

4-21-2010

# Dressing the Part: How Twilight Fans Self-Identify through Dress at an Official Twilight Convention

Marisa Shipley

Trinity University, mshiple1@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm\\_honors](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm_honors)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Shipley, Marisa, "Dressing the Part: How Twilight Fans Self-Identify through Dress at an Official Twilight Convention" (2010). *Communication Honors Theses*. 3.

[http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm\\_honors/3](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm_honors/3)

This Thesis open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

Dressing the Part:  
How *Twilight* Fans Self-Identify through Dress at an Official *Twilight* Convention

Marisa Shipley

A departmental senior thesis submitted to the  
Department of Communication at Trinity University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation  
with departmental honors.

April 21, 2010

---

Aaron Delwiche  
Thesis Advisor

---

Jennifer Jacobs Henderson  
Thesis Advisor

---

Sammye Johnson  
Thesis Advisor

---

William Christ  
Department Chair

---

Associate Vice President  
for  
Academic Affairs

Student Copyright Declaration: the author has selected the following copyright provision (select only one):

This thesis is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which allows some noncommercial copying and distribution of the thesis, given proper attribution. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

This thesis is protected under the provisions of U.S. Code Title 17. Any copying of this work other than "fair use" (17 USC 107) is prohibited without the copyright holder's permission.

Other:

Dressing the Part:

How *Twilight* Fans Self-Identify through Dress at an Official *Twilight* Convention

By Marisa Shipley

Honors Thesis

Department of Communication

*Advisors:* Aaron Delwiche, Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, Sammye Johnson

Trinity University

San Antonio, Texas

*Submitted April 21, 2010*

## Dressing the Part:

How *Twilight* Fans Self-Identify through Dress at an Official *Twilight* Convention<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 2003, Stephanie Meyer, a 29-year-old stay at home mother of three living in Phoenix, woke up from a vivid dream and, not wanting to forget it, wrote it down immediately (Grossman “Stephanie Meyer”). What she didn’t know was that the dream would become Chapter 13 in *Twilight*, the first book in a series of four that has gained international popularity (Grossman “Stephanie Meyer”). The books from the *Twilight Saga* have collectively sold more than 85 million copies and been translated into 37 languages, including Danish, Japanese, Thai, Turkish, Norwegian and Bahasa Indonesian. Although the book was written for a young adult audience, the international fan base consists of people from tween years to adults, many of whom are mothers who range in age from their late twenties into their forties.

Meyer’s dream was of two teens lying in a field having an intense conversation. “One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly and a vampire” (*The Official Website*). The girl is Bella Swan, the main character and the narrator of the majority of the series. At the beginning of the book, halfway through her junior year in high school, Bella moves to Forks, Washington, to live with her father, the chief of police. Her counterpart is Edward Cullen, a 106-year-old vampire with whom Bella becomes romantically involved. He is a member of a family of seven so-called vegetarian vampires who only drink animal blood, not human. In the dream they were discussing their unique situation, which Bella

---

<sup>1</sup> This project was made possible through the generous support of the Mach Fellowship, which is funded by Steven P. Mach, a Trinity University alumnus who is a member the Board of Trustees, and vice president and CFO of Mach Industrial Group, in Houston, Texas.

describes perfectly when she says, “About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was a part of him – and I didn’t know how potent that part might be – that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him” (Meyer, 195). Bella’s best friend is Jacob Black, a member of the Quileute Indian tribe, who lives on La Push reservation just outside of town. Jacob happens to be a werewolf and is completely in love with Bella. The vampires and werewolves are sworn enemies, but they have a pact not to cross into one another’s territories as long as the Cullens don’t harm any human. This delicate balance, with Bella placed firmly in the center of the two sides, leads to tense situations for her and causes a rift in the fandom, with people declaring their allegiance to either “Team Edward” or “Team Jacob,” also sometimes called “Team Cullen” and “Team Wolfpack.” The other main group of characters is made up of the Volturi, a clan of vampires who enforce vampire laws designed to keep the race a secret from the human population.

*The Twilight Saga* consists of four books: *Twilight* (October 5, 2005), *New Moon* (August 21, 2006), *Eclipse* (August 7, 2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (August 2, 2008) (“The *Twilight* Series”). The four books from the series have collectively spent 235 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, 136 of them in the number one spot (Click; Adams & Akbar; Grossman “*Twilight* in America”; Turan). In 2008, Stephanie Meyer sold 22 million books, more than any other author, and took all four top spots on that year’s best sellers list, according to *USA Today* (Minzesheimer & DeBarros). Also in 2008, *USA Today* named Stephanie Meyer “Author of the Year,” and in 2009, she was number 26 on *Forbes* magazine’s worldwide most powerful celebrity list (Schumacher; “World’s Most Powerful”). *New Moon* spent 47 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list and *Eclipse* sold 150,000 copies its first day on sale (“Children’s Books: Chapter Books”; Trachtenberg).

The feature film *Twilight* was released in theatres nationwide on November 21, 2008 by Summit Entertainment, owner of the movie rights to all four books in the series. With the release of the movie, the series increased in popularity. The film had a \$69.6 million opening weekend, a record for a female director, grossing just under \$400 million worldwide during its theatrical release (D'Alessandro). The second film, *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, was released on November 20, 2009 with a \$26.2 million midnight release, placing it third behind *The Dark Knight* and *Spider-Man 3* in record midnight premiere ticket sales (D'Alessandro). *New Moon* had a \$141 million domestic opening weekend and made more than \$684 million worldwide during the entirety of its theatrical run; the DVD sold four million copies during the weekend of its release (D'Alessandro; "All Time"; Sperling). *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* was filmed during the fall of 2009 and is slated for release on June 30, 2010 ("*The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*"). Summit Entertainment has not officially confirmed or denied a filming schedule for the last book, but according to Kristen Stewart, who plays Bella Swan in the films, the fourth book, *Breaking Dawn*, is scheduled to begin filming in November of 2010 and is going to be made into two movies because of the length of the story and the somewhat complicated and involved plot (Molly).

There are several different kinds of *Twilight* conventions. The first *Twilight* convention was *TwiCon 2008*, an "unofficial celebration of the *Twilight Saga* and Stephanie Meyer" that took place July 30-August 2, 2008 in Dallas, Texas (*TwiCon*). Promoters touted it as the "first and largest destination convention dedicated to the phenomenon." In their first year, more than 3,000 people attended, with "their fervor and sheer numbers a testament to the fever pitch surrounding all things vamp." This year (2010) two conventions were planned, with one in Las Vegas in June and the first Canadian event in Ottawa in July. As well as expanding in size, the

convention planned to broaden its focus to include other current vampire romance works, including the TV shows *True Blood* and *Vampire Diaries*. The *Twicon* conventions were organized by fans for fans, but on March 13, 2010, those individuals running *Twicon* decided to cease all future operations, including the two conventions this year, because of “competitive pressures, coupled with the persistent nature of the economic downturn” (*Twicon*).

The production company for the film series, Summit Entertainment, teamed up with convention organizers Creation Entertainment to produce an official *Twilight* convention tour. Each date consists of a three-day event across the country. There are 25 scheduled in 2010 and five in 2011 all over the United States, and two in Toronto and Vancouver, Canada. Programming at these conventions consists of talks by stars from the series as well as “Big Name Fans,” those fans who have a respected voice and who are well known within the fandom, primarily for running blogs like the *Twilight Lexicon* and *Cullen Boys Anonymous*. There are also photo ops, autograph signings, a trivia contest, a *Twilight* makeover, a concert, and a dance (*The Official Twilight Convention*).

This study looks at how adult female *Twilight* fans self identify through dress. It builds on a rich history of research on fan activity and identity negotiation. Focusing on a visible manifestation of identity negotiation in a real world setting, this study has roots in, but diverges from, recent work done on the presentation of self in an online context. The choice of an official *Twilight* convention as the location for the study offered a real-world sphere where people felt safe to self-identify as fans because they are among their peers. Through observation of and interviews with the fans in attendance, this study’s goal is to examine what *Twilight* costumes or series-themed gear they were wearing and to then decide how those choices acted as a mechanism for identity construction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The first incarnations of fan studies, in the early to mid-1980s, took inspiration from Michel De Certeau's studies of the struggles between the powerful and disempowered audiences who used the popular mass media as a weapon in their guerilla warfare (Gray, 2). As fan studies grew, they became a means of defending the subject of its study in order to show who the fans really were outside the stereotypes circulated about them (Gray, 3). The next wave of fan studies, in the early 1990s, was from the fans' perspective, allowing the fans to "speak of and for themselves"; the studies were often written by people who were already members of the fan community (Gray, 3). These trends showed an increasing acceptance of fans, but there continue to be divisions between those fan groups that are and are not acceptable. In the late 1990s, public access to the Internet not only allowed fan bases to grow, but also allowed people of neighboring fandoms to cross over to a new fandom easily (Coppa, 54, 57). Additionally, the fan approach moved from broadcasting to narrowcasting (Gray, 4; Mazzarella, 146). New technologies continue to make being a fan more accessible and more natural in our everyday lives, and also make it easier to participate. The new generation of fandom is much more interactive (Gray, 8; Coppa, 42).

