, such as reading the

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book, a song on the radio, or a Facebook update from Esme’s Heart. The multiple ways in which *Twilight* reaches them causes pleasure and emotion through the framework of polymorphous perversity as it extends disjunctively through various avenues.

As fans engage with *Twilight* through these polymorphously perverse methods, questions arise in terms of determining the equality or validity of these interactions. Tom Boellstorff argues against the use of the term ‘virtual’ in its definition of “approaching the actual *without arriving there*” (Boellstorff 2008:19, emphasis in original). Rather, Boellstorff utilizes the terms of ‘virtual’ and ‘actual’ as ethnographic descriptors instead of ontologically. In a similar viewpoint, T. L. Taylor articulates that these spheres are not distinct and easily separated: “It is not…that online worlds are spaces in which we simply work out offline issues and once sorted, happily leave…It is instead the case that we have phenomena that are unique to both spheres and also occupy spaces of overlap. What happens in virtual worlds often is just as real, just as meaningful, to participants” (Taylor 2006:19). While the term ‘virtual’ and ‘online’ are utilized in ethnographic contexts, this is not to suggest that these mark them as the lesser categories within a dichotomous system. Mario J. L. Guimaraes Jr. suggests that the term ‘virtual’ undermines the experience as lacking reality (Guimaraes 2005:144). However, as people occupy multiple social roles within their lives, the online persona becomes another facet of this as a situated social relationship (Guimaraes 2005:153). It was within this theoretical framework that the women I encountered within the *Twilight* fandom operated. Some people only interacted with others via the internet and yet believed the *Twilight* fans to be part of a larger community that is bonded together. Thus, membership within a larger imagined community would indicate that these interactions are not lacking
in meaning for members.

Communities are not simply formed because the text exists, but arise due to the negotiation of participant experiences and become enacted as people engage with the text and other fans. Mizuko Ito articulates this point in her ethnographic investigation of the collapsing boundary between the physical and non-physical. Ito states,

*Thus...unified communities are not imagined through particular mass media texts, but rather lived through negotiating particular locations and relationships within texts that migrate through particular sociotechnical apparatuses. So the seeming immutability and imaginary homogeneity of a particular text is constantly being subverted by the selective positionings of heterogeneous agents that co-construct meaning with the structuring resources of the text.* (Ito 1997:101)

The *Twilight* series did not unilaterally dictate that a homogenous fan community would form. Rather, as readers and viewers engaged with the material and textually poached the fantasy realm to distinguish their own message of the text. Through this engagement, fans sought each other out online as a form of self-validation for their enjoyment of a young adult series and to confirm their own reading of the series and engage with others to learn their interpretations. The resources of the internet and technology allow fans to experience the fandom through polymorphously perverse ways (Allison 2006), of which the meanings are negotiated on an individual level and then communicated with others as a method of sociality, be it in person or online.

These varied interactions then form what Henry Jenkins defines as a convergence of media, which occurs "within the brains of individual consumers and through their
social interactions with others” (Jenkins 2006:3). Furthermore, this collective meaning-making that fans engage in becomes an opportunity to enact change in other arenas (Jenkins 2006:4). Esme’s Heart and other charity-focused fan groups within the *Twilight* community articulate this opportunity as they endeavor to aid charities and give back through fandom. In these convergences of media and online communities potential opportunities exist to enact change in the ‘actual’ world, which erodes the boundaries between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’. Furthermore, these clean divides between online activities and the physical world are increasingly difficult to establish. Ito articulates the collapse between these dichotomous categories:

*I question any clean separation between human and machine, the social and the technological the real and the textual. Current trends in technology development and international politics suggest that, increasingly, machine bodies will be zones of contestation for transnational power brokering. It is hardly the time to ignore either the materiality or consequentiality of the virtual imagination.* (Ito 1997:103)

Thus, these boundaries between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ are not relegated to only holding meaning within fan communities. The global stage is increasingly connected technologically and ‘virtual’ threats are met with ‘real’ consequences50. In this framework, the ‘virtual’ is not separable from the ‘actual’ as they continually intersect and inform each other.

