

Bringing Mormon Discourse out of the *Twilight*:
Exploring how Fans Recognize, Reflect, Reinterpret, and Resist Multiple
Discourses in and around the Seductive Saga

by

Lettice Elizabeth Pelotte

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Josephine Marsh, Chair
James Blasingame
Elisabeth Gee

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ABSTRACT

In 2005, a Mormon stay-at-home-mom named Stephenie Meyer published the first in a series of vampire romance novels known as the *Twilight* saga (2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008). This study investigates the ways in which LDS fans (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) of the *Twilight* saga use literacy practices to recognize, reproduce, reinterpret, and/or resist meanings created by multiple Discourses in and around the text. This study takes place in the Mormon Blogosphere, otherwise known as the Bloggernacle. Its purpose is to explore how fans of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga make meanings from the text, particularly in relation to Mormon Big "D" Discourse (Gee, 1999/2010; 2011) and how fans recognize, reflect, reinterpret, and resist meanings surrounding multiple Discourses in and around the text. In addition, it seeks to understand how the Bloggernacle fans use language to perform various identities and position others in relation to gender and Mormonism within the digital space. This dissertation study analyzes the threads of five blogs and three discussion forums using the combined methods of critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996) and Gee's discourse analysis. It concludes, that, while multiple Discourses are present within the conversational threads, mainstream Mormon Discourse remains dominant and normalized within the space, which both informs and limits the interpretations available to Mormon fans. In addition, identity performance is negotiated in the blogs, and members form specific sub-communities within the Bloggernacle so as to create a space for those with distinct ways of believing, valuing, knowing, and identifying.

DEDICATION

First, to the *Tw*-fans of the Bloggernacle who lured me in with your sparkling discourse.

This dissertation would not be what it is had I not peered behind the veil to discover you.

You gave me my mission. Thank you.

Also, to my husband for his infinite patience with me during this indeterminate and imposing process. There were many nights while writing this dissertation that I wished I shared the lack of sleep requirement possessed by Meyer's seductive Cullen clan. I am thankful that you had Netflix as a stand-in spouse. Your stint as a dissertation widower is

finally over! Go, Team Chris!

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Glossary of Terms	
Term	Definition
Articles of Faith	Thirteen statements that outline the basic principles of the LDS faith. These were written to a newspaper editor by Joseph Smith two years before he died.
Bishopric	Consists of the bishop of a ward along with his two councilmen.
Celestial kingdom	According to Mormon theology, the highest of three kingdoms and the ultimate degree of glory attainable in the afterlife. The others are the telestial kingdom and the terrestrial kingdom.
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	The official name of the Church. Members of the Church refer to themselves and one another as LDS. Mormon is a term used primarily by those outside of the Church and by members when speaking to those who are not LDS. There is no such thing as the Mormon Church.
Doctrine	Refers to official beliefs sanctioned by the Church. In order for the Church to add Official Doctrine, a three-step process is followed. It is approved by the First Presidency with agreement by the Quorum of Twelve. Then it is sustained by a vote of the entire membership. The only books the Church officially recognizes as sources for Doctrine are: <i>The Bible</i> , <i>The Book of Mormon</i> , <i>Doctrine and Covenants</i> , and <i>The Pearl of Great Price</i> .
Eternal plan of salvation	Centered on the belief of pre-mortal existence in which all humans existed in a spirit realm before their earthly life. As part of the plan, one must be born into an earthly life in order to learn right from wrong through the gift of agency. Only then, will one attain glory in the afterlife. (See Celestial kingdom).
Fallen-away Mormon	The term used by members to describe someone who has left the Church of his or her own accord. Fallen-away Mormons often refer to themselves as Ex-Mormons.
Jack Mormon	The term used to describe a person who is a member of the LDS Church, but rarely practices the faith. Unlike an Ex-Mormon, a Jack Mormon typically supports the goals and beliefs of the Church and maintains a relationship with other members.

Joseph Smith	Prophet and founder of the LDS faith (originally called the Church of Christ). He published the Book of Mormon in 1830. Smith led his growing congregation from Palmyra, NY westward to Ohio and then to Missouri. Smith was killed in Carthage jail by an angry mob in Nauvoo, IL in 1844.
Molly Mormon	A stereotype of an LDS woman. The term can have either positive or negative connotations, depending on how it is used and by whom. Some women will refer to themselves as Molly Mormon or use it talk about the behavior of other women. Peter Priesthood is the less-common male term.
Non-member	How members of the LDS Church refer to those who are not members. Non-members are sometimes referred to as Gentiles.
Priesthood	The power and authority available to males over the age of twelve in the LDS Church that grants them leadership and allows them to perform ordinance such as baptism, confirmation, or the sacrament. Divided into two parts: the Aaronic priesthood and the Melchizedek priesthood (the higher of the two).
Ward	The name for a local meetinghouse of the LDS church. A bishop, which is equivalent to a pastor, presides over a ward.
Sacrament meeting	The term for an LDS service of worship that takes place every Sunday and lasts about 70 minutes.
Stake	Similar to a diocese in Catholicism, a stake is a group of wards. It is presided over by a stake president.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

“Meyer has written a story of a young man who finds a girl so desirable that he craves her like no other and he resists. He protects her, cherishes her, and waits till they are good and married before he acts on his desires. That quality in a hormonal young man is definitely ‘virtuous, lovely, and of good report’ to me.”

--Nancyrh, LDS Living Twilight poll, November2011

“Vampires are a great metaphor for all of us as fallen humans, with our addictions to the life-blood of others, our co-dependency. The Vampire is a symbol of spiritual death. Christ gives us his blood, the only blood that will truly heal us and give us back our life. [...] In this way we are all vampires, and we need that blood at the sacrament table every week. Otherwise, we will seek to feed our addictions and appetites by clinging onto others, abusing them, controlling them, using them. Bravo to Stephenie Meyer for using the vampire type in this modern day parable for Mormons, who at times can be some of the worst kind of vampires. We, as Mormons, are not the humans in the story, we are the vampires. We are Edward, not Bella.”

--Nate, LDS Living Twilight poll, November2011

These two introductory snippets were taken from an online conversation that stemmed from an LDSLiving.com poll asking readers to share their reactions to the *Twilight* saga. It was while reading remarks such as these that I was first lured in to the

Mormon blogosphere, sometimes known colloquially as the Bloggernacle. In the first quote, Nancyrh expresses admiration for the Bella/Edward relationship. Unlike the traditional romance novel relationship model in which the male gains power and control over the weaker female and then sexually dominates her, Meyer's saga offers readers like Nancyrh a relationship model based on denied desires, unfulfilled sexual tension, and controlled abstinence. For Nancyrh, such unrequited lust is "virtuous, lovely, and of good report" as long as it leads to marriage. The sentiment expressed by Nancyrh was not a singular occurrence in the conversational threads. In fact, I encountered similar comments in blog after blog, usually accompanied by some variation of the same phrase: "virtuous, lovely, and of good report." This led me to wonder if the meanings LDS readers were making from the text of this seemingly frivolous vampire romance novel might be in some way different from meanings being made by non-members.

I was also struck by Nate's close identification with Meyer's moral-laden vampires. His quote implies a metaphoric link between Mormon culture and the way in which Meyer's vampires struggle against their insatiable appetites. He even goes so far as to suggest that the story can be read as a Mormon parable for abstinence and self-restraint. The implications made by Nate and others ensnared me further into the conversations that were bubbling up in the Bloggernacle around *Twilight*. Immediately I was bitten by the suggestion that this may not simply be a book that happened to gain an LDS fan base because it was written by an LDS author. Perhaps there was a deeper connection lying dormant somewhere within the annals of these blogs waiting to be explored. I found myself captivated by the possibility that LDS readers were responding

to the text through a distinctly Mormon cultural lens and using the blog conversations around the text to build particular identities.

This is not a study of Meyer's vampire romance novels, per se. Much like Bella, Meyer's conflicted heroine—the novels are literally set in a town called Forks—my own quest has brought me to many overlapping and intersecting paradigms. While I use the *Twilight* text as a vehicle for understanding how literacy practices inform Discourse and identity within the Bloggernacle, this is primarily study of LDS *Twi*-fans, the meanings they make from the text, the identities they perform in the process of such meaning-making, and the multiple Discourses surrounding both the fans and the text. I use *Twilight* as an example of a cultural product that is informed in part by a Mormon figured world in order to understand how members of the Mormon Discourse use literacy practices to negotiate and shape the boundaries of the Discourse and perform various Mormon identities. I also examine how a Discourse can be reflected, reinterpreted, or resisted depending on the figured world through which a cultural product is interpreted. Furthermore, this study shows how a Discourse can use literacy practices to shape how it is perceived by the larger community. I begin with the purpose and rationale for my study followed by a discussion of the context and theoretical framework in which it is situated.

Purpose and rationale

This dissertation is a critical ethnography that explores how LDS fans of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga (Meyer, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008) make meanings and perform identities in the Mormon blogosphere, known within the Mormon online community as the Bloggernacle. I seek to critically investigate the ways in which LDS

fans of the saga use literacy practices to recognize, reproduce, reinterpret, and/or resist meanings created by Mormon Discourse in and around the text. In addition, I hope to understand how these fans perform a variety of identities in online spaces. Specifically, my research questions are:

1. What are the Discourses in and around the *Twilight* saga found in the Bloggernacle?
2. What are examples of how Mormon fans recognize, reflect, reinterpret, and resist meanings made by these multiple Discourses?
3. How do fans in the Bloggernacle use language in order to (re)make meanings about the series and perform identities?

While this is a study of Bloggernacle fan culture, it is also a study of language and literacy since the word is so intrinsically tied to the ways in which people use language to make meaning from the world. It is also my hope that this dissertation will help to illuminate how Mormon Big “D” Discourse is negotiated and refined from within as well as how it interacts with the larger culture through media and cultural products.

As a personal rationale, I became interested in this topic when I began reading through the literature on *Twilight* fandom. A fair amount of recent scholarship has attempted to answer how and for what reasons *Twilight* casts its seductive spell over so many fans (Erzen, 2012; Granger, 2010; Housel & Wisnewski Eds., 2009). Yet very few studies, and none in the field of literacy, have addressed how LDS fans interpret the text. A Google search for *Twilight* + Meyer + Mormon results in over 191,000 hits (retrieved from Google.com, January 21, 2015), yet most of the research on the *Twilight* saga gives only a passing mention to Mormonism within the series, typically to acknowledge that

Meyer, herself, is an observant Mormon. After the obligatory nod to Meyer's background, the subject of how religion impacts readership is left largely unexamined. In an interview, Meyer stated, "Unconsciously, I put a lot of my basic beliefs into the story [...]" but she does not endorse the saga as an inherently Mormon text (interview with William Morris, *A Motley Vision* blog, 2005). Similarly, Robert Pattinson, who plays Edward in the *Twilight* films, said in an interview, "I think people make up all these Mormon references just so they can publish 'Twilight' articles in respectable publications like *The New York Times*" (Sperling, 2010). While I agree with Meyer and Pattinson that there is little evidence that *Twilight* is somehow an inherently Mormon text, the fan conversations in the Bloggernacle indicate that the ways in which LDS fans (re)make meanings from the text warrant further exploration. Mormon voices like Nancyrh's and Nate's have been largely excluded from *Twilight* fan studies, and they deserve to be heard.

In first trying to understand the relationship that LDS fans have formed with Meyer's saga, I was overwhelmed when confronted with the countless vampire-themed creations spawned by the last decade. At every turn, it seemed there was another film, novel, or television series created to slake our thirst for these nocturnal blood-drinkers, including the HBO series *True Blood* (Ball & Fienberg, 2008); *Tantalize* (Smith, 2007); the *House of Night* series (Cast& Cast, 2007); and the CW's *The Vampire Diaries* (Morgenstein, Levy, Williamson, & Plec, 2009). Were the conversations I was witnessing in the Bloggernacle simply an extension of our culture's obsession with these undead, often sexually ambiguous, predators of the night? Vampires are alluring yet dangerous, and they represent our darkest fantasies and our latent longing to give in to

forbidden impulses. Sceats (2001) writes that “vampires represent what we both fear and desire; they evoke a marginal world of darkness, secrecy, vulnerability, excess, and horror. Whatever they are, it is positively *Other*” (p 107, emphasis added). This idea only begins to explain why vampires continue to seduce us and does not yet begin to address what is different (if anything) about how Mormons interact with the *Twilight* text.

Despite Meyer and Pattinson’s reticence to accept an interpretation that the teen romance novel series is shaped in part by Mormon Discourse, critical theorists point out that texts are always being enacted upon by local, institutional, and societal structures of power (Carspecken, 1996; Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 1999, 2004, 2010; Street, 1984). Fairclough (2010) writes that “linkages between discourse, ideology and power may well be unclear to those involved” and affirms the belief that social practices and their relationships to ideology are often opaque and unexamined (p. 93). In addition, studies of fan cultures show that fans often display an array of critical literacy practices even while remaining a part of a fan community (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Baym, 1993, 2000; Black, 2007; Bury, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Modleski, 1982). Furthermore, Fiske (1987) argues that popular culture is important and worthy of scholarly study because it is the strongest insight we have into the forces being enacted upon a culture at a given time.

I made it my mission to critically engage with the discourse taking place in the Bloggernacle around the *Twilight* saga in order to explore how fans (re)make meanings and build identities through the lens of this cultural product. The *Twilight Zone* is replete with fans like Nancyrh and Nate who all-at-once seem to celebrate, parody, and critique Meyer’s vampires. Fiske notes that “escapism or fantasy necessarily involves both an escape from [...] and an escape to a preferred alternative” (p. 309). The *Tw*-net provides

this necessary space, and the fact that these conversations exist signifies fan literacy practices within the Bloggernacle should no longer be obscured in the *twilight*.

In the remainder of this initial chapter, I introduce the context of my study and describe the theoretical framework that informed my research. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature on what I have learned about studying fan communities, including those that occupy online spaces, and situate my study within the larger context of fan study scholarship and the existing research on the literacy practices of the Mormon community. Chapter 3 offers a detailed review of my methodological procedures. In the methods chapter, I outline how I proceeded with my inquiry including an overview of the site and data sources as well as how data were collected and analyzed using the combined methods of Gee (2011) and Carspecken (1996).

Following the first three chapters, I discuss my findings in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4, titled *Ways that Big 'D' Mormon Discourse is reflected, reinterpreted, and resisted in the Bloggernacle*, explores how a Mormon figured world necessarily informs and limits fans' interpretations of the *Twilight* text (Gee, 1999, 2011). I focus on narratives that show how the Discourse is both reinforced as well as resisted within the Bloggernacle. In Chapter 5, titled *Mollies, mods, and fems: Female identity performance in the Bloggernacle*, I analyze how fans use interpretations of the *Twilight* text to perform socially recognizable identities. Particularly, I employ Gee's identity-building theory as well as Butler's theory that gender is performative to show how Bloggernacle fans use language to enact specific identities, thus positioning themselves in various ways in relation to Mormon Discourse.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss both the theoretical and practical implications of my study as well as what I learned both personally and as a researcher.

Context of the study

“The Bloggernacle is bigger than it used to be. Once upon a time there were just a handful of Mormon blogs posting and commenting on topics related to Mormonism; now there are hundreds. So here's the problem: How does one talk about ‘the Bloggernacle’ with someone who is unfamiliar with it? How would you explain to someone who is not a blogger that Times & Seasons (a website where lots of people trade online comments about Mormon topics) is in the Bloggernacle but Exmormon.org and the FAIR message boards (websites where lots of people trade online comments about Mormon topics) are not?”

--Dave Banack, “Defining the Bloggernacle,” Dave’s Mormon Inquiry, 2006

The Mormon blogosphere, known as the Bloggernacle (or the ‘nacle for short) is the segment of cyber-space devoted to Mormon-themed blogs. The title “Bloggernacle”—which is not ubiquitous among all Mormon bloggers—is a pun on the famed Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and emerged as a term used by academic Mormon bloggers to describe the constellation of blogs that focused primarily on Mormon doctrine (Kaprolos, 2009). These blogs were soon joined by a variety of personal blogs by members of the Church, especially women who saw digital spaces as a way to connect to other LDS women and express themselves through writing. Blogs such as the *Mormon Mommy Blogs* and *Feminist Mormon Housewives* began to shift the focus of the Bloggernacle from Mormon doctrine to the day-to-day lives of its members.

Which blogs are and are not included in the Bloggernacle is a contested point among Mormon bloggers, and what defines a Mormon blog is the difficult question. In his blog titled *Dave's Mormon Inquiry*, blogger Dave Banack (2006) defines a member of the 'nacle as one who writes from a "relatively faithful perspective," a criterion that is tenuous at best. While there is no official list of blogs, there are several aggregators that act as portals into the Bloggernacle. Ldsblogs.com, known as the Mormon Archipelago (t-shirts are even available), is one of the early aggregators and organizes blogs into "islands" of different sizes depending on prominence and popularity. Other aggregates include: MormonBlogs.org, Nothing Wavering (which also includes non-LDS blogs), and MOHO (a Mormon LGBTQ-themed portal). Aggregates play an important and often-debated role in Mormon blogging, as they can display or remove blog links at their discretion. Aggregates were often begun as ways for bloggers to prominently position their own blogs. The portal one uses to enter the 'nacle determines the kinds of blogs one will likely access, and, in turn, the perspectives and communities with which one will engage. The boundaries of the Bloggernacle remain unclear, and whether it includes all LDS-themed blogs, only those written by members of the LDS Church, or only a specific set of sanctioned blogs that are supported and upheld by one or more of these "official" portals remains contested.

Jan Shipps (2012), a non-LDS historian of Mormonism, claims that the Bloggernacle essentially acts as "an electronic gathering," a kind of digital ward that is an extension of official LDS worship meetings or seminary. However, activity in the Bloggernacle extends far beyond simply gathering to discuss Church doctrine. Blogs range as wide and diverse as the LDS community, itself. Some blogs are devoted to

Mormon culture and history. Others share humor or other personal writings. There are blogs devoted to feminism and women’s issues within the Church. Some are conservative while others lean liberal. Figure 1 satirically depicts the divisiveness within the Bloggernacle and shows it arranged in fiefdoms, small villages, principalities varying in size and influence.

Figure 1

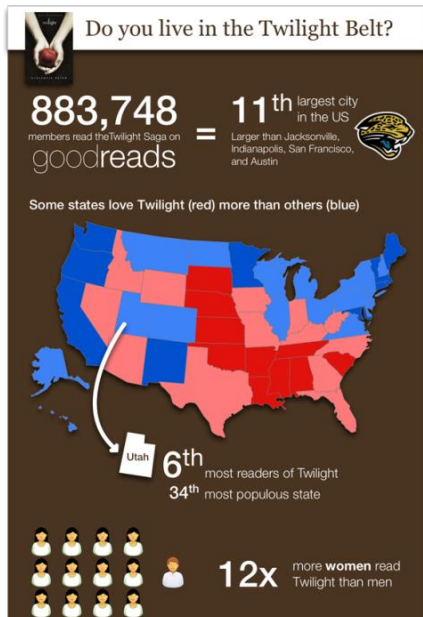


Retrieved from <http://bycommonconsent.com/2013/03/07/a-map-of-the-bloggernacle/>

These “villages” represent particular pockets where those performing diverse Mormon identities can congregate. While part of this diversity is certainly due to the need for individual expression, much of what is posted in the Bloggernacle is highly deliberate. Mormon bloggers have expressed a fear that young people today gain most of their understanding of the LDS religion through sources like *South Park* (Parker & Stone, 2003) and *Book of Mormon: The Musical* (Parker, Stone, & Lopez, 2010). The Bloggernacle offers a way for members of the LDS faith to capitalize on digital media to control how Mormonism is portrayed in popular culture.

In 2005, the Bloggernacle, like the rest of the world, was on the verge of *Twilight* mania. A Mormon stay-at-home-mom named Stephenie Meyer had published the first in a series that would take the world by storm. The saga, which includes *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008), centers on an unremarkably average teen girl named Bella Swan and her forbidden romance with Edward Cullen, a 109-year-old vampire frozen in time within an irresistible and gorgeously sparkling 17-year-old body. The series “eclipsed” *Harry Potter* on the New York Times Best Seller list, holding spots in the top 10 for 52 consecutive weeks in 2008. Five films, released between 2008 and 2012, each enjoyed box office success. The *Twilight* Belt infographic published by Goodreads (Figure 2) shows that while Utahns claim to dislike the saga, the state is 6th in the nation when it comes to readership. Despite their protestations to the contrary, Mormons do not seem to be immune to *Twilight*'s spell. Annalisa, a poster on Goodreads.com writes, “As much as I love seeing Utah on the not-so-loving side of *Twilight*, I think Utah is definitely in the Twilight belt. If you've ever been to one of the movie premieres and seen the crazy, screaming fans dressed in wedding attire you'd be embarrassed. The craze started here. The numbers alone, despite the ratings, say something.”

Figure 2



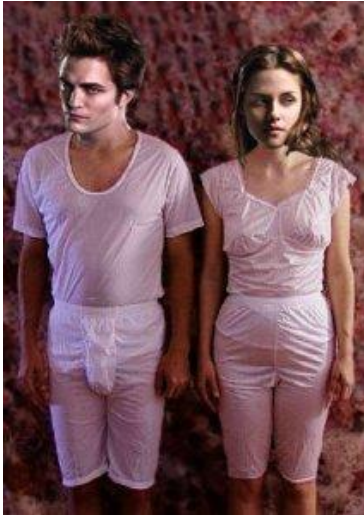
<http://www.goodreads.com/blog/show/321-do-you-live-in-the-twilight-belt-infographic>

Soon, blogs, parodies, videos, and fan fiction began to flow freely throughout the *Twi-net*, the term used by Natalie Wilson (2011) to describe the online world of *Twilight* and refers to the online spaces in which the *Twilight* novels and/films are discussed, blogged about, parodied, and analyzed by fans, known as *Twilighters* or *Twi-hards*. Many of these discussions began commenting on Mormon discourse present in and around the text. Figure 3 shows the heads of the lead actors of the *Twilight* films affixed onto bodies modeling traditional LDS undergarments. The image was taken from a blog lampooning the Mormon-*Twilight* connection. Aspects of this image are as taboo to LDS culture as the blood-sucking vampire was to Christianity, and the LDS Church has made a concerted effort to keep images of these undergarments private—an endeavor that the age of digital media has rendered impossible.

In such reiterations of the text, fans move past didactic explanation and analysis and into the realm of humor, where common understanding and knowledge is assumed.

This is important because such para-texts help to establish an insider culture. Alleen Pace Nilsen (1994) asserts that “when insiders tell such jokes, the jokes are tiny revolutions in chiding friends about the frailties to which human beings are prone. The insider is trying to expand the possibilities for group attitudes and behavior” (p. 932). In essence, these are the kind of para-texts Bacon-Smith (1992) identified as being created for an “inside audience.” In this case, a knowing Mormon fan community that was beginning to emerge.

Figure 3



Posted originally by Altarkation <http://altarkation.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/>

Another prime example of a more comprehensive insider text that addresses Mormonism in *Twilight* is a novella titled *My Boyfriend is a Mormon Vampire* by Lexi Bjornholt (2011). The book was published by Greenjacket books which deals exclusively in LDS fiction, and it satirizes Meyer’s campy writing style and self-absorbed narrator as much as it does Mormonism. It is not meant to expose Mormon themes within the series to a non-Mormon audience, but to “hold the mirror up to nature” as Hamlet famously said and allow Mormons to have a laugh at themselves.

In it, the narrator, Felicia, soon discovers the truth about her Mormon vampire boyfriend, Spencer.

“I heard a rumor that you Undead have the ancient practice of...I can’t say it.”

“Spit it out,” she said.

“*Marital Fidelity—Marital Fidelity!* There I said it. I can’t possibly be true, can it?”

“Absolutely true, but do you know what it means?”

“No.”

“*Marital Fidelity* is promising not to bite or be bitten by anybody except your spouse” (p. 120).

Bjornholt’s humor relies on her audience having already made the correlation between Meyer’s sparkly vampires and Mormonism. As insiders to the Discourse, they understand the humor of poking fun at Mormon traditions of abstinence. Spencer continues, “You see, in the future world, we can keep that desire to bite and to be bitten, but only if we qualify” (p. 121). A Mormon audience knows that by saying “if we qualify” she is referring to the Mormon belief in three distinct heavens—celestial heaven, telestial heaven, and terrestrial heaven—which one enters based on one’s level of purity and living a life according to LDS doctrine.

Finally, a YouTube video simply called *Mormon Twilight* asks, “What if there were no vampires? Just Mormons” (Figure 4). The video was filmed by a group of Mormon teenagers on a high school band retreat and has over received 218,710 views as of the publication of this dissertation. Resembling a trailer for the first *Twilight* film, a female voiceover begins by satirizing the back cover of the novel: “About three things I

was absolutely positive. First, Edward was...different. Second, there was a part of him—and I didn't know how dominant that part might be—that wanted to take me to church..." The comments that follow the video are mostly from Mormon fans who recognize the distinctly Mormon humor in jokes such as "You're like a drug to me. Like my own personal brand of caffeinated beverage." One fan writes of the video, "This is hilarious if you're Mormon." Another says, "Only Mormons get this."

Figure 4



Screenshot Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M8woIsfIjg>

The blogs that I have termed the LDS *Twilight* blogs do not exist in any one particular avenue of the Bloggernacle. Rather, they have been gathered from various corners and pockets—wherever Mormon *Twilight*ers were found to be lurking. In this dissertation, I discuss LDS *Twilight* blogs from a variety of sites, ranging from the conservative group blog *Millennial Star* to the literary-focused *A Motley Vision*, to *Mormon Mommy Blogs*—whose excessive popularity continues to vex the 'nacle's purists.