There are some who may dismiss fan studies as inconsequential, unimportant, superfluous, irrelevant, juvenile or without purpose. Lisa Lewis states that the fault may lie in the academy's "historical propensity to treat media audiences as passive and controlled, its tendency to privilege aesthetic superiority in programming, its reluctance to support consumerism, its belief in media industry manipulation" (1). She also finds fault with the popular media that has "stigmatized fandom by emphasizing danger, abnormality and silliness" (Lewis 1). Lewis urges researchers not to dismiss fan activities as trivial, but to approach fan studies as they would any



other legitimate subject (2). One of the foremost fan scholars, Joli Jenson, encourages modern scholars of fan studies to conduct their studies as a “form of respectful engagement” and use research as a means to “illuminate the experiences of others *in their own terms*, because these ‘others’ are us, and human experiences intrinsically and inherently matter” (26). More recently, communication scholar Melissa Click challenged her fellow academics, saying that the *Twilight* series and its fans are worth studying: “Cultural studies scholars have been fighting these stereotypes for too long to let the gendered mockery of *Twilight* fans continue unchallenged.” This research answers that call because it studies a fan activity without judgment in order to understand the dynamics and use of dress as a means of presenting one’s self. It does not play into the presentation of *Twilight* fans as screaming teen girls who don’t know any better, but rather works to show the fandom that endures despite being aware that the world is watching and often judging.

## Fandom

### *Gendered Stereotypes*

Henry Jenkins, a pioneer in fan studies, and Jenson challenged stereotypical descriptions of fans as kooks, crazies, irrational, or out of control, and the limited view of fans in the role of either the “obsessed individual [or] the hysterical crowd” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 11; Jenson, 9, 13). These views have contributed to the establishment of an “us” versus “them” mentality between the general public and the ominous “other” (Jenson, 9, 19). Jenkins attributes non-fans’ uneasiness towards fans and their activities to the fact that they feel the natural and dominant hierarchical structure is challenged by the fans’ refusal to follow social rules (*Textual Poachers*, 18). In his description of fans, Grossberg addresses the misconception that audiences are easily manipulated, distracted and unaware of the exploitation of the consumers (51), when

in reality, fans are often very aware of their role within the power structure and how they can be manipulated with cultural messages (53). Even within the fan world, there are dividing lines and biases among different groups. The stereotype of the female fan type is the orgiastic fan, otherwise known as the groupie who grew out of rock music. Jenkins establishes that “the eroticized fan is almost always female...the feminine side of fandom is manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls who try to tear the clothes off the Beatles” (*Textual Poachers*, 15).

Forty-six years after the Beatles came to the United States, this view of teen girls has not been replaced by another; it remains the same. The newest batch of words added to *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* in July of 2008 included the term “fanboy” but not “fangirl,” showing a clear bias in the gendered acceptability of fan activity (Sliwinski). Melissa Click, drawing on historical fan studies and current trends in the skewed portrayal of fangirls by popular media, surmises that:

fanboys have greater visibility in popular culture because their interests and activities have become an unspoken standard. Fangirls’ interests and strategies, which do not register when positioned against fanboys’, are ignored – or worse, ridiculed. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the current treatment of the *Twilight Saga*, the wildly popular franchise built upon Stephanie Meyer’s Young Adult book series.

Click goes on to discuss the media’s confusion over the success of a series with a targeted teenage girl fan base. Because society believes that fan activities are meant primarily for boys, regular male attendees at ComiCon conventions stated that the predominantly female *Twilight* fans ruined their experience by showing up in droves at ComiCon in 2009 in San Diego. The *Twilight* fans camped out for hours in order to see the stars of the *Twilight* series on

panels. This led some male attendees to hold *Twilight* protests, holding signs that read things like, “*Twilight* ruined ComiCon, Scream if you agree!!!” (Click, Ohanesian). This attitude not only places fangirls in a subordinated position to that of their male equivalent today, but also ignores the long-standing and prominent presence that female fans have had in the fan worlds over time (Click). Not only do other fans put down the *Twilight* fan base, but the media also belittle them through the use of descriptors like feverous, mad, hysterical, obsessive, rabid, ravenous, and frenzied – giving a picture of *Twilight* fans as “thousands of besotted girls [thrown] into fits of red-faced screaming” (Click).

Despite these exaggerated and false depictions of female fans, there has been recent legitimate scholarship about female viewing, mostly within the online sphere. Such scholars as Sharon Mazzarella and Christine Scodari have looked at how female fans negotiate their identities online. One insight Jenkins offers focuses on the different reading styles of men and women. He notes that men tended to read for authorial meaning, perceiving a “strong narrational voice” which shaped the events. Women, on the other hand, tend to focus on the whole narrative picture while not really seeing it clearly as something that has been “narrated into existence.” “Male reading acknowledged and respected the author’s authority, while women saw themselves as engaged in a ‘conversation’ within which they could participate as active contributors” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 108). Some issues, like the emergence of women gossiping as a method of discussion for fans, have been dismissed as “worthless and idle chatter,” but Jenkins sees importance in the practice although he acknowledges that its fluid nature makes it hard to study (*Textual Poachers*, 80). The significance of gossip for Jenkins lies in its ability to sustain fan activities by serving as a means for fans to vocalize their frustrations and commiserate with one another over embarrassing experiences (*Textual Poachers*, 81). Often it is the act of

gossiping more than the content of the discussion that is important because of the relationship that women build between one another while creating a common ground (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 81).

### *Group as Community*

Fandom serves as an alternative social community whose membership is no longer defined by physical proximity, but through affinity (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 137); they are not defined by normal demographic means, but through their voluntary relationships with this common text (Jenkins, “Strangers,” 213; Meyrowitz, 65). The fan experience is not an isolated one, but one that is affected by other fans (Jenkins, “Strangers,” 209). “Entering into fandom means abandoning preexisting social status and seeking acceptance and recognition less in terms of who you are than in terms of what you contribute to this new community“ (Jenkins, “Strangers,” 213). Jenkins observes that fans have to defend themselves and do so from what is seen as the inferior position (*Textual Poachers*, 21), but they “draw strength and courage from their ability to identify themselves as members of a group of other fans who share common interests and confronted common problems” (*Textual Poachers*, 23). In being a fan, they knowingly accept the role of the constantly criticized, but they also know they have a network to fall back on. Jenkins notes that group viewing experiences, such as midnight releases of movies, are common because fans gain a space where everyone presumably is as interested in the text and will engage in critical discussions of the text (*Textual Poachers*, 76). With the accelerated growth of the Internet, there has been easier access to other fans and existing interactions have intensified. In studying the language of fan posts, Jenkins noticed that fans felt the need for confirmation by other fans that their data or understanding was correct, as well as an emphasis on the collective nature of fans’ knowledge (*Textual Poachers*, 79).

There is a constant interchange between fans that includes building off of and negotiating with one another. Within any particular fandom, there is too much information for any one person to hold it all, so they often pool their knowledge. Jenkins makes the distinction “between shared knowledge (which would refer to information known by all members of a community) and collective intelligence (which describes knowledge available to all members of a community)” (*Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 139). Bloggers serve as an information bank and nerve center through which connections to other knowledge cultures can be made (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 151). Fans have discriminating tastes; they set sharply outlined boundaries not only between their fandom and the outside, but also within their fandom (Fiske, 34-35). Jenkins talks about taste within the fandom itself, as well as appropriate conduct, as something that has to be learned: “the boundaries of ‘good taste’ then, must constantly be policed... ‘bad taste’ is not simply undesirable; it is unacceptable” (*Textual Poachers*, 16). While there is discussion and debate among fans, and sometimes the fandom is split, for the most part “a high degree of consensus shapes fan reception” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 95).