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50 In November of 2014, virtual threats from hackers were made against Sony Pictures if they released a film, *The Interview*, which comically depicted an assassination of North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. In December of 2014, after their internal systems were hacked, Sony Pictures initially decided to cancel the release of the film. This sparked a lively discussion online about free speech and whether or not Sony Pictures had given in to terrorist threats and set a dangerous precedent. Ultimately, the movie was released for rent online and in select theaters. The U.S. government imposed sanctions on North Korea for the suspected hacking, but North Korea continues to deny any role in the event and the investigation is ongoing.
Just as the ethnographic descriptors of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ are not easily separated, they are not as dissimilar as they may appear. Vicki Kirby articulates that the divide between the physical and the non-physical are constructed as the “self-evidence of the corporeal can no longer be assumed” (Kirby 1997:129). While technology is often viewed as an interface that people negotiate in order to communicate, what of the human body? Kirby argues that all interactions are mediated and constructed, which indicates that the concerns over the “complex ambiguity” of virtual interactions are no more problematic than those experienced in physical life (Kirby 1997:140). In this framework, the self which is constructed online and the ensuing engagement with others is a mediation, not terribly dissimilar than the process of communicating with people while navigating the moors of the physical body. Thus, both constructs are interfaces that people engage in order to communicate. If it is the mediation through an interface which renders online interactions as less authentic, then are the experiences which are tempered by the boundary of the body similarly diminished in validity?

While some members desired to meet other *Twilight* fans in person and engage in social and charitable activities, others did not and enjoyed engaging with people online. Does the desires and social needs of one indicate a lower validity of the interactions of another? As people have varying social needs and motivations for participating in fan communities, it is difficult to definitively state the meaning of online interactions. For some *Twilight* fans, when they met in person it helped emotionally strengthen a relationship, while for others engaging online was sufficient to establish a connection. Thus, I argue that online interactions are valid and ‘real’ to participants as the meaning and emotional depth are individually negotiated by each person and does not necessarily
reflect the exact perception of another. Similarly, in person interactions can be equally fleeting and lacking in meaning similar to brief online communication. In this way, the interface utilized by people to communicate, be it the physical body or a computer, are not the definors of significance; rather, the meaning of these interactions are defined by the person that engages in them based on their individual negotiations and perceptions.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter, I highlighted the ways in which Esme’s Heart utilizes the internet to engage with its members and fellow *Twilight* fans. Through the incorporation of a variety of online websites and tools, *Twilight* fans are able to connect with each other more easily. While there are many positive aspects of the internet for fandoms, such as connectivity and sociality, it also contains negatives as well as dissenters are able to locate and ‘troll’ *Twilight* fans. Technology becomes a way for fans to connect with each other and also virtually travel to locations and events that are significant to the *Twilight* series. Real-time technology, such as Facetime, adds an additional layer to these experiences as people are able to show friends at home the event as it is occurring.

As the movie releases end and the hype surrounding *Twilight* fades, Esme’s Heart makes an effort to continue on and give back to their community. Through a stronger emphasis on the internet and a smaller membership, Esme’s Heart continues to nurture the connections that were established with other organizations, such as AmStar Cinemas, during the zenith of *Twilight*’s popularity. While the group is no longer associating *Twilight* with every activity, they remember their roots with the franchise and continue to post information related to the series on their Facebook page.
Through engaging with *Twilight* through multiple avenues, fans are able to experience a polymorphously perverse pleasure that helps maintain interest and triggers emotional reactions based on certain stimuli that remind them of the series. As fans engage with each other frequently online as well as in person, it raises questions of what constitutes a valid social interaction. However, this is not an easily definable topic as each person engages with physical and virtual interactions in a different way and with varying desires and needs for sociality and meaning. This range of experience is articulated by *Twilight* community members, some of which desire to meet fellow fans in person while others are satisfied with online conversations. As the body is an interface, which people mediate in order to communicate, the internet and a computer are also interfaces that are negotiated. Furthermore, the self that people portray online is often an extension of their physical world personality and there is not a distinct divide in the identity people deploy online versus in person. With the increasing pervasiveness of technology, recognition of online interactions as a mediated form of communication, similar to that of negotiating the boundaries of the physical body, is needed in order to further erode the dichotomy between online and offline, the virtual and the real; with this erosion, the validity of interactions will not be distinguished by their method, but by the meaning and significance determined by those engaged in them.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

When life offers you a dream so far beyond any of your expectations, it’s not reasonable to grieve when it comes to an end.

Bella Swan, *Twilight*

Sociality – our sense of connectedness to people, communities, humanness, and life – is what centers subjectivity. Today, sociality is in a radical state of fluctuation and change; uprootedness from bonds that constitute home, place, and belonging is commonplace. But opportunities to form new kinds of ties with distinct, sometimes different, sets of pleasures are also present.