The fact that the LDS *Twilight* blogs can be found throughout the Bloggernacle speaks to the cultural influence that the novels and films have had among the community. Through the lens of this cultural product, LDS fans use literacy practices in online spaces to shape their Discourse and perform various identities. These practices help to form communities, develop linguistic conventions, and create cultural worlds (Baym, 1993, 2000; Lammers, 2011, 2012; Steinkuehler, 2007). As one blogger, Jettboy, put it, “the *Twilight* series is no longer a work of literature, but a cultural battleground.”

Theoretical Framework

Literacy practices are situated and socio-cultural

“It turns out that just as social interaction is impossible without signs, it is also impossible without meaning. To communicate an experience or some other content of consciousness to another person, it must be related to a class or group of phenomena.”

--Vygotsky, 1987, p. 48

This study is situated within the framework of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1987). Primarily, I employ the openly ideological model of Brian Street (1984) as well as James Paul Gee’s (1992, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2011a; 2011b) theories of socio-cultural learning and Big “D” Discourse. I base my definition of literacy on the work of NLS scholars (Gee, 1999, 2004, 2011a; 2011b; Knobel, 1999; Kress, 1989, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Street, 1984/1993) and define literacy as a multi-dimensional practice that relies on one’s ability to make and *produce* meanings within a contextualized complex system of signs. I also extend my definition to include Street’s (1984/1993) explicitly ideological model that asserts that “literacy practices are

aspects not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures” (1993, p. 7). Literacy is not merely a set of neutralized autonomous skills, but an ever-evolving constructed set of multimodal, contextualized practices rooted in societal systems and institutions used for particular purposes in particular contexts.

These practices extend into digital spaces. In her study of the Sims Writers Hangout, Lammers (2011) showed how members used a variety of literacy practices in order to gain and sustain membership in the online community. Lammers maintains that members of the SWH policed the participation of other members in order to retain order in the space and set the parameters of the Discourse. When applying these concepts of insider-moderation to the Bloggernacle sites, it becomes clear that literacy practices are integrated within the larger Mormon Discourse and institutions of power. Literacy practices are central to how bloggers make meanings from the *Twilight* text and how they perform identities that are recognizable to others within the Discourse. They also use language to set rules of participation and determine acceptable means of expression.

Mormonism as Big “D” Discourse

“For any communication, ask how the person is using language, as well as ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools, and technologies in certain sorts of environments to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activities.”

--Gee, 2011b, p. 201

Big “D” Discourse refers to the ways of speaking, listening, behaving, believing and doing that signals one’s membership in a particular group or community. Mormon

literacy practices, along with their other beliefs and social practices, must be looked at in conjunction with Big “D” Discourses (Gee, 1999). Literacy practices cannot be studied in isolation from the specific social contexts in which they take place and have meaning. If one is going to be recognized as a member of the LDS Discourse, one must speak and behave in ways that identifies one as such to other members of the LDS community. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that becoming an accepted member of a community of practice “implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, to perform new tasks and functions [which are] reproduced and developed within social communities [...]” (p. 53). One way that people acquire a Discourse or become a recognized member of a community of practice is through literacy practices. Gee (2010) states that big “D” Discourses are “intimately related to the distribution of social power” (p. 2). Gee distinguishes big “D” Discourse from little “d” discourse, which he reserves for language in use. Gee (2010) describes this form of literacy as “situated-socio-cultural” and writes that literacy is a “social and cultural achievement” which needs to be “understood and studied in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional” (p. 2). By seeing language and its uses as integrally connected to Big “D” Discourse, it is possible to begin to understand how and for what reasons people use language to make meanings as well as shape their social identities.

Gee’s concept of what it means to be part of a Discourse is evident in Haslam’s (2000) study of Mormon missionaries which found that “Mormons read for a purpose of becoming a specific type of individual, a belief which influences how and what they read” (p. 18). In the Bloggernacle study, this was evidenced in how Mormons used *Twilight* as means to enact social identities and position themselves in relation to the

Discourse. Some fans used interpretations of the text to signal membership in the Discourse, while others used interpretations to challenge the boundaries of the Discourse. Still, others attempted to resist the Discourse altogether and reframe their interpretations outside of Mormon Discourse. It became clear that fans in the Bloggernacle used the text to position themselves in relation to Mormon Discourse as well as a tool to (re)position Mormon Discourse in relation to the larger culture.

Figured Worlds and Mormonism

“For any communication, ask what typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases of the communication are assuming and inviting listeners to assume. What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, objects, environments, and institutions, as well as values, are in these figured worlds?”

--Gee, 2011b, p. 171

Gee (1999, 2004, 2011) bases his theory of situated learning on cognition studies in the field of psychology which proposes that we perceive abstract concepts no differently from how we perceive experiential ones. We situate our understanding of abstract concepts within our knowledge of our prior experiences. Gee refers to these shortcuts that happen in our brains as *figured worlds*. Figured worlds are sometimes called *cultural worlds*, *narrativized worlds*, *dramatized worlds*, or *webs of meaning* (Geertz, 1973). I will use the term figured worlds used by Gee (1999) and Holland (1998) to mean “simplified, often unconscious, and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives” (Gee, 2011a, p. 172). It is also important to emphasize that figured worlds are fluid, often

overlapping and interacting with one another. They can also develop and change as experiences, events, and interpretations shift. They can remain partial, incomplete, or even contradictory.

Figured worlds are conceptual abstractions. They are cultural stories that help people frame their experiences in meaningful ways and create shared understanding. Holland (1998) discusses the importance of artifacts in figured worlds. Concrete objects give figured worlds a material dimension and facilitate the replication and continuation of shared understanding and meaning-making. Using Holland's (1998) and Gee's (1999) assertions, I employed the figured worlds theory in order to understand *Twilight* as a concrete object that is partially situated within a Mormon figured world. Furthermore, *Twilight* is a text that is often used by fans in the Bloggernacle as a vehicle for repeating and reinforcing taken-for-granted beliefs about the world.

Gee (1999) differentiates between an *espoused world*—one which we claim to believe consciously—and a *world-in-(inter)-action*, one we believe subconsciously. The Bloggernacle study supports the idea that people who are part of a Discourse shape their perceptions—consciously or subconsciously—through the lens of the figured worlds common to said Discourse. A study of Catholic school children ages 13-15 in England and Wales (Francis, 2000), found that although there were slight differences in values and beliefs between devoted Catholics, sliding Catholics, and lapsed Catholics, young people were still highly influenced by the Catholic teachings. Although the Catholic students may have claimed to have varied beliefs, overall they had similar morals, beliefs, values, and worldviews when compared with students from non-Catholic schools. In essence, they shared a figured world of Catholicism, even if they did not openly espouse

Catholic values. Similarly, in the Bloggernacle study, interpretations of the text were shaped by a Mormon worldview, regardless of how individuals positioned themselves in relation to the Discourse.

Feminism and gender identity theory

“In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.”

--Butler, 1990, p. 33

Butler (1990) purports that “gender is not a noun” but is “produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (p. 33). She notes that female bodies are always bound by external power relations and theorizes that gender identity is not natural, but rather a learned performance or way of behaving. Essentially, gender identity is real only to the extent that it is continuously performed and believed. Second, gender performance is never a single act, but is repeated across contexts in order to be understood. I use Butler’s ideas to explore the theory of gender performativity and how femininity and gender identity is performed both within the Mormon Discourse and in online spaces.

Butler (1990) negates the idea that gender is performed by a “subject,” and instead focuses on the representation, itself, claiming that “gender intersects with race,

class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (p. 6). Though Butler does not exclusively mention religion as a point of intersection, gender and religion are most certainly articulated with one another when culture is understood to be the constructor of gender identity. Thus, what may be agreed upon as gender is constantly shifting under specific culturally and historically constructed contexts. Only through repetitive articulations is gender recognized.

Empirical studies employing Butler’s theory show that gender performance is not only limited to physical spaces where bodies are present. Lina Eklund bases her 2011 study on *World of Warcraft* within Butler’s theoretical framework and explores how offline constructs such as gender and sexuality impact online identities and are reconstructed in digital spaces. She finds that while online spaces such as the *WoW* universe may allow women to experiment somewhat with femininities, these spaces are not neutral and gender is still moderated. Her study shows how digital spaces are not disconnected from the physical world, but how they interact with it.

Similarly, the Bloggernacle is part of the larger Mormon community in which gender roles are constructed under a strict patriarchy. Therefore, gender performance is an expected and necessary component of Bloggernacle culture. It is a space that is informed by LDS doctrine, Mormon culture, and the larger culture, in general. Gender is reconstructed and performed through language in the blogs, and limits are placed on how one can perform female identity and femininity in the Bloggernacle. For example, names of blog sites often invite and dictate specific types of gender performance, such as the *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *Mormon Mommy Blogs*. The Bloggernacle is a space where language is often used to, as Butler emphasizes, “institute a hierarchy in which

only some persons are eligible to speak and others [...] cannot ‘speak’ without simultaneously deauthorizing that speech” (1990, p. 153). The space acts as an extension of Mormon Discourse, in which sexuality and gender performance play a pivotal role in upholding dominant institutions of power.

Together, these theoretical frames of situated and socio-cultural literacy, Big “D” Discourse, figured worlds, and gender identity performance act as the lenses through which I have collected and analyzed data for my study of the Bloggernacle.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From *Trekkers* to *Twilighters*

“Organized fandom, is perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their relationship to it.”

--Jenkins, 1992, p. 86

In order to situate my study within a relevant context, I will discuss the research related to fan studies as well as the literature that focuses on the literacy practices of the Mormon community. This is not meant to be an exhaustive or all-encompassing review of the research and literature related to fan studies, Mormon literacy, and *Twilight*, but it is meant to provide a context for the Bloggernacle study and situate it within a larger framework of online studies of fan culture with specific attention paid to how fans use literacy to engage with the fan community.

Before there were *Twilighters* there were *Trekkers*, the preferred term used by *Star Trek* fans (Bacon-Smith, 1992). While cultural studies scholars were certainly studying popular fan culture prior to the naissance of the *Trekkers*, it was often looked at in comparison with high culture (Arnold, 1900). It was not until John Fiske (1987), Henry Jenkins (1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), and others (Anijar, 2000; Jindra, 1994; Kozinets, 1997; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1994) began studying fan culture as a discipline in its own right that fans and their practices were conceived as having strong implications for literacy research.

As Jenkins (1992) suggests, there is a difference between being a watcher and being a fan. His research, along with that of Bacon-Smith (2002), revealed that *Trekkers* were not merely tuning in every week, mindlessly soaking in each episode, and tuning out until the next show. The *Star Trek* fan community constructed what Jenkins (1992) refers to as a meta-text, or an overarching world in which each episode is situated, noting that “no episode can be easily disentangled from the series’ historical trajectory” (p. 99). Character arcs or plotlines that did not correspond with the fan-created meta-text were critiqued or “dismissed as bad writing” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 103). The emotional involvement that *Trekkers* and members of other fan communities have with the object of their fandom has a downside in that the producers of these shows are not typically as sensitive or as attached to the program as the fans are. What is pleasurable to the fans is not always at the forefront of the producers’ minds. This often leaves critical fans as a purgatorial “powerless elite” who have cultivated a “privileged relationship to the series [...] yet who have little or no influence over the conditions of production or the reception of their show” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 87).

This initial disconnect between the fan community and the fan object led many fans to take matters into their own hands and create many literacy-based modes of expression including, but not limited to: fan-fiction, fanzines, videos, skits, songs, and visual art. These para-texts are, as Bacon-Smith (1992) points out, produced exclusively for an “insider audience trained to share in the conventions of the literature” (p. 48). In many ways, the *Twi*-fans owe their ability to engage with such a wide community to the trails blazed by the early *Trekkers*. It is not surprising then, that much like the futuristic

world of *Star Trek*, itself, studies of fan communities have moved largely away from the small screen and into the bold new world of cyberspace.

It is unlikely that this dissertation study on the literacy practices of Mormon *Twilight* fans would be possible without the *Trekkers* who have boldly gone before me. The widespread popularity of *Twilight*—particularly among adolescent girls and women—is intriguing and may be attributed to a combination of factors. First, romance fiction, especially with a leading man who is unattainably perfect and even slightly dangerous, gives adolescent girls a safe place in which to act out desires and grapple with early feelings of romance and sexuality (Mercer, 2011; Mathew, 2009). Second, the vampire is a creature that is neither living nor dead. The vampire can be seen as a metaphor for the transition between childhood and adulthood, which resonates strongly with teens who often feel trapped in a liminal space (Kokkola, 2010; Kristeva, 1982; Mathew, 2009). Bella’s desire to become an immortal vampire can be interpreted as her adolescent desire to remain a child forever. In *New Moon* (Meyer, 2006) Bella is so fearful of growing old that she dreads her 18th birthday and longs for Edward to make her immortal. Finally, reading is a social act and texts have a way of positioning individuals and building social relationships. As Jenkins (1992) argued, “fandom celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings” (p. 284).

Several scholars have addressed the literacy practices of the *Twi*-fan community and their significance within the larger culture (Erzen, 2102; Mercer, 2011; Summers, 2010; and Wilson, 2011). In her study of adolescent female *Twilight* fans, Mercer (2011) uses a feminist lens to explore how teens interpret spirituality and sexuality within the text. She explains how the participants developed a sense of identity and fantasy-sharing

through reading the series that allowed them to safely explore spiritual and sexual identities. While not all participants were critical of the texts, Mercer concluded that the girls were using the text to relish in a temporary fantasy while exploring feelings of desire in a non-threatening context.

Erzen (2012) and Wilson (2011) each conducted studies of *Twilight* fan culture that included both adolescents and women. They concluded, as Jenkins did about *Trekkers*, that *Twi*-fans are not cultural dupes, but knowledgeable and savvy negotiators of culture. While Erzen acknowledges that fans are situated within a consumerist context, she found that these women also use *Twilight* to produce writing of their own and to form supportive communities with one another. Both studies found that *Twi*-fans use fan culture and the relationships they form with other fans to extend the euphoric feeling they derive from reading the books and seeing the films into their daily lives. Like the vampire, their thirst for all things *Twilight* is never fully satiated, but pleasure is derived from the continual reliving of their fantasy.

Furthermore, the ever-growing realm of online spaces allow fans to perpetually recreate their fan experiences with those who are as equally obsessed. Summers (2010) studied the online responses to a blog post titled “*Twilight* is so Anti-feminist I want to Cry.” She posits that the online fan environment encourages participation and agency among girls and women. An initial interest in *Twilight* may allow some women to participate as members of online communities as critical consumers of text. Her study suggests that the women who commented on the blog post often found a supportive community where they were able to negotiate a feminist identity.

Studies of online fan cultures

Studying online fan culture has contributed to the field's understanding of the ways in which fans interact online and use literacy practices to form communities, develop linguistic conventions, (re)make meanings, and create their own cultural worlds (Baym, 1993, 2000; Bury, 1998; Foerst, 2007; Lammers 2011, 2012; Steinkuehler 2007). These studies echo Gunther Kress who remarked, "I don't quite know where or what the boundaries of the resource of literacy are. [...] Why should you still talk about language, if literacy includes all of these things; where are the boundaries of what we regard as literacy?" (in Bearne, 2005). Online studies of literacy continue to expand the boundaries of what constitutes literacy and who has the authority to produce texts.

One of the earliest and most influential studies of online fan communities is Baym's (1993) study of folkloric practices within the online soap opera fan community Rec.arts.tv.soaps (r.a.t.s.). She examined how technology impacts the tradition of folklore and drew from the work of Dundes (1965/1977) who claimed that "the technology of the telephone, radio, television, Xerox machine, etc. has increased the speed of the transmission of folklore" (in Baym, p. 143). Most importantly, Baym looked at r.a.t.s. as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) with its own set of norms and modes of participation. Baym (2000) writes that "online places come to feel like communities and [give] us a grounded way in which to think about the much theorized but underexamined [sic] phenomenon of online community" (p. 2). She found that members of an online soap opera fan site formed a community through the development of common conventions and shared norms for posting. These common practices helped the network to "serve as a site for complex, interwoven, and personalized communities"

(p. 174). Identifying these common practices supported her idea that online networks do not impede folkloric practice and can actually play a role in the formation of such groups.

Likewise, Bury's (1998) ethnographic study recognized the presence of similar community practices in an all-female X-files fan community known as the David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade (DDEB). Bury endeavored to discover the ways in which female *X-files* fans linguistically performed gender in cyberspace. She discusses how her participants used literacy practices—conventions, critical reading, and fan-fiction writing—in order to create a community and perform gender identity. Bury concludes that gender continues to be performed in online spaces using language and that online spaces offer women a place to construct and communicate identities through membership in a fan community.

These studies support the conclusion that identity is an important component in how fans interpret texts and make meanings in online fan communities. Foerst's dissertation study (2008) focused on how fans made meaning from lesbian subtext in the online Xenaverse. Like Bury, Foerst draws on Butler's (1990, 1993) theory of the social construction of gender as well as on Foucault's (1980) concept of power relations. Foerst inquired as to in what ways the lesbian subtext in *Xena* was perceived by fans and how that discourse impacted the fan community. Foerst's research discusses three major metaphors through which fans came to understand the relationship of the show's two main female characters. In her final analysis, Foerst finds that fans most-often fail to be critical and frequently offer a hegemonic reading of the show. Just as Bury found that gender performance roles were upheld in online spaces, Foerst concludes that dominant,

heteronormative narratives of relationships prevailed in fans' interpretations of lesbian subtext.

In her 2007 study on *Lineage*, the MMOG (massively multiplayer online game), Steinkuehler sought to “tease out what happens in the virtual setting of the game and how the people involved consider their own activities, the activities of others, and the contexts in which those activities take place” (p. 299). She asserts that video games, as an entire genre, cannot be indicted for causing a decline in literacy among adolescents without determining “precisely *which games* are such denouncements referring to?” (p. 298). She argues that in order to accurately assess video games for quality literacy practices, we must look at specific games being played for specific reasons within specific contexts. Steinkuehler's research finds that gamers figure their own cultural worlds and treat virtual spaces like hangouts, what Oldenburg terms “third spaces” and what Gee (2004) terms “affinity spaces.” Using digitally-based literacy practices such as fan fiction, art, and storytelling, MMOG-gamers promote their membership in the online networks in which they participate and form communities. Steinkuehler's findings suggest that even when using a traditional definition of literacy, players of MMOGs engage in the kinds of reading and writing skills espoused by state and national literacy standards.

Lammers (2011) constructed her dissertation research on three different aspects of the *SIMS Writers' Hangout (SWH)*: tensions, literacies, and pedagogy. Lammers applies the theory of affinity spaces to the *SWH* to show that informal learning environments still operate under a system of commonly accepted rules and practices. Through her study, Lammers discovered ways in which the site was self-moderated by the participants to

give fans opportunities to create, shape, and design their space using literacy skills while becoming experts in the process.

These studies of fan literacy practices in online spaces helped to forge the standard for how researchers engage with online fan communities. Through their use of online literacy practices, these fans often are often able to exercise a form of control over the production and content of their fan object that their *Trekker* counterparts only longed for. Fans in online spaces use literacy practices that not only include reading and writing in the conventional sense, but extend to include a formidable array of para-texts. Fans are able to create community spaces, design webpages, form linguistic conventions, make meanings, and perform specific identities. These pioneering studies of online fan culture show that today's fans are truly able to "boldly go" where early *Trekkers* could only dream.

Studies of Mormon literacy practices

The research on Mormon literacy practices is fairly limited in scope. However, I was able to locate several dissertation studies focusing on how members of the LDS faith use literacy practices, with one study focusing on how Mormons use literacy in online spaces. These studies allow me to situate the Bloggernacle study between the liminal space of Big "D" Mormon Discourse and fan culture Discourse in order to discover how Mormon fans of *Twilight* use literacy practices within the Mormon online community.

Haslam's year-long ethnographic study (2000) examines the literacy practices of members of the Mormon community in Greensboro, NC, through the lens of Big "D" Discourse theory. He sought to understand how the participants' implemented Church literacy practices. Haslam's research found that the institution of the Church often

dictated what was read, for what purposes, and how participants were able to use literacy practices. First, in relation to Gee's Big "D" Discourse theory, Haslam discovered that preordained literacy practices became part of the missionaries' identity "tool kits." Second, his study highlights the ideological nature of literacy. Haslam reiterates that reading and writing are always situated and socio-cultural, meaning that reading and writing are never neutral because they are practiced for a particular purpose. In the Mormon community, these purposes are often tied to institutional Discourse. As individuals participate in literacy practices, they are also participating in the institution's Discourse. In this way, the centralized institution of the LDS Church is able to reinforce its sanctioned beliefs through the literacy practices of its members.

Sloop (2011) bases his dissertation study on the work of Haslam (2000), focusing on the literacy practices of Mormon missionaries. He concludes that the literacy practices of missionaries transfer to other forms of literacy (Street, 1993). For example, the skills of skimming a text, using non-sequential reading, and reading for a specific purpose are all practices used by missionaries studying scripture that often translate to other forms of academic reading. Sloop finds that these skills prepare missionaries for future literacy practices outside of their missionary work.

Labeau-King's master's thesis (2013) expands on the folkloric work of Baym (1993) by examining how participants in the Mommy Mormon Blogs form identities and create communities in the Bloggernacle. She notes that, while folklore was previously an oral tradition, the expanding frontier of cyber space has changed the nature of the tradition to include multi-modal communication in virtual spaces.

The literacy practices of the Mormon community are under-researched, especially the ways in which Mormons are making use of digital spaces. My dissertation study is the first literacy study to examine both Mormon Big “D” Discourse and identity performance in online spaces.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The Bloggernacle is a constellation of loosely-associated blogs operated for those and by those who identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which contributors to the Bloggernacle use literacy practices to recognize, reproduce, reinterpret, and/or resist meanings created by multiple Discourses in and around the *Twilight* saga (Meyer, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008). The study draws on the critical discourse analysis theory and methods of Gee (1999/2011a; 2011b) as well as the theoretical and practical applications of Carspecken's (1996) five-stage model for conducting critical ethnography. These two methods are utilized in order to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the Discourses in and around the *Twilight* saga found in the Bloggernacle?
2. What are examples of how Mormon fans recognize, reflect, reinterpret, and resist meanings made by these multiple Discourses?
3. How do fans in the Bloggernacle use language in order to (re)make meanings about the series and perform identities?

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) derives from the work of literacy and cultural theorists such as: Foucault (1980), Bourdieu (1979), Habermas and Cook (1998), and Fairclough (1992, 2010) who posited that texts must be investigated in relation to larger social and political constructs in order to delegitimize inequality and destabilize dominant discourses of power. Carspecken's methodology combined with Gee's

analytic tools allow me to investigate how Mormon bloggers use language and discourse in order to construct meanings, show membership in particular Discourses, and perform specific identities.

I must clarify what I mean by the term *critical* in both the contexts of critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis. Scholars who conduct this type of critical research are concerned with questions of human agency, dominant power structures, and equality involving gender, class, race and other cultural constructs. Researchers who are guided by critical theory often share a desire to reveal the nuances of oppression, question dominant discourses, and challenge and transform current paradigms (Carspecken, 1996). One of the defining properties of Carspecken's critical ethnography model is the process of discovering "systems relations" between the research site and other related sites or cultural products (p. 42). As such, this study adheres to the idea that power relationships will always exist between language and knowledge and language and truth claims (Foucault, 1980). My research into the Bloggernacle is meant to examine power relationships between Discourses, textual interpretations, and identities enacted by participants.

Gee (1999/2011a; 2011b) defines critical discourse analysis (CDA) as "any form of discourse analysis that sees conversation as the basic human communicational form and seeks to engage with politics. Critical discourse analysis deals with whose 'interests' are represented, helped, or harmed as people speak and write" (p. 204). When people use language, they are constantly negotiating interests and identities. Carspecken (1996) states that a "critical epistemology [rejects] perception models of truth [...] Instead, we work our theory up from holistic, predifferentiated human

experience and its relationship to the structures of communication” (p. 22). Perception of truth is culturally constructed, as it is tied to social institutions of power. This type of ethnography is termed *critical* because the researcher goes beyond cataloguing and describing social conditions and is able to discover and connect different systems of relations. Gee argues that all discourse analysis should be critical because language is tied to structures of power and social goods. As it applies to my study, critical discourse analysis allows me to understand how meanings are recognized, reinterpreted, and potentially resisted through language. It also allows me to examine which Discourses of power are represented within the Bloggernacle and how members use language to negotiate identities within this space.

Though not explicitly designed for digital sites, I extend the use of both of these methods to online spaces and heed Gee’s (2010) advice to “follow the social, cultural, institutional, and historical organizations of people [...] first and then see how literacy is taken up and used in these organizations, along with action, interaction, values, and tools and technologies” (p. 6). I model this kind of virtual ethnography after previous studies of literacy conducted in digital spaces (Baym 1993, 2009; Black, 2005, 2007, 2009; Lammers, 2011; Foerst, 2007). Carspecken (1996) also concedes the term *site* is not a fixed concept, but rather a “template or a lens to place over complex social life [...] (p. 34). In fact, digital spaces offer an “interesting hybrid” of the properties of both oral and written language (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 1) and provide the opportunity for in-depth conversational analysis which Gee (1999/2011a) defines as a “detailed form of discourse analysis that sees conversation as the basic human communicational form and seeks to explicate how people produce and reproduce social order through talk [...]” (p.

204). This allows me to examine how social order and power structures are constructed and reconstructed within the social site of the Bloggernacle while also allowing me to investigate the relationship between the site of interest and the *Twilight* saga as a related cultural product.

Research site and data sources

I originally began this study looking to see how *Twilight* fans respond to Mormon discourse in and around the text. When I first found the Mormon blogosphere—known to insiders as the Bloggernacle, a pun on the famed Mormon Tabernacle Choir—I thought it would be a good place begin to collect data. However, I soon became so intrigued by the amount of knowledge and insight to be gained from the conversations in this vast and varied space that I stayed for the duration of my six-month-long study.