#### *Sign Vehicles: Identity Management within the Group*

In a fan group, as in any other group, part of existing within the group is the management of the self. In people’s understanding of one another, there are “sign vehicles,” or sources of information that allow us to read into and understand each other better. These sign vehicles help “define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him” (Goffman, 1). Erving Goffman, an early scholar of identity studies, contributed to the study of self-presentation by approaching people’s interaction as a dramaturgical interaction that takes place. He sees the world as a stage where people take on different roles according to the situation that they are placed in and the people that they interact

with in these situations.

Goffman separates people's presentation of themselves to others as "front stage," that which we perform or present to others intentionally, and "back stage," that which we keep hidden. Goffman also says that everyone works together to negotiate and project a unified group consensus identity. Goffman clarifies that more truth about a person can be told indirectly through the *ungovernable* aspects, the things that are "given off," "the more theatrical and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind" rather than the *governable* things that are intentionally given (2, 5). In his adaptation of Goffman's work to the Internet, scholar Hugh Miller says "our 'selves' are presented for the purpose of interacting with others, and are developed and maintained with the cooperation of others through the interaction" (Miller, 2).

This study of the sign vehicles and play between front stage and back stage persona relates to the study of *Twilight* fans because they are choosing to present a certain image of themselves when they dress up. Fans are aware that others both within and outside of the fandom are watching. The continuity or differences between what fans are intentionally giving and what is given off without intention can be used to understand the fan dynamic. In order to give a certain image intentionally, individuals must be aware of themselves and the parameters of the group to which they belong.

#### *Self-Verification: How to Align Oneself with the Group*

The self is reflexive because it has the ability to "categorize, classify [and] ornament itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications" (Stets & Burke, 224), which is the process of identity formation. "The self both exists within society, and is influenced by society, because socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into one's

prototype or identity standard” (Stets & Burke, 232). The actions that people engage in are done so in an effort to keep others’ perceptions of themselves in line with their identity standard (Stets & Burke, 233). People engage in the process of social comparison in which they compare, among other things, their own “attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, [and] styles of speech” to members of the social category or group to determine whether they belong with them (Stets & Burke, 225). Those who do not fall in line with the group are then deemed the out-group (Stets & Burke, 225). This process of separation and intentional distinction made between the group and the out-group helps to solidify one’s own role and group identity.

Once placed in a group, one’s self esteem is raised and one feels an increase in self-worth because of the group’s acceptance and the subsequent association with the group (Stets & Burke, 225, 233). Young Yun Kim expands on this, saying that “...an individual’s personal identity is based in part on membership in significant social categories, along with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (350). Identification with the in-group, even when one’s status is low, also leads to positive evaluation of the group, tighter commitment to the group, and a decrease in one’s likeliness to leave the group (Stets & Burke, 226). There is a consistency in members’ opinions and actions as a condition of their decision to affiliate with the group; they “behave in concert” with the group norm (Stets & Burke, 226). While in the group, one does not see herself or himself as an autonomous individual, but rather as an “embodiment of the in-group prototype” (Stets & Burke, 231). This is the process that leads to “social stereotyping, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion, and collective action” (Stets & Burke, 231-232). Within a fandom, individuals must assimilate their own beliefs with those of the group. Those who do not believe the same things, who are

seen as out of bounds, are not seen as fans.

### Dress and Cosplay

Dress is important in the understanding of fans because clothing is closely tied to personal identity and self-presentation (Turbin, 45). Within traditional self-presentation studies, there is a spectrum of presentational spheres that runs from public to private. Dress studies scholar Carole Turbin modifies the traditional measure of public *or* private to one that acknowledges the affects they have on one another. It starts with the public role and purpose of dress and the subsequent public presentation of it, which in turn produces private feelings, which then have public social implications (46). Turbin positions physical clothing articles as well as the act of dress between production and consumption and says that dress is an ideal venue for exploring the links between public and private presentation (44, 46). “Dress plays two roles: it adorns the body and at the same time serves as a tool to mask or reveal something about the person’s private consciousness” (Turbin, 46). Dress is therefore an outward expression of private meaning, which is only significant to the observer when the meaning and significance are easily read through cultural understanding (Turbin, 45).

### *Dress as an Expressive Tool*

Dress is important in our study of people’s personal expression because it is always with us; we are almost always dressed. By what we choose to adorn ourselves with when we get dressed, we tell the people who see or interact with us a little about who we are. Within popular culture, dress is one of the most consistently gendered and emotionally charged elements (Turbin, 44). There is great meaning not only in the act of wearing clothing, but also in the design and construction of garments because they are not merely functional or decorative furnishing, but also are engineered constructions meant to give gendered form and meaning to



the body (Turbin, 45). Without referring directly to fans, Turbin says, “Especially during transformational periods, dress reveals aspects of ideologies ... people may use dress systematically and self-consciously as a public manifestation ... through color, pattern, design, and texture of garments, as well as gesture, stance and posture” (48).

### *Cosplay: Getting Involved*

Cosplay, a term resulting from the combination of the words costume and play, started as the practice of people dressing up as traditional Japanese anime or manga characters, usually at fan conventions. Cosplay started in Japan, where it continues to be an organized, regulated and structured process. It has caught on in the United States, but is described here as “a highly chaotic affair.” While in the United States, cosplayers roam conventions and let other attendees take their pictures at random, in Japan the practice is much more regulated, with large dressing rooms where everyone changes into costume and restricted areas designated for cosplay (Benesh-Liu, 2, 4). While cosplay takes place mostly at conventions, it is beginning to expand beyond those walls in the United States, as can be seen in a recent *Newsday* article by Maureen Ker in which she describes as the cosplay scene as it plays out on the streets of New York City (Ker). Some general trends within the world of cosplay are that groups will sometimes dress together as a group and sometimes there is cross-dressing with female cosplayers dressed as male characters (Benesh-Liu, 2).

### *Cosplay as Poaching*

Fan activities are significant for many because, as Jenkins claims, the “richness stems from what the reader brings to text, not what [they] find there (*Textual Poachers*, 74). Jenkins establishes a fan he calls the “poacher” who engages in participatory activities. Poaching is the appropriation of images by fans in the creation of their own works. This type of activity led to

the description of fan activities as a scavenger culture, using pieces of others work to create something of their own (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 24). Jenkins specifically lays out that “fannish reading” for him is a process that involves the initial consumption through its incorporation into other creative works (*Textual Poachers*, 53), and what distinguishes a fan from a regular viewer is “their emotional and intellectual involvement” (*Textual Poachers*, 56). Proximity to the text is necessary to reinterpret it for one’s own use and “only by close engagement with its meanings and materials, can fans fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 62).

In terms of dress, fans are poaching the existing descriptions or images of characters in order to create their costumes. Within the cosplay world, there is a balance between conventional and individual designs. There is an existing negotiated body of images, visual symbols and sub-texts that are easily recognized and decoded by fans who pride themselves on being able to interpret the symbolic meaning that exists within their own subculture (Manifold, “Culture,” 3). More advanced artists create costumes that diverge more from the canon imagery while still respecting the traditional visual norms of the fan community (Manifold, “Culture,” 4). “Fanartists and cosplayers are unabashed about reproducing the imagic products of commercial producers and [are] challenged to appropriate aesthetic styles from many cultures...[the] ultimate goal of fanart and cosplay is not imitation but the finding of a unique expressive style” (Manifold, “Culture,” 7). Manifold points out that cosplayers are not just trying to capture the visual likeness of the characters, but the emotional presence as well. Fans think this is both the hardest and most important element to get right (“Culture,” 3).

### *Cosplay: Construction*

Most of the time, cosplay costumes are constructed or are otherwise pieced together by

the wearer, sometimes in collaboration with friends. The sewing skills used in the construction of these garments are often learned from older female family members. More recently, chat rooms are being used as a place where methods for how to construct props can be shared (Manifold, “Culture,” 4). Depending how elaborate the costume is, it can take anywhere from days to months to complete (Benesh-Liu, 3). Part of this is the meticulous research that goes into making these costumes. Cosplayers pay close attention to details, taking screen captures in order to see every angle of the garments so they can recreate it as authentically as possible, even spending time trying to match the materials used (Benesh-Liu, 3). Outside of accuracy, the amount of artistic license cosplayers take ranges from little, leaving costumes close to their original form, or a lot, as they move towards more exaggerated and abstract representations (Benesh-Liu, 2). Josh Stenger used the auction of costumes and props from the cult hit television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to investigate fans’ engagement with the clothing. He observed that items with the closest ties to the stars were of the highest importance. He also noticed a correlation between the popularity of a certain items in auctions to how closely it was tied to an important narrative moment on the show (35). These observations carry over into the world of cosplay because more credit is given to those fans who have been able to achieve a representation of the figure closest to their representation in the canon (Stenger, 34).