Anne Allison

7.1 Introduction

The goal of this research was to better understand the intense popularity of a young adult literary series, *Twilight*, amongst an older, female fan base that then utilized this interest to form a community, online and offline, and engage in charitable work. In an effort to disrupt monolithic descriptions of adult, female *Twilight* fans as ‘predatory cougars’, I endeavored to portray a more nuanced picture of the women involved based on their own experiences and understandings. As a fan myself, who was swept up in the *Twilight* phenomenon, I wanted to challenge popular representations of *Twilight* fans as ‘crazed’ people who had lost touch with reality. Through ethnographic description, my hope was to draw a portrait that is less sensationalized than often depicted and more nuanced, even mundane, with the perspective of the women involved. While there are

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fans of the *Twilight* series that push the boundaries of propriety, my goal is to illustrate that not all women involved in the *Twilight* fandom substantiate the stereotypical portrayal and offer an alternative perspective based on the experiences of participants.

Furthermore, through participant observation and interviews, both online and offline, my intention was to articulate the ways in which fans were initially drawn to the series and what prompted them to then seek out others and form a social bond. Through these engagements, I learned that what many women valued most about their participation in the *Twilight* community was the friendships they forged and the ability to take their shared love of *Twilight* and push it one step further to then help the community through civic engagement. Ensuring people knew that they were more complex and real than the popular stereotypes was an important piece to the women involved and, as such, I hope that this dissertation illustrates that there is not one form of a *Twilight* fan, but rather there are as many ways of being as there are fans and their individual perspectives. Through these interactions, I have endeavored to articulate themes that arose, but with the caveat that these experiences are not necessarily representative of all adult, female *Twilight* fans.

In chapter two of this dissertation, through a textual analysis, I presented the complexities of reading a book and definitively determining what that series ‘is’. Readers are not just passive consumers of the text, but actively engage with the material on their own terms (see de Certeau 1984, Fiske 1989, Jenkins 1992, Radway 1991[1984]). As such, the goal of this chapter was to illustrate the complexities of simply dubbing *Twilight* as ‘anti-feminist’, which is often portrayed on social media. Due to the multiple interpretations of Bella’s character, some feminist and others not, this creates a slippage
that makes easy categorization problematic. Chapter three serves as a discussion of the ways in which participants conceptualize their interest in Twilight and the fan community. Through drawing on multiple identity categories and familiar experiences, the Twilight series forms an initial bond with adult, female readers. This connection to the franchise is then deepened when friendships are formed through a common interest in the Twilight series. As the friendships become more meaningful, so too does the Twilight series as it represents the initial bonding factor.

In chapter four, the discussion shifts to the ways in which women within the Twilight community use their common interest in the series as a way to give back to the community. With a primary focus on the group of Esme’s Heart in the Macon, Georgia area, I discuss their charitable activities and the ways in which members conceptualize their participation and what it means to them for the fandom to give back. Chapter five contains a review of the moral and gendered themes of the philanthropic activities of Esme’s Heart. Through the moral themes readers identify within the Twilight series, some fan groups and participants are drawn to the charitable activities. Additionally, I situate their activities within the larger social movement trend of fan activism. In chapter six, I review the ways in which Esme’s Heart utilizes virtual technologies as a method of connectivity and review their group status after the final movie was released. Through experiencing the series via multiple platforms, such as music and the internet, fans can have a more intertwined connection with Twilight and other fans. I also address the issue of communicative interfaces and argue for a more balanced understanding of virtual and physical interactions as mobile technologies are increasingly pervasive and fluid within daily life.
In this dissertation, I have included ethnographic examples as a way to better illustrate the perspectives and voices of the participants. This community of Twilight fans represents an intersection of virtual technologies, gender, community, and fan activism, which articulates a changing social world. The capacity of the internet to connect people over a common interest has enabled and sped up the formation of many fan communities. Furthermore, these fans are able to communicate with each other more easily and become motivated to take their positive feelings about the Twilight franchise and use it to give back to others through charity work. It is in this crux that we see the interconnectedness of fandom’s fantasy with the ‘real’ world and the erosion of the boundaries between online and offline.