The Bloggernacle can be reached through several portals. I accessed it through ldsblogs.org, otherwise known as the Mormon Archipelago (MA), which is organized into *islands* that provide direct links to numerous LDS blogs. In order for a blog to be listed among the chosen in the MA, it must “be actively posting and generally sympathetic to the Church, both in content and tenor,” according to the ldsblogs.org information page.

I chose the five blogs and three discussion forums by the dual criteria that they focused on the *Twilight* novels and films and that they were written by and/or geared toward members of the LDS community. For the purposes of this study, a blog is a site where information is generated by an author and then commenters are able to respond. A discussion forum, on the other hand, is an open discussion about a topic or question

that has been posed on a site. The main conversation develops within the thread, itself, rather than through information written by a single blogger. A discussion thread is a single topic within a blog/forum. All blogs/forums were published between 2008 and 2013 and most are accessible through ldsblogss.org. Other sources include LDS group forums on Goodreads.com, the social cataloguing site run by Amazon. Since all blogs/forums are available to the public, no names have been changed for this dissertation. In all cases, bloggers' and commenters' full names or identifying screen names have been used.

I collected the discussion threads over a period of six months between January 2014 and September 2014. I began this endeavor by collecting and reading thread upon thread that focused on *Twilight*. In order to produce a thick primary record, I kept an electronic journal with the thread pasted on one side of the page and my initial thoughts and feelings on the other. This digital diary acted as my field journal. Carspecken (1996) recommends this type of reflective journaling in order to examine one's biases and value orientations during field work (see Appendix A). In addition, I kept theoretical memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as a means to document my initial findings and recognizable patterns within the data (see Appendix A). After journaling on over 100 separate discussion threads, I selected eight to engage with using discourse analysis tools based on their relationship to my original questions. These eight threads are discussed in depth in this dissertation. Table 1 shows a comparison between the eight discussion threads analyzed, showing the format, date range of posts, number of posts to a thread, and whether the blog is group or individual. Each specific blog/forum will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

Table 1

Blog Name	Format Blog/Discussion Forum	Date range of discussion thread	Number of comments*
Feminist Mormon Housewives	Group blog	Aug. 2008-Jan. 2009	196
Mormon Mommy Blogs	Discussion forum	Aug. 2010	34
LDS Ladies Book Club (Goodreads.com)	Discussion forum	Aug. 2008-Feb. 2010	100
LDS Living (online magazine)	Discussion forum	Nov. 201-Dec. 2013	60
Hooded Utilitarian (contributor: Mette Harrison)	Group blog	Jan. 2013-Sept 2014	22
A Motley Vision	Group blog	May 2008-June 2012	83
Millennial Star	Group blog	Oct. 2008-Oct. 2011	64**
Flunking Sainthood	Individual blog	June 2011-Nov. 2011	10

*As of December 15, 2014

**combined between two separate threads by blogger, Geoff B.

My analysis of these discussion threads represents just one of the possible meanings that is able to be constructed from the data gathered from the blog sites. My investigation is not meant to represent an infallible truth claim, but meant to convey findings that meet sound methodological and validity requirements.

Critical ethnography

This qualitative research study used a modified version of Carspecken's (1996) critical ethnography five-stage model: 1) Building primary record, 2) preliminary 3)

reconstructive analysis, dialogical data, and 4/5) conducting systems analysis. I used Carspecken's model as a framework, relying heavily on the theoretical underpinnings that culture and cultural products are part of a larger system of relationships and must be looked at in connection with broader societal and institutional sites. I took liberties with the design of the study, itself, borrowing from Carspecken's model when appropriate and modifying when circumstances deemed it necessary. Carspecken notes that the five stages are "not meant to be hard and fast" and he strongly recommends "a loosely cyclical use of the stages" (p. 40). Carspecken writes that a good critical analysis "comes not only from the researcher gaining an insider's position in the culture she studies but also from the subject's gaining an insider's position in the researcher's culture" (p. 197). I used the model to explore the relationship between bloggers and the different meanings they constructed from the *Twilight* saga.

In order to build the primary record and survey the field, I collected over 1,000 pages of artifacts from over 100 discussion threads. I took extensive notes in the form of an electronic journal and theoretical memos on each of these threads. These journal responses acted as my initial observations in the field using Lincoln and Guba's field techniques (as cited in Carspecken, 1996). This included sustaining prolonged engagement in the field and using low-inference vocabulary when taking notes in my electronic journal. Ethnographic studies can use either a participant or observer approach, with most employing some combination of the two and the researcher constantly positioned and repositioned between an etic and emic point of view. Because I chose to conduct a content analysis, my position in regard to the conversations taking place was that of observer rather than participant. This was done with the understanding

that “one never does attain an insider’s view of another cultural reality” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 17). Another benefit of using such a method of data collection was that it eliminated the need to counteract the impact often brought about by the Hawthorne effect, which refers to the ways in which the presence of the researcher influences participants.

I acted as a lurker within the Bloggernacle, taking notes and collecting pages of artifacts in the form of blog posts and discussion comments. To meet validity requirements in this phase, I kept journalistic style notes as I gathered data and generated the primary record. Since the entire transcript of the primary record was generated through the blog sites, my initial comments were in the form of responses and first impressions of the data. For example, I noted patterns that appeared within and among blogs, frequent Bloggernacle commenters, along with any initial questions and clarifications. After reviewing my notes, I chose eight blogs/discussion threads for more in-depth analysis based on their relationship to my original questions.

Ultimately, the eight discussion threads were copied into separate word processing documents and analyzed using 27 Gee’s tools (2011b) of Discourse analysis. These tools are divided into four different categories: language and context; saying, doing, designing; building things in the world; and theoretical tools. Each tool posed specific questions to the data, and some tools proved more applicable than others. As per Gee’s suggestion, I began with the tools meant to look at the more conceptual rather than language-oriented aspects of the data, including the Big “D” Discourse tool and the figured worlds tool. Eventually, four tools were selected for their specific applicability to

my questions: the Big “D” Discourse tool, the figured worlds tool, the identities building tool, and the politics building tool (see Appendix B).

Discourse analysis

I used Gee’s (2011b) discourse analysis methods in order to sink my fangs deeper into Bloggernacle *Twilight* blogs. Four tools were selected during this stage as being most useful in answering my research questions: the Big “D” Discourse tool, the figured worlds tool, the identities building tool, and the politics building tool. These four tools and how they applied to the Bloggernacle study are discussed in detail in the following section. The tools allowed me to uncover the ways that members of the Bloggernacle use language to perform various identities to signal membership in the LDS Discourse and how both Discourse and identity intersect with the interpretations LDS fans were able to make of the *Twilight* text, itself. Table 2 shows these tools and how each applies to my study:

Table 2

Identities building tool	Questioned various identities people were enacting in the Bloggernacle in relation to Mormonism and <i>Twilight</i> .
Figured worlds tool	Explored stories people assumed as well as stories they assumed others shared within the Bloggernacle about Mormonism and <i>Twilight</i> .
Politics building tool	Examined how people used words and language within the Bloggernacle in order to build social goods and distribute them among members of the Bloggernacle.
Big “D” Discourse tool	Examined ways of speaking, acting, valuing, and believing in the Bloggernacle that people used to identify as Mormon.

Gee, 2011b

Identities Building Tool

I used this tool to understand how fans use language to perform identities within the Bloggernacle. Gee (2011b) refers to the identities building tool as a way to perceive which socially recognizable identities a person may be performing within social interactions. It also refers to the ways that people use language in order to gain recognition from others as enacting an identity or the ways that individuals construct the identities of others. I employ the term *performance* whenever possible when referencing identity in order to emphasize that identities are neither fixed nor firm, but fluid, overlapping, and constantly being repositioned in response to the identity performance of others. A person may enact or perform any number of identities at one time in relation to gender, class, race, religion, or other social constructs.

In this study, I used the identities building tool to look at the ways that bloggers performed various gendered and Mormon identities within the *Twilight* blogs and the ways that they positioned others in relation to these identities. For each line of data in the threads, I asked: How is the commenter using language to perform identity? What identity is the commenter trying to perform or convey to others? How is the commenter positioning others in relation to his/her identity performance? For an example of this tool as used in my data, refer to Appendix B.

Figured Worlds Tool

I used the figured worlds to tool to understand how LDS *Twilight*-fans used their understandings about the world to (re)make meanings about the text. Gee (1999, 2004, 2011b) refers to shortcuts that happen in our brains as *figured worlds*. Figured worlds are sometimes called *cultural worlds*, *narrativized worlds*, *dramatized worlds*, or *webs of*

meaning (Geertz, 1973). I use the term figured worlds as used by Gee (1999) and Holland (1998) to mean “simplified, often unconscious, and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives” (Gee, p. 76). Gee suggests that following questions are helpful in discovering figured worlds: What are the stories being told? What are the specific phrases of communication? What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, objects, environments, as well as institutions are present? It is also important to emphasize that figured worlds are fluid, often overlapping and interacting with one another. They can also develop and change as experiences, events, and interpretations shift. They can remain partial, incomplete, or even contradictory.

For the purposes of my study, the figured worlds tool allowed me to identify the stories and the beliefs the bloggers and commenters held about the world. Because figured worlds differ by cultural and social groups, I realized that some of the beliefs and cultural stories represented in the Bloggernacle were situated within a normative Mormon figured world while others were not. Through questioning the figured worlds of the bloggers, I sought to understand beliefs, values, as well as ways of using language and interacting in order to critically examine how a Mormon figured world impacts the available meanings that are able to be constructed regarding the *Twilight* saga (See Appendix B).

Politics Building Tool

This tool was useful in uncovering the values and social goods that helped to inform Mormon Discourse and social identity. Gee (2011b) describes the politics building tool as one that allows one to ask how language is “used to build (construct,

assume) what count as social goods and to distribute these to or withhold them from listeners or others” (p. 121). In the Bloggernacle study, this tool was especially helpful in determining the ways of speaking, believing, and behaving that are valued and considered normal within the online LDS community. What it means to be a “good” LDS member can vary based on the identity one is performing within the space and how others in the space respond. For example, questioning doctrine might be considered a behavior valued by the feminist Mormon housewives, but not by those in the more traditionally oriented Millennial Star. In addition, which interpretations of the text are validated and which are not is determined by the social goods that are valued within the community.

For example, for many members of the LDS community, marriage and sex are two social goods that are necessary not only for earthly life but for eternal salvation. Similarly, the *Twilight* saga, with its LDS authorship, is also an important social good to many Mormons because it denotes mainstream acceptance and representation. However, the sex between Bella and Edward after their marriage in *Breaking Dawn* (Meyer, 2008) is an often-contested plotline among LDS readers due to what has been deemed graphic nature. This becomes an argument over social goods within the community and is tied to the identity that one performs within the Bloggernacle. For each piece of data in the threads, I asked: How are bloggers using language to convey what counts as social goods? How do they use language to distribute/withhold these social goods from others? Who is able to receive these social goods within the figured world that is being represented? (See Appendix B).

Big “D” Discourse Tool

Gee (2010) states that big “D” Discourses are “intimately related to the distribution of social power” (p. 2). Gee distinguishes big “D” Discourse from little “d” discourse, which he reserves for language in use. One way that people acquire a Discourse or become a recognized member of a community of practice is through literacy practices. Big “D” Discourse encompasses not just language, but values, behaviors, appearances, actions, and interactions that signify membership in a particular group. Gee (2010) describes this form of literacy as “situated-socio-cultural” and writes that literacy is a “social and cultural achievement” which needs to be “understood and studied in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional” (p. 2). The LDS community builds on all of these concepts. It is at once a social community with specific cultural features. In addition, members of the LDS Church are situated within the historical and institutional context of the Church, itself.

I wanted to know what Discourses were present in and around the *Twilight* saga within the Bloggernacle. The *Twilight* blogs in the Bloggernacle act as a perfect vehicle for examining how seemingly conflicting Discourses are publically negotiated in online spaces. In this study, I used the Big “D” Discourse tool to discover different ways that bloggers and commenters aligned themselves with a Mormon Discourse in digital spaces. I used this tool to understand how the *Twilight* saga simultaneously influences and is influenced by Mormon Discourse and how identity and interpretation intersect with the Discourse (See Appendix B).

To be recognized as a member of the Mormon Discourse it is not enough to speak the correct “language” or use the right words. However, as with any Discourse, these are

often more ambiguous than they seem. One must embody the proper attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and practices in order to *perform* Mormon. In other words, members of the Bloggernacle were constantly communicating membership in the Mormon Discourse through language and behaviors. Oftentimes, this meant negotiating the boundaries of the Discourse, itself. For example, *Twilight's* sexual themes become a point of contention among the LDS community because two social goods come into conflict with one another. The reading of sexualized romance novels is not typically part of an accepted Mormon Discourse. However, supporting the work and artistic contributions of other members *is* decidedly part of the Discourse. Therefore, the Discourse is not static; it is constantly being re-investigated, re-interpreted, and re-shaped on an ongoing basis from within.

Systems analysis

Critical ethnography requires the researcher to conduct systems analysis (Carspecken, 1996) in order to “consider one’s findings in relation to the general theories of society” (p. 172). For the final stages in my analysis, I examined the relationship between the Bloggernacle *Twilight* blogs and other institutional and sociological sites including Mormonism and the *Twilight* saga, itself, as a cultural product.

In this phase, I revisited the data and questioned ways that the observable behaviors of commenters in the Bloggernacle could be abstracted into more general terms with the use of empirical evidence. I began to see how the social constructs of power and gender related to Mormon Discourse. Throughout the *Twilight* blogs, identities related to power and gender appeared to intersect most often, supporting prior

studies that show people continue identity performances in online spaces (Eklund, 2011; Kendall, 1998). The behaviors, values, and social goods that inform the Mormon Discourse within the Bloggernacle space were negotiated and renegotiated by members of the Discourse, as were acceptable identities. The *Twilight* Bloggernacle blogs were unique because people were not only engaging with *Twilight*; they were also participating in their cultural and religious community. This required them to balance their faith with fandom, finding ways to interpret text and (re)make meanings that aligned with Mormon Discourse and identity.

Validity and reliability

From a critical perspective, “validity refers to the soundness of an argument rather than the truth of statements” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 55). Given this statement, I do not posit that any of my truth claims are free from fallibility. This is not meant as a thin post-modern statement that liberates my research claims from critiques or challenges, but as a reiteration that all truth claims are culturally constructed and may be overturned at a future point in history by a different culture.

In the early stages of this critical ethnography, validation methods were employed by practicing of sustained engagement in the field, using a low-inference vocabulary in the written record in order to reduce bias, and using peer de-briefing to observe my notes. Later, I narrowed 27 tools down to the four most applicable for my questions: The Big “D” Discourse tool, the figured worlds tool, the politics building tool, and the identities-building tool. According to Gee (2011), validity for discourse analysis relies on the following four components: convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details. Convergence was employed in this study in that the answers to my selected tools aligned

with one another. I also shared my answers to these questions with people who were insiders in the LDS Discourse. Their agreement with the findings suggested that my findings were valid representations. These methods and the findings it yielded could also be applied to other online Discourse communities, suggesting strong coverage and adding to the validity claims. Finally, using the Discourse analysis tools to observe the specialized language of the Bloggernacle, and how members of the online LDS used language to construct meanings and identities recognizable by members, shows that the analysis is related to linguistic structure and how the broader online LDS community uses language for a variety of purposes (Gee, 1999/2011a, 2011b).

Limitations

In the end, over 100 blogs and thousands of pages surveyed were narrowed down to the eight blogs discussed in the findings section of this dissertation. This well may mean that an in-depth analysis of a different selection of blogs might highlight additional themes of interest. While this may have limited the field and the representations of voices heard, it also allowed me to focus on the data that best addressed my initial questions. Limiting the scope of data also permitted a more in-depth analysis of the discourse of those particular blogs.

A second limitation, perhaps, is the absence of the dialogic data in the form of interviews stressed by Carspecken (1996) as necessary to give “participants a voice in the research process and a chance to challenge material produced by the researcher” (p. 155). Indeed, dialogical data generation may be a practical route for extending and expanding this research. However, for the purposes of my research questions, I was most interested

in how the written data of this particular community provided insight into the site of cultural meaning-making and a content analysis seemed the most fitting for my purposes.

CHAPTER 4

MORMON BIG “D” DISCOURSE IN THE BLOGGERNACLE

“Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series is not very interesting in terms of sentence level prose or overt Mormon content [...]. And yet it has received attention from LDS literary critics because it is interesting in terms of thematics, plot, reception among readers, including LDS readers, and reception among national reviewers/critics.”

--William Morris, A Motley Vision, October 2014

William Morris, founder of *A Motley Vision* group blog adeptly asserts that *Twilight* is not interesting because of anything inherent in the text or any intrinsic relation to Mormonism. He reiterates that it is the fans and critics who make *Twilight* worth discussion. In part, it is how *Twilight* shapes and is shaped by Mormon Discourse that makes it worthy of scholarship. For the purposes of this analysis, I define Mormon Big “D” Discourse as the beliefs, practices, specialized language, and values that identify someone as Mormon to the larger LDS community (Gee, 1999/2011a, 2011b). I will also distinguish Big “D” Discourse from traditional discourse, which I define as “language in use” (Gee, 1999/2011a, 2011b). The idea of a Big “D” Discourse extends the concept of what it means to be Mormon beyond doctrine and also encompasses Mormon culture, which is itself situated within society as a whole. In this section, I will examine the ways in which Mormon bloggers and commenters use specialized language within the *Twilight* blogs to recognize, reinforce, and reinterpret Mormon Big “D” Discourse and how *Twilight*, in turn, informs that Discourse. Ultimately, there exists a dialectic between the

saga and Mormon Discourse, with each continually informing the other. In essence, Mormon fans have, indeed, cultivated *Twilight* into a text that informs and is informed by Mormonism.

The following blogs will be discussed in this section, as they are prime examples of how bloggers use language in order to recognize, reinforce, and/or reinterpret Big “D” Mormon Discourse: William Morris’ *Motley Vision* blog (May 2008-June 2010), Geoff B.’s *The Millennial Star* blog (Oct. 2008-Nov. 2011), and Mette Ivie Harrison’s *Bella as a Mormon Goddess* post on “The Hooded Utilitarian” (Jan. 2013-Sept. 2014). I have included dates in order to situate the blogs within their original context and to show that these are relevant conversations that developed over the course of time and helped to shape current interpretations of Meyer’s popular work. When referencing a commenter’s post, I have provided the commenter’s username or handle; however it was used in the post. Due to the public nature of the content, no pseudonyms have been used.

Every member a missionary: Spreading the gospel in the digital age

“I think that Mormon literature, even popular literature, even young adult literature, could do with some more thorough treatments of agency (and of other doctrines that make us unique). I don’t see the mainstream media [...] changing their definition of us by mainly what we don’t do rather than what we believe. I do see the possibility of stronger transmission of these ideas to our people through the use of culture.”

--William Morris, Mormonism and the erotics of abstinence, May 2008

Morris’ language here speaks directly to an LDS Big “D” Discourse. He is careful to situate himself as a cultural insider as well as an authoritative voice in the field

of Mormon art and literature. By using plural pronouns—“us,” “their,” “we,” “our”—Morris quickly establishes an emic point of view in order to relate to his LDS readers. Furthermore, the use of the term “agency” has special meaning within Mormon culture, referring to the privilege God gives man to choose right from wrong as part of the eternal plan of salvation. LDS readers would recognize his reference instantly.

A Motley Vision (AMV) is a group blog established by William Morris in 2004, and winner of the Association for Mormon Arts and Letters award (MAL) for criticism in 2005. An author and an early pioneer in the Mormon blogosphere, Morris describes AMV as “a place in the Bloggernacle specifically dedicated to Mormon literature and art.” The comments policy informs users that AMV “is not the place to have theological or historical debates,” but that “comments that explore Mormon/LDS history, theology and practice within the context of culture are welcome.” Here, Morris’ goal with AMV appears to be twofold. First, he seems to want to encourage Mormon authors and artists to incorporate more carefully placed Mormon doctrines in order to reinforce them within Mormon culture. Second, Morris suggests that this art would potentially have the ability to change mainstream perceptions of Mormonism by depicting Mormon beliefs more clearly to the public. AMV is essentially meant to be a partial fulfillment of the goal to help LDS artists use their talents to explore Mormon ideas in their works and bring those ideas to both the Mormon community and the wider culture at large through digital conversations.

There were a number of *Twilight* blogs and comments in the Bloggernacle written by posters who identify as male online. At first glance, I found it strange that a fair number of these posts were written by men. However, upon further analysis, this trend

did not seem obscure at all, but rather made a great deal of sense when looked at through the patriarchal foundations of the LDS faith and culture. Only worthy males are granted the priesthood, which effectively awards them the power and authority of God. While each of these blogs contributes something different to my understanding of how Mormon Discourse is recognized, reinforced, or reinterpreted within the Bloggernacle, they also share the patriarchal perspective in that they each strive to act as gatekeepers and control the *Twilight* narrative in order to contain it within a Mormon framework.

AMV specifically states that debating doctrine within the site is not accepted discourse. This may seem odd for a blog that bases its mission in literary criticism, but literary criticism from a Mormon lens seeks to explore rather than debate commonly-held precepts. In its very mission, AMV upholds and sustains Mormon Big “D” Discourse using a digital platform. Morris and his contributors cannot actually critique the *Mormon* part of Mormon literature and art. Therefore, they are bound by the institution of the LDS Church to maintain the tenets and precepts of the Mormon faith as true and accurate. Being part of the LDS Church means believing that *every member is a missionary* with the duty to positively represent the Church and its beliefs in all areas of one’s life. David O. McKay, the ninth president of the LDS Church said:

“Every member is a missionary. He or she has the responsibility of bringing somebody: a mother, a father, a neighbor, a fellow worker, an associate, somebody in touch with the messengers of the gospel. If every member will carry that responsibility and if the arrangement to have that mother or that father or somebody meet the authorized representatives of the Church, no power on earth can stop this church from growing” (McKay, 1961).

The LDS Church clearly understands and employs to its advantage the processes of cultural production. The Church understands well that the meaning-making is a constant process, one in which all members of are expected to participate. In Mormonism's brief history, it has gone from being largely viewed as a fringe cult to a mainstream religion with members represented in all fields of American life.

Morris' post reflects these important aspects of Mormon Big "D" Discourse that expect each member to use his or her abilities and talents as necessary in order to further the mission of the Church. Morris suggests that Mormon art and literature can act as conduits for Mormon ideas, if not to the larger culture, then at least to the rest of the LDS community. He proposes that Mormon values and beliefs can and should be transmitted through art and literature as well as "through the use of culture." On the "About" page of AMV, Morris is careful to say that opinions expressed in the blog are not necessarily the opinions of the LDS Church. But like other Mormon bloggers, Morris does not discount the importance of mainstream definitions of Mormonism and clearly sees the role digital media can play in shaping those definitions.

Morris emphasizes that belief over behavior is the key to altering the mainstream media's opinion of Mormonism for the better. In essence, public perception will not be changed by further knowledge of the things Mormons are known to abstain from—caffeine, alcohol, premarital sex—but by convincing the public that Mormons share their common beliefs and values. The 2012 "I'm a Mormon" campaign that coincided with Mitt Romney's bid for the presidency seems to corroborate Morris' viewpoint that the Church can use culture and media to sway public perception of Mormonism. AMV acts as a kind of gatekeeper of faith, making sure that interpretations of Mormon art and

literature do not depart too drastically from Mormon doctrine. AMV uses a digital platform to discuss art, literature, and film through a Mormon lens in order to communicate those ideas to the LDS community. In this way, the bloggers on AMV are participating in a kind of missionary work, themselves, by critiquing Mormon film, art, and literature in a way that appeals to the Mormon mindset, thereby reinforcing and strengthening Mormon culture both in physical and in digital wards.

Since Stephenie Meyer is arguably the strongest Mormon presence in mainstream literature at the moment, it would make sense for AMV to have dedicated at least one post to her opus. In fact, there are no fewer than 11 *Twilight* blog posts on AMV with hundreds of comments by various contributors published between 2005 and 2012, including an exclusive interview with Stephenie Meyer. The blog used to also have an online journal dedicated to *Twilight* called *Reading Until Dawn* that has since been discontinued. Morris writes, “Meyer has done something that I have long thought would be a rewarding strand of Mormon literature, that is, to explore how abstinence leads to a heavily charged play of small gestures among Mormon teenagers and young adults.” Morris recognizes the abstinence narrative present within the text, but he also suggests that *Twilight* has a larger calling. By consciously situating the novels and films within a wider context of Mormon art and literature, Morris intones that the saga could be interpreted as a mainstream cultural product that simultaneously questions and reinforces traditional Mormon values. In exploring and having conversations around Mormon ideas within *Twilight*, Morris and his contributors help to situate the novels within a Mormon Big “D” Discourse through the use of specialized language.

Amanda, a commenter on Morris' *Erotics of abstinence* post, writes:

“Meyer has written a book with some very critical Mormon doctrine set into the core of its plot, and that book has gone on to become one of the most popular books in the nation—she has in effect, become a missionary for the LDS church, though in an unconventional way, and I, believe [...] that it is an extraordinary feat, knowing how rare it is for a novel encrusted with doctrinal jewels to hit mainstream media.”

Amanda applies the “every member a missionary” concept to Meyer and to the *Twilight* saga's themes of abstinence and freewill as evidence that Meyer and her work are in line with the LDS faith. She praises Meyer's “extraordinary feat” of infusing mainstream media with “doctrinal jewels” and believes Meyer's novels help to reinforce the mission of the LDS Church. Furthermore, Amanda refers to Meyer as an unconventional “missionary.” With the use of the term “missionary,” Amanda implies that Meyer is doing work for the Church in writing *Twilight* and bringing ideas from Mormon doctrine into the mainstream.

Jasmine, another commenter on Morris' blog writes:

“Clearly there are some principles and doctrine of our Church woven into the story—interestingly enough using the evil of vampires to represent the dark evil nature of man and demonstrating [sic] that we can overcome with our ‘Father's’ help, the ‘natural’ man. It demonstrates the power of making good choices and ‘overcoming’ the dark side of our natures.”