### *Cosplay: Motivation*

Researchers speculate that there are many possible motivations behind people’s practice of cosplaying that may vary among individuals, plus one person may have multiple reasons. The reasons range from pleasure, entertainment, exploration, wanting to show dedication to the series or character, personally identifying with a character, feeling that they have the right body type for the character, using it as an opportunity to make social connections, or as a way to figure out

how the world works by immersing themselves in another character (Manifold, “Life as Theater,” 5; Manifold “Culture,” 3; Benesh-Liu, 2). Another reason may be that through participating in cosplay, “the adopted or invented character may serve as metaphor for life lessons that might be too intimidating or obtusely comprehended if communicated directly” (Manifold, “Life as Theater,” 5). Manifold sees cosplay as an escapist activity, but one in which the goal is to find one’s self (6), a “way of figuring out ‘how the world works’” (“Culture,” 3).

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

### *Research Question*

Do adult female *Twilight* fans self-identify through physical adornment in a real world sphere?

This research project began because I am a fan of the *Twilight Saga* and the fan culture surrounding it interested me. I saw that the fan base is made up of mostly women, ranging from teens to the TwiMoms who have all been written off in the media as crazy, which only increases the chances that people roll their eyes when the series is mentioned. In particular, the treatment of *Twilight* fans at ComiCon was interesting to me because it was so hypocritical of men at a fan convention to be annoyed by fans of a series just because they were women. I was interested in whether fans self-identify in a real-world sphere like a film premiere or a convention. At a convention, an individual is more directly tied to her role as a fan than when she is online. The anonymity that the Internet provides is gone, but a convention still could be seen as a safe space to showcase one’s identity as a fan because it is an allocation of a fan space in a specific space for a specific time.

In analyzing the behaviors and motivations of *Twilight* fans, it helps to understand a few

key terms. For example, the phrase “dressed in character costume” means that the fan dressed up as one of the characters from the series. *Twilight* gear is defined as clothing and accessories that are tied to the series. Some of these items include short sleeve t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, sweatpants, canvas bags, purses, colored contact lenses, jewelry, and temporary tattoos. In order to be considered affiliated with the series, the item must have a direct tie either through imagery, such as the Cullen family crest, the Quileute tattoo, and photos from the movies, or through text, including the names of the series, characters, and quotes from the books and/or movies.

### *Hypotheses*

Based on the literature about fan activities and conventions, as well as a familiarity with the online fan activity surrounding *Twilight*, an equal mix of fans dressed in character costume and *Twilight* themed gear was expected. There is a history of the convention being the place for character costume dress, and there is a wealth of *Twilight* themed gear that many fans are likely to own. These facts led me to expect that a small minority of people in attendance would be dressed in street clothing and the majority of the people in attendance would be equally split between being dressed in character costume and *Twilight* themed gear. Where groups of fans came to the convention together, it was expected that they would have coordinated their character costume or *Twilight* themed gear before coming to the convention.

The expectation for the most likely character costumes for a female to choose would be from the characters Alice Cullen, Bella Swan, and possibly Victoria as well. Women make up the majority of the *Twilight* fan base, and while women do sometimes dress up as male characters, it is more common for people to dress as a character of their own sex. This limits the choice for *Twilight* fans to a small pool of female characters. Bella, the main character; Alice, her future sister-in-law and lovable vegetarian vampire; and Victoria, the evil vampire who hunts

Bella for two of the four books, were anticipated as the most likely characters for women to dress up as. This is mostly from a process of elimination, as well as research done into which characters are the most dressed up as in cosplay photos posted online on fansites and cosplay sites. Other possible female characters are Bella's mom, who is absent in most of the books; Bella's human friends, Jessica and Angela; Edward's mean sister Rosalie; and a few Quileute women. All are minor characters in the *Twilight* series.

As far as those dressed in *Twilight* themed gear, it was expected that t-shirts would have the most presence and that the t-shirts would have a mix of Edward/vampire themes and Jacob/wolf themes. For the graphics on the *Twilight* gear worn, I expected a significant presence of photos from the movies as well as quotes from the books and/or movies. There also was an expected emphasis of t-shirts with photos from the movies as well as quotes from the books and/or movies. While these were the initial findings that were anticipated going into the research, there was room in the topic to discover things that were not anticipated or could not be predicted.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

This qualitative study investigates the types of physical adornment, either character costume or *Twilight* themed gear, are worn by fans at an official *Twilight* convention. Research was conducted both through passive observation of and interviews with fans. These participants were those in attendance at the official Creation Entertainment *Twilight* Convention in Miami, Florida between January 8 and January 10, 2010. Attendees were able to buy either one day passes, ranging from \$20 to \$60, or a full weekend pass for all three days, ranging from \$69 to \$279. Additionally, there were extra events, including the concert on Friday night for \$40, the

Volturi Vampire Ball, for \$99, as well as separate tickets to take pictures with the actors for \$40 each and get autographs from the actors for \$20 each at the convention. Fans who were in attendance on multiple days may have been photographed on each day. Data was collected on each of the three days of the convention inside and around the room featuring the bulk of the programming. Data was also collected at the Volturi Ball, a dance held on Saturday night that required a separate, additional ticket.

During the three days of the convention, I took 109 photographs of fans who were dressed up. I approached those adult female fans who were dressed in order to interview them about their choices. From those who consented to being interviewed, I was able to interview 23 individuals, either on a one-on-one basis or in a group setting. The fluid nature of the convention makes it hard to quantify. After initial findings had been studied, I emailed a questionnaire about the findings to a number of “Big Name Fans,” those well-known fans who are often considered to have sway over other fans, and several other fans who had participated in the fandom online. I got back responses from four Big Name Fans, all administrators of some of the most popular and well-respected *Twilight* fan sites, as well as four other fans.

### *Procedure*

There were two types of participants: the watched and interviewed. Passive photos of convention attendees were taken in order to document what items they were wearing. In addition to this, notes were taken on the dressing trends of those fans. When dressed in character costume, it was recorded which character they were dressed as, from what scene, and whether it was inspired from the book or the movie. When wearing *Twilight* themed gear, it was recorded what type of item they were wearing (t-shirt, sweatshirt, bag, etc.) and then what pictures or text the item had on it, in order to be able to find reference pictures later. On another level, fans who

were willing were asked to describe to the researcher what they were wearing. All participants who were interviewed signed consent forms and these interviews were recorded and transcribed later. When permission was given, a photo of the interviewee was taken in order to match it up to her interview. For some of the interviews, the researcher followed up with the question, “Why did you choose to wear this?” or “Why did you choose to wear *Twilight* themed gear instead of dressing up in costume as a character?” There were two interviews that took place as a more casual conversation, one with a single individual and the other with a group of four fans.

After the fact, photos of the participants were matched up with reference photos. In the case of individuals dressed up in character costumes, their photos were matched up with a reference photo of the character from the scene the costume was meant to emulate. For those participants who were wearing *Twilight* themed gear, their photos were matched with reference photos of the items that could be found in stores online. Many items could not be found online. This could either be due to being sold out, being outdated merchandise from *Twilight* that has now been replaced with merchandise themed for *New Moon*, or being merchandise that was not sold online at all. Once this data had been compiled, it was analyzed for general trends and significance. These findings were then emailed to several fans in order to get their feedback and observations about them.

## FINDINGS

### *Twilight Themed Gear*

The most significant and unexpected finding was that there were only seven people dressed in character costume during the duration of the three-day weekend, six at the Volturi Vampire Ball on Saturday night, and one on Sunday morning. An overwhelming majority of



those dressed were wearing *Twilight* themed gear, rather than being dressed up as a character. Of all of those in attendance, about half were wearing an article of clothing or accessory that was themed to *Twilight*, while the rest were wearing normal street clothes. All of those who were dressed in costume only did so during those specific times designated for that activity, such as at the Volturi Vampire Ball on Saturday night and on Sunday when a costume contest was held as the last activity on that day. Of the six people dressed on Saturday evening at the Ball, two friends were dressed as Bella and Rosalie (see Appendix A, fig. 1), and four others wore cloaks in order to dress up as assorted members of the Volturi court (see figs. 2, 3). The Volturi are a group of ancient evil vampires in charge of regulating the actions of vampires worldwide in order to keep their race secret; they all wear cloaks.