7.2 Why Twilight?

Threaded throughout this dissertation are several recurring and intersecting themes, which help facilitate an understanding of adult, female Twilight fans. These themes often overlap within the chapters and bleed together, which indicate their level of connection. Through recognizing identity categories within the series, many fans then became enamored with the franchise and sought out other with similar experiences in an effort to feel less alone. Thus, the ensuing communities were facilitated by the internet and triggered a stronger connection to the series through these relationships. From the positive feelings of the series and the community, some fans then push their activities a step further and partake of civic engagement through harnessing the fandom as a vehicle for charitable work. Through these common threads of identity, community, virtual technologies, and charity, the Twilight fandom represents a new form of a fan community, which is trending upwards and creating an impact beyond the usual sphere of fandom.
Community

While some people may read the *Twilight* series and then move on to another book easily, the women I met were captivated by *Twilight* and many utilized the internet as a way to find others with similar experiences. Confused by their intense fascination with a young adult literary series that was not specifically geared to their demographic, women derived comfort from the knowledge that they were not alone in their experiences and enjoyment of *Twilight*. While members of the *Twilight* fandom may not meet in person or converse online, there is a sense of community in an imagined capacity (Anderson 1991[1983]) through their shared bond of *Twilight*.

Within the larger, amorphous umbrella of the *Twilight* community, there emerge smaller groups that develop through websites or geographic proximity, such as Esme’s Heart. These groups become sites of sociality that are crafted through an enjoyment of *Twilight* and fulfill needs relative to each individual, such as for a break from the role of caretaker or friendships with other females. Through forming social bonds with fellow *Twilight* fans, the significance of *Twilight* adds an additional layer of meaning as new friendships formed through this common interest reify *Twilight* as meaningful as it provided the foundation for substantive sociality.

Fans form communities around a cultural text, which acts as a cohesive element to the group (see Baym 1998, Bury 2005, Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 2006, Jenkins 1992, McRobbie 1994, Wakeford 1999). Some *Twilight* fans articulate that when they find another person who enjoys *Twilight*, the odds are increased that they will be compatible as friends. Thus, I argue that due to drawing in people who recognize familiar identity categories in the *Twilight* series, when fans of the series meet, they already have a shared
sense of identity, such as caretaker, that is meaningful and able to be initially discussed through conversations about the *Twilight* narrative.

**Identity**

It is through identifying with the *Twilight* series that women are initially drawn into the fandom. This raises the question of with which themes in the series are women connecting? While the character of Bella is not always a fan’s favorite, through her viewpoint the reader experiences familiar milestones and can mark them as recognizable. Thus, experiencing the narrative through Bella’s eyes allows adult women to rekindle nostalgic feelings of adolescent first love, which then progresses to becoming a wife and, subsequently, a mother. As women progress through these identity categories, they are not discarded or eroded; rather, identity is constantly in production (see Hall 2003 and Kondo 1990) and tenuously established through performativity and repetitious acts (Butler 1997).

Women connect to these gendered identities in novels as they are recognizable (Radway 1984) and contain themes of caretaking. Even as a daughter, Bella took care of her parents, such as by moving so her mother could travel with her new boyfriends and ensuring her bachelor father ate proper meals. Thus, Bella displays traits of motherhood even before she reaches that milestone, which further allows adult, female readers to connect with her character’s experiences as many of them are caretakers as well.

Enjoyment of the *Twilight* series is then utilized by adult, female fans, perhaps ironically, as a pleasurable activity that is separate from their roles as wives and mothers. It is through a recognition and identification with familiar caretaker identity categories that women then temporarily deploy a break in their gendered performativity by abstaining
from their typical duties, such as cooking dinner, to engage in pleasurable activities related to the *Twilight* series.

**Fan Activism**

As adult, female fans of the *Twilight* series banded together to form communities, many groups began engaging in charitable activities through the fandom. These actions are representative of a larger movement among fan communities as they shift from more traditional perspectives of fans as individually motivated and self-serving to a more socially aware trend in fan studies that depicts the intersection of fandom with making a difference in the ‘real’ world (see Bennett 2012, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Earl and Kimport 2009, Jenkins 2012, Jenkins and Shresthova 2012, Kligler-Vilenchik, McVeigh-Schultz, et al 2012, Scardaville 2005). While not all fans participate in this form of civic engagement, the trend is an interesting turn as it illustrates the increasing interconnectedness of contemporary life and provides a new landscape of research for the study of social movements.