Jasmine views the *Twilight* saga as a cultural product that reinforces and supports Mormon beliefs and doctrine. Jasmine uses many pronouns to signify her membership in

the Discourse—“our Church,” “our Father,” and “our natures.” Her words also have specialized meaning to the LDS community. The Church refers to the institution of the LDS religion, itself, not to a specific building where people gather for services. That would be referred to as a ward. “Our Father” refers to the Heavenly Father, who the LDS faith purports is the actual flesh and bone physical father of everyone on Earth. Finally, the concept of “nature” is a specialized term within the LDS Discourse that refers to one’s ability to overcome basic human desires. The Church claims that “each person must be born again through the atonement of Jesus Christ to cease being a natural man” (www.lds.org). Another commenter, Wendilynn, writes:

“I think the Mormon themes that show up in the book are interesting to see in something that’s become so popular. You have the theme of overcoming our base nature. And drinking human blood is supposed to be a nature of vampires that cannot be overcome, yet, Edward and his family do. This is a major part of our theology that you can overcome the ‘natural man.’ Being in love forever throughout eternity is definitely part of our Mormon culture and then you get the pure enjoyment of romance without sex mucking it up.”

For Jasmine and Wendilynn, *Twilight* represents a reinforcement of LDS beliefs. There is nothing inherent in the text that definitively states that the vampires represent the LDS concept of natural man or that vampirism is a stand-in for celestial marriage, but such interpretations of the text allow fans to position the saga within an LDS Discourse and to situate *Twilight* as cultural product that reinforces it. For those LDS fans who recognize Mormon discourse within the text, it makes sense that Meyer would write her beliefs into the novels given that she, like all members, is called upon to be a missionary

for the Church in her daily life. Through articulating *Twilight* with Mormon doctrine and culture, fans strengthen Morris' first point that Mormon ideas such as agency or abstinence are transmitted through conversations about literature.

Morris' second point speaks to the importance of mainstream definitions in determining Mormonism's position within the larger culture. He suggests that Meyer has a part to play in shaping public opinion about Mormonism. Commenter and fellow AMV contributor, Anneke Majors, feels the novels serve to damage, rather than improve, that reputation. She writes:

“Do people in the church live in the weirdly erotic NICMO world that is reflected in Meyer's novels? Yes. Many of them? Probably. Is it an actually *Mormon* worldview? If we mean ‘doctrinally sanctioned,’ then I'd say no. She perpetuates this squeaky clean smut, *Time* picks up on it, and the layman's perspective of LDS culture is that we're a bunch of thinly restrained Freudian sacks of hormones who live lives of technical chastity. But the entire point of the New Testament is missed! We're taught to eschew adultery and ‘anything like unto it.’ We're supposed to avoid ‘looking upon a woman to lust after her.’ We're to focus on the positive, constructive things we can do while we're unmarried instead of living in the fantasy world that pop culture encourages in us.”

Anneke seems to feel that *Twilight* does little to help the public's perceptions of Mormons. She refers to “NICMO,” a commonly-known acronym in the LDS community meaning non-committal make-out. Anneke argues that the saga gives the impression that Mormons are sexually repressed, while missing the larger and more doctrinal reasons for

their chastity. However, she also acknowledges that while such practices may not be LDS doctrine, they are, in fact, part of a very real cultural phenomenon among LDS youth. This argument reverts back to Morris' original statement that LDS artists have an obligation to portray LDS beliefs rather than cultural behaviors that might appear odd to an outsider. Anneke implies that the tightly controlled sexual tension that is central to the *Twilight* saga may be a truism of Mormon culture, but it is not a part of the culture that is typically openly and willingly shared with those outside of the community.

Jettboy, a popular blogger and frequent commenter in the Bloggernacle, challenges Morris' assertion that LDS values and beliefs can and should be transmitted to the larger culture through art and literature. He writes that "[...] the idea that readers will become a member of or really learn about Mormonism by reading 'Twilight' is highly unlikely. Context of fantasy has supplanted any viable discussion of real beliefs outside of speculative literary interpretation. The average reader could care less without pre-conceived notions of what they want to find." Jettboy feels that the saga is situated within the Discourse of fantasy and most fans will read it as such. Therefore, he feels that *Twilight* cannot offer a viable discussion of Mormon doctrine and theology, especially to those unfamiliar with LDS doctrine and culture. Jettboy is careful to delineate fiction and fantasy from what members are taught is sacred doctrine. In a Mormon context, only doctrinal texts such as *The Book of Mormon* (1830), *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), and *The Pearl of Great Price* (1851), offer theological truth. Fiction is discounted as a conduit for culture and belief. Jettboy is seen often in the *Twilight* blogs acting as a gatekeeper. He frequently challenges others' assumptions and reinforces doctrine as the only sanctioned source of true knowledge. Jettboy reminds

readers that the only correct way to come to Mormonism is through the Church and not through fantasy novels, regardless of their authorship.

While Jettboy might be correct that the average fan may not consider the LDS themes in and around the saga, it may not be necessary for fans to recognize a particular Discourse for it to be acting upon them. Non-LDS fans may not situate the erotic abstinence narrative mentioned by Morris and Jasmine consciously within a Mormon Discourse. However, components of the narrative such as celibacy before marriage, sexual restraint, female purity, and monogamy are familiar tenets even in a modern, highly-secular society. In addition, fans who are LDS would have little need to call attention to Meyer's "doctrinal jewels" because they would likely assume that Meyer would naturally embed doctrinal references in her work as a Mormon artist as part of her obligation to the Church. If she had not included Mormon ideas, she essentially would have failed in her mission.

The rise of *Twilight* coincided with the infancy of the Bloggernacle, itself, and a site like AMV would not be what it is without Meyer's contribution to the genre of Mormon literature. In an AMV ten-year anniversary interview posted in June, 2014, Morris blogged:

"Blogging at AMV has also forced me to more closely examine my assumptions about the function of art and the role of artists and how that happens in relation to Mormonism. And because blogging is, by nature, a contrarian form, I have found myself resisting the truisms that abound about Mormons, Mormonism and Mormon art. Things like that we'll have Shakespeares and Miltons of our own. And Mormons can't write tragedy. And Mormons are nice

and competent and bland. And Mormons can't produce art because they have church callings and families. I think there is some truth to all of those tropes, but what's more interesting is all the ways in which individuals, families, communities, and specific works of art transcend them."

The path of mainstreaming Mormonism, as Morris reminds us, depends not in what Mormons don't do, but on showing that their core values and beliefs are in line with those of the conventional culture. Many Mormon fans have embraced the LDS discourse of *Twilight* and relish in the fact that a novel by a Mormon author has permeated the general public. It is unclear if the novels and films have the potential to shape mainstream media's definitions of Mormonism by familiarizing them with LDS beliefs, as Morris would hope. The idea that *Twilight* can or should function as a sort of literary missionary is controversial within the Bloggernacle, but as long as *Twilight* continues to be discussed in conjunction with Mormon culture and doctrine, it will continue to inform and be acted upon by Mormon Discourse. Ultimately, it is bloggers like Morris and others who help make Meyer's saga a Mormon cultural product and continue to spread the gospel of *Twilight* in the digital age.

***Twilight* and the abstinence narrative**

"I wonder if we have considered how uniquely Mormon a novel 'Twilight' is."

--Geoff B., The Millennial Star, October 2008

The Millennial Star is a group blog that advertises itself as a "faithful LDS blog" on its Facebook page. It is clear from the blog's overall mission statement that it aligns itself with the institution of the LDS Church:

“Though we welcome readers and posters of all faiths, our posts take the foundational teachings of the LDS Church as common ground and the point of departure. Posters who wish to debate or argue those foundational teachings should seek one of the other forums available for such discussions. Comments that denigrate the Church or insult its leaders are not welcome” (*Millennial Star* Comments Policy, 2014).

Geoff B. is a blogger for *The Millennial Star*, one of the early pioneer blogs of the ‘nacle founded in 2005. He describes himself in his biographical section as a middle-aged father of five. He goes on to note how he has “held several Church callings: young men's president, high priest group leader, member of the bishopric, stake director of public affairs, media specialist for church public affairs, high councilman” in order to identify himself as a member of the Discourse. The LDS Church operates through membership volunteers, known as callings. Geoff is careful to highlight callings that are of higher status. Geoff positions himself as a male member in excellent standing, a patriarchal priesthood holder who can dole out moral wisdoms and speak with authority about scripture. Yet Geoff B. posted about *Twilight* on three separate occasions from 2008 until 2011. Clearly, *Twilight*'s restrained sexuality was enough to warrant this kind of important missionary work.

Geoff does not claim to be a *Twilight* fan or even a critic. He does not swoon over Edward; he does not pick teams in the vampire versus werewolf debate; and he has very little to say about how and in what ways Mormon authors such as Meyer should participate in the larger literary community. *Twilight* is a subject that differs greatly from his usual posts, which tend to focus on Mormon political and historical issues—topics

that seem much more germane to the LDS community than a blog about sparkly vampires and the women who love them. The fact that someone in Geoff's position would choose *Twilight* as an important issue to the Mormon community is evidence of how interconnected the two have become with one another over the last decade. Geoff situates *Twilight* within the abstinence narrative, one of the common interpretations made by Mormon fans. Geoff's analysis serves a dual purpose: it helps to maintain culturally-sanctioned interpretations of the text as well as use the saga as a teaching tool that reinforces Mormon values. In this way, *Twilight* both informs and is informed by the LDS community.

In October of 2008, Geoff B. posted his first *Twilight* blog titled *Twilight—Vampires and Mormons*. Geoff B.'s discourse is situated within the abstinence narrative, a tenet that comes part and parcel with membership in the LDS Church. Every LDS teen since the mid-1960s has been given a "For the Strength of Youth" pamphlet to guide them (virginally) through their formative years. Geoff B. reinforces the abstinence narrative and the dominant LDS discourse through highlighting Meyer's Mormon treatment of the subject of sex. The result is a blog post that reads much like a father giving "the talk" to his teenage daughter and was perhaps meant as a way to help other fathers of *Twilight*-obsessed teens talk to them about their fandom. In his first *Twilight* post in 2008, Geoff B. writes:

"Bella and Edward's whole situation should remind Mormon readers of the sexual frustration of dating while trying to maintain enough purity to qualify for a temple recommend. They touch each other, but never anyplace that a modest bathing suit would cover (I can hear my bishop's voice now). And in fact,

they discuss sexuality (as well as blood-sucking) but in the end remain sexually virginal until marriage. [parenthesis original]”

It is clear that Geoff B. is not writing as a fan, but as a Mormon father and husband with a legitimate position of authority—an LDS Atticus Finch. His words read as a kind of moral lesson; he sees a teachable moment in the novels which he uses to reinforce LDS tenets of purity, abstinence, and a “temple recommend”—the special card held by high-standing members that allows them to participate in temple ceremonies. It is a reminder of the control that the institution of the LDS Church has over what its members can and cannot consume as entertainment. In calling for his “bishop’s voice,” Geoff B. is essentially acting as the same voice, reminding Mormon readers to follow Bella and Edward’s example while assuring them that he understands their “sexual frustration.” While a great deal of Geoff’s discourse on purity and virginity are also germane to the broader spectrum of conservative Christianity, he clearly speaks to a Mormon audience. His lecture is meant to act as a voice of reason, reminding faithful LDS members of the expectations by which they are bound. Geoff interprets the novels through a distinctly Mormon lens in order to capitalize upon an opportunity to re-direct fandom within the LDS community back to the abstinence narrative. By situating the *Twilight* phenomena within a Mormon Discourse, Geoff B. uses *Twilight* as a way to reinforce dominant power structures within the online spaces of the Bloggernacle. In turn, he also (perhaps unintentionally) reinforces the relationship the LDS community has with the novels and films.

In his post, Geoff B. goes on to extol *Twilight*'s Mormon values:

“In this day and age, there are very few cultures that truly emphasize the age-old virtue of chastity until marriage. Happily, our Mormon culture is one of them. It has got to be strange for the millions of Meyer's readers that her characters aren't hopping into bed left and right. But she makes up for it with paragraph after paragraph of titillating hints and passion without limits—that are to come after Edward and Bella can finally consummate their union.”

He believes that Meyer was careful to make her novels friendly for Mormon readers while reminding them of the bliss of waiting for their eternal partners. Geoff B. is careful once again to emphasize the abstinence narrative angle of *Twilight* and stress that eternal marriage is the ultimate goal. In Geoff's comments section, Jettboy asks, “are Mormons the only ones that value abstinence? [sic] Is there a particular approach to abstinence [sic] this book has that is different from non-Mormons?” Jettboy asks a worthwhile question that challenges Geoff's precept that *Twilight* is a “uniquely Mormon novel” by asking how abstinence within LDS culture is different from the larger abstinence narrative shared by many conservative groups. While there may be doctrinal differences that make the Mormon abstinence tenet unique from that of other groups, the details are not necessarily important. Meyer is not bringing the abstinence narrative to mainstream culture, because it is already very much a part of it. However, the abstinence narrative is central to Mormon values and beliefs, and this common precept helps Mormons not only connect to their values, but situate themselves within the larger conservative Christian community. For members of the LDS community, reading *Twilight* in any other manner would be dangerous and threatening to their beliefs about sexuality, dating, and marriage.

While it might be alright for gentile readers to pray with each passing page that Edward sinks his fangs into Bella's flesh or that Bella chooses Jacob so that she can have a sexual relationship, Mormon readers must refrain from such thoughts. For Mormon readers, Bella's virginal courtship that ends in a perfect eternal union is the only interpretation available that is sanctioned by their doctrine and culture. If Mormon readers find themselves seduced by the sexual anticipation, *Twilight* becomes pornography, making it as forbidden as Bella and Edward's love. In fact, the abstinence narrative does LDS *Twilight* fans a favor by reinforcing their beliefs and situating the novels within LDS Discourse. This way, when they swoon over Edward, they can tell themselves that it is not about sex; it is about waiting for (or reminiscing about) that perfect temple wedding and eternal marriage.

Jasmine, a commenter on Geoff's blog, writes, "I was drawn especially to the loyalty, tenderness, respect and sensitivity in their relationship that was depicted between a man and woman that should be was [sic] of course a main feature of the book—and I believe is what intrigues many of the youth. We have a sore lack of this in our world today." Jasmine highlights the aspects of the Bella-Edward relationship that align with Mormon values. She de-sexualizes the relationship in order to situate the saga within the abstinence narrative, which makes the novels and films palatable for the LDS audience. Her word choice is similar to the word choice in lessons taught in church to LDS couples to strengthen their marital relationships and families: "*Tenderness* and *respect*—never selfishness—[emphasis added] must be the guiding principles in the intimate relationship between husband and wife. Each partner must be considerate and sensitive to the other's

needs and desires.” (*Ensign*, 1994 p. 51). In doing so, she substantiates Geoff B.’s interpretation and reinforces Mormon Discourse.

The abstinence narrative has become closely articulated with *Twilight* in part due to Mormon bloggers who were a part of the original conversations that helped to form the initial interpretations of Meyer’s work. Geoff’s endorsement could not have been more aptly planned. At the time of his October 2008 post, the highly-anticipated first *Twilight* film was just one month away.

LDS members are discouraged from reading or watching anything that is not “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (13th Article of Faith, LDS.org) and this includes all films with an R rating. And even though *Twilight* earned a questionable PG-13 rating, endorsements from people like Geoff B. helped to assure Mormon fans that *Twilight* would be a film they could watch in good faith. Geoff B.’s interpretation also reflects and reaffirms LDS values and positions *Twilight* as a Mormon cultural product. Geoff B.’s blog is an example of how *Twilight* is used within the Bloggernacle as a tool to reflect and reinforce dominant LDS values. Mormons are shown, through an authoritative male voice, the interpretation of the text that is available to them that aligns with their beliefs and values. Mormon fans who were seeking patriarchal approval for their enjoyment of the saga may have found their misgivings alleviated by Geoff B.’s assurance that *Twilight* is a “uniquely Mormon novel.”

Not a typical nor a conservative Mormon

“I feel like I just raised my hand in Sunday School and got shot down big time by the teacher. As usual, this makes me mostly feel like I should just shut up at church because no one wants to hear what I have to say.”

*--Mette Ivie Harrison, *Bella as a Mormon Goddess*, January 2013*

Occasionally, bloggers will attempt to challenge Mormon doctrine or reinterpret it with respect to *Twilight*. Mette Ivie Harrison is a Mormon author and contributor to the Hooded Utilitarian, a “quasi-blog/quasi-magazine” (Berlatsky, n.d.). While not an officially sanctioned Bloggernacle space, Harrison’s post titled *Bella as a Mormon Goddess* drew a good deal of respondents from the ‘nacle, including Jettboy whose handle appears frequently within the Mormon *Twilight* blogs. In her post, Harrison argues that Bella can be seen as a Mormon goddess figure, a non-traditional take on both Mormonism and *Twilight*. Her interpretation acts as a counter to the abstinence narrative and attempts to expand the boundaries of traditional Mormon Discourse.

Part of Mormon theology is the belief that humans can attain godhood after life on earth. According to this theology, humans were all born as spirit children of a flesh and bone Heavenly Father. Though, rarely spoken of, this would also assume the presence of a Heavenly Mother. In some instances, Heavenly Mother is even referred to in the plural, harkening back to Mormonism’s polygamist past. Talking about Heavenly Mother in an extensive way hints at one’s deviance from traditional Mormon doctrine. It signals to other members that one is questioning the patriarchy on which the religion is founded. To evoke the idea of a Heavenly Mother in the context of any sort of meaningful or

critical discourse signals to the community that one is, as Harrison puts it, “not a typical nor a conservative Mormon.” She writes:

“The Mormon story of creation as it informs *Twilight* goes deeper than simply the story of Eve’s free will to choose to fall in taking the fruit. It is not only in becoming a vampire that Bella becomes god-like. She gains immortality, yes, but that is at the hands (or teeth) of Edward, the patriarch of all patriarchs here. She forces him to it by coming close to death in childbirth. And it is in childbirth that Mormon doctrine ennoble women. Thus, the argument that Meyer’s *Twilight* is all about keeping women in traditional roles is true. But it also has a powerful demand that women in these roles be seen as heroic, even as super-human. Immortality in Mormonism comes to women through their work as wives and mothers quite literally.”

Harrison feels that Bella’s immortality is not passively granted by Edward as much as it is necessitated by Bella embracing her dual roles of wife and mother. While Harrison concedes that Edward represents Mormon patriarchy, she also refers to Bella as “god-like,” which would suggest equal power with Edward. Harrison is evoking the idea of a Heavenly Mother in her interpretation. She seems to feel that Meyer’s work could be seen an argument for empowering traditional female roles, given that fact that Mormons have their own brand of feminism that does not include the traditional American notions that women take on the roles of men. Harrison attempts to dislodge Mormon discourse about *Twilight* away from the patriarchal abstinence narrative and equates Bella’s motherhood and immortality with female deification. Harrison goes on to say:

“Within the Mormon context of male/female relationships, Bella is equal to and perhaps more powerful than Edward. Her female ‘sphere’ of giving birth isn’t a ‘curse’ [quotations original] that follows because of Eve’s choice to take the fruit in the Garden of Eden and thus ensure the suffering and death of all mankind. [...] Bella takes up the Mormon role of motherhood to become the divine path to birth and life on Earth, a role as important as Mormon priesthood, which rules over death and the final approach to immortality.”

Harrison acknowledges Meyer’s depiction of patriarchy and a distinctly Mormon brand of feminism in which the perception of traditional women’s roles are altered so that “[women’s] work as wives and mothers” is viewed as “heroic.” Harrison is referring to *Breaking Dawn* (Meyer, 2008) in which Bella-as-vampire/goddess is able to maternally envelope those she loves in an invisible womb-like shield. Harrison uses her blog as a way to attempt to reinterpret Mormon discourse through the character of Bella Swan and assert female equality within Mormonism. However, discussing the LDS concept of a Heavenly Mother in such an open context can be perceived as a challenge to the dominant LDS Discourse. Harrison took a stab at injecting a Mormon feminist viewpoint into the *Twilight* conversation, and it did not take long for the Bloggernacle to bite back.

Jettboy, frequent guardian of the ‘nacle, emerges once again to immediately respond to Harrison’s post: “Some corrections on your Mormonism: There is a difference between flesh and blood that represents mortality and flesh and bone that represents immortality. Eternal Glorified bodies will have Spirit to replace Blood. That is a very important theological difference in Mormonism, because what has blood can get sick and die.” Jettboy is eager to exhibit his authority and knowledge of scripture in order to

uphold the hierarchy of LDS culture. It is his patriarchal duty to reposition the narrative within a masculine framework and obscure the Mormon goddess back behind the veil. In undercutting Harrison's understanding of doctrine, he undermines her interpretation of the text and thus her more feminized interpretation of Mormonism. His comments serve to situate her discourse outside the boundaries of accepted LDS doctrine and to reinforce dominant Mormon Discourse.

Members like Jettboy engage in gate-keeping as a way to make sure that posters within the Bloggernacle do not stray too far from cultural norms. His comments appear in each of the three blogs I have discussed within this section. In addition, Jettboy has a blog of his own. Such frequent contributors who hold conservative views of Mormonism are important for the success of the Bloggernacle. It is through such means that the Bloggernacle is unofficially moderated. In the absence of explicit posting-guidelines regarding LDS doctrine, it falls to other members to make sure that the intended message is being carried forth and that the mission does not fail.

Harrison replies to Jettboy by saying, "You know I am a Mormon, right? I feel like I just raised my hand in Sunday School and got shot down big time by the teacher. As usual, this makes me mostly feel like I should just shut up at church because no one wants to hear what I have to say. Sigh!" Harrison clearly feels that Jettboy repositioned himself as the authority on Mormonism and positioned her as an outsider to her own faith. By saying "as usual," Harrison suggests that she often feels positioned in this way in her non-digital life as well, revealing how opinions contrary to those of the majority in Mormonism are often discounted or repositioned.

Mette is then told by another poster, Mike Hunter, that her response to Jettboy was essentially an overreaction. Mike says,

“Jettboy himself noted that ‘besides a few places where I think you misinterpreted Mormonism properly...’ (Note the qualifiers; he was hardly saying, ‘you are an ignorant idiot, and should just shut up!’), your post was one of ‘only a few’ that did not feature ‘forced interpretations of Mormonism in the Twilight series by...simplistic outside views of the religion.’ Not quite all-out praise, but overall a positive assessment.”

Mike identifies Mette’s reaction to Jettboy as stemming from the fact that Jettboy did not praise her blog post when he says “not quite all-out praise” and tries to re-explain Jettboy’s response to her. Mike further repositions Mette’s response to Jettboy as misunderstood and emotional by saying, “note the qualifiers,” thus legitimizing Jettboy’s authority within the Discourse and undermining Mette’s.

Mette’s interpretation of *Twilight* admittedly does not conform to the traditional LDS Discourse, as she states that she is “not a typical nor a conservative Mormon.” Such non-traditional interpretations are easily redirected and even discounted through acts of gatekeeping and moderating of the Bloggernacle. Members like Jettboy can easily reinforce the dominant Discourse while members like Mike will act as reaffirming agents. Finally, Jack, another commenter, notices this pattern and asks, “Why are all the men here talking down to the author?” Perhaps the most striking response to Jack’s question is the silence; no one addresses him.

Mainstreaming Mormonism

The original Latter-day Saints were pioneers; they crossed the country in caravans to escape the persecution they faced in the East. They built a shining temple on a salt lake and have thrived and flourished for nearly 200 years. Modern LDS are no exception. They continue the same pioneer spirit as they spread the gospel in the digital age. The Bloggernacle and *Twilight* originated within a year of one another and conversations about Meyer, her novels, and the subsequent films were scattered throughout the 'nacle, especially between the years 2005-2013. The conversations that took place in the years following the saga's publication and during the release of the blockbuster films are important because the Bloggernacle did not simply respond to others' interpretations of the text. The early conversations that happened in the Bloggernacle helped to shape and inform mainstream interpretations of *Twilight* and help to position the narratives that were reinforced and the ones that were refuted.

Ironically, most of the discourse within the Bloggernacle attempts to reaffirm the "un-Mormonness" of the *Twilight* novels/films. This appears to have been done as a way of normalizing the Mormon Discourse by drawing parallels between Mormonism and the mainstream, especially the abstinence narrative which was addressed by both William Morris and Geoff B, and is an aspect of the novels that resonates with the larger conservative Christian culture as well. It is important for Mormon art and culture, as William Morris aimed to explain, that *Twilight* be seen as a mainstream cultural product that just happened to have been produced by a Mormon, rather than as a Mormon cultural product that happened to cross over into the mainstream.

Mette Ivie Harrison's interpretation of Bella as a Mormon Goddess, while straying from commonly-publicized LDS doctrine, is perhaps one of the most distinctly Mormon interpretations circling the Bloggernacle. However, such non-traditional interpretations are rare, possibly because gatekeepers like Jettboy are ready and waiting to re-Mormonize perceptions and refocus attention back on the abstinence narrative, assuring us that *Twilight* is no more Mormon than baseball or apple pie.

CHAPTER 5

MOLLIES, MODS, AND FEMS: FEMALE IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN THE BLOGGERNACLE

“I used to sit quietly at church, silently wondering if I was the only one there who felt like I did not and would never fit the cookie cutter mold. And then one day I realized that there is room in the church for everyone, even liberals, questioners, and non-traditionals. So, I’ve become much more outspoken than I used to be. And what I’m finding is that there are a lot of other people out there silently wondering if they fit in and relieved to find they aren’t the only ones.”