Attendees who wore *Twilight* themed gear sometimes had multiple layers of gear on, such as more than one of the following: a t-shirt, sweatshirt, sweatpants, purse, jewelry, colored contact lenses or a temporary tattoo (see figs. 4, 5). Some attendees who were there with friends dressed in coordination with one another. This is a cosplay phenomenon that was in effect for those wearing *Twilight* themed gear. Sometimes this was in the form of all the friends or members of the group wearing the same item, while for others there was a central theme to their clothing, such as all wolf themed t-shirts. When the researcher interviewed a mother, Mary, who was there with a friend and their two young daughters, she explained why she chose to dress up; “Just because of the fans, I was coming with the kids so just as a kind of group thing.”<sup>2</sup>

When my findings were posted on the website *His Golden Eyes*, one fan, Ashley<sup>3</sup>, responded, “Most people, myself included, typically only wear shirts to proclaim others that we support *Twilight*, what character we support, but not who we want to *be*. I know we don’t dress

---

<sup>2</sup> For all interviews, names were changed in order to keep responses anonymous. The responses were also edited for the sake of clarity. See Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> The names of fans who responded to the post were also changed for anonymity. See Appendix C.

in costume like other fans, not even close to as much.” After talking with fans about the findings, the point came up that the costumes are not unique enough to warrant recreating. Nicky, the administrator of the *His Golden Eyes* site, said, “There are no real costumes to it. Bella is a jeans and sneakers kind of girl. Edward, despite being depicted as fashionable, wears human clothes... Twilight fans would look, dare I say it, normal. The memorabilia becomes the costume. The more they have on, the bigger the costume.”

Lori Joffs, an administrator for the *Twilight Lexicon*<sup>4</sup>, one of the most used and respected *Twilight* fansites, said sometimes when she is at conventions or other *Twilight* events she often doesn't realize right away that someone is dressed in costume because the clothes are so normal looking. Joyce Swiokla, the owner of *Cullen Boys Anonymous*, another respected blog, said,

I don't think these characters have as distinctive of a trademarked “look” as say Harry Potter's scar, or a storm trooper suit. Also, this is about romance, not adventure, so people don't want to BE Edward or Jacob, they want Edward for their boyfriend or they support him as the better choice for Bella. Therefore they don't dress up like him but want to have him with them, (i.e., on their shirt or bag, etc.) or show which character is their vote/choice.

### *Source of the Gear*

There was a mix of sources for the *Twilight* themed gear, which created an enormous variety. There was some overlap, particularly with the items that were sold at the convention, such the official convention tour t-shirt. For the most part, there was not much repetition in what people were wearing. As it became later in the convention, more t-shirts were worn from one of the official vendors: Creation Entertainment, who produced the convention; Hot Topic, a retail

---

<sup>4</sup> The names of those “Big Name Fans” who are owners and administrators of fan sites were not changed. Responses were still edited for the sake of clarity. See Appendix C.

store that sells licensed merchandise for many current movies, including the new feature film version of *Alice and Wonderland*; and Twi-gear, a couple selling merchandise at a booth at the convention. Among the other vendors at the convention, there also was a vendor selling colored contact lenses, “golden vampire colored contacts” intended to mimic the golden brown color of the Cullens’ eyes, a color unique to their family and other vampires who live their vegetarian lifestyle (see fig. 6). Some fans who purchased the contact lenses put them on in the bathroom between sessions. The t-shirts and sweatshirts that people had on were graphic heavy; most of them had photographs from the movies on them as well as text. This text was made up of either the name of the movie or a quote from the books and/or movie.

### *Dressing to the Stars*

Those fans who dressed in the *Twilight* themed gear expressed a conscious choice in which t-shirts they wore on which day. Some fans selected their t-shirt to correspond to a theme for the day, for example to match the stars of the movie who were coming to speak that day. On Saturday, when two members of the wolfpack were on the schedule, there were more wolf themed shirts. In her interview, Kaylee said she wore a wolf tee in an effort to show support for Kiowa Gordon and Bronson Pelletier (see fig. 7). Another fan, Rachel, explained why she was wearing a wolfpack shirt and Cullen jacket that day: “I am definitely one hundred percent vampire all the way, but because we originally were going to take photos with both Kiowa and Bronson [members of the wolfpack], we wanted to wear wolfpack gear for the picture.” Even though she places herself firmly within “Team Cullen,” she wanted to show support for the stars who were scheduled to appear that day, although Bronson, one of the wolves, was unable to make it due to a scheduling conflict (see fig. 8).

While some fans matched their shirts to the stars at the conference, two sisters who were

interviewed, Cristina and Adrianna, said they did not wear t-shirts with anything on them, but only carried their *Twilight* bags because they did not want the *Twilight* themed gear to be in the photo op with the star that they purchased that day. Adrianna said that each morning she went online to look up the height of the actors appearing that day before she decided what shoes to wear because she did not want to be taller than them in the photos. The greatest number of people wearing the same t-shirt occurred on the last day because many fans who had purchased the official convention t-shirt with all the tour dates on the back of it chose to wear it then.

Swiokla sees the choice of shirts influenced by the stars there that day as a “sign of respect for the ‘team’ that is present. People want to be a part of what ever team is there. We *Twilighters* all pretty much like all three teams [Cullen, Wolfpack and Volturi], but we certainly have a favorite one if forced to choose. But otherwise we just support and love the story as a whole.”

### *Limited Options*

There were other reasons fans gave for why they were not dressed in character costume, with some saying there weren't enough options for them. One fan, Rebecca, who was volunteering to work at the convention, noted that you have to be “skinny” to dress up as most *Twilight* characters. Ashley expanded that, saying that:

Almost ANY story in all of fandom only has skinny characters, especially anything in the romantic genre. Almost nobody writes larger characters. This is not a *Twilight* related phenomenon. I say, just buy the larger shirts at Torrid for *Twilight*. I don't WANT to dress as Bella, and I'd never really consider it appealing. Not because she's skinny, but mainly because it just has no appeal or point to me.

Another group of four, 20-something, female fans who came together as friends and established themselves as “Team Wolfpack” said that they could not dress up because they wanted to support the werewolves, not the vampires (see fig. 9). However, they didn’t want to dress as boys and be half naked (until the fourth book, the werewolves are all boys who traipse around shirtless most of the time).

**Interviewer:** Please describe for me what you are wearing today.

**Raquel:** I’m wearing brown stretchy pants with a white shirt with sparkles on it, not *Twilight* related.

**Interviewer:** And is the tattoo *Twilight* related?

**Raquel:** It is. I got it for the ball tonight.

**Interviewer:** And you?

**Tina:** I’ve got on my glittery “hot and cold” tattoo, because I like both [the vampires and werewolves]. And I’ve got my Jacob shirt on because the speakers are wolfpack related today. Yesterday I had my *Twilight* shirt on with the vampires on it. I themed it to the day. And my jeans and my boots.

**Susanna:** I have the “bite me” tattoo ’cause I like Edward and I have the wolf shirt cause I like Jacob and just jeans and boots.

**Rose:** I am wearing all of them because I did wear my Jacob shirt yesterday, I should have thought about it. I should have worn it today but I am wearing all of them and I got the bite me, ’cause I really want one of them to bite me [laughter] and just jeans and boots.

**Interviewer:** Did you all consider dressing up as characters or were you always going to wear t-shirts?

**Raquel:** I don't know about that.

**Susanna:** No, I was always going to wear t-shirt, 'cause I am really Team Jacob

but I don't want to dress up as a boy...

**Raquel:** And you don't want to be topless...

**Tina:** I can't do half wolf half vampire, so...

**Susanna:** I don't want to be topless, that is true, I don't want to be topless.

Joffs, of the Lexicon, gave another possible alternative to why fans may not choose to dress up as the Native American characters. "Many don't feel it's appropriate to portray a character that is native if they are not native because so much was made out of casting real Native Americans [in the films]. Once we get to *Breaking Dawn* and there are a ton of new characters, I think we'll see lots of costumes in all sizes." She went on to say that "the larger problem is that a significant portion of the fans at the conventions are 25 plus. The majority of the characters are teens and the older fans feel kind of ridiculous dressing as a teen." Another reason given by Swiokla not to dress up as the wolves was that the wolf characters "aren't the really distinctive looks for these guys. They are pretty much just humans, not caricatures."