Within the *Twilight* community and their charitable actions, the themes of morality and motherhood were often discussed. Citing the morality within the books as a key theme, fans commented that they endeavored to take these positive feelings and use it to create beneficial social change. With Esme’s Heart, the women involved strove to take their love of *Twilight* and push it a step further to give back to others in their local community. While women initially identified with the aspect of caretaking and traditional life milestones for women in the *Twilight* series, they sought out a space of their own through the act of reading for pleasure and engaging in sociality with the community. However, upon forming a group and seeking a ‘break’, identity categories (see Butler
1997, Hall 2003, Kondo 1990) and conceptualizations of motherhood and ‘natural’
female roles (see Allen 1999, Ortner 1974, Rubin 1975) are not temporarily voided from
existence and habitus (Bourdieu 1979) from previous charitable experiences is enacted.
Thus, even in seeking a break from their responsibilities as wives and mothers through
fandom, the women of Esme’s Heart are still engaging their identity roles as caretakers,
be it intentionally or subconsciously.

Virtual Technologies

The study of online communities is generating a breadth of research\(^3\) that
indicates the internet is altering the ways in which many people engage in sociality. The
connectivity of the internet helped facilitate the formation of the *Twilight* community and
more easily enabled the communication and mobilization of their charitable activities.
Thus, in some ways, it is through the connectivity of the internet that fans are able to
quickly, and relatively cost effectively, mobilize for a charitable cause, be it with a
donation of time through in person volunteering or the raising of funds to benefit a cause.

A key benefit of the internet is its capacity to connect people with shared interests,
but it also allows people to identify those they disagree with or enjoy antagonizing; many
*Twilight* fans encountered internet ‘trolls’ or people who disliked *Twilight* and believed
the stereotypes about its fans. Thus, I do not wish to portray the internet as a virtual space
that is free from strife or malicious comments. The internet is, as with many interactions,
comprised of a multitude of experiences that range in significance, emotion, and
meaning. Furthermore, as the internet and mobile technologies network people together

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\(^3\) See Angrosino 2005, Beaulieu 2005, Bird and Barber 2007, Boellstorff 2008, Brooker 2007, Burgess and
as they move through their daily lives, it becomes increasingly difficult to articulate a divide between the virtual and the real.

Within this schizophrenic sociality (see Allison 2006 and Appadurai 2006[1990]), methods and experiences of communication are not linear. As such, fandom and the communities that arise around these cultural texts are not relegated to easily bounded areas; these fan communities are increasingly connected with non-fandom aspects as evidenced by the civic engagement of fan activism. This calls for a conceptualization of interactions as mediated by multiple avenues (Kirby 1997), be it the physical body or technology to access the virtual, and the recognition that each interface is constructed and, as such, each poses ambiguity.

7.3 Significance of Research

As a *Twilight* fan, I am unable to completely separate myself from the project as the series facilitated a social bond between a friend and myself. This dissertation and my interactions with the women of Esme’s Heart helped me to better understand and conceptualize my own experiences as a *Twilight* fan and, as such, this project in some regards is a form of “native ethnography” (Narayan 1993). However, while I am familiar with the *Twilight* series and view myself as a fan, I was not involved with a structured group until this project began and I encountered the women of Esme’s Heart. My knowledge of the series and fan status did provide benefits as it presented a foundational knowledge and common interest with which I was able to use as I spoke with participants. For my friend and I, *Twilight* became a language that we spoke and it was a vehicle for discussing relationships, life choices, and goals. While other friends were dismissive of *Twilight*, we could respond reminding them not to hate something
they did not understand, knowing that we had each other’s back in the discussion.

Continuing the tradition of seeing the films together, I was able to invite my friend to attend the Esme’s Heart event for the *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* theatrical release, which was symbolically meaningful as it ended our journey of seeing the movies in theater together.

![Figure 7.1 Author and friend at the Breaking Dawn: Part 2 movie premiere](image)

Years later and in different cities, the series remains a topic of conversation for us and acts as a bond. Around the end of 2014, a network was airing a *Twilight* movie marathon. Upon seeing this, my friend quickly texted me to notify me that it was on television: “There’s a *Twilight* marathon on tonight. You know what I’m doing”. Smiling, I then turned on the television to check my local listings so we could watch the series together while miles apart.