--Kim, Free to be you and me, zelophehadsdaughters.com, July 2013

LDS women must negotiate a variety of identities both inside and outside of the Bloggernacle. The quote above is taken from Zelophedhad’s Daughters, a group blog that, according to their welcome page, is interested in “subjects related to Mormonism, feminism, and academia.” Here, Kim refers to the cookie-cutter mold many Mormon women feel they are expected to fit into within their patriarchal culture. For many LDS women, *Twilight* is a bonding experience—a break from their obligations to family and the Church—and a way to safely investigate their beliefs about sexuality and traditional femininity. There are few LDS pop-culture sensations, and *Twilight* has allowed LDS women to connect with one another over a mainstream pop-cultural phenomenon written by one of their own members. Many women comment in the *Twilight* threads that it was the initial identification with Meyer’s religion and culture that caused them to pick up the book in the first place. Often, the specialized language women use within the blogs differs depending on the specific LDS identity(ies) that women perform. For this section

on the female identity performance of Mormon bloggers, the following sites will be discussed: Mormonmommyblogs.com, Feministmormonhousewives.org, and the LDS Ladies Book Club and LDS Teen Readers on Goodreads.com. While these last two forums are not technically part of the Bloggernacle, they are digital spaces where LDS women enact identities and make complex meanings from texts.

The terms *Molly*, *mod*, and *fem* are adapted from a sociological study of the life histories of 28 Mormon women (Beaman, 2001) in which the researcher looked at how Mormon women negotiated identities within the patriarchal culture. A *Molly Mormon* or *Molly* is a term used within the LDS community to refer to a woman who is dedicated to the LDS Church and to fulfilling the traditional roles and expectations set out for her by the Church and Mormon culture. It is by its definition a stereotype because however *Molly* someone might seem, the paragon of perfection is always out of reach. While the term can sometimes be used pejoratively, it is also used within the community to describe a woman who enacts a traditional Mormon identity and aligns herself strongly with the LDS faith. I will employ the term *Molly* when speaking about a female performing a traditional LDS identity in the *Twilight* blogs not in a disparaging way, but as a way of describing an identity performance that closely aligns with the precepts and teachings of the LDS Church.

A woman who is performing a moderate Mormon identity (Mod) online is one who still aligns herself with the LDS Church, its teachings, and values. However, she is much more likely to feel that faith need not feed into every corner of an LDS woman's life. She often views the books as fantasy, entertainment, and escape; and she enjoys them as a respite from duties such as childcare, housework, and chores. She is also less

likely to pass judgment on others for their choices and more likely cite the LDS belief in free agency when speaking to some Mollies who decry the sexual scenes depicted in *Breaking Dawn* (Meyer, 2008) as pornography.

A Mormon woman who openly adopts a feminist identity (Fem) is inevitably distancing herself from the patriarchy of the Church, as the label carries with it automatic connotations of resistance. While feminist Mormon women have diverse values and beliefs, aligning one's self with a group of feminist Mormons suggests that one has liberal leanings toward the role of women in the Church, which are contrary to traditional roles of femininity. Whether or not a woman who performs a feminist Mormon identity actually holds these views, the assumption is that she is an advocate for women obtaining the priesthood, an ordination reserved only for men, and currently one of the Church's most controversial issues.

These categories do not contain all the nuanced and individual variations enacted by the bloggers, but are instead meant to paint a wide brush stroke explaining typical Mormon identities performed in these online spaces. Also, while I do not know the true gender identity of these commenters, the following examples are all taken from those who self-identified as female somewhere in the thread or whose identity is known through other means such as prior articles or publications. These three identity performances were visible across threads, though some blogs positioned posters to enact one identity or another more or less frequently due to their focus or content. For example, a woman posting in *Feminist Mormon Housewives* (fMh) is more likely to perform a more feminist identity in that space than she might if she were commenting in one of the *Mormon Mommy Blogs* (MMB). The space and its norms often dictate the

appropriate identity to bring into the space. It is important to point out that identity performances are often overlapping or partial, and posters can perform multiple identities at once—some of those related to the Church and some unrelated. However, female identity performances within the Bloggernacle commonly aligned with these three categories because identities are not infinite, but limited by culture, institutions, and other sites of power.

Molly, May I?: Engaging with the theme of sexuality in the *Twilight* saga

*Young Molly was taught that for good Mormon women
Saying no to requests was a no-no.
Never “no” to helping or favors, save sex,
Then no up till marriage, then go-go!*

*Her skirts she wore long and her tops were demure
She knew she must keep the boys’ thoughts clean and pure.
Her duty, you see, to those poor men-to-be
Was not to become walking pornography [...]*

--Mike C., Zelophehad’s daughters, “*Mild Molly Mormon*,” January 2014

The poem above was written by a blogger and indicates the paradox felt by many Mormon women when it comes to sex. A Mormon woman is often burdened with making sure she is not causing sexual arousal in men; however, she must also be attractive enough to secure a husband so she can reproduce and guarantee both of their eternal salvations. An LDS woman who enacts a Molly Mormon identity is one who abides by this dichotomy. Hence the reason many LDS women report feeling that *Molly* is an impossible standard.

Within the *Twilight* threads, I observed several common behaviors from those who most strongly performed the identity of Molly, and these behaviors are discussed below. This type of poster often 1) easily quotes from scripture, 2) refers frequently to

her LDS faith, and 3) expresses the importance of consuming media with only the highest purity standards. 4) Mollies sometimes scold fellow LDS members for a lack proper adherence to the rules of the faith and 5) position themselves as the authoritative voice within the blog thread. If someone enacting a Molly identity embraces the novel series, she relates the values presented in the series to LDS values and doctrines as a way to maintain purity standards and assert her position. Specifically, I will discuss how bloggers and commenters used language to perform these various Molly behaviors within the *Twilight* blogs and the meanings they make from the text in relation to identity.

Mormonmommyblogs.com (MMB) is a community within the Bloggernacle of individual and group blogs written by LDS women and geared toward the interests of Mormon wives and mothers. Topics include crafting, spirituality, child-rearing, and genealogy as well as more general interests like health/wellness and various hobbies. MMB maintains the following policy for its bloggers:

“We strive to maintain a family friendly site and keep your browsing safe. Since Mormon Mommy Blogs is a blog aggregate, we have links to thousands of sites. If your blog is listed with MMB, we encourage you to keep your own site family friendly. If you post anything that is crude, offensive, or pornographic in nature, we reserve the right to remove your listing without notice from the Mormon Mommy Blogs website” (Scharton & Bingham, n.d.).

This type of policy is common among individual blogs within ‘nacle, but, in this case, MMB is providing a kind of community oversight—making certain that individuals blogs that are linked to their portal are in line with traditional LDS values and identity.

In a discussion on the *Twilight* series posted on the MMB page in August 2010, commenters screen names often allude to aspects of their LDS identity: Mrs. Sassy Crafter, mormonhermitmom, The Atomic Mom, Motherboard, Momza, and Wonder Woman. These screen names indicate that these women are performing Molly, as the names highlight aspects of Mormonism held dear to the rest of the community. All four names indicate that the women are wives or mothers, the most central role a woman can play within LDS culture. By referring to themselves with words like “atomic” or “wonder,” the women imply a sense of power that traditional femininity is believed to represent within LDS culture. Mormonhermitmom’s name implies that her role as a mother keeps her at home at all times, the “hermit” part leaving some ambiguity as to whether or not she finds her position humorous, tiresome or both. Out of the 34 comment threads that I analyzed on the MMB *Twilight* discussion, the words *teen*, *kids*, *daughter*, or *children* presented themselves over 75 times. The words *mom*, *mother*, or *parent* were mentioned over 50 times. These women are celebrating the traditional female roles of wife and mother by choosing screen names that highlight these aspects of their identities. Screen name choices were one way that women differentiated Mormon identity within the different realms of the Bloggernacle. Eden was a poster whose name carries religious connotations, although it is uncertain if it is her given name or a purposefully chosen online handle. Even though her screen name does not explicitly signal a Mormon identity, she performs Molly in several other ways. She writes:

“My daughter was 12 when they first came out and a woman at church raved about how she would love them and I should let her read them. I trusted this woman, and let my daughter read them first and then I followed afterwards. My

mistake. Had I done it the correct way, I would have NEVER let my daughter read them. These books are 100% being marketed to Pre-Teens and Teens and while We-- as adult women-- can differentiate between healthy relationships and non healthy as well as fantasy and reality-- these pre-teen and most teen girls cannot.”

Eden is careful to mention her churchgoing habits by referencing that she first heard of the books from a “woman at church.” Next, she admonishes this woman who she feels she should have trusted since she was from her Church for introducing her daughter to the novels. Finally, she chides herself for not having handled the situation the “correct way,” presumably by previewing the books before she allowed her pre-teen daughter to read them.

Eden does several things here that signal to others she is performing a Molly identity: First, she makes it clear that she is a churchgoing mother. She also makes it clear that she is more pure and faithful than the woman who raved about the novels by showing that she knows the difference between appropriate and inappropriate material for teens. In acknowledging her own purity standards, she indirectly admonishes the other woman for not living up to these same standards set forth by the Church. In doing so, she positions herself as an authority on Mormon motherhood as well as on LDS standards of purity.

A poster who uses the screen name Dallin and Ashley (presumably her name combined with her husband’s) also performs Molly in similar ways as Eden:

“When people ask me what genre of books I prefer, I tell them I love LDS cheesy romance novels. I can't help it. I'm a romantic at heart. Second thought- I

fear there are way too many girls out there searching for their ‘Edward’ or their ‘Jacob.’ I kid you not, when I was a single girl at BYU-Idaho, there were MANY young women who, in my opinion, wouldn't date a guy because they had this unrealistic idea of who he needed to be [...] When I met my husband, I loved his flaws because they made him REAL and they made him who he was. That being said, he is darn near perfect. [...] I would wait until my teenage daughter was at least 16 or 17 before I let her read the books. That is TOTALLY personal opinion. My reasoning is I felt like the relationships being discussed were on a more mature level than what a pre-teen or teenage girl needs to be thinking about. I read the books when I was 19-20 and when I read the 4th book, I felt like she talked a lot about intimacy.”

I observed this type of combination screen name multiple times within the MMB. Other name combinations I observed were “Tim and Amber,” “Maggie and Curtiss,” and “Heather wife to Dave mom to Jenna and Adam.” Marriage is highly expected and valued within the LDS Church because it brings with it the status of children and family. However, more than that, marriage and children signify to the rest of the community that a woman is fulfilling her predestined role in this life and is well on her way to achieving eternal exaltation in the next. Through using this combined name, Ashley can signal to the community that her identity as a wife is significantly more important than her identity as an individual. It may be a way of signaling to other women that her husband is unavailable. Ashley also references LDS views of marriage by mentioning the importance of having a realistic idea of romance, an idea essential to LDS values which stresses realism over romance in relationships. Furthermore, she refers to her LDS

Discourse by saying she like “cheesy LDS romance novels,” something about which only people inside her community are likely to know. In doing so, she signals to her fellow LDS bloggers that she aligns herself with traditional LDS views of femininity and marriage. Both Eden and Ashley are examples of women who perform Molly by frequently mentioning their LDS faith, marriage, and children; referring to purity standards; and setting themselves apart from LDS women who do not adhere to their standards.

Another common way that women perform Molly in the *Twilight* blogs is by using specialized language familiar to LDS members. A discussion thread within the LDS Ladies Book Club on Goodreads.com titled “What’s Broken about Breaking Dawn” took place between August 2008 and February 2009, just after the publication of Meyer’s final novel of the saga. In this thread, some women perform Molly by using specialized language familiar to LDS members. In particular, these women each referenced the cornerstone LDS idea of *every-member-a-missionary*, which refers to every member’s duty to live the gospel in their everyday lives and share that gospel with others. This goes beyond simply referencing traditional values and extends to citing specific scriptural passages or LDS references in order to prove one’s knowledge and faithfulness. This thread was particularly interesting because it contained posts by a variety of women who identified as LDS, but who also had differing views from one another. A commenter named Myranda in the LDS Ladies Book Club at Goodreads.com shows disdain for the *Twilight* novels and films:

“I believe the message is not one to overlook. We need to look deep into our hearts and determine if this is the way we want to lead those within our circle

of influence [sic]. To paraphrase Sheri Dew, we can no longer afford to indulge in that which does not bring us closer to our Heavenly Father. We certainly don't have room in our lives for that which has the potential to draw us away.”

Myranda performs Molly here in several ways: She uses specialized language to reinforce her LDS identity and speaks from a place of authority. Calling on her fellow LDS ladies to “look deep into [their] hearts” she speaks as if she is talking to her local Relief Society, the group that all practicing LDS women over 18 are encouraged to belong to that is centered on strengthening family through traditional LDS values. She quotes Sheri Dew, a well-known conservative LDS writer and CEO of Deseret Book, a chain of LDS bookstores. In addition, by referring to Heavenly Father and using language such as “potential to draw us away,” Myranda models the kind of language used within the LDS Discourse and uses it to position herself as an authoritative voice in the thread by inciting religion as a reason to denounce *Twilight*. Later in the thread, Myranda writes:

“Here in Utah we have been literally surrounded by this series. They are on every store's bookshelves, and sticking out of the tops of totebags [sic]. Most of the teenage girls (and many adult women) I know have been reading them. Our faith should be taken into account in everything we do - it determines our worldview, which determines our actions. ‘Watch yourselves...thoughts, words, deeds.’ ‘No man can serve two masters.’ SM's world view will affect what she writes - it comes from within her. There are messages in everything. We know that Satan will tell 1,000 truths to slip in a lie. He is the master of deception and endeavors to lead us ‘carefully down to Hell.’”

Myranda is certain to share that she lives in Utah, the state with the most Mormon influence, and says that “we” have been surrounded by the novels. She alludes obviously to Mormons, rather than the population of Utah in general since she mentions that the women she knows personally have been reading them. Following, she mentions “our faith,” assuming that others in the thread likely share her point of view. Myranda quotes twice from The Book of Mormon and once from the New Testament, showing her knowledge of scripture. Furthermore, by inciting that faith should be “taken into account in everything,” Myranda’s words echo the *every-member-a-missionary* dictum that was discussed in the previous section on Discourse. For Myranda, Ashley, and Eden, in order for a woman to uphold the *every-member-a-missionary* ideal, discussions of sex must be tightly controlled and monitored.

The *every-member-a-missionary* notion was seen throughout this thread and was a particular favorite of those performing Molly. Throughout the thread, the *every-member-a-missionary* idea became simple and effective way for a woman performing Molly to position herself in an authoritative role and frame the discussion of *Twilight* within an LDS context. It is important to note that, while many women who perform Molly—like Eden, Ashley, and Myranda—often decry the aspects of the *Twilight* novels as pornography, enacting a Molly identity does not determine one’s stance on the novels. This kind of aversion to the treatment of the theme of sexuality in *Twilight* is a common response from those performing Molly, but it is not the only response. Oftentimes, women were observed negotiating their LDS identity to incorporate the exploration of sexual themes in *Twilight*. For example, Angela writes:

“I do believe that we should be careful about how we are representing Christ, but really I didn't think Stephenie Meyer did a bad job on that. They didn't have sex until they were married. Has anyone read *Between Husband and Wife*. It was written because for some reason our youth are thinking that sex is a bad thing and it's not, it should just be with the right person and honestly how many members out there haven't kissed someone before they were married. [...]

Stephenie's books were not trashy like a non LDS author would have written about. I also think that just because we are LDS doesn't mean that all we can read is LDS books. We need to be in the world but not of the world and by me reading I have been able to meet and have in common things with non members of our faith. We are told that we need to share the gospel with others and I think books is [sic] a good way to it.”

First, Angela repeats the *every-member-a-missionary* notion in agreeing that LDS need to be careful in how they “represent Christ,” but she also supports Meyer’s treatment of sex as compared to how a non-LDS author would have dealt with the subject matter. Next, she refers to the common LDS theme to be “in the world but not of the world,” a Biblical reference to John 15:19, which reads: “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” The same “in the world but not of the world” phrase reappeared a total of 10 times across different *Twilight* threads I encountered in the ‘nacle. This is not counting the times the idea was inferred and referenced more indirectly. In addition, a discussion topic on this theme, completely separate from anything *Twilight*-related, was posted to MMB on October 6, 2014. As the phrase

implies, Mormons use it to remind themselves that they are held to a higher standard than the general populous. Angela negotiates her *Twilight*-fan identity with her LDS identity by explaining how reading the *Twilight* novels helps her be a good Mormon. Angela's final defense of the novels is that they have the ability to bring the gospel to non-members, which could be argued is the main mission of the Church. Angela does not speak of the novels as enjoyment, escape, or fantasy, but as a way to reconnect with her religion and share her beliefs with others. Through this narrative, Angela is performing a traditional Molly identity. Instead of using her religion as the primary reason for rejecting the novel's sexual themes, she negotiates her identity to incorporate the novels' treatment into her LDS identity.

Another example of a woman who sees the novels as supporting her LDS identity is Nola: "One of the themes that I really picked up on in the novel was the whole 'overcoming the natural man' -- I felt like that was very strong throughout it. That is essentially what all of the Cullen family is doing. I think that is why I struggle so much with the idea of writing a novel (I'm just a wannabe) as an LDS. I'm very conscious of everything I do as part of every-member-a-missionary." Like Angela, she references *every-member-a-missionary* and even sees the novels as a potential way to lead people to the Church. She goes on to say:

"If Meyers [sic] were teaching in church, or as a church leader, then she should have kept it with a basis in the gospel. However, just pounding on our neighbors [sic] doors and strongarming [sic] them into tossing away their coffee and cigs would alienate more than convert them (thus driving them away from the more important message), so might a simplistic romantic relationship most kids couldn't

identify with. Which is not to say we shouldn't fight sin wherever we can, or be afraid to stand up for what is right. But that sometimes, we have to choose our battles and lead people gently to the truth because, in those situations, that is what works best.”

Nola implies that Meyer is adhering to her own duty of *every-member-a-missionary* by writing books with an important LDS message that is made relatable to a mass audience. She even seems to suggest that Meyer’s books have the potential to accomplish important missionary work and bring non-members closer to the truth of the LDS gospel. References to the Church used by Nola as well as her adherence to the *every-member-a-missionary* narrative signal that she is enacting Molly. She also uses identifying pronouns such as “we” and “us” and “our” when referencing herself in connection to the LDS Church. While Nola’s opinions of the novels differ greatly from those of Myranda, she still positions herself as Molly by the fact that her faith is foremost in determining her interpretation.

Angela and Nola show that, if she so chooses, an LDS woman who is performing Molly can also view the sexual themes in the saga as positive and fully in line with her faith without sacrificing essential aspects of her identity. Nola refers to the LDS concept of the “natural man” and *every-member-a-missionary* in order to show how, for her, *Twilight* aligns with the teachings of her faith. Critical questioning of either faith or the novels was not observed in any of the women performing Molly. For these women, their final assessment of the sexual themes explored in novels—positive or negative—was found within their faith.

The contrast between the women such as Myranda and Nola is an example of how women of the same faith can perform similar identities as evidenced by the language they use. However, they can both enact the same abstinence narrative and still make significantly different meanings from the text. Those who perform Molly within the *Twilight* blogs must make a faith-based judgment of the novels. As part of their identity, questioning the purity narrative is not an option; therefore, either the novels conform to the purity narrative or they do not. Nuanced interpretations are not accessible if they are to retain their identity positioning.

A woman who performs Molly can communicate her LDS identity in a variety of ways, including: screen names, specialized language, references to faith and purity standards, and authoritative positioning. Interpretation of text is often secondary to identity performance, meaning that she may negotiate her interpretation so that it conforms to the identity she is enacting within the space. While her religious identity necessarily informs her interpretation of the text, it also places limitations upon it. A woman enacting a Molly identity typically only has two main interpretations of the sexual themes in *Twilight* available to her: either she rejects the portrayal of sexuality in the novels/films based upon the purity standards dictated by her religion or she accepts the sexual themes as part of the integral role that matrimonial sex plays within Mormon culture.

Discussion threads in the Bloggernacle seem to function as extensions of the LDS community. The MMB and LDS Ladies Book Club are digital spaces where women knowingly come together over the identifying factors of being 1) LDS and 2) being female. Therefore, it is expected that the identities women enact in their daily lives

would be reproduced in online spaces through references to their religious identity and use of specialized language. A woman who performs Molly by placing her LDS religion first and foremost in her life would likely seek out like-minded women in online communities.

An important factor to note is women who were observed performing this particular identity online used language to position themselves as faithful and righteous members of the community, regardless of their interpretation of the novels. Fans of the series who were performing Molly were able to maintain their identities while still making space for their fan object. A woman who performs Molly online in the *Twilight* threads has limited choices when deciding how she will respond to the theme of sexuality within the novels. A commenter named Jayda summed up the Molly stance perfectly: “Everything we do either takes us towards [sic] or away from Him. There is no middle ground.” Either these women can reject the sexual themes as lustful, impure, and not “praiseworthy,” or they can embrace the purity abstinence narrative and insist that the treatment of sexuality within the novels would come Heavenly Father-approved. In this way, they can still enact a rigid identity while finding flexibility in the detailed performance. Performing Molly has little to do with whether a woman will embrace or reject *Twilight* or any other piece of media for that matter, but more to do with her concept of what it means to be an LDS woman in the world today. How she chooses to perform that identity all depends on the answer that she hears when she asks herself, “Molly, may I?”

Balancing faith and feminism: Exploring two feminist discourses in the Bloggernacle

“How should we deal with sexuality in literature? Is any reference to sex or the sexual desires of characters pertinent?[sic] Does the fact that a story acknowledges the fact that a female protagonist has a libido make it ‘soft-core porn’? Can we acknowledge the fact that sex is a big part of the human experience without ‘chasing away the spirit,’ or should all romantic interactions in literature be about hugs, kisses, and the promise of an eternal family? Then factor in the feminist angle. Is it antithetical to feminism to portray a female protagonist who enjoys, ah...robust sex? Can women have such a preference, or is that merely the cultural indoctrination of a patriarchy, and are such representations in literature merely part of that indoctrination? Should good feminist literature only have characters who enjoy gentle and tender love?”

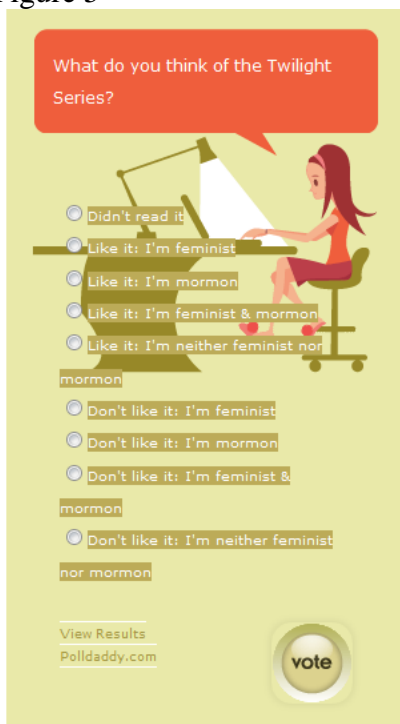
--Derek, commenter on fMh, August 2008

The group blog, FeministMormonHousewives.org was begun in August 2004, as a safe place to be “feminist and faithful.” Within LDS culture the word *feminist* carries specific values and beliefs that are often seen as a threat to tradition. I first became intrigued with this site by its very name, which seemed like a humorous juxtaposition of terms, if not an outright contradiction. This assumed contradiction is the very thing that the founding member, Lisa Butterworth—who goes by the handle fMhLisa—is attempting to question within her site. She claims she began the blog because her liberal leanings were making her a “social pariah” within her LDS community. She jokes that she added the “housewife” part to fMh because it describes her and gives the

blog a kind of “subtle Mormon legitimacy.” Being a housewife is normative within the Mormon Discourse, and to perform a feminist identity within LDS culture is to, in some ways, be at constant odds with one’s religion. Calling oneself a Mormon feminist means walking a fine line between faith and defiance, and as I learned, is often met with resistance from the Discourse even within this corner of the Bloggernacle.

As I perused this group blog site, I noticed immediately that screen names on fMh differed greatly from the names on the MMB. Names like Artemis, Alliegator, Firebyrd, and Starienite abounded and signaled that I had definitely passed through the veil into a different realm of the Bloggernacle. In August 2008, a contributor named Artemis posted poll/discussion thread asking women what they thought about the *Twilight* saga and if they considered themselves Mormon and/or feminist.

Figure 5



Retrieved from <http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2008/08/stephanie-meyers-twilight-series-poll/>

In this thread, I observed that LDS women enacting a feminist identity were more likely to be critical of both *Twilight* and their religion in context with one another than women were in the MMB. Since they already self-identify as feminist, many of these women are critical consumers of culture and questioners of their faith. Unlike the Mollies, the fems' view of sexuality tends to be much more nuanced and complex, and Bella, Meyer's protagonist, is often the vehicle for their discussions.

The opening quote is from a male commenter named Derek who also has a personal blog titled "A Liberal Mormon." Derek's questions address sex and patriarchy and are central for negotiating what it means to identify as both Mormon and feminist. Derek questions whether the presence of any form of sex within literature qualifies it as pornography from a Mormon perspective and also whether or not a sexualized female character is automatically anti-feminist. The conversations and dialogue that take place around the *Twilight* saga allow these kinds of questions to be discussed and for a negotiation to take place between the Mormon and feminist Discourses.

Two major interpretations of the text were most-often validated in this blog by those performing a Mormon feminist identity. Women either adopted a critical feminist stance, in which they were critical of both the *Twilight* text as well as the Mormon Discourse. Or, women performed a brand of Mormon feminism, less critical of the Mormon Discourse, and more celebratory of ways in which women have power within the Discourse. These two interpretations and ways of performing fem are not meant to minimize the nuanced identities enacted by LDS women, but to illustrate how identity performance can be both (re)defined and limited by Mormon Discourse. Identity

performance is not limitless; it is bound by context and the Discourses to which one belongs. I will discuss both of these feminist identity performances in brief and then proceed to a more in-depth analysis.