### *Sensitivity to Stereotypes*

Another reason reported by fans for not wearing costumes was that they were not the "hardcore fans." There was an effort by several fans to establish their place as fans within an acceptable societal norm and not become classified as an overzealous *Twilight* fan. When the researcher asked three sisters who were all wearing *Twilight* t-shirts and jewelry why they did not dress up in costume, their answers were:

**Natalie:** We aren't quite as fanatic to dress up as the characters, but we are very much fans of the series and the movies and the characters, and we do love the

Cullens, the vegetarian vampires. But we know the difference between reality and fiction [laughter]...but yeah, I guess we are just the low key type...

**Lauren:** ...fans but not fanatics...

**Katie:** ...not crazy.

They wore *Twilight* themed gear rather than dressing in costume because they want to show their support of the series without seeming like a crazed fan (see fig. 10). Another fan who responded to my email questions, Elise, compared wearing a t-shirt to a sports fan wearing a jersey, whereas dressing in character costume might be more like painting your body and dying your hair, or dressing as the team mascot. She went on to say that fans might not dress because they “know that they are likely to be ridiculed because they have seen what a stigma Trekkies have become.”

## DISCUSSION

Research collected at the *Twilight* convention not only provided information on how fans were dressing up, but also offered some insight into why fans chose to dress as they did.

### *Twilight Themed Gear*

The fact that there was not a single person dressed in character costume on the first day of the convention was surprising. There was nothing to indicate this possibility in the literature studied because the research that talked about cosplay was specifically about that practice; it was not part of a larger discussion of fan dress and activities at conventions. The first person the researcher came into contact with who was dressed in character costume was at the Volturi Vampire Ball on Saturday night. The fact that it was a vampire themed ball, a place more clearly designated for character and costume play, allowed fans to feel more comfortable. When the

researcher mentioned to a group of fans on Saturday morning that no one was dressed in costume during the day, they responded by asking if she was coming to the Ball. Those designated spaces for dressing in costume were the places where fans dressed up, which may mean that fans did not feel comfortable dressing up for the general programming during the day. For the most part, people dressed up more for the Ball than for the general programming at the convention during the day. Outside of the six people who were dressed in costume at the Volturi Vampire Ball, there was another group of 10 women and one man who dressed in gothic clothing that seemed influenced by a more traditional concept of vampire culture. A man and woman who came together were dressed in richly stitched and detailed gothic attire (see fig. 11) and there were several women in scarlet red and black corset type shirts and dresses.

The fact that people wore multiple layers of gear and that some were dressed in coordination with friends were not unexpected findings. There is a culture of proving one's self as a true fan, to show the level of one's devotion in relation to other fans. In conversation with several fans, the topic of going to see *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* film in theatres came up and there was an immediate comparison and analysis of who waited the longest. The wearing of multiple layers of gear seems in line with this, to prove that you didn't just buy one shirt for the convention, you have all of this *Twilight* themed stuff. It also seemed to allow fans to prove their allegiance to one character or group of characters. The three sisters who were wearing the same "Team Edward" t-shirt had on different pieces of *Twilight* themed jewelry associated with different characters, allowing them to distinguish their preferences for characters even within the Cullen family that they all supported (see fig. 10). Another separate reason for fans to have worn multiple layers is that it allowed them to show devotion to more than one character, or group of characters, like Rachel who was wearing a wolf themed t-shirt and a Cullen vampire sweatshirt.



According to many fans, coordinating your dress with friends is just another way to make it a group experience. This is the supportive nature of the fans that Jenkins talked about in the literature. Fandom is not an isolated experience and so fans are able to take solace in the fact that they are not alone. Jenkins made the claim that fans take solace in-group viewing experience because they know that the people around them feel the same passion for the series and are as interested in discussing the series. For *Twilight* fans, the convention at points served this role and at others went against this. On one hand, fans use the convention as a network, enjoying the time with fellow fans and making lasting friendship. On the other, fans downplay their devotion to the series in order to sidestep the criticism and judgment that come from the public. The convention, in this instance, is not seen as a totally safe haven for fans.

#### *Source of the Gear*

The wide variety of shirts and sources from which they were purchased was surprising, but should not have been. There were official licensed t-shirts from Creation Entertainment and Hot Topic that definitely had a presence, but there were many other t-shirts whose reference pictures were not found. I believe the reason for this is that some shirts being worn were old gear that has since been replaced by *New Moon* themed gear. Creation Entertainment, the company behind planning the convention for Summit Entertainment, which is the production company for the movies, had the official tour shirt (see fig. 12). It is like one you would get at a concert with a graphic of some kind on the front – in this case, the promotional photo from *New Moon* with Edward, Bella and Jacob on it, and the list of tour dates on the back.

In addition to this licensed shirt, several other stores sell official *Twilight* gear: Hot Topic, Borders, Target, CafePress and Wal-Mart. These are where shirts with photos from the movie, if they are legal, come from. The vendor Twi-gear, who also was at the convention, sells

shirts with just text and drawn graphics on them, like the Cullen's crest or the wolfpack tattoo. The fact that a majority of the shirts had photographs from the series on them makes me believe that they were from the Hot Topic gear that was sold before *New Moon* came out and the merchandise was updated with new designs for the new movie.

As for the text on the shirts, there are many lines from the books and movies that are favorites of different people as well as slogans that people connect to; fans are able to search and purchase the shirt they like best because there are so many options. Whereas most of the products in the fan culture used to be made by fans themselves, there has been a move towards a more commercial, products created by companies for fans. According to the Magazine Publishers of America Teen Market Profile, teens spent \$112.5 billion in 2003 alone. This translates to an average weekly spending allowance of \$12-\$20. With such a high level disposable income, teens are a profitable market to target (*Teen Market Profile*). It is with these choices in what the fans choose to spend money that becomes the key element of their self-identification.

When asked about how large stores might be taking advantage of the popularity of the series, fans had some interesting insights to offer. Elise said, "I definitely think that stores are trying to capitalize on *Twilight's* popularity. It is a complete cash cow – anything with *Twilight* on it (or preferably Edward's face...) will sell." Joffs talked about the fact that before the movies came out there seemed to be more fan designed shirts ordered from CafePress, a website where you can order individual, custom designed t-shirts. "We used to own a CafePress store and we were effectively driven out of business because of the movie shirts...without question, Hot Topic and to a less of an extent, Borders have completely capitalized on the franchise's popularity," Joffs said. Swiokla shared her view that there are plenty of "companies that seem to want to get

onto the *Twilight* gravy train with the characters mentioned in their ads, etc.”

### *Dressing to the Stars*

The finding that fans are planning their dress based around which stars are making appearances in the convention line up that day is very interesting. This shows that the *Twilight* fans, while they do have a favorite character and may belong to one camp in the Edward versus Jacob war, support the series as a whole first and foremost. The critical nature of the discussion of the *Twilight* fan activities has created a strange dynamic in which fans have to support and defend one another. The fact that fans can buy photo ops with stars as well as autograph sessions most likely increases this occurrence because during the “one-on-one” interaction that happens when a fan gets her photo taken with the star or gets a photo signed by the star, she wants to show her allegiance to that actor, even if he or she does not play the favorite character, or belongs to the wrong camp. There is a high level of importance on the bragging rights that meeting the star of the series provides for that fan. If it were to happen outside of an intentional structured environment, it would likely mean even more. Because there is such a validation of one’s fandom that comes with meeting the stars, the fans want to make their memento of that perfect. The different choices contribute to the construction of this memento – to wear a shirt that aligns themselves with that star, or not wear a shirt at all so the photo with the star doesn’t forever have a shirt in it. Adriana, who looked up the heights of all of the stars before she chose what shoes to wear, so she wouldn’t be taller than some of the stars, is another example of this.

### *Limited Options*

The discussion of dress in the literature is limited to offhanded mentions of dress as an activity that fans engage in rather than being the center of focus for a research study. The comment that *Twilight* is hard to dress up for unless you are “skinny” took me completely off

guard, but it totally makes sense. Because women make up the majority of the fan base, the most likely characters for them to dress up as are the female characters. The significant female characters in the first two books (because most fans dress from scenes that have already been made into movie) fall into two main groups: humans and vampires. The humans include Bella and her friends from high school, Jessica and Angela. They are described as average teenage girls in the books, but in the movies, they are all very petite. The vampires include Alice Cullen, Rosalie Hale, Victoria and Jane. The vampires are described in the books as extremely beautiful, and in the film they are all played by very fit, very thin women.