Some members of the community move on from the franchise and relinquish their participation with fan groups; some continue to enjoy the *Twilight* series online and/or privately and nostalgically visit ‘old friends’ as they re-read the books; some maintain their membership with the in person fan groups and engage in charitable work. *Twilight* will not always mean the same thing to fans and some people move on from the series

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4 Photo taken by an event attendee, Chloe, with the author’s camera.
even after several years of dedication. However, this does not diminish the meanings and significance of the series during the time period within which the people were passionate about *Twilight*. Fans are a nomadic people that traverse fantasy worlds and may, for a time, live in one for several years before moving on to the next landscape. Popular culture is intended to move out of style as the outgoing trend makes room for the new commodity in the landscape. As such, fans tend to travel to an active cultural text and its community. While some cultural texts become iconic and preserve through time, it is unknown if *Twilight* will join those ranks or not. Thus, this dissertation articulates the experiences of fans within the sphere of *Twilight*, which they then intersected with the ‘real’ world through charitable engagement.

This case study of *Twilight* fans highlights that not all fans are passive readers (see Adorno and Horkheimer 2000[1944], Benjamin 1999[1936]), but actively engage with the material and render their own readings of the text (see de Certeau 1984, Fiske, 1989, Jenkins 1992) and contribute to the production of themselves as human beings (Graeber 2011). Furthermore, their activities are not based solely on consumerism and individualistic pleasure (see Hebdige 1979, Muggleton 2000), but extend into the public sphere through philanthropic work with fan communities. Contributing to the conversation of fan activism⁵, this study adds to the understanding of why this trend is increasingly occurring. Does this represent a new way of being a fan? Has fandom become ‘mainstream’ in a way that it entices new participants that may previously have not joined? Thus, is it these new participants that are driving the change? Or does it indicate the collapsing of fragile boundaries between sections in our lives as we are

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increasingly connected via virtual technologies?

Through the intersection of identity, community, virtual technologies, and fan activism, the increasing connectivity of the world is visible and thus builds upon Appadurai’s theory of disjunctive global cultural processes and flows (2006[1990]). While the study of fan communities has largely been conducted in other disciplines, such as cultural studies, I strongly encourage for an anthropological focus on these communities in an effort to better capture the experiences and conceptualizations of the participants. Furthermore, with the collapsing boundaries between distinct spheres, aspects of fandom are increasingly intermingled with other parts of life. Thus, this project contributes to an anthropological voice in the conversation of fan studies.

This study may present an opportunity for other research projects in that it is an analysis of a fan community, but participants are often nomadic and progress through textual terrains, ‘poaching’ as they move (de Certeau 1984, Jenkins 1992). Some of the women I interviewed discussed other fandoms, such as *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997) or *Harry Potter* (Rowling 1997), and I anticipate that fans may eventually 'travel' to another cultural text that is 'active'. However, the challenge of this migration is for an adequate new landscape to be identified. As of the writing of this dissertation, the women I interacted with had not yet located a new fandom that fulfilled the same categories and meaningfulness as *Twilight*. However, if fans of the *Twilight* series find themselves in a new landscape, this project may act as a predecessor for understanding this travel.

While this project may be at an end, I believe that Esme’s Heart and its group of fewer members will continue on engaging in charitable work to benefit their local
community for years to come. The *Twilight* craze flooded the imaginations of numerous people through the books, movies, soundtracks, fanfiction, and et cetera. I endeavored to create fissures in sedimented views to illustrate that not all fans share in the same experiences and may not subscribe to the popular stereotypes as they are commonly depicted. Thus, my hope is that, even in an age of internet anonymity, those that read this study will look beyond the surface of a fan community and distinguish the variable experiences and interpretations of those within that sphere. As the internet and virtual technologies continue to increase the interconnectedness between people, I look forward to the breadth of studies yet to come on fandom and the ways in which experiences, online and offline, intermingle and flow back and forth to create vibrant fan communities that impact the real world with both consumptive pleasure and altruistic intentions.

I want to close with a story Olivia told me about an interaction with her husband on the durability of cultural texts. I must admit that I too hope for Olivia’s view of *Twilight*’s ability to persevere as the opportunity to see the movies on the theatrical screen would be quite a nostalgic treat for me and other fans years from now. Thus, I end this dissertation with Olivia’s musings on *Twilight*’s future:

*You know, my husband teases me and...they recently re-released Top Gun, which...that was his whole life, was the 80s...[He says,] ‘If we could just go back to the 80s, everything would be so much better.’ And so we sat and...he reminded me when the first opening song came on, he said to me ‘Twenty-five years from now they will not be playing Twilight on the big screen.’ And I said ‘You do not know that. Look at Star Trek and all this stuff.’ He’s like [no sound] ...So...we will see.*
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