The first of the generally accepted interpretations is the critical feminist stance. Bella is a passive, anti-feminist heroine. Sometimes, within this narrative, women describe her as a seductress who is a slave to her baser human urges. Other times, she is described as a thinly-veiled Molly Mormon who personifies patriarchal LDS values. According to this feminist interpretation, the novels function as little more than pious pornography that reinforces traditional gender roles.

A second, less-frequent narrative echoes the thesis proposed by Mette Ivie Harrison (*Bella as a Mormon Goddess*). Some LDS women who enact a fem identity feel Bella is not weak, but a powerful Mormon Goddess who achieves eternal life and exaltation through motherhood—a power granted to no other character in the novels. Both of these interpretations are markedly Mormon yet distinctly feminist. Distinct from traditional feminism, this brand of Mormon feminism views conventional femininity and motherhood as empowering. Ultimately, these two varied interpretations each reveal how LDS women are able to negotiate seemingly conflicting identities in digital spaces simultaneously while still maintaining membership in the LDS Discourse.

What's feminism got to do with it?

“In the other monotheistic traditions, the universal God transcends gender. In polytheism, goddesses abound. Not so Mormonism! We believe both that gender is eternally significant and that the eternities are significantly masculine. [...] Point me to a religious tradition whose cosmology marginalizes women more than that of Mormonism.”

--Jessawhy, By Common Consent, “The God Wife” December 2010

“I don't think [Stephenie Meyer] should get so much attention just because she's Mormon. I can understand how Mormon women love it, though, with the ‘erotics of restraint’ so prevalent. It's like porn for Mormons.”

--Sarah K., fMh, August 2008

Jessawhy and Sarah illustrate the interpretation made by many Bloggernacle women who take up a critical feminist stance: Bella is an anti-feminist heroine who conforms to traditional Mormon roles wifedom and motherhood and the books, themselves, are little more than thinly-veiled pornography. Another commenter, CC, suggests that Bella is nothing more than a “Molly in disguise” and vampirism is a metaphor for Mormonism. CC writes: “I read all four books, mostly because of the whole, ‘Mormon breaks through the mainstream entertainment’ value. The main character is a Molly in disguise! Edward, her love, is the patriarchal prototype but instead of return missionary he's a return from death vampire, who out of the goodness of his heart only maims and kills animals instead of humans.” When these women look at Bella, they see not a Mormon goddess, but a Molly in disguise.

First, it is important to note that CC's reason for reading the books in the first place was that Meyer was a Mormon author who had gained legitimacy in mainstream culture. This theme harkens back to the discussion on Discourse and the important role *Twilight* has played in bridging Mormon culture with popular culture and acting as a legitimizing cultural product. CC sees the novels as an important contribution from Mormon culture to mainstream popular culture and suggests that reading them was important for maintaining connection to her Mormon culture, mirroring Sarah's comment about how a kind of cultural kinship with the author may be one reason for the saga's allure.

In addition, CC recognizes a Mormon-specific metaphor within *Twilight*. She interprets Bella as a Molly Mormon, recognizing and critiquing the identity enacted by some Mormon women. Those who I observed performing Molly within the blogs did not self-identify, nor were they critical of such an identity performance in others. By specifically recognizing and repositioning herself in relation to Bella as a "Molly in disguise," CC adopts a critical feminist stance. This means that, although she positions herself within a Mormon Discourse, she is also able to be critical of aspects of the Discourse such as the "patriarchal prototype" represented by Edward Cullen and Bella's deference to the patriarchy. CC continues:

"[Bella] agonizes about her choice to stay human or become a vampire. Her eternal life is in question. So many of the stories [sic] elements find their origin in Mormon thought and customs. No sex before marriage. Dominant patriarchal male characters. The question of her own purpose plaques [sic] the

m.c. [main character] The angst of the whole book is that Bella (m.c.) loves the vampire even though to do so means denying her own humanness.”

By denoting Bella as an anti-feminist heroine, CC implies that feminism and Mormonism are perhaps antithetical to one another. In order for Bella to succeed in being with Edward (and a good Molly Mormon), she must forgo her human life and her own sexual desires. Instead, she must submit to Edward’s patriarchal will and ultimately sacrifice her human life, making Bella an all-too-willing convert. By referring to Bella as a Molly, CC is critiquing Mormon patriarchy and the submissive role women often feel they must play within the culture in order to be a part of it. The only way for Bella to be with Edward is to most-literally become consumed by him, giving up her life and everything that essentially makes her human. As CC implies, Bella “denying her own humanness” means embracing the Mormon patriarchy and essentially denying her own power as a woman.

Reactions to CC’s comments by other posters illustrate that some women are not able to recognize, much less adopt, this kind of critical feminist stance. Sunshine responds to CC:

“I don’t see how being a feminist has anything to do with reading this book. [...] Just because she is LDS doesn’t mean that she has to write an LDS perfect, Molly Mormon, book where she ends up in perfect heaven, and stuff like that. It is strictly fiction and so what if they make out. Like we haven’t seen that on the big screen... LDS or not. [...] I liked the books. They peeked [sic] my curiosity and I liked to read anything that can take me away... Take me away, to a secret place, take me away...take me away. I like books like that.”

CC's feminist stance goes unrecognized and misunderstood. First, Sunshine does not identify the application of feminist ideas when CC talks about "dominant patriarchal characters" and Bella "denying her own humanness." Neither is Sunshine able to identify CC's stance as critical, not just of the anti-feminist themes in the novel, but how "so many of the stories [sic] elements find their origin in Mormon thought and customs." Instead, Sunshine subscribes to the abstinence narrative, though she somewhat rejects it as well as the concept of the "perfect, Molly Mormon." Sunshine performs mod—or moderate Mormon. Her interpretations are not dictated by religious values, yet are not critical. She sees the novels for their entertainment value alone, which prevents her from being critical of either *Twilight* or its Mormon themes.

With this study, I wanted to know ways in which LDS fans were able to recognize and resist meanings of *Twilight*, as informed by Mormon Discourse. In other words, could LDS fans be critical of both text and religion? It appeared that, simply participating in a discussion with women who were able to adopt such a stance and perform a critical feminist identity while still identifying with Mormon Discourse, was not enough to help other women enact similar identities in regard to *Twilight*. Identities and interpretations were more-often fixed than flexible.

While lurking around in the fMh, I discovered Jana Riess—a well-known Mormon writer and academic who frequently blogs about Mormon culture. In a column written for Belief.net in June 2011, titled "Mormon Women, Twilight, and Internalized Sexism," Riess critiques the *Twilight* saga for its damsel-in-distress treatment of women and fears that regressive views on sexuality are informing the Mormon culture partly due to the novels' popularity. Riess writes, "In Mormonism, it seems sometimes like this

passivity is precisely what is encouraged in women (e.g., the YM young men's lesson is called 'Choosing Your Eternal Companion' while the corresponding YW lesson is 'Becoming an Eternal Companion'). The message about waiting for Prince Charming to pluck a girl out of obscurity is definitely there." Riess uses specialized language that is well-situated within a Mormon Discourser while simultaneously performing a critical feminist identity. Riess references YM and YW (young men's and young women's) which are groups within an LDS ward (individual church) meant to promote religious development in youth ages 12-18 years old. Through this, she shows she is an insider within the Discourse; however, her stance is a critical one. Riess highlights the verbs in the differing lessons offered to males and females within the Church, noting that for young men the verb is active ("choosing") while the verb for young women ("becoming") is passive. Hence, within Mormon Discourse, action and assertiveness are valued social goods for men while passiveness and patience are valued social goods for women.

I wondered if a woman with Riess' positioning in the LDS community as a successful author and public speaker would encourage other women to position themselves similarly within the Discourse and adopt a critical feminist stance as well. Similar to CC and Sunshine, I discovered that other LDS women often failed to adopt a feminist perspective and frequently did not even recognize the feminist stance taken by Riess. Although the comments following Riess' article have been removed from the site, I was able to copy them into my data set in June 2014 when they were still available.

A commenter by the name of Ern writes, "It's refreshing to hear LDS women speak out against the themes in *Twilight* [italics mine] only because they seem to be the

minority. I wrote a blog post about the latest ‘Breaking Dawn, Part 1’ movie, for anyone interested.” I was eager to follow this link to Ern’s blog post to where she was posting her minority feminist views about the themes in the film. However, Ern interestingly does not adopt a feminist stance, but seems to perform Molly in her blog:

“The characters represented virtues similar to my own and I never found anything incongruous with the LDS beliefs. Until the movies started. ‘Twilight’ the book was a delightful, quick read full of (albeit admittedly strange) romance that—and here’s the kicker—was CLEAN. Morally clean, I mean. I loved Edward’s ‘old fashioned’ ideas of abstinence. There was nothing gratuitous or graphic. So I admit to being disheartened when watching Kristin Stewart in the movie making out with Robert Pattinson on her bed in her underwear. [...] That’s not what we stand for. I grimaced for Young Women of our faith (and others) all over the world.”

Ern did not recognize Riess’ feminist stance, but fixated instead on morality and the abstinence narrative Riess is actually speaking against. Ern appeared to identify with Riess as an LDS woman without taking time to investigate Riess’ feminist views of the text before responding.

Both Sunshine and Ern respond to these feminist women as fellow Mormons and speak to them from a position within the dominant Mormon Discourse. Mollies and mods do not refute or argue the critical stance of Mormon feminists. They simply fail to recognize it, choosing instead to focus on the commonality of Mormonism shared between them. If LDS women are to enact a critical feminist identity, it seems more direct instruction might be necessary. LDS women must first be able to recognize and

acknowledge the legitimacy of the feminist voices that are occupying their own corner of the Bloggernacle.

Choosing immortality: Bella and the Mormon goddess narrative

“When [Bella] is given the choice between saving her own (physical, mortal) life and saving the life of her child, she chooses her child. [...] For Bella to choose completing a pregnancy over saving her own life, is, in the Mormon view of women’s possible godhood, her choosing immortality over mortality.”

*--Mette Ivie Harrison, *Bella as a Mormon Goddess*, January 2013*

LDS women who adopt a critical feminist stance may feel Bella embodies a Molly Mormon—male-dependent, emotionally stunted, with her only ambition being to follow Edward around throughout eternity. But some women, like Mette Ivie Harrison, who identify as both feminist and LDS see Bella as a representation of a distinct brand of Mormon feminism that recognizes the power of traditional female roles, particularly motherhood. For Harrison, Bella gives voice to a group of women who are often underrepresented both in the larger culture as well as their Mormon community. There are no depictions of LDS women in mainstream media. Shows like *Big Love* (cite) and *Sister Wives* (cite) tend to fetishize Mormon polygamy, but there are no honest portrayals of LDS women—feminist or otherwise—in mainstream popular culture. Women who identify as both Mormon and feminist seek ways to enact both of these identities and feel Meyer has given them the closest thing to a female Mormon role model.

Similarly to how Mollies were shown to often feel affinity for Bella through the abstinence narrative, some Fems relate to Bella for different reasons. They feel Meyer

celebrates traditional femininity by placing motherhood in the center of the plot and making Bella's ultimate power and transformation reside in childbirth and motherhood. Motherhood is an important social good because it leads to the ultimate goal in Mormonism—immortality. Women who adopt the feminist goddess narrative see Bella's transformation as central to the theme of female power in the novels, and, through this interpretation, they are able to enjoy the novels while feeling as though they are maintaining the feminist aspect of their identities. Contemporary LDS women lack representations of themselves in popular culture. These women do not see Bella as a weak anti-feminist heroine, as she is often seen under traditional feminist views. Instead, her transformation from docile wife to powerful, immortal mother suggests a depiction of a feminism particular to a Mormon identity.

A poster on fMh named Tay says, "I have to admit to liking the fourth [novel]. Sure, the ending was super convenient but I am kinda a sucker for happy endings. And the mother in me loved the fact that Meyer had Bella become a powerful mother, rather than just a demure wife." Here, Tay demonstrates the goddess narrative among women who identify as LDS and feminist. Tay identifies herself as a mother and sees herself as similar to Bella in this sense. Then she refers to a certain power that comes with motherhood, a distinguishing feature of traditional LDS identity and femininity.

Another poster, Jessawhy, writes, "Was I the only one who noticed how much Meyer's description of Bella's vampire body was a lot like how we think of resurrected bodies? (aside from the thirst for blood, which wasn't that important, oddly) It was very striking to me, actually" (Emphasis original). Jessawhy takes note of how Meyer's writing reflects LDS theology and the idea of a body resurrected from "flesh and bone."

The suggestion of these women is that Meyer is writing about strong women from an LDS point of view. The strongest of all women in LDS culture and theology is the Heavenly Mother, as discussed by Harrison. Jessawhy intones that Bella's "vampire body" resembles how "we" (meaning LDS) "like to think of resurrected bodies." She suggests that Bella's transformation from demure wife to powerful maternal figure represents the eventual power and eternal life that Mormon doctrine claims all faithful women have the ability to attain. Since this ultimate role model for Mormon women is seldom talked about or mentioned in scripture, seeing a strong, yet traditional feminine goddess-like Bella depicted in Meyer's work of fiction appears to be quite meaningful and impactful for some LDS women who strongly identify as both LDS and feminist. Bella becomes for these women a representation of what they, themselves, believe they will achieve through the power of divine motherhood in the afterlife.

Pam W. responds to Jessawhy by saying, "I had similar thoughts about how vampire life as Bella and the Cullens lived it was strikingly similar to how we view the afterlife (minus the bloodlust, as you said) — powerful bodies that don't get sick or age, no need to eat or sleep, lots of time to study and learn different things, not to mention have sex. How very Mormon!" In the afterlife, sex is of utmost importance for Mormons. In Mormon theology, spirit children are produced through a physical sexual act between Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother(s). While formally discouraged among the LDS by Wilford Woodruff in 1890 (cite), it is still debated among LDS whether or not polygamy still exists in the afterlife, and it is rarely talked about openly within LDS culture. Nonetheless, the sex scenes described by Meyer in *Breaking Dawn* (2008) that are decried by some as pornography, are recognized and embraced by some

who perform fem as taking place in the afterlife. Pam W. refers to these bodies as “powerful” and as ones that are not subject to illness or age. These women do not interpret the sex that takes place between Bella and Edward as flawed and human sex; rather, they view it as powerful sex that takes place in the afterlife between two vampires (celestial god and goddess). They see these sexual acts as paramount to LDS beliefs and symbolic of the perfect sex that they hope to experience, themselves, when they become powerful, yet feminized goddesses in the afterlife.

Harrison also engages this narrative and performs a Mormon fem identity. In her article, “Bella as a Mormon Goddess,” she writes:

“[Bella] makes a choice, and, as in the Mormon version of the Fall, a reluctant Adam/Edward follows after. Ultimately Edward is forced to admit that the Fall was also a fortunate one, that all his years of debating with Bella, he was wrong and she was right. She was always meant to be a vampire [...] who has the power over life and death in her femininity. Bella takes up the Mormon role of motherhood to become the divine path to birth and life on Earth, a role as important as Mormon priesthood, which rules over death and the final approach to immortality.”

Harrison’s narrative positions Bella as having the power to choose. Edward is placed in the weaker position: he is described as “reluctant” and “forced” to accept Bella’s power. The version of the Fall Mette references is a recognizable figured world for most Mormons. It is important to these women to retain both their Mormon and their feminist identities. By looking at Bella as a Mormon goddess, she is able to successfully negotiate these seemingly conflicting narratives. Motherhood is a sanctioned pathway to power in

Mormonism. By finding strength in traditional roles of femininity, women who identify as both LDS and feminist are able to maintain both identities simultaneously.

Harrison's analysis helps to explain a distinctly Mormon brand of feminism in which traditional female roles are seen as paths to power rather than as patriarchal constraints.

“It is not only in becoming a vampire that Bella becomes god-like. She gains immortality, yes, but that is at the hands (or teeth) of Edward, the patriarch of all patriarchs here. She forces him to it by coming close to death in childbirth. And it is in childbirth that Mormon doctrine ennobles women. Thus, the argument that Meyer's *Twilight* is all about keeping women in traditional roles is true. But it also has a powerful demand that women in these roles be seen as heroic, even as super-human. Immortality in Mormonism comes to women through their work as wives and mothers quite literally.”

For these women, performing a feminist identity is not in conflict with traditional female roles as it often is when viewed from traditional feminism. Again, Bella is the one who “forces” Edward to transform her into an immortal. It is Bella who finds her true power in becoming both a mother and a vampire. Fems who identify with Bella do so because she is a representation of Mormon feminism—a brand of feminism that celebrates traditional roles of femininity and believes that women achieve true power and distinction through fully embracing the roles of wife and mother.

It should be acknowledged that Harrison also adopts a somewhat critical stance on *Twilight* and Mormonism by acknowledging that “*Twilight* is all about keeping women in traditional gender roles” and then going on to say, “I am suspicious of Mormonism's

exclusively male priesthood and the insistence that men and women are eternally different with different roles. But on the other hand, I am equally suspicious of being told that there is no power in motherhood, since as a mother, I have felt tremendous satisfaction and yes, even power.” Here, Harrison openly questions Mormon patriarchy and gender roles without going so far as to denounce the male priesthood, but only saying that she is “suspicious.” She then quickly refocuses her argument away from the male-dominated priesthood and places it back on the “tremendous satisfaction” and “power” she has felt as a mother.

Those who adopt a more critical feminist identity question the immortal goddess narrative. Janet, a commenter on fMh writes:

“Why is it that the vampire father figure, Carlisle, has used his immortality to accrue oodles of knowledge and life-saving skills and become this phenomenal person, whereas the mother vampire figure has used hers to no apparent ends at all? She doesn’t do volunteer work. She doesn’t play the piano like Edward. She doesn’t appear to read. She doesn’t spend her time mothering, so the title holds little meaning—her ‘kids’ are centuries old and whatnot. Nor has she even become Martha Stewart immortal [...] All she does is hover about looking pretty and concerned. It’s almost as though Stephanie Meyer can configure no thought of what a married woman might do with immortality besides become a figurehead—because that’s all the mom figure is. She doesn’t DO anything, maternal or otherwise.”

Janet points out the gender inequalities represented in the characters of Carlisle and Esme, who are Edward’s immortal adopted parents. However, she also does not go so far

as to criticize the Mormon patriarchy as the context for this representation. Instead, Janet places the onus on Stephenie Meyer, herself, without acknowledging that Meyer's portrayal of gender roles is firmly founded in the figured world of her culture—one that places the privilege of doctrinal knowledge with the male priesthood holder.

From the represented comments, it is clear that Mormon feminism is not necessarily a contradiction in terms. There are women who openly adopt a critical feminist stance. Balancing faith and feminism, these women are able to assess the Mormon patriarchy critically while still maintaining membership in the Discourse and performing a Mormon identity that is recognized by others. However, finding divine power in motherhood and glorifying roles women are promised in the LDS afterlife, as the Mormon goddess narrative does, does not change the fact that only men are granted the priesthood here on earth, with all of the privileges it affords. Even with the feminist goddess narrative, gender roles still present a boundary for LDS women, a boundary that is shaped by the context of their Mormon Discourse. Women may be encouraged to view their roles as wives and mothers as top priority and even as the source of some distinct power that offers them protection rather than oppression; however, by positioning immortality as the highest social good, women are conditioned to focus on the rewards of the afterlife rather than on the inequalities of their earthly ones.

While Harrison may not consider herself to be “your typical conservative Mormon,” her interpretation of Bella as a Mormon goddess does not necessarily resist the dominant cultural narrative and ultimately serves to uphold the structures of power within Mormon culture. Harrison never questions the Heavenly Mother narrative in the first place or asks why she is treated with such secrecy if she is so full of maternal power and

glory. I am reminded of a point that Geoff B. made in his blog: “[Bella] just shows up, and two handsome men fall hopelessly in love with her. [...] What makes *Twilight* different is that there are two perfect men showering all the attention, and Bella can soak it all in without ever having to make any effort.” Harrison never forces us to question this; we are supposed to accept that Bella’s ultimate salvation and immortality rests solely with Edward, much in the same way that a Mormon woman can only become exalted in the afterlife when her husband whispers her secret name through the veil. We may peek through the Mormon Goddess narrative and glimpse at Mormon feminism, but the veil is never quite lifted.

The *Mod* mentality: These books are for entertainment

*“What *Twilight* has done is allow romance novels to be exposed to the sun of literary day. This is a romance book in the tradition of romance books. [...] Chances are the major difference is when the characters consummate their love. [...] Those not familiar with the genre are shocked by its motifs presented in a popular book. For some the anti-feminism of romance novels has been made bare for all the world to see; and the feminists who read them are ashamed. The puritans who scoff them are disgusted. [...] The *Twilight* series is no longer a work of literature, but a cultural battleground.”*

--Jettboy, In Defense of Stephenie Meyer, December 2009

In the above quote, Jettboy performs *Mod* in several ways. First, he discusses *Twilight* as a romance novel, highlighting the features that make it part of romance novel Discourse rather than a distinctly Mormon text. However, the identity he enacts is still decidedly Mormon because he recognizes that sex is treated differently in the *Twilight*

saga from traditional romance novels. This shows he is aware of the Mormon influence on the books and is speaking from an insider's perspective. He is also able to recognize and respond to the complex positioning of both the Fems and the Mollies who help create the "cultural battleground" through their reactions to the treatment of sex and gender throughout the series.

There is no typical Mod response to the novels or stereotypical way that commenters perform moderate identity. At first, it was difficult for me to recognize behaviors that signaled Mod—perhaps because these behaviors seemed to defy both the categories of the Fem or Molly performances. The entire time of this ethnography, I was the outsider who was peering into Bloggernacle culture. As an ethnographer, I find that it is often more facile to make the strange familiar than it is to make the familiar strange. And while I know that this chapter is primarily about female identity performance in the Bloggernacle, Mod is an identity that is often performed and recognized by both males and females. Ways of performing Mod are varied, but a common theme was downplaying Mormon influence or discourse within the *Twilight* saga and viewing the novels and films as entertainment, not to be taken too seriously. First, it is important to note that Mods are not ex-Mormons, fallen-away Mormons, or even "jack" Mormons—which is a term used within the LDS culture to describe otherwise faithful Mormons who do not abide by certain conservative standards such as refraining from alcohol or swearing. Moderate Mormons use language to show that they strongly identify with the LDS religion and culture. Sometimes a poster who performs Fem or Molly will also perform Mod. Typically, Mods are more likely to regard the *Twilight* novels as escapist entertainment rather than make any particular connection between the novels and their

religion. They are also more likely to recognize that diversity of opinion exists among the LDS community and defend the individual rights of other Church members to make personal choices, even if these choices are regarded as inappropriate by other members, in order to position the novels as entertainment.

Although Mormons performed Mod all over the Bloggernacle *Twilight* blogs, I have chosen to represent two group discussions in particular because their discussions are representative of the various themes I observed. The first site is a response to a poll on LDSliving.com and the second is the LDS Ladies Book Club on Goodreads.com, discussed in the first section of this chapter. In the discussion forum “What’s Broken about Breaking Dawn,” a commenter by the name of Jennifer writes:

“It seems that the disappointment is directly related to a mismanagement of expectations. [*Breaking Dawn*] is not a novel written for LDS people in particular. If you thought it was, then I can see how you might have thought the book would be different. But it IS about vampires for crying out loud. If you find the storyline inappropriate for teens, then don't let your teenagers read it. I would not presume to tell parents how to raise teenagers anymore than I would tell Stephenie Meyer how to write books. Just because it's sold at Deseret Book does not mean it has the stamp of approval for the Church. [...] Sometimes in the Mormon culture, we find ourselves a little preoccupied with other people's choices as they compare to our own.”

Jennifer signals that she is Mormon through the use of language. She refers to Deseret Book, a bookstore and publishing house specifically geared toward the LDS religion and culture. When she mentions Mormon culture, she uses the plural pronoun “we” in order

to signal membership in that Discourse. Second, she separates *Twilight* from religion, saying that it is a book about vampires and that not all material sold at Deseret is Church doctrine. Finally, she stresses the importance of diversity and choices within the Mormon culture. These social goods fall very much in line with what could be considered mainstream, middle-class American values. First is the value that “parents” (plural) should dictate what is appropriate for teens. Emphasis is placed on the autonomy of individual families rather than on Church doctrine. Also apparent is the valuing of individualism and freedom of choice over adherence to a set of previously-determined purity standards, especially when it comes to choosing entertainment.

Jennifer goes on to say that “it is valid to criticize [Meyer’s] writing, her characters, her work, but not to question her religious devotion based on your interpretation of her work. She did not ‘let down’ the church because she is not an official representative of the church. And if she did, who are we to point it out?” Jennifer indirectly questions the *every-member-a-missionary* sentiment expressed by bloggers like William Morris, Geoff B., and the Mollies. She separates Mormon Discourse from *Twilight*, saying that Meyer’s Mormonism does not dictate her artistic expression. By saying “who are we to point it out,” she further suggests that it is part of the Mormon Discourse, and not the Church doctrine, that demands such allegiance from its members. By emphasizing individual choice over Church doctrine, Jennifer successfully navigates an identity that is situated between Mormon and mainstream American values.

Mods are able to perform an identity that is recognized by members of the Church at the same time the same identity is situated within a mainstream figured world. The Mormon Mod identity performance aligns Mormonism with recognizable social goods

such as: individual liberty, traditional family values, autonomy, as well as freedom of choice and expression. By positioning the novels and films as harmless entertainment, Mods shift the conversation away from the cultural battleground over the role of Mormon discourse which frees fans from having to engage reconcile the two with one another. The commenters in the Bloggernacle also reinforce the concept that identity performance is not fixed. How commenters perform identity depends on the language, behaviors, and values that are exhibited at the time. Angela, who was also discussed in the first section on performing Molly, responds to LDS women who deride the novels as abstinence porn with a more moderate response, shifting subtly from one identity performance to another when she needs to be recognized differently:

“I don't know what was disgusting about the books. I have read them and I am a very active member of the church and I guess I'm not seeing what was disgusting. If you have NEVER read the books I don't think you should be making comments about them. I live in the mission field and I have people tell me all the time about the things that are ‘wrong’ with the Book of Mormon when they have never read it and it really drives me crazy. [...] Stephenie Meyer is not a bad person and she didn't have any intentions of writing for LDS people. She wrote down a dream that she had I've said this before and I'll say it again, as members of the church we need to be a little less judgemental [sic] of other members. I do believe that just because you are LDS doesn't mean that you can only read LDS books. I love all kinds of books.”