If the series had never been made into movies, women of different sizes may have felt more comfortable dressing up as characters, but with the visual precedent of small women, it is difficult for fans who are not as petite to dress in the same ways. In most cases, the costumes that fans wear for the characters are based on costumes from the movies, which in some cases have been based on actual descriptions from the books and other times have been constructed under the influence of the characters' general style, as described in the books. The only costumes that are purposely taken from the book and not the movie by fans, are those from the prom scene in *Twilight*. In the movie, Alice and Rosalie were not in the scene, but there are detailed descriptions of their dresses in the book. For Bella's prom dress in the movie, the only trait that remained from the dress described in the book was the blue color, but even that was the wrong shade. With costumes being designed for women who are skinny, some of the clothing may not be comfortable for those who do not have a petite build like the actresses who play these characters. Hot Topic, a commercial store that carries mostly text based t-shirts and licensed gear from current movies, made a replica of Bella's dress at her birthday party in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*: it is cut very tightly, the fabric does not give at all, and there are limited sizes. One

of the female characters, Jane, is a member of the Volturi Court whose uniform includes a cape. This may be why there were more costumes at the Volturi Vampire Ball, because the cape is not as restrictive and more people are able to feel comfortable dressing up in it.

This self-consciousness felt by fans about their weight highlights once again that the media's emphasis on women's (and men's) weight is ever-present. It is not an issue that is isolated to models on runways but is present in images that are in every part of our lives. The fact that it is still an issue in a series that is targeted towards teen girls and puts emphasis on strong moral values is worth reviewing. The two main characters are abstinent until after marriage, following in line with the author's religious views as a Mormon. While the descriptions of the characters in the books do not make the characters as exclusively skinny as the casting for the movies does, the writing does not directly work against the thin stereotype either.

The fact that women who identify as "Team Jacob" do not have a character that they can dress up as is an interesting finding. There is one woman associated with the wolfpack in the second book in the series, Emily, the fiancé of the leader of the wolfpack, Sam. Sam mauled Emily accidentally early in their relationship, leaving her with giant gash scars across her face. Emily is also not featured prominently, which makes dressing up as her difficult. The scars and her minor presence make her not a very appealing character to dress up as. There is no other female option for fans who support the wolves and who may want to dress up in costume.

Those fans who have not chosen a camp play the delicate balancing game of being in the middle; they do not want to align themselves with one group over the other by dressing up as a character from one side or the other. Using *Twilight* themed gear, fans are able to use multiple layers to show their love for both sides, not tipping the scale in either direction. Another element that discourages character costume for *Twilight* fans is the fact that the overwhelming favorites

are the male characters, who are the love interests. So, instead of showing their allegiance to a character by dressing up as him, these women are more easily able to do that by wearing *Twilight* themed gear that broadcasts their allegiance.

### *Sensitivity to Stereotypes*

Click described the gender bias that exists within the fan worlds which, among other things, leads to the depiction of *Twilight* fans as out of control, rabid teenagers in the media. Because of this singular portrayal of *Twilight* fans as screaming pre-teen and teenage girls, this is what most of the public thinks of *Twilight* fans as. They are given no opportunity to know anything different. According to Joffs, "I think the media can't get beyond the superficial. They still assume it's all tweens. Even Barbara Walters assumed the vampires had fangs...way to research, Barbara! Men drooling over Megan Fox don't get called out for their obsession, but it's easy to take pot shots at women's pulp fiction." Swiokla said:

I am 50 years old. Most of the 6,000 people who come to my site each day are over 21. It is not screaming teenage girls, and, yes, the media seems to miss that fact. *Twilight* is about romance, perfect love and growing up – not whose abs are better. Like Bella said, she wished Edward weren't so handsome. It isn't about the guys that play the parts, it is about the parts they play.

The fans are very conscious of the fact that they are constantly talked about in the media and by people around them. They seem to overcompensate by downplaying their level of involvement and investment in the fandom, even though they are attending a *Twilight* convention. The fact that they bought a ticket to the convention means they are not people who merely read the book and liked it. They are participating in the fandom by being at the convention, but also are trying to remove themselves from it at the same time. About the

stereotypes of fans, fan Elise said:

I do think that this is all the public sees when *Twilight* is mentioned. And to a certain extent I think it is a fair representation of the fan base. However, there are also more moderate fans... I am sensitive to these stereotypes, though, because, since I don't fit into them, and yet I identify myself as a fan, I always have to be aware that some people will think I'm an idiot because I like *Twilight*. And that's just too bad for them.

Nicky, administrator of *His Golden Eyes*, said:

I honestly do believe that most media outlets see twilight as a tween fad that consists of thousands of tweens swooning and screaming for it's "hot" cast...The worst part is that the media is basically hell bent on showcasing us in a bad light. Instead of writing about the fact that more than \$50,000 was raised by fans, they focus on the fact that Twiligheters yell very, *very* loudly...What's worse? A girl reading *Twilight*, flaws and all, and a boy spending the same amount of time playing a video game that involves killing pedestrians and crashing cars. Sadly, some would say the first.

These fans genuinely love this series, but they are drawing lines between different levels of fans, levels that are not clear, because they do not want to be grouped into the category of rabid screaming *Twilight* fan that the media has formed. One fan said that she wanted a shirt with only text and not any photos on it because she did not want it to be totally clear at first glance that it was a *Twilight* shirt. The public who is not familiar with the series might not recognize the name of the character or the quote, but would most likely recognize a photo because of all the advertising for the movies. Fans are actively seeking to create a "front stage" for their fan

activity that will be deemed acceptable. They want to create an image of *Twilight* fans that won't make them the butt of jokes and so they are front filtering, creating a more acceptable image of themselves as a *Twilight* fan. Why should they have to justify why they like this story and downplay their love for the series because the media and/or the public cannot accept another view of what a *Twilight* fan looks like?

## CONCLUSION

I started this study because of my interest in the *Twilight* series and my concerns about the way that the fans were being talked about and treated by the media and the people around them. I went into this study thinking that I would find very extroverted fans dressed as characters while attending the convention. Through the observation of and interviews with fans, I was introduced to many issues that I do not think I would have otherwise noticed. It was talking to the fans and hearing what they had to say from being in the middle of the fandom that offered the insights. The thing I found most striking is that the fans have been so berated by the media that they are overcompensating by masking their true passion for the series. There seems to be a constant struggle between showing allegiance to the series and distancing themselves from it so that they are not pigeonholed as rabid fans.

This study not only highlights the unfair and judgmental treatment of *Twilight* fans, but also shows that there is no real scholarship on the use of dress by fans. There are descriptive studies of cosplay practices, but they are merely information, not investigative. There is starting to be some research about cosplay, but by definition, the cosplay world only really covers those people who dress up as anime or manga characters. Fans have been dressing up as characters from their favorite series since *Star Trek*, but there is no real study about the practice. With the



commercial franchise, there is now official and licensed gear that gives fans another way to show their support for the series other than dressing up as a character. The fact that the practices are changing, at least within the *Twilight* fandom, only shows even more the need for research to be done in the area.

APPENDICES

Appendix A



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

Appendix B

Personal interviews from the Twilight convention that were used for this paper:

Mary. Personal Interview. 8 January 2010.

Kaylee. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Rachel. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Cristina. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Adrianna. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Rebecca. Personal Interview. 8 January 2010.

Raquel. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Tina. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Susanna. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Rose. Personal Interview. 9 January 2010.

Natalie. Personal Interview. 8 January 2010.

Lauren. Personal Interview. 8 January 2010.

Katie. Personal Interview. 8 January 2010.



## Appendix C

Interviews via email:

Ashley in response to post on *His Golden Eyes*. “Re: *Twilight* Thesis Questions.” Message to Marisa Shipley. 30 March 2010. E-mail.

Elise. “Re: Questions for *Twilight* thesis.” Message to Marisa Shipley. 25 March 2010. E-mail.

Joffs, Lori from the *Twilight Lexicon*. “Re: Questions for *Twilight* thesis.” Message to Marisa Shipley. 16 March 2010. E-mail.

Nicky from *His Golden Eyes*. “Re: Questions for *Twilight* thesis.” Message to Marisa Shipley. 27 March 2010. E-mail.

Swiokla, Joyce from *Cullen Boys Anonymous*. “Re: Questions for *Twilight* thesis.” Message to Marisa Shipley. 25 March 2010. E-mail.