Angela first establishes her strong LDS identity. She does so by referencing her mission for the Church and her familiarity with *The Book of Mormon*. This statement might even

be in line with her previous Molly performance earlier in the thread since she emphasizes her Mormon faith; yet, she then goes on to separate the novels from Mormon Discourse, saying that Meyer was not writing for an LDS audience and had no obligation to write for a Mormon fan-base. She also echoes the Mod tendency to position the novels within the realm of individual choice, rather than within a Mormon context. Mods do not discuss the novels in terms of the abstinence narrative nor do they debate issues of Mormon feminism. Instead, those performing a moderate identity often highlight the novels and films as entertainment. When other commenters in the forum frame the discussion in terms of the abstinence narrative, Mods often re-emphasize individual choice. In the discussion comments of an LDSliving.com poll called “Is *Twilight* Appropriate?” a poster by the name of Moss retorts to those who express disdain for the novels’ lustful and blood-thirsty themes:

“So, we’re going to need a lot more people to selectively quote scriptures and general authorities with random capitalizations, and then we are going to need a few people to talk about how reading books about Vampires [sic] will lead young women to Satanism. Then we are going to need some level-headed few to call the previous posters out for being hyper-judgemental [sic]. And lastly, someone to point out that your daughters are going to see it whether you approve or not, so you might as well have it on your terms.”

Moss comments on common behaviors exhibited by Mormons online, including scripture-quoting and positioning themselves as religious authorities. The performance described and critiqued by Moss is similar to that of the Mollies in the MMB. Moss characterizes this kind of allegiance to scripture and Church authority over individual

agency as “hyper-judgmental.” The agency that is emphasized by those performing Mod is still part of Mormon Discourse, but it also intersects with mainstream the American values of individual liberty and freedom of choice.

Another commenter, Azcaligirl writes:

“Kudos to those of you with wisdom and reason! And shame on those who would judge and criticize a wonderful talent such as this. She is young and just getting started, and I think it is amazing what Stephanie [sic] Meyer has accomplished! These books are for entertainment, not a social metaphor for the Mormon Church, or for anything else. I am someone who didn't think I would care for a book about vampires... but thoroughly enjoyed this series!! The subject matter may not be to your taste, but it would be a mistake to criticize the popularity of this series. It is however an excellent chance to start a conversation with your sons and daughters about any concerns you may have.”

Azcaligirl is quick to reject any possibility that *Twilight* is a metaphor for Mormonism and points out that “these books are for entertainment.” Jennifer, Angela, Moss, and Azcaligirl (along with Jettboy’s opening quote) all serve to detach *Twilight* from Mormon Discourse and frame the novels and films as frivolous romance fodder. Like all of the previous commenters, Azcaligirl de-emphasizes the role of the Church in regulating media and entertainment while highlighting the individual responsibility parents have in determining whether or not the books are appropriate for younger readers. In this way, Mods highlight individual agency over religious allegiance—a social good that is very much in line with mainstream American values and, therefore, one that is immediately recognizable to many non-Mormons.

In a sense, the moderates seem to be closest to achieving what William Morris (AMV) envisioned—a normalized Mormon cultural identity that is able to integrate with the mainstream culture while still maintaining its unique Mormon characteristics. In an interview given in June 2015, Morris writes:

“I am both more and less hopeful about the state and future of Mormon literature and culture. To me it is blindingly obvious that culture is one of the best cures for all the ills that come along with late capitalism. [...] That it is the best flip side to official discourse because it can interrogate and process the messiness of life and society without becoming dogmatic or reifying what are complex situations. [...] But the answer to that is a multitude of narratives, ones that resist both the world and the cultural constraints of corporate LDS-ness while still connecting to the community of the Church and the truths of the gospel.”

Morris’ statement is complex and seemingly aware of its own contradictions. The implication is that as long as Mormon culture—and by extension, identity—is preoccupied with LDS discourse and doctrine, then it will not integrate into mainstream society. However, if it loses its essential qualities of LDS-ness in the process of assimilation, its distinctive narrative will be lost. Those who perform Mod are, in many ways, exemplifying this kind of simultaneous reflection and resistance of LDS identity.

The Mods often reported enjoying *Twilight* for its escapist, romance genre qualities. Once neutered of all Mormon discourse through the Mod perspective, *Twilight* is easily viewed as a series of vapid vampire romance novels, containing no depth or metaphoric properties. Mormons performing a moderate identity were not often placed in the position of having to defend their identity or their faithfulness, as the Fems often

were. They also did not feel the need to wield their religion as the grand standard of measure to which all media and entertainment must submit, as was often the case with the Mollies. Mods are, in some ways, similar to Meyer's protagonist early in the series, who must discover how to live in the vampiric world of the Cullens while retaining her humanity. Mods are able to perform a distinctly LDS identity while also connecting to the larger community.

The tendency to place *Twilight* outside of the framework of religion and place emphasis on the rights of individuals to choose to read the novels or not may seem innocuous; however, it also may have unexamined consequences. In dismissing the Mormon context from the novels, the Mods succeed in closing the discussion surrounding religion and the novels. Stating that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion acts as an endnote to the discussion. By de-emphasizing the *Twilight*-Mormon connection, the Mod position intentionally or unintentionally stifles the debate as to how and in what ways Mormon discourse shapes the seductive saga. The same cannot be said about the Mollies or the Fems, who unapologetically bring Mormonism to the forefront of the discussion and out of the *twilight*.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“We articulate the perceptions of objectivity, the allegiances to norms and values, and the representation of subjective states that participants routinely employ. Thus it brings our attention to ambiguities, cultural drifts and shifts, and even to contradictory claims made in everyday life. We do not end up with a single reality but a field of reality claims consistently made by the participants of study. [...] Such fields are limited in number and display bounded qualities: we do not discover an infinite number of possible realities.”

--Carspecken, 1996, p. 188

In this critical ethnography, I assumed the role of a “lurker” in the Bloggernacle, collecting discussion threads and blog posts surrounding the *Twilight* saga. The content of these threads was analyzed using Gee’s (2011b) tools for discourse analysis, with particular attention paid to four tools: The Big “D” Discourse tool, the identities building tool, the figured worlds tool, and the politics building tool. My goal was to explore how the meanings surrounding this seemingly frivolous vampire romance contributed to how LDS fans performed identity and shaped Mormon Discourse within both the Bloggernacle and the larger culture. I employed the multiple lenses of socio-cultural learning theory along with Big “D” Discourse theory and gender performance theory to understand how fans of the seductive saga recognized, reflected, reinterpreted, and resisted multiple Discourses in and around the text. Like Carspecken implicates in the above quote, I found that while participants in the Bloggernacle study may have

differed in opinion or textual interpretations, they were more likely than not to converge on one or more of the available models that were bound by their cultural experiences.

The purpose of this final chapter is multifaceted. First, I aim to summarize my major findings of the Bloggernacle study. Second, I discuss my role as a researcher and what I learned about fan cultures and the field of language and literacy through this dissertation study. In addition, I aim to critically recontextualize my findings within an historical and cultural framework in which Meyer, her text, the Bloggernacle, along with all of its members are situated. Finally, I conclude with implications and suggestions for further research into the Mormon blogosphere and the fan culture that flourishes within the space originally intended for doctrinal discussions.

What I discovered about Big “D” Discourse

“I bring my own unique baggage to my reading, things such as personal character, life experience, my conception of Mormon theology, [...] and the ebb and flow of my desire to escape reality. Such things constantly shape the way I respond to, interpret, and ingest any text. And the same goes for the writer: his or her character, experience, theological inclination, education, gender, etc. tend to shape the form and content of what they write, though not always because the writer consciously builds it into the work and not always to a great degree. In this way, reading and writing, as all forms of art, are an extension and expression of the reader’s/writer’s self, the fruit growing out of individual character.”

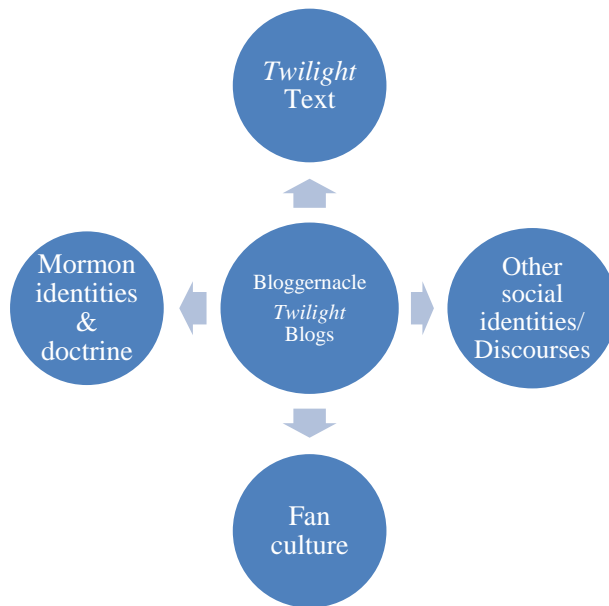
--Tyler Chadwick, Goodreads “Twilight” Review, January 2009

The entire Bloggernacle space, along with Meyer and her text, is situated within a specific cultural and historical context where multiple Discourses converge and overlap. It is a space where LDS bloggers are at once intrigued and repelled by the smoldering sexuality embedded in *Twilight's* iconic vampire lore; where the erotics of restraint intermingle with the *every-member-a-missionary* ideal; and where mainstream culture collides with uniquely Mormon gestures. Frequently, the Mormon Discourse that was layered upon the text by LDS fans created a kind of borderland Discourse (Gee, 2007) that blended various socially available identities. In addition to Mormon discourse, the meanings constructed in the Bloggernacle were continuously informed by popular fan culture, romance novel discourse, and the conservative mainstream values with which Mormonism, itself, has become closely articulated.

Meyer claims to have only researched vampires once while writing *Twilight*, though her work and fans' interpretations have also undoubtedly been influenced by traditional vampire iconography with its connotations of "Otherness" that have become embedded within our culture. Through her campy vampire love story, Meyer has (perhaps unwittingly) resurrected the familiar myth and shifted the metaphor from one of lust, greed, and depravity, to one of chastity, self-control, and moral righteousness. Therefore, Meyer's vampire with his sparkling skin and unusual self-denial is not as paradoxical as it might first appear. Simultaneous desire and fear of the "Other" are still visible in Meyer's neo-vampires, as evidenced by the conflicted reactions to the text's sexual themes expressed by some LDS fans. Figure 6 represents the dialectic relationship between the cultural site, Mormon doctrine, the *Twilight* text, and other outside cultural influences, showing how the *Twilight* blogs are sites where multiple Discourses

converge. The text and its fans are situated within a common cultural and historical context. While this necessarily includes Mormon Discourse, it also encompasses the discourse imbedded in our culture by romance novels and vampire iconography. It also follows in a tradition of fan culture and ways of signifying membership within a fan community.

Figure 6



I agree with Robert Pattinson’s claim that “people make up all these Mormon references” in *Twilight*, but I disagree that this fact renders such interpretations invalid. On the contrary, all these “made-up references” by fans are what give the saga its meaning. Jenkins (1992) asserts that texts gain meaning through their use and “intense interaction eventually leads fans to the creation of new texts” (p. 52). The *Twilight* blogs are spaces where fans create new texts and where Mormon Discourse is often reflected, reinterpreted, and occasionally resisted.

Bloggers frequently commented on the importance of how Mormonism is portrayed through the *Twilight* text to those outside of the Discourse. They often debated on whether or not Meyer's writing represented a form of literary missionary work, or if she had betrayed her faith through implementing such graphic sexual depictions. Bloggers noted that Mormon ideas like agency, abstinence, and *every-member-a-missionary* are present in the text and possibly translatable to the general public through the *Twilight* saga. However, they disagreed as to whether or not the Mormon messages carried by *Twilight* are, indeed, the messages that should be injected into the mainstream consciousness.

Bloggers such as William Morris and Geoff B. use the *Twilight* blogs as a way to consciously spread the gospel in the digital age, believing they can influence the perception of Mormonism within the larger culture. As such, interpretations of the text cannot depart too far from Mormonism; yet, they have to maintain a certain mainstream appeal as well. For example, the abstinence narrative is a common interpretation of *Twilight* throughout the Bloggernacle and provides convenient overlap between Mormon Big "D" Discourse and mainstream conservative Christian Discourse. This abstinence narrative gained value and meaning within the community as it was repeated, becoming a sanctioned narrative within the Discourse. Furthermore, the overlap of the abstinence narrative with mainstream conservative Discourse helps it to maintain its power and sustainability within the larger culture.

Mormon *Twi*-fans whose interpretations reflected dominant Mormon Discourse often did so as a way to balance fandom and faithfulness. The constraints of the LDS faith dictate that all media consumed by members meet certain purity criteria. By

framing *Twilight* within the abstinence narrative, fans of the series are able to gain pleasure from their fan object without feeling as though they are betraying their religion. Simultaneously, the abstinence narrative assists in maintaining the dominant Discourse of power. LDS fans might privately make disparate, more sexualized interpretations of the text, but they must maintain the abstinence narrative publicly in order to adhere to Discourse norms and values. This supports the idea that meaning-making is constrained by various factors including beliefs, social identities, institutions, and Big “D” Discourses.

A blogger named Kim commented that there “there is room in the church for everyone, even liberals, questioners, and non-traditionals.” I wanted so much to believe her sentiment, so I set out looking for counter-narratives and reinterpretation of dominant Discourse. An example of an attempt at reinterpretation is the feminist goddess narrative, in which Bella is seen as a literary embodiment of Heavenly Mother, who exists within Mormon doctrine but whose sacred nature is rarely discussed. The Mormon goddess narrative is not as pervasive within the ‘nacle threads, despite blogs such as the fMh that claims to be a space for the “feminist and faithful.” One reason for this might be that a centrally-organized institution such as the LDS Church depends on social hegemony to uphold the dominant Discourse. With its means of internal moderation, the Bloggernacle serves to primarily uphold dominant Mormon Discourse rather than to disrupt it. LDS scholar, Jan Shippy (2012), sees the Bloggernacle as little more than a cyber sacrament meeting that could attend across the world on any given Sunday with little dissimilarity. In this regard, the Bloggernacle functions as a kind of digital ward.

What I discovered about language

“Everyone acquires a vernacular social language (a different dialect for different groups of people) connected to his or her native language [...] People usually go on, as well, to acquire different non-vernacular social languages connected to different social groups, for example, one person may become adept at the language of Christian fundamentalist theology and someone else at the language of modern mathematics.”

--Gee, 2009, p.6

Language played an important role in how people signaled membership in a Discourse and performed identity in the Bloggernacle. I discovered that Big “D” Discourse is expressed and upheld through language. Bloggers frequently use plural pronouns: “we,” “us,” “our” to express membership in the Mormon Discourse. They use specialized language by referring to “missionaries,” “wards,” “Temple ceremony,” “stake dance,” etc., to convey their identity as part of this cultural group. In addition, they also use language to show that they are keenly aware of how they are perceived by those outside the Discourse and how their interpretations of *Twilight* may shape those outside perceptions.

Specialized terms and references to particular elements of Mormon doctrine were often used by bloggers to convey to the larger community membership in the Discourse and a specific type of Mormon identity. Pronouns such as “we,” “us,” “they,” and “our” not only referenced Mormons in general, but also were often meant to situate the speaker within a certain subgroup of Mormon Discourse. A blogger might use these pronouns to

refer to several things at once: the fan community, the Mormon community as a whole, or a particular section of Mormon society.

Referencing doctrine or quoting specific scriptures in relation to *Twilight* was used to signal to others a certain righteousness, faithfulness, or authority. This kind of blatant doctrinizing would likely be used to signal membership in groups such as the Mollies in the MMB; similar discourse would not likely surface in fMh or even AMV. It was commonly found in the ‘nacle as a way to situate the text firmly within an LDS context, as evidenced by those who subscribe to the abstinence narrative. Questioning the doctrinal knowledge of another was seen as a way to discredit certain non-traditional interpretations of the text.

Screen names were also utilized to signal identity to other bloggers. While some bloggers are known by their full names, screen names become important signifiers that reach across the Bloggernacle. For example, the entirety of the Mormon blogosphere knows Lisa Butterworth, founder of fMh, as fMhLisa. Through the use of this handle, her identity has become carefully articulated with Mormon feminism. Similarly, bloggers in the MMB often employed screen names to signal a traditional (or Molly) identity by highlighting their roles as wives or mothers. The use of screen names to perform specific identities supports the common finding that avatars and online handles are one way that people correlate their physical identities with their online ones (Baym, 1993; Bury, 1998; Gee and Hayes, 2011; Steinkuehler, 2007). While this type of identity signifier was seen across all of the blogs, it was particularly noticeable in the MMB and the fMh, where women used them to signal belonging to a particular sub-Discourse.

What I discovered about identity

“The articulation of an identity within available cultural terms instates a definition that forecloses in advance the emergence of new identity concepts. [...] Moreover, when agreed-upon identities [...] no longer constitute the theme or subject of politics, then identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them.”

--Butler, 1999, p. 22

Through my analysis of the *Twilight* blogs in the Bloggernacle, it is clear that identity performance is socially constructed because it needs to be socially recognizable by others in order to function. The behaviors, values, and social goods that inform Mormon Discourse and dictate acceptable identities within the Bloggernacle space were negotiated and renegotiated within the blogs. On one hand, the Bloggernacle is a space that affords Mormon women the freedom to express identities that they typically may not feel they have the opportunity to express within the larger culture. They often report feeling part of a group or able to express themselves in different ways. These women are able to find like-minded peers with whom to discuss *Twilight* and participate in a fan subculture that does not violate their Mormon beliefs. These women are able to build a like-minded fan community while still performing a recognizably Mormon identity. It was also clear that the Bloggernacle is arranged and divided by how its members recognize and perform various Mormon identities. The generally conservative Millennial Star bloggers, who tend to be mostly male, would not gather in the fMh or in AMV. Academic bloggers like William Morris would not deign to set

one mouse-click in the MMB. While designated spaces allow for the performance of particular identities, they also act as social barriers and as a means of cyber-segregation.

These distinct spaces in the Bloggernacle allow women to signal membership in the Mormon Discourse while still performing unique identities in relation to *Twilight*. For example, participants in the MMB would not expect to encounter the same type of Mormon female performances as they would in fMh. It is an unspoken rule that certain spaces signal the need for particular identity performances. As with any affinity space, there are rules that govern participation along with who is considered an insider (Gee, 2004). Those performing Molly tended to post in the MMB while those performing Fem congregated in the fMh. In addition, their interpretations varied depending on the space in which they posted and the identity performance they assumed. Interpretations of the *Twilight* text were likely to be shared among participants occupying the same blog space. The abstinence narrative was popular among the Mollies who championed the text as proof of the strength of human agency and self-control. The same abstinence narrative was frequently critiqued by those performing Fem.

Bloggers within the *Twilight* blogs used language to perform a variety of identities that were recognizable to others. Identity performance was often dictated by the specific site in which fans were posting. Participating in the MMB or fMh implies a specific identity performance with certain assumed beliefs and values. It is unlikely that a participant would be a member of both the MMB and the fMh. If she were to participate in both sites, her identity for each would need to shift in order to be accepted into the community. In essence, the norms within the space seemed to dictate to

participants the appropriate identity performance and which interpretation of the text to adopt.

Female identity performance was especially noticeable because women had to negotiate their Mormon identity along with their feminine identity and their fandom. Posters who self-identified as male did not vary as greatly in identity performance because their position within the patriarchy is more clearly defined than it is for women. The LDS Church operates by a strict hierarchy, and women's roles are limited as evidenced on the official website for the LDS Church in an article about the role of women:

“Women are a necessary part of the plan of happiness, and that plan cannot operate without them. Women participate in the work of salvation, which includes member missionary work, convert retention, activation of less-active members, temple and family history work, teaching the gospel, and caring for the poor and needy. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, every woman in the Church is given the responsibility to know and defend the divine roles of women, which include that of wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend. [...] They also have, by divine nature, the greater gift and responsibility for home and children and nurturing there and in other settings” (<https://www.lds.org/topics/women-in-the-church?lang=eng>).

There is no such description for the role of men in the Church because it is assumed that men receive the priesthood and take on leadership roles. According to Kristeva, (in Butler, 1993) motherhood and art have been the only two sanctioned acts for women,

presumably because they both symbolically function as giving birth. This is evermore true for LDS women.

Mormon women performing feminist were more conscious of their gender identity performance than were those performing either Molly or Mod. This group was also the only group to make critical interpretations of the text that moved beyond faith-based criticisms of sexual themes within the text. Those performing a feminist Mormon identity, such as Mette Ivie Harrison, were also more likely to experience criticism of their faith by other Bloggernacle participants acting as Discourse guardians.

Butler (1999) purports that “gender is not a noun” but is “produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (p. 33). The focus on femininity and limited ways to perform a female identity in the Bloggernacle serves to uphold heterosexual hegemony in the online space, particularly in regard to Mormon feminism. Gender identity becomes a main point of negotiation within the *Twilight* blogs and is related to issues of power within the Discourse. While the Bloggernacle may afford women expanded opportunities for expression, Mormon Discourse necessarily limits the identity performances available to these participants if they wish to be recognized by others the Discourse. Feminist performance, for example, was acceptable until the point that it began to question the patriarchy and offer reinterpretations of the text from a feminist Mormon perspective. Hence, the *Twilight* Bloggernacle blogs illustrate how dominant Discourses of power can and do function in digital spaces. While some *Twi*-fans in the Bloggernacle may attempt to reinterpret and even resist culturally constructed meanings, they are often constrained by dominant interpretations and identities.

The Bloggernacle is a site where Mormon culture is reflected, renegotiated, and even resisted. It is also influenced by outside cultural identities and products. Gender identity also becomes a main point of negotiation within the *Twilight* blogs and is related to issues of power structures within both LDS and mainstream culture. Gender is reconstructed and performed through language in the blogs. Butler (1999) purports that “gender is not a noun” but is “produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (p. 33). The focus on femininity and limited ways to perform a female identity in the Bloggernacle serves to uphold heterosexual hegemony in the online space, particularly in regard to Mormon feminism. Hence, the *Twilight* Bloggernacle blogs illustrate how dominant Discourses of power can and do function in digital spaces. While some *Twi*-fans in the Bloggernacle may attempt to reinterpret and even resist culturally constructed meanings, they are often constrained by the dominant interpretations sanctioned by male authority figures.

Interpretations that align with mainstream values, such as the abstinence narrative, are more easily accepted and integrated within the Bloggernacle community. Interpretations that are consistent with both mainstream culture and dominant Mormon Discourse tend to be more widely repeated across sites in the Bloggernacle. Finally, when bloggers do happen to resist dominant Discourse, such as Mette Ivie Harrison’s adherence to the concept of a female Mormon deity, Bloggernacle guardians are often close at hand to refute such “fringe” interpretations of the text. Foucault points out that a regime of power exercises its will from “within a social body, rather than *from above* it” (1980, p. 39). Functioning as a kind of Foucauldian Panopticon, the Bloggernacle is

home to guardians like Jettboy and Geoff B. who serve to monitor and preserve a mild-mannered, mainstreamed version of Mormon Discourse.

I found that the Discourse of the Bloggernacle is monitored and maintained from within through formal structures such as blog rules or guidelines, but also through informal means. The Bloggernacle still has yet to achieve what Bakhtin (1981) terms heteroglossia: “a multiplicity of social voices” that create “distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages” (p. 263). I am still struck by Mette Ivie Harrison’s comment that she felt as though she had “raised [her] hand in Sunday School and got shot down big time by the teacher.” Though the comment was made across time and cyber space, my heart still sank for her. Institutional structures act so strongly upon the Bloggernacle and its members that divergent counter-narratives are all too frequently eclipsed. While a variety of Mormon voices can be found in the annals of the ‘nacle, and there might be liberals, questioners, and non-traditionals among them, clearly not all voices are heard.

What the *Twilight* study has “imprinted” upon me

“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 dominant that part might be –that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him.”

*--Meyer, *Twilight*, 2005*

When I began this study, I really wanted to find out whether or not *Twilight* was an essentially Mormon text. This question is, of course, unanswerable and perhaps even irrelevant. I learned instead how and in what ways fans construct various interpretations

of the text in relation to Mormon Discourse, depending on how they use the blogs. These interpretations depend heavily upon how fans show membership within the Discourse and what types of social identities they attempt to convey. Henry Jenkins (1992) reminds us that “fandom celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings” (p. 284). My research and studies have reinforced my conviction that texts do not hold an intrinsic meaning, but that meanings are socially constructed. Meanings depend upon an interaction between reader, text, and context. How fans construct meaning in a social context is more relevant, and certainly more answerable, than whether or not *Twilight* is a “Mormon” book.

I learned that meaning-making is a complex process that is always political because it is tied to social identities and other institutions of power. What I mean by this is that people in the Bloggernacle study were always trying to represent themselves as a certain type of person or to align themselves with a particular Discourse. Literacy practices were used as tools to participate in this process. Additionally, the interpretations that individuals or groups were able to make were constrained by the institution of dominant Mormon Discourse. Hence, literacy acts are never neutral.

Finally, I learned that the Bloggernacle is a vast, borderless land even as it occupies its own particular niche of cyberspace. Interpretations of *Twilight* varied greatly from blog to blog, showing that Mormon Discourse—in the poetic words of Walt Whitman—“contains multitudes.” While loosely connected through doctrine, ways of *performing* Mormon in the Bloggernacle range widely. The space seems to afford people ways of becoming part of a kind of sub-Discourse while still identifying with their Mormon faith. Being a feminist Mormon is not novel, but thanks to the Mormon

blogosphere, women who identify as feminist and Mormon can find a community that they did not have available to them even a short decade ago.