## WORKS CITED

- Adams, G., and A. Akbar. "The World's Richest BLOODY Franchise." *The Independent* (London). Lexis Nexis database. 24 November 2009. Web. 6 December 2009.
- "All Time Box Office World-Wide." *IMDB.com* The International Movie Data Base. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross?region=world-wide>>.
- Benesh-Liu, Patrick R. "Anime Cosplay in America: A Fantastic Regalia" *Ornament* 31.1 (2007): 44-9. Web.
- "Children's Books: Chapter Books." *NYTimes.com*. *The New York Times*. 15 July 2007. Web. 15 March 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/books/bestseller/0715bestchildren.html?scp=11&sq=human+vampire+continue+love+affair&st=nyt>>.
- Click, Melissa. "'Rabid,' 'obsessed,' and 'frenzied': Understanding *Twilight* Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom." *Flow* 11.4 (2009). *FlowTV*. 18 Dec. 2009. Web. <[http://flowtv.org/?page\\_id=1748](http://flowtv.org/?page_id=1748)>.
- Coppa, Francesca. "A Brief History of Media Fandom," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet New Essays*, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson Eds. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006. Print. 41-59.
- D'Alessandro, Anthony. "'New Moon' Takes Opening Day Record: Makes \$72.7 Million, Beating 'Dark Knight.'" *Variety.com*. *Variety*. 21 November 2009. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118011718.html?categoryId=3565&cs=1>>.
- Fiske, John. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lisa A. Lewis, Ed. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 30-49.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Viking Press, 1973. Print.

- Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandovoss, and C. Lee Harrington. "Introduction: Why Study Fans?" in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandovoss, and C. Lee Harrington, Eds. New York: New York University, 2007. Print. 1-16.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "'Is There a Fan in the House?' The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lisa A. Lewis, Ed. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 50-65.
- Grossman, Lev. "Stephanie Meyer: A New J. K. Rowling?" *Time*, 171, 18, 5 May 2008. from EBSCOhost database. 2 April 2009. Web.
- Grossman, Lev. "It's *Twilight* in America: The Vampire Saga." *TIME.com. Time*. Nov. 23, 2009. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1938712-2,00.html#ixzz0j9oWjlqb>>.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York, New York University Press, 2006. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry. "'Strangers No More, We Sing': Filking and the Social Construction of the Science Fiction Fan Community" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lisa A. Lewis, Ed. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 208-36.
- Jenson, Joli. "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lisa A. Lewis, Ed. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 9-29.
- Ker, Maureen. "It's Not Halloween – It's Cosplay" 4 August 2008. Web. <<http://www.newsday.com/long-island/it-s-not-halloween-it-s-cosplay-1.882190>>.

- Kim, Young Yun. "Identity Development: From Cultural to Intercultural" in *Interaction and Identity: Information and Behavior, Volume 5*, Hartmut B. Mokros Ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996. Print. 347-69.
- Lewis, Lisa A. "Introduction" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lisa A. Lewis, Ed. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 1-6.
- Manifold, Marjorie Cohee. "Culture Convergence or Divergence? Spontaneous Art-making and Participatory Expression in the Private and Collective Lives of Youth" in *Art Education as Critical Cultural Inquiry*, J. A. Park Ed. Seoul, Korea: MijiNSA, 2007. Print. 1-10.
- Manifold, Marjorie Cohee. "Life as Theater and Theater as Life: Art Expressions of Information-Age Youth." *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education* 23 (2005). Print. 1-16.
- Mazzarella, Sharon R. "Claiming a Space: The Cultural Economy of Teen Girl Fandom," in *Girl Wide Web: Girls, the Internet and the Negotiation of Identity*, Sharon R. Mazzarella, Ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print. 141-160.
- Meyer, Stephanie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005. Print.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. "Shifting World of Strangers: Medium Theory and Changes in 'Them' Versus 'Us'." *Sociological Inquiry* 67.1, February 1997, 59-71. Print.
- Miller, Hugh. "The Presentation of Self in Electronic Life: Goffman on the Internet." Paper presented at Embodies Knowledge and Virtual Space Conference Goldsmiths' College, University of London, June 1995. Print. 1-8.
- Minzesheimer, Bob, and Anthony DeBarros. "Sellers Basked in Stephanie Meyer's 'Twilight' 2008." *USAToday.com. USA Today*. 16 January 2009. Web. 18 March 2010.  
<[http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-01-14-top-sellers-main\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-01-14-top-sellers-main_N.htm)>

Molly. "Exclusive Video: Kristen Talks Breaking Dawn and Upcoming Vacation at *The Runaways Premiere!*" Pop Sugar. Web. 18 March 2010.

*The Official Twilight Convention*. Summit Entertainment. Web. 25 March 2010.

*The Official Website of Stephanie Meyer*. Web. 18 March 2010.

Ohanesian, Liz. "Comic-Con's Twilight Protests: Is There a Gender War Brewing?" *LA Weekly*. July 28, 2009. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://blogs.laweekly.com/stylecouncil/comic-con-2009/twilight-protests/>>.

Schumacher, Rob. "USA Today's Book Staff's Top Picks for 2008: Author of the Year: Stephanie Meyer." *USAToday.com*. *USA Today*. 28 December 2008. Web. 18 March 2010. <[http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/2008-12-17-meyer-10-picks\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/2008-12-17-meyer-10-picks_N.htm)>.

Scodari, Christine. "You're Sixteen, You're Dutiful, You're Online: 'Fangirls' and the Negotiation of Age and/or Gender Subjectivities in TV Newsgroups" in *Girl Wide Web: Girls, the Internet, and the Negotiation of Identity*, Sharon R. Mazzarella Ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print. 105-20.

Sliwinski, Alexander. "'Fanboy' Gains Respect, Enters Merriam-Webster Dictionary." Joystiq, Webogs, Inc. Network. 7 July 2008. Web. 9 March 2010. <<http://www.joystiq.com/2008/07/07/fanboy-gains-respect-enters-merriam-webster-dictionary>>.

Sperling, Nicole. "'New Moon' DVD Sales on Track to Surpass 'Twilight.'" *Hollywood Insider*. 23 March 2010. Web. 24 March 2010. <<http://hollywoodinsider.ew.com/2010/03/23/new-moon-dvd-sales/>>.

Stenger, Josh. "The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom When *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Goes to eBay." *Cinema Journal* 45.4 (Summer 2006). Web. 26-43.

- Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.3 (2000). Web. 224-37.
- Teen Market Profile*. Magazine Publishers of America Information Center and Research Department. New York: Mediamark Research Inc., 2004. Web. 23 April 2008 <<http://www.magazine.org/content/files/teenprofile04.pdf>>. p. 10.
- "Top 100 Books of 2008" *USAToday.com*. *USA Today*. 5 November 2009. Web. 18 March 2010. <[http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-01-14-top-100-titles\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-01-14-top-100-titles_N.htm)>
- Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. "Booksellers Find Life After Harry in a Vampire Novel." *WSJ.com*. *Wall Street Journal*. August 10, 2007. Web. 18 March 2010. <[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118670290131693667.html?mod=yahoo\\_hs&ru=yahoo](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118670290131693667.html?mod=yahoo_hs&ru=yahoo)>.
- Turan, Kenneth. "You Wanna Neck? 'Twilight' Makes You Wish You Were a Romantic Teen Again. And For the Teens? Yeow." *LATimes.com*. *Los Angeles Times*. 21 November 2008. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/nov/21/entertainment>>.
- Turbin, Carole. "Refashioning the Concept of Public/Private: Lessons from Dress Studies." *Journal of Women's History* 15.1 (Spring 2003). Web. 43-51.
- TwiCon*. TwiCon Partners LLC. Web. 24 March 2010.
- "*The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*." *IMDB.com*. The International Movie Data Base. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1325004/>>
- "*The Twilight Series*." Amazon.com. 9 March 2010. <[http://www.amazon.com/gp/series/92936/ref=rcx\\_ser\\_ed\\_hardcover?ie=UTF8&edition=hardcover](http://www.amazon.com/gp/series/92936/ref=rcx_ser_ed_hardcover?ie=UTF8&edition=hardcover)>.
- "World's Most Powerful Celebrities: The Celebrity 100." Eds. Matthew Miller Dorothy Pomerantz and Lacey Rose. *Forbes.com*. *Forbes*. 3 June 2009. Web. 18 March 2010. <<http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/03/forbes-100-celebrity-09>>.