Jenkins (1992) was quick to critique to term fan community on the basis that no one exists primarily within a community based on fan culture. On one hand, this kind of subdividing and recombining of Discourses can expedite the formation of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and foster a sense of comfort and familiarity among its members. On the other, the original spirit of fan culture might be lacking: people from disparate backgrounds, beliefs, values, and creeds coming together and bonding over the pleasure they derive from engaging with their fan object. The innovative *Star Trek* spirit to “seek out new life and new civilizations” is obscured when *Twilight* fans can simply log on and be immediately surrounded by a fan community that shares not only their commitment to the novels and films, but also their Relief Society recipes at Sunday morning sacrament meetings.

Not only are fan cultures coming together online, but they are now afforded the opportunity to form these kinds of fan subcultures. At the dawn of the Internet age, I must confess that I was a dedicated fan of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Seeking a like-minded community of fans, I journeyed into cyberspace to find an affinity group (Gee and Hayes, 2011). This group was situated within the AOL chatroom forums, the height of cyber-style in 1997, and it was filled with a diverse cross-section of people who all just happened to share a similar passion for the Warrior Princess and her Bard.

Fast-forward to Web 2.0 and imagine that I am now mother, a Mormon, a feminist and a *Twilight* fan. I no longer have to choose one identity to foster or split my allegiance between four different affinity spaces. I can rest assured that I can typically

find a community of people with whom I share all of these traits in common. Fan subculture is changing as people can further customize their fandom experience online in the same way they can customize a playlist in iTunes or a queue of movies in Netflix. It is truly the age of the iFan.

Mormon *Twilight*-fans have a unique position in relation to the text through their cultural affiliations. In her interview with William Morris in 2005, Meyer stated: “I’d written the story for myself and my big sister [...] I was 29.” Meyer was a Mormon. She was a wife and a mother. In a way, by writing for herself, Meyer had unwittingly also written for a world of women just like her. And these women formed online communities to share experiences with other like-minded fans. In these online communities, they can create polls about what it means to be both faithful and feminist LDS women. They can debate the abstinence narrative or Bella’s transformation from weak Molly to feminine Mormon goddess. Or they can share Relief Society lesson plans or simply talk about motherhood. Would the blogs devoted to *Twilight* have sprung up in the Bloggernacle in such multitudes if Meyer were, let’s say, a Methodist? It is impossible to tell, though I venture to hypothesize that the same level of interest would have been unlikely. Meyer’s novels brought LDS women together in online spaces and allowed them to negotiate identities, push against the patriarchy and the dominant Discourse, reaffirm their faith, debate issues of sex and gender, and form communities. The Bloggernacle is richer because of them.

Implications and future research

Previous studies have investigated the literacy practices of members of the Mormon community. One dissertation study focused on identity in the Bloggernacle. This is the first study to look at how Mormon fan subculture uses literacy practices online to perform identity and signal membership in a Big “D” Discourse. I will address what I consider to be the implications of this study and the next steps in future research.

Carspecken (1996) encourages critical ethnographers to discover relationships between the cultural site—in this case the *Twilight* blogs—and other social models and theories. While the Bloggernacle study does not seek to develop a new theory of online fan subcultures, it can inform how researchers might think about sub-Discourses or what Gee (2007) refers to as “borderland Discourses.” In examining the Discourses in and around the *Twilight* saga, I have concluded that Mormon Discourse interacts and blends with a variety of other Discourses. These are used as a way to merge Discourses and allow one to represent one’s self as a particular type of individual. These borderland Discourses are in-between spaces—*Twilight* zones, if you will—in which a person must communicate from the space between two Discourses, usually a dominant Discourse interacting with a more personal one. Many times, *Twilight* bloggers were seen negotiating Mormon Discourse with fandom or Mormon Discourse with feminism. I would like to expound on this theory of borderland Discourses to include the kinds of interactions taking place in the Bloggernacle. In many cases, bloggers communicated from a borderland Discourse situated between mainstream and Mormon culture, allowing them to be recognized by both Discourses. Mormon bloggers used this kind of borderland Discourse to consciously blend Mormon culture with the mainstream in

order to influence how Mormon culture is situated within mainstream culture. It would be a fascinating and fulfilling undertaking to examine further how these borderland Discourses can function in online spaces.

This study also carries implications for how people participate and perform identity in online fan subcultures. In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I mentioned the tensions that arose in the ‘nacle between the original academically-oriented blogs founded upon tradition and patriarchy and the second generation blogs that focused more on the everyday lives of Mormon women. I feel that a study investigating the tensions between the male and female voices of the Bloggernacle could illuminate differences in how Mormon men and women use literacy in the online community to perform various identities and foster agency.

I focused primarily on how women performed identity in the Bloggernacle, with some mention of male identity performance in the Mod group. This is because variations in female identity performance were more evident in the data than were variations in how men performed identity. Furthermore, more women posted in the *Twilight* blogs than men. However, Mormon male identity performance is strongly linked to the patriarchy. Male roles and behaviors are more clearly defined as they have the power that comes with the priesthood and have more agency within the Church and within their own lives. Women, on the other hand, often find themselves defined by their dual roles of wife and mother. Participation in fan subculture and the Bloggernacle allows these women the room to negotiate these identities in ways that allow them agency that may not be afforded to them in the physical world. A study examining the differences in how men

and women utilize the Bloggernacle spaces and for what purposes could perhaps explicate the nature of some of these tensions.

Finally, this brings me back to the *Twilight* saga, itself. This is the first known examination of how fans interpret the seductive saga in relation to Mormon Discourse. When I began this foray into the unknown world of Mormon vampires, I did not know what I would find or even where to begin. As I surfed the vast reaches of the *Twi*-net, I initially gathered over 100 pages of threads from a Christian blogger named Twilight Trinity who self-identified as a heterosexual male. These threads were not included in this dissertation study, not because they were not valid representations of fan responses, but because they would have pulled the focus of the study from the Bloggernacle into the vast, yet undiscovered space of the *Twi*-net. Once it became clear to me that I wanted to focus on Mormon fans, I necessarily had to limit the scope of my research, and some voices were excluded. From my initial observations of the Twilight Trinity threads, there appeared to be some overlap between Christian and Mormon Discourse in relation to the text. Given that approximately 85% of *Twi*-fans identify with some denomination of Christianity (Erzen, 2012), discovering how and in what ways Christian fans of the saga perform identity in online spaces could help illuminate why the *Twilight* belt (see Figure 2) corresponds so closely with areas bearing a largely Christian population. Should I choose to take another bite out of this endeavor in the future, I would like to examine the voices of Christian fans in order to understand how that Discourse might overlap and work in conjunction with Mormon Big “D” Discourse.

Final bites: Everything in *Mod*-eration

I could not complete this discussion without one final mention of the Mods because it is through the Mod mentality that Mormon Discourse is most-clearly communicated. In the Bloggernacle study, the Mods were, by far, the most frequently encountered group. They also varied the most in how they performed identity, though rarely highlighting Mormon aspects of their identities in the ways Mollies and Fems often did. Generally, Mods tended to subvert the discussion of Mormon discourse within *Twilight* blogs and focus largely on the novels as vacuous entertainment. The Mods were careful to avoid drawing any parallels between *Twilight* and Mormonism because any discussion of the two could mislead the public and potentially risk the progress Mormon Discourse had made toward integrating with mainstream culture. They often stated that they did not want *Twilight* to be perceived as a Mormon text.

Yet somehow, I found the Mods most difficult to discuss and analyze simply because they were so “normalized.” Then I realized that my difficulty stemmed from the fact the Mods occupy the center of the Bloggernacle as well as the center of Mormon Discourse, placing them in a natural position of power. Butler (1990) refers to Simone de Beauvoir’s contention that the “masculine body” is “universal” and “remains unmarked” (p. 17). Much in the same way, the moderate Mormon achieves a similar universality within the Discourse. Mods do not need to defend their interpretations with either doctrine or Mormon counter-narratives and they have the privilege of ignoring those who occupy the fringes of the Discourse or dismissing them as “Other.” And in fact, the Bloggernacle serves to maintain this kind of segregation within the Discourse (see Figure 1). This is especially important to recognize as we move ever-deeper into the digital

realm where ideas can extend further and faster than ever before. It is clear from the findings of this study that many occupants of the Bloggernacle are aware of this power and utilize digital media as a means to shape how Mormon Discourse is perceived, not only by other members, but by mainstream culture as well. By cultivating a largely moderate culture, Mormon Discourse is able to monitor and adjust itself from within and articulate the Discourse evermore closely with the cultural mainstream.

The Bloggernacle is not a unified space. Like all communities, it has a wide cast of characters; it has its champions, its guardians, its questioners, its doubters and those considered imposters by those in power. Just as the LDS afterlife is divided into three kingdoms—celestial, telestial, and terrestrial, with occasional whispers of outer darkness—the Bloggernacle tends to validate and normalize some Mormon voices while pushing others into separate realms or even to the outskirts. When speaking of Mormon Discourse, it is important to remember that there exists a variety of sub-Discourses occupying distinct corners of the Bloggernacle and, in turn, Mormon culture as a whole. It is only by discovering these varied Discourses and bringing them out of the *twilight* that we can truly begin to understand how and in what ways cultural products are informed and acted upon by institutional and societal structures of power.

Like Bella's journey, mine has been one from innocence to experience. And, like the *Twilight* novels, themselves, the writing of this dissertation, has required a kind of restrained passion on my part. I have learned a great deal from lurking in the *Twilight* blogs, and I have discovered how a research question can grow and evolve as the data unfold, requiring the researcher to follow where the fans go. I have shown how Mormon Big "D" Discourse is monitored and maintained in the Bloggernacle through exploring

how fans interpret the *Twilight* saga. In addition, it is my wish that I have allowed for a multiplicity of voices to be heard. Above all, I believe that this dissertation can contribute to how we understand the ways in which popular texts are (re)interpreted by various groups and subgroups and the power that these narratives have, not only over the text, but over cultural perception, itself. I only hope that I have accomplished my mission.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES AND THEORETICAL MEMOS

http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2008/08/stephanie-meyers-twilight-series-poll/	Field notes	Theoretical Memos
<p><u>Kerry</u> says: <u>August 24, 2008 at 12:16 pm</u> I found it deeply distressing. on SO many levels. I've only <u>blogged about it once</u> because purty much every friggin person I know LOVES the book and I didn't want them to throw things at me. But the book makes me worry. And the fact that so many girls love it? I find SO disturbing.</p> <p><u>Here was a hilarious post</u> about it, though. (I didn't want to put it on my own blog because there was some Mormon trashing in the comments and I didn't trust some of my readers not to make us look worse! but ya'll will probably do better.)</p> <p>through the mainstream entertainment" value. The main character is a Molly in disguise! Edward, her love, is the patriarchal prototype but instead of return missionary he's a return from death vampire, who out of the goodness of his heart only maims and kills animals instead of humans. That's a good thing for the main</p>	<p>Kerry uses language to identify as LDS here: friggin. Also is careful to avoid what she terms "Mormon trashing" in the thread. Also refers to "us" and not wanting readers to make "us" (Mormons?) look bad.</p>	<p>I have been thinking about how identity functions in the Bloggernacle, specifically how women enact various identities.</p> <p>CC anecdotally says that Twi-fans are religious. According to Erzen (2012) a majority of <i>Twilight</i> fans are Christian. What do Christians/Mormons find appealing about this text?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Women recognize Mormon identity performance in others (Molly). There are a variety of ways to perform Mormon (Beaman, 2001), but these are also limited by the Discourse. 1. Mormon Twi-fans recognize Mormon themes, "thoughts a customs" in the novels, but they also value the novels as a cultural product—as something written by someone who is also Mormon like they are. <p>C.C. has common views with other women on the</p>

<p>character as her blood calls to him like no other.</p>		<p>site who show interest in Meyer and also discuss the novels in terms of Mormon agency, marriage, patriarchy. Also could relate to how LDS women, in particular, interpret the novels through the lens of their experience in the Church.</p>
<p>CC says: August 24, 2008 at 12:59 pm Kerry- That was a hilarious post. It made me think of all the women who have told me they love the books and basically they fall into three groups: Mormon, Catholic, or Born again. The common thread among the three being a strict sense of morality about sex. I read all four books, mostly because of the whole, “Mormon breaks</p>	<p>CC Identifies with other female readers through common religion.</p> <p>Recognizes sexual themes in Twilight and links them to morality.</p> <p>Identifies with the author based on religion.</p> <p>Bella as a Molly Mormon—specialized language.</p> <p>Agency and choice. In this case choosing to be a vamp is eternal life.</p> <p>Feminist (dominate patriarchal male). Someone who identified with a Molly Mormon identity would not use this language, would they?</p> <p>CC recognizes a Mormon metaphor within the text. Uses specialized language of the Discourse here: Molly, return missionary. Also feminist language—patriarchal prototype.</p>	<p>CC appears to have some more feminist views since she mentions Molly Mormon and the patriarchal male. In what ways can one be both Mormon and feminist?</p> <p>Critiques novels as anti-feminist here due to their Victorian attitudes about sex. Is this what appeals to the highly religious fans (as CC claims)? This connects to the “erotics of abstinence” blog in which they debate if the novels are a kind of LDS abstinence porn.</p>

	<p>Eternal life seems to be a pattern that comes up in these discussions. An important element of Mormonism and <i>Twilight</i>.</p> <p>How does this impact how Mormons read the novels? What meanings they make. Is this a common metaphor?</p> <p>Choice and agency are patterns in the novels that Mormon readers bring up frequently. (Ex: AMV blog and Millennial Star blog)</p> <p>Women often criticize the books, but it doesn't stop them from loving them. What is it about these books that women love to hate (or hate to love)? Is this different for Mormon women?</p> <p>I have noted that several Mormon women reject the idea that the novels have anything to do with feminism. Sunshine sees the novels as pure entertainment—divorced from religion or anything analytical.</p>	
<p>The main character (m.c.) agonizes about her choice to stay human or become a vampire. Her eternal life is in question. So many of the stories elements find their origin in Mormon thought and customs. No</p>		

<p>sex before marriage. Dominant patriarchal male characters. The question of her own purpose plagues the m.c. The angst of the whole book is that Bella (m.c) loves the vampire even though to do so means denying her own humanness.</p> <p>Eventually she has to make a choice. What does she eventually decide? I won't say out of respect for those who haven't read the FOUR books.</p> <p>What I will say is that the ending struck me as traitorous and the abnormally long foreplay chapter in book 4 made me want to puke. 'His eyes, his hands, his beautiful body, his verbal skills, the way he walked'it was worse than one of those Victorian novels that describe the look of a sitting room for five pages.</p> <p>And for the record...I'll be going to the movie in November after the lines die down. I'm a sucker for a love story even one that involves vampires and bad choices.</p>		
<p>Sunshine says: August 24,</p>	<p>Refers to "Molly Mormon"</p>	<p>Sunshine's argument also</p>

<p>2008 at 1:04 pm I don't see how being a feminist has anything to do with reading this book. Neither does being a Mormon. Just because she is LDS doesn't mean that she has to write an LDS perfect, Molly Mormon, book where she ends up in perfect heaven, and stuff like that. It is strictly fiction and so what if they make out.. I liked the books. They peeked my curiosity and I liked to read anything that can take me away..."Take me away, to a secret place, take me away...take me away" I like books like that.</p>	<p>situating her within Mormon Discourse. Is she critiquing the Molly Mormon idea here as myth or simply saying the novels are fictionalized and cannot inform Mormon Discourse?</p> <p>She seems to like the books for their fantasy appeal—and wants to see them as something different from her reality.</p>	<p>made by other women in different threads (LDS ladies book club) where women claim the books are merely for entertainment and dislike any analytic interpretation. How does this fit in with the feminist argument or seeing the novels as a Mormon metaphor?</p>
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APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF GEE'S TOOLS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

<p>http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2008/08/stephanie-meyers-twilight-series-poll/</p>	<p>Big “D” Discourse tool</p>	<p>Identities building tool</p>	<p>Figured worlds tool</p>	<p>Politics building tool</p>
<p>CC says: Kerry- That was a hilarious post. It made me think of all the women who have told me they love the books and basically they fall into three groups: Mormon, Catholic, or Born again. The common thread among the three being a strict sense of morality about sex.</p> <p>I read all four books, mostly because of the whole, “Mormon breaks through the mainstream entertainment” value. The main character is a Molly in disguise!</p>	<p>CC signals membership in the LDS Discourse by saying she read <i>Twilight</i> because it was written by a Mormon. She identified with the author. This way, she aligns herself with Mormonism and not as a <i>Twilight</i> fan.</p> <p>She also signals membership in the Discourse by referring to a Molly Mormon, patriarch, and return missionary. Even though she appears to be somewhat critical of these stereotypes, she uses this language to signal her membership.</p>	<p>CC builds a Mormon identity here by her use of specialized language. She also normalizes her Mormon identity by showing what Mormonism and other types of Christianity have in common. This builds common identity with any other religious (non-Mormon) people in the discussion.</p> <p>She also signals that she does not enact a typical “Molly Mormon” identity by referring to Bella as a Molly Mormon in a negative way. She also criticizes the patriarchy— showing a</p>	<p>In this figured world, there is such a thing as sexual morality. And this sexual morality is most-often dictated by religion. It also assumes that religious people have a strict sexual morality about sex and that they agree upon what it means to be both religious and sexually moral.</p> <p>She also appears to be aware of a typical Mormon figured world in which the return missionary comes back to marry the perfect girl, as</p>	<p>Having a strict sense of morality (as defined by one’s religion) is a valued social good. This is also a social good for Mormons because it is something they feel is shared with other religious groups.</p> <p>Reading <i>Twilight</i> becomes articulated with that social good as it was written by a Mormon and shares similar values about sex.</p> <p>CC suggests that not</p>

<p>http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2008/08/stephanie-meyers-twilight-series-poll/</p>	<p>Big “D” Discourse tool</p>	<p>slightly critical Identities building tool</p>	<p>she explains the metaphor. She assumes that her audience is aware of this cultural story as Figured worlds tool</p>	<p>reading <i>Twilight</i> separates women from the Mormon Discourse. Women read it Politics building tool</p>
<p>Edward, her love, is the patriarchal prototype but instead of return missionary he’s a return from death vampire, who out of the goodness of his heart only maims and kills animals instead of humans.</p> <p>That ‘s a good thing for the main character as her blood calls to him like no other.</p> <p>The main character (m.c.) agonizes about her choice to stay human or become a vampire. Her eternal life is in question. So many of the</p>	<p>This resembles the Discourse of the controlled man versus the natural man. Edward is “good” because he is the controlled man, able to resist his urges.</p> <p>Eternal life is also tied to her choice to marry Edward. CC recognizes these patterns as common to Mormon Discourse.</p> <p>Not only does CC signal membership in the Discourse, she is able to recognize aspects of it within the text and even critique them.</p>	<p>feminist identity. Signals membership with a critical stance.</p> <p>CC continues to build a feminist identity by critiquing the “patriarchal male” and how Bella responds to Edward. Yet, she admits that she will see the films. Meaning that women who consider themselves feminist and the books anti-</p>	<p>well.</p> <p>This is interesting because typically Mormon men choose and Mormon women wait to be chosen. This is also a figured world of our dominant culture as well. Men choose while</p>	<p>in part because it is a valued social good.</p> <p>In LDS culture, marrying a return missionary, abstinence, are social goods and are desired by women. For men, it is a social good</p>

<p>stories elements find their origin in Mormon thought and customs. No sex before marriage. Dominant patriarchal male characters. The question of her own purpose plaques the m.c. The angst of the whole book is that Bella (m.c) loves the vampire even though to do so means denying her own humanness.</p> <p>Eventually she has to make a choice. What does she eventually decide? I won't say out of respect for those who haven't read the FOUR books.</p> <p>What I will say is that the ending struck me as traitorous and the abnormally long foreplay chapter in book 4 made me want to puke. 'His eyes, his hands, his</p>	<p>She doesn't seem to examine how the sexuality in the novels play into Mormon Discourse. She rejects these as romance novel fodder and doesn't connect it to her previous comments.</p> <p>Signals her membership in the Twilight fan Discourse by saying she will see the films, even though she critiques the novels.</p> <p>Sunshine signals that she does not recognize herself as a feminist by saying that it has nothing to do with the novels. She identifies as LDS, but also does not recognize Mormon</p>	<p>feminist still like them.</p> <p>She further shows a feminist identity by critiquing the treatment of sex in Victorian novels, showing she is more progressive in her thinking and beliefs.</p>	<p>women wait. She seems to feel that Bella is the one with the choice here, yet she still feels the novels are anti-feminist. This may or may not be a typical figured world, then, if Bella truly does have choice.</p> <p>A typical figured worlds says love stories are written for women. And they are written in a certain way, describing male beauty.</p>	<p>to be a return missionary. These things make them deserving. This earns them power within their culture and the ability to choose a wife.</p> <p>Choice and agency are also social goods that are shared between Mormon Discourse and the dominant culture.</p> <p>In order to adhere to a feminist identity that CC built for herself, she must critique the patriarchal aspects of the novels, including the parts that fawn over Edward in the novel. As a feminist,</p>
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<p>beautiful body, his verbal skills, the way he walked'...it was worse than one of those Victorian novels that describe the look of a sitting room for five pages.</p> <p>And for the record...I'll be going to the movie in November after the lines die down. I'm a sucker for a love story even one that involves vampires and bad choices.</p>	<p>Discourse within the novels. Sees the books in line with fictional romance and entertainment.</p>			<p>showing allegiance to empowerment of women is a social good. However, she undoes this identity a bit by saying she is a sucker for a love story, since in our culture, a typical love story will include the descriptions of male beauty she criticizes.</p>
<p>CC says: Kerry- That was a hilarious post. It made me think of all the women who have told me they love the books and basically they fall into three groups: Mormon, Catholic, or Born again. The common thread among the three being a strict sense of morality</p>	<p>CC signals membership in the LDS Discourse by saying she read <i>Twilight</i> because it was written by a Mormon. She identified with the author. This way, she aligns herself with Mormonism and not as a <i>Twilight</i> fan.</p>	<p>CC builds a Mormon identity here by her use of specialized language. She also normalizes her Mormon identity by showing what Mormonism and other types of Christianity have in common. This builds common identity with any other religious (non-</p>	<p>In this figured world, there is such a thing as sexual morality. And this sexual morality is most-often dictated by religion. It also assumes that religious people have a strict sexual morality about sex and that they agree upon what it means</p>	<p>Having a strict sense of morality (as defined by one's religion) is a valued social good. This is also a social good for Mormons because it is something they feel is shared with other religious groups.</p>

<p>about sex.</p> <p>I read all four books, mostly because of the whole, “Mormon breaks through the mainstream entertainment” value. The main character is a Molly in disguise!</p> <p>http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/2008/08/stephanie-meyers-twilight-series-poll/</p>	<p>She also signals membership in the Discourse by referring to a Molly Mormon, patriarch, and return missionary. Even though she appears to be somewhat critical of these stereotypes, she uses this language to signal her membership.</p> <p>Big “D” Discourse tool</p>	<p>Mormon) people in the discussion.</p> <p>She also signals that she does not enact a typical “Molly Mormon” identity by referring to Bella as a Molly Mormon in a negative way. She also criticizes the patriarchy—showing a slightly critical</p> <p>Identities building tool</p>	<p>to be both religious and sexually moral.</p> <p>She also appears to be aware of a typical Mormon figured world in which the return missionary comes back to marry the perfect girl, as she explains the metaphor. She assumes that her audience is aware of this cultural story as</p> <p>Figured worlds tool</p>	<p>Reading <i>Twilight</i> becomes articulated with that social good as it was written by a Mormon and shares similar values about sex.</p> <p>CC suggests that not reading <i>Twilight</i> separates women from the Mormon Discourse. Women read it</p> <p>Politics building tool</p>
<p><u>Sunshine says: August 24, 2008 at 1:04 pm</u></p> <p>I don’t see how being a feminist has anything to do with reading this book. Neither does being a Mormon. Just because she is LDS doesn’t</p>		<p>Sunshine builds an LDS identity through language and familiarity with the Discourse. She refers to “Molly Mormon” and refers to Mormons is the third person plural “we.”</p>	<p>Sunshine adheres to the figured world that romance novels are for entertainment. There is no deeper meaning to be sought or thought about. She also is showing the</p>	<p>Sunshine discounts feminism as a social good. She emphasizes individual choice and expression of artists and minimizes religion in determining</p>

<p>mean that she has to write an LDS perfect, Molly Mormon, book where she ends up in perfect heaven, and stuff like that. It is strictly fiction and so what if they make out. Like we haven't seen that on the big screen... LDS or not. Some of the</p> <p>argument is young teenagers reading this...still, like they haven't seen any of that on the big screen. So I won't vote because I don't see how it applies.</p> <p>I liked the books. They peeked my curiosity and I liked to read anything that can take me away..."Take me away, to a secret place, take me away...take me away" I like books like that.</p>		<p>However, she resists a feminist identity by saying up front that feminism has nothing to do with the novels. This distances her from a feminist identity</p>	<p>belief that individuals have the right to express themselves through their art and are not bound by their faith. Individualism and expression—American values.</p>	<p>what a person can choose for entertainment</p>
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APPENDIX C
IRB LETTER OF EXEMPTION STATUS

Josephine Marsh
 ASU Preparatory
 Academy 602/523-5933
 josephine.marsh@asu.edu

Dear Josephine Marsh:

On 2/3/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Bringing Mormon discourse out of the Twilight: Exploring how fans recognize, reflect, reinterpret and resist competing Discourses within the saga
Investigator:	Josephine Marsh
IRB ID:	STUDY00000569
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• pelotte.irb.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (4) Data, documents, or specimens on 2/3/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Pelotte,
 Lettice